A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

The Peace Story program supports 25 young people from Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan in gaining peacebuilding and storytelling skills that can enhance their positive role in issues of positive peace and in preventing violent conflict. It also brings visibility to the initiatives and projects initiated by young people to promote diversity and dialogue in their community through art such as using storytelling, forum theatre, and experiential program.

Project Description

1. How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?

In the last 5 years, I have been working on peacebuilding, especially on youth participation in the Peace-building process in different capacities such as trainer, project leader, and coordinator. Throughout my journey, I discovered that only the power of appreciation of young people’s efforts can really impact their lives and communities. Giving them the tools and space to share their stories with the world can inspire their peers. In 2019, I have been selected as The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Young Peace Builder with other young activists around the MENA region to create a platform for people from different racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds to come together to create positive social change in their communities. Then, I start the first pilot of the idea in upper Egypt and see the participants cared to spread the training in their communities. However, through the project for Peace, I have more resources to work with more young people around the region, especially Syrian refugees. My approach is to build on the existing youth leaders and give them the tools to start their own impactful peace projects in their communities.

2. Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

Choosing Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan because those countries have several peace-related challenges, and they have a huge young population at the same time. Especially in Lebanon and Jordan, there are lots of issues regarding sectarian division and Syrian refugees’ inclusion in society. Also, in Egypt, there are religious/political clashes. At the same time, there is great potential for the program in those countries. I received lots of support from local NGOs working in those countries. They help me reach out to young people, recommendations for trainers, and support participants.

3. What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

We plan to do hybrid activities but covid and electricity access limit our capacity to do that in Lebanon and Jordan. So, we had most of our training online. However, that helps us to reach diverse people from different parts of the countries and reach more people. One of the tools that help us is making sure we have a flexible manual that could be easily done online or in person. Also, it is having more online options helps us to follow up with participants who have less access to electricity by watching the recordings.

4. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

We didn’t raise another fund. However, we were able to have secured partnerships that helped us to recruit participants in Lebanon and Jordan. Also, we make partners support further support our participants’ projects in their respective communities.

5. Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe

We are hoping for having to launch another edition of the program that will include more countries in the MENA region with the support of UNAOC and other regional and local partners around the region.
Reflection

1. How do you define peace?

Peace happens when there is an absence of conflict and opportunities for development and coexistence. Also, for me, Peace cannot be achieved without hope, especially for young people who born in a region is full of conflict and challenges.

2. In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?

We believe that young people are a driver for change and could be also the target of violent extremists. In a region that has a lot of challenges, young people are struggling to prove themselves and achieve their dreams. Giving them the space to appreciate their work towards their communities and telling their stories to the world will inspire them to build peace and inspire others to join the movement. This is the impact Peace story trying to have. In long term, creating a wider movement of inspiring young peacebuilders in the region to change the narrative about the region from violent to peaceful and inspiring region.

Also, After the end of the training, program participants start to implement peacebuilding projects in their communities. Currently, our participants implement their peacebuilding projects in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. in Lebanon, Anti-bullying project aims to prevent bullying because it’s a form of violence and can help parents, caring adults, and caregivers understand bullying and how to stand up to it safely. Run4Peace is another project that uses Running marathons for raising awareness of peaceful coexistence in south Lebanon. While in Egypt, Ban Bully project aims to Spread the culture of addressing and identifying bullying and violence and its bad side effects and help in preventing it from happening in the first place. Co-existence club project to facilitate a dialogue space for Egyptian youth to know more about diversity, peacebuilding, and inclusion through interactive workshops, simulation models, and dialogue skills. And fight against radicalization and extremism by building a diverse inclusive community. In Jordon, Rusul is a project focused on the role of women in Peacebuilding by creating a platform to share documentary films and stories about women.

3. What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies?

We didn’t face challenges when it comes to communication with participants because we prepare all the details before the program starts. One of the learning more than challenges was the difference between the dialects of the participants which sometimes one word has a different meaning in different dialects. We capitalize on that throughout the program to exchange cultural aspects of different countries.

4. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

This project has been a shocking experience for me that make me realize how much potential we have in the region, but youth just need the resources and motivation. I saw people who are living in very tough circumstances in refugees camp with no access to electricity or resources and at the same time, they are willing to change their community and keen to learn and implement projects in their communities. this project renews my passion and energy to support young people in marginalized communities and proved any opportunities I can to tell their stories to the world.

Personal Statement

“During the project, I learn that well planning is the key to the smooth implementation of the project. However, we always faced unexpected events. So being flexible is very important to use the unexpected events in your favor in implementation. Also, be open and flexible to outcomes. Sometimes we plan something with specific objectives, but it might have a greater impact than we thought “Mohamed Ahmed