



WORKING WITH YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION

An introductory guide to NGO programming
in support of the inclusion of youth

MENA
NETWORK

DUF
THE DANISH YOUTH COUNCIL

This introductory guide is produced in cooperation between
DUF – The Danish Youth Council and The MENA Network.

“

... the process of change has to start by building capacity and civil consciousness in people, aiming to develop an environment where promoting democracy will be possible.

Abmad Alhindawi

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Introduction from DUF

The Danish Youth Council (DUF) has in agreement with The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) initiated a process of guiding and supporting other Danish actors in providing effective programme support to youth in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa). Youth constitute the majority in the MENA countries, which, along with the hopes for their potential with regard to pushing the reform processes following the so-called Arab Spring in a genuinely democratic direction, thrusts youth to the top of the agenda. Mainstreaming youth components into all interventions and programmes would provide a potentially effective fast track in terms of boosting the opportunities for youth at a much larger scale to capture a role as active civil society agents promoting viable and solid change in their communities and society in general.

Danish youth organizations have been involved in youth cooperation in the MENA region for almost a decade, the last five years in particular, and they have achieved remarkable results. Reaching the youth outside the middle class, city-based segments remains a challenge, however, as does the development of relevant programme strategies and finding partners to ensure broader outreach. Danish and international organizations are continuously challenged to integrate the youth aspect into their strategic programming in the MENA region and there is a strong need and request from the different organizations to develop this capacity further.

DUF was therefore interested in compiling and assessing the lessons learned in order to respond to this challenge. In 2010, DUF commissioned an analysis of the MENA programme support in order to include young people in the furthering of democracy and civic participation, hence aiming to build the capacity and optimize performance and outcome in youth programmes in the MENA region. The responsibility for taking stock, compiling and carrying out the analyses was divided into two background reports. Annemette Danielsen, a Danish consultant, has carried out a desk analysis mainly identifying programme approaches related to working with youth, focusing on promoting democracy and inclusion. A corresponding regional analysis was carried out by Ahmad Alhindawi, focusing on the MENA context and providing segregated information for countries regarding youth. This brief synthesis guide is based on these two reports.¹ Ironically, the Arab Spring broke out immediately after the main part of the above-mentioned studies were terminated. The Arab Spring brought about a completely new context – the civil society emerged and a myriad of new, basically loose and in many cases internet-based organizational structures mushroomed, with young people playing a hitherto unprecedented role. As the studies were completed, all of these new civic structures resulting from the Arab Spring development are unfortunately not in any consistent way accounted for in the background reports, nor in this synthesis. Moreover, the undetermined situations prevailing in many countries at the time of writing render it impossible to provide any clear and comprehensive overviews as the context is fluid and mobile, with civil society and youth organizations also constantly changing.

The report is structured in two separate, but interlinked, sections: Section A focuses on the context, partner organizations, target groups and coordination, while Section B provides a methodological framework and principles that can be useful and inform the design of projects.

This introductory guide is intended to set the basic recommendations for NGO program-

¹ DUF can provide background reports on request.



ming supporting the involvement of youth in the MENA region; both in terms of outlining the overall contextual-based recommendations regarding youth in the MENA as well as providing key methodological entry points. In this regard, it should be noted that the emphasis is on providing an overall perspective as opposed to going into detail with the different aspects and areas the guide touches upon. Most of the country-specific details, thorough background analysis, facts related to DUF's practical experience and cases for exemplifying the different elements are not included in the report.

DUF hopes that practitioners will find this introductory guide inspirational and a help to positively changing and strengthening the focus on youth. DUF encourages any interested parties to contact DUF and enquire about further guidance, whether it be more detailed background information, technical advice or the need for DUF to assist in establishing contact with civil society organizations in the region.



SECTION A:

Building civil society and reinforcing the role of youth

1. Background – youth in the MENA region

Youth constitute a strong political power in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) as elsewhere, which we have witnessed throughout the Arab Spring revolts and revolutions. In keeping with tradition, however, young people have only had minimal access to politics, democracy and developmental processes, which has been aggravated by the fact that the civil society does not play an active policy and strategically oriented role in the MENA. Citizenship has not been rolled out, the involvement of the civil society in political processes is limited, and youth are not consulted due to traditional hierarchical structures. Obviously, this political marginalization restricts their opportunities for developing political interest, knowledge and experience. It remains to be seen whether the front line role youth have taken in the revolts and revolutions in the course of the Arab Spring will allow young people to become an integrated and active part in the ongoing consolidation and power division which will shape the future reform processes in the MENA region.

The rationale behind providing funds for Danish civil society organizations to engage in partnerships in the MENA region is to deepen and enhance the democratic development. Young people make up 28% to 60.5% of the population of the countries in the region but hold a marginalized position in politics. Foreign donors and agencies have addressed this gap by supporting young people in order to strengthen their role as active citizens in their respective societies.

However, merely establishing youth and civil society organizations can represent a challenge. In some countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and Morocco, creating organizations is relatively easy. In other countries, such as Syria, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, the existing legislation makes creating organizations difficult. In some of these countries, however, following the scheduled elections, legal reform is possible. Nevertheless, the legal system in most of the Gulf countries does not even make room for NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), and this is not likely to change for now. In most MENA countries, the law makes no mention of youth organizations, and the legal framework for establishing such organizations is lacking, limited or not set up in a conducive manner. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the MENA governments will likely amend these laws and curtail the restrictions on establishing NGOs. It is expected that the importance of the civil society sector will eventually be made visible in the years to come and the role of the civil society become recognized.

The civil societies in the respective MENA countries lack strong youth-led, member-based youth organizations. Instead, many NGOs and INGOs, International Non-Governmental Organizations, provide various services and direct support for youth, but these organizations cannot replace the need for youth-led, member-based organizations. More than just providing services for young people; youth-led organizations represent the space where democracy can be practised at the grassroots level. Until now, a broader view and strategy for bringing about change in civil society has been missing. Action has basically focused on short-term objectives and therefore missed out on pursuing long-term political aims.



1.1 Introducing youth to the political arena

In countries where the revolutions succeeded in bringing down the regimes, investing in the human and organizational ‘infrastructure’ and the capacity building of civil society actors will prove pivotal in the post-revolution era in order to sustain further peaceful and democratic development. All programmes should prioritize political awareness and skill-building components. Youth alliances, youth movements and youth organizations must be included in partnership with INGOs, as they urgently require institutional capacity building. The youth movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Morocco face the challenge of taking advantage of the momentum and building stable organizations capable of continuing the job they started.

Indeed, the dynamic way youth have been working can effectively mobilize people as in the Arab Spring youth movements in Yemen, Morocco, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia. Still, some organizations ultimately need to reach a certain level of institutionalization in order to adapt their scope of action, to build a constituency and become accountable to broader youth groups. In the aftermath of the revolts, movements struggle with deciding on strategies for how to work after the revolution – whether remaining open movements or registering as a civil society organization will provide the best way of influencing the current development.

New social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and many blogs, played a prominent role in the Arab Spring uprisings. The mushrooming of social forums and means of communication deployed by activists must translate into policy and social and political change. If the virtual activism is not linked to clear strategic action in the real world then its impact will remain limited. However, social media should be recognized for their important role in the Arab Spring revolutions, enhancing and profiling the role of youth. The youth revolutions in the region demonstrated the importance of social media as means for mobilizing young people and youth movements; the existing youth organizations were not responsible for the mobilization of the youth.

In summary: The Arab Spring is full of stories about creative and modern tools for mobilizing young people, and this should also be considered a tool for mobilization in MENA youth programmes. However, even when considering that rural youth possibly do not have the same access to technology, mass text messaging can still be used. Most importantly, programmes must basically be directed at building a democratic base for youth development – mobilizing broad, membership-based and youth-led organizations.

2. NGO programmes – in support of youth agency

As stated, youth projects in the MENA region do not generally display broad strategic visions for young people in society. Projects tend to fulfil short-term objectives, and neglect the long-term challenge of accommodating for genuine change. The international partnership approach, as experienced through the MENA programme at DUF, offers a commendable learning opportunity – in itself, it constitutes an arena for promoting democracy and enhancing the role of youth and civil society. The opportunity stems from the very collaborative process and different tasks of project implementation as it per se engages the youth themselves in debating, designing, implementing and evaluating the projects.

The gap regarding youth who are excluded from the reform and development processes



is addressed by international donors and agencies aiming to promote the inclusion of youth. Commendable and ambitious platforms calling for youth to endorse the reform agenda, adopt the venture and actively engage in politics are prevalent. Nevertheless, ambitions and expectations on behalf of youth may be excessive and even at times distort youth interventions. The Arab Spring involved large numbers of young people, although we must consider that most of these young people in the region remain unfamiliar with the concept of participatory democracy.

Programmes should reflect the fact that there will be youth groups for whom democracy does not ring any bell: no reflections, no experiences and no personal aspirations. Programming should therefore include the lowermost steps in the participation process, which are of an informal and learning character. Such basic experiences are fundamental requisites for enhancing any pursuit of participation in order for it gradually to become more youth-led, democratically oriented and political. Donors and INGOs are responsible for helping young people gain experience with democracy through their own informal learning opportunities. Change must be based on young people's own lived experiences, otherwise it represents a top-down and intrusive intervention that will not be adopted or integrated. The initial forms focused on collaboration and rule-setting activities, e.g. forming organizations and clubs is necessary if illiterate youth, rural youth and younger youth groups are to be included and democracy to accommodate more than a small elite. In summary: NGO programmes must focus on political inclusion while at the same time granting consideration to the fact that the vast majority of young people are completely inexperienced with democracy, implying that NGOs should design their programmes so as to also include the lowermost steps in the participation process and grassroots-level. Moreover, partnership collaboration must be approached in a manner so as to ensure that it serves as an arena for democratic learning.

2.1 Legitimacy – building membership to reach out to the constituency

One of the main topics in civil society work concerns the question of legitimacy. Legitimacy calls for civil society organizations to carry out inclusive democratic ruling, establish a constituency and membership base, and establish measures for accountability and transparency. In brief, youth organizations are considered legitimate if they democratically represent a segment of the population and promote their issues and cases.

However, many traditional youth organizations in the MENA region face a legitimacy crisis due to the lack of democratic representation. The structure they tend to adopt is not usually democratic, they have no member base, nor do they promote participation at the grassroots level. Moreover, they are basically quite centralized and have no interest or access to reach out to large segments of the population. The MENA countries have more than 100,000,000 young people, but the traditional organizations represent less than one-thousandth of the youth. NGOs should therefore advocate and raise the awareness of the masses, including the silent majority of young people in the MENA region.

In summary: NGO partnership programmes should involve a local partner to act as the conveyor and mediator in outreach efforts to the non-organized youth, small organizations and CBOs (Community-Based Organizations) that INGOS cannot reach directly. When offering partnership,



INGOs should make it a basic demand and requirement that partners are inclusive and, as part of the programme, reinforce legitimacy by building their own constituency, member base and democratic structure.

2.2 Target groups – embracing new groups

Well organized youth organizations in larger cities will more easily access international support. Although extremely relevant to work with these organizations, as they have the capacity and ability to act as youth agents of change, the INGOs should increase their outreach work and face the challenge of engaging new groups, most of which are unorganized. Organizing them and developing the structural and human capacity should be part of the activity portfolio. Well established, city-based youth organizations can possibly serve as a broker and supporter in mobilizing and building new independent youth organizations. A number of such new possible youth groups will be reviewed in the following.

Non-organized youth in cities: The non-organized youth in the urban centres can be difficult to reach, as there is no clear demarcation or denominators: Who is included and who is left out? Larger mainstream cultural programmes possibly incorporate unorganized urban youth who, as a result of these activities, form loosely cobbled groups or networks. There also tend to be quite a number of semi-organized groups in and around the universities. Lastly there is a huge number of political activists who work on an individual basis but engage in broader networks and political movements with likeminded youth. Which kinds of activities and programmes are attractive would depend on a number of factors but requires targeted assessments in order to establish which lines of action will be relevant.

Rural youth groups: Rural youth can best be addressed through a locality approach – see more in the section below on new points of entry. In one form of a locality approach, the governorate could provide the platform for cooperation. The entire youth population in the governorate becomes the potential target group, and a number of existing NGOs and CBOs may be included as partners in the project, helping mobilize and organize young people. This form of mobilization also includes the younger youth groups and particularly marginalized groups, such as the disabled, who face serious breaches of their rights in many of the MENA countries.

Beginning in the locality would help the outreach to rural youth. Localities provide other opportunities but also some constraints as compared to partnership-based projects with youth organizations. A locality as a project platform calls for other modalities, including close collaboration with local authorities, CBOs, teachers and parents. Comprehensive sensitization and awareness-raising programmes will aim to make adults and authorities commit to supporting youth involvement. Furthermore, project administration may be challenging, as partners such as local women's groups are likely to require special support in light of their inexperience with project management.

Religious youth groups: Religious groups appear to be effective in mobilizing young people using a combination of religious and humanitarian messages, which appears to hold an appeal for some of the MENA youth. However, very few secular INGOs work with religious youth organizations.



INGOs should generally reconsider strategies to also include work with religious groups, partly because the integration and dialogue in itself will be conducive, but also because religious groups and partners may offer the best entry point in some cases for mobilizing broader segments of the population, as they tend to have better outreach and are able to mobilize large numbers.

Marginalized youth groups: INGOs should also consider supporting groups that find themselves in a particularly challenging situation, such as the disabled, who are struggling severely in some areas. Ethnic minorities are also often prone to discrimination and should be granted consideration, as well as less orthodox forms of intervention, such as providing support to marginalized groups such as homosexuals.

In summary: NGOs engaged in the MENA region should consider expanding their partnership strategies so as also to include new target groups in order to close the gap and promote the inclusion of the majority of youth not yet participating in the democratic interventions. This calls for new forms of involvement, such as working with national NGOs as brokers and engaging with youth in remote areas. Addressing new target groups also calls for NGOs to embark on new lines of action in terms of activities. In working with these new groups, the aim to promote dialogue and democracy must always be the focus; but creative activities such as arts, drama and sports may offer a relevant first step for some groups. These kinds of activities have proven useful in the past towards facilitating awareness-raising and learning and may in fact be effective in empowering youth to become active citizens, committed to support reform endeavours in their countries in the longer run. More traditional approaches such as seminars, trainings, advocacy campaigns and organizational development projects are continuously relevant and should always be considered if not in the outset then in the longer term perspective.

2.3 Gender and equity – programmes supporting young women

Whatever the target group, organizations must always address the issue of gender as a cross-cutting issue. For a number of reasons, gender issues must be addressed in all development programmes. Gender issues in the MENA region are renowned for centering around women's rights and the challenge for these countries to attain gender equality in general. The Global Gender Index (weforum.org) documents the degree to which most Arab countries continue to perform far below the global average.

The need to consider and deal with structural hindrances for the equal benefit of the two genders is crucial for NGO programming – not least when dealing with youth. Young women often play the role as 'practitioners' in the organizations in the MENA region and rarely assume the role of decision makers. To ensure that women and men benefit equally from projects, it is therefore necessary to work with support mechanisms for young women as decision-makers in their organizations. There are some good examples of the international donor or partner working strategically to upgrade consultancy and designing projects in terms of challenging existing gender roles and structural barriers for the participation of young women, but there is a strong need for more mainstreaming in this regard. As a basic element, the international partner could, for instance, offer guidance and training on how to work with gender, particularly in terms of conducting the gender analysis of contexts and projects.

The challenges facing females become evident in the official data, such as reviews of the im-



plementation of women's rights (e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – CEDAW). INGOs and international MENA partnerships are challenged in terms of catering to the situation of girls and young women, aiming to promote general equality, and being required to ensure this in direct responses in programmes. The gender issue is deeply embedded in culture-specific customs, and it is not a political priority in most of the MENA countries. It is a lengthy process to deal with, and the issue should be taken into careful consideration at all times when implementing programmes in the region.

Gender-appropriate programming requires thorough analysis. A gender analysis must recognize the differences in women's and men's experiences as well as the differences in the value attached to women's and men's respective experiences and contributions. Disaggregation by gender aims to 1) provide information regarding the role and contribution of women and men in the representation, interpretation and communication of cultural elements, and 2) de-construct the status order, i.e. the institutionalized patterns of cultural value that privilege the traits associated with masculinity leading to status subordination and the demeaning of the feminine, including the roles of girls and women.

Programming must address equity and gender equality as cultural values through interventions promoting²:

- Parity in representation – both quantity and quality
- Parity in participation
- Empowerment of subordinated groups

In summary: Gender equality represents a challenge in the MENA region, where the right to equal participation and equal opportunities are lacking especially for young women. Programmes must address this gap, employing responding components to address the issue. In turn, this requires a thorough analysis of each case in order to establish how each particular aim is best pursued.

3. Partnership – devoting action to building civil society

INGOs work through local partners, in most cases like-minded civil society organizations; and in this case, preferably youth organizations. When choosing partners, INGOs often favour youth partners from a certain segment: Partners tend to be well organized and established 'elite' groups belonging to the middle class with elite characteristics. They tend to be urban-based, hold good command of English and demonstrate a vocabulary concerning the issue of democracy.

The partners in international development partnerships should share the same interests and visions. When choosing a partner, it is necessary to assess their work. Members of the international organization should spend time together with the partner organization, investigate how it works together with its potentials and evaluate it. By doing so, the international organization can gain an understanding of the local organization and the extent to which it has the potential to include youth and have an impact on society.

Partners can be of different kinds, including movements, institutions, organizations, infor-

² "Culture is a gender issue", Kvinno, www.womendialogue.dk. Kvinno, a Danish organization, is a valuable point of entry when dealing with gender issues in MENA with a special website providing a number of tools at www.womendialogue.org



mal and non-registered organizations, ethnic organizations, religious groups, political parties and university unions. When choosing a partner, it is essential to consider the fact that, in MENA, the recognized and well established organizations may often be tied to governments and are not necessarily promoting democratic change. Organizations close to the ruling party, ruled by relatives of the king or president, are the most visible and receive substantial funding. In most cases, such organizations focus on service provision. In everyday speech, they are referred to as Royal NGOs, or RNGOs. They have recently also started applying for international grants. Due to the government support they receive, they tend to appear efficient and professional compared to other associations in the same country. In most cases, however, they should not be considered representatives of civil society – they are neither governed by a democratic constitution nor ruled by a constituency. Rather, their work is as a rule driven by short-term, immediate and popular results together with campaigning to brand the ruling party and promote the government's policies.

Instead, support to smaller informal groups, movements and organizations can have a much deeper impact on society. Such collaboration requires that the international partner adopts a thoroughly accompanying approach and supports the collaboration process step by step in order to establish true cooperation, helping the local group to organize itself and further develop its capacity.

New types of international actors should also be included in addition to the conventional INGOs. Involving new solidarity groups in donor countries can provide feasible points of entry and new perspectives which complement what the big INGOs can provide. Matching/twinning is one option for involving new groups in international cooperation. Larger INGOs must actively promote twinning and are considered instrumental towards the pursuit of this aim, as they will be familiar with the context and able to identify potential matching partners in the MENA region.

Youth involvement is a prominent aim and claim, but it is not neutral. Many organizations claim to involve youth without having any genuine interest in youth. Their youth involvement mission may be in rhetoric alone and merely be intended as a means of appeasing donors. Organizations can have varying incentives to include youth participation in programmes, and such claims should always be scrutinized prior to becoming involved with a new partner.

Foreign agencies generally regard becoming the choice of local partners as a major challenge. The primary challenge for international partners who are really seeking to implement joint projects with local groups is to choose a reliable partner that will be committed to the empowerment of a certain social group.

When talking about the capacity of youth organizations, one of the main observations is generally that the more 'grassroots' the youth organizations is, the less professional it is. Organizational development and capacity building must therefore be addressed along with the programme activities.

In summary: When searching for partners, be cautious about the large, established NGOs, as they tend to be so-called Royal NGOs with close links to government. Rather, when striving to close the gap and selecting a partner organization, INGOs should aim to reach new target groups of youth and grassroots organizations, even if working with partners without experience in project management requires support for capacity building. New international actors should also be considered, including twinning arrangements. In principle, all types of collaboration should adopt a clear protocol with respect to developing democratic structures. Efforts to involve the constituency must be observed and integrated into the programme portfolio and partnership agreement. This is to align with the quest to gradually fit actions into the broader vision of building democracy and including the millions of MENA youth.



3.1 Capacity building issues – needs and challenges

The main role of most INGOs is to support MENA youth organizations in developing by-the-rule democratic protocols and transparent and accountable democratic structures along with support to technical management skills. Based on such an approach, project management becomes more than just management but the very point of entry to building capacity among new and under-privileged youth groups. Conducting such cooperation in close companionship should also advance ethical issues and promote a more reflective culture, encouraging partners to adopt a self-critical mode of operation which helps partners critically evaluate their practices and results.

As already mentioned, capacity building should be a component in all programmes, aiming to enhance various kinds of capacities, such as programme management, which consists of implementation, monitoring, budgeting, filing, reporting and all other technical aspects of running donor-funded programmes with extensive requirements and standards. Capacity linked to establishing democratic outreach and internal organization structures is also needed, including all of the technical aspects of running election protocols and managing membership databases.

In summary: Capacity building must promote the development of democratic protocols and transparent and accountable structures, providing the necessary ‘toolkit’ in the form of technical management skills. Part of capacity building involves, in close partnership, lifting the capacities of the organization to pursue ethical issues, also together with issues linked to gender and generational divides. Moreover, it is important to encourage a reflective and self-critical mode of operation, helping partners to critically evaluate their practices and learn from results.

3.2 Flexible funds – how to support emerging youth societies

In striving to promote new ways of enhancing the outreach to the silent majorities of youth in the MENA region, funding must be allocated in a manner directly supporting the realization of such aims. This calls for budgets that factor in budget lines with open and flexible activity funds, adjustable to the diversity and different needs among various local youth groups.

When working with new grassroots organizations, new funding modalities such as more innovative pools providing support to small emerging partnerships may be vital. As knowledge and information about working with grassroots organizations and new target groups is limited, funding should also be allocated in a way so as to support the development of new methods and compile the lessons learned. Directing the focus at new target groups essentially requires focusing more on risk-taking and more resources directed at extracting lessons learned by integrated research, surveying and real-time evaluations in order to build our knowledge base.

In summary: Working with new grassroots organizations and new target groups requires flexible funding modalities that allow for simple application procedures and innovative pools that are also open to risk-taking in order to support the emerging mobilization and organized structures.



3.3 Councils and networks

Over the last five years, well-established institutions such as the Arab League, *Alexandria Bibliotheca* and the Fiker Foundation have started working with youth-led organizations, promoting regional collaboration and networks. Increasing youth involvement in youth issues and an emerging new community of active youth workers at the regional level has been the result. The active youth involved at the regional level have been criticized for not contributing to developing real political actions, sharing a common agenda and coordinating their activities. Some of these youth representatives are active in their respective countries and can ensure a multiplier effect, but many are seen as ‘professional travellers’. INGOs should always screen the background of potential participants in order to investigate the profile of the organization and establish whether it is truly youth-led, member-based, has developed a gender policy and has similar parameters.

At the national level, there is some measure of variation from country to country as to whether coordinating bodies have been established, usually referred to as national federations or youth councils. This is the case in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, but these structures are not necessarily representative or democratic. Some countries may lack coordinating bodies, as in the case of Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and Bahrain; here, organizations collaborate but there is no recognized coordinating system. Yemen has recently established a coordinating council responsible for coordinating all of the youth movements and civil society organizations allied against the Saleh regime. In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia and several Gulf countries, civil society networks are simply not allowed.

In summary: Regional councils and networks can be vital in terms of supporting valuable coordination and pursuing global advocacy issues, although organizations and individuals should always be screened in order to ensure their credibility as true youth representatives.

3.4 Cooperating with government – enhancing impact and sustainability

All countries have youth ministries or higher councils focusing on youth, in some cases combined with sports and culture. Recently, ministries have started developing youth policies focusing on the needs of young people and adopting more strategic approaches to the issue. Unfortunately, however, policies tend to focus on service provision instead of addressing issues such as human rights and democratization issues. In that sense, youth policies do not serve as an effective platform for lasting change, which could otherwise enhance participation and the inclusion of young people in political development. Nevertheless, the national youth policies can be seen as a valuable ‘hub’ for coordination, although it will take some time before ministries reach a level where they can engage in cooperation with the civil society and international society, all coming together in joined action aiming to effectively promote the political inclusion of youth.

Despite the weakness in the new post-revolutionary societies, INGOs and multilaterals must engage with government, as this is the only way forward towards achieving an enabling environment, overcoming the existing subordination of youth as a result of generational and social hierarchies. In countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, there is a great potential in partnering with the Ministries of Youth as they work to prove themselves in the wake of their respective revolutions.



In summary: Government authorities must be consulted, also by INGOs, who must attempt to establish collaborative structures striving to influence and develop the capacities of government bodies in order to pursue a genuine youth agenda for change in a future democratic MENA region.

4. Data and surveys – an improved evidence base for youth advocacy

Coordinating bodies are considered vital in order to more effectively advance youth-related issues of both a technical and political nature. However, knowledge about youth in the MENA region is poor and scattered, and there is room for improvement. During the last decade, the demand for information about youth in the MENA region has been increasing, leading to hearing sessions and surveys being pursued in a number of countries. Youth surveys have served as a common platform for policy development in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Morocco and Iraq. Nonetheless, regional youth surveys and cross-regional analyses remain rare.

Survey quality is questionable in the sense that the quantity of data gathered is obviously valuable, but the analysis of data and findings are generally poor. INGOs should engage in systematizing all of these data, which for the time being is scattered and difficult to access due to a number of problems. Surveys are not always online; and quantitative data may not be translated into English.³ Indeed, most of the agencies work exclusively in English, also due to the fact that research funding is derived from foreign donors. The League of Arab States publishes an annual report regarding youth in the MENA region, which is available mostly in Arabic.

While surveys normally focus on individuals, mapping studies provide information about youth in their context, also organizations. There are many initiatives from NGOs in several MENA countries examining numbers and the nature of youth organizations, and these mappings tend to be conducted in a participatory manner, e.g. using focus group interviews.⁴ A panoramic view of youth organizations in the MENA region is difficult to obtain, however, as informal groups are constantly emerging and mutating.

In summary: It might be relevant for INGOs to engage in the funding of youth research as well as aiming to influence the use and applicability of research. INGOs should also work to improve coordination, reduce costs and increase efficiency in provision, leaving data collection accessible and available.⁶ Here, the idea of establishing regionally based youth observatories would allow for centralized and accessible mapping, compilation and presentation of core information.

³ Data can primarily be found in English when international organizations are involved in the study. The reports available online are published on the websites of Middle East Youth Initiative, Wolfensohn Centre, Dubai School of Government World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, Euro-Med Youth Programs and the League of Arab States.

⁴ For example, the mapping conducted in Yemen by Save the Children could be considered a leading mapping. One of its most interesting findings is the huge number of youth groups and initiatives unknown through classic means.



SECTION B:

Approaches and methodology in programming

1. Youth participation and volunteering

In many countries, youth are neglected as a social category, deprived of their rights and in an unfortunate situation with few opportunities to escape what is often a very low social position. They are in an in-between situation, neither a child that can expect care and support and nor an adult possessing the power to fight for their opportunities in life. Moreover, their knowledge and skills base is not yet fully developed; they are emerging beings. While downside exists, the youth also have advantages. In development collaboration and as agents of change, these advantages include the tendency for youth to be energetic, open, flexible and seek innovations and new ways forward. All in all, this provides them with power if they are allowed space by the ruling powers in society to take advantage of such opportunities. This is the special thing about youth – they are in a delicate and challenging social position and continue to require special support, but they are also strong and resilient; youth projects must address this duality. For instance, certain considerations should be granted in order to avoid overwhelming and discouraging young people:

INGOs should consider the fact that young people are possibly inexperienced with volunteer work: No real democracy, dialogue and reform will develop without civil society involvement – and without the participation of young people; hence, participation is regarded as an integral element when developing citizenship. Citizenship and democratic involvement are often founded on broad volunteer-based engagement. INGOs often push for mobilization, but it should be considered whether this approach might be so foreign to some cultures that the results will be limited. Experience with participation and volunteer activity as part of citizenship must be built step by step and may not immediately gain the outcome hoped for by the international organizations.

INGOs should never take generic features concerning youth for granted: In considering the methodology regarding the relevant support to youth in the MENA region, one should by way of introduction acknowledge the diversity; young people must never be seen as a homogenous mass, as needs and aspirations differ considerably. The notion that ‘no-size-fits-all’ should be kept in mind and comply with the quest for all societies having to take their own path and balance the pace if reforms are to proceed gradually and peacefully and in keeping with societal and cultural particularities.

2. Approaches to youth involvement

A few generic models and tools are presented in an attempt at classifying and clarifying more normative vectors in the discussion of how to involve youth. Youth programmes may differ radically, and establishing basic categories is therefore helpful towards defining and understanding differences. Such categories, despite their simplicity, may be helpful in revealing how youth are perceived and how the participation of young people is being applied in programming. This



model claims that, basically, there are three possible points of entry to youth involvement in projects. Projects are designed to either work for youth, **with** youth or achieving the purpose by being implemented **through** youth.

Genuine partnership with youth organizations provides excellent opportunities for the youth in the MENA region to become involved in, experience and learn from the very collaboration linked to project implementation and hence in principle promoting working **with** youth. However, this does not necessarily apply to everyone involved – project management with partner leadership means that collaboration will often be limited to a small number of the youth involved. For the rest, it easily ends up being ‘working **for**’ youth, as the constituency are offered a package without having been consulted or receiving any influence. Well designed consultative and inclusive democratic structures are required in order to avoid merely working **for** youth, which unfortunately deprives the ‘masses’, the broad constituencies, the opportunity to practice and gain experience with dialogue and democracy in real settings. The third category, working **through** youth, refers to implementation as taking place **through** youth groups or youth institutions. In this case, the point of entry is pragmatic, implying youth are taken advantage of as an instrument, a tool, for instance as a pipeline through which information is spread. Here again, youth will not be involved or have any real say. Nonetheless, they may be availed some resources or training as part of their acting as a pipeline for others and hence benefit from the cooperation.

In summary: The mode of working **with** is favoured in interventions for obvious reasons, seeking to deepen democracy and enhancing the scope of participation and influence. In comparison, working **for** does not imply inclusion and influence on project design and implementation; here, provision refers to a provided service. Working **through** youth organizations indicates youth are being subjected to an instrumental role and used to fulfil a certain purpose, set by others.

“Values need to be experienced and lived. They can’t be spread in speech alone”. This statement was made by Steven Mountfield, YMCA Scouts in Denmark, who was convinced of the outcome of cooperation in the MENA region: Significant democratic and cross-cultural learning.

3. Building competences and establishing space for youth action

Obviously, young people lack experience and are often subjected to a lower position in the generational and societal hierarchy. This deprives youth of room to act. While they might possess a number of qualities considered vital for society, they are nevertheless still often obstructed by adult forces. The notion of agency aims to express a person becoming empowered and exercising their power, which requires having the space to do so. **Youth agency** is an emerging potential but must be nourished in order to flourish, which international programmes can play an instrumental role towards achieving. Millions of dollars have been invested in developing the skills and capacity of youth, much of which has been devoted to information and raising awareness regarding rights. Nonetheless, if there is no way or nowhere to act upon the knowledge and skills acquired, the effect is minimal. Youth cannot be expected to create space and opportunities entirely on their own; they lack the power to do so. Youth require support from adult power holders, otherwise space will not be provided.

Programmes aimed at bringing about change for youth must apply a two-pronged strategy



and address the quest for *space*: how to create and enhance space for young people to become active and take part and address the needs for *capacity and competence* development: How can the necessary competence base be built or reinforced in order for youth to take advantage of the established space.

Capacity and competence development aims to empower youth in order to be able to participate actively and responsibly. Youth require knowledge, skills and tools to become involved and play an active role in programmes, communities and societal reform processes. Competence development should be drafted so that it serves the purpose of youth becoming informed citizens, committed to promoting development and inclusion among their peers and within their communities.

Space and promotion of an enabling environment aims to sensitize communities in order to create space for youth participation. A substantial part of the programming must be directed at working with communities in order to create an enabling environment so that there will be room and space for youth to participate. Sensitization, awareness-raising and advocacy are necessary if adults are to become convinced of the validity of youth agency.

A particular constraint in the MENA region is the vague role of civil society in building democracy. Youth participation is a reputable endeavour as a strategic point of entry to deepen democracy. However, the position of youth in these societies is extremely weak, which calls for a clear focus on the creation of space.

In summary: Working with youth in the MENA region requires a two-pronged strategy in which the lines of action must be implemented in parallel processes: When working to build the competences and capacity of young people, effort must also be invested in the creation of space. Space is meant to widen the room for manoeuvre, to roll out real opportunities for youth to exert influence. The claim for simultaneity must be adhered to if action is to lead to genuine change. Unfortunately, skill development tends to be the main point of entry, and advocacy is first factored in during the late exit phase, which at that stage is far too late to have any effect.

4. Creating opportunities for youth via competence building

‘Creating space’ basically indicates that space should be stretched and expanded, as it is held to be too narrow. This is based on the grounds that space should be seen as a basically flexible and socially managed phenomenon. Political space is governed by authority of kind, but it is negotiable due to the fact that it is socially constituted. Creating more space for youth action is a considerable challenge requiring major efforts and strategically well designed plans of action in order to be successful. The first step is always to convince parents and local leaders, however, and here pragmatic arguments are a good starting point, underlining the added value in terms of individual learning and improved performance leading to improved prospects and opportunities for young people.

Participation is probably the single most important mechanism when seeking to reinforce youth development and agency. An informal formation is taking place as a result of youth being included in communal life and being given opportunities to express themselves. It is simple, but



the impact is conspicuous: Young people learn tremendous amounts when they become truly involved on equal terms in programmes together with their peers and adults – the processes taking place should be seen as ‘learning communities’ having a significant impact as insights, practical skills and a sincere understanding of collective aspects of development are brought about.

The effect of participation can be clustered and classified. A few examples are provided in the following to illustrate an otherwise almost infinite range of effects:

Psychological strength: Resilience, negotiation skills, strategic thinking and planning, self-confidence and innovation and entrepreneurship.

Social capacity: Ability to take responsibility, competences in supporting others and the ability to pursue solutions to emerging problems.

Policy insights: Ability to identify solutions, knowledge regarding societal issues and experience with management and leadership.

***In summary:** Participation and inclusion are the primary keys to empowerment – youth become wiser and competent by the very specific act of participating.⁷ Active agency develops and enhances social skills and useful competences, and youth therefore become increasingly recognized and respected for their contributions to their family and the community. Young people engaging in concrete projects which benefit the community at large will gain recognition and respect, which is the starting point for improving the current position of youth, which is rather subordinate.*

5. Drivers in mobilizing youth

Youth may not always be particularly keen to organize and participate. Being unfamiliar with broader civic organizations, they may not have witnessed the advantages and will not understand how they can benefit from civic engagement.

In mobilizing youth, one must know what works as incentives and drivers for youth and how they become motivated. As a global social category, young people possibly share a number of motives, but this issue should always basically be studied in the context of operation. Motive structures differ considerably; motives may even prove to be different from one district to another.

The drivers and motivation for volunteering and organizing are often expected to be personal gains in terms of opportunities, experiences and exposure, access to resources, networking and fun and recreation. In many cases, such personal gains may be combined with the aim to ‘do good’ and achieve social recognition. Drivers and motivation can also be categorized. They may include:

Identity: Building up a shared identity is important ‘glue’ for bonding a group together. Identity is built when challenges are experienced together or a common interest or activity is shared. In some groups or organizations, a political goal to promote societal changes is an important aspect of the group identity.

Networking: Relating and building links to peers and adults who may benefit them in one way



or another but also to help fellow youth in need and to have fun and gain access to new social arenas.

Access to resources and capacity building: Many refer to capacity building and training as key drivers for keeping an organization running. Access to training and capacity building is found via networking or affiliation with adult organizations or international agencies and donors.

Recognition and appreciation: Recognition and appreciation from the outside seems to be an important driver. Recognition may come from members of the organization, the community, from other organizations, the authorities or from international organizations. Young people strive for recognition for the work they are doing but also in relation to the efforts carried out by young people more generally.

In summary: The mobilization of youth requires knowledge concerning incentives and drivers. This issue should always be studied in the context of operation, as it differs significantly. A screening may take the point of departure in categories that can be identified, including the wish to profile identity, to network and build relations, to gain access to resources and to gain recognition from the wider community.



CLOSING REMARKS

Youth constitute the majority in the MENA countries, and young people have played a prominent role in mobilizing and supporting the uprisings constituting the Arab Spring. Hopefully, youth will also become a central player in the reform processes leading to a new democratic direction in the region. Mainstreaming youth components into all of the MENA programmes would provide a platform for an efficient fast-track line in support of youth becoming active agents in the civil society.

Mainstreaming is one of the instruments available in the efforts to strengthen the position of youth in the MENA region. In the Danish context, the mainstreaming angle is emphasized in the review 'Danish-Arab Partnership Programme: Objective and guidelines for the implementation of bilateral activities under the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme' (DAPP), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, March 2010:

"... Similarly, Denmark shares the region's concern about how to integrate the huge youth generation in societal life and ensure this generation's active participation, also in political life. The two issues [together with gender, ed.] are presented as independent thematic programmes, but all experience indicates that in order to promote the participation of women and young people, it is crucial to mainstream this in more general programmes. Consequently, all programmes under the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme should consider how special efforts are best carried out in order to promote the participation of women and young people." (p. 8)

Such recommendations are supported by the MoFA. According to the MoFA website, *"the political agreement surrounding the 2011 Budget entails that the thematic focus of PDRs (Partnership for Dialogue and Reform Programme) ... will continue in accordance with the priorities established following an external review in 2009 (with a stronger focus on media, women and youth)."*

<http://um.dk/en/danida-en/activities/countries-regions/middleeast2/partnership-for-dialogue-and-reform/partnership-for-dialogue-and-reform/> (2011-12-13)

The Danish Youth Council (DUF) has in agreement with The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) initiated a process of guiding and supporting other Danish actors in providing effective programme support to youth in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa).

DUF has many years of experience with development work and comprehensive experience with youth in general, and therein a particularly advantageous position for promoting and advocating a central position for young people. Danish youth organizations have been involved in youth cooperation in the MENA region for almost a decade, yielding remarkable results. The challenge involved in reaching and accessing youth outside the middle class city-based segments remains, however, and it is a challenge to develop relevant programme strategies and find partners to ensure broader outreach.

To meet such challenges, DUF calls for more and new types of international actors to become involved, also aiming to enhance the scope and outreach of the MENA youth programmes.

The circumstance that the MENA countries are in a process of revolt and change poses



a further challenge to interventions. The Arab Spring has brought about a completely new context: civil society has emerged and constitutes a myriad of loose and often internet-based organizational structures, which have mushroomed and become characterized by youth playing a hitherto unprecedented role. How can such structures be supported to find a way of also becoming a player in the impending political reform processes? How can energetic, fluid and mobile civil society-based youth networks be schooled to think and position themselves in terms of governance? Such political and structural challenges related to youth should also be addressed by international organizations.

All in all, the youth in the MENA region require extensive support and encouragement, as the prospects for stability remain distant. In seeking to stabilize and sustain peace and democracy in the region, committed international players must work to secure a new, fair and weighty role for young people. DUF aims to support the other NGOs and institutions that engage in support to youth in the MENA region, whether actors are new and require help to get started or whether the aim is to improve the quality and effectiveness of youth intervention. DUF encourages everyone to contact DUF and enquire about professional guidance, be it providing general information, technical advice or the need for DUF to assist in establishing contact with civil society organizations in the region.

Contact should be made to DUF, Scherfigsvej 5, DK-2100 Copenhagen – telephone (+45) 3929 8888. Ask for the MENA desk officer or mail to duf@duf.dk. See also the Danish, English and Arabic websites, respectively: <http://duf.dk/>; <http://duf.dk/english>; <http://duf.dk/arabic>



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