



ASSOCIATION AMAL AL MANSOUR

Supporting vulnerable youth into work every step
of the way

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Oxfam's Youth Participation and Employment (YPE) project helped Hind, a young woman in Morocco, to enter the labour market. Though she is educated, her skills were insufficient to get a job. The Amal Al Mansour Association, a YPE partner, helped her with practical training in developing soft skills and accessing the formal labour market. With support from the Association, she got a job in the retail sector. Her current job is a stepping-stone to achieving her personal and professional goals. She wants to obtain her law degree and find a stable job in line with her qualifications. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the number of available jobs has decreased, and it is hard to get a full-time salaried position. Hind is hopeful that the YPE programme can help young people in Morocco through advocating for decent work for vulnerable young people.

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Cover photo: Hind, a young woman participant in the YPE programme. Credit: Hamza Nuino.

1 INTRODUCTION

'In 2017, a friend told me about the [Amal Al Mansour] Association, and that they could help me find a job. I was doing nothing, I was lost and inward-looking. The first time I saw Soukaina,¹ I opened my heart to him – me, who never told anyone about my problems, not even my loved ones.

With them [the association], I did communication courses. They struggled with me, I could not pronounce even a simple sentence in French. But little by little, I was less blocked. The theatre was a big part of it. What I learned in the theatre helped me in life. For example, in a difficult situation, I saw it a bit as if I was on the stage, meaning the look of people no longer had the same importance. I learned to work on a computer, to do my CV truthfully, learned the rules of communication with customers, the lines to never cross.

The association helped me find odd jobs. I started to earn a living, and above all, I gained confidence in myself. It got me out of the bubble where I had locked myself. I gained experience, in work and also in life. Since meeting the association, several things have changed in my life. Of course, there is money, but what has really changed is me. Before, I imposed myself on my loved ones by aggression, so much so that I had begun to lose those who mattered to me. When I spoke with Soukaina, I understood my mistakes, I realized it was not always the fault of others. I also learned to trust again, not only in myself, but also in society. I learned to count on myself, to know my rights and to defend them intelligently, to participate in what concerns me, and most importantly, I learned a balance in the relationship with other [people]. For example, I am naturally polite, and people sometimes take this as weakness, meaning suddenly I had to show my claws, do like them, to impose myself. But Mr. Mouline² said to me: "No, trust yourself, impose yourself, but without denying who you are, your values, the education that your parents instilled in you. Defend your interests but remain yourself." In my current work, these messages often come to mind when I have to manage my relationship with my colleagues and even my boss.²

I got this job thanks to the association. They even helped me financially until I got my first salary. Today, I value everything. When I buy something, what makes me the happiest is that it's thanks to my work, my efforts.

I will never forget what Hassan, Mouline and Soukaina have done for me. It goes far beyond the framework of the association. They make me feel that I'm part of a family – and I am not the only one, other young people like me, say the same thing. That doesn't mean I've already arrived or that it's been easy. Before I started training, they wanted to know what my goals are, and what I was willing to do to achieve them. They said to me, "We're going to help you, we're going to do our best, but if you want the easy way, it's not here. You're going to have to be patient and work very hard, but we're here with you." And it is hard, they didn't lie! It's been four years. I fall and get up, I fall and get up, but every time I get up a little stronger. I know today that no one has power over me. If someone gets in my way, I dismiss it, gently. The most important thing for me is to continue my path.'

(Hind, February 2021)^{3,4}

Hind crossed paths with YPE partner the Amal Al Mansour Association when she had been unemployed for several years. As with so many young clients

of the association, her economic and social vulnerability was coupled with psychological distress. This was immediately addressed by the association, as part of a comprehensive approach, which combines training in soft skills and languages (French and English), financial support and personalized support. In Hind's case, this lasted four years – intermittently, as necessary. Ms Naji, the head of integration, explains, 'When we met Hind, she was locked in a vicious circle, where social problems negatively impacted her economic situation, leading to psychological vulnerability. To break this circle, we had to tackle all these aspects.'

Today, Hind is employed in retail while studying at law school. She is engaged and aspires to a future where work-life balance is paramount. She feels that she has set her foot on the road to achieving her aspirations. The support she received has not only equipped her to find a job and keep it, but it has also allowed her to develop herself. Hind has had many challenges to overcome. Traumatized by the early loss of her mother, raised by a single father, worn down by years of unemployment and living without prospects, it is not surprising that Hind lost confidence in herself, her context and the future. Yet she retained a rare ability to take a critical look at herself and her relationship with those around her. And most of all, she is persevering, which is essential if you want to get a bachelor's degree after four attempts, or to combine full-time employment with university studies. For Hind, her current job is a stepping-stone to achieving her personal and professional goals. She wants to obtain her law degree and find a stable job in line with her qualifications: 'I want to make the most of my current job, earn a living, have experience. It's an honourable job, but with my degree, I can do better', Hind says.

Hind's case illustrates the people YPE targets: unemployed youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, with low or non-existent self-esteem, low social capital, limited chances of integration and a high risk of marginalization. This combination requires close support over time. And the more difficult the young person's initial socio-economic situation, the greater the investment in terms of time and content. For the Amal Al Mansour Association, a holistic approach is needed: 'We have a strategy tailored to our targets. Thanks to the support of our partner Oxfam, we are able to achieve extraordinary things with the job path, but some young people could not have benefited without financial support. Some don't even have enough money to pay for transport.'

The support, technical and psychological, is personalized according to the needs of each young person. As Omar, who received technical and communication training, says,⁵ 'The training was very good, very practical, but what struck me the most was the impact of the personalized coaching on some participants. Between the beginning and the end of the process, the difference was impressive. People who could barely show up, later managed to integrate [in a multinational]! That's why I say that the most important thing is personal development.'

Not all cases require the same degree of input as an accompaniment. A four-week technical training course on customer relations has been enough for several young people to enter the job market. It is this diversification in the profiles of clients which allows the association to

achieve its goals. 'We have easy cases, which need a simple boost, and others for which long-term work is needed', says Abderrahmane Mouline, Project Coordinator. This diversification is also in line with the programme's approach, based on a balance between numerical indicators (which are largely achieved) and impact. In cases such as Hind's, her initial situation was such that the changes are significant. The concrete effects of the project on her life are many: improved employability, empowerment (financial independence initiated, personal autonomy achieved), significant improvement in well-being (self-confidence, self-esteem), ambition (personal and professional) and finally, restoration of confidence in the surrounding environment and her ability to influence it positively.

In the context of endemic unemployment, aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, cases such as Hind's are common and set to multiply. The programme's partners are doubly under pressure – a tension shown by the widening imbalance between a growing demand for integration support on the part of young people, and the decline in the supply of companies. While the quality of employment is a central pillar of the programme, the market is more precarious than ever. 'We are faced with a dilemma', Mr Mouline explains. 'On one hand, we have an obligation to promote decent employment; on the other, the economic situation is such that we find almost only fixed-term contracts.'

Faced with this situation, the programme must remain true to its approach, supporting young people, with the private sector as a partner and an ally whose constraints must be taken into account. In the face of the economic crisis and uncertainty about the recovery, employment opportunities are scarce. Young people are aware of this.⁶ 'With COVID-19, the team has halved, and my workload has increased', says Abdessamad, a young participant in the YPE programme, 'but I am not complaining. It's the crisis, for everyone. This is not the time to change. Even if there are offers, it's three- to four-month contracts, it's too risky. Having a regular salary and papers is a blessing.'

This proves the relevance of the YPE programme. At the heart of the approach is advocating for decent work for vulnerable young people, while taking into account the legitimate needs of the private sector. Soukaina Naji puts it this way: 'We are not mere intermediaries between a job offer and a job application – we act in the market. We start from our business partners' needs and we prepare our young people so that they can meet this demand. To do this, we need to build a relationship of trust with the private sector.' This relationship of trust has allowed, in the midst of a pandemic, the integration of many young people – including Hind.

'Before, I helped out a little with odd jobs, but I had nothing', says Hind. 'I was desperate, helpless, without solutions – yet I did not dare to tell the association. And then one day, Mr. Mouline called me to join my current post. Can you imagine – when other people lose their work, I get a job!'

NOTES

1 Soukaina Naji, Head of Integration at the Al Amal Association for Solidarity and Development.

2 Abderrahmane Mouline, Project Coordinator, Amal Association Al Mansour.

3 Hassan Sebbar, President of the association Charity Al Mansour.

4 " إذا شيء واحد وقف لي في طريقي، أتخطو و ندوز، غير بالفن، المهم نكمل طريقي " 4

5 Omar, 31, completed the YPE customer relationship management course and is currently a customer relations manager in a multinational company.

6 Aaron is 31 years old and has participated in the theatre and film workshops programme, training in business creation and financing, training in soft skills and job search techniques. He is currently employed in an international catering firm.



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