GYE Corruption Disruption

December 30, 2020

BEIRUT, LEBANON; TBILISI, GEORGIA; LVIV OBLAST, UKRAINE; & PORTLAND, ORE., U.S.A

Overview

At the end of November 2020, Global Youth Entrepreneurs (GYE) held its inaugural *Corruption Disruption*. GYE is a Portland-based student-led nonprofit promoting international youth entrepreneurship and exchange. Corruption Disruption brought together – over Zoom and Slack – more than 40 high school students from across Georgia, Lebanon, and Ukraine for intensive intercultural learning and to develop start-ups that address pressing social issues created or exacerbated by corruption. The participants were split roughly evenly between the three countries, and they represented a range of demographic backgrounds: 25 different high schools in 21 cities. Almost half the participants were granted partial or full financial aid to attend. The program featured opportunities to network and build community with a diverse group of youth, receive one-on-one mentorship from industry experts, engage in fast-paced business ideation, initiate real-world customer validation, practice public speaking, and experience English language immersion.

About the Event Organizers

The program was led by seven American, Georgian, Lebanese, and Ukrainian high school and university students: Lynn Abou Jaoude (Hult International Business School '24), Jackson George (Catlin Gabel School '22), Mariam Gogidze (Hult International Business School '23), Andriy Kashyrskyy (Minerva Schools at KGI '23), Li Lambert (University of Chicago '24), Britton Masback (Princeton University '24), and Aarman Pannu (University of Chicago '24) (alphabetically). We would also like to thank Diana Sobolieva (Miss Hall's School '21), Seth Talyansky (Stanford University '23), and Solomon Olshin (Pomona College '23), who supported facilitation of the event.

Bootcamp: Keynote Speakers and Group Activities

In preparation for the main weekend of the *Corruption Disruption,* a "Bootcamp" program connected the students on Sunday, November 22. At the Bootcamp, participants were introduced to the event format, spoke informally with one another, and shared their personal experiences with corruption. They discussed the specific issues they hoped to tackle during the main event, and brainstormed how best to address them. Ukraine National Agency for Corruption Prevention Deputy Head Oleksandr Starodubtsev and University College London's Professor Dr. Evangelos Markopolous joined as distinguished guests, speaking to participants about the importance of anti-corruption work and the power of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for self-actualization. After a Q&A session, the Bootcamp continued with icebreakers and breakout room discussions. The day concluded with an engaging panel session featuring two youth already accomplished in the anti-corruption sphere: USAID SACCI Youth Engagement Director Roman Tyshchenko (Kyiv, Ukraine) and activist Leen Elharake (Beirut, Lebanon).

Friday Night Ideation & Practice

The main program began on the evening of Friday, November 27, with icebreakers and team bonding exercises. Participants met their teammates and chatted about corruption-related themes that had arisen during the larger Bootcamp discussions, considering which corruption issues could be most effectively addressed by startup initiatives. Afterward, organizers led the group through an intensive, dynamic pitching exercise, introducing attendees to the GYE pitching process and getting participants excited to present in front of their peers.

The Pitching Process

Next, GYE created a breakout room for each of the prearranged teams and gave students the opportunity to pitch to their teammates the initiatives they wanted to create over the weekend. Aided by survey responses, the organizers curated demographically and academically diverse teams, each focused on a shared corruption-related theme (e.g. education or access to information). In the hopes of encouraging team independence and decision making, pitches were left largely unstructured. Every team member was given the opportunity of an initial 90 second pitch, but the deliberation and voting period afterward was left largely up to each team.

48-hour Nonstop Work Time with Mentors, Workshops

After pitching, teams immediately began work on their projects. Teams had access to continuous mentorship from leaders in business, education, and policy from Ukraine, Lebanon, and Georgia. These volunteers were a crucial part of the *Corruption Disruption*. Chosen for their diverse professional backgrounds, mentors were able to help teams construct a social media and marketing plan, develop a sound business proposal, design complex logos and applications, and more. Saturday was devoted to creating a minimum viable product (MVP), essentially the simplest form of a website, app, or physical product representing the key features of their initiative. As the MVP was developed, teams validated their products with potential customers, updating it in response to the feedback they received. Students also participated in five expert-led workshops aimed at teaching them a useful skill that could help them develop their startup including business model canvas development and working with government entities.

Sunday Night / Monday Morning Pitching and Prizes

The *Corruption Disruption* concluded with teams pitching to a panel of judges. GYE's slate of volunteer judges included two organizers, Andriy Kashyrskyy and Mariam Gogidze, and special guests Ayman Dandash, Programs and Grassroots Manager at Transparency International (Lebanon); Leen Elharake, anti-corruption activist from Lebanese American University; and Seth Talyansky, one of the co-founders of GYE. This year's *Corruption Disruption* followed a special pitching format maximizing personal interaction with judges as well as the opportunity for teams to showcase their work to the larger participant body. Each team was given 15 minutes to present their pitch deck and conduct a Q&A session with the judges. Afterward, teams gave shorter informal presentations of their work in an all-group Zoom call, while the judges deliberated. Finally, the *Corruption Disruption* closed with the announcement of prizes, a group reflection on the importance of anti-corruption work, and a photo slideshow prepared by Mariam Gogidze.

Prize Recipients
After an extremely difficult deliberation session, judges awarded Red&Blue, Domino Effect Organization (DEO), and Trust'In the top prizes. Red&Blue is an organization working to eliminate voter fraud in local elections through revamped entrance and exit polls. DEO works to give students an opportunity to speak out against corruption in education through workshops, forums, and publications. Trust'In works to educate and inspire people to fight against corruption through a website with information about local corruption, opportunities for people to interact with one another, and a simulator for practicing investigating corrupt officials. These three teams now have the opportunity to continue their work over the next six months under direct guidance from GYE organizers, before pitching to a panel of judges again in June 2021. There, the winning team will receive $1000 in grant money.

Most Valuable Participant (MVP) Prize
Three students—one from each country—were chosen as "MVPs." In the eyes of the *Corruption Disruption* organizers, these students embodied the ethos of our event and were key to the success of their teams through their enthusiasm, poise and dedication. Chadi Massoud (12th grader from Fraikeh, Lebanon), Yana Lahoda (11th grader from Enerhodar, Ukraine), and Salome Tsintsadze (10th grader from Tbilisi, Georgia) each received a certificate from GYE and $25 in Udemy course credits.

GYE *Corruption Disruption* Impact
The inaugural *Corruption Disruption* proved that students do not need to count on months-long academic exchanges or school-run pen pal programs to forge meaningful connections with peers in different countries. This model, if replicated for students in more cities and countries, can democratize cultural exchange and remove barriers to partnerships between youth across borders. The choice of Ukraine, Georgia, and Lebanon as the three sides in this event was particularly apt. In the wake of recent events in all three countries that have exposed the tragic effects of corruption, it is more critical than ever to strengthen ties between young people in our common quest for freedom, democracy, and prosperity. Given the enthusiasm and solicitude that marked all the interactions of participants, the abundant relationships formed this weekend are sure to last for much time to come. The *Corruption Disruption* has thus helped pave the way for a day that Ukrainians, Georgians, and Lebanese will no longer see each other first as foreigners but as friends.

Additional resources
GYE is compiling pictures from the program. Media will be posted to globalyouthentrepreneurs.net/corruptiondisruption. To learn more about GYE's work, please see globalyouthentrepreneurs.net.

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