

Executive Summary

In 2014, the United Nations Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People (UNIATTTYP) of the Middle East and North Africa region commissioned the American University of Beirut, Faculty of Health Sciences, Center for Public Health Practice, the documentation of good practices in adolescent and youth programming, with the aim of recommending evidence proven 'best buys' that respond to the situation and priorities for adolescents and youth in the region.

Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Identify, rate and document global and regional good practices that have had positive outcomes on adolescent and youth development and well-being, and that respond to the critical needs and priorities of adolescents and youth in the region;
- Identify preliminary push factors that lead to successful programming of these good practices;
- Recognize the requirements for scaling up of adolescent and youth programming in MENA region, and identify partners to facilitate training and scaling up;
- Review these good practices in light of the UN Comparative Advantage and support the scaled roll out of the strategic good practices for our region.

The thematic areas of relevance to the region and in which the research focused were:

Civic engagement: meaningful and sustainable participation of adolescents and young people in local and national governance processes;

Skills development: Employability, workplace readiness, school-to-work transition, twenty-first century skills (such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration);

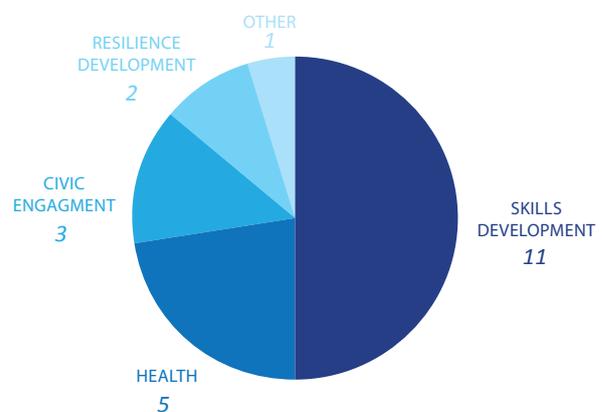
Resilience development: comprehensive programming in humanitarian contexts;

Health;

Other: social learning, volunteering, adolescent-led initiatives, internships (public/private partnerships), entrepreneurship.

Potential good practices were identified through a multi-pronged approach including: a desk review; consultation with UN offices; an online survey in English and Arabic; and an advisory committee and a network of individuals with expertise in adolescent and youth programming in the region.

A total of 221 programmes were identified during this process, and 22 programmes were selected as good practices: 11 on skills development; 5 on health; 3 on civic engagement; 2 on resilience development; and one on other (entrepreneurship). Given the scarcity of findings in the areas of civic engagement and resilience development, six promising practices were selected and included in the good practices documentation.





A series of overarching elements of success were identified across the selected 22 good practices:

- **Skills development was an integral component of effective programmes. Skills development included peer education skills, parenting skills, work readiness to entrepreneurship skills, community engagement skills, and skills such as communication, planning, collaboration and critical thinking.**
- **Effective programmes linked skills development, knowledge generation with opportunities to practice the skills and access the services through community involvement, entrepreneurship, internships and friendly health services.**
- **Expansion of positive options and choices for adolescents and youth: creation of safe spaces; skills development; recreation; and opportunities for active engagement in the communities.**
- **Programmes were developed with the active involvement of adolescents and youth, and responded to the needs in the community.**
- **Planned for sustainability from the start. Key elements which ensured sustainability: flexible and comprehensive programmes; diversified funding; involvement of stakeholders; programme delivery through existing institutions; and utilization of community human resources in programme implementation.**
- **Robust documentation and**

monitoring to measure and improve the quality of the programme.

- **Clear and detailed implementation guides and manuals.**
- **Implementation of a pilot test.**





Key recommendations for programme implementers, decision makers and policy makers

- 1 **Approach young people from an assets-based perspective, convinced of their promise and focusing on their strengths:** Many of the elements of success echo the conceptual assets-based approach to youth positive development.
- 2 **Ensure that skills-building and experiential learning form a key component of any intervention.** The analysis suggested that all but one of the good practices includes skills-building and many include experiential learning. This is in line with the positive youth development approach. Programmes with skills-building components are much more likely to show impact.
- 3 **Encourage and emphasize that the intervention is conducted with participatory engagement of the ‘community’:** three of the most common overarching elements of success are related to participatory engagement: (a) use of available community human resources; (b) utilization of already existing facilities as sites for intervention; and (c) forging partnerships with community stakeholders. This participatory engagement strengthens and reinforces connectedness to caregivers, community members and mentors.
- 4 **Require that the programme respond to the needs and priorities of youth:** Almost all good practices were built on a solid identified need.
- 5 **Flexible programming:** The analysis suggested that the ability to be flexible and adapt programming to context, all the while

having key components, was a critical element of success.

Key recommendations in youth programming

- 1 **Encourage innovation and experimentation with programmes around civic engagement and resilience development:** There were many fewer programmes in these areas despite the rhetoric around their importance in international literature. Innovative programmes in these areas should be supported with the caveat that they should include as many of the overarching elements of success as possible to enhance probability of success. The concept of resilience that we promote here is not one that focuses on individual traits and risks blaming the victim. Instead we focus on resilience theory that highlights social and environmental influences. Of note, we consider resilience programmes to be those that aim to develop ‘resilient communities’ rather than resilient individuals. Resilient communities are composed of “healthy individuals, families, and communities with access to health care and the knowledge and resources to know what to do and care for others in both routine and emergency situations.”
- 2 **Encourage youth involvement at the highest level:** Many of the programmes that were reviewed (including those that were promising or good) state that the extent of their involvement with youth is when they are programme participants, take part in the evaluation of activities (process evaluation) or are ‘subjects’ in the impact evaluation (pre- and post-intervention assessments).





Youth involvement in identification of needs, designing the programmes and implementing and evaluating the programme should be encouraged, if not required.

Key recommendations in programme management

Two specific recommendations are made related to programme management, and are a direct result of the analysis of promising practices. Two of the main deficiencies that led to programme being categorized as promising rather than good were: (1) the reliance on external funding; and (2) a lack of data on effectiveness. With this in mind, we recommend:

- 1 **Planning for sustainability from the start:** Plans for programme continuity need to be developed while the programme is in the early stages of planning. Most of the programmes identified as good practices have diverse funding bases and have institutionalized their activities into existing governmental or community structures. The programmes grew into this through experiences and intent.
- 2 **Improve the evidence:** This can be accomplished by building capacity around monitoring and evaluation, committing to strengthening routine monitoring, and integrating outcome evaluations in the planning of programmes.
- 3 **Funders should require that at least 20 per cent of every programme budget be devoted to monitoring and evaluation,** based on a clear justification for the effects expected from each activity (a problem diagram and related objectives).

Key recommendations related to next steps in good practices documentation

- 1 **The good practices should be highlighted, celebrated and disseminated:** As evidenced by the number of programmes reviewed as compared to the number of good practices identified, good practice programming is rare. The 22 programmes that went through all phases of this project and emerged as ‘good’ should be celebrated. Mechanisms could include:
 - A. Hosting a conference/workshop on good practices programming and highlighting these by thematic area;
 - B. The production of reports on each good practice for sharing with decision makers, stakeholders and funders;
 - C. A scientific publication to inform and share with the academic community about the process and outcomes.
 - D. The engagement of youth in this process of dissemination should be ensured.
- 2 **The process of documentation of good practices should continue:** This process has been a learning process for all those involved. Many programmes identified as potentially good or promising or even those included in this overall assessment have been eager to provide data and engage in this process. All the organizations engaged in youth programming aim to enhance the well-being of youth and the feedback will serve as an incentive for them to continuously improve their programmes, and eventually will result in a larger basket of good practices for the region and globally.



3 Identification of programmes led by grass-roots youth: Recommend an active search in countries and through in-person focus groups with youth to ensure a wider selection of lesser known and resourced programmes that have potential.

4 Partnerships with academia should be enhanced to continue the work of measurement and documentation: This current partnership between academia and the United Nations has been synergistic at its core. Partners were committed to the well-being of youth, to the region, to evidence and to ensuring a robust process of documentation.

5 Capacity-building workshops should be offered in gap areas that were evident in the rating of programmes. The matrix analysis of 221 programmes could guide targeted invitations to workshops.

A. Workshop on documentation: Most programmes lacked sufficient documentation of their processes and intervention. This includes good, promising and other practices. The template utilized in this process for good practice analysis and write-up can serve as a good tool for documentation.

B. Workshop on monitoring and evaluation: These can be offered per thematic area for programmes that were deemed promising (or a broader audience). Thematic group sub-workshops would be important to help those working in the same area to identify some common evaluation indicators that they would all be willing to use.

C. Workshop on youth involvement: More emphasis is needed on how to engage youth most meaningfully in decision-

making. This workshop could be targeted at the good practice programmes as well as those designated as promising practices because overall this was a gap in all programmes.

D. Workshop on environmental issues: Although not directly relevant, there is a big gap in the MENA region with respect to environmental concerns. Almost none of the programmes had anything to say about how they are taking care of the environment. Given the critical environmental situation in this region, it is critical to raise awareness around the issues of environmental sustainability so that it is a component of every good practice.

