

The Peace Building in Lebanon



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Special Edition

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Special supplement on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, issued in collaboration with



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News Supplement



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Children and Life in Shelters



For Every Child, Every Right

Let's Recommit to Put Children and Youth First

This special issue of the peace building news supplement is fully dedicated to children and the international treaty that mandates the fulfillment of their rights, known as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Thirty years ago, nations joined together to make an unprecedented promise to the children of the world. They pledged not only to proclaim children's rights, but to uphold them and be accountable for them.

The CRC was a landmark achievement. For the first time, governments explicitly recognized that children are born with rights. They have the right to quality standards of health and nutrition, to clean water and sanitation, to a seat in a classroom and to be safe in their homes and communities. They have also the right to express their opinions and the right to be heard.

Lebanon ratified the CRC in 1990 and, over the past 30 years, the situation of boys, girls and young people has significantly improved, in law and practice. Some examples are the establishment of the Higher Council for Childhood in 1994, which is responsible for the care and development of children in accordance with international conventions, the most recent commitment to free vaccination in all health centers and dispensaries, and the launch of the National Non-Formal Education Framework for Lebanon last year.

The UN in Lebanon, including UNICEF and UNDP, has supported Lebanon to achieve these goals. We continue working for the progress of girls, boys and the youth within the framework of the CRC and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pursuing the commitment that every child has access to every right.

As we celebrate 30 years of the CRC, it is also important to look ahead to what we must do to continue to translate rights into reality. Despite tremendous progress over the past decades, huge challenges remain for the 1.3 million children in Lebanon. Many of them are still out of school, and safe drinking water is not available to all vulnerable communities. While multiple forms of violence are breaking thousands of childhoods, girls and boys remain engaged in child labor, many girls are faced with early marriage, and a high percentage of young people are out of learning or unemployed. At the same time, children and young people across Lebanon have been coming together in the last few weeks to add their voices for a future that meets the aspirations of their generation.

As governments look to live up to their commitments, we urge them to put children and youth first. The best pathway to a better, more sustainable future for all is to invest in all children and young people today.

Across the world, and in Lebanon, children and young people are speaking up and speaking out for their rights as never before. We should take our lead from them. We must act now – with boldness and determination.

***Yukie Mokuo**

****UNICEF Representative in Lebanon**

**** Celine Moyroud**

****UNDP Resident Representative in Lebanon**

Children are One Third of Our Population and All Our Future!

Children are our future. It should be the main focus of all politics and social endeavors to provide them with appropriate living conditions and chances for a good future.

Children do have their rights. These are indispensable and a value of their own. Children have the right to live in peace and dignity.

Obtaining and securing children's rights is also an important target of the German Development Cooperation – not only in Lebanon, but in the entire world as well.

In the context of German-Lebanese development cooperation, Germany through KfW is providing funding to help the Lebanese Ministry of Education to integrate 130,000 children into the national education system in the context of the "Reaching All Children with Education Programme" (RACE), year by year.

This is accompanied by a wide range of non-formal educational activities to help children follow the national curricula, and to reach those vulnerable children, and children with disabilities who are not able to attend the national educational system at all.

Moreover, Germany is supporting the provision of

competency-based and vocational skills training for adolescents and youth, avoiding creation of a lost generation, and chances for youth.

In a parallel context, we support educational infrastructure by improving child-friendly schools and appropriate living conditions through shelters, sanitation facility, and water supply. These approaches also contribute to spreading peaceful environments at school particularly for students affected psychologically by the war by helping them recover.

Providing information, counseling and legal assistance for affected people further enhances the German engagement in Lebanon - to claim and exercise their rights, and to find durable solutions especially for ensuring children with human identity.

Let us all keep on contributing to achieve Children's rights in the future; this will help them live in dignity and to fully unfold their future potential.

Mr. Sascha Stadler

Director, German Development Bank KfW,
Lebanon

Rights that Poverty Consumes

Only the poorest envy the poor. This is the case with Syrian children in Lebanon. They certainly do not receive a quality education, especially with the loss of some of the funds allocated to their education in unusual circumstances, not for a racial reason or similar slogans raised by a number of human rights advocates in theory, without contributing, even by a simple step, to making these theories a reality, and not due to poverty and lack of funds because international organizations and institutions take care of it and pay obligations, but the reason basically lies in the absence of the surrounding atmosphere and the appropriate environment for a good education. Syrian curricula are very different from those of Lebanon, and many Syrian students are unable to keep up with local curricula. Furthermore, Lebanese teachers cannot provide quality education according to curricula they have not been trained in. The main obstacle for this lies in Lebanon's unwillingness to teach refugee children Lebanese programs, because this

encourages the process of a persuasive resettlement, since contrary to what some might think, many do not wish to return home.

Together, these points initiate profound questions about rights, most notably the right to education, which cannot be separated from an integrated basket of rights. Whereas there is no good education under complex life conditions lacking the means of a decent living, no mental health in that imperfect life, and no healthy childhood with the given circumstances, and thus the issue of human rights becomes a current subject of discussion. But the danger lies in the fact that Lebanese envy Syrians for simple services that are not available to them after poverty overtook their families and is increasing, which generates tensions between the host and the guest, which also negatively impact the right to a decent living.

Ghassan Hajjar

Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

Organized Laxity

While many Lebanese have a lot to learn in terms of education, there are some recurring themes in the press and on television, revolving around the abuse suffered by some children. In this situation, it is unfortunate to see the alarming judicial shortfall that often allows offenders to escape prosecution and remain unpunished.

It is nevertheless appalling to note that, despite the law on the free flow of information in public institutions, neither the Ministry of Labor nor the Ministry of Social Affairs have ever published any statistics, even partial, on the number of young boys and girls being dropped among cars at peak times, offering the most diverse items at competitive prices, goods which origin is often not even known.

Have the public authorities ever thought about investigating the identity of persons or entities who exploit with impunity these out-of-school minors, thrown out onto the street with the aim of soliciting the pity of the citizens? Are we aware, for example, that there are real networks organized in mafias to collect money, for the benefit of some unknown parallel economy?

Having become the all-category champion of laxity in the

face of unenforced laws, the Lebanese State also turns a blind eye to many breaches of the labor law. Since the 1975-1990 civil war, child labor, until then limited, has erupted. More than 10% of 10-17 year olds work, which puts this country at the bottom of the Middle East.

Even if the situation in the country is not the most serious, many children are forced to work to help their families. Many young boys are employed in agriculture, metallurgy or carpentry. Their working conditions are cruel and children are killing themselves for a miserable wage. However, Lebanon has signed the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Child Labour, but severely lacks the means to implement its provisions.

This is not to mention the Syrian refugees' children frequently employed by Lebanese people who subject them to poor living conditions in exchange for a meager salary. So many reforms to be carried out, in the hope of getting Lebanon out of the rut! From expectation to expectation, the country is dying of desperation...

Gaby Nasr

Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

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Safeguarding Children's Rights: Laws Implementation and Necessary Amendments

Roula Mouawad*

How do we make children's rights a reality? What is the best law application protecting them, and what are the effective ways of working according to conventions? National efforts to promote children's rights are numerous, as are conventions and treaties, but we need more to progress and meet challenges, such as implementing and performing necessary amendments to the laws to comply to international standards, and adopting the draft laws referred to the Parliament.

Moukheiber:

Former MP lawyer Ghassan Moukheiber believes that there are many conferences, committees, and theoretical speech, while the challenge remains in the implementation and application of a number of basic rights on the ground. He listed the most important challenges, the first of which is the right to education. «Lebanon has adopted the principle of compulsory education in elementary and complementary levels, and endeavored to develop the right to education, and efforts were made to build schools and develop other free, semi-free and public schools. However, two main problems remain: First, the Lebanese government is failing to pay its financial dues to free and semi-free private schools. And years of accumulated debts are threatening the disruption of these services.

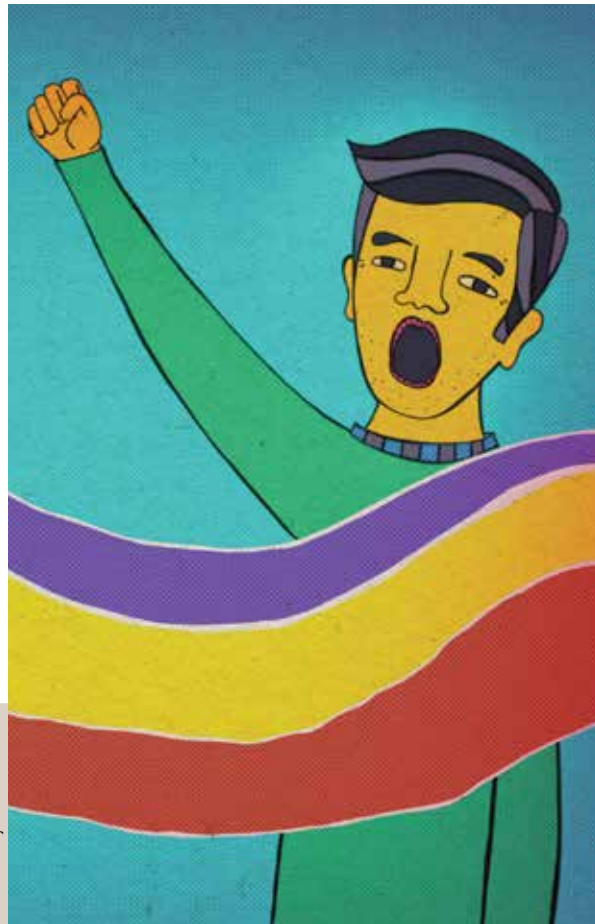
Second, a serious problem in public schools, which despite the efforts to build them, still do not cover all needs, nor the means to engage parents in registering their children in such schools in terms of incentives or fines, thus making many children out of the educational system, which threatens them and their future and violates their right to education.

And there is child labor, especially children working in the streets such as begging, which is a very widespread phenomenon, especially in the poorest areas. However, efforts are being made to raise the minimum age for child labor, but the implementation falls somewhat short in terms of pursuing the children operators or developing programs that target the cultural, social and economic incentives driving families to resort to child labor.

The third right is the protection of children at risk, and there is the Juvenile Protection Act, which needs improvement, and its amendments have not yet been adopted by parliamentary committees for more than eight years. It stipulates the prohibition of children imprisonment, meanwhile many prisons include children wards and continue to issue prison sentences. There are also few and overcrowded correctional facilities managed by associations.»

He added «In order to make children's rights a reality, we must put into effect the abovementioned main three rights, which are an entry point for other rights: The right to education, that is, the child does not work during childhood and is not subject to harm, and the protection of juveniles who are at risk of physical and sexual violence and begging, all of which are the ugliest forms of violence against children, and those are the practical required steps. The main challenges are the lack of funding, and the absence of incentives for parents such as not benefiting from the Poverty Targeting Program unless they register their children in schools, and fines.»

Key recommendations include: «Setting fines, development of public schools, payment of state obligations to schools in the educational sector, strict monitoring of institutions that employ children, development of a law to protect juveniles at risk, interruption of juvenile imprisonment, development of correctional centers, their curricula and the quality of their services, not only in Beirut but in all regions, accelerating



the adoption of a law prohibiting the marriage of minors, where there is a law to raise the age of marriage to 18 years, and another still under discussion to raise it to 16 years but with restrictions and under supervision of the juvenile judge, and the adoption of a unified personal status law that protects minors, especially in matters of custody, surveillance and escort, and the right of Lebanese women to give nationality to their children, and all problems associated with statelessness.»

Mikhael:

The former Secretary-General of the Higher Council for Childhood, Dr. Elie Mikhael, transformed the commitment to the text and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 into a daily article of discussion on various issues of childhood among all parties concerned with the rights of the child. He said: «14 committees of the Higher Council for Childhood were established, representing the relevant ministries, influential actors, Community-Based Organizations, universities and the private sector, to coordinate on the recommendations of the International Convention, namely, strengthening partnerships, and each committee worked on a plan of action to implement them. For example, in 2012, the Committee for the Prevention of Violence was able to endorse the National Strategy for Child Protection and Prevention against All Forms of Violence, as a result of the

stakeholders' collaboration, children's participation and dialogue with them and other actors, which was praised by the International Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, which considered that Lebanon was a model in creating a working dynamic for children. The Department of Women, Family and Childhood of the Arab League also called for Lebanon's experience to be considered a model for all Arab countries. The administration of the Council was not a traditional administration, we rather became a regulatory framework for public policies on children such as protection and child labor, street children, quality of education and school drop-outs, integration of children, enhance their participation, protection from the Internet, in a collaborative work style. One of the most prominent programs is the completion of a draft legal study comparing Lebanese laws and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions. As a result of the study, there are currently about 20 new draft laws to ensure full compliance of Lebanese laws with the provisions of international agreements, in cooperation with Saint Joseph University, confirming the principle of the academic sector partnership in the various issues of the Council.»

Dr. Mikhael spoke about the establishment of a «Documentation and Information Center for Childhood in Ain El-Remmaneh, which contains studies, laws and projects that have been implemented, and an interactive website to make it easier for children to access and obtain the desired information.

One of the pilot projects is the child-friendly municipalities, where the local level has the capacity to implement projects and programs that children are involved in designing and executing. And one of the key achievements is the efficient role the Center initiated in the rejection of violations and their follow-up with the competent local authorities. The Council has trained «Young Media» children in media communication, participation and interaction skills, with a weekly activity in specialized conferences, and has produced several educational materials to promote children's culture and knowledge of their rights in an easy and understandable language. And we have established a code of ethics for media coverage of childhood issues.»

He pointed to the main challenges: «Lack of funding to secure economic and social rights, and the biggest challenge is the lack of planning, programming and the adoption of integrated social policies. Another challenge is the free hotline for children to file complaints, as it allows children to express their complaints in order to ensure their protection and transfer to the care and assistance agencies, in addition to the importance of having an integrated strategy for implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.»

Key recommendations include: «A clear strategy and establishment of a special law on the rights of the child, follow-up efforts in building the capacity of professionals working on childhood issues, and making childhood issues a priority for officials.»

The Burden of Violence

Bernard Gerbaka*

Child abuse and neglect [CAN] is a global health, social and economic problem.⁽¹⁾ Violence against children [VAC] is also a public health, human rights, and social problem, with potentially devastating and costly consequences.⁽²⁾ Its destructive effects harm children in every country, impacting families, communities, and nations, and reaching across generations; it is included within the UN legal frame of violence against children.⁽³⁾ It is still present in all societies⁽⁴⁾ and cultures,⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾ despite the presence of specific structures for detection and protection.⁽⁷⁾ It's a tragic yet preventable public health problem across the world⁽⁸⁾.

The Increasing Plight and the insufficient Response

In the 1990s, it was estimated that only 10% of children in danger of abuse received appropriate support⁽⁹⁾ and had appropriate management, in terms of alert and disclosure.⁽¹⁰⁾ Currently, based on WHO resources, still only a limited number of children that are exposed to maltreatment have a thorough follow up⁽¹¹⁾. It is pertinent to note that educations institutions, like nurseries and schools, have poor medico-social structures that are relevant to child maltreatment and therefore do not seem to be able to play a decisive role in the detection and reporting of child abuse,⁽¹²⁾ while such abuse is overwhelmingly



© Artwork by Mona Abi Wardle

committed inside and outside families.⁽¹³⁾ The percentage of children exposed to violence has also dramatically increased by the plight of refugee children.

Within the growing turmoil of unsafe environments for many children around the Globe, migrating and displaced children are at risk of some of the worst forms of abuse and harm. Often dependent on human smuggling, they can easily fall victim to traffickers and other criminals. Many are subjected to extreme forms of abuse and deprivation during their journeys. In the recent years, nearly 50 million children have migrated around the world, across borders or been forcibly displaced – and this is a conservative estimate. More than half of these girls and boys fled violence and insecurity – 28 million in total. These children may be refugees, internally displaced or migrants, but first and foremost, they are children: no matter where they come from, whoever they are, and without exception.

In all circumstances and all livelihoods, unhappy children are a stigma of failed humanity.

Children in armed conflicts are killed, mutilated, kidnapped, displaced, ill-treated, neglected, persecuted, exploited, trafficked, impoverished, separated, forced to labor.

Children do not bear any responsibility for

the bombs and bullets, the gang violence, persecution, the shriveled crops and low family wages driving them from their homes. They are, however, always the first to be affected by war, conflict, climate change and poverty.

Children in these contexts are among the most vulnerable people on earth and this vulnerability is only getting worse. The number of child refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate has more than doubled in just 10 years – this shocking statistic is simply unacceptable.

According to a recent CDC study published in Pediatrics, most of deaths are preventable⁽¹⁴⁾ and more than half the world's children – that's a billion kids between the ages of 2 and 17 years – experienced some type of violence in the past year⁽¹⁵⁾.

What must we do?

Recognizing the pervasive and unjust nature of CAN and VAC, almost all nations (196) ratified the 1989 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes freedom from violence as a fundamental human right of children. Now, over 25 years later, the UN

has launched a new Agenda for Sustainable Development to end all forms of violence against children.⁽¹⁶⁾

Many of those Sustainable Development Goals 2030 are relevant to the aim of ending violence on youth and children⁽¹⁷⁾. New partnerships should capitalize on this momentum – and on growing appreciation of the toxic effects of violence on the developing mind.

The Global Partnership to End Violence against Children has a critical role to play in helping the world achieve Global target 16.2. This book is part of such a strategy.⁽¹⁸⁾ It is also a training tool. The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) has developed modules and curriculum materials to support its mission of creating sustainable child abuse and neglect systems of prevention, protection and treatment throughout the world.⁽¹⁹⁾

Professionals from social services, law enforcement and the courts are also welcome and encouraged to participate in this curriculum.⁽²⁰⁾ The scope of the curriculum is medical in nature, so it will teach these professionals a wide range of information and skills they need in their specific roles of children protection; it will also provide, based on a multicultural pool of resources, a valuable knowledge base of medical and psychosocial issues, so health professionals [but also in other relevant sectors] can have a better understanding of how best to help children.⁽²¹⁾

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Listen to the Children and the Youth!

Nadine Labaki*

For the first time of my life I let myself be carried away.
For the first time of my life I follow a direction without asking.
For the first time of my life I don't think of any potential danger.
I let myself be carried away by their voices and hopes.
They inspired me.
The youth inspired me!
During this beautiful revolution that Lebanon is witnessing, I have seen children and young people in the streets of Beirut raising their voices for a better future and I was stunned by their way of expression and their pacifism and so I let myself be carried away.
The voices of the new generation need to be heard. We need to listen to them and make things right for them, they are critical to shaping the future and they want to contribute to the solutions that the country is demanding. Solutions must ensure that every young person can access

education and development opportunities. Solutions must guarantee that every child enjoys their right to a childhood. No boy or girl should be left behind, at high risk of abuse or exploitation, deadly preventable diseases or out of school.

In Capharnaüm, Zain was feeling «invisible» like an «insect». He represents only one of many broken childhoods that we see in the streets of Lebanon – sometimes selling gum, sometimes flowers, sometimes carrying heavy loads, forced by life to experience hunger, abuse, exploitation, violence, lack of protection, disease, constant fear for their life...

It is our responsibility to change this reality. We cannot adapt to this situation. Each of the achievements for child rights that we are celebrating, must reach every girl and every boy, wherever they are and regardless of their condition. We all have the power to do something. Let's give them back their childhood. Now is the time to

re-commit, and to address the very real challenges that too many children and youth of the 21st century face. This is the moment for our generation to listen to their voices and demand that our politicians, our governments, our business leaders, the international community and our communities fulfill their commitments and deliver real action for children now.

Recently, as the world is celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we need to remind ourselves that the next generation is dreaming of a country that reflects their aspirations for equal rights for all. We must not lose this opportunity as we won't have a second chance. WE owe it to them and to their dreams for a better Lebanon.

** Filmmaker and UN supporter for the children and youth's rights*

Planting the Seeds of Revolution

Maysaa Ajjan*

The presence and participation of youth and students in the October Revolution marked an important precedent in the form and content of civil protest movements.

A lot of parents who turned up to protest for the rights of their children made it a point to bring their children along, and to explain to them what a revolution is exactly.

«This will teach our children what they will not learn in a classroom,» Lina Daouk-Öyry, an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Olayan School of Business (OSB) at AUB, and a mother of two, told An-Nahar. «I am the mother of two non-Lebanese children who do not have the right to the Lebanese nationality, despite being born and raised in Lebanon,» added Daouk-Öyry, who is married to a Finnish gentleman.

Daouk-Öyry was not alone in protesting for her rights to pass the nationality to her children and spouse. Sylvana Ghandour-Barrois, a mother of two who is married to a French gentleman, also joined the protest. «I am here for the rights of my children. They are both young, and they have a lot of questions at this stage in their lives. They are starting to question everything,» she said.

But the right to the nationality was not the only reason why Daouk-Öyry and Ghandour-Barrois turned up for the protests. They were part of a larger circle of parents who joined every morning the protests and participated in the cleaning initiatives, as well as the Storytelling and Arts N' Crafts initiative, which, through fun activities and techniques that center around the concept of patriotism, aim to instill a sense of citizenship in the children.

«These initiatives are very important educational experiences for the children. It's important for the parents to let their children participate in the revolution because this is the revolution that will shape their future,» says Daouk-Öyry, who co-organizes several classes for the children.

However, not all parents have the luxury to participate in «the tent», as it is now known- but that does not deter them from showing up with their children and heading to the square that is closest to them.

«It's the first time I hear of a tent dedicated to children's activities, and I wish we had such a tent in Tripoli,» 38-year-old Fatme Al Dirani, mother of three, told An-Nahar. «But that will not stop me from bringing my children with me every day to [the protests] and from explaining to them what is it exactly that we are fighting for.» Al Dirani admits that explaining the revolution to her children was «no easy feat», but the urge to have them understand her situation was stronger than the urge to «leave them as they are, with no clue of what's happening around them.» Her son Ahmed, who is seven, had some basic questions that she

© Cartoon by Lina Daouk-Öyry, Associate Professor at the American University of Beirut and activist



found difficult to answer. «He asked me questions like «what is a revolution?» and «what are we fighting for?» and «why can't we swim in the sea?» These were all difficult to answer.»

In fact, almost all parents that An-Nahar spoke to stressed the importance of using games and special techniques to bring the concept of the revolution closer to their children. Faten Merashly, the mother of a 17-year-old son who suffers from autism, used charts and cardboards to explain to her son what the protests were all about. «Even if Mahmoud [my son] has autism, that doesn't mean he can't conceptualize what a revolution is,» Merashly, who famously brought her son with her to the revolution, told An-Nahar.

«When people stand up for their rights, they unconsciously teach their children to do the same, which is a beautiful

thing,» Daouk-Öyry said.

School and university students also took part in the protests. If children needed any guidance in interpreting what a revolution is, then school students certainly took the bull by the horns, taking to the streets and marching with the older university students from one university to another, chanting slogans of anti-corruption and anti-government.

Ahmed Fallah, a 13-year-old sixth-grader, said to An-Nahar that his dad has to work two jobs so he can get an education, which «wasn't fair». «My father works a lot and the [managers] barely pay him,» Ahmed told An-Nahar. «Why must he work so hard to educate me? Education must be free.»

It should be noted that primary education is free and compulsory in public schools by law in Lebanon. Another student, 14-year-old Ali, complained of the tangible difference in quality education between the public and private schools. «I'm currently in a public school,» Ali told An-Nahar. «I always hear that private schools are better. Why must it be like that? Public schools belong to the government- they should be stronger.»

16-year-old Rania, who resides in Sidon and who did not wish to be known by her real name, told An-Nahar that, on Wednesday, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth-grade students met outside her school at 7:30 am and headed to the city's main protest area, the Elia Crossing. «We are on the streets to provide ourselves with a better future because most of us are graduating without any job opportunities and are forced to leave the country,» she told An-Nahar.

Many of Rania's friends passionately echoed her sentiments by marching across all of Lebanon, electrifying the country with their chants and slogans. «Thawra! Thawra! Thawra!» They chanted.

As for university students, their requests centered around finding work in a country that has one of the highest employment rates in the Arab world. «All what we are asking for is the right for a decent job after graduation,» 20-year-old Qussai told An-Nahar angrily. «We have the right to a secure future where we can help our families and not be a burden to them.»

The student's voices did not go unheard, as several media outlets named their two-day-protest as one of the largest student demonstrations to go down in Lebanon's history.

** Journalist at Annahar newspaper*

Lebanon Revolts with an Eco-Friendly Attitude

Sandra Abdelbaki*

In an attempt to portray Lebanon in the «cleanest» and most «environment-friendly» way possible, Lebanese protesters have taken the cleanup initiatives to another level in what has come to be known as the Lebanese October Revolution.

Garbage and scattered discarded water bottles were all one can see on the streets of Lebanon on the first night of the revolution. Yet, what has been quite dazzling is that the morning of the day after, the protestors woke up to clean streets with not a single cigarette butt in sight.



During the past three weeks of the revolution, hundreds and even thousands of Lebanese citizens coming from different age groups and backgrounds came together to clean the streets every morning before the first chant is even heard.

While many Lebanese begin their day with protesting and closing roads, Peter Mouracade, founder of Beirut Marathon NGO, begins his day holding a bag on his back and wearing gloves in his hands. When asked about the motive that drove him to start cleaning, Mouracade's answer would be really simple: «We aim for a civilized revolution». «I turned on the TV the night of the revolution, and after I saw the damage that has happened, I couldn't sleep», Mouracade said. «The next morning, I woke up and went down to the Martyrs' Square, and I started cleaning», he added.

The initiative has started with around 10 people only on the second day of the revolution. From 10 people to 100, it has reached more than 1000 people cleaning the streets every single morning. As the revolution grew by the day, the cleanup initiatives have also developed to be more organized. It expanded to a group called «muwatin lebnene» which translates in

English into «Lebanese citizen». The group identifies the initiative simply as a «collective action of individual Lebanese citizens driven by civic duty and social responsibility». And as randomly and spontaneously as it started in Beirut, it has spread to other Lebanese cities and grew exponentially over social media.

Each day the volunteers would start cleaning in the morning and the collected trash would be sorted and recycled at the end of the day in collaboration with NGOs such as Arcenciel, Recycle Lebanon...

In only 10 days, 10.3 tons of trash were sorted, only 10% of trucks were sent to Landfills, 5000 volunteers came together, and half a million cigarette butts were collected to be turned into paddleboards. The cleanup initiatives, during this revolution, have provided an opportunity for the demonstrators to feel more active as citizens and have reinforced their civic engagement in their country. Not only that- it has also raised awareness among the Lebanese about recycling and sorting. In fact, it has become noticeable that the Lebanese attitudes, in general, have become more eco-friendly over the years and that has been proven to be right in today's revolution, according to

Mouracade.

«People have become more aware of the importance of living in a clean environment», Mouracade said. «This initiative will stay ongoing and I believe we were able to set a good example for the government and not wait for the government to do so.»

Not only have the youth and grownups been involved in this initiative, but children have also been taking part in the cleanups.

Lina Daouk-Öry, an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at the American University of Beirut, believes that engaging the children and parents in such initiatives is also as vital.

«We should expose the children to such activities at an early age. It's our duty to encourage them to be part of the revolution in a positive way through recycling and other civic activities because at the end of the day, this revolution is for their future», Daouk-Öry said.

Teaching children to care for the environment is an ongoing learning process that needs to start at an early age. This has pushed Daouk-Öry to encourage some parents to take their children to the streets and start cleaning and recycling.

Maya Abouchalbak, a mother of two young girls, also stressed the importance of involving her daughters in cleanup initiatives because it encourages them to get used to such principles at an early age and provides them with a chance to develop their citizenship skills and civic engagement. In fact, according to the national scientific council on the developing child, implementing citizenship principles in children at a young age is like an investment in the future generation because children are the foundation of a sustainable community.

«They shouldn't be afraid of the revolution. Instead, they should learn how to add a positive contribution to it», Daouk-Öry added.

If the Lebanese citizens have been described as «peaceful» and «civilized» after this revolution, they have proven to be «eco-friendly» as well.

«I think this revolution has shown, not only to Lebanon but also to the world, that we know how to revolt in a very civilized manner», said Hanin Haidar Ahmad, one of the young protesters who have been part of the cleaning initiatives since day one.

*Journalist at Annahar newspaper

An anthology of 39 poems and stories from the «Haneen» book written by Syrian children living in informal tented settlements across Lebanon, interpreted by Lebanese and Syrian artists.

Returning

to rebuild you, my beloved
homeland
Returning
to kiss the willow and the olive
trees
To you, a love scented with life
and peace
and layers upon layers of hidden
yearning
We shall return.

JAMAL HASSANI
Aleppo - Age 13



Numbers

10-9 my classroom number
16 my tent number
26 my camp number
3 my classroom desk number
5 my appointment number
3212576 my United Nations card number
A never ending list of numbers
A list that bothers me
And causes me distress.
Back in Syria,
I only saw those numbers in math textbooks
A subject I used to love,
But now, I hate it.
It's suffocating me day after day
My mother has become a number
My father, another number
My sister, my brother, myself, numbers
... numbers ...
And we count the days numbly
Just numbers rolling by
And I wait hopefully
For another number
Of a day that is yet to come
When I will be told
We're going home, to our country
Then, I will erase these numbers
And carry my identity,
Syria's identity.
We no longer feel human,
We are robots, with numbers, and no names.

SHOKRI ASKAR
Aleppo - Age 13



The Game of Running Away from Death

The Drowning of Innocent Childhood in Syrian Eyes

When I remember Syria or Syria's children, the only image that comes to me is that sad and painful picture of a Syrian child, its suffering painted in the blood of the merciless Syrian conflict.
The war has stolen children's right to live in peace and safety, or to play and learn in schools, as these have been totally destroyed.
Syria has become a military zone, giving lessons in death and revealing a culture of killing on students'

desks.
The war has stripped childhood of its basic rights, so the biggest dream of a child in Syria, is staying alive. And its favorite hobby is running fast due to sudden bombing. Running away to a safe or a safer place.
They only know one game, everyone takes part in.
The game of running away from death.
Perhaps the image of the Syrian

child drowning on Turkish shores, will reflect the extent of the suffering that has moved the whole world.
Syrian childhood's innocence drowned with that child, and the future of an entire generation went down with it.
So save what is left of Syria's children.

FADI AL-AHMAD
Aleppo - Age 13



The Cold

We used to live in our country, safe.
And then we were displaced to Lebanon,
because of war.
I hate winter.
Sitting in our tent, in the harsh cold,
the storm beating the tent's side walls,
making dreadful sounds.
Every day, my dad used to gather some wood
and cardboards for warmth.
In Syria, I was never cold,
or scared, of winter sounds.
I used to love wintertime,
but now, no longer.
Last winter, children died of cold.
This winter,
I am afraid it will be my turn to go,
or one of my siblings and friends.
My God, take us back to our country Syria,
where we are safe and warm.

FATIMA AL-TAMER
Idlib - Age 10



© Artwork by Fares Cachoux



© Artwork by Laila Hamzeh

Innocent Questions

Am I not a child?!
Do I not have a child's innocence?
And ambitions?!
And that love and purity?
Why do I not live like them?
By what right does my dream get lost?
And with it, my safety?
Who stole my country's tenderness?

And who traded safety for death?
But I will earn back my rights, despite the sorrows
For love, truth, and kindness,
Over oppression shall prevail.

SHAIMA' ALOUSH
Homs - Age 12

May God Help my Country

Bitterness after bitterness
How and where to
Is this story going?
Oppressed souls, broken hearts,
And memories of people
On forsaken house walls.
To whom shall we tell our story?!!!!
Over whom shall we cry?!!
Bitterness again.
A hint of hope.
And we say, we only have God,
He knows how the story goes.

TAGHREED EZZEDINE
Homs - Age 14



© Artwork by Amandine Brenas

Promoting the Right to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon: Pathways for a «No Lost Generation»

Bassel Akar* - Al Hasnaa Keftaro**

Individuals who have sought refuge in Lebanon due to forced displacement from war or persecution, endure various human rights violations. The most vulnerable segment pertains to refugee children who receive limited access to quality education and rehabilitation from war-related trauma. Of the 666,491 school-aged Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, only 42% are in formal schooling, as 10% are in non-formal education programs and as 48% do not have access to any education (UNHCR, 2019). The limited access to education and rehabilitation, combined with their poor emotional wellbeing, economic marginalization and violence-ridden environments, can detrimentally impact the entire generation. This paper includes a framework that defines children's right to education, the key efforts implemented to improve the educational wellbeing of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon as well as the challenges that hamper this feat.

The Right to Education

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; United Nations, 1989) is a legally-binding instrument ratified by all countries except the USA. The CRC stipulates that children possess a right to free, safe primary education that upholds the principles of mutual respect and sustainable living (Article 22). Additionally, vulnerable children, such as victims of violence or forced displacement, are entitled to special protection (Article 22) and interventions to recover in an «environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child» (Article 39). Tomaševski (2001) argues that children have a right to an education that is accessible, available, acceptable and adaptable. The International Network for Education in Emergencies identify detailed educational practices, like problem solving and coping skills, to allow children to «make informed decisions about how to survive and care for themselves and others in dangerous environments» (INEE, 2010, p. 2).

Responses: Systems and approaches

National education systems in host countries often aim to provide displaced children with their right to education by establishing systems of governance and fostering intercultural relationships between refugees and host communities (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). Significant efforts in Lebanon have been made to support academic achievement and psychosocial development of Syrian refugee children. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon (MEHE; 2016) with support from international donors and UN agencies developed the Reaching All Children with Education strategy framework (RACE I 2014-16) followed by RACE II (2017-21). The RACE strategy documents target all children in Lebanon from the ages of 3 to 18. RACE II identifies three fundamental pillars in creating sustainable quality education: improved access to education, improved quality of learning and teaching and strengthened governance systems. Under RACE, the MEHE opened afternoon shifts in its public schools, which have increased the capacity of formal and non-formal schooling. The number of second shift schools surged from 88 in 2013 to 346 in 2018 (UNHCR, 2019). MEHE has also invested in workshops for teachers,

school rehabilitation initiatives, transportation services and classroom supplies. To a national education system exhausted by limited resources, civil society and international organizations have provided some relief through non-formal education (NFE) for Syrian refugees. NFE programs vary; some provide learning support before the second shift in public schools starts, vocational training or expressive arts to address traumas and promote emotional well-being (Akar & Van Ommering, 2018; Karam, Monaghan, & Yoder, 2016).

Cultural barriers

Various roots limit Syrian refugee children's access to a quality education in Lebanon, such as the climate of survival, marginalization and domestic violence. Refugee children are often victims of domestic violence and bullying at school. A social ecology of structural and direct violence exacerbates stress in children; sustained chronic stress levels hinder neurological functions for critical thinking and language learning (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014 [2005]). In an attempt to address this, the MEHE and UNICEF extended the «Child Protection Policy in Schools» in 2018 to provide safety measures at home.

Another root stems from the limited resources and systems of governance already prevalent in the national education system that compound the issues in adapting education for vulnerable children. Staring with pre-school, approaches to early childhood education in Lebanon are mostly grounded in staged theories of development (e.g. Piaget), which, according to Walsh (2005) is irrelevant to understanding human growth for early years. Pre-school education in Lebanon largely mimics the first grade through its [over]emphasis on learning literacy and numeracy. Interviews with kindergarten teachers and observations in their classrooms suggest that the core aim of reading and writing encourages pedagogies that can undermine children's trust in self-constructed knowledge (Abu El-Haj, Kaloustian, Bonet, & Chatila, 2018) and neglect the foundations of brain architecture necessary for building healthy relationships, emotion management, executive functions and regulating stress (Akar, Amr, & Chen, 2017).

Qualified teachers are also scarce as only 23.5% of public school teachers possess a degree recognized as a teaching qualification (CERD, 2019). Moreover, the surge in short-term contractual hiring of teachers in public schools led to a «significant over-supply of under-qualified teaching staff in public schools» (MEHE, 2016, p. 8). Activities under RACE II have attempted to address this by providing professional development workshops.

Other challenges are derived from the rampant corruption in Lebanon which impacts the budgets allocated to the educational sector. Sectarian tensions have also influenced the treatment of refugees, even in organizational settings (El-Ghali, Alameddine, Farah, & Benchiba, 2019).

Conclusions and new directions

Nevertheless, Lebanon's pursuit to ameliorate its public education sector has attained various milestones. Future

endeavors should consider how to further integrate Syrian refugee children into the Lebanese society to mitigate social tensions and improve their sense of self-efficacy. The MEHE could further strategize with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and the Ministry of Social Affairs to enhance capacities of government agencies when responding to the education crisis (El-Ghali, Ghalayini, & Ismail, 2016). These directions can support existing measures for the overall wellbeing of Syrian refugee children and vulnerable host community children. Consequently, this should generate hopes and aspirations for the future, safeguard their human potential and help prevent a lost generation for the region.

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Enhance implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through Placemaking

Rony Jalkh*

When the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child met for its first formal session in September/October 1991, it highlighted the general principles that were to help in the interpretation and guide the implementation of the Convention. The four principles are 1. Non-Discrimination, 2. The best interests of the child, 3. The right to survival and development, 4. The views of the child.

In 2015, the role of public spaces received unprecedented recognition by including a target in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, SDG 11 target 7, which commits to «Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities».

Public spaces can have different roles and can be used in a variety of ways by all the segments of the population. Yet, they are often referred to as «the poor man's living room» as they have particular importance for marginalized and vulnerable groups, especially children. In spite of being open and accessible in theory, most of these public spaces end up being sites for discrimination, unsafety, and exclusion, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as children.

Do public spaces currently play an important role in promoting inclusion, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as children? Can Placemaking support enhancing the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child? **Placemaking is both a philosophy and a process:**

Placemaking is a participatory approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces. It involves both looking carefully at a place, and observing and listening to the people, who live, work, and play there, all in an effort to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for the place with the aim of creating a good public space that promotes a community's well being and social inclusion.

The answer to the question on how Placemaking can contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child lies in how Placemaking can give a practical dimension to the four general principles:

1. Non-Discrimination

As expressed in Article 2:1 «States parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, poverty,



Children drawing a participatory mapping for their Neighborhood in Tripoli

disability, birth or other status.»

Placemaking creates inclusive places that aim to reduce discrimination and social tensions among segregated communities. The concept of inclusive public spaces does not only mean designing a place that can include different community groups but also how to involve these groups in planning and designing these spaces in ways that lead to social inclusion.

2. Best interests of the child

Children need special support to be able to enjoy their rights fully as formulated in Article 3:1. «In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institution, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.» Placemaking promotes good governance and improves the awareness of local authorities and communities on the importance of ensuring the participation of all community groups especially the most vulnerable ones such as children. Placemaking helps bridging local actors and encourages them to work collectively

for the best interest of the child and his right to have safe and child-friendly places within the city.

3. The right to survival and development

It is the most directly related to children's economic and social rights and it is formulated in Article 6:2 and states that: «State Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child».

Placemaking highlights the importance of public spaces as drivers of social and economic development, enhancing safety and security and favoring social interaction. Placemaking promotes good public spaces that improve the physical and mental health of children by encouraging physical activity, reducing stress and providing a calming environment.

4. The views of the child

The principle is formulated in Article 12:1 which states that «States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child

being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.»

As a people-centered approach, Placemaking involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions to people to discover needs and aspirations. Often, children are the main participants in the community within the Placemaking process and thus highly contribute to envisioning public spaces. Children naturally tend to better express their views and interests in relation to public spaces and thus it is crucial and logical to listen to and respect their views.

The Placemaking experience in revitalizing public spaces as a collaborative community process, allows the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to materialize in a physical space where it can be implemented and more importantly foster social inclusion. Improving access to good public spaces for the most vulnerable urban residents is a powerful tool to improve equality, promote inclusion and combat discrimination.

* Activist and Practitioner of Placemaking

Outside the Bubble

Tahani Nassar*

It was the first time I went to a Lebanese school. From a young age I have only studied in Palestinian schools. My fellow classmates, my teachers, the principal, even the shopkeeper in the school playground was Palestinian. Everything around me was Palestinian: the dialect, the flag on one of the walls, the articles on the wall magazine, the songs and dances we practiced for school celebrations, even the childish messages and comments written with colored pens on the toilet doors were Palestinian.

All this has changed. From the first moment I set foot inside Omar Farroukh Public School, everything seemed different. I knew then that I was out of my comfort zone which even seemed like a flying gas bubble, gone with a blink of an eye. The assistant principal greeted me with a glimpse all the way from the administration door to the concrete edge on which I was sitting alone. She approached me, pointing to the Palestinian Hattah (Keffiyeh) hanging from my shoulders to my waist, saying, «What's this?» She meant that I was violating the school's rules that prohibit the display of political symbols on campus. Yet at the time, I thought she didn't know the black and white patterned cloth. My naivety pushed me, to explain to her in my own vocabulary about the uses of the Hattah and its symbolism to the Palestinian people, but she ordered me to remove it and not bring it back again. I was so angry given that I was so proud to wear it on my first day because it was a gift sewn by a friend of my grandmother «Sawda».

I grabbed the left hanging end of the Hattah, folded it gently, and locked it in the school bag. My heart was beating so turbulently, and I felt something inside me break. The sound of the bell was different. I walked towards the students who lined up in the courtyard within seconds. One teacher helped me find my class and made me stand in the front. The principal greeted us welcoming the new school year, and then music rang all over the place, and the voice of all the students rose, chanting: «Kullunā lil watan, lil 'ulā lil 'alam, Mil'u 'ayn iz-zaman, sayfunā wal qalam» (All for the country, for the glory and flag, our valor and our writings are the envy of the ages). I knew that this was the Lebanese national anthem, as I knew its words from the national education lesson. Although I studied at UNRWA schools for Palestinians, the curriculum was mostly Lebanese. - Yet my country is not Lebanon! So why are students staring at me for being silent while they stand up for the anthem? I was standing there, feeling as if my original nationality and my homeland culture were stolen from me in this tight space. Other teenagers were unintentionally exerting a sort of social pressure on me, so I turned around my lips moving like everyone else and singing to the Lebanese flag.

No one in class called me by my name; I was «the new student» for students as well as for teachers. That's how they recognized me and addressed me. That day, I couldn't blend in class because I was so busy figuring out why I was being treated like this. Was it because of my different nationality and culture? Difference is not a problem. It is rather a right. This is what I learned with my sister in one of the awareness seminars we attended at one of the Non-Governmental Associations in

Illustration from the story «Em Yasser wa Koub el Halib» ©2020 from the book «Hekayat Setti» (©2018, Dar Al Furat)



the camp about children's rights. My right to my name, nationality and identity must be protected in accordance with Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Palestinian Hattah/Keffiyeh is part of my identity. - Although I was convinced of what I have learned, but what happened to me made me angry. I went back that day to Burj El Barajneh camp furious. I thought about leaving school, but it was impossible, because I'm the one who asked to move to a new school. I threw my bag at the house entrance door violently. My grandmother, Sawda, was sitting in the center of the house facing the open gate, inspecting the red chili peppers lined up on a sheet on the floor. She raised her head slightly and called me, «Hey, mischievous girl, why did you throw your bag this way? Did something bad happen?» I gave her the Hattah back and told her I wouldn't need it anymore. She screamed at me with her usual voice because she thought it meant nothing to me. So I explained to her and told her what happened at school and how the assistant principal scolded me and made me hide the Hattah, and added «they even wanted me to become Lebanese, they didn't put the Palestinian anthem, only the Lebanese!». Grandmother Sawda laughed at me, for my overreaction and asked me to

bring her the hand pepper grinder from under the staircase. She took it from me and put a pot under the grinder strainer, then started shoving the dried pepper pieces into its nozzle. «Now I want to show you that you are the one who made a mistake today,» she said coldly while I was stunned after hearing her last sentence, and because she knew me well -the only granddaughter who received the honor of a bedtime story years ago- she added: «Be quiet until I finish».

Sawda taught me that what happened was normal. Why would they play the Palestinian anthem in a Lebanese public school? Do UNRWA schools repeat the words of the Lebanese anthem every morning? Moreover, participating with them does not mean that I lost my identity or became Lebanese. According to her, «You are of a Palestinian descent inherited from your ancestors, from Kweikat, the village of your grandfather and grandmother. That's something no one can take from you because it is in your blood. Everyone in this vast world, my dear grandchild, has a country, an identity, and traditions that resemble him, which he must preserve.» Adding that we have been living in Lebanon since the Nakba, and it is good that the two cultures get mixed because this enriches both of them, citing

my grandfather's shop outside the camp, where he deals with Lebanese and customers of different nationalities. That day, my grandmother, did not forget, of course, to mention my mother's parents, who had acquired the Lebanese nationality due to political naturalization circumstances, but who still lived in the camp with their close ones. Sawda's words made me realize that my lack of awareness is the real reason behind my anger. I was ashamed of my inappropriate behavior in front of her, but she noticed my red cheeks and concluded: «Your name is Tahani Nassar, no one calls you other than by your name. Before you go and change your clothes, remember that the Hattah is not a political symbol, tell the teacher that your grandfather used to wear it on his head while working in the land of Kweikat.»

That day I learned a lot. Sawda has always been a good teacher, despite her strict personality and sharp nature, which most family members and perhaps neighbors could not bear. I ask myself today, would I have become who I am now, if it weren't for her wisdom and the camp that shaped my national identity awareness? It was not easy for my ancestors who crossed the Palestinian-Lebanese border on foot in 1948 seeking a safe haven for their children. Perhaps the camp, and for many reasons, is not an ideal place for a child. - Yet it certainly was for me and my generation a place that provided us with our obvious rights as children, considering it was a safe place where we grew up on its soil, and between its narrow alleys and humble quarters, playing the «zahfa» and running behind a Kaak-seller's cart who forgot to give us a handful of thyme wrapped in thin paper. In the camp, the houses' doors remained open since the morning, and passers-by could see the residents gathered around a morning coffee talk or an afternoon teacup. The walls of the camp are filled with drawings and sayings that contributed to strengthening our identity, from the full map of Palestine listing the names of the displaced villages and towns of upper Galilee, to the image of Hanzala, who was our friend when we were his age and endured our wickedness the day the wax crayons melted from our extreme wall rubbing in order to change the color of his clothes. In short, it is the place that gave us our right as children to exercise our Palestinian identity in terms of language, customs and traditions, and taught us from a young age that we are of a Palestinian nationality in a Lebanese environment whose children hold the nationality of their country, because that is their right, our right, and the right of each child in the world.

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How to Immunize the Youth of Today with Skills for a Fierce Confrontation?

Suzanne Berbery*

«No one understands me...Enough bullying me... You treat me lightly...» These words are always repeated by the teenager, who is lost between the temptations of life and the obedience of his parents. This is the difficult stage of stubbornness, rebellion, attempt to prove oneself and rejection of any kind of authority, as his family loses the compass in knowing how to deal with him, especially if he is addicted to drugs, without realizing the negative repercussions on his life and the resulting psychological disorders. So how to help him make the right decision when facing a problem, and when should he say «No»?! To what extent is today's youth responding to skills-enhancing workshops?

Lost Youth and Rescue through UNICEF Training

How many sad social cases do we hear about, «a young man whose body was saturated with white poison, lost his future and found no one to save him», until someone came today to train him to firmly face his reality in making a decision, strengthening his self-confidence, and distinguishing right from wrong, but how? and what are the training methods?

Against that backdrop, it was necessary to stack up projects and workshops with the sole purpose of helping today's generation to become self-sufficient. This is what UNICEF Adolescents and Youth Programme Officer, Abeer Abou Zaki presented when she stated that: «Mental health is part of health skills, and one of the youth's rights, and it is our commitment to support them psychologically to face difficult decisions by providing them with skills, with the aim to reach a conscious and psychologically immune generation. This is what UNICEF seeks by supporting youth mental health projects in coordination with the Ministries of Education and Health, the United Nations, and relevant associations, because young people aged 10 years and above, the target age group in our programs, need to enhance their self-skills in making the right decision, and when to say «no» when

exposed to temptations such as smoking or nargile, which we work to urge them to reject by showing their disadvantages, and focusing on sports for development, social support activities, and skills enhancement to remove negative energy and stimulate positive thinking through the development of self-skills by promoting communication both with the parents or the school administration to understand what the teenager is going through and how to deal with him without discouraging negatives, because at this stage these teenagers suffer from psychological frustration and need to be encouraged, and mentally supported and heard in order to build a solid personality, which helps them express their feelings by providing them with the skills to make the right decision.»

Mental Health Education

On the other hand, since education is the basis for training a student in life, it was necessary to immunize him at a young age so he becomes the decision-maker in any problem he faces. This is what Sonia Najem, Head of the School Health Department at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, explained in detail when she said that: «The concept of prevention is not only based on scientific information, but on skills. For example, if we tell the student that smoking is harmful, we have to equip him with life skills in

order to have a critical thinking through which he can make sure that smoking is not good and must therefore take the right decision, and knows when to say «No», especially if he is blackmailed by his companions: «If you don't smoke nargile like us, you are not in our team». At this point, we have to help him make the right decision, and how to deal with problems in finding solutions through his critical thinking, and thus overstepping the psychological issues in any problem he faces. That's why we focus on life skills training by age, and it's best to start with the youngest from kindergarten and under 10 years of age. It is true that we cannot train him to think critically, but at this age we have to guide him in maintaining his own intimacy in case anyone touches his genitals so he knows how to defend himself, and also we must protect him from psychological problems in the event of sexual assault. Furthermore, if the school doctor examines the students and detects any injury, then we have to verify whether the student was subjected to violence or beaten at home or outside, which makes us resort to the health counselor to immunize him with proper educational guidance.»

Skills within a Strategy

«The core of our work consists of promoting youth mental health» with these words

Nadia Badran, Director of the Health Care Association (SIDC) described the supportive activities to immunize young people psychologically and provide them with skills, as means to strengthen them firmly in the face of any obstacle they encounter: «Our work includes a national challenge to highlight, for example, the importance of sports as a way to improve the mental health of young people, especially those who suffer discrimination and stigma, or who suffer from certain health conditions. And we will launch a new project to assist students at schools with a view to their psychological immunization, focusing on the important role of parents and schools in this area. We will also work on a national plan adopted by the Ministry of Health as part of a national mental health strategy, and included in work programs. On the other hand, we have also dedicated a chat activity with young people to talk to them about various topics, including drugs, since they affect mental health.»

Finally, with the importance of immunizing the youth of today with psychological and social skills to face the temptations of life, we hope to find them effective support in word and deed from those involved so that the movement becomes a blessing!

*Journalist

Watching the colors of the sky

Najat A. Saliba*

Growing up, I learned early on to associate the colors of the sky with the local weather. From all shades of blue to all variations of gray, this myriad of colors was a clear indication of storms, rain, and hot or cold weather. Today, frequent hazy and smoggy days make the visibility poor and consequently the link between the sky and the weather is no longer evident.

Smog is a combination of two words: smoke and fog. The word smog nicely describes how smoke is merged with fog to produce a yellowish or blackish atmosphere with poor visibility. Smog consists of a mixture of pollutants (e.g., fine particles) and harmful gases (e.g., ozone and nitrogen dioxide) together with dust or soot and water vapor. This toxic air blend makes breathing difficult.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution because they (i) live closer to the ground where the concentration of pollutants peak and (ii) breathe more rapidly than adults. As a result they absorb more pollutants which impact the development of their lungs, trigger chronic asthma, and prompt the progress of childhood cancer. Later in life, a continuing exposure to air pollution may be at greater risk for cardiovascular diseases.

Smoke is produced by burning fuel in car, diesel generator, motorcycle, and ship engines, chimneys, and fires. Due to its toxicity to all living species, emissions

from such sources are highly regulated in most developed countries. In low- and middle-income countries, these emissions are poorly controlled, leading to a substantial increase in morbidity and mortality incidents. In fact, more than 80% of the illnesses that occur due to air pollution are reported in developing countries.

Added to the high emissions from combustion sources is the reduced amount of rainfall that we have experienced in the past 10 years. Our winters are shorter, and our summers are definitely more extended and hotter, with a growing number of heat spikes. The effects of dry weather coupled with high temperatures are detrimental. They include saltwater intrusion, the drying of aquifers, the entrainment of dust from dried soil surfaces, and the increased frequency of desert storms and fires.

When a short winter leads to a low supply of water. It is the depletion of fresh ground water by pumping it up from the wells to the surface that leads to seawater

infiltration further inland to replace it. This process is called saltwater intrusion. It is a problem in heavily populated coastal zones such as Lebanon where the saltwater levels in the aquifers and the dug wells have surpassed 1000 ppm (parts per million) in some areas. The salt levels in fresh water should remain below 300 ppm to be harmless to humans, animals, and crops.

Drought has also caused rivers to dry out, thereby affecting the livelihood of many farmers who have been forced to abandon their crops. Consequently, the dried land has increased the number, duration, and intensity of forest fires. We have witnessed a terrifying example of intense fires across the country in the past few days in Lebanon.

In the midst of all these challenges, our survival in the region is coupled with the great need to adapt.

We at the AUB Nature Conservation Center, have adopted a public participatory approach to work with and for the people

on (1) reforestation programs that promote drought- and fire-resilient plants, shrubs, and trees, (2) citizen science projects to test and mitigate water, air, and soil pollution, (3) the protection of natural reserves and cultural sites, and (4) educational and awareness programs to support best environmental practices in schools, municipalities, and local organizations.

We hope to uncover the natural colors of our sky, sea, and landscape so that our children can look around and get inspired by the beautiful transformations and colorful changes that nature offers.

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Children - Leaders... These Are Our Problems, the Entities in Charge, and the Suggested Solutions

Nawal Nasr*

«We have identified our problems and voiced our opinions, towards the person in charge, to tell them: These are our fears. These are our rights. And these are the solutions,» said little Rasha Dirani.



Children of 2019 are the Future Leaders...we can see peace and change in their Eyes

«Children of 2019 are the Leaders of the Future...we can see peace and change in their eyes.» With this in mind children and young people took the lead to start their consultations. They came from all Lebanese Governorates, prepared with their working documents, to meet the Governors. They sat responsibly, with their notes and spoke, in orderly manner, in their name and on behalf of the boys and girls of their generation. Such a wonderful sight. Children can identify better than anyone else their problems, their issues, and the needed solutions to bring back their rights, justice and peace.

Like leaders they sat and started articulating their challenges and proposed solutions. Nour, Balsam, Ahmad, Shahd, Lynn, Hoda, Saad, Batoul, Amjad, Marwa... children and young people participated in raising their problems with much dignity. Problems previously identified during discussion sessions, where they wrote down on paper scraps issues reflecting personal or general suffering, discussed with confidentiality to avoid unease and embarrassment.

«We, 160 boys and girls and young people, convened on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, actively managing for the first time in thirty years a project from A to Z.» This is how Marwa explained the process of this initiative adding: «This initiative allowed us to shed light on our problems and find solutions. And we will succeed.»

When Children Speak on Behalf of Children

Amjad, 14, spoke of «violence against children by other children and teachers» and explained: «Teachers who use violence with their students should be held accountable, children must be prevented from bullying their friends, and violence perpetrators should be punished. Also, let the Ministry of Social Affairs intervene to reduce child labor.»

Marwa, a Palestinian girl, said with tearful eyes: «I'm afraid for my future in a country of which I am not a national. I fear this will affect my dream of becoming a lawyer when I grow older and I enrolled in this project to become stronger and be able to overcome my fears.» Ramez, 17 years old,

spoke about drugs in schools: «They should protect us from drug dealers. We don't feel safe. They should arrest them and enforce the law on everyone.» Ahmed, 13 years old, talked about pollution of the sea: «Throwing plastic into the sea are then eaten by the fish thus exposing us to diseases. The municipalities, the ministry of Environment and the Governors are responsible. They should clean the sea.»

Complaints about the heavy school bag and the exhausting intensive curriculum was repeatedly voiced by the children who identified the responsibility: «The Minister of Education is in charge. He must issue a decision to replace heavy books with modern technologies such as the tablets.» «School hours are long, recess time short, and the school bag is heavy,» said 12-year-old Ali.

Children and young people voiced concerns adults would have never thought of. They talked about the suffering of many of them. There are bullied children at school, there are teachers who hurt children's feelings with their attitude, there are parents who do not know how to deal with a lazy son or a shy daughter who stutters and doesn't dare to mingle with others. These children talked about issues that are most of the time unnoticed by many adults. Children have feelings and ideas that they do not often convey or express.. UNICEF's initiative succeeded in breaking the circle around many of these rightful thoughts, releasing ideas, proposals and visions of children and young people who are supposed to grow up and later lead the country and institutions. It has also uncovered to local officials a generation they have long forgotten or overlooked during their planning and implementation of projects and laws.

Ali, 10 years old, arranged his papers and read a demand in his name and in the name of kids of his age: «We want paved roads, buses that take us to schools, and clean bathrooms in our schools. This is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.» He then gave the floor to 11-year-old Lynn who said: «We are subjected to violence. We fear getting kidnapped. The «police» should interfere.» Saad, 13 years old, takes over to convey an additional demand: «Recess time in school is too short. we want more space and time to play, eat, have fun as we study, learn and grow.» Sabine, in turn, says, «We want sidewalks and public parks, and that is the

responsibility of municipalities.» Lara addresses the divorce problem: «Children are the most affected by divorce, and spiritual courts are supposed to be more just and listen to the child's opinion.» Children have many requests, and some are very simple: «We want safe places to play, clean air to breathe and less noise around us.» These are very simple demands from children who are supposed to be happy, educated and raised in safe environments.

The initiative did not stop there. Children and young people backed their demands with solutions. In this context, Clara says, «Our education system is not up to date. The Ministry of Education must develop the system and the curriculum.» Children with special needs and strong will also need to be integrated with other children, and the participant children repeatedly demanded that «all logistical facilities must be equipped so they could be with us and we could be with them». In his turn, Nour tried to speak on behalf of refugees' children: «refugee children living in Lebanon have the right to learn and interact with others.» These are the proposed solutions from children to the problems they face. It is their right to express, participate, suggest and innovate, and to make the official bear his responsibilities.

It is amazing how these children got together to find solutions to other children's problems. It is amazing to hear and see their excitement and hopes as they follow the underlying problems with solutions and hope.

Children from all governorates: Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, South Lebanon, Bekaa, Hermel, and Nabatiyeh. They all participated with a strong willpower, in rectifying many things by declaring with tremendous hope: These things harm us, these solutions protects us, and these recommendations will keep us safe.

They are children and young people who deserve to be crowned leaders of 2019. They are children and young people who overcome daily many challenges that hinder their right to joy and health, play, leisure, learning, speech, and communication. Children - Leaders who succeeded on the 30th anniversary of the declaration of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in expressing themselves and establishing a road map.

«Qudwa»: A Program by UNICEF to Protect Women and Children

Patricia Khoder*

With the help of local NGOs, girls are rescued from early marriage and boys reintegrate technical institutes.

«My father wanted me to get engaged. There was a young man from Aleppo whose family had been living in Lebanon for several years who wanted to marry me. I succeeded with my mother's help in deterring my father. I don't want to marry until I'm 18,» says Farah, 15, from Idlib, who has lived in Lebanon for eight years. Farah is the eldest of a family of seven daughters. She lives in the village of Kleiat in Akkar and like her mother Fatima, she received training from the NGO «Akkar Network for Development» (AND) under a UNICEF program called «Qudwa». This program is being conducted in cooperation with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and aims, among other things, to prevent child labor, teenage marriage and domestic violence against women.

«I was mostly afraid of the expected responsibilities if I got married, of complications in case of childbirth. I was also afraid of running into an abusive husband,» says Farah, who left school and dreams of becoming a hairdresser last year. She thus repeats what she learned during the session of the AND.

«I don't want my daughter to get married before she is 18,» adds Fatima, «I will fight for my seven children till the end. I want my daughters to still have a normal



childhood,» she says.

In the Bekaa, a young teenager benefits from the same program, set up by the NGO «Himaya». Ahmed, 14, left Serghaya district in Syria at the age of 11 to settle with his mother, younger brother and sisters in Baalbeck. He is responsible for his family, including a divorced sister with an infant. Ahmed admits that he never liked school,

even when he was in Syria. When he moved to Lebanon, he started working in an Internet café every day from 9am to 1am in the morning (16 hours per day) for 5000 Lebanese Pounds a day. «It was very tiring, besides, the customers hit me, and gave me very strong patting on the back and neck. I was only 11 years old,» he recalls.

Today, thanks to the intervention of

«Himaya», Ahmed was able to follow a remediation course, where he is once again learning to read and write. He should then complete technical training. He plans to become a mechanic. «It's a job that will allow me to make a good living,» he hopes. «The «Qudwa» program aims to develop an enabling environment for the adoption of protective behaviors for women, girls and boys, and to promote positive individual attitudes towards the promotion of health care, non-violent behaviors and the empowerment of girls and women,» states UNICEF. «It is the targeted communities that are entitled to act and lead change. This program includes around 38 activities focused on educational entertainment, community engagement, social mobilization and capacity building,» the source added.

Nevertheless, change in social behavior takes time to become apparent. It will take years to be defined. Yet already in the Bekaa and North Lebanon, where the program is being implemented, small social changes are being noticed, particularly with regard to domestic violence, child protection, and even women's role in the family.

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Invisible, No More!

Fadia Farah*

With international human rights frameworks, like the CRC and CRPD, the International Community made a significant stride from viewing persons with disability as objects of charity to making them right-holders who are entitled to receive appropriate education, healthcare and other services, protection from abuse and neglect as well as inclusion in the lives of the society and communities where they live in. There was a shift of conceptual focus from 'fixing the person' to adjusting the environment to enable the full participation in all spheres of life.

I talked to young people with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, about how to promote inclusion and build peace, and I am proud to share with you their messages that I divided into three parts: he, the person with a disability; the family; and the community.

First, at the individual level, persons with disabilities have a strong potential and multiple abilities that need to be nurtured and developed.

«Stop telling us what we cannot do; we are ready to help you discover our abilities.

We are people first and with support, we can change the world,» said Manal.

«Like every child and young persons, persons with disabilities need access to education and other services to unleash their potential,» said Meri Poghosyan, education specialist - inclusion at UNICEF.

«All education partners have an obligation

to include children with disabilities in the regular programs. More efforts are needed from different services to ensure that children with disabilities are identified and appropriately supported».

Second, to grow and have confidence in themselves, children need to stay in their families. They need the love and tenderness of parents, they need to argue and even fight with their brothers and sisters to learn how to face and solve problems, and they need to learn the rules of society with their peers.

«I have confidence in myself because I was raised in a very strong family that respects me.

I make my decisions because my family supported me; they listened to me and respected my decisions.

I say loudly what I have to say; my family taught me that I have the same worth as

everyone.

To help us better, the family needs support. The voices of the families need to be heard in order to find answers to their questions,» Manal continues.

«The demand is in line with UNICEF's work with the Lebanese government on strengthening inclusive education and advocating for promoting family-based alternatives to residential institutions,» added Poghosyan.

Finally, the message of youth for their community was also strong and clear.

In 2017, UNICEF's Knowledge, Attitude and Practices survey in Lebanon revealed that only one in four persons thought that children with intellectual disabilities should be integrated into society. «UNICEF is working with partners on social-behavioral change communication interventions to move from misperceptions

around children's abilities, fear, over-protection, pity or indifference to normalizing disability, increasing its acceptance as part of human diversity, and viewing people with disabilities as contributing members of society».

«People with disabilities are discriminated against in society. They are invisible and do not participate in the life of their community. This creates a fear due to ignorance of disability. This is reinforced in societies that do not accept the difference and that do not have laws to protect people with disabilities,» says Mia.

«We are in this world to stay and we want to live happily and participate in the life of our community so that together we work to make this world a better place to live,» she concludes.

* President of the Lebanese Association for Self-Advocacy, LASA

For Every Child, Every Right



Artwork by «Ashekman»



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project works since 2007 on enhancing mutual understanding and promoting social cohesion by addressing root causes of conflict in Lebanon. The project has been also lately working on addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on social stability in Lebanon. The project supports different groups from local leaders and local actors, to educators, journalists, youth and civil society activists, in developing medium and long-term strategies for peace building, crisis management and conflict prevention.

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