

Concept Note: Youth Leadership Programme

28th – 31st March 2019, Beirut, Lebanon

“Explore, Experiment, Expand”

Background

The Arab region is home to the youngest population in the world, with over 100 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29.¹ These young men and women have the potential to drive significant change and promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, they are faced with several challenges that make it difficult for them to become change-makers without the proper resources and support. Despite widespread stereotypes about unmotivated and unskilled youth in the region, it has been demonstrated that they tend to be “better educated and more connected to global knowledge relative to older ages.”² This indicates that it is not the lack of skills, but rather of available opportunities, that prevents them from becoming change-makers in their communities.

Unemployment among youth in Arab States is the highest in the world, 30 percent in 2016, comparing to 13 percent worldwide³. The region struggles with an ongoing exclusion of young women and restricting their capabilities and opportunities. Women in the region still face discrimination - the issue is exaggerated even more in countries facing conflict or post-conflict transition. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region is vital for the young people to progress and become effective leaders and social innovators and of the future.

While positive steps have already been taken to foster youth inclusion in a number of Arab States, much more work remains to be done. The recently released UN Youth Strategy (2018-2021) has prioritized promoting the civic and political engagement of youth, noting that the UN must leverage its capacity in order to promote youth participation in public affairs at all levels.⁴ Young change-makers must be identified and supported, and closer collaboration must be fostered among the government, civil society, and private sector.

Rationale of the programme

The Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) was launched in 2015 as an initiative to build the region’s most dynamic network working at the intersection of youth, innovation and sustainable development. YLP has run four successful cycles to date and, as of end of 2018, has worked with over 7,000 youth participants and supported around 5,000 projects. YLP participants have launched and established successful small businesses, won municipality elections, received recognition and awards for their innovative solutions, and presented their ideas at renowned universities and global platforms like the ECOSOC Youth Forum within the UN Headquarters in New York, Stanford University, Hult International Business School, and the European Parliament.



¹ “Expanding Youth Opportunities in the Arab Region.” United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/poverty/ExpandingYouth%20Opportunities%20AHDR%20research%20paper.pdf>

² “Expanding Youth Opportunities.” UNDP.

³ https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_514537/lang--en/index.htm

⁴ UN Youth Strategy. 2018.

“YLP is in every way a catalyst not only for our participants and partners but also for UNDP. Started four years ago, YLP has already made its mark on the region, drawing in top talent and empowering them to change their communities and their futures. We know that when taken to new heights, this programme has the potential to transform the way youth can contribute to peace and stability in their communities and around the globe.” Mourad Wahba, Regional Director, UNDP, RBAS.

In 2018, YLP was recognized for its impact and work by the UNICEF Generation Unlimited campaign - a global partnership that aims to ensure that every young person is in education, learning, training or employment by 2030.

As the programme has been successful and popular across the region, attracting immense talent and diverse skill sets, the plan for the next three years is to scale up and extend the reach to over 100,000 young people and 1,000 youth-serving organizations. In order to do so the programme is working on introducing a number of tools, platforms and ideas that will enhance the collective knowledge and bring people together on national and regional levels:

- 1. Exploring new mechanisms of support**, beyond the traditional approaches, to advance youth development solutions. YLP will develop a new platform that will encourage networking opportunities to explore forward thinking, analyze emerging trends and foresee upcoming developments. The platform will facilitate exchange of expertise, building collective knowledge and offering collaboration opportunities that will cross borders of countries as well as thematic areas. In addition, the platform will help provide and facilitate global networking opportunities, conferences and forums to extend reach to show case youth projects and prototypes.
- 2. Experimenting to strengthen the design of solutions and learn through experimentation.** We are determined to support 1. Strategic thinkers that can collectively tackle a tough challenge, 2. Crafty experimenters that are constantly looking for ways to test what they're working on, so they can better understand how it works and how to improve it and 3. Systems thinkers to design solutions that take into account the different parts of a society to be connected and impact each other. YLP would mobilize the means required to implement this agenda based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity. The programme aims to establish a grants scheme that would offer financial and technical support to young innovators and change makers.
- 3. Expanding knowledge by institutionalizing the YLP approach.** To enhance the collective knowledge and build the capacity of its participants, the programme will launch an online Learning Facility that will host several materials, guides and manuals that YLP participants can access. A new curriculum on topics and solutions identified during the first four years of the programme will be developed. In the era of technological advancement and virtual conduct of business, the curriculum will contain learning materials on digital literacy with demand-driven thematic courses and training. These skills are vital for participants' development solutions to succeed and reach a wider audience.

YLP believes that investing in expanding knowledge, networking and resources will facilitate the scale up process and support participants in becoming global competitors in innovation, solution mapping and

change-makers and a force for change across the region. Furthermore, enabling young women to implement and show case their ideas, initiatives and solutions will help them to realize their full potential and talent and further contribute to achieving gender equality. Once taken to the new heights this programme has the potential to revolutionize the way youth can contribute to the development, peace and stability in their communities and around the globe.

“I knew I had to do something for my community. I wanted to change our thinking and our societies for the better. This year I have learned that changing the world is a challenge for which I need the right tools, networks and initiative to achieve. But, with the help of YLP, I now feel confident that I can truly make a difference”-

Mohamed Omer Mohamed, Sudan.

YLP5-2019

Building on the lessons learned and momentum generated during YLP1-4, YLP5 is set to launch in 2019. As part of YLP5, UNDP will partner with youth-serving organizations in countries across the Arab region to host national activities designed to support and empower a diverse set of young women and men change-makers, as they design, implement and scale innovative, impactful and sustainable development solutions. In addition, two regional events will be held to launch and support the programme, bringing together youth, youth-serving organizations, policy makers and relevant stakeholders from across the region.

The expected outputs are:

- 1) Strengthening the capacity and skills of youth participants, enabling them to become effective political and civic leaders, thinkers, innovators, and change-makers;
- 2) Consolidating and expanding YLP’s network of youth-serving partner organizations to strengthen the ecosystem for youth-led innovation for development in the Arab region;
- 3) Creating a knowledge-sharing platform to provide youth and partners with access to innovative materials, methodologies, and tools related to political and civic engagement and social innovation.

YLP aims to build a generation of young leaders, thinkers, innovators and change-makers in the Arab region to become drivers for social change and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda. However, this cannot be achieved when half of the regions’ population is held back by discriminatory laws and no access to opportunities. Advancing gender equality, ending violence against women and providing young men and women with equal opportunities across all spheres of society, private as well as public, is vital for the progress of social change and justice in the Arab region.

A focus on political and civic engagement

Considering the importance of supporting young people’s role in the realization of SDG 16 in Arab States, YLP5 will place dedicated emphasis on political and civic participation and engagement. This will be done in close collaboration and coordination with the UNDP Regional Electoral Assistance Project, to ensure exchange of relevant expertise and experience-sharing between the two projects’ partners and beneficiaries.

Regional Workshop #1 (28th – 31st March 2019)

A first regional workshop will be held in March 2019, which will bring the selected youth-serving organizations and youth representatives together to launch YLP5.

The workshop will bring together 80 youth-serving organizations from the participating countries over three days. It will provide a collaborative space where participants can engage in various sessions designed to familiarize them with the aims of YLP and to create networks among themselves, while developing a range of skills that will enable them to support youth in becoming political, civic, and policy change-makers.

The main objectives of the first YLP5 Regional Workshop are to:

- i) Bring together selected youth-serving organizations to familiarize them with the vision, methodology, and the aims of YLP
- ii) Discuss challenges preventing youth from engaging in politics, civic and policy dialogues
- iii) Facilitate networking and knowledge exchange among participants to build their understanding of political, civic, and policy issues
- iv) Exploring mechanism and tap into new financial technologies and mechanisms to access investment for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- v) Finalize National Action Plans (NAPs) with partner organizations to promote youth engagement.

Following the regional event, YLP5 will continue to provide access to technical expertise, networking, and financial opportunities for participating organizations and youth through the national activities, leading up to the second regional workshop.

Regional Workshop #2 (TBD)

Following the initial regional workshop, YLP regional team through UNDP Cos will work with partner organizations to implement the NAP developed during the March workshop and conduct national activities from April to November, including preparatory activities on political/civic participation and policy dialogue. Following these activities, there will be a second regional forum in the end or as decided during the first regional workshop 2019.

The main objectives of the second YLP5 Regional Workshop are to:

- i) Expand knowledge of partner organizations to better support youth-led initiatives and change-makers at the national level, especially with respect to innovative leadership, civic/political participation, and policy dialogue
- ii) Provide a space for youth-serving organizations/stakeholders to continue engaging with political/civic/policy leaders, building on YLP4 Regional Forum's policy dialogue
- iii) Build further trust between young people, youth leadership stakeholders and local/national politicians, civic leaders, and policy makers through interactive activities.
- iv) Advance UNDP strategic direction on our Sustainable Direction Goals through our collaborative support platform.

“YLP helps youth in providing them with modern and advanced methods that can transform their ideas into projects, making them capable of implementing them on a scientific basis and in the end positive, sustainable change.” —Salma

Belhassine, reflecting on her experience with the programme.