Salomé Jaquet (third from left), UN Volunteer Local Development Specialist, during a training workshop with youth in Medenine. © UNDP, 2021

Strengthening intergenerational ties through civic engagement

This year, International Youth Day advocates for intergenerational solidarity. UN Volunteers Salomé Jacquet (27) and Abdelkrim Tounsi (68) come from two different backgrounds and belong to two different generations. Yet, they both pursue the same goal of creating a world for all ages, facilitated through intergenerational dialogue.

Salomé Jacquet (France) is a UN Volunteer Local Development Specialist serving with the UN Development Programme (UNDP). She supports a project focused on supporting decentralization, governance and local development as a means of improving the living conditions of beneficiary communities. Since 2019, she has been serving as the project’s focal point for youth-related aspects.

As part of her assignment, Salomé supported the implementation of a pilot initiative to
promote youth participation in local governance in the Governorate and municipalities of Medenine via a Youth Advisory Council. She helped amplify youth voices to local authorities and beyond to regional officials, thus facilitating intergenerational conversations, while enabling previously sidelined youth to have their voices heard.

One key observation for Salomé was that misunderstandings or misinterpretations may arise between the two groups. In her opinion, this communications gap originated from intergenerational differences, as people from different generations tend to have different expectations of outcomes.

"For instance, administrative delays cause discouragement and anxiety and can lead to the demobilization of young people. In return, such reactions may induce a reluctance on the representatives’ side to engage with young people, ergo, leading to a loss of trust and hindering the effectiveness and durability of the collaboration," she explains.

"Initiatives that bring different age groups to the table for collective action can significantly contribute to overcoming intergenerational barriers. When people from different generations come together, get to know each other, understand their differences and share their expertise and knowledge, they learn to collaborate and to build back better together. --Salomé Jacquet, UN Volunteer Local Development Specialist, UNDP Tunisia"

Salomé was keen to ensure the success of the pilot Youth Council, as the replication of this experience would help create more opportunities for younger generations to have a say in decisions that affect them.

Indeed, the successful experience in Medenine opened the door for similar councils to be set up in other municipalities. Thereafter, Salomé supported efforts to mainstream this experience as a best practice.

Along with her team, she took part in preparing project documents, mobilizing resources and building partnerships with new technical and financial actors. This resulted in setting up similar Youth Councils in seven other municipalities and governorates in the South of Tunisia.

Abdelkrim Tounsi (Tunisia) is an Expert UN Volunteer from an earlier generation who serves in support of youth empowerment. He brings long experience in participatory democracy and decentralization, along with a thorough knowledge of development issues and civil society.
He is currently engaged in launching a resources centre in Djerba. This is designed to offer an enabling environment to civic engagement, particularly among youth and build civil society’s capacities, in addition to facilitating dialogue and partnerships between local actors.

The centre is the outcome of collaboration between the three municipalities of Djerba (Houmet Essouk, Midoun and Ajim), civil society and local development actors, with the support of UNDP Tunisia, through the Tamkeen project. It was launched following an integrated participatory and inclusive approach adopted by the project throughout its implementation process.

Abdelkrim believes that “the scantiness of dialogue mechanisms and the lack of openness to diverging ideas and opinions impede social cohesion in its entirety.” He hopes the centre will help overcoming such a barrier by serving as an open space to all civil society and community-based organizations in Djerba. He is enthusiastic about the opportunities this space could open for youth and intergenerational dialogue.

Therefore, he attaches great importance to the involvement of young people, calling upon them to take ownership of the centre and to take part in its revitalization by suggesting activities and initiatives.

"The creation of an inclusive world for all ages requires the multiplication of intergenerational projects, as well as the creation and sustenance of spaces for intergenerational dialogue. --Abdelkrim Tounsi, UN Volunteer Civil Society Expert, UNDP Tunisia"

Through their participation, Salome and Abdelkrim both are champions of intergenerational engagement, while equally demonstrating that volunteering itself is indeed an intergenerational activity.
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