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# POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT

Promising Practices  
in the Middle East  
and North Africa

**Governance Integration for  
Stabilization and Resilience in the  
Middle East and North Africa**

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SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

جامعة البلقاء

AL-BALQA UNIVERSITY



# POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT

## Promising Practices in the Middle East and North Africa

### Governance Integration for Stabilization and Resilience in the Middle East and North Africa

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Governance Integration for Stabilization and Resilience in MENA

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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.



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## ACRONYMS

AMAL	Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds (CARE)
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CLP	Education Component of the Community Livelihoods Project
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FORSATY	Favorable Opportunities to Reinforce Self-Advancement for Today's Youth
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GSE	General-Self Efficacy Scale
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCRI	Lebanon Community Resilience Initiative
LETS	Learning Environment Technical Support
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MSI	Management Systems International
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAVE	Pathways to Advancing Viable Alternatives to Education and Employment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PYD	Positive Youth Development
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SGM	Sexual and Gender Minority
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	The UN Refugee Agency

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Agency:** Ability to perceive and employ one's assets and aspirations to set goals, make decisions, and act on those decisions to achieve desired outcomes.

**Armed Conflict:** A situation in which states and/or groups engage in armed confrontation with intensity and organization.

**Assets:** Skills, resources, and competencies that can be used to achieve desired outcomes.

**Conflict:** An incompatibility of needs, interests, desires, and objectives arising from a reduction of resources and consequent increased competition. Conflict may occur among families, communities, workplaces, nations, regions, and individuals.

**Conflict Sensitivity:** The ability to understand conflict dynamics in intergroup relations, understand how the intervention and conflict dynamics interact, and act upon these understandings to minimize any unintended negative impact and maximize the positive impact of the intervention.

**Contribution:** Engagement as a source of change for one's own and one's community's positive development.

**Do No Harm:** A principle in peacebuilding that dictates that interventions must not put those living in violent contexts at a greater risk than they would otherwise face without the intervention.

**Enabling Environment:** An environment that develops and supports assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities and strengths as well as the ability to avoid risks, stay safe and secure, be protected, and live without the fear of violence or retribution. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term "environment" should be interpreted broadly and includes social features (e.g., laws, policies, program services, and systems) and physical features (e.g., safe and supportive spaces).

**Fragility:** A condition in which state-society relations fail to produce effective and legitimate outcomes.

**Mental Health:** A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community.

**Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services:** A composite term referring to a wide range of interventions that aim to protect or promote individual and community psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental health disorders. Such interventions include mental health initiatives, which are typically overseen by health professionals and involve specialized support to improve psychological well-being and treat mental health disorders. These interventions also involve psychosocial support, which focuses on improving the connection between the individual and their environment, others, and the social context (e.g., community and culture) to support overall well-being and coping and does not require facilitation or supervision by mental health professionals or specialists.

**Positive Youth Development:** An approach to youth development that supports youth in reaching their full potential by engaging them with their families, communities, and/or government. Positive youth development approaches build youths' skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen youths' environments; and transform systems.

**Protective Factors:** Conditions that enhance the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes and reduce the likelihood of negative consequences from exposure to risk.

**Resilience:** The ability of individuals, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stressors to reduce chronic vulnerability and facilitate inclusive growth.<sup>1</sup>

**Risk Factors:** Conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive developmental outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes.

**Social and Emotional Learning:** Cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children, youth, and adults learn through explicit, active, focused, and sequenced instruction. These competencies allow them to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.<sup>2</sup>

**Soft Skills:** Skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environments, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.<sup>3</sup>

**Structural Violence:** An interplay of ingrained economic, political, and social factors that results in inequality for or the exploitation of certain groups of people and creates unequal opportunities for them.<sup>4</sup>

**Women and Girls Safe Space:** A designated location that protects and empowers women and girls in crisis settings by providing them with opportunities to rebuild social networks; receive social support; acquire contextually relevant skills; access multisectoral sexual and gender-based violence response services; and raise awareness on issues related to women's rights, health, and services.<sup>5</sup>

**Youth Engagement:** An inclusive, intentional, and mutually respectful partnership between youth and adults, whereby power is shared and respective contributions are valued. Additionally, young peoples' ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and the world.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

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 as well as 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).

This report identifies effective practices for PYD programs in conflict-affected MENA contexts and seeks to provide practitioners with guidance and recommendations on how to contribute to longer-term PYD in these environments. First, a brief overview is given of the situation of conflict-affected youth in MENA, followed by a review of PYD as a guiding framework in fragile and conflict-affected contexts alongside other youth-relevant frameworks. A review of 12 program examples from conflict-affected contexts in MENA reveals promising practices and lessons learned that can be applied in future programming. The report concludes with recommendations for actors to advance PYD policy and practice in conflict-affected areas across the region.

### YOUTH AND CONFLICT IN MENA

The definition of youth varies among MENA countries—for example, in Jordan, youth are individuals ages 12–30,<sup>6</sup> whereas in Yemen, youth are individuals ages 15–24<sup>7</sup>—because the cultural implications of youth vary among societies. This study adopts the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) definition of youth as individuals ages 10–29, but also considers youth more broadly in the transition from childhood to adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

However, not all youth are the same and neither are their experiences; youths' situations and needs vary based on gender, age, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

By the year 2030, 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.<sup>9,10</sup> Conflict significantly threatens the well-being of youth, who are undergoing crucial developmental changes. 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; gender roles and norms; civic and social engagement; and governance. These factors shape young peoples' 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.<sup>11</sup> Despite these challenges, young people demonstrate remarkable resilience in conflict, and with proper support, some of the negative impacts of conflict can be mitigated.

## 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 role and contribution. 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 as well as 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:

i 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/>

- Conflict inhibits the development of youth **assets**<sup>12</sup>—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 the 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 youths’ interpersonal skills to non-violently manage conflict.

*Conflict can negatively impact youth assets, agency, and contribution.*
- Conflict can negatively impact the development of youth’s **agency**<sup>13</sup> —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 also disrupt the identity development process 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 environments 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 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.
- Opportunities for youth **contribution**<sup>14</sup>—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.
- Conflict may interfere with youth’s ability to experience an **enabling environment**<sup>15</sup>— physical, social, normative, and structural surroundings that maximize youths’ 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 youths' 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.

*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.*

The following guiding principles are 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 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. The inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized identities is key to effective and sustainable development. In PYD, this 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).** 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, which enables 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. A smaller percentage of youth may require additional, focused support to reduce psychological stress or specialized treatment that is 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.



## MENA POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING MODELS

The team identified 12 programs that contain promising PYD practices. These programs demonstrate the interconnection among PYD domains, highlighting their cross-sectoral nature and 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 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.

*In contexts where youth experience political or socioeconomic exclusion, increasing their knowledge of community issues and their ability and access to resources can foster a greater sense of belonging to their communities.*

## 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.
- **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 contexts 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.** In conflict-affected contexts, opportunities for youth contribution may be limited. 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 capacity 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.

#### 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 engagement in MENA, where hierarchical structures and social norms are often dominant.

#### 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 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.



#### 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 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 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 as well as contribute to the services' long-term 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.



Graphic I: Advancing Positive Youth Outcomes



### 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 focusing 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.



## INTRODUCTION

By the year 2030, roughly 40 percent of the population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)—nearly half of which is individuals under the age of 24—will live in conflict or crisis conditions.<sup>16,17</sup> Many MENA countries are affected by armed conflict—including ongoing civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen and cycles of violence in Iraq—or its resonating effects, such as foreign terrorist fighters returning from conflict zones and mass population displacement that destabilizes host communities.<sup>ii</sup> Despite these challenges, young people demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of conflict, and with proper support, some of conflict’s negative impacts can be mitigated. Young people can also play a positive and constructive role in humanitarian and crisis response and local and national peacebuilding efforts.

This report identifies effective practices for positive youth development (PYD) programs in conflict-affected MENA contexts. The report aims to provide recommendations and guidance on activities and approaches that contribute to longer-term PYD in these environments. The report covers the following topics:

- **Youth and Conflict in MENA:** A brief overview of the situation of conflict-affected youth in MENA and the potential long-term outcomes and trajectories for these young people.
- **The PYD in Conflict Approach:** An overview of PYD as a guiding framework in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and other guiding principles related to working with youth in these contexts.
- **MENA PYD Programming Models:** A set of 12 program examples from the region that contain promising PYD practices and demonstrate the importance of integrating multiple PYD domains and program features.
- **Promising PYD Practices:** Lessons learned and operational guidance generated from a review of PYD programs in MENA and related literature as well as consultations with experts and implementers.
- **Recommendations:** Specific areas for the broader community of practice and donors to advance PYD in Conflict across the region, organized by four themes: elevating PYD in Conflict, youth engagement and leadership, building the evidence base for PYD in Conflict, and developing tools.
- **Annexes:** Additional information and tools, including an overview of the study’s methodology, scope, and limitations; a checklist for effective programs for conflict-affected youth; links to key resources, tools, and guidance; and links to a table of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) investments in PYD programs in MENA to date, the list of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions, and a summary of programs reviewed for the study.

ii The region was home to 5 percent of the world’s population but accounted for 55 percent of the world’s refugees and was home to 41.3 percent of the world’s internally displaced population in 2017. Ibid.

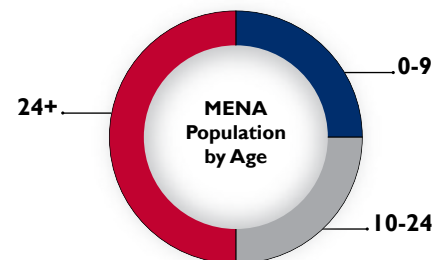


## YOUTH AND CONFLICT IN MENA

Children and youth ages 0–24 constitute nearly half of the MENA population, and adolescents and youth ages 10–24 constitute more than a quarter.<sup>18</sup> Conflict significantly threatens the well-being of these youth, who are already undergoing crucial developmental changes, through its impact on the context for youth development, including in governance; civic and social engagement; gender roles and norms; and access to adequate education, health care, and employment.

This study adopts the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) definition of youth as individuals ages 10–29, but also considers youth more broadly in the transition from childhood to adulthood. For many youth in unstable, conflict-affected regions, the transition to adulthood is disrupted and delayed or may occur earlier. Not all youth are the same and neither are their experiences; youths' situations and needs vary based on gender, age, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

Graphic 2: MENA Population Distribution by Age



## GENDER

Gender norms influence everything from access to education and health care to opportunities for employment and civic engagement. These norms shape how young women and men conduct their lives and the adult roles they are expected to fill. Some notable trends have emerged in MENA around gender, youth, and conflict, including new manifestations of gender norms, spikes in domestic and gender-based violence, and more frequent early marriage in late childhood or adolescence.

Gender norms vary across MENA, but there are similarities. Conflict has influenced and shifted social roles and norms. For example, men's unemployment in Iraq has made women's paid work more necessary, opening new opportunities for young women, even if some families view this shift as temporary. Although most combatants are young men, young women also seek membership in armed groups, performing roles enforcing Shari'a, doling out punishments, and monitoring women and girls in their communities.<sup>19, 20</sup>

Gender-based and domestic violence frequently escalate in conflict settings because of growing household tensions—for example, when adults cannot fulfill their expected gender roles. Sexual and gender minorities (SGMs) have also been targeted in conflict-affected areas—for example, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and armed security groups have attacked lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals in Syria and Iraq.<sup>21</sup> In addition, early and forced marriage rates climb as families seek to protect girls from sexual violence and limit their premarital relationships or relieve household economic stress.<sup>22</sup> Young women may also be forced into marriage under pressure from armed groups or as a result of trafficking.<sup>23</sup> However, some young women, such as in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen, seek marriage as a way to access more control and adult status.<sup>24</sup> In part due to early marriage and gender-based violence, as well as reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services, youth in these contexts may be young parents and gender norms allocate most childcare responsibility to women.

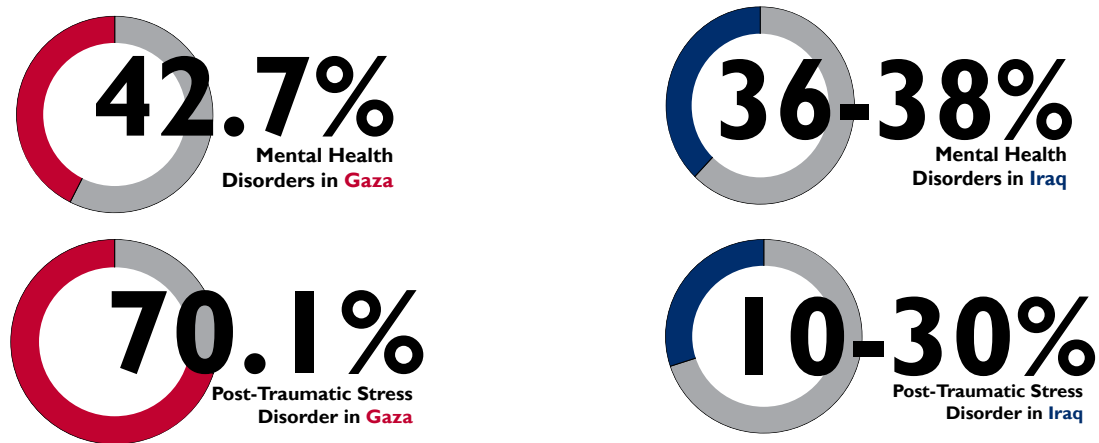
## DISABILITY

Youth with physical and intellectual disabilities almost always face additional challenges in conflict-affected contexts and are often further excluded and stigmatized than in stable contexts, compounding the risks they face. Challenges include a lack of access to disability services; inadequate accommodations, especially if they have been displaced from their homes; and difficulty leaving their homes quickly in times of danger.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, youth are at a greater risk of experiencing a disability as a direct result of conflict.<sup>26</sup> With family resources under strain and hospitals contending with attacks and shortages, youth with disabilities may not be able to receive the medical care they require, which risks prolonging the duration or severity of war-related disability.<sup>27</sup>

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health challenges that MENA youth face vary widely across the region. Youth in middle- and high-income MENA countries are more likely to suffer from non-communicable health issues, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, compared to the global average.<sup>28</sup> Youth in lower-income MENA countries, as well as displaced and refugee youth, are more likely to face infectious diseases and malnutrition as key health risks. Across the region, sexual and reproductive health knowledge levels are low, putting many youth, especially young women, at a greater risk of sexually transmitted infections and related health consequences.<sup>29</sup> Despite limited data, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that collective violence accounts for a substantial burden of ill health in MENA countries, particularly for men.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, women in conflict-affected contexts, including in refugee camps, are at a higher risk of rape and intimate partner violence.<sup>31</sup> Despite these challenges, in 2015, only 27.5 percent of the regional population lived in areas with access to health services that met the WHO standard of care.<sup>32</sup>

Graphic 3: Percentage of Youth Impacted by Mental Health and PTSD Across the Region



Studies on the mental health of MENA youth in violent conflict areas show high rates of overall mental health disorders (42.7 percent in Gaza<sup>33</sup> and 36-38 percent in Iraq) and post-traumatic stress disorder (70.1 percent in Gaza<sup>34</sup> and 10-30 percent in Iraq<sup>35</sup>). Adolescence is a key time in brain development, during which youth actively build their capacities for problem solving and complex information processing as well as personal interests, skills, and talents. However, the adolescent brain's active development and relative malleability also render it more vulnerable to chronic stress and psychological trauma. Exposure to chronic stress in adolescence affects the neurocircuitry in the brain region responsible for emotional regulation and threat response, which in turn may trigger the development of conditions, such as depression, anxiety, personality disorders, and eating disorders.<sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> This can manifest differently based on social, cultural, and gender norms.<sup>38</sup> Exposure to chronic stress can also have long-term health consequences because stress strains the body's stress regulation system, leading to inflammation of the immune system and a wide range of health ailments that can transcend generations.<sup>39, 40</sup>

Mental health care systems in MENA lack the staffing, training, policies, and resources required to address the region's mental health and psychological needs and are often incompatible with current decentralized mental health care practices.<sup>41</sup> Because of these gaps, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian agencies have become important actors in providing mental health services, particularly in unstable or conflict-affected countries. However, they may struggle to provide services that are culturally appropriate or delivered by fully trained staff.<sup>42</sup> Cultural stigma around mental illness influences how negative experiences are managed and often prevents youth from expressing distress or seeking help.<sup>43</sup>

While writing this paper, COVID-19 poses significant risks to youth's physical and mental well-being. Current WHO evidence suggests that although young people are at a lower risk of developing severe physical health symptoms, they are more susceptible to the significant psychological impacts of social distancing, quarantine measures, forced migration, and economic uncertainty.<sup>44</sup>

## EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Many MENA youth lack access to opportunities for formal and informal education and training. Fifteen million MENA children and youth ages 5–14 are not in school as a direct result of armed conflict in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.<sup>45</sup> Now, under COVID-19-related restrictions, more than 110 million MENA children and youth only have limited access to formal and informal education because of the closure of school and university facilities, youth centers, and public spaces.<sup>46</sup> In particular, displaced migrant and refugee youth face barriers to accessing educational opportunities because of their lack of legal status. By losing access to school, youth are cut off from learning and safe spaces, social cohesion, and even “therapeutic spaces of recovery.”<sup>47</sup>

Some MENA youth even face educational barriers in more stable contexts—poverty and socioeconomic inequality force many youth into child labor or early marriage. School attendance for young people with disabilities is much lower than that of their peers without disabilities in the region and drops significantly between the under-14 age group and the 15–24 age group.<sup>48</sup>

For both young women and men, access to education is influenced by socioeconomic factors, including the value families place on girls’ education. For primary schools, the out-of-school rate is 9 percent for boys and 11 percent for girls. In middle school, these rates rise to 12 percent for boys and 18 percent for girls.<sup>49</sup> However, in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, on average, women’s university enrollment is at least equal to young men’s. Across the region, girls with disabilities in rural areas tend to have the lowest school attendance and graduation rates; only 1.8 percent of young women with disabilities in Yemen attend school compared to 15.1 percent of young men with disabilities.<sup>50</sup>

Regardless of access, educational content in many places is highly politicized and often fails to include critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and fundamental core competencies that contribute to employability and citizenship.<sup>51, 52</sup> Education does not necessarily lead to employment, especially for young women. In Jordan, despite more women holding university degrees, only 17 percent are economically active, in part because of gender norms associating women’s work with unpaid household labor.<sup>53</sup> Regionally, youth unemployment is higher in urban areas,<sup>54</sup> yet in rural areas, young women are also marginalized because of job shortages and the priority given to young men as presumed breadwinners.<sup>55</sup> Such experiences contribute to youths’ earliest perceptions of injustice and exclusion.

MENA labor markets also present barriers to youth entry, including the unavailability of job opportunities and perceived discrimination and corruption or *wasta*.<sup>iii</sup> Displacement or refugee status can exclude youth from economic opportunity because of the requirement to have official documents to enter the formal labor market.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup>

Young people with disabilities, and especially young women with disabilities, generally face greater challenges accessing employment opportunities across the region. In Iraq, for example, employment rates for men with and without disabilities are 32.8 and 63 percent, respectively.<sup>59</sup> This also varies across urban and rural areas. For example, in the West Bank and Gaza, the unemployment rate among women with disabilities is nearly three times higher in urban areas.<sup>60</sup> Only 9.3 percent of MENA youth engage in entrepreneurship and self-employment,

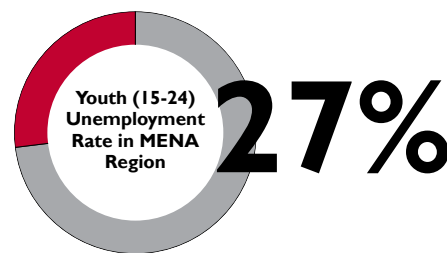
iii In Arabic, *wasta* loosely refers to nepotism or the use of personal connections to influence certain circumstances

lower than the global average among countries with available data, largely because of a lack of access to finances.<sup>61</sup> Youth-led businesses that have launched continue to face restrictive business environments, which impacts their sustainability. There are bright spots, however, including the International Labor Organization’s MENA program Know About Business, which has been found to expand youth’s knowledge and interest in starting a business.<sup>62</sup>

Across MENA, informal employment is widespread and associated with limited or a lack of social protection coverage and low and unstable revenues, making informal workers particularly vulnerable in the face of a crisis. Moreover, about 80 percent of youth in the region work in the informal sector of their national economies, which generally offers fewer or no benefits or protections.<sup>63</sup> Street work, hazardous agricultural work, bonded labor, and commercial sexual exploitation of youth exist across the region. During conflict, youth labor trafficking increases, particularly among displaced youth. Although young men are reported to be more vulnerable to labor trafficking, young women’s unpaid labor (such as through early marriage), though often not documented, may be a critical element in labor trafficking.<sup>64</sup>

The slowed economy resulting from COVID-19 further exacerbates youth vulnerability in the regional labor market, which already has the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world (exceeding 27 percent on average), and youth are five times more likely to be unemployed than their adult counterparts.<sup>65</sup>

Graphic 4: Unemployment Rate Among Youth Ages 15-24



## SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite youth’s prominent role in the Arab uprisings for social and political change, those in the region widely cite experiences of political and social exclusion that compound their economic frustrations.<sup>66</sup> There is a strong sense among many young people that policymakers, community members, and elders hold negative stereotypes about youth’s role in society. Hierarchical social norms regarding appropriate youth behavior (e.g., “respect your elders” or “listen to your parents”) can deprive young people of engagement opportunities and discourage the disruption of the status quo. Uneven practices and policies toward citizenship, rights, and privileges across the region lead to unequal treatment and exclusion of different identities within social and civic arenas based on religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and class.<sup>67</sup> Combined with widespread stereotypes associating violence and extremism with young people from certain areas or identities that are typically marginalized,<sup>68</sup> these norms are institutionalized across government, policies, and other aspects of public life.

These dynamics create a strong sense of mutual distrust between young people and the leaders and institutions meant to serve them. Several of the programs reviewed for this study identified mistrust of the state, civil society, international actors, and the multilateral system as a significant barrier to youth engagement.<sup>69</sup> As a young person in Yemen explains, “A lot of youth at the moment don’t have faith in the rule of law and they don’t think that they can live under the rule of law. They don’t think about going to a police station, court, or any institution.”<sup>70</sup>

This extends to local civil society organizations, which implementers often turn to for support in identifying, reaching, and engaging with youth. Young people who have risked their lives for sociopolitical causes describe feeling disillusioned and used, and many youth express skepticism that participation in formal civil society or political channels will lead to concrete change.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, PYD initiatives must build mutual trust to improve young people's enabling environment.

When young women and men do engage in civic and political spaces, they face increased and gendered risks. In some places, youth organizations are barred from formal registration or recognition that would enable them to operate more safely and freely and access more reliable funding and support. Security groups, armed actors, and governments take punitive actions against young activists in many places and leverage narrowly defined gender norms to target women.<sup>72</sup> Through privacy breaches, the use of smart technology, government suppression of access to social media platforms, and digital security threats can all be lethal to youth activists, especially to young women who may be subject to greater social consequences for content posted online.<sup>73</sup> Under these pressures, young people describe deep internal divisions that undermine the scope and impact of their work.<sup>74</sup>

Despite these challenges and a lack of trust in government and civil society, young men and women continue their activism and peacebuilding across the region and are often the first responders in crisis and conflict. Young women and men participated in the 2019–2020 protests in Iraq; joined political demonstrations in Sana'a, Yemen; and continued protests in Egypt.<sup>75</sup> In Gaza, young women established school parliaments, and in the Maghreb region, young men's support for women's rights and public participation is taking hold.<sup>76</sup> Young people in Libya lead grassroots peacebuilding efforts, and Syrian youth mobilize across the diaspora to advocate for a role in the peace process.<sup>77</sup> In many MENA countries, young women and men increasingly engage in online activism when they cannot participate in person. Although it carries its own risks of blackmail, harassment, and other repercussions, such as the well-documented arrest and torture of Syrian youth over social media activities, digital engagement allows young people to connect across geographical barriers, express discontent, and organize collective action.<sup>78</sup>

A 2016–2017 survey of 9,000 participants across Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen revealed that MENA youth—both young women and young men—remain committed to addressing socioeconomic issues through mobilization outside of party politics and formal civil society organizations and see an important role for the state in providing security, given rising insecurity in many areas.<sup>79</sup> The same survey found that youths' priorities are increasingly shifting away from political reforms or access to civil liberties and toward the ability to secure their basic needs in a violence-free environment. PYD programming should build on these opportunities and ongoing efforts as well as legislation in regional and global frameworks calling for greater youth participation and inclusion. The recent United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535 offer a potential framework for strengthening the enabling environment for youth in conflict-affected MENA contexts. Some MENA member states, such as Jordan, have already adopted action plans.

## COVID-19

While writing this paper, the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a significant toll on young peoples' lives and well-being across MENA. The pandemic presents both immediate shocks and medium- and long-term economic, educational, health, and psychosocial challenges for the region's youth, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, including individuals with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced people.<sup>80</sup> The toll on mental health, loss of employment and disposable income, and disruption in access to education are the pandemic's most challenging aspects for youth and youth organizations.<sup>81</sup> The pandemic and related response have also impacted conflict. In many places, the crisis is exacerbating conflict dynamics by further exposing inequalities, compounding stigma and discrimination, interrupting peace processes, undermining social cohesion initiatives through social distancing measures and restrictions on gatherings, and providing opportunities for abuse and exploitation by armed groups and authoritarian governments.<sup>82</sup> Gender-based and domestic violence are increasing around the world.

*COVID 19 presents both immediate shocks and medium- and long term economic, educational, health, and psychosocial challenges for the region's youth, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, including individuals with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced people.*

At the same time, the pandemic has created new opportunities for youth leadership and peace efforts as young people in the region and around the world play active roles in responding to the crisis, mitigating the virus's impact and spread, and preparing for recovery.<sup>83</sup> Examples in MENA include a Syrian youth-led initiative to produce protective masks and a Jordanian initiative by Liwan Youth Space that is using online platforms to continue building a sense of community, train youth on how to combat COVID-19 in their communities, and combat misinformation.<sup>84, 85</sup> Although warring parties recently violated a COVID-19 ceasefire in Yemen, youth created the #YemenCantBreathe hashtag, which has trended worldwide on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, to raise awareness of the ongoing violence and devastating humanitarian crises.<sup>86</sup> It is critical to continue monitoring the rapidly shifting situation and its impact on MENA youth.



# THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT APPROACH

## OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT

PYD is both a philosophy and an approach to adolescent development. USAID's YouthPower defines PYD as follows:

Positive youth development engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

As a philosophy, PYD views youth as having assets to be nurtured and developed rather than problems to be solved. It recognizes that proactively building intellectual, physical, social, and emotional competencies among all youth is a more effective development strategy than one that merely reacts to the risks faced by a small minority of young people.<sup>87, 88</sup> It also recognizes that investing in young people benefits society by strengthening youths' connections to civil society and helping youth successfully transition to adulthood.<sup>89</sup>

PYD programming focuses on four domains: assets (skills and resources), agency (the ability to use these assets), contribution, and enabling environment. To provide opportunities for youth to develop assets and agency, PYD builds mutually beneficial relationships between youth and their families, peer groups, schools, workplaces, communities, government institutions, society, and cultural institutions. These relationships and opportunities foster an enabling environment that supports youth's agency and the ability to positively contribute to their communities.

Seven PYD features, based on the work of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, have been identified as essential for strong programs: 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 (Table 1). These PYD features have been tailored to the developing country context and help define which programmatic activities to map onto each of the four PYD domains.

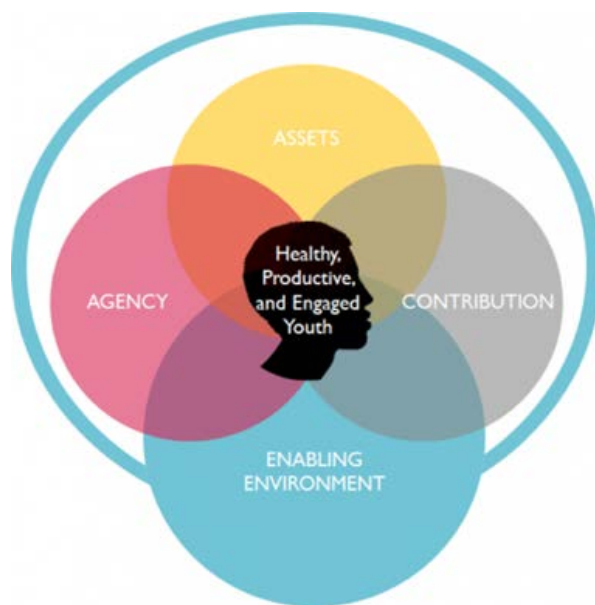


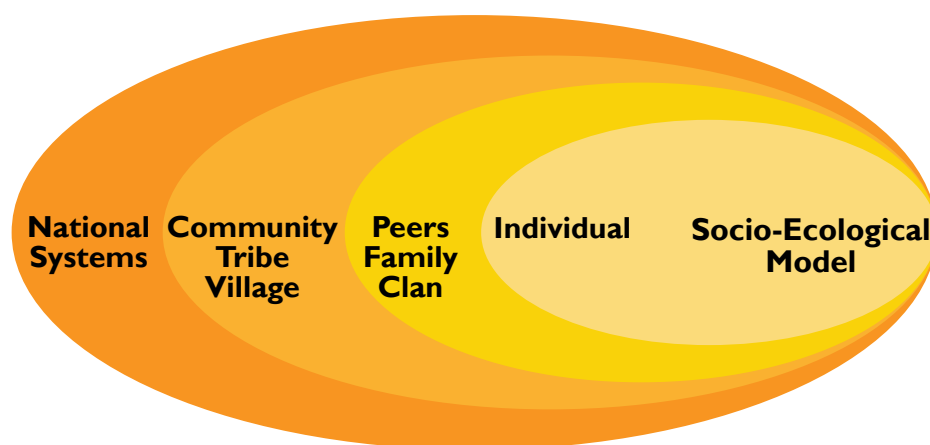
Table I: PYD Features

Recommendation	Recommending state/s Position	Full list of rights/affected person
Assets	Skill building	Develop soft skills, life skills, and hard skills through skill-building activities in individual, family, peer, and community settings.
Agency		
Contribution	Youth engagement and contribution	Allow youth engagement to take different shapes. This can include youth expression, youth involvement in community services, and the creation of opportunities for youth decision making at various government levels. This can also include programs that provide structure for youth contributions or support youth leadership.
Enabling Environment	Healthy relationships and bonding	Identify and link youth to positive adult role models, mentors, coaches, teachers, health care providers, and community leaders. Ideally, youths have at least one caring and consistent adult in their lives. Healthy peer relationships are also particularly important for youth.
	Belonging and membership	Foster activities where youth feel included, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or another factor. Identify activities that provide a positive sense of belonging (schools, sports, community service, faith-based youth groups, etc.).
	Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions	Have clear and consistent norms and expectations about health, relationships, and forms of engagement that provide youth an increasing amount of responsibility and independence and allow youth to grow and take on new roles.
	Safe space	Create safe spaces that are tailored to youth needs, including physical infrastructure and emotional safety. Space can be defined in a variety of ways, including virtual. Many communities lack any space for youth to convene. Thus, communities must be committed to providing youth with safe spaces to practice, engage, and learn creatively and collaboratively. An emotionally safe space is critical to learning.
	Access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services; integration among services	Make information available to youth and families, connecting and integrating health and social services so there is accessible care and support at a community level.

The PYD approach requires implementers to consider not only young people but also the multiple socioecological systems in which they are embedded (Figure 1). Families, peers, communities, and broader sociopolitical contexts have substantial effects on youth development. Applying a socioecological lens allows implementers to understand these systems, how they interact, and what leverage points they offer for programs to have a positive impact on youth.

To tackle the challenges that span youths' socioecological systems, PYD programs must incorporate multiple PYD features that support and reinforce one another. For example, building youths' skills, especially in conflict-affected contexts, often entails establishing safe spaces for learning. Building youths' agency through social-emotional and interpersonal skills can help them navigate the backlash or conflict that may result from their contributions or efforts to shift social norms. On the other hand, programs that build skills and agency in civic engagement without helping youth identify opportunities for contribution can not only undermine youths' potential, but also contribute to their disappointment and unmet expectations. Youths' unmet expectations can cause more harm than good, undermining PYD program goals. Therefore, PYD programs must take a holistic approach, particularly in conflict-affected contexts where youth are at greater risk.

Graphic 5: Socioecological Model

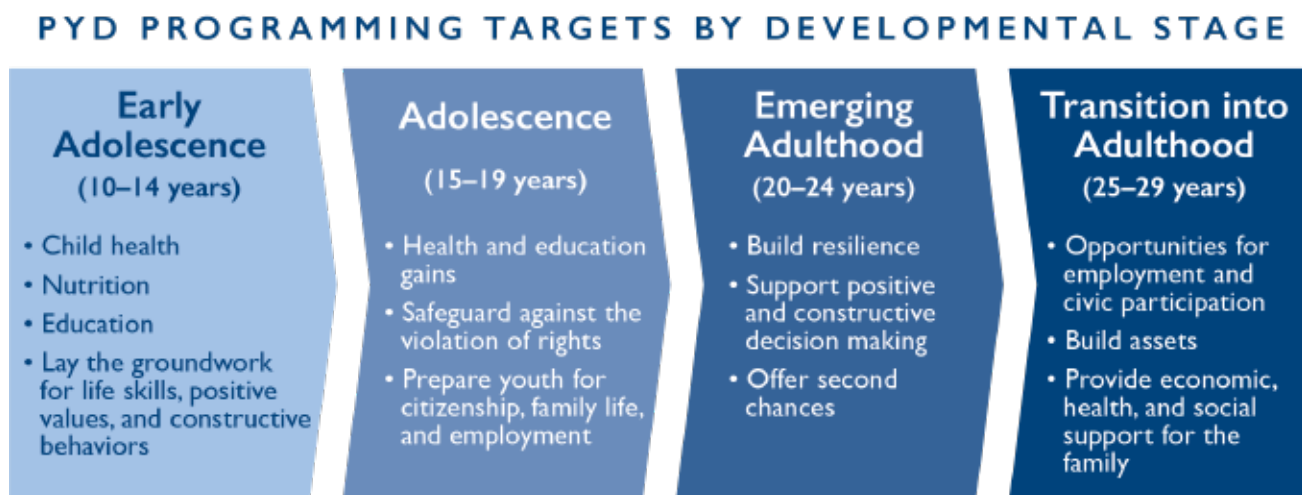


## APPLYING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT

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 role and contribution. 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 as well as play a critical role in advancing peace and stability.

Successful PYD programs include interventions that integrate all four domains into the design in an age-appropriate way. Developmental stages of youth vary widely, and social, emotional, and cognitive skills change rapidly across these age ranges. These developmental differences should be used to inform and target programming along the youth lifespan, from adolescence through early adulthood. In a conflict setting, the transition to adulthood can be accelerated or delayed by events that mark adulthood within a culture, such as marriage, parenthood, joining a military or armed group, or starting a job. Although the transition from childhood to adulthood is neither finite nor linear and varies across and within countries, the USAID Youth Policy recommends grouping youth into the following developmental age bands:<sup>90</sup>

Graphic 6: Programming Targets by Developmental Stage



- **Early Adolescence (10–14 years):** This period offers an important opportunity to invest in child health, nutrition, and education and lay the groundwork for life skills, positive values, and constructive behaviors. The brain is now primed to learn new skills, thus developing critical thinking skills is a priority. Reproductive health and maturation are now emphasized as young people enter early puberty. Protection efforts should be emphasized for addressing vulnerabilities that may be acute at this age, especially for girls. Appropriate interventions will include preventing child labor, school dropout, early marriage, pregnancy, and sexual exploitation; expanding learning opportunities; and promoting gender awareness and tolerance for diversity.
- **Adolescence (15–19 years):** During this time, it is important to ensure and expand health and education gains; safeguard against the violation of rights, including exploitation, trafficking, and hazardous work; and prepare youth for citizenship, family life, and employment. Appropriate programs may include education to promote healthy lifestyles and positive gender norms, the provision of youth-friendly reproductive health services, academic retention and vocational education, financial literacy and saving, soft skills and service learning, mentoring and peer networking, opportunities for civic participation, and education on legal rights. At this stage, it is also critical to offer second chances that enable disaffected youth to re-establish connections to school and society.

- **Emerging Adulthood (20–24 years):** As the final brain development solidifies neural connections and behaviors, it is important for programs to build resilience, support positive and constructive decision making, and offer second chances. Relevant programs include advanced education and professional training, life and leadership skills, livelihood and citizenship opportunities, asset accumulation, reproductive and maternal health, and family support.
- **Transition into Adulthood (25–29 years):** Learning continues during this stage, although physical maturation is largely complete. Programs should link youth to opportunities for employment and civic participation, as well as enable youth to build assets and provide economic, health, and social support for the family. Programs that provide accelerated learning opportunities and psychosocial support are often needed in post-conflict settings.

### Resilience

One word you might hear often in conflict settings is resilience, or the ability to manage adversity and change without compromising well-being. Resilience has the potential to contribute to PYD in conflict-affected contexts in MENA by supporting the development of an enabling environment.

Building resilience at the individual level entails investing in youth education and health and supporting youth to develop the cognitive processes required to adapt, including self-efficacy, goal setting, and a positive perspective of well-being. Building the resilience of youths' socioecological environments entails strengthening supportive relationships between youth and their families, friends, and communities; connecting youth with community groups where they experience belonging, membership, and safe spaces; and connecting youth with an authority to support engagement and contribution. PYD initiatives in conflict-affected contexts can contribute to social cohesion by supporting opportunities for youth from different backgrounds to learn and build assets together; developing safe spaces that facilitate inclusion and belonging, and fostering supportive and caring relationships with adults.

Although most evidence on youth resilience in adversity is U.S. based, there are applications and promising practices for MENA. For more information, see:

[https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/0717118\\_Resilience.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/0717118_Resilience.pdf)

## ASSETS IN CONFLICT

YouthPower defines assets as “the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.”

Building youth assets, including resources, skills, and competencies, is crucial to their well-being and success in adulthood. Skills such as problem solving, self-regulation, self-esteem, and strong cognitive or intellectual skills can act as protective factors for conflict-affected youth.<sup>91,92,93</sup> PYD programming may build assets that can help mitigate conflict’s impact. Resources may be tangible, such as financial support, education, or training, as well as intangible, such as ideas. Skills that build assets might include hard skills, such as the ability to perform a specific task; soft skills, such as communication skills; or skills that connect to social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and ethical development. Competencies encompass the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for youth to meet the complex demands of a successful transition into adulthood and include social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies.

Conflict can threaten youth’s ability to develop these assets. For example, forced displacement, family pressure to leave school early, or destruction of learning sites can disrupt formal or informal education and skill building. Conflict can cut youth off from the resources necessary for asset development, such as financial support. Conflict may disrupt the development of broader competencies by impacting youth’s brain development. For example, chronic stress has been shown to impact areas of the brain related to memory, attention, and executive function, which affect social, emotional, and cognitive development and can challenge youth’s ability to learn and develop new skills.<sup>94,95</sup>

Youth develop skills in the context of family, community, and structural systems, all of which can be disrupted or negatively impacted by conflict. It is critical to identify safe opportunities for young people to continue developing assets and skills in conflict environments. Establishing healthy relationships, a sense of belonging, positive norms, and safe spaces for youth can help promote skill development, even in conflict-affected contexts.

## WHAT DO ASSETS LOOK LIKE IN PYD PROGRAMMING?



### **Feature: Skill Building (Assets: Resources, Skills, and Competencies)**

Skills that fall under assets include training, formal education, interpersonal skills (social and communication skills), higher-order thinking skills, recognizing emotions, self-control, and academic achievement. Youth need technical and academic skills for economic opportunities, but they also need transferable skills, such as life and soft skills. In well-designed programs, sports, theater, arts, and other activities can help build and model soft skills, such as teamwork, problem solving, and self-control. Many communities lack youth-oriented programs that foster such skills.

### Illustrative Activities:

- Establish informal and nonformal education opportunities for youth to access skill building where formal opportunities are limited by conflict. Alternative opportunities can include youth clubs, second-chance education in basic literacy and numeracy skills, continuing education, and community-based programs. It is critical to identify opportunities during key development windows.
- Build youths' emotional literacy and regulation skills with activities that help them positively respond to feelings and emotional reactions in themselves and others so they can de-escalate or disengage from conflict situations. Such activities may take place in or outside of formal classrooms and may include developing cooperative problem-solving techniques, learning to identify emotions in oneself and others, managing stress using movement and breathing, and role-playing to practice conflict resolution. Effective programs will support key adult figures in youths' ecosystems to ensure appropriate emotional skills are modeled and reciprocated.
 

*Build youths' emotional literacy and regulation skills with activities that help them positively respond to feelings and emotional reactions in themselves and others so they can de-escalate or disengage from conflict situations.*
- Develop higher-order thinking skills to help youth identify an issue, absorb information from multiple sources, and evaluate options to reach a reasonable conclusion. These skills are crucial in conflict-affected contexts as they can empower youth to distinguish between conflict narratives that support or counter violence. For example, media literacy trainings can help youth learn to identify false information and rumors that might contribute to violence. Youth-driven learning strategies, such as organized problem solving and project-based learning, can help youth develop evaluative, logical, and decision-making skills.<sup>96</sup>
- Help youth build interpersonal skills so they can nonviolently manage conflict with peers, families, and partners. Appropriate activities may include identifying similarities among a group, building dialogue skills, role-playing to resolve interpersonal conflict, and facilitating joint learning and action opportunities for youth from different backgrounds. Adult modeling and reinforcement of effective interpersonal skills can build youth's confidence in their ability to develop and maintain social relationships.<sup>97</sup>
- Incorporate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities to restore emotional well-being, including restoring a sense of normalcy through structured activities; raising awareness of positive coping strategies; strengthening interactions with caring adults; and encouraging self-expression through art, sport, and play. Providing youth with information about the brain's response to stress has been shown to normalize stress responses and equip youth with tools to improve stress management (see MENA PYD Programming Models: Advancing Adolescents).
- Educate parents in soft skills that can serve as key protective factors for conflict-affected youth through trainings, parental support groups, and direct parental involvement in youth programming.

- Provide technical assistance and support to schools, communities, and employers to establish opportunities for extracurricular activities, such as vocational
- Work with government ministries (e.g., Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education) to advocate for policies, structures, and funding that encourage extracurricular activities, internships, apprenticeships, career exposure, and other opportunities to support skill building.

### Model Programs Developing Youth Assets

**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.

**Advancing Adolescents** provided Syrian refugee and Jordanian youth with a range of skills to facilitate resilience, including psychosocial support; vocational, recreational, and technical training; and interpersonal communication and social self-efficacy. Alongside the psychosocial component, which focused on developing youth empathy for their own and others' stress, the program offered opportunities to build concrete skills in areas such as sewing, soccer, and computer repair. Both the psychosocial as well as vocational, recreational, and technical skill-building modules relied on adult mentors to model and reciprocate new skills, which helped youth build confidence and develop a sense of social support. The Advancing Adolescents initiative demonstrates how skills across multiple domains—vocational, soft, emotional, and social—can reinforce one another when developed simultaneously in youth.

In **A Future Called Peace**, Yemeni youth acquired skills in dialogue, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution that helped them identify local conflicts and develop targeted initiatives to resolve conflict. Through youth-led dialogue with community stakeholders, a process of issue diagnosis and analysis, and youth-developed solutions to the identified issues, youth further developed analytical, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Youth from various socioeconomic, tribal, and clan backgrounds jointly participated in trainings and youth-led initiatives that fostered tolerance and respect for diversity. Finally, community elders co-designed and co-led local initiatives alongside youth, which helped build appreciation and respect for youths' new skills.



#### AGENCY IN CONFLICT

YouthPower defines agency as “the ability to employ assets and aspirations to make or influence decisions and set goals and act on one’s decisions to achieve desired outcomes without fear of violence or retribution.”

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. These skills play a crucial role in building youths’ resilience and coping abilities, empowering them to navigate challenges in their environments and take action to reach their full potential.

Agency is particularly important in conflict-affected contexts, where many youth face environmental challenges that can undermine their development, including challenges to their health and well-being, access to education, employment and civic engagement opportunities, and continuity of family and community support. During adolescence, youth are actively developing cognitive abilities that allow for the construction of complex identity by interacting with their own accumulated experiences and socioecological environment.<sup>98</sup> There is evidence that conflicts, especially those driven by competing social identities, can disrupt or impact adolescents’ identity formation and positive sense of self.<sup>99</sup> Building skills that contribute to youth’s positive sense of self, orientation toward goals, and sense of hope can help youth overcome challenges and bounce back from the adversity of conflict.

Despite longstanding perceptions of youth as violent or destabilizing forces in society, recent research tells us that most youth are peaceful actors. Additionally, evidence shows that promoting youth agency can mitigate violent behavior and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes following youth engagement in violence.<sup>100</sup> This includes providing youth, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalized, with concrete opportunities for decision making and constructive pathways for empowerment.<sup>101</sup>

#### WHAT DOES AGENCY LOOK LIKE IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING?



#### Feature: Skill Building (Agency: Decision Making and Goal Setting)

The agency domain plays a dual role, acting both as a set of skills and a mechanism for change. Skills that fall under agency include positive identity, self-efficacy, goal setting or the ability to plan, perseverance (diligence), and positive beliefs about the future. Learning and practicing new skills can be important in and of themselves because they enable a young person to feel passion and build confidence and competence in something as well as support youth to feel empowered to use these skills.

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Develop youth's self-awareness and the ability to use skills in appropriate situations. In a conflict setting, this may involve providing young people with the opportunity for self-reflection and/or mentoring on when and how to use specific skills. For instance, programs may help a young person identify a situation when negotiation skills could be used effectively to resolve a disagreement.
- Provide experiential learning opportunities, combined with adult or peer feedback, to help young people identify strengths, practice skills, and build a positive identity. For instance, an internship can help a young person use and improve key workforce skills, such as self-regulation and communications, while building a positive self-concept.
- Build skills that contribute to youths' positive and coherent attitudes, beliefs, and values about themselves, which can act as protective factors in conflict contexts where identities and narratives are often subject to politicization by conflict parties. For example, skill-building activities that allow for positive self-expression, such as art, sport, and theater, can provide youth with a sense of self that emphasizes positive identity over conflict-related identities.
- Build skills that help youth maintain optimism about their potential, goals, options, and plans, which might otherwise be undermined by conflict. For instance, by building technical or vocational skills that allow them to experience mastery or competence, youth can develop greater confidence in their ability to access and negotiate for opportunities, even in protracted conflict settings.

*Sports, theater, arts, and other activities can help build and model soft skills, such as teamwork, problem solving, and self-control. Many communities lack youth-oriented programs that foster such skills.*

- Build skills in goal setting and perseverance—through experiential learning in which youth are coached or mentored in how to anticipate risk, manage spoilers, and execute alternative strategies—to help youth overcome obstacles in their environment related to conflict settings.
- Strengthen parental and community support for greater youth agency alongside youth-targeted programming. As youth take on more active roles in their family and community settings, they may experience backlash for what may be perceived as violating traditional norms and the status quo. Involving parents throughout programming and/or strengthening relationships between parents and youth can encourage parental support for youth agency.

### Model Programs Developing Youth Agency

**Partnership with Youth** developed youth agency by strengthening the programming of youth development resource centers (YDRCs) in the West Bank. YDRCs provided a range of course offerings, including in technical skills, such as media and ICT, and soft skills, such as leadership. The program offered concrete experiential learning opportunities for youth to apply their skills through a standardized internship program formed through partnerships with local businesses, as well as through funding for small, youth-led initiatives to address community challenges. The program team devoted significant resources to developing a PYD ethos among staff, which allowed youth to be actively engaged in planning and delivering programs as equal partners and was cited as a core tenet of building youth agency. Overall, 86 percent of youth said that YDRCs built their self-confidence, made them feel valued, and supported their goals and dreams.

In **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 sexual and reproductive health issues. 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.

**Palestinian Adolescents: Agents of Positive Change** helped Palestinian youth in the West Bank and refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria access safe spaces and opportunities for positive development. The program offered training in vocational skills, life skills, and psychosocial competencies as well as provided experiential learning through youth-led action research on community challenges and the implementation of local initiatives to address those challenges. One of the most impactful programming elements cited by youth was their parents' involvement in programming through intergenerational dialogue, which helped youth feel more respected and understood by their parents. Following the initiative, 91 percent of youth reported increased confidence and 88 percent said they saw a better future ahead.



### CONTRIBUTION IN CONFLICT

YouthPower defines contribution as “engagement as a source of change for one’s own and one’s community’s positive development.” It defines meaningful youth engagement as follows:

An inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared; respective contributions are valued; and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and globally.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup> Youth are an important resource in conflict response and can play critical roles in informing interventions that affect them and their communities. In conflict-affected areas, youth use their skills, abilities, local knowledge, and networks to contribute to disaster response, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts. Investment in youth contribution may both strengthen response efforts and reinforce youths’ abilities to build a future for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries.<sup>104</sup>

*Investment in youth contribution may both strengthen response efforts and reinforce youths’ abilities to build a future for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries.*

Although conflict can limit formal civic, political, and social engagement opportunities, there are still meaningful opportunities for youth participation in even the most protracted conflict environments. Conflict-affected youth may contribute through employment that addresses the conflict-specific needs of their families or communities; youth-led volunteer initiatives that seek to tackle local community challenges; and concrete opportunities for leadership within established youth safe spaces, such as youth clubs or resource centers. Programs that promote

youth-led and youth-centered approaches can offer opportunities for youth contribution within the scope of the program itself, even when external opportunities may be limited by conflict. Focusing on youth-led activities can help empower youth to play a leading role in their own and their peers' development and may also improve programming.

Youth engagement in conflict-affected contexts succeeds most when youth are mobilized to act on issues that are concrete and localized and can manifest short-term results. For example, young entrepreneurs in Yemen shifted their business concepts in the aftermath of the civil war to focus on conflict-specific challenges, such as water and hygiene issues (see MENA PYD Programming Models: Yemen Economic Empowerment Program). In Tunisia, youth designed and led local initiatives focused on concrete community grievances, such as the refurbishment of public spaces (see MENA PYD Programming Models: Sharekna [Sharekna Project to Support Youth and Empower Communities]), and in Jordan, youth worked to designate additional buses to their university and refine university curricula (See MENA PYD Programming Models: Ana Usharek).

*In some cases, providing youth with opportunities for constructive contribution in conflict-affected contexts can prevent youth engagement in violence.*

In some cases, providing youth with opportunities for constructive contribution in conflict-affected contexts can prevent youth engagement in violence.<sup>105, 106</sup> The vast majority of young people do not engage in violence, and many are actively working for peace and security in their communities.<sup>107</sup> The small group of youth who do engage in violence have complex motivations for doing so and may view violence as their only path toward greater recognition, meaning, or belonging. Providing youth with opportunities for meaningful contribution in conflict-affected contexts can offer them constructive avenues to apply assets and agency and address their frustrations and disillusionment.

However, interventions to increase youth engagement in decision making and policymaking, without addressing systemic barriers to youth leadership and participation, risk overpromising and underdelivering on outcomes, which can lead to unmet expectations for youth.<sup>108, 109</sup> Additionally, when youth engage in activism in conflict-affected contexts, they often face a heightened risk of discrimination, jail, and other human rights violations.<sup>110</sup> These risks indicate the importance of strengthening the enabling environment in parallel to youth engagement and contribution efforts. Youth contributions can be more successful when preceded by efforts to build mutual trust between youth and powerholders or hold intergenerational dialogue among youth, their families, and their communities. Engaging adults and powerholders, including local government officials, religious and community leaders, and tribal leaders, to prepare them for youth engagement and ensuring youth-led initiatives are local and concrete can help manage youths' expectations, mitigate risks to youth protection, and achieve better PYD outcomes.

Two KIs for this study emphasized that the destruction or disruption of systems and structures during conflict should not be viewed as limiting; rather, it can be viewed as an opportunity to rebuild structures and processes in a more just and equitable way.<sup>111, 112</sup> Research has shown that youth's political participation during peace negotiations contributes to more inclusive and representative governance structures.<sup>113</sup> Youth and youth-led organizations can often operate in spaces where governments or the international community cannot, have critical understanding and

insight on local dynamics and issues, and access otherwise hard-to-reach peers and communities, which all make them important partners in peacebuilding and development.<sup>114, 115</sup> Conflict responses and post-conflict recovery efforts offer an important opportunity to address systemic barriers to youth engagement and contribution, which may even be fueling conflict dynamics, and increase meaningful youth representation and participation in decision making. The contribution of youth-led organizations can be further supported through consistent and flexible funding mechanisms, support for dynamic leadership development and networking, organizational capacity development that recognizes the diverse ambitions of youth-led organizations, and collaborative partnerships with youth-led organizations as equals.<sup>116, iv</sup>

#### WHAT DOES CONTRIBUTION LOOK LIKE IN PYD PROGRAMMING?



#### Feature: Youth Engagement and Contribution

Youths' contributions to their communities depend on ensuring opportunities for inclusion and participation. By actively participating in decisions about programs and policies that affect them and their peers, young people can be empowered to play a vital role in providing and delivering youth-appropriate services, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes.<sup>117</sup>

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Make youth central players in conducting conflict and risk analyses and needs assessments in early stages of rapid-onset crises. For instance, youth can be trained in youth-led research methodologies or community dialogue approaches, which can be used to collect and analyze information on local challenges and develop youth-led solutions.
- Promote meaningful, inclusive youth participation in conflict- and disaster-related planning, strategy setting, response, and recovery processes and mechanisms. This could take place through youth-led advocacy or by establishing a youth envoy or youth steering committee to inform official strategies on conflict mitigation and recovery.
- Identify local, concrete opportunities for contribution to ensure that youth see tangible results during the project lifecycle. This helps build youths' confidence in their broader systems and environments, reduces frustrations with unmet aspirations, and encourages positive norms around youth engagement for observing adults.
- Conduct training for parents, teachers, and other adults to engage youth in age-appropriate decision making as equals. Engaging adults alongside youth can ensure greater buy-in for youth leadership and agency.

iv For more on how to engage youth and youth-led organizations as equal and successful partners, see Development Alternative, *Shifting the Power: What Will It Take to Do Development Differently?* (Development Alternative, 2020). [https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DevAlt\\_Shifting-The-Power\\_All.pdf](https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DevAlt_Shifting-The-Power_All.pdf)



- Support youth-led organizations or initiatives that track and engage in decision making and formalize channels or platforms, where possible and as desired by youth, to sustain youth participation in decision making. This might include supporting student councils or a youth municipal council that mirrors the actions of the local municipal council and facilitating trust building and dialogue between the local officials and youth for cooperative, short-term action or the exploration of longer-term collaboration mechanisms.
- Ensure protection for youth taking on more visible leadership roles and include youth in the development of protection policies and programs—at the program, community, and systemic levels—for young people and other marginalized, at-risk, and vulnerable populations.
- Use new technologies to organize and mobilize youth participation and engagement in healing, reconciliation, and restorative justice. For example, information and communication technology (ICT) and online platforms can serve as mediums for facilitated dialogue and virtual exchanges between young people across conflict divides, analysis and early reporting on violence, peace gaming to develop skills for navigating interpersonal conflict and build collaboration, documenting abuses, and more.<sup>118</sup>
- Provide flexible funding, technical support, and partnerships (formal and informal) with diverse youth groups as well as new initiatives on disaster, conflict, and peacebuilding efforts. These partnerships should begin at the analysis and design stage of programming and continue through implementation and evaluation.
- Create platforms for youth-led policy dialogues and service delivery and advocate for the inclusion of youth in platforms to ensure that youths' voices are heard and all ideas are considered in decision making that affects their lives.

### Model Programs Developing Youth Contribution

In **Sharekna**, 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 short-term results. 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.

Through the **Youth Economic Empowerment Program**, Yemeni youth received business and life-skills training and contributed to their communities by establishing their own enterprises. Following the outbreak of Yemen's civil war in 2015, youth pivoted their business strategies to address emerging community needs related to the conflict, including agriculture, school rehabilitation, and water security. Responding to conflict-specific needs empowered youth to contribute to their communities in a way that was relevant to the conflict context, which in turn shifted employers' and communities' perceptions of youth as economic actors who can contribute to community well-being.

**Ana Usharek** fostered the contribution of Jordanian youth by building their skills in civic engagement and their knowledge of local government. Youth accessed concrete opportunities to apply these skills and tackle community challenges, including through town hall meetings with members of Parliament; televised issue debates; and concrete local initiatives, such as working to amend the law on domestic violence. 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. Building youths' flexible thinking and troubleshooting skills was cited as essential to their successful contributions.



## ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN CONFLICT

YouthPower defines enabling environment as follows:

Youth are surrounded by an enabling environment that maximizes their assets, agency, access to services and opportunities, and ability to avoid risks, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. 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 encourages and recognizes young people while supporting their development. A positive enabling environment will include opportunities for prosocial involvement, positive norms, value and recognition, youth-responsive services, gender-responsive services and policies, youth-friendly laws and policies, and physical and psychological safety.

Conflict has a significant effect on a young person’s environment.<sup>119</sup> Healthy relationships (peers, family, teachers, etc.) can be a key protective factor in a young person’s development, but in conflict, the impact of chronic stress on relationships and caregivers can interfere with bonding and the establishment of healthy relationships.<sup>120</sup> PYD programs should support not only youth but also the family and caregivers that youth rely on for healthy adult relationships and bonding.

Conflict may also interfere with parts of a young person’s environment, such as households, 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.<sup>v</sup> PYD programs are more likely to be effective when implemented across these multiple settings. In environments where these settings might be disrupted by conflict, it is important to work with youth and their communities to identify new safe spaces for programming.<sup>121</sup>

It is also critical to create an enabling environment to ensure that youth have access to opportunities. For example, livelihoods and income-generating opportunities can foster greater economic empowerment and inclusion, reducing current or potential conflict over resources and services. Interventions to create an enabling environment for youth livelihoods can include developing youth-friendly cooperatives, increasing access to capital for youth, and/or advancing policy and accountability reforms to improve the business environment.

Also crucial for the enabling environment are social norms and expectations, which can either help or limit youth's ability to access opportunities and youth-friendly services. For instance, societal norms about young people's ability to make decisions can make community members less likely to vote for a young person running for office, even if they are qualified and legally old enough to run. KIs conducted for this study further emphasized that conflict could erode positive community values and norms, putting youth at a greater risk of harm.<sup>122</sup>

To promote a positive enabling environment, programs should engage youth and influential community stakeholders throughout program design and implementation to garner buy-in and create an environment in which youth can

<sup>v</sup> Simpson notes, "A sense of community—which may otherwise provide a 'home,' or a sense of social cohesion for young people—is often destroyed or vulnerable in situations of violence and conflict. The family; the schoolroom; the workplace; and sports, cultural, and religious organizations potentially offer important spaces for social cohesion, trust, and the safety of young people. But these social and community settings tend to be prime casualties of the dislocation and mistrust associated with conflict, violence, and terrorism." (Graeme Simpson, *The Missing Peace*, 31).



thrive. Program implementers can apply youth and community member inputs in the program design phase to increase buy-in and engagement. Such inputs can be gathered through surveys, focus groups, and KIIs, among other methods. Where possible, engaging institutional partners, such as local and national authorities, in youth-focused programming can help sustain gains in fostering an enabling environment for youth, even in highly unstable conflict contexts. For example, a civic engagement program in Libya partnered with the Ministries of Education in the country's two parallel governments to develop a new civic engagement curriculum for Libyan youth.<sup>123</sup>

#### WHAT DOES ENABLING ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE IN PYD PROGRAMMING?



#### Feature: Healthy Relationships and Bonding

For youth to be able to bond and form healthy relationships, they must be linked to positive adult role models, mentors, coaches, teachers, health care providers, and community leaders. It is crucial that youth have at least one consistent and caring adult in their lives. Youth also place a high value on healthy relationships with peers.<sup>124</sup>

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Offer parenting programs for male and female parents as well as teacher and youth worker training in PYD approaches. Such trainings might focus on developing parenting behavior; building specific skills that are necessary for youth to develop assets and agency, and supporting youth to identify and pursue opportunities and youth-friendly services.

- Integrate mentorship activities involving older tutors, apprenticeship sponsors, and exposure to speakers. Mentorship programs have been shown to improve social connectedness, enhance academic performance, and reduce at-risk behavior among youth.<sup>125</sup>

*Mentorship programs have been shown to improve social connectedness, enhance academic performance, and reduce at-risk behavior among youth.*

- Offer special programs that target youth without family ties. These may include support groups for youth who have recently lost family members to conflict or mentorship programs for youth in orphanages.
- Offer platforms for intergenerational dialogue and community initiatives jointly led between youth and adults to build the trust and mutual understanding needed for youth to feel supported and encouraged.



### Feature: Belonging and Membership

Youth experience belonging when there are opportunities for them to feel included, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or other factors. Spaces and activities that can provide a positive sense of belonging may include schools, extracurricular activities, sports, theater and arts, community service, faith-based youth groups, and others.

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Create a sense of community in youth programs, vocational programs, and youth activities. Community building can take place through activities that involve joint learning, team building, and self-expression. Support from trained facilitator(s) can help maintain a sense of unity, facilitate positive team dynamics, and navigate interpersonal conflicts, particularly when young participants come from diverse backgrounds or cross conflict divides.
- Establish a sense of bonding in communities by building youths' skills to address community issues and providing them with concrete opportunities to contribute. Youth who understand community challenges and feel equipped with the skills to address them report feeling a sense of shared responsibility toward their communities.<sup>126</sup>
- Establish opportunities to reach and include marginalized youth. Involving youth in mapping peer networks can help identify other youth who are often excluded from youth programs. Identifying these youth and ensuring their inclusion alongside their peers is crucial to facilitating their sense of membership and belonging.<sup>127</sup>
- Incorporate gender-sensitive learning opportunities in anti-bullying, tolerance, and respect. This can take place through formal education or dedicated curricula and can be reinforced in informal learning settings through role-playing, storytelling, and teambuilding exercises.



### Feature: Positive Norms, Expectations, and Perceptions

Youth require clear and consistent norms and expectations about health, relationships, and forms of engagement. Such norms should provide youth with an increasing amount of responsibility and independence and allow them to grow and take on new roles.

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Highlight youth leadership and contribution through media, such as televised policy debates (see MENA PYD Programming Models: Ana Usharek) or nationally broadcast reality television shows (see MENA PYD Programming Models: The President). Media can be a powerful tool to showcase youth engagement to communities at large, shifting their perceptions and fostering a more enabling environment for youth participation.
- Support youth to engage powerholders using tools, such as political advocacy, media awareness campaigns, or community dialogues, to influence youth-friendly service provision or advocate for youth issues. PYD programs can also support youth by separately engaging powerholders for their buy-in and managing youth expectations.



### Feature: Safe Spaces

Youth require safe spaces that are tailored to their needs, including physical infrastructure and emotional safety, and that allow them to engage and learn creatively and collaboratively. Many communities lack any space for youth to convene, and conflict can further limit the availability of safe spaces. The establishment of safe spaces, including virtual ones, is critical for youth learning and development.

#### Illustrative Activities:

- Recognize the need for gender-specific safe spaces that provide services; opportunities for skill-building; opportunities to form social connections; and outlets to address potential forms of social isolation, such as reduced mobility or early parenthood.
- Conduct youth-led mapping to identify gender-sensitive safe and unsafe spaces for conflict-affected youth.
- Promote safe interactions for youth with peers and staff, including gender-sensitive, anti-bullying environments. Safeguarding standards, as well as codes of conduct and “house rules” for peer and staff interactions, that are developed and agreed upon with youth can help foster safe and sensitive environments for youth.

- Ensure that adults, including parents, teachers, and program staff, promote safe peer interaction, including gender sensitivity and anti-bullying, through modeling and reinforcing positive, prosocial behaviors. This can include training parents, teachers, and staff on how to promote a safe and inclusive environment for youth.
- Work with youth to help them understand their rights, legal processes, and services available for protection and to advocate for policies that protect youth and establish a support system for youth exposed to violence.



### **Feature: Access to Age-Appropriate and Youth-Friendly Services; Integration among Services**

Youth-friendly services are defined as services that are equitable, accessible, acceptable, appropriate, and effective.<sup>128</sup> Youth-friendly services are age-appropriate, private, confidential services that reach and are designed specifically for youth in other sectors, such as education and employment. It is critical to make information available to youth and families, connecting and integrating health and social services for a continuum of care and support at a community level.

#### **Illustrative Activities:**

- Provide information on youth-friendly services, such as youth-friendly business services that tailor financial products and tools to include youth-friendly language and resources, including access to entrepreneurship mentorship programs.
- Conduct an assessment to identify multiple avenues to reach youth with sexual and reproductive health and mental health services. Recognize that older youth may offer the best avenue for providing trusted advice to younger adolescents through peer mentorship, as was the case for Syrian adolescents living in the Za'atari Camp (see MENA PYD Programming Models: *Wisdom and Information on Sexual Health Education by Girls* [WISE Girls]).
- Work with service providers to provide integrated holistic youth services and train service providers on youth-friendly approaches. When working with centers or other youth platforms, it is critical to ensure community buy-in to sustain services in the long term.
- Integrate access to services geared toward youth with family, school, health care, and other services that affect youth's socioecological environment. This could include integrating mental health support services into schools or providing youth employment resources at a youth center.

### Model Programs Developing an Enabling Environment for Youth

**FORSATY's** one-stop shop model facilitated access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services geared toward Moroccan youth with specific needs. The program provided academic support services to youth ages 9-14 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 support categories, 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.

**Promise Pathways** provided youth and their families with integrated, youth-friendly services aimed at reducing child labor in Morocco. Service provision took place through an integrated referral system, which allowed case managers to analyze youths' needs within the context of their broader family and community contexts and make appropriate service recommendations. Services for youth included enrollment in formal or informal education or life skills or vocational training, the provision of school supplies, counseling or psychosocial support, or legal support, while support for families included medical care, cooking, management of cooperatives, and marketing and financial education. By establishing partnerships with government agencies, civil society organizations, and service providers, the program was able to embed elements of sustainability, such as the adoption of the PAVE caseworker methodology by Morocco's National Mutual Aid.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT

The conflict transformation field offers several overarching principles to guide PYD strategies and programming in conflict-affected contexts. Donors, implementing partners, and other actors supporting PYD programming should apply the following principles, regardless of the geographic or thematic emphasis of their interventions to ensure the safe and inclusive participation and engagement of conflict-affected young people. Each principle includes specific considerations as well as practical recommendations and examples tailored to MENA.

### APPLY CONFLICT SENSITIVITY AND DO NO HARM PRINCIPLES

Conflict sensitivity entails understanding conflict dynamics and intergroup relations to develop and manage programs that avoid exacerbating grievances along dividing lines or inadvertently creating new ones. Applying Do No Harm principles helps ensure that PYD initiatives do not put youth at greater risk than they would be without intervention. It is important to balance young people's right to participation and protection, in line with the PYD commitment to youth agency and contribution. Programs should use risk and conflict analysis to understand local dynamics and sensitivities; however, some common conflict dynamics and risks of harm that require sensitive PYD programming in MENA include the following:

- Identity-based conflict among youth from different ethnic, religious, or national backgrounds, including conflict between youth from refugee and host communities.
- Unequal access of young women and young men to basic services and rights, such as education, health care, employment, inheritance, and the freedom to make decisions about issues that affect them.
- Exclusion of socioeconomically marginalized youth, youth with disabilities, SGMs, and refugee youth from political, economic, social, and cultural opportunities, as well as from employment and basic services, such as education.
- Intergenerational conflict between youth and adults that is reinforced by hierarchical social norms and compounded by inequalities in access to resources and decision making.
- Lack of trust between youth and state institutions and authorities—driven by corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, and bureaucratic government systems.



Do No Harm entails anticipating risks of harm to young people and their communities and using them as a basis for programmatic decision making to minimize potential harm while maximizing potential benefits.

### Additional Reading:

[\*USAID Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs\*](#)

[\*USAID Conflict Assessment Framework\*](#)

[\*CDA's Do No Harm Trainers Manual\*](#)

[\*Keeping Children Safe's Safeguarding in Conflict and Crisis and Keeping Children Safe Online\*](#)

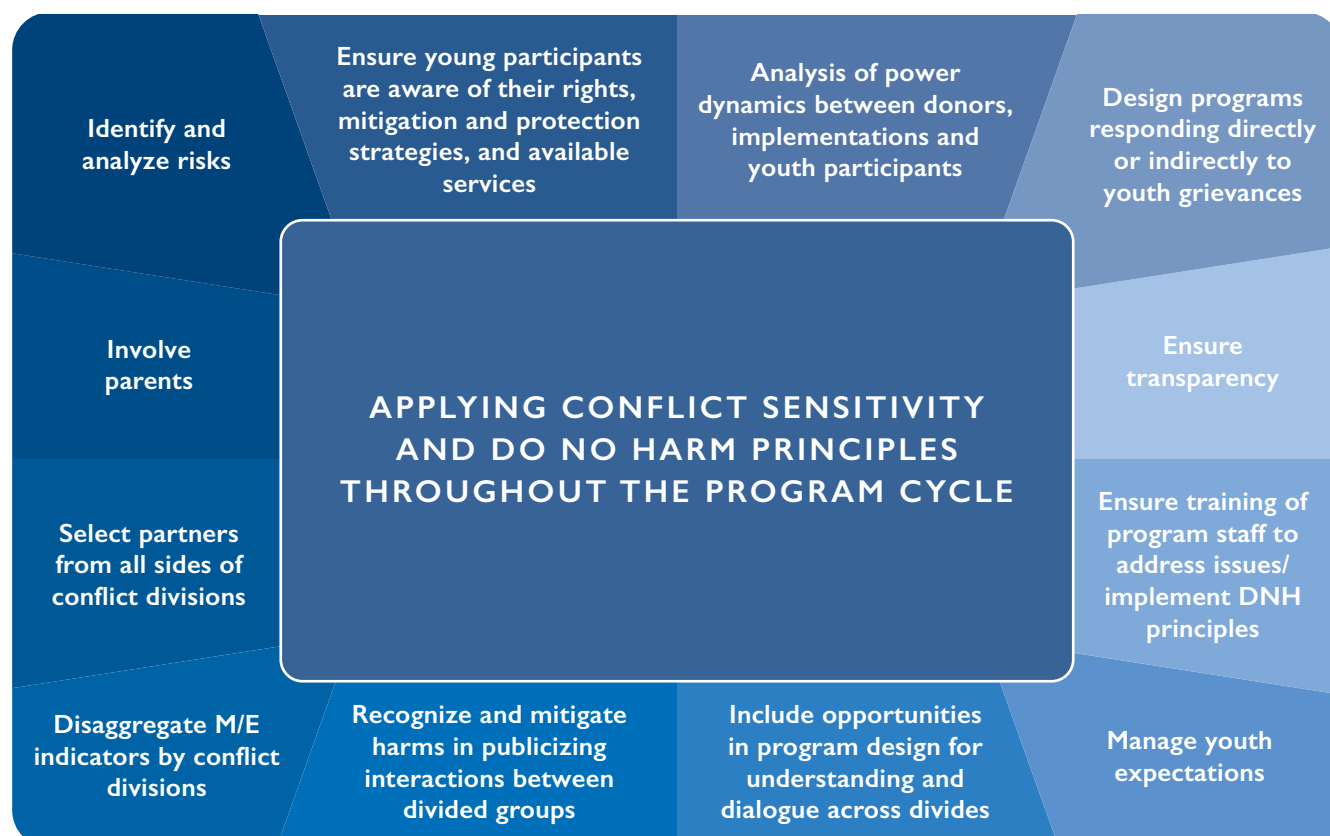
[\*Tactical Technology Collective's Holistic Security Trainers' Manual\*](#)

- Social norms that position youth, especially young men, as destabilizing actors and/or perpetrators of conflict. Gendered social norms around the role of youth in conflict often characterize young women as passive victims in need of protection and idealize their peaceful nature while characterizing young men as threats and perpetrators of violence.
- Physical, emotional, and digital threats to young people's safety when exercising agency, even when done constructively, in conflict-affected contexts. These threats include cyberbullying, surveillance and violation of privacy, harassment and discrimination, imprisonment, or even violence by authorities or armed groups. Youth may incur backlash from adults or traditional powerholders who perceive that they risk losing power or status because of PYD programs.
- Heightened risks of violence, abuse, harm, and exploitation for certain young people (e.g., those from marginalized groups, those with disabilities and mental health disorders, those formerly associated with armed groups, and unaccompanied and separated minors) because of uneven power dynamics between youth and adults and hierarchical social norms that may make it more difficult for young people to protect themselves or raise concerns. This is particularly true when PYD programs provide essential assistance or services to young people.



PYD programs can maximize their positive impacts, even in highly constrained contexts, by applying conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm principles throughout the program cycle as follows:

Graphic 7: Application of Conflict Sensitive and Do No Harm Principles



- From the planning stage, identify and analyze risks to young participants from staff, programming, operations, and the wider community and context, ideally with young people's participation. This risk analysis should then be used to develop appropriate measures with young people for mitigating risks, preventing abuse and harm, and creating a safe environment for youth participation, as well as monitoring and responding to concerns that may arise. These measures, which can also be described as safeguarding, should include a reporting and response process that staff, youth, and their communities are aware of and is aligned with local laws and procedures; the identification of appropriate services available for care and assistance as needed; the designation and training of a safeguarding focal point; careful vetting, management, and training of staff in direct contact with young people; and confidential channels for feedback and complaints from youth and communities, such as through monitoring and evaluation.

- Ensure that young participants are aware of their rights, protection and risk mitigation strategies, and available services and assistance so they can better protect themselves and play an active role in their own protection and well-being, in line with PYD principles. This may include capacity building in risk assessment, digital security training, physical safety measures, trauma awareness, and stress management (see principle below on integrating MHPSS).
- Include an analysis of power dynamics and perceptions between donors, implementers, and youth participants in conflict assessments to recognize and mitigate the potential for PYD projects to deepen mistrust and tension that already exist<sup>129</sup> in these relationships.
- Design programs to respond indirectly or directly to youth grievances and/or strengthen resiliencies identified in conflict analysis.
- Ensure transparency in selecting, engaging, and providing services to youth to avoid perceptions of inequality.
- Ensure that program staff are trained in impartial and inclusive facilitation as well as actively monitoring intergroup relations among young participants, addressing conflict or tensions, facilitating positive group dynamics through teambuilding and trust-building exercises, establishing ground rules or codes of conduct in a participatory manner, strengthening youth skills for collaboration and respect for diversity (empathy, critical thinking, active listening, responding to conflict, self-control, etc.), and providing opportunities for cooperative action through joint projects or initiatives (contribution).



- Manage youths' expectations about what can be achieved and what will happen after the project's conclusion.
- Include opportunities in the program design for developing understanding and dialogue across conflict and generational divisions among participants and key stakeholders. These decisions should be made based on risk and conflict analysis, which are likely to identify such activities as essential to risk mitigation and conflict transformation strategies. Activities should include building assets and agency around dialogue and conflict transformation (separately and jointly) and creating or identifying safe spaces for dialogue and cooperative action that identify, respect, and speak to the needs of each party.
- Recognize and mitigate risks of harm associated with the visibility and publicity of interactions between divided groups, using a gradual process and potentially beginning interaction through informal channels and spaces as appropriate.
- Disaggregate monitoring and evaluation indicators by conflict divisions, including age, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, or political ideology.
- Select partners from all sides of conflict divisions to avoid exacerbating conflict dynamics.
- Involve parents throughout PYD programs and maintain open lines of communication, particularly around culturally sensitive program content, to help protect youth, encourage safe female participation, and prevent backlash. Supporting youth leadership in parental outreach and engagement can further increase youth ownership and reinforce youth agency.



## ENSURE MEANINGFUL INCLUSION OF DIVERSE YOUTH

Ensure meaningful inclusion of diverse youth throughout the program lifecycle to strengthen resilience and address conflict factors around exclusion and inequality. USAID defines inclusive development as “the concept that every person, regardless of identity, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies and their inclusion throughout the development process leads to better outcomes.”<sup>130</sup> Some identities have been

historically marginalized or have become vulnerable to marginalization for a variety of cultural, political, and/or contextual reasons. Marginalized identities often experience discrimination in the application of laws and policies and/or access to resources, services, and social protection and may be subject to persecution, harassment, and/or violence. The success of PYD approaches depends on understanding how young peoples’ intersecting identities, especially those that have been historically marginalized, affect their access to opportunities and participation in society as well as identifying and addressing the barriers to inclusion, ensuring that all young people can fully engage and take leadership roles in all stages of the program lifecycle.<sup>131</sup> Intersecting identities that might lead to a greater degree of exclusion and marginalization include caste; ethnicity; gender; indigenous, refugee, migrant, or citizenship status; sexual orientation; disability status (developmentary, sensory, physical, psychosocial, and other disabilities may face different forms of discrimination); religion; political opinions; socioeconomic status; marital status; parental status; age; and others. In conflict-affected contexts, inclusion becomes even more important, as exclusion and inequalities between subgroups may be a significant factor in conflict dynamics. Meaningful social inclusion can be practiced in PYD programming through the following approaches:

- Ensure the participation of diverse youth throughout the program lifecycle, including in strategic decision making around agenda setting, grantmaking, staffing, and defining overall program success, as well as more typical stages of involvement in design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Incorporate programming components that support girls and young women to overcome socially driven barriers to their participation in PYD programs, such as the establishment of female-only spaces and greater parental engagement.
- Recognize the rich history and diversity of MENA’s religious, ethnic, and linguistic populations, accommodating their participation through appropriate facilitation and acknowledging the power dynamics between different minorities and the Arab/Arabic-speaking majority.
- Dedicate space and time for youth and program staff to reflect on the internal capacities<sup>132</sup> for supporting inclusion within the project (such as their own biases and assumptions or power dynamics within the project), as well as external factors (such as patterns of exclusion and power differentials in society and within their groups, discriminatory policies, and social norms) to strengthen inclusive and nondiscriminatory practices and share concrete ways to make the activities more inclusive (e.g., choosing not to use terms or labels that diminish the agency and assets of certain youth, such as “at risk” or “vulnerable”).

### Additional Reading:

[USAID Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations](#)

[YouthPower Social Inclusion in Positive Youth Development Programs](#)

- Recognize and build on youth leadership by partnering with diverse youth-led groups and initiatives, including informal and formal groups, networks, and movements, as well as those representing marginalized communities.
- Based on the conflict analysis, develop tailored outreach and engagement strategies for subgroups that are traditionally marginalized or “hard to reach” by civil society or society more broadly, recognizing that different subgroups may have different aspirations and needs within each PYD domain and that identifying certain subgroups or identities (e.g., youth formerly associated with armed groups and violent extremist organizations, members of the LGBTI community) may cause harm, in which case programs will need to take appropriate measures to protect participants’ identities (e.g., focusing on eliminating barriers and preventing risks for marginalized or excluded youth rather than actively identifying them as well as preparing protocols to protect and anonymize personal data).
- Recruit program facilitators and trainers who reflect youth diversity, speak local languages, and model respect for all youth. Adult facilitators should also be equipped to proactively facilitate inclusion and nondiscrimination among youth and between youth and adults. This includes creating opportunities for different youth to demonstrate leadership (e.g., having a rotation of youth participants lead exercises and discussions during workshops or meetings), encouraging youth ideas and creativity, supporting youth to find common ground with one another, and jointly making decisions with young participants.
- Strengthen assets among youth, project staff, and partners that help develop respect and understanding for differences and similarities, such as empathy, compassion, and critical thinking, as well as establish a sense of self, such as self-confidence and appreciation for one’s own culture and beliefs.
- Provide opportunities for older youth to develop relationships outside of their community/subgroup while encouraging positive dynamics and establishing clear, culturally appropriate boundaries for peer engagement to ensure that everyone is safe and feels respected.
- Ensure that youth have space to reflect on their own identities and safely explore and develop beliefs and identities independently of their communities or subgroups. For sensitive issues, it may be important to engage and sensitize parents/caregivers and provide separate spaces for youth subgroups to reflect and discuss with members of their own group (e.g., separate discussions by genders, ethnic or religious groups, or refugee and host communities) before joining mixed groups for discussion. This requires careful management to prevent reinforcing marginalization and may not be appropriate for heavily stigmatized groups that may face an increased risk from being actively identified.
- Use traditional and social media to highlight positive examples of inclusion and youth participation, challenge stigma and discrimination, and promote positive social norms of inclusion and youth participation.
- Track, measure, and evaluate inclusion throughout the project using inclusive project indicators and tools that measure participants’ attitudes and biases toward different subgroups, especially marginalized groups and identities, while balancing the potential risks/benefits of data collection for staff and participants.<sup>133</sup>

## INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Conflict has a profound impact on young people and their relationships, families, and communities, which are crucial to their development and well-being. Long-term exposure to conflict without appropriate mitigation can adversely impact young people's physical and mental health, creating or amplifying feelings of isolation, uncertainty, fear, anger, loss, and sadness.<sup>134</sup> Conflict may also disrupt family relationships and strain or fracture social cohesion in communities, undermining the support and protective functions they could otherwise provide. For these reasons, MHPSS interventions are critical for the healthy development and well-being of conflict-affected youth. Four KIs for this study cited MHPSS activities as a fundamental need for PYD programs in conflict-affected contexts.<sup>135, 136, 137, 138</sup>

MHPSS encompasses a broad spectrum of interventions designed to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and prevent and treat mental health disorders. Conflict affects people in different ways, and a layered combination of MHPSS interventions and services is necessary to alleviate the various impacts on individuals, families, and communities. This holistic treatment approach is best described through the MHPSS intervention pyramid (Figure 2). The first layer is the broadest, focusing on (re)establishing security and basic services (e.g., education and health) in a participatory and culturally appropriate way for youth and their communities. The next layer includes interventions to (re)establish or strengthen youth access to key community and family supports for recovery and resilience. The top two layers reflect additional support for a smaller number of youth who require more focused interventions from trained and supervised workers (or paraprofessionals) and an even smaller percentage of youth who require specialized psychological or psychiatric assistance from mental health professionals.

### Additional Reading:

[\*Young People Will Transform Global Mental Health\*](#)

[\*INEE, Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support\*](#)

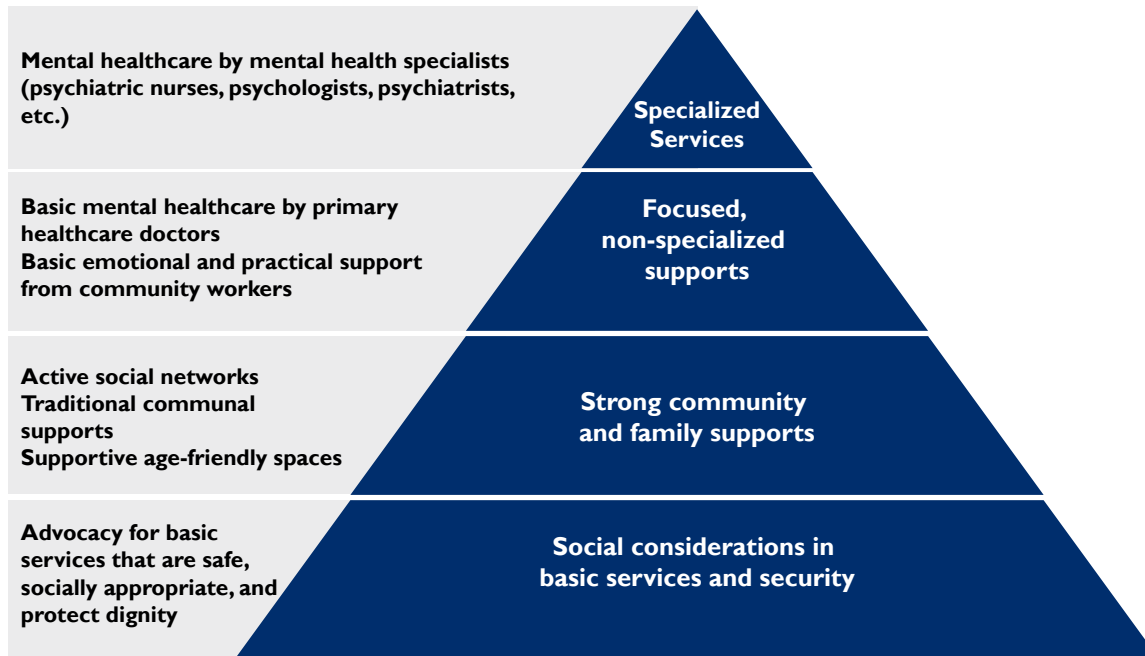
[\*UNICEF, Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support\*](#)

[\*Evidence-Based Child and Adolescent Psychosocial Interventions\*](#)

[\*Youth MHPSS Toolkit\*](#)



Graphic 8: Levels of Psychosocial Support Programming



For the purposes of this document, integrating MHPSS into PYD programming entails psychosocial support interventions (layers 1–2) to support overall social well-being and promote healthy coping mechanisms for youth and their communities, as well as mental health interventions (layers 3–4) to provide specialized support under the supervision of mental health professionals for the smaller percentage of youth with mental health disorders.

**Psychosocial support programming** should be integrated for all conflict-affected youth and their communities to support their overall well-being. Psychosocial support is closely tied to youths’ day-to-day relationships and coping mechanisms and does not require facilitation or supervision by mental health professionals or specialists (although it is critical these professionals are available for a referral for youth with specific psychological needs). Youth have diverse coping skills and responses to conflict, and most young people will be able to heal and thrive with basic psychosocial support and will not require specialized mental health services.<sup>139</sup> In PYD programming, psychosocial support interventions may include the following:

- Provide or support youths’ access to structured, meaningful activities—education, skills training, sports, recreation, and so forth—that support their development, strengthen their relationships, and reestablish a feeling of normalcy during and immediately after disruptions by conflict or crisis.<sup>vi</sup>

vi As a 23-year-old man in Medenine describes, “Every day, it’s the same scenario, a long empty day to pass, I have nothing to do, I have no goal to achieve,” pointing to the lack of alternatives that young people face for meaningful engagement when they are not in school or employed. Another young man (age 26) says, “Spend time in cafés, and you understand everything. We have no choice. Young people spend all day sharing a coffee, playing cards, counting passersby.”



- Support and strengthen youths' development of social and emotional knowledge and skills (social and emotional learning), including ensuring culturally appropriate coping mechanisms, recognizing and managing emotions, and constructively responding to conflict, through cooperative play, emotional regulation exercises, role-playing, reflective discussions, and so forth. This may be particularly effective when combined with developing and strengthening technical and vocational skills, which have reduced stress among adolescents (see text box "Program Example: Incorporating MHPSS into PYD Initiatives").
- Support and strengthen peer dialogue, mentorship, groups, or support networks, recognizing the importance of positive peer interactions for youth's sense of belonging, social capital, identity formation, coping, and resilience. This may include separate groups based on age and gender, specific to youths' needs or interests. Peer engagement and mentorship also play crucial roles in the disengagement and reintegration of young people from armed groups, gangs, violent extremist organizations, and prison; youth may serve as a bridge between disengaged youth, their victims, and the community.<sup>140</sup>
- Fund and support youth-led psychosocial support initiatives, such as raising awareness on constructive coping methods. Peers may be more credible messengers than adults and authorities, particularly in conflict settings.
- Raise teachers' awareness of the impact of psychological trauma on youth's health and well-being, as well as on teachers themselves, and help them create trauma-informed, safe, and positive environments for youth in educational settings. Activities can include educating teachers on the impact of potentially traumatizing events experienced by youth and ways to respond to youth who are experiencing trauma. Such activities can be categorized as community interventions.
- Train or sensitize caregivers, community members, and youth themselves to promote mental health awareness, recognize stress reactions and the signs of deeper psychological needs and illness and how they may differ by age or gender; understand positive coping strategies and how to access or refer mental health support, and reduce stigma and improve help seeking.

- Integrate activities that strengthen youths' positive interactions and relationships with their teachers, parents, and peers, such as engaging them in cultural and recreational activities, conducting trust- and teambuilding exercises, building capacity in positive parenting and responsive caregiving (including for youth who are parents), and holding discussion groups and facilitated dialogue.
- Incorporate activities that support positive self-expression, such as arts, recreation, sports, and play.
- Develop communications and awareness campaigns with youth, targeting different age ranges, to reduce negative stereotypes and stigma (which youth often internalize, generating depression or hopelessness<sup>vii</sup> and limiting their agency and contributions<sup>141</sup>) and promote constructive coping and positive youth contributions.

#### Program Example: Incorporating MHPSS into PYD Initiatives

The **Advancing Adolescents** program 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.

**Mental health programming**, for the smaller percentage of youth with mental health disorders who need specialized support, aims to improve psychological well-being by reducing psychological stress levels, improving daily function, and promoting healthy coping strategies. A trained mental health professional should supervise mental health interventions. In PYD programs, this should include the following:

- Identify and establish linkages or partnerships with local, trained mental health professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, etc.) to provide specialized services for young people with mental health disorders. If appropriate support cannot be found in health institutions or social affairs services, implementers may look to NGOs and international organizations with a local presence, which tend to fill mental health service gaps in MENA. Ensure that these providers and services use evidence-based treatments that are culturally appropriate and abide by Do No Harm principles. This process should include anticipating and preparing to accommodate specific needs based on participating youths' backgrounds and identities, such as gender-sensitive mental health support and appropriate languages or translations.
- Assess and strengthen identified mental health professionals' capacities in PYD approaches that have been shown to improve outcomes for youth recovery and resilience.<sup>142</sup>

vii In Tunisia, for example, youth describe suffering from depression linked to their marginalized and "humiliating" position in society: "Even if you make the effort to change, society gives you an eternal tattoo, a label of an offender, a failure, or a source of problem," in the words of a 23-year-old-man from Tunis.

- Create a functioning, well-communicated referral mechanism to ensure that appropriate care is provided in a timely, professional, and confidential manner. Nondiscriminatory, sensitive handling of referrals and responses is particularly important in conflict settings, where stigma and social divisions and biases may affect the referral and provision of care. Age and gender sensitivity are also important in this process, considering that half of all mental health disorders start by the age of 14 and mental health disorders appear to manifest differently by gender.
- Identify, train, and support caregivers, school counselors, youth workers, and trusted community members, including youth and religious leaders (ideally identified through a participatory process with youth) to provide basic, focused psychosocial support for those who may need more attention than others (but do not require specialist care), such as individuals with disabilities, individuals in minority groups, survivors of gender-based violence, and former combatants. Developing these skills among relevant stakeholders can support the early detection of more severe mental health disorders and ensure rapid referral in the event of symptom escalation.



**Key overall considerations and best practices for MHPSS interventions** in conflict-affected contexts in MENA include the following:

- Ensure that PYD programs create safe, supportive spaces and environments where young people of all backgrounds and identities are treated with respect and dignity, protected from harm, and supported to actively participate (see recommendations above for Do No Harm, social inclusion, and meaningful participation) and meet their basic needs effectively, including providing information to all youth on accessing basic services, such as health care and education, and providing focused psychosocial care for youth who are experiencing distress or need additional attention.
- Within MHPSS interventions, Do No Harm best practices include focusing on group and individual psychosocial interventions, refraining from singling out specific youth for special care, ensuring that only trained and qualified professionals provide specialized mental health treatment to individuals who need it, using appropriate and evidence-based interventions, understanding that a one-off or single-session psychological debriefing or training is not sufficient, and identifying and building on youths' strengths to help foster a sense of control over their own ability to recover and thrive (versus fixating on the victim identity, which can promote hopelessness).<sup>143</sup> Safeguarding and child protection processes and training are also essential for all PYD programs to protect participants' safety and prevent additional harm.
- Involve diverse young people in mapping and assessing MHPSS resources, supports, and systems that already exist in their communities and environments and in determining culturally and contextually appropriate interventions that are backed by empirical evidence, taking into account the associated risks and resources by age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and so forth and sensitizing responses accordingly.
- In MENA, the provision of MHPSS services in family, school, or community settings takes on a greater importance as a result of the significant cultural stigma around mental health, discussed earlier in this study. It is essential for MHPSS interventions to engage caregivers, families, schools, and communities to ensure their buy-in and empower them to provide basic MHPSS services. This includes strengthening their capacities for supporting and caring for stressed youth (including youth who may adopt self-destructive coping mechanisms in response to distress, such as drug usage and social withdrawal), as well as providing them with access to psychosocial support and care when they are experiencing conflict-related stress or are caring for young people who require additional attention or support, such as those with disabilities or serious distress or mental health disorders. Some youth may be parents or caregivers themselves.

*It is essential for MHPSS interventions to engage caregivers, families, schools, and communities to ensure their buy-in and empower them to provide basic MHPSS services.*

- Include awareness raising on negative coping mechanisms and constructive, evidence-based methods for responding to these mechanisms, recognizing that different mechanisms have varying levels of stigma or social acceptability depending on context, gender, and so forth, which may affect appropriate identification and treatment. For example, suicide and self-harm have been used very publicly as a gesture of protest and covered widely by media in some MENA contexts,<sup>viii</sup> and abuse of certain substances may be more socially accepted than others in different places, in accordance with cultural or religious practices and beliefs.
- Support youth advocacy and participation in policymaking to ensure that social services are delivered in a meaningful, equitable way and address social factors, such as poverty and discrimination, that influence young people's mental health, recognizing that these services and youth's ability to navigate and shape them are key to youth resilience and recovery<sup>144</sup> and that inequalities in service provision and delivery are linked to conflict.
- Acknowledge and create space to examine the interconnectedness of youth's individual trauma and distress to the social, political, and economic exclusion they experience, as well as the collective trauma that conflict creates for communities or certain groups. Acknowledging social, cultural, and historical trauma and the influence of broader social factors and marginalization on youth's psychosocial well-being will likely resonate more strongly with youth and lead to better outcomes.<sup>145</sup>
- Given the cultural stigma around mental health in MENA, MHPSS interventions do not need to be labeled as "mental health" or "psychological" support or activities, but can simply be incorporated into programming (programs may incorporate arts and recreation activities for positive self-expression, for example, without labeling them as "psychosocial support activities"), labeled under a more socially acceptable term (a "friendship bench," for example, instead of "peer counseling"), or described under the umbrella of "well-being."
- Facilitate opportunities for youth to connect to their cultural and religious identities and traditions, where appropriate, as these may be an important component for MENA youth to reestablish a sense of normalcy, belonging, and hope as well as reduce stress. This may entail working directly with religious leaders (including to address youth grievances or mistrust of religious leaders, as appropriate), scheduling program activities to enable youth to participate in religious practices or occasions, and creating space for youth to reflect on their psychosocial well-being as part of their own value systems and religious communities. Practice conflict sensitivity and ensure inclusivity in these efforts to accommodate all religious and cultural identities and practices, including for youth who do not have religious affiliations.
- Provide psychosocial support to PYD staff themselves, who may be experiencing their own distress and conflict-related stress or may need additional support while working with youth who require greater attention and care. Programs engaging youth who require focused psychosocial interventions may also require higher staff-to-participant ratios to reduce the burden on staff and ensure that youth get the attention and support they need.

viii For example, in a focus group discussion with hard-to-reach youth in Tunisia, one 27-year-old male in Medenine said, "We look at daily Facebook images of unemployed young people who commit suicide and put an end to their suffering in public in front of everyone." H. Deman and Z. Saidani, *Youth Consultations on Peace and Security: Findings from Focus Group Discussions and Interviews Including Hard to Reach Youth in Tunisia*, (SFCG, 2017). 15. [https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-04/12.%20FGD\\_Tunisia\\_SFCG%20%28FINAL%29\\_0.pdf](https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-04/12.%20FGD_Tunisia_SFCG%20%28FINAL%29_0.pdf)

- Anticipate and innovate methods to provide psychosocial support to youth and families when conflict and/or crisis limits mobility and youth cannot leave home or shelter or when conflict leads to temporary displacement or migration. These conditions place additional strain on youth and family psychosocial well-being, including elevated stress, reduced social and recreational outlets, and a disrupted sense of normalcy. Social media, radio broadcasts, television, and ICT can be effective methods for bridging physical distances, as long as new risks are mitigated (e.g., moderating online spaces and establishing rules for respectful interaction in chat groups).
- Consider the specific psychosocial support needs of youth disengagement from violent extremist and armed groups as well as the communities to which they are returning. Social reintegration is just as important as economic reintegration for disengaged youth, including their need to reconstruct their social identity, rebuild social relations, treat their psychosocial needs and trauma, and address the social alienation and stigma that may have contributed to their engagement with violent groups in the first place.<sup>146</sup>



## MENA POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING MODELS

The 12 PYD programs identified below contain promising PYD practices that are particularly relevant for conflict-affected MENA contexts. These programs demonstrate the interconnection between PYD domains, highlighting their cross-sectoral nature and the importance of integrating multiple PYD domains and program features to develop a truly holistic programmatic approach. Several combinations of PYD programming features stand out as particularly relevant for MENA conflict contexts:

- Building young people's agency through self-awareness and experiential learning while building their assets through technical and soft skills can help them navigate conflict in their families and communities as they apply new skills and knowledge, particularly to sensitive topics, such as sexual and reproductive health.
- Building youth assets through practical training in vocational and technical skills, thereby building youth's confidence and hope, can reduce stress levels (alongside skills in emotional regulation) and offer youth a sense of control and power, even amid intractable conflict.
- In contexts where youth experience political or socioeconomic exclusion, increasing youth's knowledge of community issues and their assets and opportunities to address these issues through contribution and engagement can foster a greater sense of belonging to their communities.
- Incorporating successful youth engagement and contribution, when showcased appropriately to adults and community stakeholders through, for example, ongoing parental involvement or intergenerational dialogue, can contribute to more positive social norms and perceptions around youths' roles in society and build trust between youth and adults for healthier relationships and bonding.

The programs below demonstrate that establishing physical and emotional safe spaces for youth to strengthen their skills and engage with peers and communities can support PYD, even in the most disabling conflict environments.



## WISE Girls – Mercy Corps

**Location:** *Za’atari Camp, Jordan*

**Target Participants:** *Adolescent girls ages 10–18*

**Sectors Engaged:** *Global health, gender equality and women’s empowerment, humanitarian assistance*

**Project Summary:** *Implemented a girl-led and girl-designed solution to engage younger adolescent Syrian girls (ages 10–14) to learn about puberty in a creative way to address the complex challenge of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights in Za’atari Camp*

**Further Information:** [Mercy Corps WISE Girls Case Study](#)<sup>147</sup>

### PYD Features

- Adolescent girls **built skills** in sexual and reproductive health education, storytelling, reading, facilitation, research, and lesson planning to support peer learning on sexual and reproductive health.
- Adolescent girls **engaged in mutually respectful partnerships** with Mercy Corps staff to lead peer education sessions for younger adolescent girls (ages 10–14) through storytelling, which **contributed** to addressing the lack of sexual and reproductive health education.
- Adolescent girls **bonded** and **built healthy peer relationships** with younger adolescent girls over several storytelling sessions, enabling them to become trusted peer mentors.
- The girl-led sexual and reproductive health peer education initiative sparked girls’ agency throughout the Za’atari Camp, encouraging **membership and belonging** to a network of girl leaders.
- Storytelling sessions established **positive norms, expectations, and perceptions** of girls’ responsibility to understand and act on accurate information about puberty and menstrual health.
- Adolescent girls selected **physically and emotionally safe spaces** and invited younger adolescent girls to return to these spaces whenever they wanted.

To address the complex challenge of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights in Za’atari Camp, Mercy Corps, with funding from IDEO.org and the Department for International Development (DFID), implemented a girl-led, girl-designed solution that engaged adolescent Syrian girls in learning about puberty and menstrual health. A group of adolescent girls in Za’atari Camp worked through the stages of human-centered design—inspiration, ideation, prototyping, and testing—to develop, prototype, and test “Jazirat Al Zohoor” (“The Island of Flowers”), a tale of a young Syrian girl named Zahra who gets her period for the first time. Nine of the girls underwent training in facilitation, puberty awareness, and reading aloud to prepare them to lead engaging peer education sessions directed at younger girls. Over four months of the one-year initiative, the adolescent girls empowered a network of 127 girls to navigate puberty, with 93.7 percent of the girls reporting that their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health had grown.



The WISE Girls initiative demonstrates that placing youth at the center of an ongoing, iterative design process facilitates greater youth agency and enables a genuine shift in hierarchical power dynamics between youth and adults. Through “learning by doing,” adolescent girls developed a style of peer education that challenged traditional authoritative teaching roles and normalized taboo topics for the adolescent girls. Mercy Corps staff observed that the more trust and leadership the girls were given, the more autonomous and dedicated they became. This transformation in agency led adolescent girls to adapt their sessions’ content to their youth audiences, rather than seeking validation from Mercy Corps staff.

Parents commented on their daughters’ newfound confidence and agency, noting the girls’ increased willingness to share opinions and raise challenging topics at home. Mercy Corps cited early and frequent parental and community engagement as a core requirement for youth-led programming. Local Mercy Corps staff facilitators conducted initial consultations with parents and teachers and conducted outreach to parents before and after each “Jazirat Al Zohoor” session to share the learning content in advance and solicit parental feedback. The impact brief highlights that girls could lead future parental outreach to further deepen girls’ ownership of the initiative. In MENA, where girls’ leadership and open conversations about sexual and reproductive health challenge established cultural norms, ongoing dialogue with parents ensured that girls were allowed to participate in the program and their leadership did not trigger backlash from families and communities. Thus, community engagement was critical to ensuring girls’ inclusion and protection.

## Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds (AMAL) – CARE

**Location:** Northern Syria

**Target Participants:** Pregnant Syrian adolescents and first-time mothers ages 10–19

**Sectors Engaged:** Global health, gender equality and women's empowerment, humanitarian assistance

**Project Summary:** Engaged adolescent mothers and mothers-to-be, health service providers, and communities to improve adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and well-being by improving sexual and reproductive health services and advancing more equitable gender norms

**Information:** [Young Mothers' Club Video](#)<sup>148</sup> [AMAL Toolkit](#)<sup>149</sup>

To address the needs of young mothers in northern Syria, CARE, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),

### PYD Features

- Through young mothers' clubs, pregnant adolescents and young mothers **built skills** in antenatal and postnatal care, child development, family planning, communication and interpersonal relationships, problem solving and decision making, and preventing gender-based violence.
- Participating adolescents have the option to **remain engaged in young mothers' clubs and contribute to improved sexual and reproductive health** by leading outreach to new participants from their communities.
- AMAL supported the development of **bonding and healthy peer relationships** within young mothers' clubs and equipped girls with the skills to strengthen **healthy relationships** with their husbands and families.
- Young mothers' clubs established **positive norms, expectations, and perceptions** of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers assuming responsibility for their own sexual and reproductive health and family care.
- Young mothers' clubs were held in officially designated women's and girls' **safe spaces**, primary health centers, or other confidential and secure locations.
- AMAL provided access to **age-appropriate and youth-friendly services** by building the capacity of health service providers in adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

Syria Relief and Development, and other local partners developed the AMAL program. Funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, AMAL has three components: young mothers' clubs, consisting of an eight-session curriculum to build skills among pregnant adolescents and first-time mothers; trainings for health service providers on rights-based approaches to family planning counseling, communication skills, and adolescent-friendly health services; and community engagement sessions to rally community and household support for vulnerable adolescents. Young mothers' clubs include adolescent advisory committees of trained volunteers with additional leadership roles, including liaising with young mothers' club facilitators and community advisory groups to share feedback and identifying hard-to-reach youth in their communities to refer to AMAL services. Initial monitoring and evaluation results showed that following engagement in young mothers' clubs, 58 percent of

respondents reported good or very good efficacy in seeking health services and 52 percent reported good or very good confidence levels in interspousal communication.

AMAL's socioecological approach recognizes and seeks to address the multilevel barriers that adolescent girls face in exercising autonomy over sexual and reproductive health and family planning in conflict-affected MENA contexts. The AMAL curriculum equips adolescent mothers with accurate information about sexual and reproductive health while also building life skills, such as communication, interpersonal relationships, and emotional awareness, so that girls can effectively engage and negotiate with their husbands and families on sexual and reproductive health topics. AMAL also works to transform the attitudes and biases of health care providers and communities toward adolescent mothers to facilitate sexual and reproductive health services that are tailored to adolescents. Community advisory groups—consisting of influential community members, such as religious leaders, teachers, community health care workers, husbands, mothers, and mothers-in-law—liaise with communities and help facilitate an enabling environment for the girls. AMAL's three-pronged approach not only contributes to improved sexual and reproductive health outcomes for adolescent girls, but also to a longer-term shift in power and gender dynamics.



## Sharekna – FHI 360

**Location:** Tunisia**Target Participants:** *Tunisian men and women ages 16–29***Sectors Engaged:** *Democracy, human rights, and governance; working in crisis and conflict***Project Summary:** *Engaged youth to identify community-level risk factors and collaborate with civil society and local government to design and implement local initiatives to increase resilience to violent extremism***Information:** [USAID Sharekna Fact Sheet](#)<sup>150</sup>**PYD Features**

- Tunisian youth **built hard skills and soft skills**—including community mapping, data entry, facilitation, and presentation—in preparation for leading community youth mapping activities.
- Youth **engaged in equal partnerships** with local civil society and government leaders to collaboratively design and lead local initiatives, **contributing** to the resolution of local issues.
- Youth built trust with adults in community stakeholder action planning and local resilience activities, developing **positive adult role models and relationships**.
- Involvement in community activities and organizations through local resilience activities helped youth develop a **sense of belonging** to their communities.
- Youth leadership alongside civil society and community leaders **improved norms, expectations, and perceptions** of young people in the community.
- Activities were conducted in **spaces that felt safe** for youth.

Sharekna, implemented in Tunisia from 2016–2019, aimed to boost four Tunisian communities' resilience to economic, political, and social stresses, including the threat of violent extremism. The pilot activity served as the basis for the Ma3an project, now being implemented by FHI 360 on a wider scale. Sharekna empowered youth to lead community youth mapping, review findings, jointly plan concrete actions through community stakeholder action planning, and collaboratively lead local resilience activities funded through small grants. Sharekna measured changes in youth behavior, capacities, and relationships using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), the only resilience tool clinically tested across multiple cultures and languages. According to Sharekna's findings, youths' GSE scores did not rise in a statistically significant way, which may indicate the need for different or more culturally specific resilience measurement tools. However, qualitative data suggested that youth developed greater trust in local authorities, civil society, and local associations to handle violent extremism–related stresses and that the program made violent extremist organization membership less acceptable to youth.

Sharekna fostered mutual trust by providing a safe platform for joint action. Youths' initial leadership in community youth mapping demonstrated their potential to adult stakeholders, who came to embrace more positive views and norms of youth contribution. This shift enabled youth and adults to collaborate on community stakeholder action planning and local resilience activities. Setting concrete, manageable goals for local resilience activities helped build youths' trust that their efforts would have an impact. Locally implemented initiatives were designed to be visible and concrete (e.g., refurbishment of public spaces) to foster accountability and cooperation between youth and other project stakeholders. At the end of the program, youth participants expressed that they were more likely to engage with civil society outside Sharekna because of greater trust. Likewise, local civil society organization partners trusted Sharekna's youth participants more, citing the youths' increased understanding of community needs and development of critical thinking skills.

Building on the knowledge and lessons learned from Sharekna, the Ma3an project is working to build resilience in 33 of Tunisia's most marginalized and vulnerable communities. Ma3an focuses on empowering Tunisian youth, men, and women to identify and reduce community-specific vulnerabilities and enhancing Tunisian state and nonstate actors' capabilities to prevent and counter violent extremism.



## Advancing Adolescents – Mercy Corps

**Location:** *Jordan*

**Target Participants:** *Syrian refugees in Jordan and Jordanian peers ages 8–15*

**Sectors Engaged:** *Global health, humanitarian assistance, working in crisis and conflict*

**Project Summary:** *Brought together Syrian refugee and Jordanian youth to improve resilience by enhancing their emotional well-being, safety, and social ties*

**Information:** [Advancing Adolescents Approach](#)<sup>151</sup>

**Evaluation:** [Hair cortisol concentrations in war-affected adolescents: A prospective intervention trial](#);<sup>152</sup> [Insecurity, distress, and mental health: experimental and randomized controlled trials of a psychosocial intervention for youth affected by the Syrian crisis](#)<sup>153</sup>

### PYD Features

- Syrian refugee youth and their **Jordanian peers built technical and vocational skills** in competencies, such as sewing, soccer, arts and crafts, and computer repair and soft skills, including emotional regulation and interpersonal skills.
- Syrian and Jordanian youth designed joint community development project plans to link them to community leaders and build social capital, setting the stage for future **engagement and contribution**.
- Syrian and Jordanian youth established **healthy relationships and bonding** with adult mentors who worked with them on relational skills and self-expression.
- Joint activities offered inclusion—a **sense of belonging and membership**—to both Syrian refugee and Jordanian youth.
- **Safe and familiar community spaces** were identified to ensure physical protection and emotional safety.
- Community centers provided **age-appropriate and youth-friendly psychosocial**

From 2014–2015, Mercy Corps, with funding from the Government of Canada, implemented the Advancing Adolescents program, which aimed to strengthen the resilience of the host community and Syrian refugee youth in Jordan through equitable access to psychosocial support, protection, and informal learning opportunities. Over eight weeks, Syrian refugee and at-risk Jordanian youth attended biweekly sessions and participated in skill-building modules that included fitness activities, arts and crafts, vocational skills, and technical skills. In parallel, youth worked with adult mentors to develop a greater sense of social support and better understand the brain's reaction to stress, with the aim of improving emotional regulation and building empathy for the self and others. Underpinning the program was the Mercy Corps Profound Stress Attunement model, which works with youth to develop empathetic responses to their own and others' profound stress to support the development of emotional safe spaces, manage stressors, and build relationships with others.

A randomized control trial that measured hair cortisol to assess the program's impact on physiological stress found that the intervention regularized cortisol production and reduced chronic stress by one-third.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, the organization's impact evaluation found that program participants demonstrated higher levels of trust toward people in their communities, particularly those of other nationalities. Boys were more likely to indicate that they had greater access to safe spaces; girls showed no evidence of program impact for this indicator. Participants were more likely to have hope for their future (14.5 percent), which indicated a restored sense of normalcy, especially for Syrian participants.

The Advancing Adolescents program shows how PYD and MHPSS activities can reinforce each other in conflict-affected contexts to produce stronger outcomes. Increasing knowledge of the neurobiological drivers of emotional stress and building youth's capacity in emotional attunement lowered their 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 stress levels than recreational activities,<sup>155</sup> which indicated that building assets and agency may have reduced stress overall. Finally, by including both Syrian refugee youth and their Jordanian counterparts, the initiative was sensitive to conflict dynamics between refugee and host communities and contributed to addressing the root causes of conflict by building trust across dividing lines. Still ongoing, Advancing Adolescents has introduced Profound Stress Attunement sessions for participants' parents to facilitate a more enabling environment for youth's well-being and development.



## Favorable Opportunities to Reinforce Self-Advancement for Today's Youth (FORSATY) – International Organization for Migration (IOM)

**Location:** Tangier and Tétouan, Morocco

**Target Participants:** At-risk youth ages 12–25

**Sectors Engaged:** Democracy, human rights, and governance; working in crisis and conflict; education

**Project Summary:** Improves youth's access to educational, vocational, and community engagement opportunities to further integrate them into their communities and reduce their susceptibility to delinquency and violent extremism

**Evaluation:** [Midterm Evaluation](#)<sup>156</sup>

### PYD Features

- FORSATY builds **academic, vocational, or soft skills**, depending on each young person's profile, and builds **life skills** across all learning categories.
- Students, job seekers, and excluded youth are given opportunities to **contribute** to their communities through extracurricular activities, employment, and community service initiatives.
- FORSATY's one-stop shops are led by teachers, supervisors, and coaches who share power with and act as mentors for youth and support youth to **form healthy relationships and bond with adults and their peers**.
- One-stop shops include all youth, even those who are traditionally excluded from community activities, and facilitate a sense of **belonging and membership** through creative activities that offer a platform for self-expression and experience sharing.
- FORSATY staff, trainers, and facilitators support the maintenance of **positive norms around youth relationships and engagement** by modeling positive behavior and mutual respect.
- One-stop shops serve as **physically and emotionally safe spaces for youth** to convene, learn, and express themselves.
- One-stop shops provide **age-appropriate, youth-friendly services** that span the educational, vocational, and community engagement sectors that are operationally integrated with public and private Moroccan institutions.

Since 2012, FORSATY has worked with disaffected youth at risk of socioeconomic marginalization to improve the availability and accessibility of education, employment, and community engagement opportunities. Youths' participation in these activities supports their increased integration in and contribution to their communities and reduces their susceptibility to delinquency and violent extremist organizational recruitment. FORSATY offers academic support and extracurricular activities to youth at risk of dropping out of school, vocational training and job placement for job-seeking youth, and community engagement activities for excluded youth who are neither in school nor seeking employment. FORSATY works with local NGOs by building their institutional and

organizational capacity to serve as centralized hubs—one-stop shops—for all activities to ensure quality and sustainable service provision. The program emphasizes family involvement in education, works with Moroccan educational institutions to coordinate service provision, and draws on private-sector partnerships to facilitate job placement.

According to the midterm evaluation, academic performance improved by 76 percent in primary schools and 65 percent in middle schools as a result of FORSATY activities. Evaluators cited the program’s vocational component as being the most effective as it offers “quick integration into the labor market” by providing vocational skills over short training cycles. Overall, 91 percent of youth receiving academic services and 97 percent of those receiving vocational services felt their lives had improved as a result of the program, and 72 percent of youth reported that the quality of life in their neighborhoods had improved.

The FORSATY approach centers on changing the life paths of youth facing distinct forms of structural violence—namely, youth at risk of failing school, unemployed youth seeking work, and excluded youth who are neither in school nor seeking employment.<sup>157</sup> This approach requires mapping the multilevel systems in which youth are embedded and identifying key leverage points for change. Helping youth at risk of failing school, for example, may entail improving their relationship to learning through tailored pedagogical support, building confidence through sport and theater activities, addressing personal and family issues through psychosocial support, and engaging parents in parents’ groups to discuss the student’s progress. Addressing these factors simultaneously supports youth to navigate the resources they need to succeed and contributes to a market for services that support youth.<sup>158</sup> FORSATY has leveraged this demand to move toward sustainable programming—namely, by charging parents for academic support services. Future efforts to achieve sustainability might entail institutionalizing financial partnerships with schools or private-sector employers,<sup>159</sup> in parallel to supporting one-stop shops to secure diversified financial resources.



## The President Reality Television Series – Search for Common Ground (SFCG)

**Location:** West Bank/Gaza

**Target Participants:** Palestinian youth ages 18–35

**Sectors Engaged:** Democracy, human rights, and governance; working in crisis and conflict

**Project Summary:** Engaged Palestinian youth in a nationally televised reality television program to build skills and knowledge in peaceful civic activism and inclusive democratic practices

**Evaluation:** [Final Evaluation](#)<sup>160</sup>

### PYD Features

- Palestinian contestants **built skills and knowledge in civic and democratic processes**, including legislative processes and electoral law.
- Palestinian youth **contributed through community service and outreach campaigns** and had the opportunity to **engage with politicians and community leaders** through short-term work experiences in ministries and private companies.
- Palestinian youth who advanced in the competition received political mentorship from politicians and ministers, which offered them opportunities for **bonding and healthy relationships**.
- Palestinian youths' participation in *The President* reality television show increased their **connection and sense of belonging** to their communities, particularly through community initiatives.
- By directly engaging the public and private sectors, as well as Palestinian audiences more broadly through a vote-by-SMS process, the reality show contributed to **positive norms, expectations, and perceptions** of youth leadership.

*The President*, a reality television show based on a mock presidential election, aimed to create a new generation of Palestinian leaders and develop a political culture of peaceful civic activism and inclusive democratic practices. Through the initiative, Palestinian youth competed based on their knowledge of political and civic processes and their performance in real-world challenges, such as leading major Palestinian companies; facilitating municipal town hall meetings; and conducting comprehensive presidential campaigns, including community outreach and public debates. *The President* reached an audience of 1.2 million Palestinians (28.5 percent of the population) through television and radio platforms, and 250,000 SMS votes were cast for television candidates over 16 episodes. The 600 Palestinian youth trained in civic and democratic processes showed a 2.6 percent increase in knowledge on these topics, and 70.8 percent of youth participants reported that the program's community and social initiative phase helped them gain the competencies and knowledge to make community-level decisions. Overall, 96 percent of the audience reported that the program increased their awareness of civic engagement.

Amid internal political conflict between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, which delayed elections and contributed to political stagnation, *The President* offered a creative outlet for Palestinian youth to contribute to and engage in realistic simulations of decision making and governance. *The President* demonstrated that media—including television, radio, and new media—can be a powerful tool to provide youth with opportunities for engagement and contribution that might otherwise be blocked by structural violence. Moreover, media can vastly expand the reach of PYD initiatives from an immediate target group to millions of viewers or listeners at the national level. In this way, media can help shift social norms and perceptions of youth’s potential for positive contribution.



## A Future Called Peace: Strengthening Yemeni Youth Leadership for Conflict Transformation – SFCG

**Location:** Aden, Taiz, and Lahij in Yemen

**Target Participants:** Young Yemeni leaders ages 20–35

**Sectors Engaged:** Working in crisis and conflict

**Project Summary:** Trained 87 Yemeni youth leaders (“insider mediators”) to resolve disputes in their communities and identify and respond to drivers of local conflict

**Evaluation:** [Final Evaluation](#)<sup>161</sup>

### PYD Features

- Yemeni youth leaders **built skills** in conflict resolution, conflict analysis, and mediation and facilitation techniques.
- Yemeni youth leaders **engaged with elders in their communities** to resolve local disputes and further contributed to dispute resolution through local initiatives.
- Yemeni youth leaders networked through in-person trainings and online exchange groups, allowing them to **bond and form healthy peer relationships**.
- Yemeni youth leaders were selected from across clan and tribal backgrounds, enabling them to develop a sense of **membership and belonging** to a common identity.
- Through increased trust between Yemeni youth and elders, communities saw shifts toward **positive norms, expectations, and perceptions** of youth leadership.

A Future Called Peace, funded by USAID and implemented by SFCG in partnership with four local organizations from 2017–2019, aimed to advance Yemeni youth leaders’ role in peacefully transforming conflict in their communities. The initiative trained youth from various clan, tribal, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds in conflict analysis and dialogue techniques, thereby fostering shared values and promoting constructive conflict engagement across dividing lines. Youth “insider mediators” then led conflict scans and inclusive community dialogues to identify the root causes of conflict and co-designed local initiatives to address these issues with community elders and local authorities. This process strengthened intergenerational relationships and supported a gradual shift in social norms of youth engagement. At the end of the initiative, 65 percent of community stakeholders surveyed believed that youth were helping reduce violence in their communities, and 60 percent of youth participants reported increased collaboration in their communities across dividing lines.

A Future Called Peace demonstrates how PYD programming can target the underlying conflict dynamics that contribute to a disabling environment. Rather than supporting youth to directly address Yemen’s national armed conflict, the initiative targeted concrete, local issues driving community divisions—such as purchasing chairs for a girls’ school where the lack of chairs was driving a local dispute over whose daughters could attend school. The

initiative thereby ensured that youth-led initiatives were manageable and did not result in disappointment. The initiative also strengthened social cohesion by building relationships among youth from different backgrounds and trust between youth and elders. Together, the targeted activities yielded concrete change and improved social cohesion, contributing to a broader culture of nonviolent conflict resolution and a more enabling environment for Yemeni youth.

The initiative achieved this impact despite substantial challenges. An outbreak of armed conflict led to severe implementation delays and budget cuts that caused some disappointment among youth leaders and lowered trust between youth and community elders in some governorates.<sup>ix</sup> Nevertheless, 96 percent of survey respondents confirmed that the initiative reduced the gap between youth and elders. These results highlight the importance of conflict sensitivity and show that impact can be achieved even amid armed conflict.



<sup>ix</sup> Initially set to begin in 2015, the program was postponed when USAID suspended aid to Yemen amid the outbreak of armed conflict. Upon relaunching in 2017, the implementing team struggled to coordinate with the parallel Ministries of Planning and International Cooperation in the North and South of Yemen, leading the team to shift program activities away from Sana'a, where authorities proved to be more sensitive. Because of the financial crisis caused by the armed conflict, budgets for local initiatives that were allocated in 2015 were no longer sufficient, causing fewer initiatives to be implemented than planned.

## Youth Economic Empowerment Program (YEEP) – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

**Location:** Yemen

**Target Participants:** Yemeni youth ages 18–30

**Sectors Engaged:** Economic growth and trade, working in crisis and conflict

**Project Summary:** Contributed to Yemeni youth economic empowerment through business training and mentoring, cash-for-work programs, job placement, and support for microbusinesses

**Evaluation:** [Midterm Evaluation](#)<sup>162</sup>, [Final Evaluation](#)<sup>163</sup>

**Other Information:** [Best Practices Brief](#)<sup>164</sup>

### PYD Features

- Yemeni youth built **business and life skills** through vocational training and cash-for-work programs.
- Yemeni youth had the opportunity to **contribute through concrete employment opportunities**, including entrepreneurship, microbusinesses, and social impact jobs.
- Youth who pursued entrepreneurship and self-employment **were matched with business mentors**, providing opportunities for **bonding and healthy relationships**.
- YEEP supported the development of **positive financial management norms** among **youth** and established **employers' positive expectations and perceptions of youth**.
- YEEP provided **access to innovative, age-appropriate, and youth-friendly employment and entrepreneurship services** and made some progress toward **integrating** these services within local institutions.

YEEP, implemented by UNDP in two phases from 2012–2016, aimed to contribute to youth economic empowerment, stabilization, conflict prevention, resilience, and the development of solutions for inequality and exclusion. UNDP's 3x6 approach consisted of three phases: inclusiveness, ownership, and sustainability. During the inclusiveness phase, the initiative identified at-risk youth and placed them in a short-term, cash-for-work program to build immediate capital, providing capacity building in business and life skills at the same time. After two months, the youth designed a business plan and received feedback and mentorship from business advisors. In the ownership phase, the youth placed two-thirds of the income from the cash-for-work program into savings accounts to fund business plans. Finally, the initiative either placed youth in jobs through private-sector partnerships or helped them implement their business plans through participatory market needs assessments, access to credit, and ongoing business mentorship. After the first phase, 521 youth were enrolled in immediate income-generating activities coupled with life skills and business training, saving 34,434,400 Yemeni Rials and establishing 260 enterprises.

YEEP demonstrates the impact of concrete financial opportunity on at-risk youths' livelihoods and well-being. According to the midterm evaluation, youth participants found the program "life changing," and many of them developed financial saving practices that were not traditionally part of Yemeni culture. Youth developed businesses that addressed community needs, including agriculture, school rehabilitation, and water security, helping employers and communities perceive youth as economic actors capable of contributing to community well-being. In its first phase, YEEP established several governmental and private-sector partners that contributed to the cash-for-work component's financial sustainability and offered buy-in for integrating the 3x6 approach into Yemen's Youth Employment Action Plan.

However, the program's second phase came amid the escalation of Yemen's armed conflict in 2015, which undercut government partnerships and worsened Yemen's economic crisis. Prospects for long-term program sustainability might have been greater without the onset of armed conflict. Nevertheless, the 3x6 model proved to be flexible, and many youth shifted business plans to focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene initiatives and other challenges brought on by the crisis. YEEP demonstrates the importance of a PYD approach that offers concrete, immediate gains, such as short-term employment, as well as long-term paths to stability, such as entrepreneurship and self-employment.



### Palestinian Adolescents: Agents of Positive Change – UNICEF

**Location:** West Bank and Gaza and refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria

**Target Participants:** Palestinian youth ages 10–18 living in the West Bank and Gaza and in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

**Sectors Engaged:** Education, working in crisis and conflict

**Project Summary:** Sought to provide a supportive and protective environment for Palestinian adolescents for healthy development, recreation, protection, and participation

**Evaluation:** [Final Evaluation](#)<sup>165</sup>

#### PYD Features

- Adolescents engaged in **remedial learning (particularly in Arabic and math); built life skills, vocational skills, and psychosocial competencies**; and participated in recreational activities.
- Adolescents **helped manage safe spaces** and **designed and led community initiatives** on relevant topics, such as drugs, pollution, and school dropout.
- Youth **built healthy relationships with peers and peer educators** and established stronger **bonds with parents who participated in the program**.
- Youth who participated in the program reported increased feelings of **acceptance and belonging**.
- Youth accessed **positive health and youth engagement norms**, and **parents and communities developed positive perceptions of youth engagement**.
- Youth **accessed safe spaces** in established locations, such as women's centers and youth councils.

Between 2004–2007, UNICEF implemented the Palestinian Adolescents: Agents of Positive Change program, which sought to provide a supportive environment for Palestinian youth by establishing and empowering adolescents to manage safe spaces, providing appropriate life skills training, undertaking action initiatives to improve communities, facilitating networking among adolescents, and collaborating with other organizations working with adolescents. Specific skill-building activities varied according to local needs assessments in the country of implementation and included targeted training in English and computer skills (Syria), intergenerational dialogue between youth and parents (Jordan and Lebanon), psychosocial support (Lebanon), and employability training (Jordan). Across all countries, youth conducted action research and led local initiatives on issues important to youth.

Following the program, the evaluation highlighted that 91 percent of youth surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident in themselves and 88 percent said they saw a better future ahead. Overall, 80 percent of youth reported experiencing better relationships with their mothers and 75 percent reported experiencing better relationships with their fathers. In total, 78 percent of respondents said their communities gave them

more respect as a result of the program. Evaluators asked high-impact participants to rank the most important factors leading to the program's impact on them. The two most significant factors were the role of adolescent-led initiatives in changing community leaders' perceptions and parents' improved understanding of youth's situation.

These results demonstrate the significance of intergenerational dialogue and parental involvement in facilitating PYD outcomes, particularly where hierarchical family norms are common, as in MENA. The evaluation notes that in Lebanon and Jordan, parent workshops had a high impact on youth, whereas in Syria—where the initiative lacked a parental engagement component—parents saw the program as having a negative impact on their children. Youths' observations that community initiatives helped change community leaders' views indicate that youth contribution can support a shift in norms, expectations, and perceptions of youth behavior. However, youth were less likely to feel that youth initiatives led to community leaders listening to youth, acting on their input, seeking out their views, or involving them in decision making,<sup>166</sup> suggesting that youth still face significant barriers to meaningful engagement in their communities.



## Promise Pathways: Reducing Child Labor through Viable Paths to Education and Decent Work in Morocco – Creative Associates International

**Location:** Marrakech-Safi region of Morocco

**Target Participants:** Moroccan youth ages 6–14 for educational services; Moroccan youth ages 15–17, 18+, and their families for employment and training services; and government and civil society for capacity building to provide adequate services

**Sectors Engaged:** Education; democracy, human rights, and governance

**Project Summary:** Sought to reduce child labor in Morocco by increasing access to appropriate education and vocational training and providing livelihoods and other social services to adults in their households

**Evaluation:** [Final Evaluation](#)<sup>167</sup>

### PYD Features

- Moroccan youth participated in **remedial education or vocational training** to support alternatives to potentially exploitative forms of child labor.
- The program worked with youth, families, schools, and civil society and government officials to **promote positive norms and expectations of youth health and safety**.
- The program contributed to **safer spaces for youth** by removing many of them from exploitative labor and gaining parental buy-in for their children's safety.
- The program used case workers to liaise between youth and households and civil society and government to **provide access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services**. These services were **integrated through a centralized service referral system**.

From 2013–2017, Promise Pathways sought to reduce child labor by increasing access to training and education for youth at risk of or engaged in child labor and providing livelihoods and social services to adult family members. By partnering with four Moroccan ministries, National Mutual Aid, and local civil society organizations, the initiative boosted family and community resilience by linking beneficiaries to local services and building those services' capacity to meet vulnerable families' needs. The program trained more than 100 case workers in the Pathways to Advancing Viable Alternatives to Education and Employment (PAVE) methodology<sup>x</sup> and deployed them to identify individual households' specific needs and refer the households to the most appropriate services, including enrollment in formal or informal education or life skills or vocational training; provision of school supplies, counseling or psychosocial support, or legal support; and medical care, cooking, management of cooperatives, and marketing and financial education support for family members. Promise Pathways provided educational and vocational services to 5,257 youth and supported the education and livelihoods of 1,131 adult family members.

<sup>x</sup> PAVE is 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.

The evaluation highlights Promise Pathway’s success in mobilizing government and civil society actors to provide the services needed to withdraw children and youth from child labor, even amid significant political bureaucracy. The program established early memoranda of understanding with state institutions and ministries and provided ongoing capacity building in the PAVE methodology, risk mapping, and an early warning system for school dropout, among other topics. These institutional partnerships increased the sustainability of certain program elements—for example, 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. The use of case workers has been highlighted as essential to the project’s success, as it allowed for individualized support in skill building and service provision to youth and their families.



## Ana Usharek – National Democratic Institute (NDI)

**Location:** *Jordan*

**Target Participants:** *Jordanian university, high school, and middle school students*

**Sectors Engaged:** *Education; democracy, human rights, and governance*

### Other Information:

[Ana Usharek + video](#),<sup>168</sup>

[Ana Usharek Schools video](#),<sup>169</sup>

[Ana Usharek Mujtam3i video](#)<sup>170</sup>

#### PYD Features

- Jordanian youth **built skills in civic education, such as citizenship, responsibility, and human rights.**
- Jordanian youth **designed and led civic initiatives to help solve a community challenge and constructively engaged national and community leaders.**
- Jordanian youth **bonded with peers and formed healthy peer relationships** through joint learning and civic initiatives.
- Jordanian youth developed a **greater sense of belonging and membership to their communities** through their in-depth understanding of their communities' challenges and their efforts to address them.
- Jordanian youth experienced **more positive norms and expectations about their engagement** through the program, including from **parents and communities**, whose perceptions shifted as a result of the youth's changed behavior.
- The *Ana Usharek* classroom program and extracurricular sessions **provided a safe space for youth to learn creatively and express themselves.**

Ana Usharek ("I Participate") launched in Jordan in 2011 to engage youth in political life through civic education and community action. The program initially targeted university students in Jordan, reaching 20,000 students through 25 university partnerships in the first five years. Through weekly facilitated discussions, youth build knowledge and skills on diverse topics, such as democratic values and political systems, civic responsibility, and human rights. Using these skills, youth engage in town hall meetings with members of Parliament and meet with senior government officials to discuss pending legislation and political reform. Youth also learn debate skills and participate in national debates that are broadcast weekly on a national television channel. Exceptional Ana Usharek graduates have the opportunity to engage in the Ana Usharek+ program, which supports youth to design and lead civic initiatives to tackle issues, such as refining university curricula, improving local infrastructure, and amending Jordan's law on domestic violence. Still ongoing, Ana Usharek has been expanded to include middle and

high schoolers and a pilot program that focuses on supporting Syrian and Jordanian adults. During the 2019/2020 academic year, the program operated in 23 university campuses and 323 schools. Since its launch in 2011, it has engaged more than 90,000 students and resulted in more than 1,200 civic initiatives and advocacy campaigns.

Ana Usharek 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. Two youth leaders interviewed for this study explained that the program instilled greater loyalty to their communities by promoting youth's agency to address community challenges and providing them with the skills to do so.<sup>171</sup> Through a multistep process involving information gathering, issue selection, stakeholder mapping, and coalition building, youth approach civic initiatives confidently and effectively, gaining parents' and community leaders' trust. 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.<sup>172</sup> 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.



## Partnership with Youth – IREX

**Location:** West Bank

**Target Participants:** Palestinian youth ages 14–29

**Sectors Engaged:** Education, working in crisis and conflict

**Project Summary:** Supported youth to contribute to social and economic development by establishing sustainable hubs for youth innovation and learning and expanding educational and leadership opportunities

**Evaluation:** [Most Significant Change Study](#)<sup>173</sup>

**Other Information:** [Final Report](#)<sup>174</sup>; [Youth-Led Most Significant Change Video](#)<sup>175</sup>

### PYD Features

- Palestinian youth **built technical and soft skills in employability, ICT, leadership, and media** through drop-in, peer-led training, and activities.
- Youth **engaged in design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation** throughout the program cycle and **contributed to their communities through internships** and by **leading community initiatives**.
- Palestinian youth built **healthy relationships with peers and peer mentors**.
- YDRCs held cultural, sports, and other recreational activities to **build a sense of belonging and membership among youth** and **facilitate the inclusion of young women** in what were traditionally considered predominantly male spaces.
- Parents and communities developed more **positive social norms about youth engagement** and **shifted their views** on issues, such as **mixed-gender programming and the value of professional development programs, as an alternative to low-gain or informal employment**.
- YDRCs served as **safe spaces for youth development and expression**.
- YDRCs received capacity building in comprehensive service provision for youth, ensuring their ability to provide **age-appropriate and youth-friendly services, such as professional training and internship placement**.

IREX implemented Partnership with Youth from 2013–2018 to expand youth educational and leadership opportunities by creating youth development resource centers (YDRCs)—sustainable spaces for youth innovation and learning. IREX forged a range of government, private-sector, and NGO partnerships and built YDRCs' capacity in operational and financial competencies and youth-focused programming. Consequently, eight YDRCs and two partner organizations provided drop-in, peer-led employability training for youth, placed them in public- and private-sector internships, and supported them to lead community initiatives. In the youth-led Most Significant Change study, 86 percent of youth said the program significantly impacted their lives. Specifically, youth said that the training, internship program, and safe environment built their agency by boosting self-confidence, making them feel valued, and increasing their hope for the future.

Partnership with Youth offers another example of meaningful youth engagement throughout the program cycle. IREX recruited youth ages 18–25 to be peer interns for the project. These interns underwent extensive PYD training and eventually delivered the program’s employability and life skills trainings. With facilitation from the project team, youth led the Most Significant Change evaluation at the end, including designing the questionnaires, conducting focus group discussions (FGDs), and analyzing data. Empowering youth to take on these leading roles in project implementation required a PYD ethos among international and local staff—something that IREX actively sought to achieve through hiring criteria and interview processes, in-depth PYD training for NGO partners and peer interns, and maintenance of a youth-centered culture that drove project decision making.<sup>176</sup> Among adult project staff, this PYD ethos supported the development of safe spaces by facilitating healthy relationships, norms, and mentorship inside YDRCs.

Partnership with Youth also highlights the challenges of implementing PYD programs in a fundamentally disabling conflict environment. Palestinian youth face a range of challenges that have the potential to block positive change, including traditional social norms that devalue youth and entrenched exclusion from political, social, and economic life. Youths’ challenges also stem from the region’s longstanding violent conflict and include restrictions on movement, imprisoned friends and family members, and exposure to conflict narratives that justify violence. Although little can be done to address the underlying causes of conflict in such a complex context, Partnership with Youth provided physical and emotional safe spaces for youth that catalyzed youth agency. Youths’ newfound agency and skills motivated them by giving them hope and supported their ability to cope with the adversity of their environments.<sup>177</sup>



## PROMISING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

The following promising practices from the selected PYD programming models can support implementers to design, staff, manage, and evaluate PYD programs in conflict-affected MENA contexts. Promising practices have been organized based on their relevance to specific aspects of the program cycle to provide practical guidance for programmatic decision making.

### INSTITUTIONAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS

- **Select civil society, community-based, and institutional partners that are highly invested in cross-sectoral PYD outcomes.** Initial stakeholder mappings should identify governmental and nongovernmental actors with diverse interests in youth development. Building a broad alliance of these partners can improve the chances for integration and sustainability. Project teams should explain the PYD approach to partners during initial meetings to set expectations for youth engagement.
- **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. They can also help identify hard-to-reach youth and gain parental buy-in for youth (particularly girls) participation. A youth-led mapping of local organizations can help implementers identify youth-led organizations and networks as well as other prospective partners with more community trust.
- **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.** In line with PYD, it is important to build on young peoples' assets, agency, contributions, and structures of belonging and membership by partnering with youth-led groups, initiatives, networks, and movements. Despite limited financial and staffing resources, youth-led groups can reach where other actors cannot, delivering humanitarian relief where conflict restricts access and mobilizing peers and hard-to-reach communities.<sup>178</sup> They also tend to organize through looser, horizontal leadership across digital and physical spaces, often outside of formal civil society.<sup>179</sup> Partnerships with youth-led groups should reflect these realities and embrace their innovative approaches, which may require greater flexibility and risk taking.
- **Manage partnerships by providing ongoing capacity building in and accountability for PYD approaches.** Programs that built the capacity of institutional partners in specific approaches, such as the PAVE approach in Promise Pathways or the 3x6 approach in YEPP, gained greater buy-in from partners and were more likely to become sustainable. Institutional and implementing partners should receive ongoing capacity building in engaging youth as equal partners to contribute to successful PYD outcomes. Youth-led

*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.*

partners should receive support in building organizational capacities tailored to their own goals, as well as networking and knowledge exchange with other partners and youth. Youth-led partners are likely to have different capacity building and support needs from those of traditional or formal civil society or institutional partners.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

- **Create opportunities for 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. Youth should have genuine opportunities to lead PYD programs—beyond surface-level consultations or participation in steering committees. Implementers can identify mechanisms to mainstream youth-led design throughout the program cycle, including through human-centered design or youth-led issue mapping and the design of local initiatives. Such approaches require program leadership to listen to youth and put their priorities first, even if sometimes at the expense of predefined program objectives (see staffing section).
- **Consider conflict dynamics and cultural context in designing PYD programs and tools.** PYD donors and implementers must conduct a conflict assessment to ensure conflict sensitivity and design programs that respond indirectly or directly to youth grievances and/or strengthen resiliencies identified in analysis. Although PYD concepts have been demonstrated to be broadly relevant in low- and middle-income countries, tools should be adapted and translated using a specific language to translate concepts in a way that resonates locally.<sup>180, 181, 182</sup>



- **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. This practice might entail building youths' skills through online trainings or shifting the focus of contribution activities to address urgent community needs that emerge in humanitarian crises. Several implementers highlighted the need for financial flexibility to address unanticipated needs, identifying rapid response funding pools as a best practice.
- **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 touches family, school, employment, and community systems and may have unanticipated negative effects on PYD programs. This is particularly true in MENA, where youth are often embedded in and accountable to interdependent family systems. Successful PYD programs have analyzed these systems, identified leverage points for change, and designed initiatives that tackle leverage points across multiple systems. Programs can be even more responsive to youth needs by tailoring service provision to youth based on their specific contexts or by offering different engagement levels based on youths' personal goals.
- **Integrate PYD at the strategic level prior to project design.** Country development cooperation strategies and/or other country partnership frameworks should be informed by youth assessments, youth project evaluations, and/or research that is framed within a PYD lens. Additionally, PYD should be included as a core evaluation principle of project design. It is also important to designate a PYD point of contact within missions and/or country offices to ensure that PYD is integrated and championed across all standalone and non-standalone youth projects.



## TOOLS AND APPROACHES

- **Build skills that youth, families, and communities consider relevant to the conflict context.** Programs focused on providing youth with services or opportunities to access basic needs or rights—such as education, employment, or well-being—should develop skills that will empower them to succeed in these environments, including critical thinking; technical or vocational competencies; respect for diversity and nonviolence; leadership; and soft skills, such as social and emotional learning and interpersonal communication. Programs that seek to shift the power structures and norms that contribute to conflict may equip youth with skills, such as citizenship and civic engagement, dialogue design and facilitation, nonviolent communication, and non-adversarial advocacy to prepare them to directly engage in conflict transformation or political advocacy.
- **Support ICT innovation and close digital divides to expand youth contribution.** In conflict-affected contexts, opportunities for youth contribution may be limited. Innovative use of ICT, including traditional and social media, offers opportunities for youth to contribute to formal and informal civic life, including through online roundtables and debates, interactive video games, or mock reality television shows. Social media is an increasingly important tool in the region's interactions between state and citizen for information dissemination, citizen engagement, public service delivery, and more.<sup>183</sup>

*Social media is an increasingly important tool in the region's interactions between state and citizen for information dissemination, citizen engagement, public service delivery, and more.*

ICT can help conflict-affected youth overcome some of the barriers they face to mobility, association, and organization and is a key tool for youth contribution in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.<sup>184</sup> In Syria, for example, it has allowed local peacebuilders to continue to access remote technical and security support as well as to create peaceful narratives and share diverse perspectives and voices.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, ICT can vastly expand the reach of PYD initiatives from an immediate target group to millions of users, viewers, or listeners at national and international levels. In this way, ICT not only expands the arena for youth contribution but can also help shift hierarchical norms and perceptions about youth's potential for positive contribution.

However, not all youth benefit equally from ICT, as online risks and digital divides affect youth unevenly across the region, including girls who have less access to computers and technology at home in many places.<sup>186</sup> Women in MENA are 9 percent less likely to own a mobile phone than their male counterparts and 21 percent less likely to access mobile internet services.<sup>187</sup> Closing this digital divide and building young people's digital literacy and understanding of online safety are critical steps for expanding youth contribution through ICT, particularly as COVID-19 underscores the psychosocial and economic impact of restricted mobility on youth.

- **Develop community-based platforms for integrated, youth-friendly services to facilitate community access, ownership, and sustainability.** Programs that centralized youth-friendly service provision within a hub, youth center, or case worker role integrated these services more effectively. Community advisory boards include formal officials and community leaders as well as traditional community elders. These platforms can facilitate community ownership and buy-in for youth-friendly services, contributing to greater sustainability.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- **Engage powerholders separately from and in conjunction with youth leaders.** Youth-led initiatives facilitated more positive social norms of youth engagement. However, this positive impact did not always extend to concrete opportunities for youth to feel heard by leaders or participate in government decision-making processes. PYD programs that identified opportunities for youth to contribute to government decision making engaged powerholders in advance of youth-led initiatives. Practitioners highlighted several ways to do this, including framing the situation as an opportunity for adults to transfer knowledge and participate in the new solution or explaining that depriving youth of resources and opportunities destabilizes communities.<sup>188</sup> Another practitioner suggested that bringing together powerholders from different political parties or institutions to discuss their experiences with youth engagement can foster a healthy sense of competition or pressure to collaborate more effectively with youth.<sup>189</sup>

*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.*
- **Identify local, concrete opportunities for youth contribution that can have an immediate impact.** In many conflict-affected contexts, attempting to tackle highly politicized issues can cause youth to feel disillusioned with political and civic institutions. 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. This practice can help address the trust deficit and generational gap in MENA communities.
- **Actively manage youth expectations about engagement outcomes and support them to develop alternatives.** Youth who succeed in youth engagement programs are aware of the constraints on their environment and the possibility for less-than-optimal outcomes. This perspective builds flexibility and resilience among youth engaging in MENA, where hierarchical structures and social norms are dominant.

## GENDER

- **Designate local staff members to gain parents' buy-in for girls' participation and work with well-connected civil society or community-based organizations to gain parents' trust.** In some cases, staff or partners can be trained as mediators to communicate with parents. For example, Mercy Corps identified local staff in Za'atari Camp to conduct outreach among parents of adolescent girls to ensure their support for their daughters' participation.

- **Account for girls' specific needs when designing and budgeting for safe spaces.** Conservatively defined gender norms lead many parents to restrict their daughters' movements to protect them and avoid social situations that involve unsupervised gender mixing. PYD programs must consider girls' specific needs when designing safe spaces, including accessibility for girls with disabilities, and ensure a sufficient budget for program elements, such as supervised transportation to and from the space. Programs should also recruit female staff and mentors—from both conservative and less conservative backgrounds—to support girls and foster positive norms about their engagement.
- **Design PYD training content and timing to be relevant to both genders.** In communities with more conservative gender norms, certain skills may be considered more (or less) appropriate, depending on the young person's sex. This is particularly true for older youth, as many families pressure sons to provide immediate financial support and do not approve of their participation in professional training or recreational activities. Also, some vocational training considered relevant for men may not be considered appropriate for women, and some young women may not have their families' support to work at all. Youth-friendly services should consider these cultural constraints and try to serve both genders' needs.



## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- **Disaggregate by sex and age to ensure that PYD approaches are gender and age appropriate.** Always disaggregate by at least five-year age bands (10–14, 15–19, 20–24, 25–29) and, if feasible, consider whether narrower age bands would be useful, given that youth experience changes significantly over five years, particularly between 10 and 14.<sup>190</sup>
- **Design monitoring and evaluation frameworks to identify unanticipated outcomes and assess project inclusiveness.** In youth-led programs in rapidly changing conflict-affected contexts, results may deviate substantially from predefined objectives. Most significant change or outcome harvesting frameworks can help identify unanticipated outcomes and demonstrate impact. Given the importance of meaningful and diverse youth inclusion in conflict-affected contexts for building resilience and countering conflict dynamics around exclusion and inequalities, monitoring and evaluation frameworks must also allow for measurement and assessment of the project's inclusiveness. Disaggregating indicators by conflict divisions, including indicators on the quality of youth participation, and measuring participants' attitudes and biases toward different subgroups and identities are some ways to do so, taking care to prevent harm from the active identification of stigmatized identities.
- **Empower youth to define project success.** Monitoring and evaluation should measure what is most relevant and meaningful to youth themselves. 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.** Implementers are increasingly partnering with research institutions to conduct randomized control trials of PYD programs in conflict-affected contexts or securing funding for longitudinal studies that measure impact over a longer time after a program's conclusion. Both options require sufficient budgeting for a rigorous evaluation process and overcoming ethical concerns about conducting research in conflict-affected contexts.



## STAFFING

- **Develop a PYD ethos among the project team and partners.** Even with a strong program design, PYD outcomes can be easily undermined by staff or partners who do not prioritize youth agency and leadership throughout the program cycle. 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 culture that drives decision making. Project leadership must be willing to adapt the project work plans to youths' contributions, advocate to the donor for youth-driven outcomes, and make difficult staffing decisions when necessary. Ensure that staff have access to psychosocial support and wellness programs as the stress of conflict on staff can impact program participants.
- **Employ youth as staff, interns, and peer mentors.** Peer engagement can be powerful in facilitating PYD, providing positive youth role models, and facilitating bonding and safe spaces. Opportunities to include youth as paid staff members should be identified and prioritized.
- **Equip staff to manage conflict, facilitate meaningful inclusion, and build trust among youth and between youth and adults.** Considering the impact that conflict has on social cohesion and trust, it is critical that program staff and facilitators have the skills and tools to respond to conflicts and build collaboration across divisions within the program team, among youth participants, and between youth and adult stakeholders.

## JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE

- **Generate demand for youth-friendly services.** Several implementers described how PYD outcomes generated demand for youth-friendly services by demonstrating youth's ability to contribute to society. When this happens, parents, schools, and institutions become willing to pay for these services, which can support the PYD program's financial sustainability. This shift can happen organically but usually entails identifying market needs; forming partnerships to facilitate initial opportunities for youth; and communicating PYD outcomes to parents, businesses, and powerholders through direct engagement and media.
- **Encourage positive social norms by making youth skills and initiatives visible to relevant adults.** Many parents and community leaders experienced a shift in their perceptions of youth potential by observing youth lead. Such a shift can generate greater trust and help improve youth engagement. Mainstream and social media can help highlight youth leadership through, for example, televised debates and reality television shows.
- **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. (See Institutional and Civil Society Partnerships section above.)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations apply to donors, host-nation governments, international and local partners, youth and youth-led organizations, academics, researchers, and more. All the actors have a role to play in advancing promising PYD practices. These actors are increasingly connected through communities of practice and PYD platforms, and recommendations are not intended to be unilaterally led by one actor but to be developed and implemented through an inclusive and integrated process. Recommendations are grouped into four key areas: (1) elevate PYD in Conflict, (2) promote youth engagement and leadership, (3) build evidence for PYD in Conflict, and (4) develop PYD tools for MENA.

### I. Elevate PYD in Conflict



Too often in conflict-affected settings, donors seek to identify and “solve” problems. The research and evidence on PYD demonstrate that prevention- and problem-focused approaches are not effective, so it is critical that donors shift to focusing on advancing positive outcomes. Approaches to advancing PYD in Conflict include developing conflict-sensitive youth policies and tailoring PYD programming to the conflict environment.

- a. **Advocate within communities of practice** for a thematic focus on the intersection between PYD and conflict across sectors. Through initiatives, such as a dedicated working group, conferences and fora, or learning products, these communities of practice should spark conversation and knowledge exchange to elevate the use of PYD in Conflict among youth and youth-led organizations, implementing partners, academic and research partners, donors, host-nation governments, and more. These efforts should take place across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors at all levels, including national interagency coordination mechanisms; regional frameworks, such as No Lost Generation; international networks and platforms, such as USAID’s YouthPower communities of practice<sup>191</sup> and YouthLead platform; the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies and its Arabic language community; the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security; and the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action.
 

*Approaches to advancing PYD in Conflict include developing conflict-sensitive youth policies and tailoring PYD programming to the conflict environment.*
- b. **Apply standards and guidance for the protection and well-being of conflict-affected youth.** Given the higher risks to youth in conflict-affected contexts, all actors should work with young people to understand their concerns about protection and well-being and apply standards and guidance to ensure appropriate prevention, mitigation, and response to risks. Donors and implementers across sectors should work with youth participants and partners to integrate safeguarding standards, conflict sensitivity, and Do No Harm principles as well as MHPSS into programming and ensure that youth have the knowledge and capacity to protect themselves. This may entail advocacy to strengthen local and national legislation, services, and mechanisms for youth protection and well-being.

## 2. Promote Youth Engagement and Leadership



The most effective way to design and implement PYD programming is through youth-led and youth-serving organizations. In conflict-affected contexts across MENA, this may generate a sense of purpose and address ageism issues that are particularly pronounced in fragile environments.

- a. **Fund youth-led groups.** Donors should create opportunities to fund and build the capacity of both formal and informal youth-led groups to advance youth-led programming and address power dynamics within the international development system. This may entail conducting targeted youth-led mapping of youth structures and organizations, adopting more flexible and participatory funding mechanisms and grant regulations, and building the capacity of grant officers to engage youth-led organizations. International and local partners can partner and collaborate with youth-led groups to build their capacity and leverage their expertise in PYD. Donors and implementers should engage youth-led organizations as equal partners, ensuring respect for their leadership and ability to advocate for themselves and their own priorities. In many contexts across MENA, youths' livelihoods help support a broader family system, so supporting their work is an investment not only in individual outcomes but also in community.
 

*Donors and implementers should engage youth-led organizations as equal partners, ensuring respect for their leadership and ability to advocate for themselves and their own priorities.*
- b. **Create opportunities for youth leadership** in alternative avenues and channels as well as formal processes and spaces. Because of the restrictions and discrimination limiting the participation and inclusion of youth, especially young women, young people often pioneer their own alternative paths of expression and action outside of formal and traditional spaces and institutions. Their aspirations, realities, and needs—reflected in social enterprises, employment in the informal sector, and political activism outside of formal party systems—may differ from traditional development priorities. Donors and implementers should seek to understand and support youth where they are already exercising agency and contribution, as well as promote opportunities for safe participation and inclusion in formal processes and institutions.
- c. **Support networking, coordination, and the collaboration of youth-led and youth-serving organizations** across sectors to coordinate and leverage efforts. Recognize that conflict can challenge the coordination required among diverse actors, initiatives, and sectors to achieve systemic change. Dedicate funding and resources to strengthen and sustain networking and collaboration toward greater collective impact.

### 3. Build Evidence for PYD in Conflict



Conduct applied research, monitoring, and evaluation and widely disseminate findings and lessons learned to strengthen PYD practice in conflict-affected contexts. Youth should be at the forefront of these efforts. It is critical that an approach to apply learning is developed and implemented by, with, and for youth.

- a. **Manage evidence.** This is a vital step in building the evidence base and ensuring that the learning taking place in each conflict setting is being shared across the various communities of practice. Communities of practice should engage all actors in the PYD space with the expectation that each will share past and present lessons learned to continuously build the evidence base. This will serve as a crucial starting point for future learning.
- b. **Develop a learning agenda.** Identify conflict-, gender-, and age-sensitive gaps in the available evidence for PYD in Conflict and determine a way forward in responding to those gaps. This may involve collaborative efforts between communities of practice or a dedicated subgroup within a community of practice to develop a learning agenda or to incorporate specific research questions into a learning agenda.
- c. **Specific evidence needed:**
  - **Capture the impact of youth-led initiatives** that often lack evidence because of operational barriers and constraints. Donors funding youth-led organizations and international implementers that include youth initiatives in program design should ensure sufficient time and budget to build capacity and conduct monitoring and evaluation of youth-led initiatives and youth engagement, without undermining the innovation and risk-taking at the heart of much youth-led work. This process will further build youth capacity and accountability while generating evidence for the impact of youth contributions.
  - **Identify best practices for inclusion of youth with disabilities** in PYD programs. Few implementers could share concrete experiences of engaging youth with disabilities. Those that did cited the lack of government accountability for youth disability services<sup>192</sup> and perceived the incompatibility of PYD program outcomes with the goals of disability-focused NGOs<sup>193</sup> as challenges to successful engagement. Additional work should be done to understand these barriers and determine how PYD programs can be more sensitive to the specific needs and experiences of youth with disabilities in conflict-affected areas.
  - **Determine the effective range of protection measures.** In conflict-affected contexts, young women and men often face increased threats and violence when they advocate for social or political change or attempt to participate in local decision making or peacebuilding. This is particularly true in conflict-affected contexts and spans physical and digital spaces. Through privacy breaches, the use of smart technology, government suppression of access to social media platforms, and more, digital security threats can be lethal to youth activists, especially to young women.<sup>194</sup> Despite the increased focus on digital security, activists have highlighted the inadequacy of institutional support for physical security<sup>195</sup> as well as financial, legal, sociocultural, and economic security. Much guidance on safety and protection

in programming focuses on adult human rights defenders or child protection, with little evidence on the specific needs and protection measures for young people. Donors and implementers engaging youth leaders and groups need to work with them to better understand the risks they face and identify and implement improved protection measures.

#### 4. Develop PYD Tools for MENA



Despite the abundance of PYD tools and resources, few focus on MENA-specific or conflict contexts. Rapidly changing and context-specific conflict dynamics increase the need to tailor PYD tools to MENA and make tools available in Arabic and French (where they do not already exist) for cross-regional use.

- a. **Disseminate tools and resources that take a PYD approach and are adapted to conflict or crisis settings, particularly those in MENA.** Donors should support and commission efforts to translate and contextualize tools to MENA and conflict settings and develop new tools where needed. Annex C makes a first attempt to identify and categorize available tools.
- b. **Specific tools to develop:**
  - **Adapt MHPSS tools for MENA.** These tools should be contextualized and validated for MENA and translated into Arabic to provide culturally appropriate guidance to partners on designing and implementing programs that mitigate and reduce chronic stress, strengthen resilience and positive coping strategies, and promote psychosocial well-being.
  - **Develop an Arabic-language PYD monitoring and evaluation tool** that can be applied across MENA. The tool can draw on current frameworks and contain guidelines on testing and adapting the tool to local dialects and cultures. The tool should include additional considerations for conflict-affected contexts.
  - **Develop a staff training guide for PYD in Conflict.** The guide should provide insights on how implementers can more effectively engage and support conflict-affected youth and should be translated into the primary working language among staff (which may be French in North African countries, for example). It should include guidance on how to build PYD partnerships and engage adult stakeholders and powerholders so they view PYD as a positive change rather than a threat to the status quo. Content could include how to build trust and collaboration among divided youth. The guide can draw on knowledge and content already developed by implementers.

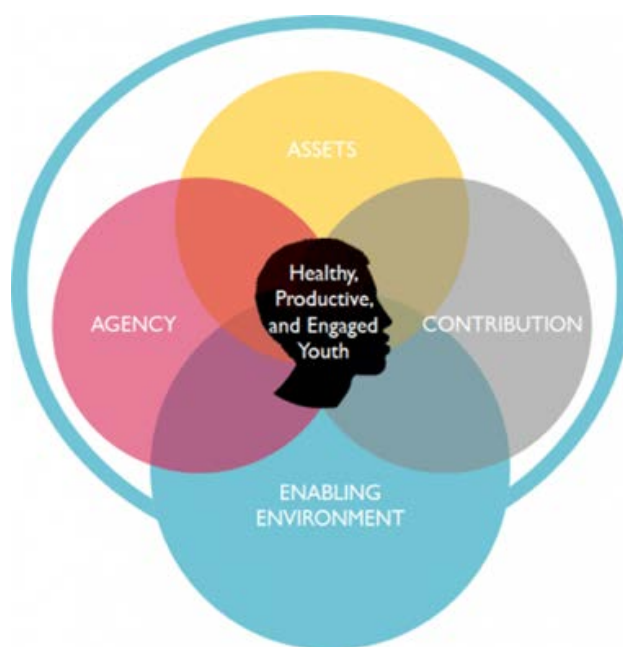
## ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed conceptual literature and program evaluations spanning Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. The review used a broad definition of conflict to encompass regions with active armed conflict and latent conflict or in post-conflict recovery.<sup>196</sup> The definition also encompassed regions affected by community-level and social conflict.

The review relied on YouthPower’s definition of PYD,<sup>197</sup> which states that “PYD engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.” The review focused on the four PYD domains—assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment—as indicators of PYD and selected only programs that addressed at least two of these domains.

Graphic 9: PYD Domains



### SELECTION OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PROMISING PRACTICES

The team searched implementer and donor websites for externally evaluated programs that met established criteria. However, few programs had publicly available evaluations. Therefore, the team sent a survey to more than 25 mainstream international development implementers, including those on the YouthPower communities of practice email lists. The survey elicited 11 responses, two of which had to be discarded because of geographical irrelevance. The team also considered programs with other types of program literature, such as final reports and toolkits.

The team found 50 programs that matched the criteria; of these, 24 had sufficient program literature for a review of promising practices and 12 were selected. The team identified promising practices as tools, methodologies, and approaches that addressed the four PYD domains and facilitated the achievement of the project’s youth-focused objectives.

## ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTION

The team collected additional information on programmatic best practices by conducting 15 KIs with implementing team members as well as PYD and otherwise youth-focused scholars, policy experts, and donors. Key informants were selected in collaboration with SFCG's children and youth thematic department.<sup>xi</sup> The team also conducted an FGD with practitioners at USAID's Middle East and North Africa Positive Youth Development Symposium, which took place from March 2–5, 2020, in Tangier, Morocco.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, only limited peer-reviewed literature is available on PYD in low- and middle-income countries, and peer-reviewed and grey literature on PYD in conflict-affected contexts is also limited. Therefore, the conceptual review considered other relevant frameworks, such as resilience and assets-based programming. The lack of precise alignment on common frameworks and terminology for youth programming can be considered another study limitation.

Second, only a limited number of external evaluations of PYD programs are publicly accessible. This limitation could indicate a need for more rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems on PYD programs, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, which is identified as a gap in this report.

Third, although the team sought to review programs from diverse conflict-affected MENA contexts, given the limited research timeline and availability of program evaluations, this review cannot be considered representative of all MENA PYD programs.

Finally, at the time of submission, the research team could not identify any evaluations of local or youth-led programs that met the review criteria and could not reach any key informants from local or youth-led organizations. This is a key gap, particularly given the review's subject and conclusions. The lack of evidence for these initiatives reflects the broader power dynamic within PYD and youth-inclusive programming, including the limited resources typically available to local and youth-led organizations. However, the team conducted two KIs and one FGD with youth leaders or youth-led organizations.

<sup>xi</sup> A detailed description of KIs is available in Annex E.

## ANNEX B: CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

### Project Design and Implementation

- ☐ A conflict analysis has been conducted with young people to better understand conflict stakeholders, their interests in and positions toward the conflict, and potential leverage points to address entrenched power dynamics.
- ☐ Based on the conflict analysis, a tailored outreach and engagement strategy is developed for partners across conflict divides, including youth-led formal and informal groups, and for subgroups that are traditionally marginalized or hard to reach by civil society or society more broadly. The recruitment, engagement, and selection process for participants and partners is transparent to avoid perceptions of inequality.
- ☐ Internal reflection is held among the project team to examine biases and capabilities and establish norms and standards for a PYD ethos among staff, and staff reflect youth diversity, speak local languages, and model respect for all youth. Appropriate staff members are trained in impartial and inclusive facilitation.
- ☐ A youth-led design methodology, such as human-centered design or youth-led community mapping, is adopted and integrated as part of the core program methodology.
- ☐ Conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm are applied throughout the program cycle, ensuring that youth are safe and protected during their involvement with the program. As part of these processes, a risk analysis has been conducted with young people to identify physical, psychosocial, and digital risks and develop safeguarding measures to prevent and mitigate these risks and provide a clear response when harm occurs, with young people as key actors in their own protection.
- ☐ Where applicable, MHPSS elements are designed by or in collaboration with experienced psychosocial actors and mental health professionals, are evidence-based, and are coordinated with other efforts in the field to ensure non-duplication and Do No Harm.
- ☐ Program design identifies and includes skills that are appropriate for the program's context and goals—that is, critical thinking and social and emotional learning for programs that help youth access basic services, such as education or employment; non-adversarial advocacy, civic engagement, or dialogue facilitation skills for programs that help youth constructively engage in conflict dynamics; and agency-focused skills for youth in active conflict to rebuild a sense of control over their environment.
- ☐ Program design identifies concrete, manageable opportunities for youth contribution that enable youth to experience quick, tangible rewards of their actions, avoid disillusionment, and contribute to greater trust of their institutional environment.
- ☐ A safe space appropriate for the conflict context has been identified, preferably by youth themselves, that considers gender sensitivity, youth with particular needs (such as youth with disabilities), and those who are more at risk of violence in conflict (such as SGMs and/or specific religious or ethnic minorities).
- ☐ A youth-led stakeholder analysis is conducted to identify and reach out to influential community members whose project buy-in might contribute to a gradual shift in social norms around youth agency and contribution. For PYD programs specifically engaging women, this might entail engaging male allies to support female agency and contribution.

## Activity Design and Implementation

- ☐ Youths' parents are consulted and engaged throughout the activities to ensure their buy-in for youth participation, and specific staff or facilitators are designated to continue parental engagement throughout project activities.
- ☐ Youth have opportunities to reflect on inclusion and exclusion dynamics within their context, safely examine their own beliefs and identities, and develop understanding and dialogue across conflict divides, based on the conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, and Do No Harm principles, as well as age-appropriate and gender-sensitive considerations.
- ☐ Activities include mechanisms to foster relationships between youth and their adult counterparts, such as local dialogues and jointly led community initiatives.
- ☐ Activities engage community leaders and powerholders in constructive youth engagement workshops to equip them with the assets to work effectively with youth.
- ☐ MHPSS activities are culturally appropriate, ensure youth agency, give youth opportunities to address collective as well as individual trauma, and address youths' family and community systems
- ☐ Youths' expectations are managed to avoid disappointment or spoilers, particularly in high-risk or conflict-affected settings where concrete results may take time to see.
- ☐ Media tools, such as radio, television, and social media, are used to amplify positive narratives of youth as constructive leaders in their communities to shift negative stereotypes and biases held by communities.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- ☐ Youth are involved in developing indicators and measurements reflective of the conflict context, as well as in collecting and analyzing data.
- ☐ Programs develop and use youth-led accountability mechanisms, such as community scorecards, that have buy-in from community members and powerholders.
- ☐ Indicators are disaggregated by age (at least five-year brackets) and gender and measure and evaluate inclusion and conflict-related factors where appropriate (such as participants' attitudes and biases toward different subgroups or identities), while balancing the potential risks/benefits of data collection for staff and participants, particularly those from identities or groups facing elevated risks.

## Strategic Planning

- ☐ System mapping is conducted to understand the complex systems affecting youth within the conflict context, such as the Whole System in the Room methodology.
- ☐ Program staff are trained in PYD and execute PYD values in interactions with institutional, local, and youth-led partners.
- ☐ Institutional partners' interests in and positions toward PYD are mapped to identify leverage points for the institutionalization of PYD approaches.
- ☐ Youth-led community mapping identifies youth leadership as well as groups and segmentations of youth that may be difficult to reach or have less visibility in conflict contexts

## Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

- ☐ Ongoing mechanisms are established for youth leadership within adaptive design and implementation processes and the program remains flexible to ongoing iteration

## ANNEX C: TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND GUIDELINES

### Youth-led Design and Engagement

- [Human-Centered Design Kit](#) (IDEO.com)
- [Guidance Note on Youth-Led Research](#) (SFCG)
- [Toolkit for Youth-Led Mapping](#) (SFCG)
- [USAID Youth Engagement in Development](#) (USAID)
- [Youth Speak Toolkit](#) (Creative Associates International)
- [Youth Engagement Measurement Guide](#) (YouthPower)
- [Adolescent and Youth Engagement. MENA: UN NGO Adolescent and Youth Group Toolkit \(#NoLostGeneration\)](#)
- [COVID-19: Working with and for Young People \(Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action\)](#)  
Available in [Arabic](#), [French](#), and [English](#).

### Local, Institutional, and Private-sector Partnerships

- [Whole System in the Room](#) (FHI 360)

### Curriculum and Programming

- [Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes](#) (YouthPower Action)
- [Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills among Adolescents and Young Adults](#) (YouthPower)
- [Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE](#) (YouthPower)
- [Engaging Children and Youth in Conflict Toolkit](#) (SFCG)
- [Youth4Peace Training Toolkit](#) (United Network of Young Peacebuilders [UNOY]) in English, Arabic, and French
- [AMAL Toolkit: Unleashing the Power of Adolescents in Fragile Contexts](#) (CARE)
- [The Children's Resilience Program](#) (Save the Children)
- [Pathways Advancing Viable Education/Employment - PAVE](#) (International Initiative to End Child Labor)
- [Getting into the Game: Understanding the Evidence for Child-focused Sport for Development](#) (UNICEF)
- [Passport to Success](#) (International Youth Foundation)
- [Youth Radio for Peacebuilding](#) (SFCG)
- [STRESS: Strategic Resilience Assessment](#) (Mercy Corps)
- [The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation](#) (UNICEF)
- [Positive Discipline Approach](#) (Save the Children)
- [Guiding Principles for Youth Participation in Peacebuilding](#) (UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development).  
Available in [Arabic](#).

## Curriculum and Programming

- [Safety, Privacy, and Digital Citizenship: Introductory Materials](#) (Harvard University)
- [Youth Political Participation Programming Guide](#) (NDI)

## Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm

- [Do No Harm Trainers Manual](#) (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects)
- [Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs](#) (USAID)
- [Conflict-Sensitive Education Pack](#) (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies [INEE]) in Arabic, English, and French
- [USAID Conflict Assessment Framework](#) (USAID)
- [eSafety Toolkit for Schools](#) (Australian Government, eSafety Commissioner)
- [Holistic Security Trainers' Manual](#) (Tactical Technology Collective)
- [Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#) (Front Line Defenders)
- [Integrated Security: The Manual](#) (The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights)
- [Violence Prevention through Multisectoral Collaboration](#) (End Violence Against Children, Prevention Institute, and Violence Prevention Alliance)
- [Safeguarding Young People during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Youth Work Support)
- [Manual on Human Rights Monitoring: Trauma and Self Care](#) (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner)

## Gender and Social Inclusion

- [Social Inclusion in Positive Youth Development Programs](#) (YouthPower)
- [Toolkit for Youth Inclusion in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance](#) (YouthPower)
- [Accommodating Religious Identity in Youth Peacebuilding Programs](#) (SFCG)
- [Does Your Program Reflect Gender Transformative or Positive Youth Development Practices? A Checklist](#) (YouthPower)
- [A Gendered Approach to Positive Girl and Boy Development](#) (FHI 360)
- [Engaging Girls Toolkit](#) (SFCG)
- [Adolescent Girls Toolkit for Iraq](#) (UNICEF)
- [Measuring Gender Dynamics in Resilience](#) (Mercy Corps)
- [Women & Girls: Safe Spaces](#) (UNFPA)
- [Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations](#) (USAID)
- [Including Everyone: Strengthening the Collection and Use of Data about Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Situations](#) (UNICEF)

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

### Mental Health Resources

#### Background Information/Research

- [Young People Will Transform Global Mental Health](#) (Mental Health Innovation Network)
- [Child Development in the Context of Disaster, War, and Terrorism: Pathways of Risk and Resilience](#) (Annual Review of Psychology)
- [Mental Health Practice in Arab Countries](#) (Current Opinion in Psychiatry)

#### Evidence-based Interventions

- [A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of Mental Health Promotion Interventions for Young People in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#) (BMC Public Health)
- [Evidence-Based Child and Adolescent Psychosocial Interventions](#) (PracticeWise)
- [Interventions for Adolescent Substance Abuse: An Overview of Systematic Reviews](#) (Journal of Adolescent Health) \*Note: These interventions come from a variety of international contexts and have not been validated in the MENA region or translated into Arabic.
- [Principles of Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment: A Research-Based Guide](#) (Behavioral Approaches) (National Institutes of Health) \*Note: These interventions come from the U.S. context and have not been validated in the MENA region or translated into Arabic.
- [Principles of Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment: A Research-Based Guide](#) (Family-Based Approaches) (National Institutes of Health) \*Note: These interventions come from the U.S. context and have not been validated in the MENA region or translated into Arabic.
- [Group Interpersonal Therapy \(IPT\) for Depression](#) (WHO)

#### Mental Health Scales/Assessment

- [Psychometric Properties of an Arabic Version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales \(DASS\)](#) (Research on Social Work Practice). Also available in Turkish
- [The MENAT \(Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey\) Measurement Library](#) (INEE). Available in Arabic, French, and English

### Psychosocial Support Resources

#### Assessments

- [Assessing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and Resources](#) (WHO and the UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR]). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)

#### Background Information/Research

- [National Mental Health Strategy of Lebanon](#) (Government of Lebanon)
- [Background Paper on Psychosocial Support and Social & Emotional Learning for Children & Youth](#) (INEE). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

- [Advancing Adolescents: Evidence on the Impact of Psychosocial Support for Syrian Refugee and Jordanian Adolescents](#) (Mercy Corps)
- [Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being of Syrians](#) (UNHCR)
- [Fact Sheet on Suicide Prevention](#) (WHO) Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Resilient Realities: Global State of Youth Civil Society Report](#). (Restless Development, Recreare; and Development Alternative)

### Guidance Notes

- [Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings](#) (UNICEF)
- [Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support](#) (INEE). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Disability Inclusion in Psychosocial Support Programs in Lebanon: Guidance for Psychosocial Support Facilitators](#) (Women's Refugee Commission). Available in Arabic and English
- [Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#) (Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC]). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: A Checklist for Field Use](#) (IASC). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19](#) (IASC). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Basic Psychosocial Skills - A Guide for COVID-19 Responders](#) (IASC). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)

### Toolkits

- [Safe Healing and Learning Spaces Toolkit](#) (International Rescue Committee)
- [Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#) (IOM)
- [Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#) (UNICEF)
- [Preventing Suicide - A Community Engagement Toolkit](#) (WHO) Trainings
- [PSS-SEL Training Module](#) (INEE). Three-hour training available in Arabic, English, and French
- [PSS-SEL Training Module](#) (INEE). One-hour training in English
- [Psychological First Aid Training Manual for Child Practitioners](#) (Save the Children). Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), and [French](#)
- [Youth MHPSS Toolkit](#)

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- [YouthPower Action Soft Skills Assessment](#) (YouthPower)
- [Youth Programming Assessment Tool](#) (YouthPower)
- [Compendium of Participatory Indicators of Peace](#) (Generations for Peace)

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- [Measuring the Unmeasurable: Solutions to Measurement Challenges in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts](#) (SFCG)
- [Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources](#) (Horizons – Population Council and Impact – Family Health International)
- [Psychometric Properties of the Arabic Version of Adult Hope Scale](#) (Alali, T.)
- [Validation of the Arabic Translation of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support \(Arabic-MSPSS\) in a Lebanese Community Sample](#) (Merhi and Kazarian)
- [Emerging Practices in Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation for Education for Peacebuilding Programming](#) (SFCG)

## Staffing

- [Introduction to Positive Youth Development: Engaging Youth as Partners in Advancing Our Common Development Goals](#) (YouthPower)

## Sustainability (Journey to Self-reliance)

- [Social Analysis and Action Global Implementation Manual](#) (CARE)
- [Translating Youth, Peace, and Security Policy into Practice](#) (SFCG and UNOY)
- [Democracy and Governance Innovations in Fragile Contexts](#) (Mercy Corps)
- [The Wages of War: How Syrians Have Adapted Their Livelihoods through Seven Years of Conflict](#) (Mercy Corps)

## ANNEX D: TABLE OF USAID INVESTMENT IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN MENA

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country	Funding Amount	Duration
Creative Associates International	Learning Environment Technical Support (LETS)	USAID	Jordan	\$13.5 million	2010–2014
Creative Associates International	Education Component of the Community Livelihoods Project (CLP)	USAID	Yemen	\$123,534,771	2011–2014
Creative Associates International	Youth Speak	USAID	Morocco	\$300,000	2012–2014
FHI360	USAID Career Center Activity	USAID	Morocco	\$23.8 million	2015–2019
FHI 360	Ma3an	USAID	Tunisia	\$48.55 million	2018–2023
FHI 360	Foras Project	USAID	Iraq	\$926,728	2013–2015
FHI 360	Sharekna	USAID	Tunisia	\$4 million	2017–2019
Global Communities	USAID YouthPower	USAID	Jordan	\$23.57 million	2017–2022
IOM	FORSATY	USAID	Morocco	\$12.77 million	2012–present
International Youth Foundation	Youth for the Future (Y4F)	USAID	Jordan	\$33 million	2009–2014
IREX	USAID/West Bank and Gaza's Partnerships with Youth Activity	USAID	West Bank and Gaza	\$14.4 million	2013–2018
Management Systems International (MSI)	Community Resilience Initiative (LCRI)	USAID	Lebanon	\$30.6 million	2014–2017
NDI	Elections and Political Processes Program	USAID - CEPPs	Jordan	\$19.2 million	2017–2020
NDI	Elections and Governance Support	USAID - CEPPs	Libya	\$10.5 million	2012–2019
NDI and the International Republican Institute	Strengthening the Role of Youth in Cross-Tribal Conflict Mitigation Process	USAID	Yemen	\$1.17 million	2015–2017

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country	Funding Amount	Duration
SFCG	A Future Called Peace: Strengthening Yemeni Youth Leadership for Conflict Transformation	USAID	Yemen	\$968,480	2017–2019
USAID	Lebanon University Scholarship Program	USAID	Lebanon	\$63.9 million	2010–present
AMIDEAST	Promoting Youth Civic Engagement and Non-Traditional Actors	USAID	Yemen	\$3.6 million	2011–2015
Education Development Center	The Palestinian Youth Empowerment Program (Ruwwad)	USAID	West Bank and Gaza	\$17.75 million	2004–2010

## ANNEX E: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Interviewee	Country Represented	Gender	Date	Reference
International Implementer with Learning Focus (1)	United States	Female	February 12, 2020	KII1
International Implementer with Learning Focus (1)	United States	Female	February 12, 2020	KII2
International Implementer (1)	Jordan	Female	February 13, 2020	KII3
Youth Policy Expert (1)	Jordan	Male	February 13, 2020	KII4
International Implementer (1)	Syria	Female	February 13, 2020	KII5
International Implementers (3)	Jordan, Libya, general	One Male; Two Female	February 28, 2020	FGD1
International Implementer (1)	Morocco	Male	March 3, 2020	KII6
Academic/Researcher (1)	United States	Male	March 4, 2020	KII7
Youth Leader (1)	Tunisia	Male	March 4, 2020	KII8
International Implementer	West Bank and Gaza	Female	March 5, 2020	KII9
Youth Leaders (3) and International Implementer (1)	Jordan	Two Male Youth Leaders; One Female Youth Leader; One Female International Implementer	March 5, 2020	FGD2

Interviewee	Country Represented	Gender	Date	Reference
Group of Practitioners at USAID's Middle East and North Africa Positive Youth Development Symposium	Regional delegation	Approximate group size of 11 with a balanced gender representation	March 5, 2020	FGD3
International Implementer (1)	Libya	Female	March 19, 2020	KIII0
International Implementer (1)	Yemen	Male	March 27, 2020	KIII1
International Implementer (1)	Iraq	Male	March 29, 2020	KIII2
International Implementer (1)	Tunisia	Female	March 30, 2020	KIII3

## ANNEX F: SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS REVIEWED<sup>xii</sup>

### PROGRAMS REVIEWED FOR PROMISING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country
CARE	AMAL (Hope) Initiative: Adolescent Mothers Against all Odds	European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid	Syria
Creative Associates International	LETS	USAID	Jordan
Creative Associates International	CLP	USAID	Yemen
Creative Associates International	Promise Pathways	U.S Department of Labor Office of Child	February 13, 2020 KII4
FHI 360	Foras Project	USAID	Iraq
FHI 360	Sharekna	USAID	Tunisia
IOM	FORSATY	USAID	Morocco
International Youth Foundation	Y4F	USAID	Jordan
IREX	USAID/West Bank and Gaza's Partnerships with Youth Activity	USAID	West Bank and Gaza
Mercy Corps	The Advancing Adolescents program	Government of Canada	Jordan
Mercy Corps	Wise Girls: Wisdom and Information on Sexual Health Education by Girls	IDEO.org and DFID	Za'atari Camp, Jordan

<sup>xii</sup> Programs identified but not reviewed may have been excluded because of a lack of available evidence in the form of a peer-reviewed or externally conducted evaluation, which holds true for most initiatives that are in progress (unless an external midterm evaluation and/or staff interview was available).

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country
MSI	LCRI	USAID	Lebanon
NDI	Elections and Political Processes Program	USAID	Jordan
	Youth Mobilization for Issue Advocacy	National Endowment for Democracy	Lebanon
	Elections and Governance Support	USAID	Libya
	Enhancing Youth Political Engagement	National Endowment for Democracy	Morocco
	Launching Parliamentary Internship Program	National Endowment for Democracy	Tunisia
	Strengthening the Role of Youth in Cross-tribal Conflict Mitigation Process	USAID	Yemen
SFCG	Rainbow of Hope	US Embassy - Public Affairs	Lebanon
SFCG	The President Reality Television Show (Second Season)	The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative	West Bank and Gaza
SFCG	A Future Called Peace: Strengthening Yemeni Youth Leadership for Conflict Transformation	USAID	Yemen
SFCG	Partnership for Behavior and Social Change in Yemen	UNICEF	Yemen

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED BUT NOT REVIEWED<sup>198</sup>

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country
Chemonics	Injaz II	U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and DFID	Northwest Syria (Raqaa)
Creative Associates International	Youth Speak	USAID	Morocco
FHI 360	Ma3an	USAID	Tunisia
German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)	Youth employability improvement program	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	Yemen
GIZ	Peace Process Support for Yemen	BMZ, European Union (EU)	Yemen
GIZ in cooperation with the Spanish Agency for International Development, Education First, and Hungarian Interchurch Aid	Qudra – Resilience for Syrian refugees IDPs and host	USAID	Tunisia
Global Communities	MENA Youth Empowerment Strategy (MENA-YES)	Caterpillar Foundation	Lebanon, Yemen, and Jordan
Global Communities	USAID YouthPower	USAID	Jordan
Islamic Relief and World Vision	The Youth RESOLVE	EU Regional Trust Fund	Iraq
Save the Children	The Return to Learning program		Bekaa, Lebanon
SFCG	Peace Education in Yemeni High Schools	French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs	Yemen
Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation, Polish Center for International Aid, and KL Denmark	Maintaining Strength and Resilience for Local Governments	EU Regional Trust Fund	Lebanon and Iraq

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country
German Academic Exchange Service, the British Council, Campus France, and Nuffic	HOPES	EU Regional Trust Fund	
UNDP	Yemen Resilience Programme	European Union	Yemen
UNDP	Social Protection for Community Resilience	UNDP/European Commission	Yemen
UNDP	The Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project	The World Bank	Yemen
UNDP	YEEP	Government of Japan, Government of Korea, Netherlands, Silatech, Spark, and Peacebuilding Fund	Yemen
UNESCO	Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen	EU	Yemen
UNESCO	Prevention of Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia	Co-funded by the Canadian Government	Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	Promoting social cohesion and harmony in the host	USAID	Jordan
UNIDO	Support for host communities affected	Jordan	Iraq
UNIDO	Vocational training for Syrian youth and women	Lebanon	Bekaa, Lebanon
UNIDO and Scania	Partnering for employment and economic revival	Turkey	Yemen
The World Bank	Promoting the Inclusion of Conflict-Affected Iraqi Youth	Japan Social Development Fund	Iraq

Implementing Organization	Project Name	Funder	Country
McKinsey and Co.	E4E Initiative for Arab Youth	International Financial Corporation (IFC), Islamic Development Bank	Tunisia,
	Promoting Youth Civic Engagement and Non-Traditional Actors	USAID	Yemen
Education Development Center	The Palestinian Youth Empowerment Program (Ruwwad)	USAID	West Bank and Gaza

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- 12 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.
- 13 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.
- 14 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.
- 15 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.

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