Project Summary
With the aid of the Davis fund this summer, we were able to expand TEDxYouth@ABIS’s operations resulting in a bigger, more impactful annual TEDx event which will be taking place the last week of September. Powered by TEDxYouth@ABIS, we launched “Tagreba” (arabic for “experience”), an initiative aimed at increasing access to extracurricular activities and supporting low-income students in their extracurricular pursuits.

Project Description
Vision
We believe in the efficacy of extracurricular activities as a tool for youth development because it targets a problem that is specific to Egypt: the traditional educational system and the resulting lack of youth empowerment. The Egyptian educational system is entirely memory-based and usually sciences-focused with no attention to soft skills or diverse academic exposure to social sciences/humanities. And because entry to national colleges is solely based on your transcript with no regard to what you do outside the classroom or your community initiative, students prioritize their academics and are rarely incentivized to pursue any activities. This produces generations of students who are unable to engage in critical thinking and therefore cannot think for themselves. In addition to that, students are left unequipped with the soft skills necessary to start their own initiatives or occupy any leadership positions.

This perpetuates a cycle of dependency where Egyptian youth are spoon fed academics and social norms and therefore cast as followers, with no space for autonomy or proactivity. How can we expect to see change when our country’s youth are in no capacity to think or lead for themselves? In my years as a high school student in Egypt, I grew up to witness the problem but also to be part of the solution. I saw how our educational system made us into compliant viewers and how joining activities allowed me to step out of this position to challenge the ways of things around us and be active both in expression and in action. In starting TEDxYouth@ABIS, I saw how activities allowed my friends and colleagues to experience the same transition.

Expanding Our Vision
Our implementation strategy as a team was to expand our operations for our annual TEDx event to increase our reach, in addition to launching a mentorship program, and an online directory that aggregates extracurricular opportunities. Before implementing our vision, we carried out some fieldwork with students and stakeholders working with students to understand closely the challenges students and organizations face when it comes to extracurricular activities. Our fieldwork confirmed our prior understanding that students communities lack awareness of the importance of extracurricular activities, but some interviews notified us that the problem is not only a matter of awareness but also a matter of accessibility and capability. We found out that multiple students struggle to join activities because of their location in remote governorates, especially since most activities are located in cities like Cairo and Alexandria. We also discovered that low-income students are excluded from many extracurricular activities because of the high fees or due to a language barrier, since many activities are conducted in a mix of Arabic and English and therefore those who do not have the privilege of language training are easily excluded. Accordingly, our vision of spreading awareness of
extracurricular activities is expanded to include finding solutions to hindered access due to financial/geographical constraints.

**Implementation**

Our main operations included

1. **Planning our TEDx event** in its 4th generation, scheduled to take place during the last week of September.
   - It hosts speakers discussing a range of topics relating to youth empowerment, specifically advising students on how to be more *strategic* under the theme “Checkmate.”
   - Collaborating with community partners who offer development services for students to set up booths at our event.
   - With the aid of the Davis fund, we were able to employ promotional activities that helped expand our reach to new schools, therefore diversifying our audience for this year’s event.

2. **Tagreba website** ([www.tagreba.org](http://www.tagreba.org))
   - Tagreba is a directory aggregating all extracurricular opportunities with ratings and reviews for organizations.
   - We recruited a team that uploads 10+ opportunities daily with weekly quotas set per category, location, and required experience level.
   - We currently have 120 opportunities live on the website in STEM, Entrepreneurship, Organizational Committees, Research, Arts, and Music.
   - We just recently hit 400 users.
   - Opportunities are available in Cairo and Alexandria and recently in 3 new governorates (Menya, Dakahlia, Assiut).

3. **Build Your Future Summit**
   - Partnering with OBM education, we secured a booth at Build Your Future Summit, which brings together 3,500 high school students. BYF’s is characterized by its reach to students from remote governorates and student communities who mostly attend public schools. This helped strengthen our reach to students who face obstacles in access to extracurriculars due to geographical or financial constraints.

4. **Mentorship**
   - We recruited a group of student mentors who demonstrate extracurricular achievement through occupying leadership positions in clubs, ranking in entrepreneurship/scientific competitions, publishing their research, having an outstanding music/arts portfolio or any other notable accomplishment.
   - We matched students we met at BYF with suitable mentors according to their interests to meet for online zoom meetings for guidance on opportunities and advice on skill development.
   - We also introduced an admissions mentorship service, where students meet for application reviews when applying to summer programs/undergraduate programs by mentors who already got accepted into these programs.
   - We worked closely with 45 students since the mentorship launch last month (and still counting!)

**Future Direction**

The conclusion of the Davis fund is not the end of this project. TEDxYouth@ABIS has successfully ran for 4 generations, and thanks to a strong alumni network that advises the transition from one generation to another with a competitive application process for prospective presidents and capacity-building trainings after selection, we are confident that our annual event will continue to impact hundreds of students for upcoming generations to come. Tagreba’s team will continue to
operate the website and the mentorship program and are currently applying for local grants and considering other fundraising sources.

Reflection
My understanding of peace was and remains to be influenced by the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the political events that followed. This is a time when I witnessed youth take to the street, speak up for the socioeconomic injustices our population faced for decades, and command change. With the Arab spring’s fall, a generation of youth was left losing hope in the future they’ve longingly aspired for and are left in an educational system that does not challenge them to think critically or acquire the skills necessary to take any initiative. Working on this project has allowed me to reignite passion in young generations not to be non-critical observers but to actively participate in activities that allow them to engage on the community level while acquiring leadership skills. A future of change and peace is a future where youth think for themselves and are capable of taking a stand and acting.

Personal Statement
“The Davis project allowed me to witness first-hand that when students are given opportunities to grow their skills outside the classroom, they learn to think for themselves and take initiative, ultimately becoming active community members with impact. We certainly can’t expect a future of change with unempowered youth.” - Zeina Shalaby.