FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A 2ND TRACK OF THE MOBILISE TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Egypt Country Focus

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The MOBILISE project aims at launching a scalable and institutionally entrenched circular talent development program between the Netherlands and Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia for the strengthening of climate-smart agriculture. The project, which specifically targets the agricultural sector, seeks to meet the demands of the labor market in the participating countries by involving partners from the public and private sector while developing cooperation with local higher educational institutions.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt)
GIS	Geographic Information System
HEIA	Horticultural Export Improvement Association
HR	Human Resources
SEKEM	Egyptian sustainable development foundation (Sekem Group)

1 Introduction, objectives and methodology

This feasibility study aims at uncovering the potential of including a second track of participants to MOBILISE program in Egypt. The first two batches of the program were dedicated to undergraduate students. In the following batches, the study investigates whether to include fresh graduates, graduates of more than 2 years and/or employees. Additionally, this report evaluates the challenges associated with each segment and how to overcome them.

Generally speaking, the current feasibility study is intended to assist MOBILISE project in determining the suitable target for the second track as well as identify the relevant local partners for implementing the program. In this respect, the current study aims to set forward a number of recommendations that would help in developing a cohesive program that aligns within the framework of circular migration. Consequently, this study specifically aims at:

- Determining the different characteristics of potential candidates for this program while identifying the reasons for joining the program as well as their motivation to return to their home countries.
- Highlighting the local legal and administrative requirements for participation while considering possible obstacles and the necessary support to overcome them.
- Discussing the different strategies for recruiting and selecting candidates in addition to the required logistics of pre-departure training.
- Evaluate and adapt internship activities including tasks, duration, financing, and logistics to satisfy the needs of both the participants and host organization.
- Discuss the possible role of local companies during recruitment, selection, and training of participants.
- Determine potential sources that could be relied upon during the implementation of the pre-departure and returning training programs.

To address these objectives, the study relied on a combination of desk research and field interviews. Desk research examined statistical data on agricultural graduates and labor market trends in Egypt. Field interviews were conducted with the Horticultural Export Improvement Association (HEIA) and multiple horticulture companies of varying sizes and specializations (see Appendix II). Their input provided valuable insights on market needs, preferred candidate profiles, and training requirements. This mixed-method approach ensures that the analysis and recommendations are evidence-based and tailored to the Egyptian context.

2 General Overview of Target Population

2.1 Graduates from the faculties of agriculture in Egypt

As indicated in Appendix I, In 2022, the total number of graduates from 25 faculties of agriculture (all public except one) were 16,995 graduates from all specializations. Figures indicated that female graduates were slightly higher than males where the former were 8,725 and the latter 8,270 (CAPMAS, 2023).

Despite the number of graduates of the different universities, it is argued that most of the taught curriculum is outdated and usually not compliant with the needs of the labor market. In addition, it is argued that most employers in the agricultural sector find it difficult to find graduates who can critically analyze problems as well as integrate academic concepts and theories within practical life (Ghimire et al., 2021).

2.2 Employment in the agriculture sector

There is lack of data that reflects the distribution of employment in the agriculture sector by educational degree. In all cases, in 2024, total number of individuals employed was 29.3 million employees. Out of this figure, 18.80% are employed in the agriculture sector, thus making 5.51 million individuals employed of ages 15 years onwards (CAPMAS, 2024). It is noteworthy that woman contribute significantly to the agricultural labor force. Agriculture is even said to represent almost half of all female jobs in Egypt. It is important to note that the majority of jobs in the field of agriculture are informal where it is estimated that 94% of female jobs and 78% of male jobs are informal (Balbaa & Mansour, 2023).

3 Analysis of Recommended Segments

To delve deeper into the potential as well as the challenges of the recommended three segments, the Horticultural Export Improvement Association (HEIA) were interviewed as they have a lot of experience with horticulture companies and know a lot about their needs. Additionally, multiple companies were interviewed. These companies were of different sizes and worked in different fields.

3.1 Market needs:

In general, companies are always searching for potential talents who have the necessary skills (soft, managerial, and technical) to join their workforce. Additionally, companies are always keen on upgrading the expertise of their employees to improve work. Thus, all interviewed

companies were interested in collaborating with MOBILISE program for different segments proposed (i.e. fresh graduates, graduates of more than 2 years and employees).

During the interviews, all companies expressed willingness to hire the interns from the first two categories either prior to travel or once they return. In addition, as manifested in the first two batches of MOBILISE project, all companies expressed interest to play a role in the selection of candidates. For instance, they may be part of the selection interviews.

Companies were also interested in selecting candidates among their employees for this segment. This is viewed as an opportunity to upgrade the technical, managerial and soft skills of the employees.

3.2 Participants profile & Needed Logistics:

3.2.1 Demographics:

In relation to the "**employee" target group**, the candidate employees proposed by the companies fall mostly within the 24 to 35 age range bracket, though there is one exception – 55-year-old proposed by SEKEM, described as highly motivated and eager to learn. In terms of education, all candidates are graduates of agriculture with different specializations. Mostly these are bachelor graduates but there are also some masters holders. Almost all candidates are males with the exception of one female candidate proposed by SEKEM.

For the **fresh graduate category**, participants are typically between 22 and 26 years old, having completed a higher education degree (HBO/WO equivalent) within the last two years. Most candidates have academic backgrounds in agriculture or technical fields, often with limited professional experience beyond internships. This group tends to be more gender-balanced than the employee category and demonstrates strong motivation for gaining international exposure. However, a major structural challenge arises in Egypt due to **mandatory military service for male graduates** aged 18 to 30. While students may defer service during their studies, they are usually required to begin military service within 6–9 months after graduation, serving between 12 and 18 months. Exemptions are granted only in specific cases (e.g., medical conditions or being the only male sibling), but these do not apply broadly. This significantly limits the pool of eligible male fresh graduates for short-term international mobility, particularly in the months following graduation.

3.2.2 Internship in the Netherland:

Most of the interviewed company executives indicated that, for employees, an internship or training period in the Netherlands should ideally last between 2 and 6 weeks, with only one company (SEKEM) suggesting a longer duration of up to 12 weeks. Based on these preferred durations, companies anticipated sending between 1 to 10 employees each, depending on internal capacity and training relevance. Notably, the type of agricultural products or area of expertise to be covered by the Dutch internship varied. For instance, some companies were

interested in potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumber, tomato, medicinal plants, berries, and nurseries. In addition, other companies were interested in greenhouses, smart farming, climate management, and remote sensing technology. With respect to the timing of the internship, it also varied depending on the type of agricultural product (please refer to the table in Appendix II for more details).

3.2.3 Motivation to return to home country:

Almost all companies had no clear recommendations for ideas to ensure the return of graduate students from the Netherlands. However, they all believed that employees are likely to return due to job and family obligations. All companies were sure that they are capable of selecting employees who would return based on their knowledge of these individuals and the trust between them as well. Only one company (SEKEM) added that in cases where they sent young employees, they made their parents sign financial trust receipts with an amount of 1 – 2 million as an additional guarantee.

3.2.4 Legal requirements:

For the three categories of candidates for the program, a valid passport, military status release or permission (for males), visa, invitation letter from the Netherlands, security permission, and movement certificate are required. In addition to this, employees are also required to attach a HR letter, social security letter, and bank statement (6-12 months) with their visa applications.

3.3 Recruitment & Selection of Candidates

3.3.1 Recruitment sources:

To reach potential candidates from the two categories of graduates, most of the interviewed company executives recommended consulting universities' databases and social media networks especially LinkedIn to recruit participants. However, two of the executives have showed interest in specific universities (Cairo University for Daltex and Al-Azhar University for HEIA).

As for the third category, employees in horticulture companies, all interviewed companies were very clear on which candidates they would like to propose to Mobilise. Some have also provided some recommendations for other companies that could be contacted (snowballing). Interestingly, one participant recommended consulting the databases of the training center of the faculty of agriculture in Cairo university to get recommendations for employees who could then be included as well.

3.3.2 Selection criteria:

All interviewed companies confirmed the need to assess the English proficiency levels of candidates and conduct an interview for them. Only one company mentioned an interest to

upgrade they language proficiency of the candidates prior to selection because they believed that some individuals with great potential could be missed if this was set as a criterion for selection (this was specifically mentioned for employees). Additionally, graduates of both categories were recommended to submit recommendations letters provided by, for example, their university professors. Others have requested the need to assess the attitudes of candidates towards learning as well as evaluate their personalities.

3.4 Program Details:

3.4.1 Cost of travel and replacement expenses:

Although most of the companies commented that the norm is for the program to bear the cost of travel, yet almost all of them accepted to pay for the travel and replacement cost given the value of the training. However, HEIA refused to pay any expenses.

3.4.2 Pre-departure training courses:

- **English course:** All interviewed companies agreed upon the necessity to provide an English course to all candidates from the three categories. The aim of this course is to maintain an average level of written and spoken English (B-level).
- **Management and soft skills:** The following topics were mostly recommended by participating companies:
    - Communication skills
    - Presentation skills
    - Report writing
    - Basic management functions
    - Culture in the Netherlands

On the other hand, other topics were introduced by different companies such as critical thinking, Business etiquette, finance for non-financiers, and orientation on the expected outcomes of the program.

- **Technical training:** All companies stressed the importance of management and soft skills training, yet only four companies recommended topics pertaining to technical training. In this respect, the topic varied and included the following main topics:
    - Quality management: Sampling, inspection, statical analysis
    - Basic agriculture production: Problems, challenges and process (this topic should be especially elaborated upon for fresh graduates and graduates who have finished their studies more than two years ago)
    - Agriculture terminology in English

- Pest management
- Rational use of fertilizers
- Using AI in agriculture
- Ethics in agri-business
- Property rights in agriculture
- Packaging
- Soil health and fertility management
- Weed control strategies
- Good agriculture practices
- Basics of Satellite Data Interpretation and Digital Scouting
- Introduction to Climate-Smart agriculture
- Techniques for Irrigation Efficiency and Fertigation
- Greenhouse technology

Returning interns training courses

- **Management and soft skills:** Most of the interviewed candidates stressed the need the conduct training of trainers' course to enable returning interns to transfer the acquired knowledge and skills to their peers. Another topic that was commonly discussed pertained to supply chain management. On the other hand, the following topics were recommended by some companies in the pre-departure course while other companies suggested their implementation in the returning interns training:
  - Teambuilding
  - Presentation skills
  - Report writing
  - Teambuilding
  - Basic management functions
  - Finance for non-financiers (or alternatively financial literacy)

  On the other hand, the following topics were introduced by different companies:
  - Eco-system of agriculture in Egypt
  - Agri-project planning and time management
  - Leadership skills
  - Performance management
  - Basics of accounting

  - Export management
  - Lessons learned from the Netherlands
- **Technical training:** Only few companies responded to question pertaining to their recommendations on the technical training. However, the following topics were recommended by two companies:
  - Transferring technical experience learned from Netherlands such as plant life, planting process, inspection of disease infection in plants, recommended practices for planting protection, pre-harvest intervals, sustainable agriculture, carbon emission and how to measure sustainability, climate resistance
  - Analysis of fertilizers in crops
  - Pest management
  - Greenhouse technology

- **Courses implementation**: All interviewed companies believed that the success of the training programs (pre-departure and return) should rely on implementation by practitioners and experts in the field and not academic staff. To this end, they recommended relying on freelancers or training centers that might be specialized in the agricultural sector.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

The field survey and interviews with horticulture companies indicate that the employee segment is the most suitable target group for a second track of the MOBILISE program in Egypt. Employees are generally easier to recruit and are considered more reliable in terms of returning after the internship in the Netherlands, as they have established professional and family commitments. However, a main challenge is that this category will consist predominantly of male candidates.

The study also highlights that management and soft skills are the priority training needs identified by companies. This is consistent with earlier findings of the project's scoping study, which showed that Egyptian universities often focus on theoretical knowledge while employers seek more practical competencies. Companies also underlined the importance of implementing both pre-departure and return programs with trainers who bring practical, field-based experience.

Recommendations

- Direct greater attention to the employee category as the main participant segment, while keeping opportunities open for fresh graduates and graduates of more than two years.
- Focus the pre-departure and return training programs on management and soft skills, since these were the main needs identified by companies.
- Ensure that training delivery is entrusted to practitioners and professionals with practical experience rather than academic staff.

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Appendix (1): Graduates per University

Total number of graduates - Faculties of Agriculture, Egypt				
University	**Type**	**2022 - All Specializations**		
		Male	**Female**	**Total**
Cairo University	Public	373	516	889
Alexandria University	Public	318	577	895
Ain Shams University	Public	1,188	1,850	3,038
Assuit University	Public	130	202	332
Tanta University	Public	201	309	510
Mansoura University	Public	273	672	945
Zagazig University	Public	986	805	1,791
Minia University	Public	212	362	574
Menoufia University	Public	463	303	766
Suez Canal University	Public	166	154	320
Ganoub El wadi University	Public	150	301	451
Al-Azhar University	Public	1,631		1,631
Fayoum University	Public	204	288	492
Beni Suef University	Public	181	181	362
Banha University	Public	411	574	985
Sohag University	Public	144	302	446
Kafr El Sheikh University	Public	333	283	616
Damanhour University	Public	573	436	1,009
Suez University	Public	28	24	52
Damietta University	Public	80	227	307
Aswan University	Public	120	213	333
Arish University	Public	32	33	65
Matrouh University	Public	34	42	76
New Valley University	Public	38	65	103
Heliopolis University	Private	1	6	7
Total		**8,270**	**8,725**	**16,995**

Appendix II: Field survey answers by company

General overview of companies' needs from the project							
Company name	**No. of employees**	**When to travel**	**Max. Duration - Weeks**	**Type of product**	**Cost of travel**	**Intern replacement expense**	**Willing to pre-hire**
HEIA			6	Sweet Potatoes Berries (E.g. blue berries, raspberry)	No	No	Yes
Daltex	2-4	Nov. – Dec.	6	Nurseries (orange, mango, avocado, grapes, vegetables) Potatoes, Carrots, Sweet potatoes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mazaree	1		6	Pepper (Color) Cucumber, Tomato Greenhouse, mid-tech (first priority)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rijk Zwaan	2-3	May - Sep.	4	New technology in agriculture Climate management	Yes	Maybe	Yes
Isis	10 Preferably split over 2 groups	June -Oct.	4		Yes	Yes	Yes
Tamkeen	3 - 4	Aug. – Sep. Or Jan. – Mar.	4	Smart farming Remote sensing technology GIS Agronomy	Yes		Yes
Sekem	6-7		12	Medicinal plants Nurseries Greenhouses	Yes	Yes	Yes
Agriit	Will start planting in green houses in 2025			Cherry tomatoes			

Interns Demographic profile				
Company	**Gender**	**Age**	**Education**	**English language**
Daltex	Males	25 – 45	Agriculture (Bachelor degree)	Average – Proficient
HEIA	Males/females	25 – 35	Agriculture (Bachelor degree)	Average
Mazaree	Males	25 – 35	Agriculture (Bachelor degree or less)	Average
Rijk Zwaan	Mostly males	25 – 32	Agriculture (Bachelor degree in Horticulture, Pest control Plant disease	Proficient
Isis	Mostly males	25 – 34	Agriculture (Bachelor degree)	
Tamkeen	Mostly males Maybe one female	24 – 35	Agriculture (Bachelor degree)	
Sekem	Mostly males One female	25 – 35 One over 50	Agriculture (Bachelor degree and Masters' degree)	Average

Recruitment sources and selection Criteria			
Company	**Recruitment sources**		**Selection criteria**
	Fresh graduate and graduates of less than 2 years	**Employees**	
Daltex	University databases especially Cairo University Social media (LinkedIn + Facebook) Training center at Cairo University (Faculty of Agriculture)	Companies Training center at Cairo University (Faculty of Agriculture Snowballing	English Language proficiency Pre-test: technical Interview
HEIA	University databases especially Al-Azhar University	Companies Associations Snowballing	English language proficiency Interview
Mazaree	Universities databases	Companies Snowballing	English language proficiency Interview
Rijk Zwaan	Universities databases LinkedIn Recruitment agencies	Companies	English language proficiency Interview Letters of recommendations
Isis	Social media (LinkedIn + Facebook)	Companies	English language proficiency Interview Employees due for promotions Assessing attitudes and personality of fresh graduates
Tamkeen	Through teaching assistants in faculties of agriculture Recommendations of individuals in the universities	Companies	English language proficiency Assessing communication skills Interview
Sekem	Social media (LinkedIn + Facebook)	Companies	English language proficiency Recommendation letters Willingness to learn
Agriit	LinkedIn	Companies Snowballing	English language proficiency Interviews

Pre-departure training program			
Company name	**Management and Soft skills**	**Technical**	**English Course**
Daltex	Communication skills Presentation skills Report writing Business writing etiquette Finance for non-financiers Basic management functions Culture in the Netherlands	Quality management: Sampling, inspection, statistical analysis Basic agriculture production Problems Challenges Process Pest management Rational use of fertilizers	✓
HEIA	Communication skills Digital skills Business skills Teambuilding Culture in the Netherlands	Agriculture terminology in English Using AI in agriculture Packaging Property rights in agriculture Ethics in agri-business	✓
Mazaree	Communication skills Presentation skills Report writing Culture in the Netherlands		✓
Rijk Zwaan	Communication skills Culture in the Netherlands		✓

Pre-departure training program (continued)			
Company name	**Management and Soft skills**	**Technical**	**English Course**
Isis	Basic management functions Soft skills Communication skills Presentation skills Report writing Culture in the Netherlands Expected outcomes from the program		✓
Tamkeen		Soil Health and Fertility Management Weed Control Strategies Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Basics of Satellite Data Interpretation and Digital Scouting Introduction to Climate-Smart Agriculture Techniques for Irrigation Efficiency and Fertigation	
Sekem	Soft skills Communication skills Presentation skills Report writing Critical thinking		✓
Agrit	Communication skills Presentation skills Critical thinking	Greenhouse technology	✓

Returning interns training program		
Company	**Management and Soft skills**	**Technical**
Daltex	Training of trainers Coaching and mentoring skills Team building and management Supply chain management Performance management	Transferring technical experience learned from Netherlands such as: Plant life Planting process Inspection of disease infection in plants Recommended practices for planting protection Pre-harvest intervals Sustainable agriculture Carbon emission and how to measure sustainability Climate resistance
HEIA		
Mazaree	Export management Eco-system of agriculture in Egypt Supply chain management Purchasing	Analysis of fertilizers in crops Pest management Greenhouse technology Climate resistance
Rijk Zwaan	Leadership Time management Giving feedback Presentation skills for effective knowledge transfer	
Isis	Overall program assessment Refreshment course on lessons learned in Netherlands and how they are applied in Egypt	
Tamkeen	Leadership in Agri-sector Agri Project Planning & Time Management Presentation & Reporting Skills Financial Literacy for Agri-managers Team Coaching & Motivation Training of Trainers – for knowledge sharing	
Sekem	Basic management functions & Basics of accounting	
Agriit	Training of trainers	