Read-out of No Lost Generation donor briefing on Adolescents and Youth

On 22 November 2017 ECHO hosted a discussion under the auspices of the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative on Adolescents and Youth in MENA, bringing together humanitarian / development agencies, policy makers from Jordan and Lebanon, researchers, and 12 members of the international donor community, including: Canada, Denmark, ECHO, EU, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US (PRM).

The No Lost Generation initiative is a concerted effort by humanitarians, donors, governments and others to secure the safety and futures of a whole generation of children and young people in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt whose safety, wellbeing, education and development stand to be decimated by conflict. Comprised of work under three pillars – Education, Child Protection and Adolescents & Youth – embedded in existing humanitarian plans, it is a powerful call to invest in the resilience, capacities and potential on which the future of the region depends.

Conveying the highlights of an Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth organised by the regional UN:NGO group on adolescents and youth the previous day with support from the EU Madad Trust Fund, the agenda included presentations by UN agencies and NGOs and young people from No Lost Generation countries on the multidisciplinary global and regional evidence on the urgency for investing in adolescents and youth in MENA followed by in depth current evidence in three priority areas: 1) Adolescent and Youth Engagement; 2) Violence Against Adolescents and Youth; and 3) Access to Employment.

Highlights from presenters:

Ms. Jenny Hobbs, Thematic Expert on Education, ECHO, opened the briefing by emphasising that adolescents and youth are not just the future, they are also the present. Whilst ECHO has not taken a lead role in supporting adolescent and youth engagement, the aim of the briefing was to promote discussion on this important issue that all stakeholders should be considering. Evidence presented at the NLG event showed that adolescent and youth participation in programme design in the MENA region’s humanitarian action is minimal, which ECHO sees as important feedback for all donors to take note of and work to improve.

Bertrand Bainvel, Deputy Regional Director for UNICEF added his remarks, describing 4 ways in which evidence is important in strengthening outcomes for adolescents and youth: 1) the neuroscience in particular is key to help us understand the plasticity of the developing brains of young people; 2) evidence (rather than beliefs or ideologies) is essential to building the right policies and programmatic responses for adolescent girls and boys; 3) evidence can help build the investment case for this cohort; and 4) evidence helps measure progress and promote proven interventions.

Presenters from the Symposium (including adolescents and youth) then conveyed key points including the following:

1. There is a window of opportunity now to reap a demographic dividend: as well as immediate results we can ensure the next generation of adults and parents are better able to build a stable and prosperous future for the region. We are at a tipping point between the hope that young people have for the future and frustration with the status quo.
2. Gender is an important factor which determines the opportunities open to adolescents.
3. ‘Adolescents and Youth’ is a diverse group and differential interventions for different sexes and ages.
4. We need to invest in programmes that work (see here for good practices from the region). One criterion for success in programming is working with young people, another is using integrated, multi-sector approaches.

1 Adolescents are in the age range 10-19 inclusive; Youth are in the age range of 15-24 inclusive; Young People refers to both groups.
5. It is important that programming for adolescents and youth is grounded in national structures – including national and local government.

6. Partnership with the private sector is essential to address employability and employment challenges for youth.

7. Active labour market policies, particularly those that target vulnerable populations such as low skilled youth, rural women and refugee populations are proven to have positive job and business impacts.

8. Employability, entrepreneurship, employment services and subsidized employment programmes can generate youth employment, within a framework of pro-employment macroeconomic reforms.

9. There is some excellent evidence on what works to improve outcomes for them; but there are also important gaps in this evidence; for example on the positive ways in which young people are contributing to society across the region; increase the knowledge base on addressing gender-based barriers to adolescent and youth wellbeing.

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<th>Adolescents and Youth affected by conflict in MENA: what the evidence tells us</th>
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<td>• Whilst Intersecting vulnerabilities and violations of rights limit the opportunities for many adolescents and young people, the <strong>responses provided by local and international organizations are limited</strong> in scope and duration as a result of the conflict and short term humanitarian funding.</td>
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<td>• The MENA region the is most dangerous in the world for adolescents today. More than 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence globally were living in MENA.</td>
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<td>• <strong>1 in 5 girls in MENA are married before the age of 18</strong> and the rate of child marriage is increasing in conflict affected settings.</td>
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<td>• <strong>MENA has the highest youth unemployment rates in the world</strong>, particularly for young women whose unemployment is twice that of young men;¹ this is exacerbated in conflict affected settings.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Adolescent and youth engagement works</strong> when done right and has an impact both at the individual and community level.</td>
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Conclusions and ways forward which emerged from the discussion:

1. There is an urgent imperative to dramatically increase investment for adolescents and youth in the MENA region.
   - Investing in adolescent girls and young women is particularly pressing. It is critical to ensure their protection from violence, exploitation and abuse, and empowering girls and young women to participate fully in community, workplace and political life, as well as enhancing their access to gender friendly education and employment services.
   - One of the priority objectives of working with young people should be fostering a stable and peaceful society through, citizenship education; promoting participation of adolescents and youth in decision-making that affects their lives; and greater attention to initiatives to build their commitment to peace and tolerance, participation, democracy and shared responsibility for the region’s disparities and deprivations.
   - Investment cannot come from the humanitarian sector alone. Longer term development funding should also be used as well as greater involvement from private sector.
   - All investments should build on existing structures and capacities in order to achieve scale and sustainability.

2. Work with and for young people must be based on proven approaches. The following three elements are essential:
   - An integrated package meeting needs in: Protection, Education, Engagement, Social Protection and Health;
   - Inclusion of the public sector, private sector, families, communities and young people as partners; and
   - Addressing underlying drivers such as social norms, unemployment and inequity.

3. Humanitarian actors can and should take steps now to increase visibility and improve outcomes for marginalized adolescents and youth through:
   - Systematic tracking of results for adolescents and youth interventions through age and sex disaggregated indicators;
   - Improvement of intra and inter-sectoral learning and coordination in adolescent and youth programming;
   - Systematic engagement of adolescents and youth in the design, implementation and review of all programming affecting them; and
   - Amplifying the perspectives and voices of young people and advocating for platforms to facilitate young people’s engagement in planning and decision-making which will affect their present and future.