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A photograph of two women wearing hijabs, one red and one dark blue, sitting at a table. The woman in the red hijab is looking towards the left, while the woman in the dark blue hijab is looking towards the right with her hand near her mouth. On the table in front of them are two plastic water bottles, a white mug, and some papers. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT: MENA PROGRAMMING MODELS

Promising Practices in the
Middle East and North Africa

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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 Study¹](#)

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](#)² [AMAL Toolkit](#)³

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.

To address the needs of young mothers in northern Syria, CARE, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 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 Sheet⁴](#)

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](#)⁵

Evaluation: [Hair cortisol concentrations in war-affected adolescents: A prospective intervention trial](#);⁶ [Insecurity, distress, and mental health: experimental and randomized controlled trials of a psychosocial intervention for youth affected by the Syrian crisis](#)⁷

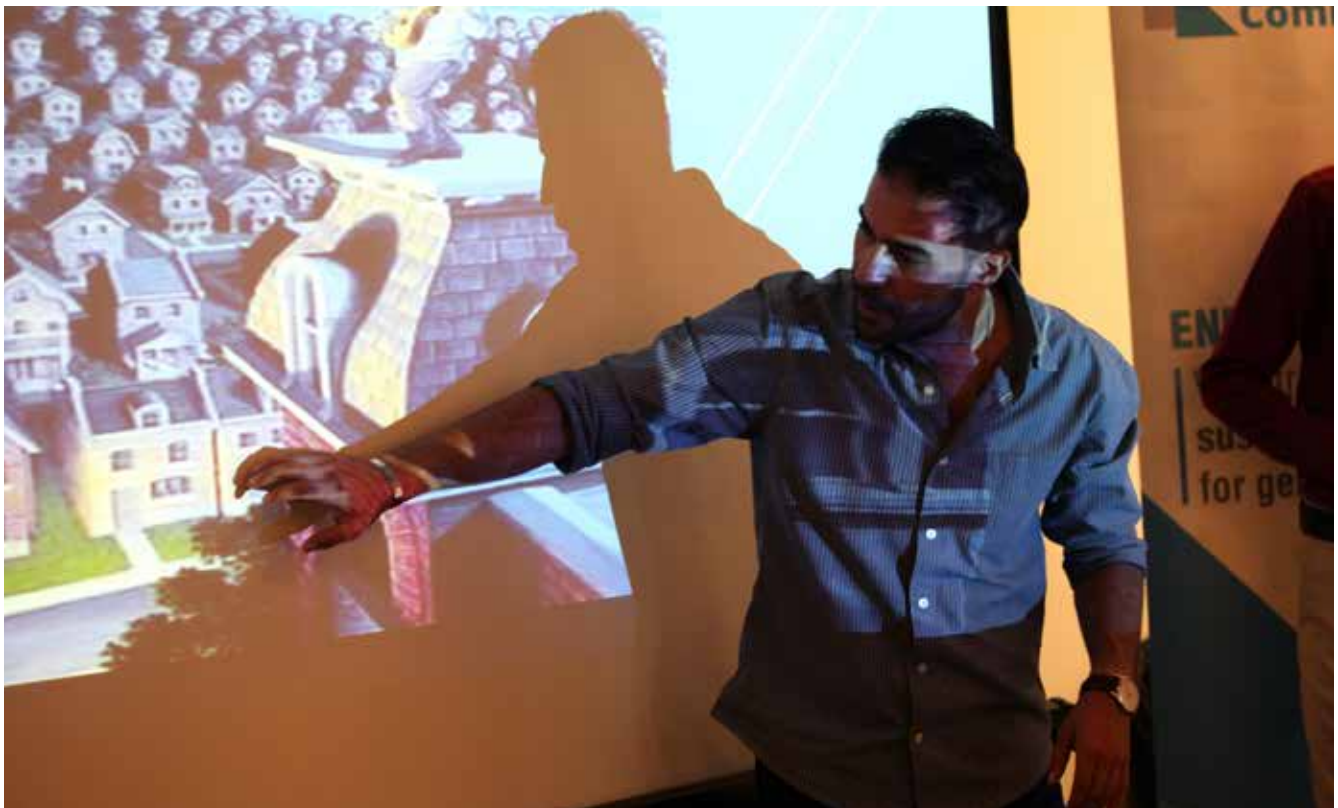
PYD Features

- 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.⁸ 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,⁹ 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](#)¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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,¹³ 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](#)¹⁴

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](#)¹⁵

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.ⁱ 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.



ⁱ 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](#)¹⁶, [Final Evaluation](#)¹⁷

Other Information: [Best Practices Brief](#)¹⁸

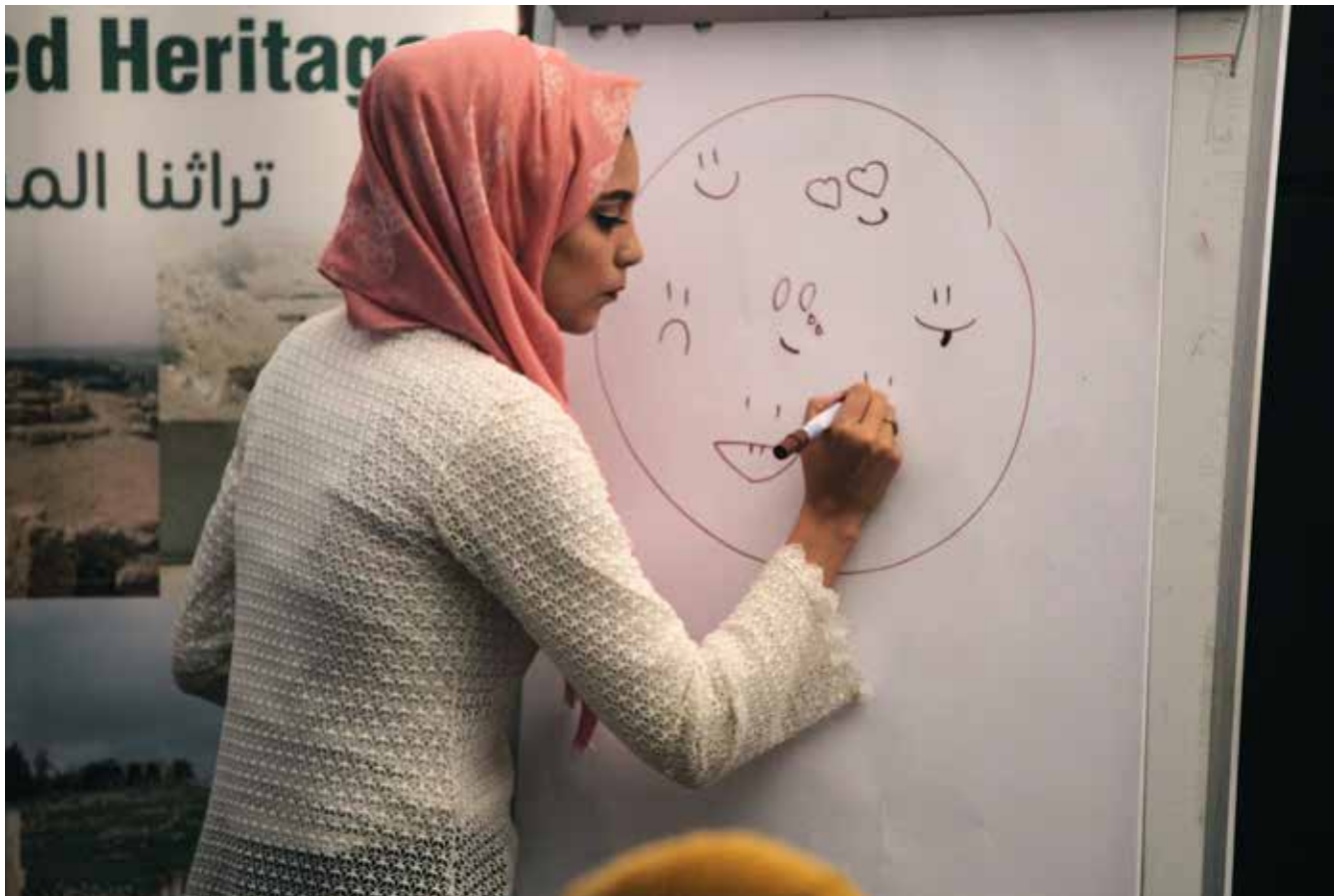
PYD Features

- 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](#)¹⁹

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,²⁰ 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](#)²¹

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) methodologyⁱⁱ 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.

ii 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](#),²²

[Ana Usharek Schools video](#),²³

[Ana Usharek Mujtam3i video](#)²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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](#)²⁷

Other Information: [Final Report](#)²⁸; [Youth-Led Most Significant Change Video](#)²⁹

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.³⁰ 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.³¹



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