



Anti-corruption and Youth Empowerment & Engagement

Overview



This session presents a review of existing literature and data relevant to the topic of anti-corruption and youth engagement in the Arab States region, with a focus on the seven priority countries of the ACIAC (i.e. Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt).

It addresses the following questions:

- What is the current status of youth in the Arab States?
- How are youth in the Arab States impacted by corruption?
- What is understood by 'youth participation'?
- What are the benefits of youth participation/engagement in anti-corruption efforts?
- What are the enablers and barriers to youth participation/engagement in anti-corruption efforts?
- What are some examples of best practice in engaging youth in anti-corruption efforts?
- What are some examples of successful country-specific strategies?
- What are the lessons learned?

Youth in the Arab States



- Young people between the ages of 15-29 comprise **approximately 25% of the total population** of the Arab States (UNDP 2023).
- This is the **largest cohort of youth** the region has ever seen, creating an unprecedented potential for economic growth, social progress and sustainable development.
- Youth are a rising tide of ambition, energy, and potential - a vibrant and dynamic force, whose voices, perspectives, and actions are **pivotal to address global challenges**.
- Youth offer many countries a '**demographic dividend**'. The youth bulge in the Arab States could prove to be the region's most valuable asset as other regions of the world grapple with population ageing and labour shortages.
- Yet, young people are more than just potential human capital and a future workforce for governments and businesses, they are **rights-holders**. Empowering youth to exercise their rights can unlock their potential as well as accelerate global progress.

Challenges facing youth in the Arab States



- **COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath**
- **Poor quality of education:** inadequate resources, poorly trained teachers, inadequate preparation for the labour market (e.g. skills mismatch, rote learning instead of critical thinking).
- **Political instability and conflict:** ongoing conflict, tribal and sectarian divisions, military-dominated governance, Occupation (Palestine), refugee and internal displacement crises (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq).
- **Poverty:** slow or regressive progress on the SDGs (e.g. SDG 8 - decent work, SDG 2 - zero hunger), high dropout rates, early marriage, hazardous and unregulated work (ESCWA 2023).
- **Climate change, food and water insecurity**
- **Unemployment:** world's highest youth unemployment rate (25.9% in 2021- ILO), high NEET rates.
- **Gender inequality:** world's lowest female labour force participation - 42.5% - more than double that of young men (21.4%) and almost 3x as high as the global average (14.9%) (ILO 2022); second widest gender gap in the world as measured by the Gender Development Index (GDI) (UNDP 2023).
- **Social inequalities and exclusions:** tribalism, sectarianism, nomadic lifestyles and livelihoods, youth with disabilities.
- **Connectivity, new technologies, and AI:** unequal access, generation gap, online bullying and abuse.
- **Widespread corruption**

Understanding ‘youth’



Definition of ‘Youth’:

- The UN defines youth as those aged 15-24, but the term varies across cultures and societies (e.g. African Youth Charter defines youth as 15-35).
- ‘Youth’ can be understood beyond age through other indicators, such as financial independence, emotional reliance, and social responsibility.
- **A general definition is that ‘youth’ is the period of transition in the life course from dependence to independence and autonomy.**
- Sociological, psychological, and health issues differ between adolescents (13-19) and young adults (20-24).
- **‘Youth’ are not a homogenous group**, and individual character, social relations, identity markers (gender, class, ethnicity, migration), and contextual location play important roles in shaping the different social realities in which young people live – e.g. in the Global North, youth may lead more protected lives, while in the Global South, they may face adult responsibilities earlier (family breadwinner, early marriage, childrearing).

Youth and corruption



Youth as uniquely vulnerable:

- Young people are exposed to many of the same everyday forms of corruption faced by adults.
- At the same time, due to their unique characteristics (e.g. impressionability, limited life experience, weaker access to financial resources, weaker social and legal protections), youth are often more vulnerable to corruption than adults.

Different ways that youth may respond to corruption:

- **Lack of awareness** - If corruption has become 'normalised', youth may be unaware of it, or not realise they are engaging in it.
- **Reluctant acceptance** - Youth may hold disapproving attitudes towards corruption and perceive it to have negative impacts but still feel helpless to resist it.
- **As active participants** - Youth may learn from an early age that corrupt practices are 'necessary' to get ahead and that they need to rely on 'informal solutions' (e.g. *wasta*) to solve issues they face.

An example from education



- Youth are the main stakeholders of schools and universities (and the primary reason these institutions exist). Thus, they are **particularly impacted by corruption in the education sector**.
- The large size of the education sector, the funds it receives, and the high stakes associated with obtaining a good education, can all create corruption vulnerabilities.
- Corruption in education can include bribery, fraud, embezzlement and extortion – e.g. misappropriation of funds earmarked for school improvement, diversion of school supplies, nepotism and favouritism influencing recruitment processes leading to the employment of underqualified teachers and lecturers, bribery and favouritism in admissions, collusive cheating in examinations, plagiarism, essays for purchase...
- Privatization and commercialization of education by nonstate actors – e.g. shadow/parallel education, corruption related to the licensing of private educational institutions, teachers poached from state institutions, imposition of tuition and service fees, private supplementary tutoring, ‘diploma mills’...

Impacts of educational corruption



Educational corruption has long-term and wide-ranging negative impacts...

- **For youth:** creates disillusionment (e.g. in ‘meritocracy’ - the social contract that education leads to opportunity), negatively impacts youth opportunities, encourages disincentivization and lack of interest in higher levels of education, wastes potential.
- **For education systems:** reduces education quality, undermines institutional reputations, undermines the value of qualifications students obtain.
- **Social impacts:** creates/exacerbates socio-economic inequalities, hinders social mobility.
- **Economic impacts:** contributes to unemployment, exacerbates inequalities, encourages migration and “brain drain”, undermines a country’s economic growth prospects.
- **Political impacts:** promotes a mistrust in public institutions and youth apathy towards participation in political life; political alienation increases instability and the potential for violence; NEET status as a breeding ground for radicalisation and extremism.

Youth and anti-corruption efforts



Why youth engagement?

- Anti-corruption requires a multi-stakeholder approach, and youth are a key part of civil society in combating corruption.
- Youth bring energy, insight, fresh perspectives, innovation, creativity, passion, commitment, tech-savviness, and strong voices to anti-corruption efforts.
- Youth are particularly effective at positively influencing peers, their families, and communities.

Benefits of youth engagement:

For youth: Participation empowers youth by helping them to understand and improve their lives and communities. It builds confidence, skills, knowledge, and social networks, boosting youth employability and cultivating them as future leaders.

For countries: Youth are essential agents of change in development, helping to address inequality, promote democracy, and contribute to sustainable development.

Research Contributions: Youth offer valuable insights into their contexts, particularly within marginalized communities.

Authentic participation

Genuine participation and engagement requires more than just token involvement; it necessitates youth having a meaningful voice in decision-making.



Authentic participation (cont.)



- The **potential of youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts remains underutilised** and is often treated as tokenistic or cosmetic by national authorities.
- Youth often develop feelings of helplessness and hopelessness in the face of inadequate steps to involve them, which may demotivate them in terms of confronting corruption.
- Youth engagement can itself lead to inequalities if only elites have access to participation opportunities.

Participation as method or approach:

- **Participation as method** - A toolkit of techniques that can be used to actively involve youth in anti-corruption initiatives.
- **Participation as approach** - A deeper questioning of attitudes and behaviour; a critique of conventional methods and practice.

An example from research...

All participation is not the same...



	Keep youth informed	Consult youth	Youth provide inputs	Youth as equal partners	Youth play a leading role
Identifying the research focus					
Designing the research					
Undertaking the research					
Analysing the data					
Writing up the findings					
Presenting the findings					

Aims of youth engagement?

Youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts can have a number of different aims:

A continuum?



- **Resilience:** most often connoted by behaviours of endurance, adaptability and coping. ‘Resilience’ as passive adjustment to the status quo?
- **Agency:** capacity to act or make decisions, exercise ‘free will’ *Agency is always limited and framed by the different power structures in which people are embedded.
- **Resistance:** a form of opposition or refusal to comply – e.g. overt political and striking actions but also common everyday acts. Resistance is every action and gesture that allows people to improve their existence, quality of life, and well-being – e.g. refusing to engage in acts of corruption.
- **Critical consciousness:** the ability to recognize and analyze oppressive social forces and to take action against them.

Factors impacting youth engagement



Internal Factors:

- Personal characteristics such as developmental level, education, motivation, and confidence. Youth motivation increases when the issues at hand are relevant to them and when they feel they can influence outcomes.

External Factors:

- Social norms, rules, and institutional structures that can either enable or hinder youth participation. Societal perceptions, family dynamics, and cultural norms play significant roles in shaping youth engagement – e.g. youth seen as less autonomous; decision-making as communal and influenced by patriarchal and age-based norms.
- Youth participation may conflict with family or community expectations, especially when challenging power structures or traditional values.

Gender, Class, Other Exclusions:

- **Gender:** Female youth face unique barriers, such as invisibility in public life and restrictions based on cultural or religious norms. Gender roles often limit youths' participation in public spaces and decision-making.
- **Class:** Youth from low-income families often face additional obstacles – e.g. their participation may be undervalued or restricted due to a focus on obedience over autonomy; young people from poor communities often need to work and do not have the time to engage in nonremunerated activities.
- **Other exclusions:** Certain groups, such as migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, youth with disabilities, and rural youth, may face systemic exclusion from participation. These youth often do not share the same experiences or priorities as other youth, nor do they have access to the same support structures or the same opportunities to mobilize.

Challenges of engaging youth



Conceptual:

- There is a lack of understanding and consensus on what '**authentic participation**' means – putting methods before approach (change in behaviour and attitudes) – leaves youth with minimal impact on decision-making; minimal power to initiate organisational change.
- **Self-interest in the status quo?** People (including youth) often benefit from corruption. How to challenge deeply embedded social norms and structures if there is limited will?
- **Power imbalances** - the views of young people are often not valued; further exclusion is based on social identities of age, gender, race, religion, disability, etc.
- When you ask a question, you **lose control of the answer**. Young people often come up with unexpected 'solutions'.
- It is difficult to get youth to say what they **really think** and not what they think you want to hear – desire to please, fear of retribution.
- Engaging young people can imply that they are **accountable** for solving problems (e.g. corruption) which they did not create.
- Anti-corruption efforts can raise the **expectations** of youth which may not be met.

Practical:

- **Resource constraints:** Many anti-corruption bodies lack the resources and expertise to engage youth effectively.
- **Time and commitment constraints:** Engaging youth is time-consuming and requires long-term commitment.
- **Information gaps:** e.g. how to become involved...
- **Logistics:** e.g. location and affordable transport...

Considerations when thinking about youth engagement

- ✓ Is it voluntary, not forced?
- ✓ Is it accessible to all, including young women and marginalised groups?
- ✓ Is it respectful of local knowledge?
- ✓ Is it relevant? Is it based around issues that youth care about ?
- ✓ Is it genuine? Are youth perspectives really valued?
- ✓ Does it make a difference? Do youth have real influence on outcomes?
- ✓ Is it safe? Are there repercussions for participation?
- ✓ What happens afterwards? Is there follow-up?

Preliminary recommendations



1. Education, Training, and Capacity Building:

- Increase awareness about corruption and its impact on youth in both formal and non-formal educational settings.
- Nurture young people's intolerance for corrupt and unethical behaviour.
- Promote democratic citizenship and values.
- Build youth skills in critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving.
- Model integrity and set good examples for youth in professional practice.
- Train adult staff in anti-corruption bodies to effectively engage with youth.

2. Engagement-enabling Environment:

- Ensure adequate resources (e.g. dedicated youth budget) for youth engagement.
- Strengthen institutional readiness for meaningful youth participation.
- Create authentic opportunities for youth to engage at all stages of anti-corruption initiatives. Youth activism can trigger tangible outcomes.
- Set realistic expectations for youth and safeguard them from retaliation.

Preliminary recommendations (cont.)



3. Coordination and Partnerships:

- Support intergenerational collaboration with families, communities, and civil society.
- Help young people coordinate and mobilize anti-corruption efforts.
- Pursue partnerships that benefit both anti-corruption authorities and youth.

4. Diversity and Inclusion:

- Ensure inclusive youth participation, addressing barriers for marginalized groups.
- Conduct stakeholder analysis to understand youth views and barriers to participation.

Discussion

Contributions are welcome...especially from youth delegates!

- Examples of best practice and lessons learned?
- Successful country-specific strategies?



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