Empowering Tomorrow’s Leaders

While Iraq has entered a post-conflict phase, the country remains marked by deep-seated divisions, which threaten to plunge the country into renewed violence. Youth and women are often excluded from reconciliation efforts that can help overcome them. Meaningful reconstruction must, however, include opportunities for them to influence governance mechanisms.

With the support of their donor, the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, Search for Common Ground and Peace and Freedom Organization have sought to advance such efforts by establishing Youth Leadership Councils (YLCs) in the KRI, under the Promoting Inclusive Governance for Youth and Women (IG) project. Councils host Dialogue Sessions on local governance, and generating conversations between local authorities, community members, and youth.

Though only 25km outside of Erbil, Qushtapa’s youth face significant barriers to civic engagement comparatively to youth living in the KRI’s capital. It was not until he was selected as a part of Qushtapa’s Youth Leadership Council (YLC) that Royar found a channel to express himself, contribute to civic change, and interact with other youth from all walks of life.

Royar is positioning himself to be a changemaker and leader in his community. Throughout each step of the IG project, he has observed Qushtapa youth form a collective understanding around the importance of listening openly to different ideas and opinions, and has solidified bonds with his peers. “Teamwork is very powerful in strengthening our own individual skills,” he emphasizes, “we have improved our abilities together.”

Through the project, Royar has honed media management and public speaking skills. As part of the YLCs media committee, he has learned to effectively convey social media messages that showcase the YLC’s work in Qushtapa. “I am a hard worker and feel happy with my YLC accomplishments,” Royar comments, describing his dedication to creating high-quality communications materials for his group. He also reflects on his prior inability to communicate well in public, a skill that the community-wide Town Hall Meetings have helped him develop. “I now understand leadership practically— how to be encouraging, how to be charismatic...” adds Royar.

Most importantly for Royar, the YLC also “allows maximum engagement,” by accepting youth from all educational, socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. He is confident that this diversity, complemented by their acquired skills, will shape the Qushtapa YLC participants’ futures. Royar hopes his YLC will sustain high engagement community far beyond the end of the IG project.

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*The names have been modified to maintain participants’ anonymity. have been modified to maintain participants’ anonymity.