



General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 September 2016

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-third session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Jssor Youth Organization, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 August 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.16-15276(E)



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Empowering youth in the implementation of the SDG 2030

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals was broadly considered as a commitment to young people. It must be used as a tool to include young people in tackling the most pressing social, economic, and environmental problems facing societies. With its call for accountability, transparency, and inclusion, it is an opportunity to acknowledge that young people's experiences and initiatives are needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Today's generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. One in every three people alive today is under the age of thirty, and around ninety per cent of young people are living in developing countries, mainly in Asia and Africa. In a number of countries mired in conflict.

With youth comes energy, innovation, and optimism – if there are supportive environments and opportunities. These lay the ground for major positive contributions by youth, and for a demographic dividend for nations and our world. The converse is also true – alienated, frustrated, marginalized, and/or excluded youth can't make the positive contribution societies and our world as a whole need.

The countries and communities of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are experiencing particularly complex conditions that have a major impact on the overall potential of enhanced livelihood opportunities for youth in the future. Young people make up 28% to 60.5% of the population, and has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world. In 2012, the World Bank estimated an average unemployment rate of 22% for young men and 39% for young women.

In this region, the cohort of young people on the brink or at the age of entering the workforce makes up a larger proportion of the population than any other specific group, and the current state of the labor markets in many MENA countries is precarious due to the political, economic, and social instability in many parts of the region. It is increasingly unlikely that young people will be able to depend on the availability of certain social safety nets or resources, such as government education and employment, or support of local governments or communities. Additionally, many of these young workers lack basic job and technical training, as well as the softer skill sets of workplace communication, teamwork, creative thinking, and customer service.

The challenges that some of the MENA countries face of creating enough jobs and opportunities for the large youth population entering the labour market is one of the major challenges. But there are others too, like:

- Inequalities, which are growing in the majority of the world's countries, with few exceptions, and the fact that hundreds of millions of people are still living in extreme poverty;
- Protracted conflicts, which are badly destabilizing countries from the Horn of Africa and from the Morocco to Iraq and Afghanistan. Radical insurgents from Boko Haram to Al Shabaab on the African continent and Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Middle East are making life unbearable for those on whom they prey. War and conflict bear a huge responsibility for generating the displacement of almost sixty million people from their homes.
- Insufficient funding is a key constraint to youth partnerships. There are many creative young people with big ideas who lack resources to implement them. National initiatives such as the creation of Youth Councils and Parliaments were presented as ways to bridge the gap, by providing a feedback loop that informs the Government of the kind of support needed.

MENA youth are attaining higher levels of education as school enrolment has risen markedly throughout the region. Primary education is universal or nearly universal in the region, except for pockets of populations in Yemen, Morocco, Iraq, and Egypt. The great majority of MENA's illiterate youth live in these four countries. Furthermore, in most countries, the gap between boys' and girls' enrolments in secondary school has disappeared, and more women than men are attending universities. Between 1980 and 2000, on average, MENA countries spent 5 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on education—higher than any other developing region.

Yet, MENA countries urgently need to improve the quality of education to prepare the young labour force for today's job market and help them become productive members of their society.

The poor quality of education leaves graduates unprepared for the increasingly competitive labour market. Representatives of the region's private sector regularly voice concerns that new graduates lack job-ready skills. In a global survey, more than 25 percent of firms in the MENA region reported the lack of skills among workers as a major constraint to business growth—a higher rate than reported in other world regions.

The demand for modern skills is increasing as the region's market economies increasingly adopt new technologies and become more integrated into the world economy, making much of the material taught in public schools in MENA obsolete.

The school curricula have yet to evolve in a way that cultivates critical thinking and problem solving skills among students, preparing them with entrepreneurship skills. And because job opportunities in the formal, private sector have been limited and the public sector is not hiring at the same rate as before, new job seekers—young women in particular—increasingly turn to the informal sector to find a job, where the quality of jobs and wages are low.

Recommendations

We at Jssor Youth organization we strive to change the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and make a positive contribution to society. Our Mission is to give young people the tools they need for life, work and a better future.

We believe programs aimed at bringing about change for youth must apply a two-pronged strategy and address the quest for space: how to create and enhance space for young people to become active and take part and address the needs for capacity and competence development: How can the necessary competence base be built or reinforced in order for youth to take advantage of the established space.

Improve achievement in relevant and high quality key competences including skills and transversal competences in a lifelong learning perspective, through formal or non-formal education and training, from early childhood education and care, over school education, youth activities, higher education and vocational education and training to adult learning.

1. By offering program services, sharing best practices, training local youth serving institutions and brokering positive relationships between financial services companies, policy makers and employers on behalf of youth, the nonprofit sector can contribute to the overall support structures available to young people
2. The policy makers need to pay special attention to employment and entrepreneurship in the MENA region through creating opportunities for development, personal realisation and improved self-esteem and confidence. Helping young people transform their creative ideas into successful business plans by removing the barriers to entrepreneurship has many potential benefits, including direct and indirect job creation and the development of human capital
3. It is important for businesses, governments, and nonprofit sector entities to collaborate in order to create the support structure necessary to foster an environment ripe for entrepreneurship. It was noted that third sector organizations can play a role in helping local governments to implement the policies and programs on the ground that facilitate an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, especially among young people.
4. Young people and youth-led organizations need to have the space and recognition to participate in translation of the agenda into local, national and regional policy, in implementation, in monitoring and review, in holding governments accountable. Young people need structured mechanism for participation through decision-making, ideally in co-decision manner, and especially in areas that have a clear impact on young people. With right political commitment and adequate fund allocation, young people can fulfill their roles — and that way make the most effective transformation of the world into a better place for all.

- Partnerships are key to allowing young people to engage more broadly in development efforts. Central to this is the issue of leadership in both the public and private sector. Good leaders at all levels, including young leaders, are needed to achieve peace and transform the world. Youth should benefit from appropriate training to gain leadership skills.
 - Special efforts should be made to ensure that partnerships must be intergenerational and diverse so that lessons are learned that cross all ages and ethnicities.
 - Partnerships should include a strong outreach and communication component. The greatest challenge lies with a 2030 horizon. If the story is not told from today, real impact will not be achieved. If the vision and principles of the Sustainable Development Agenda are not amply shared, then no success can be expected. Only if all are aware of what is imagined for the future and what the stakes are for all of humanity, can true progress be achieved.
 - The creation of youth networks should be encouraged at all levels and spaces and platforms for discussion, organization and partnership should be created. In this vein, participants proposed that a global youth platform should be set up to track progress on the 2030 Agenda.
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