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Wahda: Understanding the Impact of Youth Dialogue in Lebanon

Ex-Post Evaluation: Stories of Change

December 2021

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Acronyms

Aleph	Aleph Strategies
EoD	Essentials of Dialogue
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GenG	Generation Global
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Assessment and Learning
OW	Outreach Worker
PIRS	Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
TBI	Tony Blair Institute for Global Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YDF	Youth Dialogue Facilitator
YDP	Youth Dialogue Participant

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Introduction > The Wahda Program

Wahda (which means unity and togetherness in Arabic) was funded by [USAID](#) and implemented by the [TBI](#) and [Naba'a](#) in Lebanon. It was a pilot program that aimed to test the efficacy of youth dialogue centered on the identification of bias and augmentation of tolerance for those of various backgrounds.

Wahda was a variation of TBI's [Generation Global](#) (GenG) education program, in that the dialogue sessions were led by youth dialogue facilitators (YDFs) aged 18 – 28 as opposed to more seasoned education practitioners. YDFs delivered dialogue-based activities to youth dialogue participants (YDPs) aged 12 – 18 utilizing an adaptation of TBI's '*Essentials of Dialogue*' (EoD) curriculum to educate youth to deal with differences in a peaceful way. It also included the practical application of skills developed through awareness raising initiatives on issues facing young people and engagement (dialogue) with local government to effect change.

There is little field-based support for what does and does not work in youth dialogue-oriented programming. By assessing the extent to which youth dialogue can be an effective mechanism for reducing bias and increasing tolerance toward difference and diversity, this program aimed to contribute to the existing evidence base.¹

Wahda was guided by its Theory of Change, Logic Model and Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS). These detail the proposed pathway from activities to key results, and the metrics used to measure success. The original pilot program ran for 17 months (Oct. 2019 – mid-Feb. 2021); 4.5 months longer than intended due to COVID-19. This was followed by an Endline Evaluation (mid-Feb. – May 2021) and finally a no-cost extension (July – Dec. 2021).

Figure 1: Wahda Program Logic Model

Long-term Impact

Organizations and institutions have an increased understanding on how facilitated youth dialogue reduces bias and increases tolerance of diversity and difference in Lebanon

Intermediate outcomes

Reduced perceptions of bias amongst facilitators and participating youth towards other religious and ethnic minority groups

Increased open-minded attitudes of facilitators and participating youth towards other religious and ethnic minority groups

Immediate outcomes

Local partners and in-country coordinators have enhanced capability to deliver, monitor and evaluate youth dialogue programs

Youth dialogue facilitators gain confidence, expertise and ability to deliver the youth dialogue curriculum through activities with participating youth

Participating youth demonstrate improvements in practicing dialogue and are more confident in using dialogue to engage with difference and diversity

Outputs

Partnership agreement with local CSO

Needs assessment and training of CSO

Workshops to co-design curriculum and adapt resources

MEAL plan finalized and validated with participants

Youth dialogue facilitators trained to deliver dialogue activities to participating youth

Participating youth attend dialogue sessions delivered by youth dialogue facilitators

Participatory Rapid Assessment conducted by youth dialogue facilitators

Youth-led initiatives delivered by youth dialogue facilitators

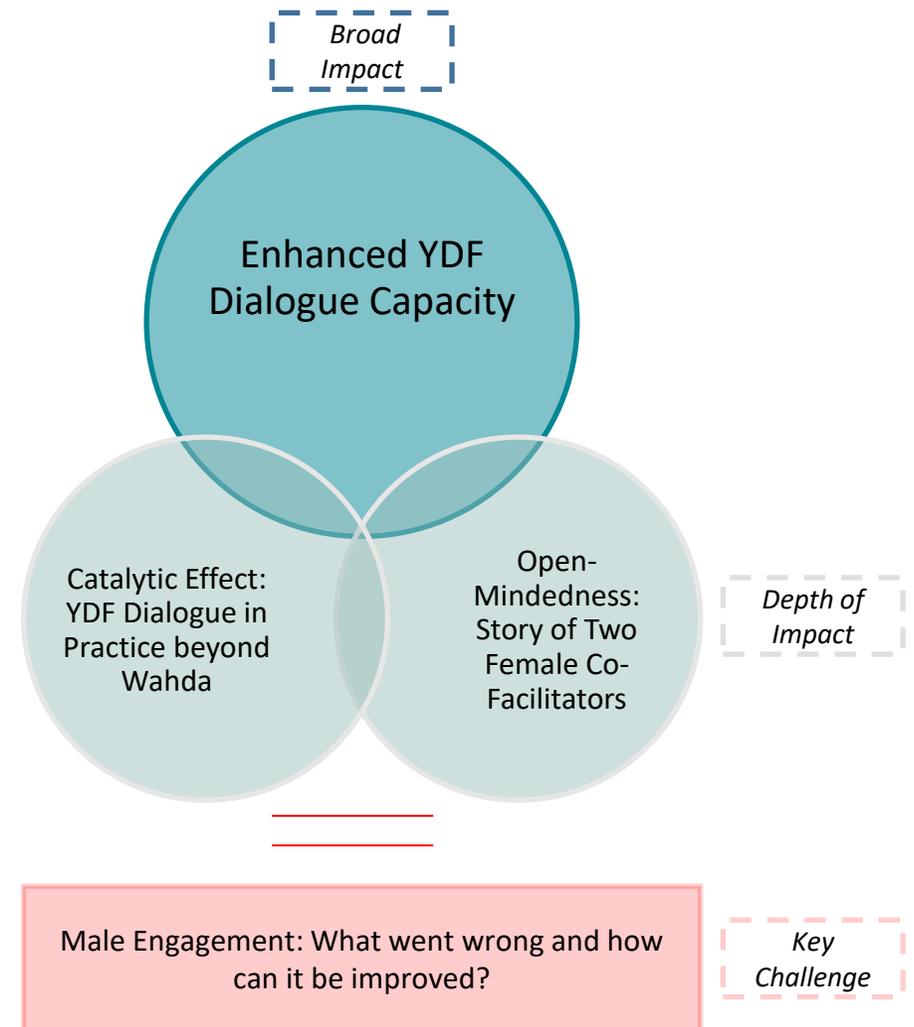
¹This Ex-Post Evaluation adds to TBI's body of evidence. Notably the Wahda MEAL Results Report (June 2021) and the TBI / Exeter University Report '[Measuring Open-Mindedness](#)' (2017)

Introduction > This Document

This **Ex-Post Evaluation** has been prepared by Aleph Strategies. It follows a Baseline Report (April 2020), Midline Insights (October 2020), the Intervention End Report (April 2021) and MEAL Results Report (June 2021). Given limited funds available, this Report is not a comprehensive Evaluation. Instead it builds on the evaluation that came before it by providing some key insights on broad program **Impact**, as well **Stories of Change** that highlight depth of impact that emerged over time through the eyes of YDFs. Specifically, the report builds on previous findings in which most YDFs *reported* improvements in dialogue and facilitation but COVID-19 restrictions limited Aleph’s ability to observe *demonstrated* attitudinal and facilitation improvements. As such, observation of behavior was central to this Ex-Post Evaluation process, and was complemented by additional quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Four themes emerged from Aleph’s Research: 1) Wahda’s breadth of impact on most YDFs’ dialogue capacity; 2) an observed depth of open-mindedness transformation amongst some YDFs; 3) the catalytic effect of Wahda on the lives of some YDFs beyond the program; and 4) some lessons on securing stronger male engagement.

To these ends, this document is organized as follows: This **Introduction** provides a brief overview of this document as well as some background on the program. The **Methodology Note** provides an overview of the approach towards building an evidence base. The **Limitations** detail some challenges that were experienced and the counter measures employed to better ensure quality data. The **Key Statistics** section gives an overview of program beneficiaries and data points. The **Change** section provides details on program impact; focused in some cases on selected YDFs. Finally, the **Recommendations** section ties together observations from this research to improve programming of a similar nature in the future.

Figure 2: Themes of Ex-Post Research



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Research Methodology

Aleph employed mixed-method qualitative and quantitative techniques to triangulate findings. Much emphasis was placed on observation during key activities to determine if any slight attitudinal changes had occurred. Aleph also reviewed YDF video diaries submitted after key milestones, conducted interviews and focus group discussions with selected beneficiaries and administered and analysed the quantitative YDF self-reflection scorecards.

Figure 3: Research Methodology

Activity Observation

Aleph designed observation checklists that were used by OWs to observe in-person and online activities



Interviews & Focus Group Discussions

Aleph conducted interviews with:

- 3 OWs
- 3 Male YDFs
- 5 Female YDFs
- 1 Male YDF who did not participate in the extension activities



Video Diaries

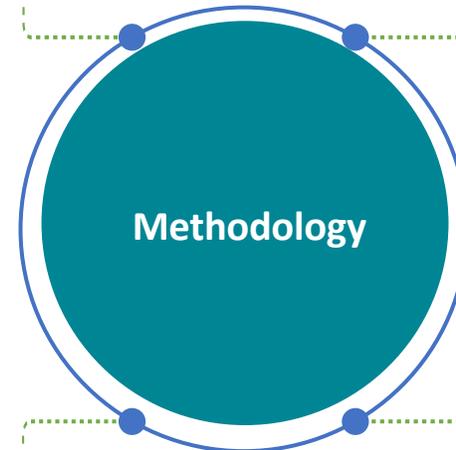
YDFs shared video diaries after completion of key milestones:

- PRA Training
- Community-based initiatives
- Meetings with local authorities



YDF Scorecards

18 YDFs completed the Dialogue and Facilitation self-assessment scorecard



Research Limitations

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic and economic (fuel) crisis in Lebanon impacted in-person observation. Yet, these issues were anticipated and Aleph adapted as required to ensure quality data could be collected. Naba'a's OWs were provided additional training to observe YDFs in action and Aleph shifted emphasis from reviewing OW work to interviews with OWs post-activities to ensure depth of findings were captured.

Figure 4: Research Limitations



Limitations & Consequences

The COVID-19 pandemic and fuel crisis limited in-person research methods. This had a particular consequence on observational techniques (i.e. observing YDFs in-person during PRA training, dialogue initiatives and meetings with municipalities). Like activities, most observations were shifted online.



Limited in-depth analysis of observations conducted by OWs. Due to language barriers and/or time limitations, OWs provided less rigor and analysis in terms of the observations than expected during pilot trials of the tool.

Mitigation Factors

Aleph adapted the observation checklist to be fit for online observation purposes and in parallel built the capacity of Naba'a OWs to use the checklists (whether observations could be completed in-person or online). This unintended skill development element worked to further strengthen Naba'a's M&E capacity (PIRS Immediate Outcome 1.2).

Aleph shifted to direct briefings with the OWs using the observation tool as a guide to ensure in-depth exchanges and analysis. This also allowed the Project Manager to follow up on their assessments with additional questions to increase comprehensiveness of stories.

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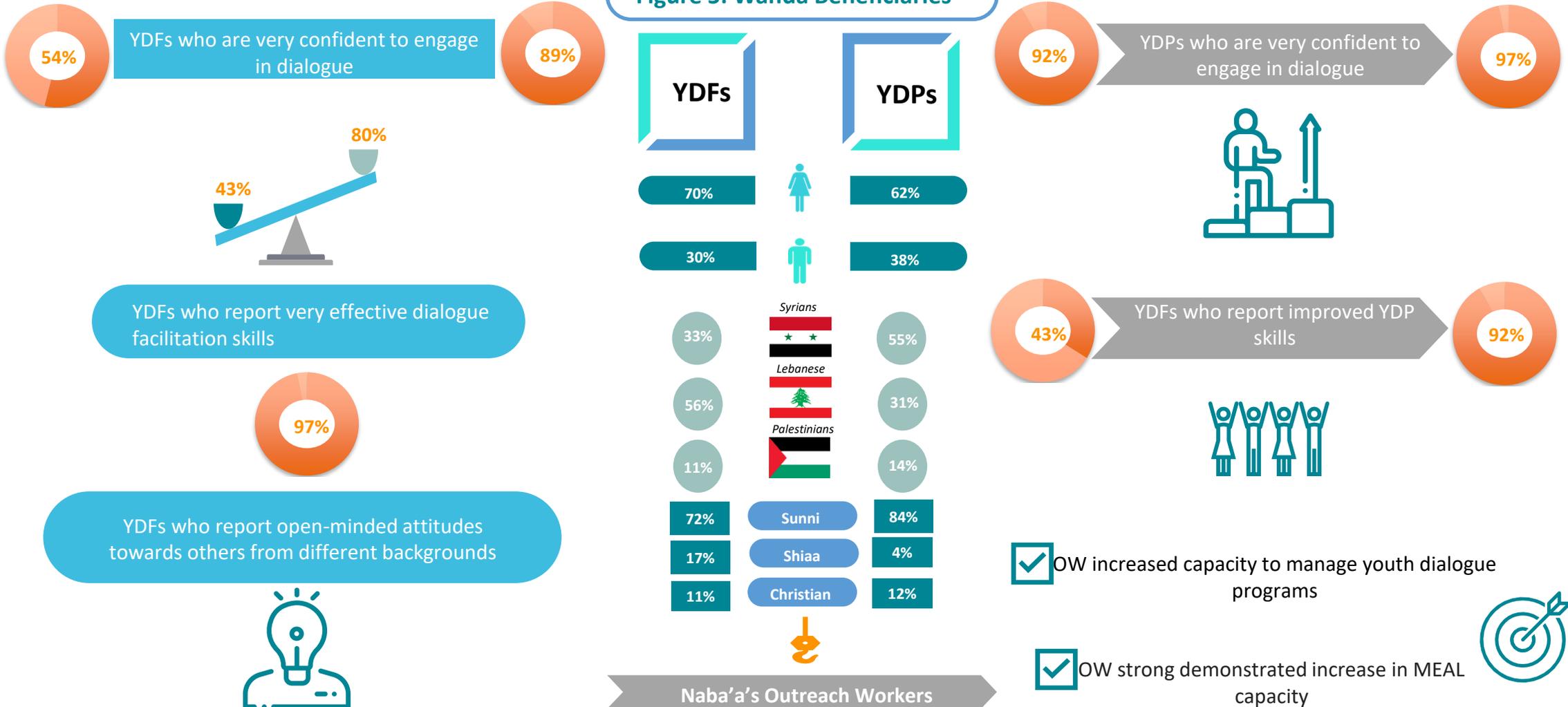
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Key Program Statistics

Figure 5 below presents key changes in Youth Dialogue Facilitator (YDF) and Youth Dialogue Participant (YDP) self-appraisals from baseline to endline (YDPs) and ex-post (YDFs) as well as Naba'a Outreach Worker (OW) improved capacity. The data point on the left is the baseline aggregated self-appraisal and the data point on the right is the endline or ex-post aggregated self-appraisal.

Figure 5: Wahda Beneficiaries



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Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Summary

At its core, Wahda is about improving youth dialogue so that youth deal with differences in a peaceful manner. By-and-large the program delivered. This sub-section summarizes YDFs' improved capacity to engage in constructive dialogue. It presents the different types of attributes developed by YDFs complemented by first-hand insights from the implementation of the participatory rapid appraisals (PRAs) and community initiatives.

During the original implementation period (until Feb. 2021), YDFs were mostly engaged in online dialogue sessions with YDPs. All the anecdotal evidence of change collected up until the MEAL Results Report (June 2021) revolved mostly around this task. The No-Cost Extension period provided an opportunity to re-examine the different notions of improvement after they were put into practice in real life scenarios. YDFs planned and conducted PRAs that included focus group discussions with youth and parents, as well as interviews with key informants in their communities to determine pressing issues facing youth.

The identified priorities and recommendations have guided the implementation of community-based activities and provided an opportunity to YDFs to demonstrate their capacity and leadership in facilitating dialogue and conducting meetings with municipalities.

Picture 1: YDFs facilitating a dialogue session on gender equality with youth in Saïda



Picture 2: YDFs in a meeting with Mayor of Sibline as part of the awareness campaign on bullying



Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Key Change 1



Active Listening

YDFs managed to develop and strengthen their active listening skills thereby demonstrating respect for other dialogue participants. YDFs are more capable of actively listening to different points of view, even if other opinions contradict their own. They were observed being less aggressive when hearing other opinions, even when they were convinced that the other opinion was wrong.

During the dialogue sessions with YDPs and meetings with local authorities, YDFs were observed listening to others until the end of their interventions without interruption. This was not the case when the program started. Similarly, YDFs were observed listening intently to research participants (i.e. youth, parents) and asking probing follow-up questions to better understand and clarify viewpoints.

“We started listening with our eyes and senses and paid more attention to the topic of the conversation.”

- Rayane, 20 years old Lebanese Sunni

“Before, I used to feel that I could understand the arguments of others before they even finished their sentences, without discussing it with them or better understanding what they meant.”

- Fatima, 29 years old Syrian Sunni

“I used all the skills I have developed during Wahda (in the meeting with government officials). I listened and focused on what the Mayor was saying in order to plan my intervention.”

- Wassila, 20 years old Lebanese Sunni

“In one of the sessions with the community, one of the participants mentioned that women do not have a role outside of the house. I still managed to hear him until the end before intervening with follow up questions. Before Wahda, I would have gotten into an argument with him.”

- Laila, 24 years old Lebanese Shiaa

Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Key Change 2



Confidence to Engage in Dialogue

YDFs have enhanced their capacity to communicate in public, including improved body language. They are more capable of formulating their arguments and means of persuasion / negotiation. For example, OWs observed YDFs motivating participants to better engage in focus group discussions. Ultimately YDFs are more confident to engage with people from any background, regardless of age, position, and status. Through the no-cost extension activities, they were empowered to engage with local authorities which further boosted self-belief. Some now feel they can effect change and are motivated to improve the situation for youth in their communities.

After the meetings with Saida, Dalhoun and Sibline municipalities, YDFs shared how their confidence to engage with Mayors and municipality members has increased. They became more confident to share their ideas with individuals holding key positions in their communities. Nourhan for example, felt the growing confidence in herself and youth to act as change agents in their communities.

“A very exciting experience to meet with a decision maker – during the interview. I asked open questions, and we felt that the Mayor was supportive. We felt that our voices were heard and started the path for longer change at the level of our community. It also increased my self-confidence to participate in something so empowering.”

- Areej, 26 years old Syrian Sunni

“I never imagined that I had it in me to meet with the Mayor. Wahda had significantly increased my self-confidence and it was a very positive experience.”

- Ahmad El Khatib, 23 years old Palestinian Sunni

“YDFs have gained more self-confidence after their meetings with Mayors. Most of them were hesitant in the beginning but managed to engage in fruitful conversations and present youth priorities and recommendations.”

- Wahda OWs

Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Key Change 3



Enhanced Facilitation Capacity

YDFs have also managed to improve their capacity to prepare and facilitate dialogue sessions. At the beginning of the program, they required a lot of assistance from OWs. Now most YDFs can prepare and facilitate without external support. This observed change culminated during the PRA, awareness raising activities and local authority engagement. YDFs coordinated and divided tasks amongst themselves, prepared accordingly, actively listened and respected opinions during discussions with community members and put their skills to the test to convince their audience of their opinions and ideas.

During the two online dialogue and the in-person session part of the community-based initiatives, YDFs played an essential role in facilitating the sessions. They managed to present the session clearly, reminded YDPs of the essentials of dialogue, thanked participants for their participation/intervention, summarized the YDP interventions before responding, and then asked probing follow-up questions.

“I presented the session to all participants, reminded everyone of the essence of dialogue and initiated the tone for the conversation. It was highly engaging. Before Wahda, I used to be very shy and would have never succeeded in doing something similar.”

- Joanna, 23 years old Lebanese Christian

“Meeting Mayors and leading dialogue sessions were important experiences for me and gave me a boost of hope that our voices could be heard as youth and can bring a positive change if we try.”

- Fatima, 29 years old Syrian Sunni

“The initiatives had a very positive impact on me, because it confirmed my knowledge about dialogue and seeing its application on the ground, especially with young people. Managing a positive dialogue and discussion session is not easy, but it is very fun.”

- Nourhan, 22 years old Syrian Sunni

Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Key Change 4



Acceptance of Others

YDFs were observed to be comfortable engaging with people from different backgrounds they met for the first time. They shared through their video diaries how they stopped judging others for their opinions. They also shared stories on how they better communicate and connect with others from different religions and nationalities.

Several of the YDFs have never, or rarely, had conversations or interactions with people from different religions or nationalities before Wahda. Now they have managed to explore and interact with others and collaborate together on research and dialogue activities.

“I was afraid before meeting the Mayor of Dalhoun of being judged for my Nikab. However, thanks to Wahda, I managed to get the courage to go through the interview without any problems. The project helped me strengthen my beliefs and be ready to accept others as they are, similar to how I want them to accept me.”

- Zainab, 26 years old Syrian Sunni

“I used to be afraid of someone who had her face covered [referring to women wearing Nikab]. After meeting Zainab [a fellow YDF], and discovering how cultured she is, I now realize I cannot judge someone based on their appearance alone. I started telling my students and siblings to forget about someone’s appearance and focus on the essence of the person in front of them.”

- Laila, 24 years old Lebanese Shiaa

“Before Wahda, I had no communication with people from other religions. I used to hear a lot in my community that Christians will not accept me. My co-facilitator is a Lebanese Christian, and I am a Palestinian Sunni refugee in Lebanon. We did not stop at these differences and had upmost respect for each other.”

- Ahmad, 23 years old Palestinian Sunni

Enhanced YDF Dialogue Capacity Insights

Key Change 4



Acceptance of Others

“These encounters made me understand that each of us has value and not to identify someone by race, language, nationality or gender. I currently see myself as an open-minded person and capable of engaging with different groups, unlike the past years when I was insulated with people from the same religion, customs and traditions.”

- Maya, 23 years old

Picture 3: Maya co-facilitating a dialogue session with YDPs



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Summary

This story showcases two female YDFs. They were paired together to co-facilitate dialogue. They come from different communities and religions. Wahda provided them with a unique opportunity to regularly interact to achieve a common objective of facilitating effective dialogue. Over time these interactions (and with others) allowed them to overcome inherited stigma and cultural barriers and ultimately led to demonstrated increased open-mindedness towards others from different backgrounds. Furthermore, this transformation allowed them to better facilitate dialogue with their YDPs.

Picture 4: Joanna Costantine, 23 years old



Joanna is a 23-year-old Catholic from the Eklim area. She is currently completing her Masters thesis and active with Naba'a on Wahda

Picture 5: Rayane El Abed, 20 years old



Rayane is a 20-year-old from Saida who is specializing in Islamic studies as an undergraduate. She is also an active volunteer in her community

Open Mindedness: The Story of Two Female Co-Facilitators

The Beginning: When Joanna and Rayane Met

Joanna and Rayane clicked from the time they first met. Joanna joined the program late and Rayane welcomed her to the program, made her feel comfortable, and brought her up-to-speed on the program's approach to dialogue with young people.

They both stated that they originally felt open to the idea of interacting with individuals from other nationalities and religions. However, they soon discovered the program could offer a lot more than just socializing with others who are different from them. They were afforded the regular opportunity to discuss 'sensitive' topics with each other and with the YDPs they were leading. Ultimately, the manner in which YDFs were taught – and then imparted to YDPs – to deal with disagreement was something “new” and “impactful”.

For example, before Wahda Rayane used to feel that her opinions were the right ones and rejected everything that did not align/adhere to what her understanding of what is right and wrong. Rayane would have never imagined herself cooperating with someone that she does not agree with or have different opinions or beliefs. She used to believe that her religion is the “right one” and could have never partnered with someone from a different religion.

Joanna did not have many friends and rarely interacted with individuals from different religions, or nationalities. Co-facilitating dialogue sessions with Rayane and leading a mixed-youth group of Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians gave her ample opportunity to forge new relationships and to increase her open-mindedness and appreciation of others through often-time contentious dialogue.

“Before Wahda, I used to believe that I know what is right and wrong and was not willing to compromise my religious beliefs. Never would I have imagined myself collaborating with others from different religions.”

- Rayane, 20 years old Lebanese Sunni

Open Mindedness: The Story of Two Female Co-Facilitators

Changes Observed in Joanna and Rayane's Behavior

Thanks to their engagement in Wahda, Rayane and Joanna had ample opportunity to interact and discuss a broad range of topics, whether connected to their facilitation or beyond. This allowed them to progressively build not only their relationship but also their capacity to deal with different opinions / disagreement.

For example, Rayane had in-depth conversations with Joanna about certain practices that she felt "inappropriate". Rayane used to categorically believe that it is a Christian manifestation to wear indecent clothes. Before Wahda, she would have never imagined herself engaging in such discussions directly with a Christian.

Outreach Workers observed small changes over time and that growth was not linear. What was important was the opportunity for youth such as Joanna and Rayane to have regular Interactions. These YDFs never had a similar medium or safe space to discuss inherent cultural misconceptions or biases. Each dialogue session and interaction reinforced skills and knowledge imparted and by the end of the program these YDFs felt they had the necessary experience to test their capacity in "real" community-based activities.

The PRA, awareness raising initiatives and community dialogue were a good test. The research exercise and field work were an opportunity to put in practice their dialogue skills, like listening, facilitation and acceptance. They have further developed their confidence to have conversations with people that they did not know from before.

"Rayane and Joanna like many of their generation lacked the opportunity to interact with others from different religions and nationalities. Through Wahda, they have managed to do so effectively over time."

- Wahda OWs

"I became capable of genuinely listening to what others from different religions believe in. We disagree on what is Haram and Halal but made the effort to truly listen to each other without judgement and that opened the door to better understanding."

- Rayane, 20 years old Lebanese Sunni

"After Wahda, we became capable of breaking the ice with any person no matter who they were or their background and understood what they truly feel"

- Joanna, 23 years old Lebanese Christian

"Because of Wahda I became more peaceful and less judgmental. I stopped overreacting and started taking the time to listen to others before shutting down"

- Rayane, 20 years old Lebanese Sunni

Open Mindedness: The Story of Two Female Co-Facilitators

Knock-on Effect on Joanna and Rayane's Capacity to Facilitate Dialogue with YDPs

Due to their own increased open-mindedness, Joanna and Rayane succeeded in modeling an open and engaging attitude that made the participants more comfortable and willing to interact with one another. Joanna and Rayane co-facilitated a group of mixed YDPs including youth from various nationalities and religions. They were sceptical in the beginning of the extent to which the participants would be open to engage in such dialogue together. But like themselves, they eventually witnessed changes in attitudes.

The conversations and exchanges around traditions and celebrations opened the door for more explorations and understanding of others. For example, Christians were asked about "Saint Barbara" which is a religious celebration on December 4th. Joanna explained how the confusion and mix up with Halloween impacted the perception of people towards this Holy day and attached to it some possibly "negative" or less formal connotations.

Joanna values the ideas and beliefs of others as she used to encourage YDPs to talk about their experiences and opinions, even if others did not agree with her point of view. She also supported her fellow YDFs to better understand Christian norms as well as different practices and celebrations. It was observed that she speaks constructively and shares a lot of depth in her arguments.

"We were maybe the only group that had all of this diversity in regard to religion and nationalities. Through the discussions around traditions and culture, and by modeling our behavior, the YDPs were very cooperative and eager to better know each other."

- Rayane and Joanna

Open Mindedness: The Story of Two Female Co-Facilitators

Wahda's Impact on Joanna and Rayane

This example demonstrates how Wahda provided two individuals from very different backgrounds the opportunity to reflect, learn and grow. Rayane and Joanna worked together to achieve a common objective of facilitating effective dialogue with YDPs. Through that work they have discovered each other and therefore the traditions and beliefs of their respective communities. Although different, they not only accept each other's differences, but also now embrace those differences to better themselves, their dialogue skills and community impact.

Looking forward, Joanna is recently married and will leave Saida to join her husband in Beirut. She will continue to support Naba'a through her high capacity to mobilize YDPs from her community. In turn, Rayane plans to continue her studies, participating in future capacity building trainings and volunteering in similar projects such as Wahda. They both use their knowledge and skills they have acquired through Wahda in their day-to-day lives and with their family members and friends.

"If I disagree with someone, I use the dialogue skills I have developed and do not overreact. I give space to the person to complete the argument. If he/she speaks about a misconception regarding my religion, I thank him/her for his/her opinion and I offer the correct information."

- Joanna, 23 years old Christian Lebanese

Knock-on Impact: Dialogue Beyond Wahda

Summary

This story showcases the knock-on impact beyond Wahda. Several YDFs have put their gained knowledge and skills in practice at home or professional settings with their families, peers, and colleagues, among others. Here we highlight the endeavors of two YDFs who have capitalized on skills, knowledge and experience gained through Wahda.

Profiles

Meet Rita. She is a 23-year-old Lebanese Catholic from Marjeoun. She holds a Masters degree in Management and currently teaches Arabic, English, science and math at a Lebanese public school.

Meet Ahmad Khatib. He is a Palestinian Sunni refugee living in the Ein El Helwe camp in Saida. He is 24-year-old with an MBA working as an outreach coordinator for UNRWA.

Picture 6: Rita abou Ayoub, 23 years old



Rita presenting the findings of the PRA research at Saida municipality

Picture 7: Ahmad El Khatib, 23 years old



Ahmad (to the left) with Mr. Abed El Latfi CEO of Naba'a

Knock-on Impact: Dialogue Beyond Wahda

Knock-on Effect on Rita's Students

Rita works double shifts at a Lebanese public school. She teaches Arabic to Lebanese students in the morning, and English, math and science to Syrian students in the afternoon.

Rita has leveraged components of the EoD curriculum with her students. She used conflict management and mitigation, as well as assertiveness and communication skills to convince students and their parents to adopt positive attitudes towards students from other nationalities. She engaged with students and parents alike to raise their awareness on the importance of accepting and respecting others.

Rita also developed her listening skills. She used to interrupt her students' answers to offer her own "correct" answer, and not care much about students' responses. Now, she listens to them until the end and asks follow up questions to better understand their feelings and points of view.

During the meeting with the Saida municipality, Rita also managed to develop and implement her capacity to frame and ask probing questions. This enriched the dialogue and helped her better engage with representatives of local authorities on issues of priority to youth.

"Some parents used to approach me complaining that their child is sitting next to a Lebanese student, or another who is in a group project with a Syrian. I used my dialogue skills to convince them of the importance of acceptance and open mindedness regardless of religion or nationality."

- Rita, 23 years old Lebanese Christian

"Rita has been succeeding in utilizing her dialogue skills in increasing the level of acceptance among her Lebanese and Syrian students."

- Wahda OWs

Knock-on Impact: Dialogue Beyond Wahda

Knock-on Effect on Ahmad's Colleagues and Beneficiaries

Ahmad implemented key notions of dialogue and acceptance within different teams he worked with. Ahmad is currently an outreach coordinator for a back-to-school project with UNRWA. Previously he was working for ANERA on a water, sanitation and hygiene project as a Team Leader.

In both of his postings, Ahmad put in practice leadership and communication skills he acquired through Wahda. He started listening better to others and adopted a more inclusive approach to leadership. He respected every team member and gave them the space and encouragement to contribute with ideas and opinions.

Regardless of their nationalities, being Syrians or Palestinians, Ahmad, accepted all their differences and strengthened their contribution in decision-making processes.

Ahmad feels, that with the skills and shift in mindset he witnessed after Wahda, he managed to become a better and more inclusive leader, which in itself meant better and more effective service provision to beneficiaries.

“I currently use communication skills I have developed through Wahda in the project I am working on. I listen more to my team members, encourage them to express their opinions and give them the space to be more involved in decision making.”

- Ahmad, 23 years old Palestinian Sunni

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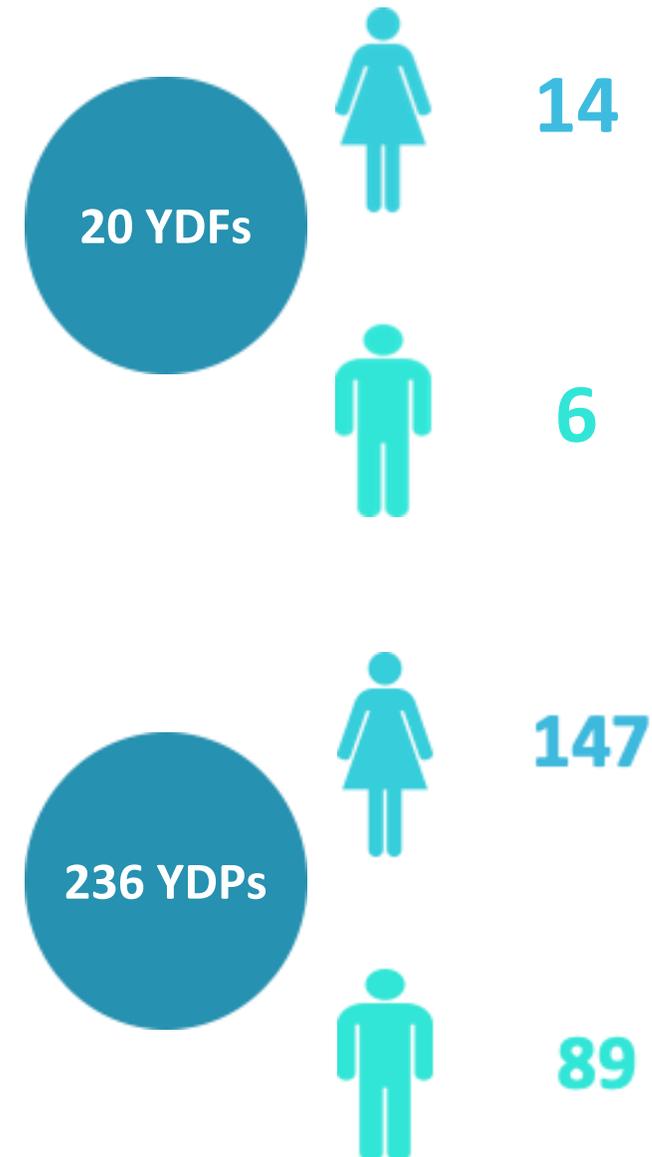
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Limited Male Participation & Engagement

What was the challenge?³

Wahda had a gender imbalance throughout implementation. This is despite great efforts by the project team to ensure an even split between young women and young men. For example, during the initial training in February 2020, Wahda has an almost even split of potential YDFs. Yet as the program progressed, female participants remained (males tended to drop out) or were easier to recruit. By the end of the baseline period, out of the 20 YDFs, the proportion was 14 young women to 6 young men. Later during the extension, the number of committed YDFs decreased to 18, but the difference remained the same (13 females and 5 males). The gender gap was also prevalent amongst YDPs, with 62% being females and 38% males.

This challenge is not new and has been well documented throughout the implementation of Wahda. It was noted in previous research that not only were females better represented, they were also more active participants during discussions. Simply put, females were by-and-large more engaged, offering richer exchanges, more detailed video diaries, and therefore unsurprisingly observed making greater strides in dialogue and open-mindedness.



²This sub-section is not a comprehensive review of program challenges. Please see the Implementation End Report and MEAL Results Report for key program challenges. This sub-section offers insights into a ever-present issue of recruiting and maintaining male participation in the program.

Limited Male Participation & Engagement

What were the reasons?

Several reasons were identified for lower male participation:

- **First, culturally, young men are expected to earn income for their households;** particularly if they live in poverty which has been exacerbated by the dire economic situation Lebanon currently finds itself in. Time to “learn” is not a luxury that some households can afford.
- **Second, OWs stated that by-and-large young women are more mature than young men and were more capable / willing to engage in discussions on oneself.** Discussions on feelings and sensitive personal opinions were often challenging for boys, either being too proud or too shy to open-up in a group setting (and in particular in front of girls).
- **Third, interviewees remarked that subjects covered were of more interest to female participants than male participants.** According to some, young women are more interested in social work and civic duty than young men. Moreover, classroom-based learning and dialogue activities are of greater interest to young women; whereas young men prefer “exciting” and “physical” in-person activities.
- **Finally, increased female participation thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic could have contributed to the gender imbalance as much as reduced male participation.** The young women part of the program often noted how they - and their parents – felt more comfortable participating online; especially female participants from more conservative backgrounds. This could be viewed as a program strength (an unintended outcome) as typically international development programs suffer shortages of female participants.

“There is less excitement with online activities. Males are interested in interactive physical activities and less engaged in emotionally demanding/revealing ones.”

- Youssef, a YDF that did not participate in the PRA and community initiatives

“Males have their work and university commitments and that probably why they are less engaged and represented on the project. Females are also more comfortable and like to talk and express themselves.”

- Wahda OWs

Limited Male Participation & Engagement

What can be done about it?

Programming of a similar nature in the future could consider the following:

1. Formalize the YDF role as a full-time paid job. In the case of YDPs, consider providing financial support to vulnerable families so young people have the time to participate. While Wahda did provide financial stipends to YDFs and participation support to YDPs (i.e. data bundles, transport costs and warm meals), programs of a similar nature in the future should carve out more budget to ensure household concerns are met
2. Continue to empower youth to create their own lesson subjects and/or activities. The PRA method is good practice as it aligns community needs with youth innovation and interests.
3. Combine classroom-based activities with “fun” in-person activities (i.e. sport, films, games, etc.). This would be in-line with the original idea of creating a “youth club”.

Picture 8: Group of potential YDFs during the Essentials of Dialogue Training in Saida in February 2020. They did not continue further with the program



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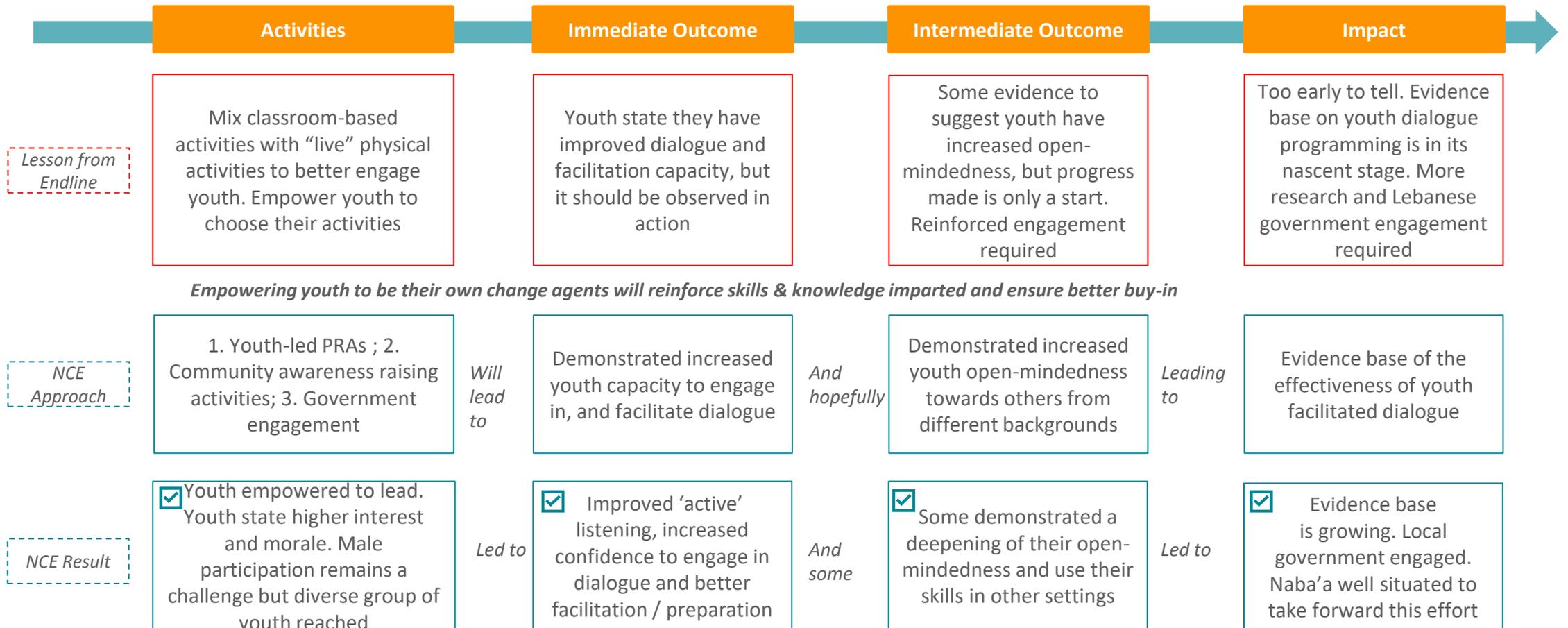
Key Statistics

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Conclusion

Most YDFs demonstrated improved dialogue capacity by the end of the program. Learning from the MEAL Results Report, the chosen NCE activities provided YDFs with a platform to put theory into practice in order to make change in their communities, and most youth embraced this challenge. Some YDFs emerged as leaders and further demonstrated a deepening of open-mindedness and utilization of skills and knowledge developed beyond Wahda. This catalytic effect is a promising legacy of this program. Ultimately organizations operating in Lebanon now have more of an evidence base on youth-led dialogue programming and a local organization – Naba’a – is well situated to build on Wahda’s success and advocate for more programs of a similar nature in the future. The program did well to attract a diverse range of participants from various background (i.e. by nationality and religion). Wahda struggled, however, to maintain male participation. It is vital that this key challenge is addressed to ensure vulnerable males are not left behind.



Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations to improve programming of a similar nature in the future:

What?	Why?	How?
<p>1</p> <p>Male participation / engagement should be given more attention during recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wahda somewhat struggled to engage males. This research uncovered three issues: a) young males from impoverished backgrounds are required to find work; b) the subject matter / classroom style was not found to be interesting to some males; and c) males tend to be less mature than females and therefore discussing ‘feelings’ openly proved uncomfortable/challenging (especially in front of females).• Historically vulnerable males are more susceptible to recruitment into violent extremist groups.³ The majority of acts of extremist violence have been and continue to be committed by men.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To overcome these issues, future programs should build on the youth empowerment theme by formalising the YDF role as a job AND/OR provide income to households. Second, build on the youth empowerment angle to allow participants to design their own program (not just certain activities within parameters). Sport, games and general “fun” (i.e. movies) could all become components and then these activities could be “discussed”. Youth – and in particular males – are looking for a social “youth club”, not necessarily more “homework”.
<p>2</p> <p>Yet continue to offer online activities to maintain high level of female engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The program succeeded in recruiting female participants. A major reason for this was the adaptation of program activities online.• Some female participants and their parents felt more comfortable with this approach given young men were part of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing bias and increasing open-mindedness may be best served by in-person ‘youth club’ interaction. Youth may need to see each other, share meals together, play games together, etc. in order to fully understand and appreciate someone else’s opinion, culture, and religious beliefs.• Yet the program should not leave anyone behind. While in-person activities could be prioritized when the pandemic ends, online/remote options should also be available for participants who may feel more comfortable with this approach.

³ See the Geneva Centre for Security and Governance, OSCE, and UN Women Policy Brief: Gender, Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (2019)

Recommendations

What?	Why?	How?
<p>3</p> <p>Continue empowering youth to lead their own real-world activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• YDFs were more engaged in NCE activities because they had more ownership over the program’s direction.• They enjoyed the challenge of advocating for real change. It gave them a morale boost and self-belief that they could actively contribute to the well-being of their communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow youth the space to design their own lessons and activities. The PRA approach is good practice and should be replicated as hypotheses can be tested and activities are then backed by evidence. Whatever activities are decided will involve group work towards a common goal which will allow ample space for dialogue reinforcement.• Community engagement is also good practice as it gives a sense of “civic duty”, thereby increasing youth morale and confidence to be active members of society.
<p>4</p> <p>Regular interaction is key to reinforce skills, develop relationships and expand horizons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many programs focus on training a high number of participants over a short period of time (breadth over depth). This approach has limited impact.• Instead, Wahda focused on fewer individuals but offered regular learning opportunities for its beneficiaries (depth over breadth).• Regular interactions between the YDFs offered them the time required to develop a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and experience. This “time” allowed the youth to overcome biases, build confidence and slowly begin to change attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritize depth over breadth in youth-dialogue related programming.• Having a greater impact on a fewer number of direct beneficiaries may also lead to greater knock-on impacts. For example, youth who have sustained skills are far more likely to pass on knowledge and skills to family members, colleagues and friends.

Recommendations

What?

Why?

How?

5

Pairing YDFs from different backgrounds is paramount to confronting biases

- The more diverse a group is, the more opportunities the participants have to learn and grow.
- The story of the two female co-facilitators highlighted in this report is case in point. They could not be more different but over time they learned from one another, built a relationship and used this experience as motivation to teach youth participants in their group.

- More attention should be paid to facilitation pairing and overall group dynamics.
- Groups should contain a diverse mix by gender, religion, nationality, education levels, and perhaps even income levels.

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Expand use of video diaries

- Video diaries provided youth with an opportunity to reflect on the program (i.e. strengths and weaknesses), their progress and even future aspirations.
- They also proved to be excellent tools for research measurement over time. Comparing / contrasting the depth of answers given by particular youth allowed the evaluators to observe change.

- Video diaries should be standard practice and built into program planning.
- Reflection points should take place after each major milestone. For example, in the case of the NCE, YDFs created video diaries after the PRA process, then again after the community engagement, and finally after the local authority meetings.



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