



The RAYAM theory of Change posits

“If young people participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies intended to serve them, then they will be empowered to create better outcomes for themselves.”

MENA Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis

Innovation

Technological innovation and adaptation are key to the RAYAM's goal of reaching the least heard voices. Systematic engagement with hundreds of young people across 20 MENA countries requires robust, secure communication tools tailored to their needs. Currently, an online discussion forum stored within the MENA Adolescent and Youth Hub (www.menayouthhub.org) provides RAYAM members the opportunity to discuss their views on a variety of topics and policies. The RAYAM has already made significant contributions to regional adolescent and youth programming – from innovation to quality education. For instance, in 2019 a democratically elected cohort of RAYAM members played a pivotal

role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the No Lost Generation Tech Summit (<https://nlgedtech.com/>). Among other roles, this committee helped select the participating tech organizations, designed the agenda, and proactively engaged with participants on panels and in roundtables. In addition to programming, the Majlis also helped shape policies, by providing valuable inputs to the design of UNICEF's strategies such as the global education strategy and to decisions in regards to funding such as the Dutch embassy's decisions to fund adolescent and youth programming in Lebanon.



Background

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM) is a sustainable and inclusive regional platform for young people from the the region. The term "Majlis," which indicates "a place of sitting" in Arabic, was selected by young people to highlight the group's role in providing a secure space where the voices of disadvantaged, active adolescents and youth can be safely shared, heard, and acted upon.

Founded in 2018 by the UN:NGO Group on Adolescents and Youth, a consortium of UN agencies and NGO partners, the RAYAM seeks to bridge the divide between the need for high quality youth engagement and informed programming on the one hand and active change-makers whose voices are rarely heard on the other.

The RAYAM seeks to replace tokenistic engagement with systematic engagement, echo chambers of the same voices with transparent processes and diverse voices, programs designed in distant offices for young people with programs designed in close partnership with young people.

Systems are in place to consolidate members' feedback from the online discussion forum, share it with UN:NGO group members, and evaluate the extent to which young people's contributions influence decisions. From 2019 30 young people from 8 countries volunteered to become members of the Executive Committee, a leadership body which will organize and take the lead in all Majlis activities, including management of the online discussion forum.

RAYAM is designed to empower young people themselves to reach, amplify, and empower other least heard voices.

The sectors which RAYAM members can influence is virtually unlimited – from health and wellbeing to quality education and clean water and energy.

In line with RAYAM's mission to empower young people, to make it an adolescents and youth led initiative, the UN: NGO group steering committee has established an executive committee to transfer leadership and decision-making responsibility for the organization and direction of the group to the members themselves. Provided that, after completing the transparent nomination process, only 30 members from different countries in the region (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria "Aleppo, Damascus, and Zaatari camp in Jordan", Tunis, Yemen), has applied for seats and participated in a 2-3-day summit is to bring the thirty RAYAM executive committee members together to create their own vision and mission of RAYAM, share their experience, successes as well as challenges/issues from their countries, and to agree on three main priorities in order to establish an annual plan of action. Through providing an orientation on the online platform and RAYAM structured format in which they can organize themselves and take the lead in all aspects of the platform.

The objective of the summit was to provide an overview of the UN:NGO group and how it functions as well as RAYAM project and establishing an annual plan as well as identifying the regional priorities. Young people presented

their own experiences working on youth programming/projects/initiatives...etc. and country-specific and regional issues young people face in their society. The sessions were facilitated by UNICEF, Save the Children, and Mercy Corps, in the presence of representatives of different UN agencies (FAO, WFP, UNAIDS). Despite the online participation of 8 young people, nevertheless their contributions at the meeting were included and heard, YP have Identified key regional priorities: unemployment, quality of education, GBV, youth political engagement, and inclusion of people with disabilities, they experimented developing a workplan and formed the vision and the mission of RAYAM from their own perspective, furthermore, they developed a slogan for the platform titled "MENA a vision entitled youth", "مينا رؤيا عنوانها الشباب", Vision: "RAYAM is a powerful, sustainable, democratic platform- where young people share their needs, take and make decisions, and lead the change". Moreover, they agreed to continue sharing their experiences and provide capacity building learning online through skype/zoom until the platform is up and running and emphasized on the importance of the RAYAM platform as being a sustainable one where YP voices will be heard and acted upon.