TURNING THE ENERGY OF ARAB YOUTH TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT

The Governments of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen have endorsed a project agreement with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to facilitate youth volunteerism as a positive and sustainable mechanism for social change.

Formalized during the project's very first project board meeting in Amman, this endorsement follows a year-long process of national consultations with youth in the region and marks the transition to the implementation phase of the project.

Entitled "Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future", the project aims to support the ability of youth to engage in and influence change in development processes in all five countries. As volunteers, young people can be positive agents of change within their communities, taking the lead in development and reconciliation and building trust and cooperation among generations and social groups.

A yearly board meeting will be held by UNV and will be co-chaired on a rotating basis by a government representative from one of the five participating countries. As the Higher Council for Youth in Jordan co-chaired this year, this first project board meeting took place in the country's capital, Amman.

This 3-year project aims to harness the power and energy of youth through volunteerism, drawing on the inherent core values of self-help, solidarity and social cohesion.

“Building on the uniqueness and richness of volunteering, the project will seek to make a difference that matters to the lives of Arab youth.”

Ghulam Isaczai, Chief of UNV Development

Project outputs

1. Awareness of the role of volunteerism in socio-economic development and participatory governance increased
2. Institutional frameworks for volunteerism in the target countries and the region strengthened
3. Capacity of youth organizations and CSOs to promote youth volunteerism enhanced
4. Formal structures for youth inclusion through volunteerism strengthened
Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future is an initiative led by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. The project is in line with regional strategies of the United Nations and supports the UN Secretary General’s Five Year Action Agenda (January 2012).

The agenda highlights the importance of working with and for young people as a priority. Point 5.4 “Address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known […] To help advance this agenda, the UN system will develop and implement an action plan, create a youth volunteer programme under the umbrella of the UN Volunteers and appoint a new Special Adviser for Youth.”

Following this action plan, Ban Ki Moon recently appointed Ahmad Alhendawi as the first UN Envoy on Youth. The 29-year old Jordanian national is representative of the youth the project aims to reach.

“I’m pleased to see this pilot project taking shape. Volunteers are proven to be more prepared and engaged in the development of their communities, and working with youth through volunteerism is the key to ensuring a better future, with equal opportunities. Initiatives like these are what young people are expecting from us: concise, tangible and high-impact.”

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**Young People and Volunteering**

- Young people are important contributors to development in their countries.
- Volunteerism provides an opportunity for youth to make changes that matter to them, gain new experiences, meet new people and have fun.
- Youth who take part in volunteering activities tend to develop positive social behaviors and are exposed to active citizenship.
- Volunteerism benefits individuals and communities in terms of health, well-being and community engagement.
- Young people should not be seen as passive recipients of resources or as the cause of society’s problems.
- Volunteerism is one route by which young people can improve their employment prospects, by enhancing job-related skills.

20% of the population in the Arab Region is between 15 and 24 years old, and clearly represents a huge potential for development. These are some of the key things to keep in mind with respect to youth and volunteering, included in the 2011 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report.
Harnessing youth capacities: challenges and solutions
Results of the five national consultations

In the framework of the Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future project, in 2012 five national consultations were organised in order to gain a deeper understanding of the capacities, needs and solutions regarding volunteerism in the region, more specifically in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. The consultations brought together youth and key stakeholders (including government representatives, international organizations and donors) to facilitate a participatory dialogue.

Across all five countries, various similarities were found with respect to the challenges faced by youth with regards to volunteering:

- Economic: unemployment and lack of financial support.
- Cultural: cultural norms impact in the ability of certain group to participate in civic engagement.
- Social: need for a "culture of volunteering" in the region.
- Infrastructure: lack of social or legal frameworks to support voluntary action.

The consultations however also envisaged recommendations on how to facilitate change through youth volunteering:

- Developing supportive infrastructures for volunteering.
- Fostering a "culture of volunteering".
- Developing capacity to support volunteerism.
- Creating opportunities for inclusion.
Volunteer voices

"Volunteering structured my personality and my way of thinking. It created a person who opens his hand to others and changes other people's lives."
Mohammed, 24 years old (Yemen)

"Easy life never grows change-makers: You are the hero of your life, do not live uselessly."
Mariam, 22 years old (Egypt)

"I think small acts of kindness are missing in today's world. Besides, it really fills my heart with happiness when random people appreciate what I do."
Haydar, 23 years old (Jordan)

"My experience in the world of volunteering helped me discover that the term 'volunteerism' means life, hope, change and development; a change everyone aspires to."
Oussama, 23 years old (Morocco)

"Volunteering has helped me grow as a person, made me stronger, more organised and happier. It made me feel like I have a purpose, like I have the power to change the world one little step at a time."
Amel, 24 years old (Tunisia)

For more information on UNV or Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future, or to submit your stories, photos and comments, please contact maira.cabrini@unrpd.org /UNVYouthVolunteeringArabStates @UNVYouth_AS