

## **Debate for Action**

### **Egypt**

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### **A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project**

Debate for Action (DfA) has shown the huge potential that young people have for learning debate and dialogue. Sixty young people across different regions in Egypt learned all the skills necessary to be good debaters. During the program, we aimed to change the stereotype of debate as a form of conflict so that participants see debate instead as an initial path to achieving peace. We focused our curriculum on three core skills and values: listening, critical thinking, and effective communication. On the path to peace, these three values are pivotal to understanding and accepting the other side of the aisle. The impact of the project on the community was palpable; we were able to see the difference in participants' mindsets before and after Debate for Action.

### **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

We could not raise more funds; however, we secured several partnerships that gave us additional non-financial support, such as digital marketing posts, which helped in recruiting the participants and securing reasonably priced venues.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

DfA grew out of different experiences I had from working with young people in the MENA region over the past eight years. The project aims to create a space for young people to express themselves freely and make their voices heard. I consider debate one of the most important tools of discourse. Debating makes people listen, think, understand, empathize, and take action to create change. We teach young people to be ready to debate on any side—even if it is not the side that they believe in. By doing that, the participants have the opportunity to look at the two points of view, do comprehensive research on the two sides of each motion, and build arguments that support both sides. This idea allows young people to be flexible and understand that there are always at least two sides and that they might both be right.

### **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

The main issue we are trying to work on in DfA is the lack of spaces that give young people the right to speak freely and make their voices heard. The issue exists not only in Egypt and the MENA region; I believe that it is a global issue. Youth need to have the opportunity to speak up and make policymakers involve them in decision-making processes because the future is for young people. Furthermore, young people need to develop their listening skills, which leads them to accept each other and accept any other views that are different from their point of view.

### **Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

I chose Egypt because it has a huge population of young people: almost 60% are under 35 years old. This gives a huge opportunity to intervene to develop those young people and prepare them to be future leaders.

### **Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

No, but we faced many challenges because of Covid-19; we were always trying to overcome these challenges with more innovative ideas.

**What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

We have not faced challenges in communication with our participants because we explained all the details for the participants from the first moment they applied. We had a detailed description of the program details in all the social media posts for the project, and then we explained more in the interviews we had with the participants to select them. In Debate for Action, we tried to tackle different topics including but not limited to gender equality, youth participation, education, the national development agenda, and political debates. Some of the topics we had in the implementation were critical for some of the participants for many cultural and political reasons; however, our team communicated effectively with those participants about the importance of discussing those topics. One of the debate motions that we had a long conversation about before and after was "Women should have an equal opportunity with men in getting leadership positions". This motion led to some miscommunication with some of the participants, but we worked with them to accept debating on the pro side of that debate.

**How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

DfA showed a great potential to make young people accept each other's opinions and make them listen effectively. In addition, the project makes those young people communicate their ideas to the policymakers who will transfer their ideas into actual policies, which will ultimately make their voices heard. We believe that when people do not feel that their voices are heard, some people choose violence and other ways to express their anger for not being listened to. We understand that does not always happen in all cases of violence; however, not having platforms for young people might lead them to use violence as a way to announce their existence.

**Please describe changes created by the project during the summer?**

The project created a direct change in the mindset of 60 young people from 7 governorates in Egypt. Based on the survey feedback we collected from the participants, 85% agreed that the project supported them being more flexible and listening actively to other people's opinions without any previous judgments. Also, 90% of the participants have mentioned that the project has developed their research skills and guided them to look at credible resources and avoid fake or non-credible resources.

**Please describe anticipated changes that will continue in the future as a result of the project.**

I think the result that will continue in the future for the participants is that they will be able to share those experiences with other young people through the debate clubs they established after the end of the project. Those debate clubs will keep the ideas that are delivered to the young people always alive. We asked them to cascade the training to other young people in their communities, and we will follow up with them every four months to check their progress.

**Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The project has opened my mind to new ways of supporting young people to involve them in the process of changing their communities positively. I saw a huge potential from young people towards learning and gaining new experiences, and that was an inspiration and motivation to work more to support those young people across the MENA region and the whole world.

**Was your project impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The project was impacted by the pandemic because we planned to have more in-person activities; however, after assessing the current situation of the pandemic in Egypt, we decided to conduct the majority of the activities online and conduct some other activities in-person. The hybrid mode helped us include more participants who live in rural areas, which was an unusual opportunity for those young people as most of those activities happen in big cities only. So, I believe that the hybrid model we implemented supported us to include more marginalized people.

### **How did you advance your projects goals despite these challenges?**

One of the main projects was to include young people from marginalized areas in Egypt, and because of the model we worked with, we could consist of a large number of young people from rural areas. I think we achieved that goal and overcame one of the biggest challenges: how we can include a diverse cohort from different backgrounds during the pandemic.

### **What advice would you give to future PfP grantees given the pandemic-related challenges you experienced?**

The main advice I give is to be flexible as much as you can. We had to change our plan several times, but I was always excited to change the plan because every time I changed it, I found that it helped me include more people in our activities.

### **If you were able to implement your project remotely, speak to the highlights and challenges of a conducting a remote project**

The main challenge was the internet connectivity. We lost many people during the implementation because of the bad connection of the internet, but we overcame this challenge by supporting our participants to have different sources of internet such as home internet and hotspot from their smartphones.

### **Motions of the debates:**

- 1- This House believes that supports abandonment of women quota in public elections.
- 2- This House believes that the world succeeded in fighting environmental pollution.
- 3- This House believes disadvantages of banning use of coal are more than the advantages.
- 4- This House believes Women should have an equal opportunity with men in getting leadership positions.
- 5- This House believes the new high school system in Egypt will not achieve its goals.
- 6- This house believes that foreign debts compromise economics of third world countries instead of nourishing them.
- 7- This house believes that local cultural heritage is perishing over globalization.
- 8- This House believes that the feminism movement has failed in the Arab countries.

### **Quotes from the participants:**

· “Debate is such a valuable skill that everyone should have, I am glad that I was able to be part of this program.” Belal Khaled – Participant

· “I was excited to learn more about debates and how I can use the debate to communicate with other people. The workshop taught me different skills, and I had so much fun during the workshop and during the debate.” - Malek Elhady – Participant

· “Supporting young people to gain this kind of experience encourages them to be active citizens. Debate is a strong tool that can change the present and shape the future.” Mai Hegazy – Debate Facilitator

Pictures from one of project activities:





