Abby-Gail Blanchard: Greetings, everyone. My name is Abby-Gail Blanchard and I'm a graduate student at Pennsylvania State University and also a 2022-2023 Hubert H. Humphrey-Fulbright Fellow. In partial fulfillment of the conditions of my fellowship, I'm conducting my professional affiliation experience at the headquarters of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or CHEA in Washington, D.C. My primary assignment over the past six weeks was to support initiatives of CHEA International Quality Group, CIQG. In that time, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Nadia Badrawi and Jamil Salmi, who are both members of the CIQG Advisory Council. Dr. Badrawi is the president of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, while Dr. Jamil Salmi is a global tertiary education expert who provides policy advice and consulting services to governments, universities, professional associations, multilateral banks, and bilateral corporations. With their permission, we now share aspects of our conversation, but first, we listen as they tell us a little bit about themselves.

Nadia Badrawi: Hello, everybody. I'm Dr. Nadia Badrawi. My background, I'm a professor of pediatrics at Cairo University, but I don't say I changed my career because I keep my career as a pediatrician. But I worked in quality assurance since the year 2000 and I was one of the founders of the Quality Assurance Agency in Egypt, and I was one of the main founders of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. And I joined CHEA International Quality Group, I think since 18 years or something like that, maybe 2004 was my first visiting to the CHEA. And then I am in this Advisory Board since its initiation. So this is my background as a quality assurance expert.

Jamil Salmi: I started working on higher education in 1990 and it was really serendipity because when I joined the bank a few years earlier, I was more of a vocational training specialist. But when the World Bank decided to prepare its first strategic position paper on higher education development, I was invited to lead the team. And that's when I fell in love with higher education. So I had the honor of writing the first higher education policy paper and I stayed with the topic and the World Bank was a great place to get opportunities to keep learning beyond writing that paper. I've been privileged to work in many countries, supporting my colleagues with country focus, and in the process, learning a lot about higher education reforms, about differences among countries, and even though I took early retirement from the World Bank in 2012, I'm still working, as you mentioned, as an independent consultant and enjoying it. That's my brief summary of how I joined the higher education landscape and why I continue doing it because, as you know, the world of higher education has been changing a lot in the past decades, and of course, with the pandemic, there have been more factors of disruption and it makes it all the more exciting and interesting to observe and to be part of.

Abby-Gail Blanchard: When I asked Dr. Badrawi to give an overview of the developments of quality assurance in higher education in the Arab region, this was her response.

Nadia Badrawi: This is a very good question actually because it started in most of the Arab countries between the year 2000 and year 2004. I remember in 2004, there were about three to four Arab countries that they developed their quality assurance agencies. When the Arab Network of Quality Assurance had been established in 2007, there was exactly eight countries from all the Arab regions and they had a quality assurance agency. And the Arab region have 22 Arab countries. So it was very good. It started actually with a project. There was called this project, GICAQ project, project between UNESCO and World Bank to establish quality assurance regional network. At that time, maybe there was the ENQA which is the European Network, there was the Asian Pacific Network, and maybe another one. And by that time, they established with this project about five or six quality assurance agency, new one. We started together, so by this project, it was the opportunity to see all the other world what they are doing. And there was a lots of exchange of knowledge, exchange of experience. We benefited a lot actually from this project. This project stayed until, I think, 2011, but the other network, they all worked alone. Still we are working together. Nowaday, instead of 2007, we were eight countries with quality assurance agency in Arab region. Nowaday, we are 18 countries

with quality assurance agency. We have lots of commonality and we have lots of challenges in these countries. So we are trying to communicate with each other and we have a very good communication standards actually, and we developed together a core standard for institutional accreditation. We developed together a core standard for qualification framework. I know that qualification framework is not very well known in United States, but qualification framework is present in all Europe and nowaday, in all the Arab countries. We do conference every three years, but every year we have a forum, either online or face-to-face. So one of the challenges say, facing cross-border accreditation mills, facilitating the exchange of resources, because one of the most important thing is the resources. If I don't have resources, the regional network will not continue. So the resources is very important. That's why after the World Bank and UNESCO project stopped, some of this regional network declined. We have a challenge that how to support each other. I mean, a big countries like Egypt, like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like United Arab Emirate, they have lots of support, that they can give it to small countries or to me, not small countries by size, to the countries that they starting their quality assurance agency. So this is what the Arab Network was doing most of the time, how to communicate, communication between each other as a quality assurance agency and communication with the other regional network like the INQAAHE, like the ENQA, like the AfriQAN, like the APQN. This is a challenge actually. It's not easy. It's a big challenge. So continuing to be successful is something that we have to work on it, all of us. And recently the qualification framework is coming to all the Arab Network, all Arab country, all of them, they are developing their own qualification framework. So if there is no something that can connect each other, they will never be that, because one of the best thing in the qualification framework is the mobility, mobility of student, mobility of staff, something like that, which is actually something that we have to work on it. And still we have lots of work on the qualification framework in the Arab countries.

Abby-Gail Blanchard: In the next clips, we will hear their individual perspectives on topics such as globalization, internationalization, and the sustainable development goals in higher education. Let's listen.

Jamil Salmi: I think there are two sides to the audio in terms of effects of globalization on higher education. One is internationalization which you mentioned. Even after the pandemic, we see growing numbers of students interested in going abroad for their studies. We see more programs of mobility, joint research, and now even virtual internationalization as a new modality to bring universities together. And on the other side is the... You know, partly because of the rankings, attempts by universities to attract the best researchers, the best students. So these two phenomena together, I think, reflects the impact of globalization on higher education. At the same time, we see forces that run a little bit against globalization and internationalization at least in terms of, you know, the increased nationalism. Of course, the brutal invasion of Russia in Ukraine has created some major disruptions and is also having an effect on the patterns of movements in terms of academic and students' mobility. Technological advances that we've been seeing the impact for the past 15 years. But again, with the pandemic, I think we had a major shift, because what I would have described as a hobby among a few or regional or innovative faculty members became the mainstream way of teaching and learning for the students. I think it has given the online learning distance education much more prestige than it used to have before. It was in many countries, in many cases, viewed as a second best way of engaging with the students, and I think it has gained a legitimacy that it had not seen before. And lately with the artificial intelligence and platforms like ChatGPT and the like, or Bard, we see a new challenge. I think we are barely starting to grasp the significance of this new phenomenon that's seen as a threat in many parts of the world, but on the more positive way, perhaps as a way of harnessing technology, to move beyond traditional practices and to embrace new ways. I mean, to have, you know, intelligent assistance to enhance creativity and critical thinking if it is used in a positive way. And of course, again, you know, access to the internet, distance education can bring students, academics, researchers, and institutions much closer regardless of their geographical location. I'm very pleased to see that a growing number of universities are taking the SDG seriously and are realizing that they have a very important role to play in training technicians, professionals, specialists, scientists who could find positive solutions to address many of the SDGs. Higher education institutions realizing that they have their part to do, so by having a green campus, by traveling less, by taking

the train when you can avoid flying, by having buildings that use less energy, by recycling wastewater and other waste products. So it's a big agenda, and even though I'm not a big fan of rankings, I salute the Impact Ranking that the Times Education launched a few years back because it pushes universities to think about their contribution to the SDGs. And so I see that as a very positive development.

Nadia Badrawi: The CHEA International Quality Group play a big role in this actually, because they have developed a standard that many of the region apply actually. They organize this conference yearly that many of the region meet together, and also recently there is something called international or consortium for digital universities that, I think last year, there was a session about this in the CHEA International Quality Group. And this consortium is developing a benchmark for digital universities. And many of the network all over the world are part of this consortium of the digital, consortium for quality assurance of digital universities.

Abby-Gail Blanchard: Both Dr. Badrawi and Salmi had some interesting things to say about the evolution of quality assurance from their vantage points.

Jamil Salmi: Whatever changes we see in higher education affecting the way universities and other institutions operates, and the new goals that they may assign to themselves, it will definitely impact quality assurance and in several ways, if universities embrace these SDGs as an important purpose in their missions, be it their teaching mission, their research mission, their engagement with the environment, with society, then the criteria that quality assurance agencies rely on should reflect this evolution. If we think, for example, of SDG 4 in terms of access to education and the quality of education, the diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda should definitely be part and parcel of what quality assurance agencies are about. And we've seen already a positive evolution in that direction. As you may all be aware, the CHEA brought a survey last year to assess the extent to which quality assurance agency across the world are incorporating some dimensions of that agenda. And the answer was very positive. We have very positive findings in that respect. Then if we think about the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education that took place a year ago in Barcelona, equity and inclusion and pluralism were definitely high on the agenda. And of course, with the pandemic, quality assurance had to take on board a sudden shift towards online virtual education. Before, as you may remember, we had two separate types of agency and criteria and processes to measure the golden norm of on-campus face-to-face education and the less prestigious approach of virtual or online education. I think that's one of the positive consequences of the pandemic has been to demonstrate that both modalities were equally valid, could complement each other, and we see that today, that many universities, even when they went back to opening their campuses, have kept some elements of online teaching and learning and that the hybrid or HyFlex modes will become the new norm for higher education institutions throughout the world. And I see that as a very positive development.

Nadia Badrawi: Yeah, definitely it's evolving. As I told you, in the Arab region, also there was very political unrest, say in Syria, in Iraq, in some countries they were very political onset. Those countries, they are evoluting themselves these days to come up. So we have to support them and help them in whatever they are. There is another thing actually in the Arab region and I think it's everywhere in the world. Whenever you are working with standards and the usual way of doing accreditation, whether it is institutional or it is programmatical accreditation, I believe that there should be some evolution in this. I believe that we should not continue as we are doing. We should develop ourself in another direction. The microcredential is coming. The digital universities are coming. The online is coming. So actually it is a continuous evolution of the quality assurance everywhere in the world, not only in the Arab region.

Abby-Gail Blanchard: Here are some final remarks from both of our experts.

Nadia Badrawi: I think there should be awareness, awareness of the international part of this, because if you don't do this awareness, whether international or regional, some country will never know what is going on all over the world. So this is one of our aim, actually, in the network, to do an awareness project... And it is by the way, it's not only awareness one time, it's recurrent. Practice exchange, which is very important. The best practice exchange is one of our main aim. So if I can find in United Arab Emirates something that really best practice, and they say we have a best practice in doing that, we exchange this with the other countries so they can use it also.

Jamil Salmi: A few years back, I wrote for CHEA a paper where I talked about... I coin the expression "the quiet revolution," referring to the fact that most countries in the world in the past two decades, have moved towards establishing or strengthening their national or regional quality assurance agencies. In other domains of higher education, if we talk, I think, about financial reform or governance changes, these are reforms that were much more controversial that met with much more opposition. But for some reason, there has been conversions, then kind of consensus to recognize that quality assurance is a very positive force for higher education. And while, you know, it's been more established in the US, then a little bit in Japan or the Philippines, it was not prevalent in most other places in the world that we've seen over the past 20 years. This very rapid evolution. So I think this has a very positive development. It's really something that's happening everywhere in the world, even though there are some differences. But I don't think they are really substantial differences to reflect the variety of cultural and social and geographical context. It is important to innovate in the way we set up our program content, in the way we deliver teaching, we organize learning, and in assessment modalities and criteria. So, you know, I think that's hopefully, most higher education institutions would not just go back to the way they operated before the pandemic, but take advantage of the lessons of the pandemic to embrace innovative ways of designing their curriculum, of transmitting knowledge, and assessing how well their students are learning. And this implies that quality assurance agencies should be more open to these innovations and willing to embrace new ways of doing things, and perhaps focusing more on the results, on the competencies, on the knowledge, on the skills, and the attributes and the attitudes of graduates to judge the quality and relevance of programs rather than inputs and processes. So that would be my big hope in this new post-pandemic era.

Abby-Gail Blanchard: Thank you for your attention to this segment. Hopefully, you enjoyed watching it as much as I enjoyed working on it. We thank both Dr. Nadia Badrawi and Jamil Salmi for their time and for sharing their wisdom. Hopefully, you enjoyed hearing from them as much as I did. I take the opportunity to thank the team at CHEA for the support that they have offered me in preparing this recording. I especially thank Ashley Corley for her support during the recording and editing. Please consider how you can contribute to future issues of Quality International Newsletter. The guidelines for submission may be found on the CHEA website at the link on your screen. For more information about the Humphrey Fellow Program, please visit the link below.