



Photo: Adolescents initiative in Al-Zaatari, open day for children. (credit: Dar Abu Abdallah)


CASE STUDY 5

YOUTH LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AMIDST THE COVID CRISIS


Collective
service |

“KNOWING THE IMPORTANCE OF INITIATIVES, AND HOW TO DESIGN AND TAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT THEM, GIVE US A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OUR COMMUNITY ... WORKING ON THIS INITIATIVE ENHANCED OUR CAPACITIES AND RELEASED OUR CREATIVITY AND POSITIVE ENERGY.”


Moumen, Youth Leader.

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The aim of the intervention was to offer a comprehensive support package for small project developments and implementation plans for participating youth. They were encouraged to develop initiatives that would help their communities in the COVID-19 crisis.

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The strategy was built on provision of training and capacity building, followed by youth projects supported with small grants, and afterwards sustaining the engagement.

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Twenty young people (aged 15-24 years) from five impoverished regions of the country participated in the initiative.

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The initiative was managed by Dar Abu Abdallah (DAA), a local non-governmental organization, and supported by UNICEF Jordan.

THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened an already difficult economic situation, especially for 16–25-year-olds in Jordan: 48 per cent of this group were unemployed, and 40 per cent were neither getting educated nor trained.¹ The pandemic resulted in business closures and impacts of local economies leading to lay-offs, decreased salaries, and related increase in poverty levels. Despite

the fact that young people had the space to become engaged given the high prevalence of underemployment in Jordan, many did not consider the possibility of contributing to their communities through volunteering programmes focused on refugees and young people with disabilities. Yet, the youth continuously stressed the need for meaningful civic and social engagement opportunities.²

THE INTERVENTION

In the response to the pandemic and the economic hardship it generated in some of the most vulnerable and remote areas of the country, Dar Abu Abdallah (DAA) and UNICEF Jordan decided to integrate a COVID-19 response focus within their existing youth leadership programme – ‘The Leadership Skills and Economic Empowerment Programme’.³ It was structured to give participating youth practical experience-based knowledge and skills, with concrete tools and opportunities to put in practice leadership skills they acquired through the theoretical part of the training.

This was done by integrating COVID-19 response into the training provided to young leaders on project design, work plan development, financial management, and by providing ongoing mentoring, oversight, and quality assurance. Young men and women

were also trained on issues considered crucial for a leader and included creative problem solving, effective teamwork, as well as facilitation skills and techniques when working with adolescents.

After the training, each trainee returned to their community and selected a group of adolescents, to lead them in the design and implementation of an initiative aimed at solving a need in their community. The youth decided on their projects, with oversight but not direction from DAA, and the young leaders led the design and implementation of social initiatives, autonomously developing their idea and action plan for solving the needs. To implement this, they received a total of 250 JOD [@352 USD].

The social initiative projects included: (1) distribution of non-medical face masks in schools, (2) preservation of

1. National Department for Statistics: <http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/category/unemployment-rate/>.

2. OECD Development Centre (2018), “Youth Well-being Policy Review of Jordan”, EU-OECD Youth Inclusion Project, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusive-societies-development/Youth_well_being_policy_review_Jordan.pdf

3. The Leadership Skills and Economic Empowerment Program was already a successful partnership between DAA and UNICEF Jordan, targeting youth aged 18-24 years and adolescents aged 15-17 years from vulnerable families; and operating in 5 areas: Zaatar town – Mafraq governorate; Busaira – Tafeeleh governorate; Al-Dissi – Aqaba governorate; Wadi Araba – Aqaba governorate; Sweimeh, Jordan Valley – Balqa governorate.



Photo: A group of adolescents planting Al Ghada Tree in Al Dessi Area – Southern Jordan. (credit: Dar Abu Abdallah)

the environment through removing COVID-19 related waste from streets, (3) improving the safety and condition of open-air spaces which became crucial during the pandemic, and (4)

raising awareness for school students on prevention practices against COVID-19 and developing their sense of responsibility in preserving the condition of the schools.

OUTCOMES & RESULTS

The initial training resulted in the launch of initiatives that applied participants' organizational, management and interpersonal skills in a real-world scenario. This gave them the chance to master the newly acquired leadership concepts and skills through an interaction with adolescents. The

experience then served as a preparation for the launch of their own micro-businesses, again an opportunity to put in practice their leadership skills, this time with a clear profitability goal. As part of this second phase, participants received comprehensive support for community needs assessments,

entrepreneurship skills, financing, tailored mentorship, linkages with private sector and local municipality, and overall supervision.

The youth-led project contributed to the creation of social initiatives and business that addressed specific community needs. In whole, this project has played an important role in the community recovery from COVID-19. For example, one young leader set up a kitchen which distributed food during the pandemic, and another youth leader partnered with the local municipality to bring digital financial services to an area that previously lacked ATM machines. This

provided much needed relief at a time when COVID-19 curfews and limited mobility made payments and cash transfers through e-wallets essential.

Other results included the development of lasting municipal and youth partnerships, for example, several local municipalities partnered with young people and adolescents to give continuity and scale to their projects, and another municipality set up a Youth Council with the trained youth leaders. The youth also continued beyond the scope of their projects to become researchers for DAA within their communities.

MEETING CHALLENGES

Challenges that were identified and addressed in this programme included the challenges of initially recruiting young people, and the challenges of gaining parental acceptance.

Due to restrictive, gendered social norms, males and females often did not want to work together. DAA addressed this by over-recruiting at the beginning to make sure they got the expected number of participants upon reaching the selection stage. To address parental concerns, parents were invited to training sessions and were kept informed of all activities. After such engagement, parents were reassured, and during the second cycle

of the programme, DAA encountered less resistance thus leading to an easier implementation. It was found that when more parents became convinced of the benefits of the programme, other parents from the community also ended up requesting attendance for youth in their communities.

Another challenge identified was about some limitations in innovative thinking. This required active engagement and supervision from DAA to ensure that ideas that were generated were responding to the specific needs of the community, adapted to the local context and made the most of local strengths and opportunities.

KEY LESSONS

Key lessons that have been learnt through this practice have centered around the value of involving different stakeholders, the importance of youth-led research, and the ownership of the processes.

In this programme, stakeholders from various levels were engaged; from government departments to municipalities and local community-based organizations. By inviting their participation and gaining their trust, these bodies were supportive of the programme. For example, they helped by providing space and linkage to local communities and community leaders, and in some cases, also provided financial support to upgrade the social initiatives designed by the youth and adolescents.

Understanding the importance of the research on community needs being

youth-led also has been a learning lesson in this programme. When the youth led research, they gained relevant skills, engaged with their community, demonstrated their agency and value, built confidence, and continued to use these new skills in future research work for DAA and other organizations.

Another key lesson has been the importance of young people leading their initiatives and becoming leaders and facilitators of subsequent groups of adolescents. This led to them developing positive thinking, creativity, problem solving, tolerance towards others and acceptance of diversity through interactive activities and brainstorming. Beside solving a community need, these social initiatives allowed young leaders to put in practice their leadership skills and familiarize themselves with the process of idea generation and implementation.

For further information about this case study, you can contact the following individuals:

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You can also find out more by visiting the organization's websites:

- [Dar Abu Abdallah \(DAA\)](#)
- [UNICEF Jordan](#)

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This document forms part of a collection of 7 case studies, and has been selected by the Youth Engagement Subgroup YES! of the Collective Service (UNICEF, WHO, IFRC, GOARN) as an initiative of UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the Collective Helpdesk with the support of UN WOMEN and the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, as part of an open call for good practices to document, analyze, and promote youth engagement and youth leadership across countries and regions.