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**YEMEN**

## At-risk youth show signs of softening attitudes toward Yemeni Government & West

### *Yemeni Youth practice conversational English*



[Insert Photo Credit]

“When I used to see foreigners swimming at the Marib Dam, I used to go with my friends to shoot in the air to scare them away,” laughed a 24-year-old student.

A new USAID career training program for youth is attempting to reverse distrust of foreign visitors by at-risk youth from the volatile governorates of Shabwah, al-Jawf, and Ma’rib.

At the outset of the tour guide training program, 51 student participants acknowledged they shared anti-Western and anti-American sentiments before the training. Their attitudes were influenced by local community suspicions and rumors that foreigners come to Yemen as spies.

In just two weeks, the program made modest strides toward increasing the credibility of the government at the cost of al-Qaeda.

“Believe me, there are young people who are so susceptible to being recruited by terrorists,” said one trainee, articulating the general fears that disenfranchised Yemeni youth with distorted perceptions of the world are a fertile recruitment field for al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula. Others turn to smuggling, violence, and kidnapping as a living.

These fears are especially significant because the youth bulge in Yemen is the highest in the Arab world and lack of marketable job skills, education, and employment opportunities are drivers of instability in many rural areas

Although skeptical at first that the tour guide training in Sana’a was a government conspiracy, students now studying English and Yemeni history, say they appreciate the value of tourism as an industry to stimulate the economy.

“I used to sit at these ancient sites and chew qat, and it never occurred to me how valuable this location is” to our national heritage, said one 20-year-old man from Ma’rib.

The program is helping to change the worldview for the at-risk youth. Careers in tourism offer healthy livelihood options as well as hope and confidence. The students believe their newly acquired skills will open doors for them and are gaining confidence in their skills and marketability.

Where youth had turned to crime and violence out of desperation in the past, these students now see new ways they can become constructive members of Yemeni society.

“We can solve our problems peacefully without kidnapping tourists,” said one 25-year old youth from Shabwah.