

## For People and Planet: Youth Transforming the Future

What does a healthy planet, community or person look like? How can young people be part of the transformation of the future?

On the 12th of August, the International Youth Day celebration brought together more than 350 young changemakers and social innovators across the Arab region to explore how youth can make personal wellbeing matter, move towards healthy communities, and create planetary prosperity through innovation and direct action.

Starting from the individual level, Fatima Mussa, a Media graduate and co-founder of With Hope Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, highlighted the importance of mental health awareness. She said that while many young people are struggling with their mental health, many others are not even aware of their issues. Creating awareness and reducing the stigma around mental health is important for both individuals and communities.

*"The health systems are under huge pressure and the youth can play a critical role to support them", said Crystel Hajar, a Ph.D. candidate in microbiology and the winner of the 2020 L'Oréal - UNESCO for Women in Science Levant Young Talent Prize, from Lebanon, emphasizing the role young people can play in supporting health systems in their countries, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

While the awareness and actions of young people can bring about change at individual and community levels, much is needed to bring youth's voices into the global discussion. Rayan Kassem, the West Asia Regional Director for Youth4Nature, explored the connection between health, individuals and the globe. He noted that to create change, *"We need to create optimism. In the past, we could not see women-led campaigns, but now we can see them everywhere. We need to do the same for youth-led campaigns. We are an integral part of the world."*

During the event, participants also engaged in discussion with young innovators working on individual, community and planetary wellbeing through Social Innovation Room discussions. These six innovators are among the alumni of UNDP Youth Leadership Programme, and shared their work, challenges and goals. One of the youth participants in the rooms, Zainab from Tunisia, noted: *"I heard valuable insights from other youth today. I am now motivated to start my own project."*

The event was the first youth-focused discussion organized by the Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region (YDD), which is a joint initiative by the UNDP and the Arab Youth Center (UAE). The initiative empowers young people to work with UNDP across 10 countries in the Arab region, to promote youth inclusion in development.

Ahmad Buasallay, Youth Delegate from Bahrain, led the development of the event and moderated the discussions. He noted that *"Inclusion and engagement of young people in the transformation*



*of their societies and the region is vital. We need to recognize their role as partners in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and a more sustainable future.”*

Stay tuned for more upcoming discussions, and join us to bring Arab youth’s voice together, united under sustainable development for the Arab region!