

Ode to the Young Ones

NOON SALIH: If you had the chance to propose a solution to a pressing problem, where would you start? [pause] Would you talk it out with a friend? Would you write some words down? Or sketch it out on a napkin?

SOFIA FAGHIHY: I proposed an idea starting from a napkin sketch. So a really basic proposal that was just a sketch of my idea that was later taken through many stages and was among one of the projects that were selected to be displayed at the Expo Young Innovators exhibit.

NOON SALIH: Meet Sofia, a grade-10 student, who loves to bike.

She goes on those occasional biking hikes in Hatta, a region high in the Hajar mountains. . And Everytime she goes on a hike, she has to remain extra vigilant to keep safe. This was the main inspiration behind her innovative project, Darraja, which offers a solution to the challenge of bikers' safety around the world.

SOFIA FAGHIHY: My project's name is Darraja, which basically is a bike safety glove that aims to protect cyclists from obstacles and dangers. It combines both the ADAfruit circuit playground on the glove, which is a circuit board with many features, as well as an app and also a helmet with a built-in display to increase the safety of bikers' experience as a whole.

If you are curious about Sofia's Darraja glove, like I am, you can see it on display along with 297 other innovations at the ground floor of Terra - the Sustainability Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. Those innovations were designed and implemented by students within the Young Innovators Initiative, part of the Expo School Programme.

ALYA AI-ALI: This initiative is a true celebration of young people and the outstanding ideas that they have created. It's proof that they can dream big and see their dreams come to life.

NOON SALIH: This is Alya Al-Ali, vice president of the Expo School Programme.

ALYA AI-ALI: How are the youth part of Expo 2020, that is something that we take very, very seriously as Expo 2020 Dubai, by ensuring that the young generation are contributors through a global platform, such as Expo, by listening to their ideas and seeing things from their perspective. We're empowering them to be actively involved in shaping the schools and the communities and the world of tomorrow.

NOON SALIH: In this episode, we will see Expo 2020 Dubai from the eyes of the young ones and how they got to be key-players, stakeholders and shapers of this world event.

I'm Noon Salih, and this is Inside Expo, an official podcast of Expo 2020 Dubai, where history is being made.

[INTRO STING]

ALYA AI-ALI: The Expo School Programme is a programme and a team that is dedicated to engaging with schools across the UAE and making sure that they're really at the heart of this incredible World Expo. The establishment of the programme is a direct result of our leadership's commitment to youth and a strong belief that they are key contributors to both creating an exceptional event and a meaningful legacy as well.

NOON SALIH: The Expo School Programme is the umbrella that holds many initiatives together. All designed to suit the different age groups and interests.

One of those initiatives, the Young Innovators, received over 6,000 proposals from students between grades 1 and 12. The ideas were submitted in the form of a sketch on a napkin, just like many of the world's brightest innovations. This format was meant to put across that great ideas can also start with something as simple as a pen and a napkin.

SOFIA FAGHIHY: I was so taken aback by how excellent plans and policies and prototypes and solutions that I was seeing. And there were students who were way younger than me who had participated in this. I had submitted mine back in 2019, before COVID. So I was in grade eight. However, I saw submissions from students in grades one and two that were mindblowing, and it's just brings me so much optimism and hope to know that there are people like me, people out there who care about the planet, who care about helping other people who care about mobilizing innovation, so that we're able to overcome the problems and obstacles that you know, that caused problems all around the world.

NOON SALIH: A device that decrypts baby talk, a fog collector for safer roads, an infinite tree grower and energy-producing shoes are just a few of the prototypes designed by students, printed in 3D and displayed in the Young Innovators exhibit.

Archive

From Jazz Rockers Performance | Expo Young Stars: Who are we? We are victory. We are catalysts of change and ability. We are honorary. We are vast like the sea.

NOON SALIH: Students that are more into arts and music also have a place at Expo, and not just any place; performances created and enacted by students have been frequently taking place at Al-Wasl Plaza, the heart and soul of Expo 2020 Dubai, on the very same stage that hosted those students' favorite super stars. What you just heard is from a performance by Jazz Rockers Institute of Dance that took place in November.

ALYA AI-ALI: Another one of our initiatives is Expo Young Stars, which is another way for us to empower students through arts and music. And as a result, a hundred schools from across the UAE will be performing their own interpretation of the vision of Expo 2020 Dubai on Al Wasl stage.

MUSIC

ALYA AI-ALI: Seeing kids as young as five years old, performing on the same stage, where international artists have performed, it means so much to them. And again, it shows that there's a strong belief and commitment to their talent also.

NOON SALIH: From the day Expo 2020 Dubai opened its doors, just under half a million school students have been involved with different activities.

ALYA AI-ALI: We've developed various activities and initiatives to make sure that the educational community makes the most of this once in a lifetime opportunity.

ALYA AI-ALI: And probably one of the main initiatives that's really at the heart of what we do is the school journeys.

NOON SALIH: Schools across the UAE, both public and private, can register for school visits through the Expo website in a few easy steps.

ALYA AI-ALI: We have four incredible school journeys that are designed specifically for school students. Each Journey is a perfect combination of learning, fun, inspiration, and it's packed with mesmerizing exhibits, arts, science, technology, culture, innovation, wonder. You name it!

We've also linked our exhibits and our content to the different curricula in the UAE.

So really every student, no matter which school they attend in the UAE will be able to relate their learning material to many aspects of these journeys.

NOON SALIH: The four tailored school journeys Alya mentioned are titled Legacy of the UAE, World of Opportunities, Universe in Motion, and Sustainable Planet. A direct reflection of the UAE's rich history as well as Expo 2020 Dubai's main subthemes: Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability.

ANJUM HASAN: My school is a school with 7,000 students and staff, and almost every grade has visited. Then we were very fortunate to be part of the Majlis, which we just visited. So these are some of the wonderful trips that we had the opportunity to visit.

NOON SALIH: Anjum Hasan is the head of the biology department at Delhi School Sharjah and the Expo coordinator for her school.

Besides the journeys, Anjum says that her school took part in the "Next Gen Majlis," another Expo School Programme initiative. In the Next Gen Majlis, students participate in conversations around a variety of crucial topics and themes regarding the future.

Alt Narration: Besides the journeys, Anjum says that her school students, some of whom are on the "eco committee," or environmental action committee, took part in the "Next Gen Majlis," another Expo School Programme initiative. In the Next Gen Majlis, students participate in conversations around a variety of crucial topics and themes regarding the future.

FARIS ALMHEIRI: I was actually interested in sustainability. We did talk about it in the Majlis. And in my opinion, the Majlis, when it gathered all the youth, it really helped me look at sustainability in a different perspective. Which actually made me go deeper into the field of sustainability.

NOON SALIH: And this is Faris, a grade-11 student at Al-Ithad Public School in Abu Dhabi. Faris submitted a recorded speech as an application for the Next Gen Majlis. He was then selected to take part in the Majlis conversations with other students.

But let's take a minute here to understand what a Majlis is. An inherent element of UAE's culture, a Majlis is a space where a group of people gather to discuss current affairs or topics that matter to their lives.

FARIS ALMHEIRI: We would sit around, we would start talking about topics, and each person would have their own turn to talk about the topics that we were given and thought of. That's like a part, which I really enjoyed because I mean, you get to talk with other people, it's nice because having a group of young thoughtful creative people actually gets your brain going and makes you think of questions and things you've never thought of before, which would help you in your future.

ALYA AI-ALI: It's part of the overall World Majlis program and it fosters conversations with our nation's youth on a variety of topics and themes that matter for the future. It speaks to our older students, mainly the high school students and offers them a platform to voice their opinions, but also to be actively part of the change that they would like to see in the world.

ARCHIVE

Hayyakum Allah, first of all, in our Majlis. I want you to remember one thing: This is your conversation, so whatever you bring into this conversation is completely yours. We want to invite your thoughts, your opinion... Your honest opinion. So this could be an awkward silent moment or it could be a productive conversation with all of you.

NOON SALIH: One of the topics Faris engaged in a discussion about at Next Gen Majlis was sustainability. He introduced a project that he also submitted to the Young Innovators Initiative.

FARIS ALMHEIRI: The “Pure Marine” was made from homemade items. It actually worked fabulously. It's goal is to float on the water and it would be placed in the marinas because there would be oil spills and garbage there. It has a motor, which is at sea level. So any plastic that would float into its radius would be pulled in. And it also had a polyetherin in it, which absorbs the oil from the ships, which actually helped clean the marina.

MUSIC

NOON SALIH: The work on the Expo School Programme started many years before the actual Expo site opened its doors. According to Alya, the Expo School Programme has been in the making since 2016. Throughout the years, the Expo team visited numerous schools all around the UAE, collecting aspirations for the World Expo from student and teacher ideas. They also established long standing ties with teachers and school leaderships, who were the main inspiration behind the student activities.

ALYA AI-ALI: Teachers played a very important part of this engagement with the schools. They are, in fact, the golden thread that ties us all together. Most of our initiatives are a result of discussions and brainstorming sessions between our team and educators and teachers and the school staff here in the UAE. Because we really wanted to make sure that we reach our long-term impact and our goal, which is to empower the next generation and who better to ask than the school teachers and the educators who are in communication with those students on a daily basis.

I'll give you one example, which is the learning resources. This initiative was actually as a result of teachers expressing to us that this is something that would be very useful in their classrooms. So we went ahead and we created it, but we didn't create it by ourselves; we had 70 volunteer teachers from the UAE. Who actually helped us develop those learning resources.

ANJUM HASAN: Right from the making of the expo, there were a lot of virtual sessions, right? So my, as I said that I registered in 2019 September. And since then, every other week, every other day, there are fun-filled activities. Experiences for the students. And we keep participating though they're all virtual activities, but they take us to a world as if you were that physically mesmerized.

NOON SALIH: Anjum encourages her students to proactively engage in the activities and embody what they learn.

ANJUM HASAN: I was able to share with my class, certain images of the sustainability pavilion, and I made it a point emphasizing that they must go and visit the spot. You have to go there when you do the research project, because they have to submit a research project as part of their school. So I have made it mandatory that they must add at least one research point from expo. What was the takeaway? So every teacher in debates, English language, whether it's maths, we are all trying to incorporate the school programs.

SOFIA FAGHIHY: And that's why I really appreciate Expo 2020 and the Expo School Programme, because that's exactly the idea that it fosters. It encourages everyone to bring out the best in themselves. Propose any solution or innovation or technology that they might have under the idea that there is, there is no question, there is no proposition that is bad and anything can be a solution. And it's better to share those than to suppress them because, oh, you're too young or my

idea might not be good. Just put yourself out there and you'll find that it's rewarding.

MUSIC

SOFIA FAGHIHY: knowledge has the ability to change the world more than anything else. Because with knowledge, you're equipped with creativity, you're equipped with ideas, you're equipped with perspective that will enable you to see the world in a different way. And through Expo through my involvement in these activities, I have built knowledge and this knowledge will most certainly helped me not only equip myself with skills so that I can continue my educational career, so things like, university credits or resumes and applications.

But also once I exit the world of academia and eventually move on to a career after studying, I this experience and these initiatives that I have taken part of will just allow me to see the world from a different perspective. See the world from a perspective that is less based on me, but more based on the people around me and how I can help solve problems in their lives, how I can help the wider community and how I can make a positive impact on the rest of the world beyond the scope of my own life.

ARCHIVE

What are we? We are free. City on hills that cannot be hidden. A new generation that can't be beaten. We are possible. We are a heartbeat that can't be ceased, a fire that can't be extinguished. We are a language that ought to be expressed and warriors that won't be oppressed.

MUSIC

NOON SALIH: Inside Expo takes you behind the scenes at Expo 2020 Dubai, sharing our stories and others across the 170-year history of this global event. Learn more by visiting [VirtualExpoDubai.com](https://virtualexpodubai.com).

To learn more about the majlis in Emirati culture and at Expo 2020 Dubai, listen to Episode 18 of Inside Expo featuring Expo 2020 Dubai's Head of the World Majlis Initiative, Dr. Federica Busa.

Inside Expo is produced by Kerning Cultures Network.

We release episodes every Tuesday and Friday. Subscribe to Inside Expo on your favorite podcast app so you don't miss an episode. If you enjoyed the show, share it with your friends and leave us a review.