Debate for Action

Participating University: Middlebury Institute of International Studies - MIIS
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Proposed Dates: April - August 2021
Proposed Location: Egypt

Background

It has been a decade since one of the most remarkable revolutions in human history, the Egyptian revolution of January 2011. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptian youth went to the street against a 30-year-old repressive regime. Young people, who had only seen one regime in their lives, chanted on almost every street in Egypt for freedom, social justice, and bread. In only 18 days, these peaceful protesters overthrew the regime and started a new page in their life. But due to the repressive military regime, youth could not access the tools to develop their political understanding and discussion abilities which leads to many incidents of violent conflicts after the revolution.

I was only 14 years old when the revolution happened, and I have witnessed the conflicts and issues that happened during and after the revolution; one of the main issues is the absence of spaces for debate, where young people can learn to see issues from multiple angles, listen to and learn from their teammates to build an argument, and develop communication and persuasion skills. That’s why I’ve spent much of my time since the revolution teaching young people debate skills. Debate not only builds skills in critical thinking and communication that are vital to civic participation — debate also requires participants to take on other perspectives and points of view in order to win a match. This is especially important in Egypt, where citizens are sharply divided along political, economic, ethnic and geographic lines. I have facilitated more than 80 debate workshops in 6 years attended by almost 1,200 young people, not only in Egypt but in other MENA countries such as Tunisia. I conducted these workshops as part of a promising debate program in the Mediterranean area called Young Mediterranean Voices, which is supported by the British Council, European Union, and Anna Lindh Foundation. My experience has shown me that what Egyptian youth need now is a debate program by Egyptians, for Egyptians, that focuses on local issues and discussions that matter to us, as well as global issues brought into the Egyptian context.

Proposal

The project will give young people the space and resources to learn the art of debate. It will also allow young people to have debates with the participation of international policymakers and present policy memos to the policymakers, aiming not only to debate for the sake of debate but also to understand how a debate position could be translated into action. Debate for Action aims to develop 60 young people across Egypt with a focus on marginalized people, such as young women and people who live in rural areas, at least 55% of the project’s participants will be young women. I will use the network of local development organizations in Cairo and rural areas to reach out to young women and men as well as using social media platforms to reach more young people.

Debate for action will teach Egyptian young people essential life skills such as public speaking, communication skills, listening, empathy, collaboration, researching tools, and writing policy memos, which will reflect on their debate and dialogue skills. These life skills are a pivotal stone in developing the personalities of young people to support conflict resolution. The project will teach debate as a tool which allows people to understand the other side’s ideas and arguments. During the debate, the facilitators will work with the young people to be ready to debate on both sides of the debate regardless of their preferences. This will give the beneficiaries the ability to be in different positions even if it is not the position that they support, as an opportunity to be in the shoes of the other side. The ultimate goal of the project is to give young people the ability to debate with each other not for winning but for the ability to
understand an issue from multiple perspectives. I believe that debate is a strong tool that prevents conflicts and supports conflict resolution by giving the space for people to speak with each other and learn to evaluate arguments critically.

Moreover, we will conduct 5 debates covering local community issues such as gender equality, youth empowerment, and women empowerment as well as global issues such as climate change and peacebuilding. During these debates, the participants will write policy memos that they can present to policymakers to make their voices heard to the decision-makers. In addition, we will support the participants to establish their own debate clubs in their local communities. At the end of the program will support the 60 young people to not only conduct effective, strong debates but also to build these skills among their peers through debate clubs.

**Project goals**
1- Facilitate 4 workshops for 60 young people who are between 16 to 25 years old on debating.
2- Conduct 5 debates between our project participants and write 5 policy memos.
3- Support participants to found 4 to 6 debate clubs across the country.

**Secured partnerships**
I plan to create a number of partnerships with different international and local entities that support young people and debate and dialogue scenes in Egypt. These organizations are:
1- Young Mediterranean Voices
2- Teens Club for Development (which leads one of the biggest debate clubs in the MENA region)
3- Local youth development organizations

**Implementation plan and activities**
The project will be implemented in three phases, from April 2021 until August 2021: First phase will focus on researching and developing a curriculum, including peer-to-peer training and activities. The curriculum will be designed by experts in debate and public speaking, and it will be flexible to be implemented fully in-person, online, or a blended module between in-person and online. The second phase will consist of 4 training sessions, each one will include around 15 participants ages 16 to 25. Each training will be held over 4 days and include topics such as public speaking, presentation skills, body language, scientific research, building a strong debate argument, rebuttal, debate models, and policy debates. These training sessions will be conducted by a peer-to-peer educational system, which will allow young people to learn from each other. The third phase will be by conducting 5 debates between our beneficiaries and with a participation of policymakers. Those policymakers include but are not limited to NGOs leaders, government officials, and international organizations representatives.

**Timeline**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April to May</td>
<td>Partnerships and curriculum design</td>
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<tr>
<td>End of May - June</td>
<td>Conduct 4 debating workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>5 Debates and discussion circles</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Launch new debate clubs</td>
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**Sustainability**
At the end of the project, 60 young people will acquire +10 different life skills, and they are able to present their ideas and arguments in an effective way and have an open mind to accept and understand other people’s ideologies, beliefs, differences. In addition, these life skills will support their personal, academic, professional paths. In addition to that, we will support our program graduates to establish their own debate clubs in their schools, universities, or neighborhood, so they can be able to cascade the skills that they have learnt to other young people in their communities by using our project curriculum and conducting regular debates in topics that matter to them.