



UNITED IN PURPOSE

IYF's Partners Advance “Year Of Youth” Goals

By Lisa Jones

College student Maya Saoud may not have years of experience in the international development arena, but she is equipped with enough passion and enthusiasm to earn the hushed attention of some of the world's most influential diplomats and leaders. On August 12, 2010, her rallying words rang out into the crowd of government officials, distinguished speakers, NGO leaders, and youth ambassadors gathered at the UN Headquarters in New York City.

“We are asking you for your help, for your understanding and for your willingness to make available all that is necessary to ensure that young people are empowered. We are asking you to please understand the valuable natural resource that is the youth. Unlike other resources, we do not spark wars and conflicts. We do not create contempt between the haves and have-nots. We are the resource that does the very opposite. Utilize the youth for the sake of our collective future. Allow us to create a global environment where dialogue and mutual understanding are preferred over the destructiveness and terror of conflict.”

Ms. Saoud knows first-hand the importance of mutual understanding among youth. She is a member of the UN advocacy team for *Pax Romana*, a worldwide organization of students working to bridge cultural, religious, economic, and generational divides. Her words were delivered at the 2010 UN Year of Youth Kick-Off event—marking the 25th anniversary of the first UN Youth Year held in 1985. As the youth of the new millennium face increasingly complex and daunting global challenges, it became more imperative than ever for young people to have the opportunity to come together and plan for the future under this year's theme: Dialogue & Mutual Understanding. Because societies often view youth as problems to be solved, the UN declared the 2010 Year of Youth to give this under-represented population a platform to voice their ideas for sustainable solutions to global crises—and to galvanize support to address those challenges.



The goals of the UN's year-long campaign were to increase commitment and investment in the world's young people, boost youth participation and partnerships, and intensify intercultural understanding among youth. Member States of the UN were encouraged to host national events in celebration of the Year and to raise awareness about the contributions of youth to their country's development. Youth and youth-serving organizations were encouraged to plan events that demonstrated the passion and potential of youth and provide a space for young people to collaborate on ideas for effective change.

RESPONDING TO THE UN'S CALL: A SPOTLIGHT ON IYF PARTNERS

The International Youth Foundation has spent 2010 following just such a course of action—working to improve the lives of some 2.8 million young people around the world through expanded opportunities to learn, work, and have a voice in their communities. At the heart of these efforts is IYF's global partner network of 200 highly respected and effective NGOs who help design and implement our programs in more than 70 countries

worldwide. IYF and its partners have been particularly active during this UN Year of Youth, implementing programs that support its goals—including efforts to reduce youth unemployment rates and encourage youth leadership and activism. IYF is also increasing its investments in the regions of the world where young people make up a huge proportion of the population and thus where they face the greatest barriers to becoming civically and economically engaged.

Today, 1.5 billion people are between the ages of 12 and 24, making this group of young people the largest ever to be entering adulthood and the largest underrepresented segment of the world's population. The "youth bulge" reaches its most critical levels in Africa, the Middle East, China and Southeast Asia, and central America—where unemployment and youth disenfranchisement are rising as well. IYF collaborates with partner organizations in each of these critical areas, investing in projects that support the UN's key areas of youth empowerment. We provide here a snapshot of three of these outstanding IYF partners who work with us in these particularly challenging regions of the world.

REGION:

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

PARTNER:

AFRICAN CENTRE FOR WOMEN, INFORMATION, & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY: KENYA

SOLUTION:

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND CAREER TRAINING



In many African countries, including Mali, Niger and Uganda, average fertility rates exceed six children per woman. A recent study published by the Washington-based Globalist Research Center reveals that even if fertility rates across Africa were to fall immediately to replacement levels, the population would still continue to increase due to its young age structure—growing to 1.5 billion in 2050 and 1.8 billion in 2100. However, if birth rates can be decreased, goals of progress and development in Africa—and across the globe—would become more feasible. The African Centre for Women, Information, and Communications Technology (ACWICT) gives young African women the tools they need to become educated, independent members of society, ultimately reducing birth rates and elevating gender equality.

Founded in 1998, ACWICT is a Kenyan-based organization whose mission is to promote women's access to information and communication technologies as tools for social, economic and political advancement. In a country where as many as 75% of the young people are ill-equipped for jobs in the formal economy, ACWICT has demonstrated that ending the isolation of marginalized women

through digital communication and entrepreneurship training can positively affect female employability as well as other areas of development such as health education and political representation.

ACWICT is not alone in its vision. The United Nations Fund for International Partnership (UNFIP) has recognized ACWICT as a key contact in Africa for bridging the gender digital divide through strategic partnerships. IYF also believes in ACWICT's power to improve development efforts through the education of young women, and has partnered with the organization since 2007. One such collaboration is the *Youth Empowerment Program* (YEP), supported by Microsoft, which has trained 10,000 youth in three African countries in ICT and other marketable skills and assisted them with job placement services, internships, community service, and entrepreneurship opportunities. From all-girls technology summer camps to AgriTradeKenya, a community-based web portal designed to facilitate agricultural market networking in Eastern Africa, ACWICT is working to ensure young women have both the skills to be successful in their communities and the platform to be heard across the region.

Young graduates of IYF's Youth Empowerment Program, implemented by ACWICT in Nairobi, Kenya, showcase their products and services at a "career fair" [left] and participate in an ICT training course [right] to equip them with marketable skills.

REGION:

ASIA

PARTNER:

CHINA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOUNDATION: CHINA

SOLUTION:

YOUTH CAPACITY BUILDING—
LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Students at a vocational school in Beijing learn the art of pastry making [left], as part of the Brilliant Futures program, supported through the Harry Winston Hope Foundation. A young Chinese journalist in training [right] acquires her skills as a participant in Nokia's Make a Connection program. CYDF is the implementing partner for both initiatives.



Youth capacity building is a critical step in combating the generational disenfranchisement often associated with large youth populations around the world. If young people feel empowered to make a difference and are productively engaged, they are more likely to become assets in society. In China, where each year an estimated 1.5 million new college graduates are unable to find a job, the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) is hard at work empowering youth to improve their access to the marketplace and become leaders in their communities.

As one of the longest-standing nonprofit organizations in China, CYDF has been building the capacity of Chinese youth through education, volunteerism, and engagement since 1989. Its mission is to improve the environment for the development of young people by providing them support services, giving voice to their interests and concerns

and carrying out social advocacy. As part of these efforts, CYDF every year presents China's Top 10 Outstanding Youth Award to recognize and commend admirable young people who have made prominent contributions to the country's development.

Partners since 2000, CYDF and IYF have teamed up again in 2011 for a youth development project sponsored by the Harry Winston Hope Foundation to merge life skills with employability training in secondary schools using *Passport to Success*—IYF's life skills curriculum. In addition to skills training, youth are provided with technical and financial support to implement community development projects that teach volunteerism, leadership, team work, and project design and implementation skills. By encouraging engagement and community activism, CYDF has shown its trust in youth to lead the way forward in China.

REGION:

MIDDLE EAST

PARTNER:

INJAZ-PALESTINE

SOLUTION:

JOB TRAINING AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT

High school students [left] enjoy an interactive "master class" for young entrepreneurs, provided through INJAZ-Palestine. A "youth host" [right] welcomes dignitaries to the launch ceremony of IYF's Youth Entrepreneurship Program in Palestine in March 2011.



Together, Arab countries have the highest regional youth unemployment rate across the globe. With half of the population below age 25, over 500,000 young people enter an already bleak—and worsening—job market each year. *Injaz* has made its mission to incorporate youth into the economy before they are lost to the social isolation and conflict typical of large groups who are denied the opportunity to contribute economically or civically to their communities.

Injaz implements programs through local schools and universities that bridge the gap between scholastic knowledge and marketable job skills. Participants in these programs are able to acquire hands-on experience through job shadowing and experiential learning opportunities. *Injaz* makes it a priority to network with Palestinian businesses, educators and policymakers in order to tackle their shared goals of creating jobs, building a stable economy

and providing higher standards of living. While working to link youth to job opportunities, it also encourages entrepreneurial efforts and sponsors youth businesses.

Injaz is currently one of the partner organizations working with IYF to implement the *Youth Entrepreneurship Development* (YED) program in Palestine—a US\$15 million four-year initiative with USAID to improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities for more than 2,000 young Palestinians. As part of the program's initial activities, *Injaz* held a Gaza Work for Youth summer camp for teenagers to prepare for future employment and consider the possibility of entrepreneurship. **Y**

Lisa Jones, the 2011 recipient of the Sophie Kerr literary prize, has recently joined the IYF staff.