USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Promising Practices in the Middle East and North Africa

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

BACKGROUND

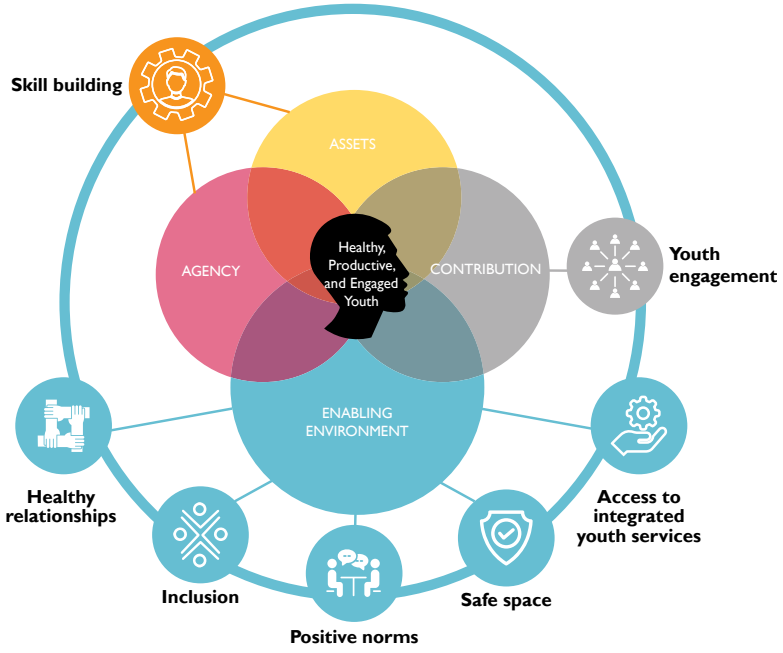
Conflict-affected youth face substantial risks to their well-being and successful transition to adulthood. Positive Youth Development (PYD), a strengths-based approach to facilitating youth development, offers a useful framework for supporting youth in such contexts. PYD aims to empower youth to reach their full potential by engaging them with their families, communities, and/or governments and enhancing their assets (skills and resources), agency (ability to use these assets), contribution, and environment. Additional research is needed to understand how conflict affects PYD outcomes, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This brief is a companion to a full report, *Positive Youth Development in Conflict: Promising Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*. It identifies effective practices for PYD programs in conflict-affected contexts in MENA and seeks to provide practitioners with guidance and recommendations on how to contribute to longer-term PYD in these environments.

YOUTH AND CONFLICT IN MENA

By the year 2030, projections indicate that roughly 40 percent of the MENA population—nearly half of which is individuals under the age of 24—will live in conflict or crisis conditions.[i, ii] Conflict significantly threatens the well-being of youth, who are undergoing crucial developmental changes. While the definition of youth varies among MENA countries, USAID defines youth as being individuals between the ages of 10-29 as well as more broadly the transition period from childhood to adulthood. In MENA, conflict impacts multiple factors in youth development, including access to adequate education, health care, and sexual and reproductive health services; employment and financial stability;[1] gender roles and norms; civic and social engagement; and governance. These factors shape young people's environments, which can promote or impede the development of youth assets and agency as well as opportunities for youth engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic presents further challenges to youth development, posing considerable risks in education, employment, and mental health, especially for vulnerable youth. Moreover, although youth and future generations will shoulder much of the long-term economic and social consequences of the crisis, their well-being may be superseded by short-term economic and equity considerations.[iii] Despite these challenges, young people demonstrate remarkable resilience in conflict, and with proper support, some of the negative impacts of conflict can be mitigated.

1 Youth unemployment rates in MENA have remained the highest in the world for more than 25 years, reaching 30 percent in 2017, with 43 percent among Palestinians and 36 percent in Jordan and Tunisia. N. Kabbani, *Youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Revisiting and reframing the challenge* (Brookings, 2019). https://www.brookings.edu/research/youth-employment-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-revisiting-and-reframing-the-challenge/.

PYD Domains and Features



THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT APPROACH

PYD, which is both a philosophy and an approach to youth programming, integrates seven features—skill building; youth engagement and contribution; healthy relationships and bonding; belonging and membership; positive norms, expectations, and perceptions; safe spaces; and access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services—across the four domains of assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment. PYD is a holistic approach that attends to the multiple aspects of youths' socioecological environments, including family, school, employment, community, and social and political systems. To tackle the challenges that span young peoples' socioecological systems, PYD programs must incorporate multiple PYD features that support and reinforce one another.

Conflict constrains PYD by undermining youth's psychological, emotional, and physical well-being and safety. It disrupts social support systems, hampering youth's ability to build skills, form supportive relationships, and access opportunities. Armed conflict along ethnic, religious, or other identity-based divisions may disrupt youth's sense of belonging in their communities, and the instability arising from conflict can undermine positive norms and expectations about youth's roles and contributions. Despite these barriers, many young people overcome the adversity of conflict with appropriate protective factors. In addition, youth can positively contribute to conflict response, mitigation, and peacebuilding and play a critical role in advancing peace and stability.

PYD approaches must account for the challenges within conflict-affected environments and integrate all four PYD domains in programming in an age-appropriate way, building on young peoples' existing assets, agency, and contributions:

Conflict inhibits the development of youth **assets**[2]—defined as the resources, skills, and competencies necessary to achieve desired outcomes—by disrupting formal and informal education and skill-building; cutting youth off from resources necessary for skill-building, such as financial support; impacting the development of competencies, such as executive function, by disrupting youth's brain development; and disrupting the positive relationships that contribute to the successful development of skills. It is crucial to establish alternative opportunities for asset development in conflict settings, especially at key points in youth's development. Building assets can also support the mitigation of the negative effects of conflict, such as by developing the skills needed to cope with emotional stressors, supporting youth to critically evaluate conflict narratives that might contribute to violence, and building youth's interpersonal skills to non-violently manage conflict.

Model Program: Developing Youth Assets in Conflict

Implemented by Mercy Corps, WISE Girls supported adolescent Syrian girls in Jordanian refugee camps to develop overall competency in sexual and reproductive health. Girls gained knowledge of core sexual and reproductive health concepts from qualified medical professionals and were empowered to develop life skills and soft skills through project-based learning. By engaging in the four stages of human-centered design—inspiration, ideation, prototyping, and testing—girls developed the higher-order thinking skills needed to understand a problem, gather information, analyze and plan for action, take action, and evaluate success. Working in small groups and engaging in peer-to-peer education further helped girls build interpersonal and communication skills and strengthen social self-efficacy. As a result, Syrian girls developed the confidence and agency to become peer educators for sexual and reproductive health and communicate their ideas on the topic with their families.

Conflict can negatively impact the development of youth's **agency**[3]—defined as the ability to employ assets and aspirations to make or influence decisions and act on one's decision to achieve desired outcomes without fear of violence or retribution. Conflict can disrupt the process of identity development that typically occurs in adolescence, posing additional roadblocks to youths' goal setting or instilling a sense of hopelessness about their prospects. Building agency has the potential to develop youths' resilience and coping abilities and empower them to navigate challenges in their environment and take action to reach their full potential. In at-risk environments, providing opportunities for youth agency has been shown to mitigate violent behavior and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. Building youth agency in conflict might look like providing youth with

2 Building assets entails building skills, such as problem solving, self-regulation, self-esteem, and strong cognitive or intellectual skills; providing or developing tangible resources, such as financial support, education, or training, and intangible resources, such as ideas; and developing the necessary social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies

3 Agency encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, and values that youth hold about themselves. PYD programs facilitate youth agency by building key soft skills, including self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-determination, clear and positive identity, and belief in the future.

opportunities for self-expression that emphasize positive self-concept over conflict-related identities. It may also entail building skills in goal-setting and perseverance—including anticipating risk, managing spoilers, and executing alternative strategies—to support youth to overcome obstacles and maintain a sense of hope for the future.

Model Program: Developing Youth Agency in Conflict

Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds, young Syrian mothers participated in young mothers' clubs to build their knowledge and skills in areas such as prenatal and postnatal care, child development, family planning, and sexual and reproductive health. Alongside these core topics, girls developed skills in interpersonal communication, emotional awareness, problem solving, and decision making, which supported the girls' agency to effectively engage with their parents and/or partners on issues of sexual and reproductive health. This approach recognized that building assets in sexual and reproductive health was not enough and that fostering agency was essential for girls to challenge prevailing social norms around mothers' traditional roles in family decision making. Following the pilot, 52 percent of girls reported having good or very good communication with their spouses as a result of the program, allowing them to more effectively participate in family planning.

Opportunities for youth **contribution**[4]—defined as youth engagement as a source of change for their own and their community's positive development—may be limited by conflict. When youth lack opportunities to apply developed assets and agency through concrete avenues, this may result in unmet expectations or disillusionment, and in rare cases, cause youth to seek alternative paths to contribution through violence. Existing opportunities for youth contribution may actually expose them to heightened risk of discrimination or harm. However, meaningful youth contribution in conflict-affected contexts has the potential to rebuild structures and processes in a more inclusive and representative way. Potential programs to support youth's contribution in conflict might include identifying local, concrete opportunities where youth can build confidence in their ability to affect tangible change; building the capacity of parents, teachers, and other adults to engage youth as equals; ensuring the protection of youth in taking on more visible leadership roles; and supporting youth-led organizations.

Model Program: Supporting Youth Contribution in Conflict

In **Sharekna**, implemented by FHI360, youth participated in community stakeholder action planning alongside adult civil society and community leaders and in the joint implementation of local resilience activities. The identified resilience activities were designed to be concrete and manageable, such as restoring local parks or infrastructure, to ensure that youth and adult stakeholders could see results in the short term. This approach helped youth develop greater trust in civil society as a potential avenue to effect change. At the same time, adults developed positive views of youth contribution in part because they could quickly see the tangible results of youth-led efforts.

4 Along with building youth leadership capacities, meaningful youth engagement aims to shift power structures that discount young people's expert knowledge and understanding of their own needs and priorities.

Conflict may interfere with youth's ability to experience an **enabling environment**[5]—physical, social, normative, and structural surroundings that maximize youth's assets, agency, access to services and opportunities, and ability to avoid risks, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. By disrupting caretakers' and mentors' well-being or separating families, conflict can inhibit youth's ability to bond and experience healthy relationships with adults. Conflict may also destroy or disrupt young peoples' access to schools, community centers, and extracurricular activities, all of which provide youth with opportunities to experience safe spaces, healthy relationships with peers and adults, a sense of belonging, and positive norms. Violent conflict may erode social norms and youth's physical safety. Without an enabling environment, it is difficult to support the development of youth's assets, agency, or contributions. It is crucial to engage government and traditional powerholders in program design to ensure an environment in which youth can thrive. Even in the most disabling of conflicts, establishing a safe, youth-friendly space within the context of a PYD program has been shown to promote youth well-being and development.

Model Program: Fostering an Enabling Environment in Conflict

Favorable Opportunities to Reinforce Self-advancement for Today's Youth (FORSATY)'s one-stop shop model facilitated access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services geared toward Moroccan youth with specific needs. Implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the program provided academic support services to youth ages nine-14 struggling to stay in school, vocational services to older adolescents and young adults out of school and seeking employment, and community engagement and recreational activities for youth neither in education nor seeking employment. This integrated model ensured flexible programming that was responsive to youths' evolving needs—meaning that if a young person participating in community activities decided to seek employment, these support services were readily available. Across all three categories of support, youth engaged in activities that facilitated a sense of belonging and membership, such as theater and sports. Program staff acted as mentors, supporting youth to build healthy relationships and modeling positive norms and behaviors. Ultimately, the one-stop-shops became safe spaces for youth, creating an enabling environment for youth development.

The following guiding principles are also essential for implementing PYD in conflict-affected contexts:

- **Apply conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm principles.** This entails understanding intergroup relations and ensuring that programs do not exacerbate inequalities or grievances or cause harm. Conflict-sensitive programs include youth across all ages and dividing lines, engage partners from different sides of a conflict, facilitate understanding and dialogue across conflict divisions among youth and across generations, distribute services and resources equally, and manage youth expectations about what can be achieved in the institutional and enabling environment. Youth may face many threats to their physical and psychosocial safety in conflict-affected contexts—from discrimination to state repression and imprisonment. As smart

5 The term "environment" should be interpreted broadly and can include the social (e.g., relationships with peers and adults), normative (e.g., attitudes, norms, and beliefs), structural (e.g., laws, policies, programs, and systems), and physical (e.g., safe, supportive spaces) environment. An enabling environment will include opportunities for prosocial involvement, positive norms, value and recognition, youth- and gender-responsive services and policies, and physical and psychological safety.

technology and social media are increasingly used to target youth activists amid closing civic spaces around the world, implementers must also prioritize capacity building in digital security and the protection of youth in online spaces. Implementers must anticipate the various risks posed to youth by participating in PYD programs, including backlash to youth "empowerment." All actors should work with young people to identify appropriate ways to prevent or mitigate these risks through applying Do No Harm principles and establishing safeguard measures to protect youths' physical, psychosocial, and digital safety and build their capacities to protect themselves.

- **Ensure meaningful inclusion of diverse youth**. Meaningful inclusion is critical for strengthening individual and community resilience in conflict-affected contexts and countering conflict dynamics between generations and subgroups. Inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized identities is key to effective and sustainable development. In PYD, it entails ensuring that all youth, across all intersecting identities and regardless of disadvantage or disability, can equally contribute to and benefit from programming. Intersecting identities might include caste; ethnicity; gender; indigenous, refugee, migrant, or citizenship status; sexual orientation; disability status (developmental, sensory, physical, psychosocial, and other disabilities may face different forms of discrimination); religion; political opinions; socioeconomic status; marital status; parental status; age; and other factors. In conflict, inclusiveness requires that PYD implementers understand and address the barriers, biases, and power dynamics associated with young peoples' intersecting identities; tailor outreach and engagement strategies for different youth subgroups; and train program staff and facilitators in inclusive and nondiscriminatory approaches.

- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). MHPSS encompasses a broad spectrum of interventions designed to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and prevent and treat mental health disorders. These initiatives are essential to mitigate conflict's impact on youth and their relationships, families, and communities. Incorporating MHPSS activities into PYD programs can help youth meet basic health and security needs, build resilience, and develop positive coping strategies, enabling them to attain a wide range of PYD outcomes. Youth have diverse coping strategies and responses to conflict, and PYD programs should use a layered approach to meet their various psychosocial needs. Basic psychosocial support programming aims to strengthen overall social well-being and promote healthy coping mechanisms for youth and their communities, and is typically conducted by teachers, social workers, volunteers and community health workers who have received training. Depending on the activity and referral systems available, psychosocial support intervention may also require supervision by mental health specialists. A smaller percentage of youth may require additional, focused support to reduce psychological stress or specialized treatment, supervised by mental health professionals, for mental health disorders. In conflict-affected contexts where mental health stigma is high, it is particularly important to involve families and communities in MHPSS, raise awareness of mental health and positive coping strategies, ensure interventions are culturally appropriate and conflict sensitive, and give youth opportunities to address collective and individual trauma. It is also crucial that staff, families, and communities involved with youth have access to MHPSS services for their own psychosocial needs.

Guiding Principle: Incorporating MHPSS into PYD Initiatives

The Advancing Adolescents program implemented by Mercy Corps offers an example of how PYD and MHPSS activities can reinforce each other in conflict-affected contexts to produce stronger PYD outcomes. Teaching young people about neurobiological drivers of emotional stress and building their capacity for emotional attunement lowered levels of insecurity, stress, and other mental health difficulties. At the same time, practical training in vocational and technical skills helped build youth's confidence and hope. The randomized control trial found that sessions on technical and vocational skills had a more significant impact on youths' stress levels than recreational activities did, indicating that building assets and agency may have reduced stress overall.

MENA POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING MODELS

The 12 programs reviewed for promising PYD practices demonstrate the interconnection among PYD domains, highlighting the importance of integrating multiple PYD domains and program features to develop a truly holistic programmatic approach. In conflict-affected MENA contexts, building young people's agency and assets in soft skills, as well as technical knowledge and skills, helps them address backlash they may face from their families or communities when they apply new skills and knowledge, particularly in sensitive topics. Building agency—for example, through experiential learning and concrete opportunities for contribution—can also support psychosocial well-being and offer youth a sense of control and power, even amid intractable conflict. In contexts where youth experience political or socioeconomic exclusion, increasing their knowledge of community issues and their ability and access to resources to help address these issues can foster a greater sense of belonging to their communities. Successful youth engagement and contribution can help shift social norms and build trust between youth and adults.

PROMISING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MENA CONTEXTS

The following promising practices offer operational guidance on designing, staffing, managing, and evaluating PYD programs in conflict-affected contexts to ensure success.

INSTITUTIONAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS

- **Select civil society, community-based, and institutional partners who are highly invested in cross-sectoral PYD outcomes.** Building a broad alliance of these partners can improve chances for integration and sustainability.

- **Select civil society partners, community-based organizations, and youth-led organizations that are trusted by local communities and youth across conflict divides.** Credible partnerships with civil society and community-based organizations can help overcome trust deficits on sensitive issues in conflict, particularly those that challenge social norms.

Promising Practices in Institutional and Civil Society Partnerships: Promise Pathways

Promise Pathways, implemented by Creative Associates, provided youth and their families with integrated, youth-friendly services aimed at reducing child labor in Morocco. The program trained more than 100 case workers in the Pathways to Advancing Viable Alternatives to Education and Employment (PAVE) methodology, a child-centered approach to case management that enables a participatory planning process involving young people and their families in taking up appropriate education or training opportunities. Promise Pathways was successful in mobilizing government and civil society actors to provide the services needed to withdraw children and youth from child labor. The program gained buy-in early on by establishing early memoranda of understanding with state institutions and ministries. Ongoing capacity building in youth-centered methodologies, including PAVE, risk mapping, and an early warning system for school dropouts, was provided to over 500 state actors, who found that the project's youth-centered approaches increased their capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families. As a result, the National Mutual Aid began to use the PAVE methodology to train social assistants working in Morocco's Child Protection Centers, and the Ministry of Employment duplicated the project's risk mapping and analysis training for labor inspectors across all regions.

- **Prioritize partnerships with youth-led groups (formal and informal) and engage them as equal partners**, recognizing that their operations and aspirations often differ from those of traditional civil society.
- **Manage partnerships by providing ongoing capacity building in and accountability for PYD approaches.** Institutional and implementing partners should receive ongoing capacity building in engaging youth as equal partners to contribute to successful PYD outcomes, and youth-led partners should receive support in building organizational capacities tailored to their own goals.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- **Create opportunities for diverse youth to design and adapt programs throughout the program cycle.** This practice is particularly important in conflict-affected contexts, where youth-centered programming can build youth agency and contribute to a sense of control and safety.
- **Consider conflict dynamics and cultural context in designing PYD programs and tools** by conducting a conflict assessment to better understand localized drivers and adapting tools to local languages.
- **Ensure a flexible program design that can adapt to evolving conflict contexts.** PYD initiatives should be able to adapt to changes in the conflict context to ensure impact and avoid youth disappointment.
- **Root program design in youths' socioecological contexts and provide individualized services where possible**. Mapping the systems in which youth are embedded is critical in conflict-affected contexts because conflict affects youths' broader environments and may have unanticipated negative effects on PYD programs.

TOOLS AND APPROACHES

- **Build skills that youth, their families, and their communities consider relevant to the conflict context.** Skills may be tailored to help youth access basic needs or rights or support youths' contributions or roles in shifting social norms.
- **Support innovation in information and communication technology (ICT) and close digital divides to expand youth contribution.** ICT can help youth mitigate some of the challenges to mobility, association, and organization they face in conflict-affected areas and help expand their ability to contribute to formal and informal civic life. However, it is critical to close digital divides and build youth digital literacy and capacities in online safety to fully benefit from ICT innovation. Innovative media programs can offer opportunities for youth to contribute to formal and informal civic life, including through online roundtables and debates, interactive video games, and mock reality television shows.
- **Develop community-based platforms for integrated youth-friendly services to facilitate community access, ownership, and sustainability.** Programs that centralize youth-friendly service provision within a hub, youth center, or case worker role integrate these services more effectively.

Promising Practices in Youth Engagement: Ana Usharek

Ana Usharek, implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), fostered the contribution of Jordanian youth by building their skills in civic engagement and their knowledge of local government. Through issue identification, strategy development, and action planning, youth reported developing a sense of responsibility to their community, which contributed to greater feelings of belonging. Parents observed positive changes in their children's attitudes toward community engagement, and local media highlighted youth-led initiatives, which contributed to improved perceptions and trust of youth. Program staff highlighted the importance of independently engaging community powerholders to gain trust and buy-in, bringing together powerholders from different ideologies and institutions to exchange experiences in youth engagement and using media to make youths' skills and actions more visible. Selecting concrete civic initiatives that achieve immediate impact improves powerholders' and communities' perceptions of youth contribution and helps manage youths' expectations about their contributions' outcomes. Building youths' flexible thinking and troubleshooting skills was cited as essential to their successful contribution. Ana Usharek's program approach demonstrates how youth contribution can facilitate a sense of belonging to the community and shift social norms around youth engagement, even where youth face significant political and social exclusion and hierarchical social norms.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- **Engage powerholders both separately from and in conjunction with youth leaders.** Approaches to adult engagement could include framing the situation as an opportunity for adults to transfer knowledge and participate in a new solution or explaining that depriving youth of resources and opportunities destabilizes communities.
- **Identify local, concrete opportunities for youth contribution that can have an immediate impact.** Focusing on manageable issues allows youth to see immediate results, building their trust in political and civic engagement and increasing adults' and powerholders' trust in youth-led action.
- **Actively manage youths' expectations about engagement outcomes and support them to develop alternatives.** This perspective builds flexibility and resilience among youth engaging in MENA, where hierarchical structures and social norms may serve as barriers to progress.

GENDER

- **Designate local staff members to gain parents' buy-in for girls' and boys' participation** and work with well-connected civil society or community-based organizations to gain parents' trust.
- **Account for girls' specific needs when designing and budgeting for safe spaces.** PYD programs should account for gender norms that can restrict girls' movement and ensure sufficient resources for girl-only spaces, dedicated transportation, or female trainers to support girls' participation when appropriate.

- **Design PYD training content that is relevant for both genders and that considers cultural norms.** PYD trainings should account for MENA gender dynamics that might cause a training topic, timing, or venue to be viewed as inappropriate for young women or young men, accounting for age and gender sensitivities. Training plans should be reviewed with participants to ensure comfort with the balance of women and men where same-sex cohorts and trainers may be more or less acceptable in different contexts. Consideration should be given to logistics, such as accessibility for youth with disabilities, childcare options, multiple options for participation, and activities that do not require physical touch. Do No Harm principles should be considered, such as the appropriate use of photography and coordination of separate activities targeted to male guides in settings where young women cannot go out alone.

Promising Practices in Gender: Partnerships with Youth

When designing programming for youth development resource centers (YDRCs) in the West Bank, IREX's program Partnerships with Youth sought to address findings from their baseline study that female youth participate less than male youth in community activities and report lower levels of competency levels than their male counterparts. Existing YDRCs provided sports and cultural activities, primarily targeting young men. Partnerships with Youth's initial program design sought to address barriers to female participation, including by working with trusted local associations to recruit an equal number of male and female youth, ensuring gender sensitivity in the timing and content of program offerings, recruiting female volunteers and role models, and finding culturally appropriate ways for young men and women to participate in activities together in partnership with local communities.

Yet, when the program began, rates of male participation were lower than those of female participation, which stood at 60%. IREX conducted a rapid gender assessment to better understand the norms affecting both genders and how to address barriers to participation. They found that young men felt they did not have time to participate in YDRC programming, which had been scheduled during afternoons to accommodate norms around women's participation and consequently clashed with young men's work schedules. Additionally, the content of the available skill building options, which had been tailored to ensure the inclusion of young women, was often viewed as superfluous or not a priority by young men's families, particularly when compared to competing opportunities for paid employment.

Overall, prevailing norms around young men as the primary financial providers for their families proved to be an important barrier to their participation, alongside more commonly observed barriers for women related to safety, childcare obligations, or other forms of structural discrimination. IREX sought to address this by providing more diverse programming options, including those that took place after working hours and that provided more advanced technical skills. At the midline assessment, 77% of youth indicated that males and females were treated equally at the YDRCs as compared to 33% who believed this at schools and universities. At the final evaluation, a significant number of youth identified the program's Most Significant Change as being the shift in their families' acceptance of gender mixing, which came as families observed youth become more active in their communities as a result of YDRC activities.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- **Disaggregate by sex and age.** Analyses should always disaggregate by sex and five-year age bands (10–14, 15-19, 20–24, 25–29), given that a PYD-focused approach should be gender and age appropriate.
- **Design gender- and age-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks to identify unanticipated outcomes and assess project inclusivity.** In youth-led programs in rapidly changing conflict-affected contexts, results may substantially deviate from predefined objectives. Most significant change or outcome harvesting frameworks can help identify unanticipated outcomes and demonstrate impact.
- **Empower youth to define project success.** Youth can define success by setting indicators and analyzing data. This process can also help manage youths' expectations about what the project can achieve.
- **Adopt rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems** to contribute to the evidence base for PYD programs in conflict-affected contexts, adopting monitoring and evaluation approaches and indicators that are gender- and age-sensitive.

STAFFING

- **Develop a PYD ethos among the project team and partners.** Developing a PYD ethos means explaining and gaining buy-in for the PYD approach from the beginning, setting recruitment and partnership criteria, providing in-depth PYD training for staff and partners, and actively maintaining a youth-centered work culture that drives decision making.
- **Engage youth as paid staff, interns, and peer mentors.** Peer engagement can be powerful in facilitating PYD, providing positive youth role models, and facilitating bonding and safe spaces.
- **Equip staff to manage conflict, facilitate meaningful inclusion, and build trust** among youth and between youth and adults.

JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE

- **Generate a demand for youth-friendly services.** When youth who benefit from services demonstrate an improved ability to contribute to their communities, demand for these services can grow among parents, schools, and businesses and contribute to the services' long-term use and financial sustainability.
- **Encourage positive social norms by making youth skills and initiatives visible to relevant adults,** thereby improving adults' views of youth contribution. These activities can also increase the acceptance of young women's participation and contribution.
- **Build partnerships that facilitate financial and methodological sustainability.** Institutional partnerships can adopt specific PYD program approaches or methodologies or integrate youth-friendly services into their own budgets.

A WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

To complement the number of promising practices identified, actors working with youth can continue advancing PYD in Conflict across the region by implementing the following recommendations:

1. **Elevate the PYD in Conflict Approach:** Research and evidence on PYD indicate that approaches that focus on advancing positive outcomes are more effective than problem-focused approaches. Donors and implementers should prioritize and advocate for PYD in conflict approaches, including through communities of practice, conflict-sensitive youth policies, and tailored PYD programming. Given the higher risks for conflict-affected youth, including the risks associated with "youth empowerment," all actors should work with young people to understand and address their concerns about protection and well-being. Safeguarding standards, conflict sensitivity, Do No Harm, and MHPSS are important elements for PYD programming in conflict-affected contexts and should involve youth as key actors in their own protection.

2. **Promote Youth Engagement and Leadership:** The most effective way to design and implement PYD programming is through youth-led, youth-serving organizations. Donors and implementers should engage such organizations as equal partners to address power imbalances within the international development system—for example, through direct funding and capacity building for youth-led groups and initiatives. Creating opportunities for youth leadership within formal processes and institutions, as well as through alternative avenues and channels, is crucial. Support for networking, coordination, and collaboration among youth-led, youth-serving organizations helps strengthen and sustain their collective capacities and impact.

3. **Build Evidence for the PYD in Conflict Approach:** Conduct applied research, monitoring, and evaluation and widely disseminate findings and lessons learned to strengthen PYD practice in conflict-affected contexts. Start by consolidating the evidence base across communities of practice and sectors, identifying gaps in available evidence and developing a learning agenda. Youth should be at the forefront of this process. Some previously identified knowledge gaps include capturing the impact of youth-led initiatives, identifying best practices to include youth with disabilities, and determining an effective range of protection mechanisms for young people in conflict-affected contexts.

4. **Develop PYD Tools for MENA:** Despite the abundance of PYD tools and resources, few focus on MENA-specific contexts. Rapidly changing and context-specific conflict dynamics increase the need to tailor PYD tools to MENA and make these tools available in Arabic and French for cross-regional use. Tools should include contextualized and culturally appropriate guidance on MHPSS for MENA youth, an Arabic-language PYD monitoring and evaluation tool, and staff training for PYD in Conflict in local working languages.

ENDNOTES

i UNICEF, *MENA Generation 2030 Report*, (UNICEF, 2019). 9. https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/mena-generation-2030.

ii A. Abdellatif, P. Pagliani, and E. Hsu, *Leaving No One Behind: Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries* [Ebook] (United National Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2019), 2. Retrieved March 15, 2020. https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-research-paper.html

iii Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery, and Resilience*, 2. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134356-ud5kox3g26&title=Youth-and-COVID-19-Response-Recovery-and-Resilience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the Search for Common Ground research team, including Megan Leigh Smith, Research Specialist; Saji Prelis, Research Lead; Rachel Walsh Taza, Program Manager for Children and Youth; Mena Ayazi, Youth, Peace, and Security Associate; Chaima Fartoun, Research Assistant; Sana Gasmi, Research Assistant; Limou Dembele, MENA Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Specialist; Rim Aljabi, MENA Gender Advisor; Hilde Deman, MENA PYD Expert; and Hendrick Townsley, Team Leader, working in coordination with Management Systems International with the support of Bettina Kimpton, Managing Editor; Perin Arkun, Senior Project Manager; Brian Felix, Project Manager; Amina Aaqib and Adam Bloom, Graphic Designers; Chris Bathon, Technical Manager; Jess Ngo, Technical Manager; Laurel Bradley, Technical Manager; and Paul Turner, GISR Chief of Party/Technical Director for Peace and Stabilization. USAID staff who contributed/edited the report includes Rachel Goldberg, Carey Utz, Abir Aldhalimi, Allison Salyer, Ahmad Al-Amine, Idriss Touijer, Talar Karakashian, Angie Haddad, Nadia Blackton, Christine Capacci-Carneal, Monica Villanueva, Muhanad Manna, Hind Houas, David Hunsicker, Najiyah Alwazir, Milad Abraham, and Michael McCabe.

Disclaimer:
The authors' views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.