



The 7th International UNESCO-NGO Forum

Which adjective could best describe the 7th international NGO-UNESCO forum held in Riyadh, 3-4 May, on the Youth and their social impact? Amazing, innovative, intense, dense, stimulating, moving and promising...

Amazing because of the number of participants (2000 registered among which 400 NGOs according to the official **forum communiqué**) and a faultless organization and logistics thanks to the working partnership with the MiSK Foundation.

Innovative because of a **Conference App** created to access the detailed and updated **programme of the forum** and vote for a poll during the ongoing **plenary and breakout sessions**: as an example, the youth could vote for the type of education they most trusted (formal education, non-formal and informal education) and the vast majority favored non formal education, thus sending a clear message on our duty to rethink education and better adapt it to the needs of the youth.

Intense because of the succession of speeches and presentations by keynote speakers and representatives from the diplomatic, institutional, academic, business, sports and the media worlds as well as from civil society.

Dense because of the varied interventions of role models and their inspiring experiences for the youth, like the CEO of Wikipedia with his own narrative of « from failures to success », galvanizing the young audience.

Stimulating thanks to the high participation of youth (70% under 35 years) ready to get engaged as volunteers or workers in an association or NGO, and determined to be the change makers.

Moving because of the personal and inspiring stories of hidden heroes/heroines from NGOs and civil society organisations, who made it despite challenges they thought they would never overcome; the pitch competition between the selected NGOs young representatives was a case in point as the young finalists had to present their projects in an extremely concise and convincing way before a thrilled audience and they were much applauded and were awarded money prizes by the Misk Foundation.

Promising because of the interactions between the official representatives and the civil society organisations, between the elder and younger generations made possible through interactive breakout sessions and a multi-cultural networking in a larger than life venue.

The UNESCO Director General Ms Irina BOKOVA's presence and her closing speech altogether gave another dimension to the forum as she raised hopes commending the forum as an example of the rapprochement of cultures and told the much impressed audience two personal stories in Afghanistan and Iraq, thus reminding us of the key role of education and culture in the empowerment of all human beings and ending on: « Use your pen as a sword » which still resonates in our minds.

As Ms Bokova said « Empowering youth is a key condition to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNESCO is making steps every day in this direction, harnessing the soft power of education, skills, culture and science to empower youth ». We now have to keep the momentum and support the youth acknowledged as change makers in the declaration, include them in our projects for sustainable development and peace.

You will thus find **the interviews and feedbacks of committed youth** and participants of the forum and I extend my thanks to Ousseynou Gueye for his support with this project with the youth.

Thank you!

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