Digital Transformation: A New Era For Youth

Technology and social media play a great role in our lives and have changed many aspects of our world, including helping youth elevate their voices and contribute to the development of their communities.

On October 28, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) and the Youth Development Delegates conducted a virtual webinar on "Youth in the Digital Era", engaging more than 100 participants, including youth across the Arab region. The webinar emphasized how digital technologies, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, have changed the way we work, run our businesses, and communicate with each other, as well as affected what news we see and believe.

Here are the key insights from the experts and young innovators:

First, it is important to understand the danger of misinformation in online spaces. The role of digital platforms increased during the pandemic, said Paul Semaan, digital transformation consultant from Lebanon. While the platforms gave us a way of connecting with each other when physical closeness was not possible, evaluating the truthfulness of information posted online is not easy.

"Youth should analyze any news they receive by checking if it is published from a credible resource, and if it is based on contested information", noted Ghassan Ben Chiheb, founder of Tahaqaq platform, the first digital platform in Morocco to combat fake news. “There are many digital tools available to check the truthfulness of news”, added Riham Abu Aita, who heads the Kashif program that focuses on fact-checking and verifying online news.

The sentiment was shared by Munya Thaher, who works as a media coordinator at 7amleh, Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, in Palestine, promoting digital rights. She highlighted the role that media education can play in helping people identify misinformation and hate speech in online spaces.

Second, digital transformation has brought many benefits for doing impactful business online. Discussing the role of digital in marketing and business practices, entrepreneurs Jad Fakhani, CEO of Beycom, and Rami Alama, co-founder of Lexyom.inc, noted that digital has made doing business easier. Whether it comes to signing contracts digitally or reaching out to new audiences through digital marketing, new opportunities can also open chances for youth if they are comfortable utilizing the digital to the fullest. Jad and Rami addressed the youth with a piece of advice: “Technology and social media can be very beneficial for entrepreneurs as they can give you access to a lot of data that can help you.”

Third, technology affects us at all levels of life, from global development to personal interactions. Highlighting the centrality of technology in global development, Issa Ahmed from the Arab Youth Center, which aims to empower a new generation of youth from the Arab region to build a better
future, noted that "Technology is a key driver for the development of societies and countries, as it accelerates the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals". Technology can help young innovators to come up with solutions that can contribute to solving the most pressing challenges, including climate change.

On the other hand, our actions and encounters in digital spaces can have significant impacts on individuals. Leila Mnekbi, national coordinator at Salamat Tunisia, works on raising awareness on digital safety and digital violence and emphasized that we need to create abuse-free online environments to support the mental health of youth and adults alike. You can watch the live recording of the webinar (in Arabic) here.

Youth Development Delegates in the Arab Region is a joint initiative between UNDP and the Arab Youth Center, through which 11 youth from the region are deployed in UNDP country offices to contribute to sustainable development and youth empowerment. The “Youth in the Digital Era” webinar is the second in the series in which the Delegates lead discussions on timely topics related to youth and development in the Arab region.