Challenges of Engaging Young People in Civil Society through NGO Trainings in Lebanon

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Executive Summary

NGOs conduct trainings of young people in Lebanon to 'engage them in civil society'. This should be understood as providing young people with skills and motivation to 'organize, advocate and act by themselves', thus enabling them to become 'agents of change' as part of Lebanon's civil society. This report draws on six months of field work in various youth training projects in Lebanon, including a 'leader training' organized by the author of this report for MS Action Aid Denmark (MS). The purpose of the report is to explore the challenges and outcomes of the training approach used by MS in the MENA region, in order to provide them with recommendations about how to proceed in their effort to engage young people in civil society in Lebanon.

The report concludes that MS with their leader training in Lebanon did reach their aim of engaging young people in civil society while 'strengthening their ability to organize, advocate, and act by themselves' since some participants used the concrete skills obtained in the training to develop their own projects following the training.

However, the report shows that trainings seldom manage to get young people to believe that they through civil society can become 'agents of change'. The main reason is that they do not see NGOs making a major difference in society. NGO trainings and other projects are seen as determined by the agenda of foreign donors and are also seen as too small-scale to make any significant difference. Furthermore, the trainings are seen by young people as not addressing their needs, since they are more concerned about their immediate needs, such as finding a job and securing their future.

Nevertheless, many young people do attend the trainings and some are active in the NGOs. Especially the well-educated, leftist secular youth, who are not part of the established sectarian parties in Lebanon, use the anti-sectarian NGOs as their political platform to engage in different campaigns. They especially use the trainings for networking and coming up with different projects during the trainings. Some of them also get jobs in the NGOs after having volunteered. These young people are generally skeptical of the overall work of NGOs. However, many find meaning in the specific project of the NGO which they are engaged in.

Trainings are also used by participants as a social space. The young people enjoy being away from home with other young people, being in a less formal learning environment, meeting new friends, and discussing and expressing themselves. They also use the trainings for acquiring practical skills, such as doing group work, public speaking, writing proposals, and managing projects. Thus, in spite of young people not attending trainings in order to become engaged in civil society, the trainings have political, social and practical benefits for the participants, which motivate them to attend.

The report emphasizes that MS faces significant challenges related to achieving its goal to engage young people in civil society, including the following:

1: It is difficult to measure whether the trainings lead to their intended outcome, partly due to the difficulty of monitoring the participants after the trainings to see whether they use the trainings to engage in civil society activities after the trainings.

2: Choosing the right local partner organization is a challenge that involves the dilemma of choosing between a) professional anti-sectarian NGOs, which are formally non-political and are in a position to work with young people across the various political and sectarian divides in Lebanon but whose support base do not reach beyond a relatively small elite centered around Beirut, or b) to work with more political or sectarian organizations that have a much broader support base among the young people in Lebanon.

3: Encouraging volunteerism is a challenge, since the term 'volunteering' has been watered down in the Lebanese context to describe almost any activity related to NGOs, including attending trainings and being paid as a volunteer.

4: Addressing the needs of young people in Lebanon is a challenge, because young people do not express a need to become 'agents of change', as the NGOs would like them to be, but rather express a need for more immediate job-related skills (e.g. computer training) and concrete job opportunities.

5: Dealing with suspicions that MS was working as part of a pro-Western political agenda is a challenge, since the themes of the activities of MS are similar to those of USAID of whom the young people are especially skeptical.

Key recommendations for MS related to the above challenges include that MS should:

- carefully decide on key success indicators

- establish ways to ensure that the challenges of the trainings are brought to light

- move its emphasis from 'volunteerism' to 'activism' in the way MS describes its projects

- make sure that the projects the young people engage in are meaningful to them and not too small-scale

- coordinate and collaborate on efforts with other NGOs

- accommodate the young people's needs for concrete job-related skills to the extent possible

- be as transparent as possible about its goal, objectives and official views, and actively communicate and explain these to the young people in Lebanon to prevent suspicions and conspiracy theories

By keeping in mind the challenges identified in this report as well as its recommendations, MS should be in a stronger position to decide on and plan any future effort to engage young people in civil society through trainings in Lebanon.

Acknowledgements

List of acronyms

DAPP	Danish-Arab Partnership Programme
DPNA	Development for People and Nature Association
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
GP	Global Platform
LADE	Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MS	MS Action Aid Denmark (MS = Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, which in English means 'cooperation among people'. Since 2010 it is called 'Action Aid Denmark'. AA DK)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OTI	Office for Transition Initiatives
ULDY	Union for Lebanese Democratic Youth
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. INTRODUCTION

MS Action Aid Denmark (henceforth 'MS'[1]) is one of the NGOs in Lebanon that work with training young people in order to engage them in civil society as part of a broader democratization effort. More specifically MS' aim is to "[engage] young people in civil society issues and strengthening their ability to organize, advocate, and act by themselves."[2] Training is one of the methods used to reach this aim, since it is believed that young people through these trainings will obtain the skills and motivation required to actively promote and engage in civil society activities on their own after the trainings.

1.1. Goal

The goal of this report is to help strengthen MS' understanding of the different challenges that MS face in their work to engage young people in civil society in Lebanon[3]. This, it is hoped, will help strengthen the foundation for MS planning and decision-making processes related to its future work in this area, including with regard to the use of trainings as a way to engage young people in civil society.

In addition, the report aims to facilitate a discussion of these challenges among all key stakeholders in Lebanon. It is therefore the plan, if MS agrees, to distribute this report widely also in Lebanon and return to Lebanon to discuss the findings and implications of this report with its various stakeholders.

1.2. Objectives

In addition to the overall goal outlined above, this report has the following objectives:

- To explore how anti-sectarian NGOs in Lebanon work when training young people
- To understand how the trainings are being used by the participants
- To find out how the donors' intentions are understood by young people in NGOs
- To understand the everyday circumstances and needs of the young people that participate in NGO youth trainings

1.3. Activities

In order to attain the above goal and objectives, the author of this report (henceforth: "I"), engaged in 10 NGO trainings and several other NGO events and activities. Specific activities included the following:

- Organizing, implementing and evaluating a leader training seminar in Lebanon for MS Action Aid Denmark in 2009
- Participating in 9 other anti-sectarian NGOs' youth trainings, as well as several other events.
- Having meetings with Lebanese NGOs to talk about their work with young people and find participants and trainers for the MS training
- Spending time with young people active in anti-sectarian NGOs

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1 In 2010 MS changed their name to Action Aid Denmark – AA DK. However at the time of research (2009) it was still called MS Action Aid.

2 From "Strategy for MS' MENA Strategy" (2008).

3 More specifically the report was carried out for MS' 'Global Platform' training center in Jordan.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. Framing the efforts of training young people in Lebanon

In the 20th Century, the MENA Region (Middle East and North Africa) had the oil that built the infrastructure of the region. Today 2/3 of the population in the MENA region is under 30 Years of age. This is what we can now call the Human oil of the Middle East, which is a new huge opportunity. The only difference between the oil and young people is that, if you had not discovered the oil it would not have been a problem. But if you are not investing in young people, then I am afraid that young people will tend to be more radical and feel hopeless and marginalized in their countries, which is very dangerous.

-Ahmed Al Hindawy – Youth Policy Specialist, League of Arab States[4]

In many reports, articles and presentations about youth in the Middle East, young people are depicted in a contradictory manner: on the one hand being portrayed as having the potential for creating a bright future - like Al-Hindawi describes them as being 'the human oil of the middle east' - however, on the other hand, being depicted as a 'demographic bulge', 'a generation in waiting' or 'a potential security threat due to radicalization'. The same rhetoric can for instance be found in the Country Report of Lebanon for USAIDs Office of Transition Initiatives: "The program focuses on youth who are often protagonists in conflict but also offer the most potential as voices of peace and agents of change."

These two opposing depictions are used by donors and organizations to argue that it is necessary to take action, including 'to turn the threat into an opportunity'. A significant part of this effort is done by training young people in the region based on the understanding that by training them on topics such as human rights, leadership, communication, project management and citizenship they will get the skills, motivation and self-confidence to become agents for positive change and reform in their countries. Whether this approach is realistic is one of the issues that this report will consider.

2.1.2. The role of MS

MS' overall aim is to "fight poverty by promoting political empowerment of the world's poor."[5] Its Middle East and North Africa (MENA) programme is funded by the Danish governments' Danish Arab Partnership Program (DAPP). DAPP was launched in 2003 by the Danish Government with the objective to "establish a basis for improved dialogue, understanding and cooperation between Denmark and the Arab region and to support existing local reform processes in the Middle East and North Africa." It has allocated around DKK 100 million a year to work for developing three main areas in the MENA region: 1) democratization, 2) development of knowledge based societies and 3) gender equality[6]. Under the pillar of 'democratization' MS is allocated funding and MS received DKK 16.4 million (~3.1 mio.U.S.$) in 2009 for 3 years for their MENA programme under the above-mentioned

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[4] Quoted from a TV interview with Al Hindawi in DR2 Deadline – 8. June 2010.

[5] www.actionaid.dk/sw115215.asp

[6] The priorities of funding for the Danish Arab Partnership Program were chosen on the basis of recommendations from the UN Arab Human Development Report in 2003.

aim of 'engaging young people in civil society issues and strengthening their ability to organize, advocate, and act by themselves.'

MS, like many other NGOs, use trainings as one of the ways to reach this aim. In this context, MS funded a leader training seminar in October 2009 in Lebanon for young Danish and Lebanese volunteers in order to "give young people the skills to lead volunteer groups to make social change."[7] As part of the research for this report, I had the opportunity to organize, implement, and evaluate this seminar.

2.1.3. MS' planned next steps

MS does not yet have staff in Lebanon but has plans of hiring some. Its regional MENA office is located in Jordan. MS is now expanding the MENA programme and will be organizing more trainings as well as other youth projects in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. A training centre opened in Amman in June 2010, called 'Global Platform', and two Danish trainers have been hired to organize the trainings. Training is a new essential activity in MS' work. MS is expanding its 'Training4Change' unit globally, recently opening 'Global Platform' training centers in El Salvador, Nepal, and Tanzania.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Author's role

This report is written as part of my Master's thesis in Anthropology for Copenhagen University. MS, as mentioned, provided me with the opportunity to organize a Leader Training Seminar in Lebanon as part of my fieldwork research. I was allowed to do so in part based on my previous experience with MS in Denmark as a volunteer trainer and organizer of MS' leader trainings in Denmark. Furthermore, I have studied and worked in Egypt, speak Arabic, and have been involved in several youth projects and trainings with Danish and Arab young people. The research was carried out on a voluntary basis. However, my plane ticket and expenses for organizing the Leader Training in Lebanon were covered by MS.

2.2.2. Context

I arrived in Lebanon at the end of June 2009 together with MS' regional Coordinator and MS' training consultant Thomas Kiernan. They stayed with me the first week of my six months stay. We had meetings with several NGOs in order to find a suitable partner with whom I could organize the leader training. After this first week, I continued to have meetings with NGOs, who also helped me find trainers and participants for the training.

The Danish-Lebanese Leader Training Camp took place from 30 September to 4 October 2009 in a venue one hour by car north of Beirut. There were 36 participants in the camp (12 Danish, 20 Lebanese, 3 Palestinian Lebanese, 1 Jordanian) and 12 trainers (6 Danish, 6 Lebanese) who also attended a four day Training of Trainers prior to the camp. In the training participants were divided into six groups, where each worked on a campaign, and led another groups campaign. Furthermore,

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[7]From the 'Call for Participants for Danish-Lebanese Leader Training Camp' August 2009

there were sessions on project management, communication, group dynamics, conflict resolution, and how to motivate and empower youth.

During my six months stay, I was in contact with many Lebanese NGOs and participated in their different youth projects, events, and trainings. Thereby, I got well acquainted with the NGO environment in Lebanon, the people involved in the work and learned about the challenges and outcomes of other trainings as well.

2.2.3. Key informants

The young people whom I have quoted and whom I write about in this report are the young people active in the anti-sectarian NGOs in Lebanon. Some of them were participants in the camp and others I met through other NGO events and trainings. Many of them were part of a network of NGO activist in Beirut and were volunteering and/or working in these NGOs. They were in general aged 20-30 and most spoke English well.

I did, however, also spend time at trainings outside Beirut. I especially followed a six month youth project in Southern Lebanon funded by USAID, called 'Village-to-Village'. Spending time with the young people from projects and trainings around Lebanon gave me further valuable input, which was useful for comparing their situation to the situation of the young NGO activists in Beirut.

2.2.4. Approach

I used an anthropological approach combined with conducting 'Participatory Action Research'.

The anthropological method used for this report includes 'Participant Observation'. This means that besides doing formal recorded interviews, I gathered a large part of my data by spending time with the young people active in NGOs, participating in trainings and events. I thus collected data from observing and through informal conversations, at the same time being part of the situation I was researching[8].

'Participatory Action Research' was essential for my approach. It is a method which is not only used by anthropologists but also by other researchers who engage directly in their field of study in order to encourage certain improvements.

In my case, the 'participatory action' consisted of organizing the MS training together with staff and trainers from Lebanese NGOs and after the training evaluate and talk about the trainings with the participants in order to improve MS' future work with trainings.

In meetings and when meeting young people active in NGOs, I would present myself as being a volunteer researcher for MS who wanted to establish themselves in Lebanon working with training (MS did not yet have a programme in Lebanon). My position as an MS researcher gave me access to meetings with NGOs and volunteers, all of who were very helpful. It seemed to be interesting for them to establish contacts with MS - a new international NGO who was a potential donor for their projects – and some hoped that my research could help improve how NGOs work in Lebanon. Many invited me for their training sessions and other projects and openly discussed their work with me.

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[8] I wrote field notes, when possible and every night, from my observations and conversations.

It was essential for me to combine participatory action research with participant observation, since spending time with the young people gave me more of their critical reflections on NGOs and their experiences than I would have gotten from more formal NGO meetings.

My informants have also—in addition to being objects of my study—been a direct part of my research process since I throughout my fieldwork have been discussing my findings with them. Many have also been sent drafts of this report in order to comment on it. Furthermore, most quotes in this report have been verified by those that made them (they are identified by name in this report). In cases where I was unable to reach these individuals, they have in this report been referred to as a 'guy' or a 'girl'.

The above-mentioned approach has been useful for understanding why and how trainings are carried out, why young people participate in them, and how they use them.

2.2.5. Data collection (See Annex 1 for details)

The following data has been produced/collected for this report[9]:

- 5 Notebooks of handwritten notes and 236 Computer Pages of field notes from attending:
    - A total of 27 days of trainings/Workshops
    - 16 NGO events
    - Meetings with 15 different NGO
    - Meetings with 7 youth organisations/clubs
    - 2 Focus group interviews (1 and 3 hours)
- Recorded interviews with 11 individual NGO youth (1-2 hours each) making 111 pages of transcribed data
- Email correspondence with MS and other NGOs throughout 6 months
- Publications, folders, flyers, project descriptions and reports from NGOs

2.2.6. Limitations

An essential limitation in my fieldwork was language. Since I only know Egyptian Arabic and not Lebanese Arabic, I missed out on some discussions at the trainings. It also meant that my key informants where mostly English speakers. Also since I lived and spent most of my time in Beirut, my key informants mainly became the English speaking NGO activists in Beirut rather than young people attending trainings in other parts of Lebanon.

In my research I focused on MS' aim of engaging young people in civil society from the perspective of how participants engaged in these efforts. This meant that I had to devote less time and attention to the perspective of other stakeholder such as staff, trainers and the donors. The report does also not include an examination of the extent to which a strengthened civil society furthers democracy. Finally, the report does not include an analysis of the 'dialogue' between the Danish and Lebanese participants at the MS camp, in spite of this also being an aim of the training. I also did not include a gender analysis nor does it include the issue of training methodology, both of which could be the subject of future research efforts.

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[9] I analyzed the data by coding and mapping it using the programme 'QSR Nvivo 8.'

2.3. Basic facts about Lebanon

2.3.1. Fact box on Lebanon[10]

Area: 10,452 sq km (4,036 sq miles)

Population: 4 million, which does not include an estimated 300,000 - 450,000 Palestinian refugees. The population is predominantly Arab with a sizeable Armenian minority.

The Lebanese diaspora is thought to total 14 million.

Capital City: Beirut (population: 1.6m, estimate 1996)

Languages: Arabic (official), English, French, Armenian

Religion(s): There are 18 registered sects in Lebanon including, Maronite Christian, Shia Muslim, Sunni Muslim and Druze (a separate religion with Islamic roots)

Currency: Lebanese Lira

Major political parties: Numerous political groupings exist in Lebanon, organized along mostly sectarian lines

Government: Republic

2.3.2. Political situation in Lebanon

Lebanon is characterized by its diversity. Its population consists of 18 different registered religious sects. Lebanon had a long civil war from 1975-1989, which formally ended by the signing of the Ta'ef Agreement. This agreement institutionalized a power sharing formula among the two major religious communities, the Christians and the Muslims. This meant that half of the seats in the parliament were allotted to Christian denominations, and the other half to four Muslim Sects: Sunnis, Shiites, Druze and Allawites. The political parties are also mainly organized along sectarian lines: The Sunnis mainly support the Future Movement lead by Saad Hariri, the Shia support Hezbollah or the Amal Movement, the Druze the Progressive Socialist Party, the Christians the Free Patriotic Movement or Lebanese Forces and so forth. There are however also smaller more non-sectarian parties such as the Syrian National Socialist Party, the Democratic Left, etc. All parties are officially non-sectarian.

The parliament is divided into two main coalitions: The '14 March Coalition' which is currently in Government, mainly supported by Sunni and Christian with a few Shia, and the '8 March Coalition' which is part of the opposition, consisting mainly of Shia Amal, the Hezbollah movement, the Christian Free Patriotic Movement and a few Druze and Sunnis.

Lebanon is also host to 422,000 registered Palestinian refugees, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA 2009). These are however not part of the Lebanese Parliament, as they lack political rights. Today, the youngest generation of Palestinians in Lebanon has been born into refugee status, and many of the refugees live in destitute conditions inside twelve official refugee camps scattered throughout the country. With limited access to the labor market and to the Lebanese educational system, Palestinian refugees remain highly dependent on international assistance.

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10 www.fco.gov.uk Foreign and Commonwealth Office

2.3.3. The 2006 war

During the 'July War' in 2006, Lebanon saw 34 consecutive days of Israeli bombardments, causing the death of 1,200 Lebanese civilians and the displacement of up to one million people. The Israeli bombardments particularly targeted the Shi'a dominated areas of Beirut's southern suburbs, southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, which are among the poorest of the country. During the war, international governmental as well as non-governmental organizations responded with a massive humanitarian relief operation in the targeted areas.

In the aftermath of the war, the international community pledged U.S.$900 million for humanitarian assistance and early recovery efforts, although only U.S.$581 million was eventually disbursed or contributed. An additional U.S.$7.6 billion in assistance for reconstruction and economic stabilization was pledged at the International Conference for Support to Lebanon, or "Paris III", in January 2007[11].

2.3.4. Situation of young people in Lebanon [12]

First some key statistics:

- About one-third of the population in Lebanon (32%) are between 18 and 35 years old

- The unemployment rate amongst youth aged 15-24 is 22.6% and this rate is higher for young women (30.4%) than for young men (19.6%).

- Youth unemployment constitutes more than 70% of the overall unemployment rate in Lebanon.

- More than 37% of youth aged 18-35 wish to emigrate or leave the country temporarily – this rate is higher among young men (43.3%) than young women (23%).

Young people in Lebanon share many of the characteristics and challenges with other Arab Youth: a high unemployment rate, a desire to leave the country, a close relationship with their extended family, widespread use of communication technologies which provide a link to the outside world, and a high level of political consciousness. When most of the young Lebanese people finish their studies, they often face unemployment, and since there is no established program to facilitate their transition to work life, the young people often remain dependent on their families. The situation is thus especially problematic for young people whose families cannot help them to find their first job. Political parties and connections through these parties are however seen as one essential way to reach a job for the young people.

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[11] Lebanon Country Profile 2010 www.finance.gov.lb.
[12] From "Studies on Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Countries: Lebanon" Euro-Med Youth III Programme

2.4. The Lebanese civil society

One of my reasons for choosing Lebanon for my research was that it is the country in the MENA region known to have the most vibrant civil society, with the highest number of associations and organizations per capita. Today more than 5,000 NGOs are registered in Lebanon although not all of them are active.

Young people in Lebanon more frequently engage in campaigns and make their own political movements and initiatives than is the case in other Arab countries. Young people are mainly active in NGOs, associations, political parties and political organizations.

Civil society organizations started really developing during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) when aid started arriving from abroad and relief work was needed. During this period civil society organizations worked independently of the weak government. People, however, increasingly leaned towards their sectarian parties as the war progressed. This was mirrored in the organizations becoming more sectarian.

In the 1990's, civil society expanded to include labor unions and syndicates and aid continued to come in from abroad. Today, the biggest political parties still have their own charity foundations and organizations, which are largely religiously motivated and sectarian in nature.

The number of NGOs has risen especially after the 2006 war with Israel, as foreign donors in the Paris III agreement pledged U.S.$ 7.6 billion for the reconstruction of Lebanon. A part of the funds went to NGOs, including to their work with young people. This resulted in the large amount of youth projects and trainings taking place in Lebanon today.

2.4.1. Trainings - a popular way to do projects

When I came to Lebanon in June 2009 together with the two MS staff, we initially had meetings with different Lebanese NGOs to find a partner organization. We were looking for an organization that had experience with trainings. This was, surprisingly, not difficult at all. Doing trainings seems to be an integral part of most youth projects and apparently an easy way to get funding.

As the aim was to 'engage' and motivate the young people to act, trainings had been used to 'transfer knowledge' on a certain topic, and it had been assumed that the participants could use the information and skills for doing small projects after the training. For instance, the Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI) under USAID had at the time of my research spent nearly U.S.$ 10 million on their youth programme since 2007, including U.S.$ 7,5 million on topics such as Youth Leadership, Civic Education, Conflict Resolution, and Media. Doing trainings mainly involved hiring a trainer, finding a venue and participants. I was often told that the short time frame of a training made it convenient and attractive to both NGOs and donors, because they could then more easily monitor the project and term it a success if there had been participants.

'Leader training' was a topic on which a large number of trainings by other NGOs had already been conducted. Although, I did manage to find just enough participants to fill the available slots of the MS training, finding these participants was not easy.

For instance Afif, the president of one NGO, Aie Serve, that had been invited to send participants to the MS training wrote to me when chatting with him: "*I don't think many people will apply …I send call for participants, workshops and camps weekly...so if all NGOs send all their volunteers I'd still have more workshops for them hehehe :) This leadership camp will be one of many others that took place this summer and many that will come...maybe not strictly leadership but as in a training in general..*" His NGO ended up sending one participant and one trainer. So from the beginning of my stay, I asked myself what the need was for MS to conduct leader trainings in Lebanon, when the young people apparently already had so many other similar training opportunities.

2.4.2. Anti-sectarian NGOs

Lebanon's civil society is as diversified as the Lebanese population, divided into different political groupings and organizations, of which most are associated with a certain religious sect. Political parties and sectarian groups are closely related, and many organizations have sectarian and/or political affiliations. This is a basic issue in NGO work: When I was looking for a partner organization for MS, one criterion, besides having experience with trainings, was that, ideally, the organization should not be neither religiously, nor politically affiliated, since this might keep other parts of the Lebanese youth away from participating in MS activities. This was a legitimate concern, although not a requirement of the donor, the Danish Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP), as they also support Danish organizations that work with political or sectarian organizations.

Many other international NGOs are restricted by their donors not to work with anyone politically affiliated, and this did mean that there were many organization to choose from who promoted themselves as being anti-sectarian and not politically affiliated. This large number has inevitably increased along with the increased funding to this type of NGO. Other international NGOs were also, due to this type of funding restriction, not cooperating with politically affiliated NGOs: For instance, in a meeting with Save the Children Sweden, the project manager I talked to said about their local Lebanese partner organizations: "*It is important that they are not politically affiliated. If we find out that they are – we will cut off the cooperation right away*".

Calling these NGOs anti-sectarian, as I will do in the following, and not just 'non-sectarian', is because the NGOs clearly distanced themselves from the sectarian parties, criticizing the parties for contributing to keeping Lebanon a divided country. Rather, these anti-sectarian NGOs saw themselves as working to unite Lebanon. For instance, the director of the NGO Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA) said: "*We believe in the nation – not in the sect. We work for youth all over Lebanon*".

It seems difficult for the professional anti-sectarian NGOs to reach out to young people, because they are largely seen as promoting causes decided by the donors, and lacking their own political vision or standpoints. Employees in NGOs also complain about the restrictions imposed by the donors. Even the appeal of anti-sectarian NGOs to uniting Lebanon does not help to attract a lot of young people since most political parties make similar statements.

2.5. Young people active in anti-sectarian NGOs

2.5.1. A network of young NGO activists

The young people active in anti-sectarian NGOs were largely part of the same network of people that knew each other from different training events, NGO projects, or campaigns. Many had participated in the election monitoring with LADE (Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections). Some of them were NGO volunteers and others were working part time for NGOs next to their studies for example as trainers or project coordinators.

These young people would often belong to several NGOs, and some would call themselves 'NGO activists'. It would not be unlikely to hear someone saying "*I'm a volunteer in four different NGOs. I participated in a training with Junior Achievement, I'm a member of Rotaract, I worked as a trainer for Nahwa el Muwateniya and I did election monitoring with LADE.*" Through participating in these different trainings and activities, the young people got to know each other. Since I became 'friends' with many of the young people on Facebook, their network became apparent to me, as I could see how many 'friends in common' we had whom I knew from different NGOs. I also saw how they commented on each others' pictures, wrote messages and shared events and articles. So Facebook became a forum for networking, which I also used.

2.5.2. NGO activists spending time in Hamra

I would spend time with the young people in the cafes and bars in Hamra. Hamra is an area in Western Beirut which is known to be the only non-sectarian place in Lebanon where not one religious or political group is dominating. Rather it is a 'leftist' area, where, historically, artists and musicians would sit in the cafes, and there were theatres and cinemas. Today, it has become increasingly commercialized and expensive. However, many secular parties as well as NGOs have their offices in Hamra. The only two non-sectarian Lebanese universities, The American University of Beirut (AUB) and The Lebanese American University (LAU) are located there.

Due to Hamra's mixed environment, many NGO activists said they felt at home there. For instance Asaad told me one day, walking along Hamra Street: "*This is where I always hang out. It is the only place in Lebanon where you can just be yourself and people mix. Like if you grow up in Hamra, you will probably not be sectarian, unlike if you grew up in another place.*" Also, at a private party one night in Hamra, I talked to two young guys who were also working in NGOs. They said "*Half of Ras Beirut (greater Hamra) is working in NGOs. If you are newly educated, you can always get a job in an NGO*" and the other guy said "Y*es, and they are all cliques and know each other.*" Therefore, Hamra became one of the main places where I would spend time and a place where it was easy to meet young people active in NGOs, and it was especially their experiences and opinions I was curious about for my research.

2.5.3. NGO activists being 'leftist'

Besides criticizing the sectarian parties, many of the young people, who termed themselves NGO activists within the anti-sectarian NGOs also said they were 'leftist'. Being 'leftist' did not have a fixed meaning, and when I asked people why they were leftists, they most often said because they were secular, against the sectarian parliament system in Lebanon, and against the influence of foreign

powers in Lebanon. However, the leftists were not somehow a united political group. Some were more with the government coalition and some more with the opposition, and some neither. Most said the only politician they liked was Ziad Baroud, the current interior minister. He is a former NGO activist and did not belong to any political party, but was personally appointed by the president to become minister. I noticed that many of the 'leftist' NGO activists were 'Fan' of him on Facebook.

This tendency of NGO activists to be leftist was also something I noticed with regard to student clubs in the universities. Political student clubs were in principle banned in most universities, although everyone knew which clubs were related to which parties, many of which were sectarian. It seemed that those students that were active in anti-sectarian NGOs outside of the universities tended to belong to clubs in the university that were also anti-sectarian and largely leftist.[13]

Thus, the young people active in the NGOs in Beirut were largely anti-sectarian and leftist, using the trainings for socializing and networking and coming up with new projects, trying to make a change independently from the political parties. For instance Afif, who founded his own youth NGO and was a typical NGO activists told me that he aimed to prove and encourage that *"you can be a Lebanese, but you do not have to be either with the 8 March or 14 March coalitions, you can be part of a community, you can find a job, you can do everything you need, without being part of political party*."

The leftist young people in different anti-sectarian NGOs thus maintain their network through the trainings, as a sort of alternative political platform to the sectarian parties.

3. CHALLENGES

From talking to the young people, and from attending different youth projects and trainings, I was able to identify several challenges that I believe it is very important for MS and other actors doing similar work to be aware of.

The challenges I will discuss below are the following:

- The difficulty of measuring outcomes

- Identifying the right local partner organization

- Encouraging volunteerism

- Addressing the needs of young people in Lebanon

- Dealing with the suspicion that MS is part of a broader pro-Western political agenda in the Middle East

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[13] I saw this being the case at the American University in Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University, and Lebanese International University (LIU).

3.1. The difficulty of measuring outcomes

3.1.1. The nature of the objective leads to a focus on outputs rather than outcomes

As mentioned, the trainings are one way to reach MS's aim of engaging young people in civil society and to strengthen their ability to organize, advocate, and act by themselves. However, what the young people do after the trainings, if they actually do engage in projects, campaigns or other activities in civil society is very difficult to measure, partly because this aim is not very concrete, having no time frame and no clear success criteria.

Since the actual outcomes cannot be easily measured, what usually gets measured instead is 'the effort made' or 'outputs' . For example, if there are participants and a trainer, it would seem an effort has been made, whether the intended outcome of engaging young people in civil society is ultimately being reached or not. The fact of attending a training can also in itself be seen as being engaged in civil society. Consequently, attendance sheets are a normal procedure at trainings in Lebanon, so that the NGO can show to the donors the number of participants. Attendance thus becomes a success criteria in itself[14].

Furthermore, participants have to fill out evaluations at the end of the trainings. At the MS training a participant wrote in the evaluation "*I am now very inspired to do activism.*" This is one indicator that the training was a success, since it seems the effort of motivating was then fulfilled, and the person was 'empowered'. However, unless individual participants are monitored over a long period time—which is not really feasible—it is impossible to know what the participant will actually do afterwards, no matter how satisfied the participant was with the training.

3.1.2. Participants attending for reasons that are unrelated to MS' objective

One should be cautious with simply accepting participation as a success criteria, since I learned from my research that participants attend for many different reasons, including reasons (described below) that seem unrelated to the overall aim of 'engaging in civil society issues, in order to organise, advocate and act by themselves.'. Nevertheless, these reasons for attending the trainings also reflect positive side benefits of the trainings that should be recognized as being valuable in their own regard.

I learned this both from talking to the participants, but also through attending the MS training and other trainings. For example, at the MS training participants had to write down their 'hopes' on the first day of the trainings, and many wrote 'get new friends' 'have fun' 'learn new tools'. They wanted to learn something, but many also attended in order to have fun and expand their network.

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[14] For instance, a report which examined the effects and outcomes of the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme, stated that the aim of the MENA Youth programme to build young people's capacity 'has presumably been supported, since a great proportion of the planned activities were carried out' (my translation). Report to State Account Auditors about the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme ('Beretning til Statsrevisorerne om Det Arabiske Initiativ'), May 2010, p. 17.

Nisrine, a participant in the MS camp and active in several other NGOs, told me why she was attending trainings: "*At least it is good to participate in something to get out your frustrations. At least you are doing something, then. I also learn different things and it is good for my CV also.*"

A guy who participated in a series of trainings in the South, told me during a break in a training why he participated. He said he had to have participated in a certain number of the trainings in order to attend the final party with other youth groups at the end, and this was one of his only chances to meet girls. He told me in Arabic that this was the reason why all the boys were here, and he pointed to the room, in which 15 boys – and no girls - were sitting waiting for the training to continue.

Another guy from the youth project in the South told me that his biggest dream was to move to Europe, and he had gone around to several embassies in Beirut to apply for a visa. He told me he participated in the youth trainings in order to get a certificate from the NGO that he could then show the embassies. He was hoping that it would improve his chances to get a visa, since he believed that working with a USAID funded NGO would prove that he was not linked to Hezbollah.

However, the motivation of some other participants were more in line with MS' aim of enhancing civil society and strengthening young people's ability to organize, advocate and act by themselves. Participants who were part of the NGO activists' network in Beirut had a particular tendency to use the trainings for networking and to come up with new projects. For example Asaad, a young NGO activist, told me "*I had this training about the elections with LADE two weeks ago. I met this cool guy […] and we started thinking about what we really wanted to do one evening. So we came up with this project, which is about publishing a book, in which each boy or girl who is under 30 or 35 will contribute with one poem, and we will do this one book for them. We just thought of it, we worked on it, and now we have funding for this project. Yep! So, that's the kind of connections and work you achieve in the trainings. And the idea had nothing to do with elections!*"

Thus the participants had many different reasons for joining the trainings, some of which were quite different from the subject matter of the trainings as illustrated by this example. When positively evaluating the trainings, this could thus well be related to their own personal objectives with these trainings rather than being an indication that the ultimate goal of the trainings had been met.

3.1.3. Those that conduct and participate in trainings may not want to expose the challenges

Several dynamics seem to prevent the exposure of the various challenges related to the trainings. One is the fact that NGOs generally have to evaluate themselves when reporting back to their funders, which runs the risk of the NGOs painting an overly positive picture in order to keep the donors content and the money flowing. This makes it difficult to openly address what may have gone wrong or what could have been improved.

Furthermore, donors may not be very interested in hearing about the challenges, because it may question the way in which they are spending the money of the tax payers, although I did not research this issue in particular.

Interestingly, throughout my research, I have not encountered a single article, report or book discussing the challenges of doing youth trainings. What I found published only encouraged the continuing training of youth without questioning their outcomes. For example, in a policy memo written by an American NGO entitled 'Youth Can Become Effective Leaders in Lebanon ' it says: "*Active citizenship and dialogue projects quite easily find strong participants – particularly because many youth realize that it is precisely this sort of activism which will help stabilize their country.*"[15] This is quite different from what this research project has shown as will be further described below.

I did find a certain openness to discussing the challenges among participants, trainers and NGO staff that I met with in the course of my research project, and I will outline some reactions below that often do not make it to the bigger decision-makers, including the donors due to the dynamics just described above.

3.1.4. Negative reactions to the trainings expressed privately by NGO participants

One example is that of Mohamad, who was in his mid 20's and told me at a party one night that he was "*leaving the whole civil society thing*". He had worked for four years in different NGOs in Lebanon, but he could not name one NGO which he found was doing a good job – except maybe a few programs like small agricultural programs that would teach farmers agricultural skills. He would be leaving Lebanon a few months later and would go to study a Masters in political science in Europe.

Another guy, Arek, who was still working for an NGO, told me how critical he was of all the trainings: "*I have been trained to death! It is all about peace building and capacity building. But the problem is, they build our capacities, and then what? The NGOs expect the youth to work in their own communities and organizations, but they do not.*"

The people quoted above were working in NGOs. I found many examples of young people somehow being in a contradictory situation, as they did believe in the projects they were part of, and saw the NGO they worked for as doing good work, however at the same time criticizing and being skeptical of NGOs, donors, trainings and projects in general.

For instance, I met a girl who worked as a trainer in dialogue workshops. One day she told me how "*the donors just give money for conflict resolution and dialogue and these things that are not the needs of the Lebanese.*" Instead she mentioned that the needs would for instance rather be to help the fishermen in Saida with their fishing. However, she also told me she was really happy to be a trainer in dialogue workshops, and that she had learned a lot from it and that the young people she trained learned a lot. Thus she got her immediate aim fulfilled of working as a trainer, which she liked, but she was overall skeptical about the large funds going into trainings.

Also, Ali criticized the large amounts of funding being used for needless causes. For instance, he told me how his youth group was paid to participate in the Beirut Marathon as an activity, but he could

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[15] *Youth Can Become Effective Leaders in Lebanon by* Catholic Relief Services (CRS),Research and Policy Memo#3 Issam Fares Institute, American University in Beirut, September 2009.

not see what that had to do with changing anything. He did accept the tickets and had a fun day, but he said "*it is instances like this that make you not have confidence that the money is actually spent in the right way*".

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that there also were positive stories from the trainings. These positive stories had a tendency of being much more widely reported by NGOs and donors alike, although this may also reflect that these NGOs simply were not aware of the more negative feedback. Just to give an example of one such positive story, after the MS training, I spent time with participants in their different NGOs or youth clubs and I saw examples where the participants used some of what they had learned in the camp. For instance, Ali, one of the participants, organized a 350 person Climate Campaign Flash-mob at his university that drew many students' attention. Also in the NGO Kafa – a women's rights NGO – the three training participants tried to start up a volunteer group after the training. They told me that this effort was a direct result of the leader training.

3.1.5. Implications for MS

In order to ensure that the trainings lead to the desired outcome, MS is encouraged to:

- **carefully decide on its indicators for success.** There is here a need to recognize that it may not be possible to measure the ultimate outcomes, which makes it all the more important to decide on the right output indicators that do not easily allow for misinterpretation.

- **if participation is one of those indicators, try to identify the reasons for the young people's participation in the trainings.** If these reasons are vastly different from the project objectives, it may be worth asking whether these objectives are being achieved.

- **ensure trainings are followed up and are linked to specific campaigns**. Such campaigns, i.e. advocacy campaigns on specific issues such as civil marriage or Palestinian rights, could be an opportunity for MS to evaluate the actual outcomes of the training.

- **establish ways to ensure that also the challenges of the trainings are brought to light.** There should be an open dialogue at the trainings about the challenges, as well as in the relation to MS' own donor to encourage frank dialogue and improvements with regard to future training programmes.

3.2. Identifying the right local partner organization

3.2.1. Choosing a local partner organization

MS decided to work together with a Lebanese partner organization when we organized the training. Besides it being a requirement from DAPP, MS also found it important that participants would be able to use their newly acquired skills immediately after the trainings within their respective organizations. In Lebanon, however, it became a challenge to find a suitable partner organization, since we found that the more professional anti-sectarian and non-political organizations did not engage young people over longer periods of time. MS would have been able to reach out to many more young people by choosing a more political or sectarian organization but would thereby likely be seen as less neutral. This would have made it difficult to work with a large part of the Lebanese youth

due to the politically divided nature of Lebanon's population. Thus the question became what to prioritize when choosing a partner organization.

Because we did not find a suitable partner organization from the beginning, we organized the MS trainings with participants and trainers from many different organizations, both more professional and more political organizations, all of which were non-sectarian. But because we would like to have a partner in organizing the training, a few weeks before the training, we agreed with a political leftist youth organization, the Union for Lebanese Democratic Youth (ULDY), to be partners, as we decided to prioritize working with an organization with many active young people, rather than choosing an organization with more staff and project experience (which we ideally also wanted), where the young people would maybe attend trainings, but not really feel attached to that organization in the longer term.

After all, MS was going to do work with engaging and activating youth in order to strengthen civil society and democracy—working with the many active members of ULDY was seen as more likely to lead to civil society engagement than working with the generally less active members of the other anti-sectarian organizations. This would be important also from a long-term partnership perspective. An additional element in the decision was that ULDY was an organization that would reach out to young people beyond the most well-educated elite from Beirut due to their branches around Lebanon. Finally, ULDY was seen as an organization with a relatively good gender balance.

In order to reach an even wider youth audience, MS could have chosen to partner with some of the bigger sectarian parties since ULDY is still a relatively small political organization in comparison. These parties have sectarian organizations affiliated to them, which act as religious charity organizations. However, besides the risk to MS' perceived neutrality if it decided to partner with this kind of organization, it also seemed that there would be little mutual basis on which to build a relationship, since engaging young people in civil society 'to advocate and act by themselves' did not seem to be an important part of their agenda.

3.2.2. Description of the partner organization that was chosen by MS

ULDY is a political leftist youth organization that is run completely voluntarily and which has many members all over Lebanon, especially through student clubs in universities. Their activities include summer camps, demonstrations for Palestinian rights, sessions on leftist theories and thinkers, and campaigns to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 years. The ULDY is also to some extent connected to the communist party, doing some joint activities. Many of the members of ULDY are also members in the communist party.

The ULDY call themselves an organization between a political party and an NGO. Partnering with ULDY is in Lebanon generally viewed as supporting one part of the political spectrum. However, it is also widely understood that many of the people working in other anti-sectarian NGOs are also leftist. Working with the ULDY may be a necessary compromise, however, MS choice of partnership was therefore likely still viewed as a 'mild' political choice.

3.2.3. Consequences of choosing a political organization

After having made our choice of partner organization, reactions from other NGOs revealed how politicized also many of the supposedly non-political NGOs really were. It made me realize how much politics there is in the Lebanese NGO world.

When I first told the director of one NGO that ULDY would be the partner organization for the training, I was told that it would ruin MS future work in Lebanon. MS would then always be associated with the communists, and consequently many young people would not work with MS in the future. After this reaction, I immediately set up meetings with all the NGOs that had sent participants to the training to hear their opinions. I got quite different reactions. Some said that it was fine as long as ULDY only took care of logistics and did not have an influence on the program. Some said that since the trainers and participants were from many different NGOs, it did not matter that they were the partner organization. So because ULDY had a minor role, it was fine. However, many of the NGOs also directly said that ULDY was a great organization with active youth and that it was no problem at all. Those NGOs that were themselves leftist were generally quite enthusiastic about our choice. For example, when I met the leader of one leftist Palestinian NGO in the street who had not yet sent participants and told him that ULDY would be our partner organization, he said "*oh, then I will definitely send participants.*" He sent me two applications the next day.

Had we chosen a sectarian NGO, it was clear to me that the reactions from the other anti-sectarian NGOs would generally have been much more skeptical.

3.2.4. Implications for MS

In order to reach out to a broader group of engaged youth than just the well-educated anti-sectarian NGO elite that most international NGOs choose to partner with, MS will have to continue to make some compromises, including with regard to the following:

- **Neutrality:** MS is already compromising on its perceived neutrality by partnering with ULDY, an openly leftist NGO with a broader reach and membership than most of the formally non-political NGOs. In order to reach an even broader audience, MS could also have chosen to partner with one of the large sectarian political organization, for instance to encourage charity volunteerism as a means to strengthening civil society, although this would have risked further compromising MS' perceived neutrality.

- **Professionalism:** By choosing ULDY, MS has also had to compromise with regard to professionalism, since ULDY is less professional than the non-political NGOs which generally have more experience in partnering with international organizations.

All in all, MS seems to have made a balanced choice that both reaches out to a wider group of young people than what is normally the case, while it at the same time allows MS to keep some of its neutrality, as least with regard to Lebanon's various sects and religions. At the same time, this choice allows MS to work with the already existing interest in strengthening civil society and democratic processes that reside in the anti-sectarian NGOs and which do not seem to be part of the agenda of the larger sectarian political organizations and their affiliated charity organizations. **MS is encouraged to continue its current relatively well-balanced approach to this challenge in its future work.**

3.3. Encouraging volunteerism

MS encourages young people to volunteer, since volunteering is seen as an integral part of youth participation in civil society. Training young people is seen as a tool to get them to volunteer by giving them the skills and the motivation to go out and act. Volunteering was also a key concept at the MS training which was about 'how to lead volunteer groups,' also because the method drew on the participants' own experiences from volunteering. When participants of the MS training were asked who had been a volunteer in the past, they all raised their hands.

However, I found out the term 'volunteering' is used to describe any activity related to the NGOs, also when benefitting from the NGOs, such as attending trainings and being paid to volunteer. It can thus be misleading to encourage or talk about volunteerism, if the point is to encourage the youth to 'act and advocate by themselves'.

This different way of using the term 'volunteering' is a product of the increase in funding from 2006, after the war with Israel. Since then the amount of NGOs has increased, and especially the funding for making trainings and youth projects. However, as Adib Nehme, a consultant to UNDP and member of LADE, pointed out in a public debate about the role of civil society, the increase in organizations should not be mistaken for a more active civil society, since in Lebanon, it has meant a decrease in real volunteers who believe in the NGOs. [16]

3.3.1. Volunteering as attending trainings

It surprised me that attending trainings was seen as 'volunteering'. Both the NGOs and the participants used the term in this way. For example, when I received applications for the MS trainings, I noticed how most Lebanese had filled out 'previous volunteer experience' with their attendance in different workshops and trainings for NGOs. And when I had meetings with NGOs and asked them what their volunteers did, they would typically mention attending computer classes, attending the conflict resolution workshops or attending other projects. This probably also has to do with the fact that volunteering is seen as a positive term, so the liberal use by the NGOs and the participants of this term may have been a way of increasing the likelihood of receiving additional funding, being selected for trainings, etc. The fact that MS and I had also been looking for a partner organization with many 'volunteers' is a case in point.

3.3.2. Volunteers being paid

As mentioned, since the 2006 war there has been an increase in NGOs wanting to do projects with young people. This has led some NGOs to increasingly pay their participants as it was otherwise difficult to find them.

For example, in the project I followed in Southern Lebanon, I found that the youth leader in each village was paid 25 dollars a day, and that the volunteers were paid 5 dollars a day to attend the training. The project coordinator of the village told me that right after the war with Israel, the

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[16] 'Civil Society and Power, Who Chooses Whom?' Nahwa Al Muwateniya Debate Session, 7. December 2009, Dynamo Café, Hamra

volunteers would get as much as 15 dollars a day for volunteering with the NGOs. Therefore, they were now not used to 'volunteering' for free.

However, many, including trainers and project coordinators, said that they had previously done the same work for free. For instance, Mayada, a girl very active in different NGOs, said that "*if you ask someone to come volunteer for an NGO, they will ask directly 'how much will you pay?' Maybe not to attend a workshop, but to be a trainer or to do other work for them.*" She explained that when she recently was volunteering for the election monitoring with LADE she would get 20 dollars for accommodation a day, and petrol money for the car and credit for the phones. Before she would not get anything but would still go because she believed in the work.

One leftist guy working in an NGO, explained why he thought NGOs now had to pay their volunteers and also gave me the example of LADE. He had, like Mayada, previously volunteered for election monitoring for free, but he said that this was before LADE 'turned to the right'. He said that before 2005, LADE was doing campaigns and advocacy to call for proportional representation with Lebanon as one electoral district. However, after getting the possibility to get large amounts of funding, they started calling for smaller and smaller reforms. "*That's why people stopped volunteering and only went there because they got money*". His point was that you could not find real volunteerism within the established NGOs, because the NGOs did not have a cause that the young people believed in anymore. This was a general point that many young people mentioned, criticizing the NGOs for only working for causes decided by the donors.

3.3.3. Volunteering challenged by young people's economic situation

Whether the young people believe in the projects or not, they can often not *afford* volunteering on a regular basis, because they have various family responsibilities or have to work to earn money in their spare time. Like Sarah said: "*We do not have real volunteering in Lebanon. We have to finish our studies and then work immediately after.*" Also one guy, who did not work with NGOs, told me "*We do not volunteer through organizations, we help our families instead. Like I just spend the whole weekend in the mountains taking care of my sick aunt.*"

Omar, at the time working for the NGO Movement Sociale which is one of the oldest secular NGOs in Lebanon, told me that the political parties attract many volunteers away from the non political NGOs, because they can pay the volunteers. Consequently, many NGOs now have to pay the young people to 'volunteer' for them.

Also, several people within the NGOs told me that young people would rather volunteer for political parties because it gave them connections and security for a future job. Therefore, the ones that would volunteer for the NGOs, would be the ones who were more well off, or who would be leftist and therefore not join a sectarian party. NGOs were however also a place for job opportunities.

On the other hand, some said that young people would volunteer for political parties and not NGOs because political parties would have an ideology or a cause they could believe in. This was not the case with NGOs, which were increasingly seen as donor oriented due to the increased funding.

3.3.4. Implications for MS

- **MS may need to move its emphasis from 'volunteerism' to 'activism' in the way it describes its projects.** Since the word 'volunteer' seems to be increasingly watered down, even to include participation in trainings, and being paid, MS may wish to consider focusing more on 'activism', which would also be more in line with its goal to strengthen young people's ability to 'organize, advocate, and act by themselves'.

- **MS should recognize that potential volunteers are sought after also by the political parties and that NGOs like MS therefore need to ensure the usefulness of the trainings for the volunteers themselves.** This could reduce the need to attract them through payments or stipends. While we did manage to find volunteer trainers for the MS leader training, we were told that this was an exception in Lebanon and that trainers usually get paid. In many cases young people find political parties to be a more meaningful place to donate their spare time, which has the added benefit of allowing for political networking which can result in practical benefits such as jobs, etc.

3.4. Addressing the needs of young people in Lebanon

In addition to reaching the project objectives, as discussed above, it is relevant to ask whether the trainings actually address the needs of the young people in Lebanon. As mentioned, young people often criticize NGOs in this respect, saying that NGOs tend to train them on different soft skills, that are not useful to them and that do not lead to any larger social changes that would benefit them.

The aim of the trainings is, as mentioned, to enhance youth participation in civil society so they can get more influence on decisions that concern their lives. Interestingly, the young people that I spoke to never mentioned this as their needs. Instead, what they stated as being their needs can be divided into two categories:

1. **Concrete job-related skills and opportunities.** This included English and computer skills, which could help put them in a better position for getting a job, as well as concrete job opportunities. Due to the high level of unemployment, both of these were in high demand among the youth.

2. **Bigger social changes**. This includes the need to get rid of sectarianism, which was seen as having led to the splitting up of Lebanon and to different parties fighting each other instead of finding common solutions. Other issues mentioned by the young people themselves included getting rid of all the foreign interests in Lebanon as well as the Palestinian issue, which included stopping Western support to Israel and finding a solution for the Palestinian refugees.

I will address each of these needs below and then discuss whether there can nevertheless be a need for engaging young people in civil society, even if there is no apparent demand for this. I will argue that one reason they do not directly state this as their need, is because they do not see it as realistic that they themselves should be able to change something of bigger importance and they do not see this change coming from the NGOs.

3.4.1. Addressing the need for concrete job-related skills and opportunities

In addition to broader social changes, the young people expressed a clear need for more concrete skills, which would help better qualify them for getting jobs. For instance, at a meeting in Bekaa, a poor area in eastern Lebanon, we (MS staff and I) had a meeting with over 20 girls from the local area in a women's rights NGO and talked to them about the NGOs and what they needed. They criticized the NGOs openly and said they were coming with their ready made solutions, instead of exploring what the real needs were. They especially criticized the trainings in Human Rights and Peace building and said they rather wanted concrete skills such as English or computer skills, so they could more easily get a job. Generally, unemployment was always mentioned as the biggest problem the youth were facing and also one of the main reasons that many youth emigrated.

The concrete skills they learned from trainings were mostly useful for getting development-related jobs. I asked Raghda, the project manager at the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), about the impact of the trainings, to which she responded: "*It creates a network of youth that are aware and that have skills to do bigger projects in this regard. They can now write proposals and manage a project. They can basically initiate an NGO and get funds.*" It seems clear that these skills are useful for getting jobs in the NGOs, just as the many networking opportunities that have been described earlier can be useful platforms for getting jobs.

3.4.2. Addressing the need for bigger social changes

NGOs work with young people, in order to encourage them to become 'agents of change', although many of the current youth projects are too small scale to lead the young people to think of themselves in this way. The regional coordinator of MS recognized this problem with many youth projects and told me: "*It is no use that the youth will just clean the streets or plant trees. They have to do something that changes something more long term*."

However, looking at current youth projects by different NGOs in Lebanon, it was difficult to see how they changed something more long term. The youth projects that I followed, read about and heard about were typically a series of trainings attended by young people who afterwards received a small grant to do a project. These projects would typically be things like making a garden, planting trees, cleaning an area for garbage, painting a wall, making a concert, or engaging in activities with children.

For instance, in the youth project I followed in the South, funded by Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI) 'youth leaders' from three villages were trained on topics such as leadership, conflict resolution, project management and psycho social support in the NGO center. After these initial trainings, the 'youth leaders' would train other youth volunteers in their villages and end up with doing a project in their village within a budget of 3,000 U.S. dollars. The project they ended up doing was building benches along the road side from one village to the next. The previous year, they had built a clock in the village square.

The youth were nevertheless generally promoted as the decision-makers of tomorrow. This became especially apparent to me when I followed the celebration of 'Global Youth Day', another OTI funded project.

This event started in a village in the South, where more than 50 young people turned up. First, they had breakfast, and were handed a t-shirt and a cap with the logo of the NGO to wear. After breakfast, we spent 2 hours, driving through 3 villages, picking up litter in the streets around the main square in each village. There was dancing and singing in the bus when driving between the villages and everyone was having fun. Afterwards there was lunch at a restaurant and then a 'workshop' where a trainer (a man around 50 years of age) gathered us to talk about the challenges for young people.

Interestingly enough, he started by saying that this Global Youth Day was established by the UN to give the youth influence and to make their voices heard. He would tell the youth that they were the future and important for Lebanon. Some participants were given the microphone and there was a talk about their challenges for example about finding work or having money to get married. The day ended with loud music and dancing 'Dabke' (Lebanese National Dance).

The Youth day was an example of how the young people during the course of the trainings are promoted as important future decision makers, although the projects they engage in are so small scale that they merely become fun youth activities. However, the young people were not frustrated about only having to clean the streets at the event but were instead happy to have spent a fun day.

3.4.3. Young people not being heard

NGOs only having small scale grants and these mini projects not contributing to any real change was only part of the reason why the young people did not feel that their need for affecting bigger social changes was addressed. Another reason was that young people in Lebanon are generally not listened to on important matters.

MS has recently initiated a youth project in Bekaa, where youth groups will get trained on various topics by a local organisation. Afterwards, they should identify some concrete needs in order to advocate for them through their local municipalities. However, the challenge in this regard is that municipalities often do not listen to the needs of the young people, especially not if it requires that the municipality has to fund a project over a longer period of time.

For instance, a young guy, Bechara, told me he had participated in a similar youth project, where he was trained on his rights and on advocacy. He was in a group that came up with the project of putting up litter bins every 100 meter in his village so that they would be closer to people's houses. However, when he tried to advocate for the project with the municipality they did not listen to him. "*I talked to them, but it does not matter. The problem in my municipality is this kind of feudalism. They think in this way. They do not accept the participation of youth or the participation of women, so we cannot deal with them about our problems.*" So, unfortunately, the project did not succeed.

Thus, it is a challenge to empower youth in surroundings that do not allow them influence. Even if the NGOs were to provide bigger grants and set up larger-scale project, it will still be difficult for young people to advocate for more significant changes.

3.4.4. Can there be a need without a demand?

In Lebanon, I met a Swiss woman who came to Lebanon for an American Peace NGO in order to see if her NGO should come and work in Lebanon with peace building and dialogue activities. I asked her what she had found out so far, and she said "*There is definitely a need but no demand.*"

I agreed with her that there was no demand, since I had especially heard the young people criticize the peace building and dialogue trainings. I thought it could, to some extent, be true for the leader trainings that there was a need but not a demand for them. Most of the young people did not participate in order to go and make a bigger difference afterwards. However, they did demand larger social changes, but did just not see NGOs in civil society as institutions that could promote this change.

For instance, one night in a bar, two weeks after the MS leader training camp, I met Nadim, one of the participants. He was an active NGO activist, and had been so excited right after the camp, and wanted to gather the participants to do campaign together. But this night, he told me how he was so frustrated. He was frustrated that there was no follow up after the camp and that he did not know where to go and make a difference.

"*Give me one good example of where the NGOs have made a difference. I do not believe in the grassroots. All the NGOs talk about grassroots movements, but really that is not the solution. The solution has to come from top down, not from bottom up. The only people that can change something are the politicians. Like Indyact is not a grassroots organisation. When we do a campaign, it is so we can take pictures and send them to the UN. Like Wael Haemden, the leader of IndyAct, he is well connected, and that is why he can influence stuff. He knows the politicians, so he can discuss policies with them. That is the only thing that can promote change here in Lebanon. The other NGOs what do they change?* "*

Thus, in general the young people do not demand to become 'agents of change' maybe because they do not see it as realistic and because they did not have examples that could show them that it could actually be possible.

In this sense, even though there is not direct demand, it seems there is an indirect demand for the trainings because the young people do demand bigger social changes, which may be achieved through a strengthened civil society.

3.4.5. Implications for MS

MS is encouraged to:

- **accommodate the young people's needs for concrete job-related skills to the extent possible.**
  This could include identifying ways of integrating concrete skills training such as English and computer training into its training programs. While it may be difficult to justify this via-a-vis MS' donor, there may be some indirect ways of enhancing such skills by incorporating them into the projects.

- **make sure that the projects the young people engage in are meaningful to them and not too small scale.** This would help demonstrate to the youth that they do have the ability, through their work and engagement in civil society, to affect broader social changes on issues that they care about. This includes giving examples of specific youth projects, that have led to larger social change.

- **coordinate and collaborate on efforts with other NGOs** to help bring the many NGOs in Lebanon closer together, which would in itself be seen as a positive change by the young people in Lebanon.

- **consider whether trainings are indeed the best way to meet both the needs of young people in Lebanon as well as MS' own goals and objectives.** As mentioned, trainings are popular partly because they quickly produce an 'output', namely the training itself, although the actual outcomes are often more questionable. While this report is focusing on the trainings and to some extent on the funding of small-scale projects that are linked to these trainings, MS may wish to commission a report that compares various alternatives to conducting training that might more effectively strengthen civil society.

3.5. Dealing with suspicions of MS working as part of a broader pro-Western political agenda in the Middle East

Many young people saw the work of the NGOs in a political context and thought that there was a political agenda behind the funding. Many called it a 'hidden agenda,' because it was not clear to them what the donors expected in return for the funding. The examples below illustrates this suspicious attitude:

Ali, a young guy who was a participant in the MS training and who had started his own small youth initiatives, said that he saw the donors as 'double faced', which is a term that describes well how many of the young people saw the donors: "*It's like the double face, it's a famous strategy in our region here. You see how the U.S. and other countries are making war from one side and from the other side sending you the games and the flowers and the funds for having human rights. It's okay, but just stop the war and then we do not care about what you give us*". He also compared the Lebanese situation to Iraq, which many of the young people mentioned, since they, in general, have a great awareness of Middle Eastern international politics. He further said: "*After the war in Iraq the same countries that were in the war, they still send their NGOs and their trainers to just tell the youth, tomorrow you can be happy and everything can be better. No, there is something not coherent. There is something like a double face ... what the hell? Then don't enter this war. It's like I beat you and after that I'm sorry and I take you to the hospital.*"

For many young people it was not clear what the real intentions behind the funding was, however many young people active in the NGOs chose to just use the money in the way they thought it made a positive difference. A girl working for an NGO who was also working with youth said: "*I think the donors have an agenda. I don't know why they spend money. They don't do it for free, that is definitely not the case. But NGOs should be smart and use the money in a beneficial way.*"

In the following, I will try to illustrate some of the more concrete suspicions of young people in Lebanon, including that Western donors and NGOs are trying to keep young people from joining extremist parties, that they aim to spread Western ideology and a few others. I will then outline the implications of these suspicions, including for MS.

3.5.1. Keeping young people from joining extremist parties and groups

Some young people saw a hidden agenda from the side of the donors and international NGOS to get the youth to engage in various projects so they would not join extremist parties. Some of the trainings were also regarded as a direct effort to prevent this from happening. For example, Ahmed, a young NGO activist told me: *"The donors think we are all terrorists, so we just need some conflict resolution trainings. But that is really not where the problem is. The problem lies with the leaders of the sectarian parties – they give the orders for the conflicts and the small wars. The youth don't have problems with each other, we live peacefully side by side."*

While MS criticizes the approach to encourage democratic processes with the motivation to preventing youth from being recruited into extremist groups[17], other international organizations working in Lebanon do make such a link, which could justify the above-mentioned suspicion. USAID's Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI), for instance, publicly states that its aim is "*to engage at-risk youth in productive activities…to reduce their vulnerability to political manipulation and recruitment into extremist groups.*"[18] One example of such an activity may be the cleaning activities which OTI supported at the Global Youth Day, which was mentioned and photographed for the OTI country report. The picture text stated: "*Youth in Aitaroun mark Global Youth Day with a cleanup campaign that spanned four villages in the deep South.*" However, OTI also makes reference to promoting civil education and youth-led activism, although this does not seem to be its central goal. MS on the other hand, by focusing on engaging young people in civil society, with the focus on 'advocating and acting by themselves', seems to aim more at helping and empowering young people to create change, rather than just trying to keep them from turning radical through various activities.

Nevertheless, despite this different focus, MS' activities seem similar in nature to those of OTI, which out its $10 million budget for youth was spending more than $3.2 million for leadership trainings alone, which was the highest funded priority, and additional $1.5 million for civic education. There is therefore a risk that MS in Lebanon may be viewed as having the same agenda as USAID/OTI, which in the eyes of Lebanese youth is very much politically driven.

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[17] The programme-coordinator of MS wrote a feature in a national Danish Newspaper, criticizing the rhetoric of the Danish Arab Partner Ship Programme for using extensive anti-terror rhetoric in their programme, rather than focusing on the benefits of democracy and partnerships for empowering the worlds poor. (in JP 24 January 2006)

[18] The entire aim is: *The program aims to engage at-risk youth in productive activities that expand their horizons, encourage critical thinking, and* **reduce their vulnerability to political manipulation or recruitment into extremist groups**. *Given the plethora of means political parties use to attract youth, OTI supports a wide range of activities, including life skills training, community development, cultural and artistic expression, and vocational training. Most activities incorporate civic education and youth-led civic activism, which contrasts with the top-down approaches inherent in existing political structures* **by empowering youth to make decisions and to leave a mark in their community**." (authors highlights) Country Report for Lebanon, Office of Transition Initiatives, USAID Annual Report, Oct 2008 - Sep 2009

3.5.2. Spreading Western ideology

The trainings in particular are by many young people seen as spreading western ideology, as the most common topics are leadership, citizenship, conflict resolution, human rights, dialogue and gender trainings.

For example, Mazin, whom I talked to after a meeting at the Secular Club at AUB, and who was active in 4 different NGOs, said: "*the problem is that there is only funding for things like gay rights and women's rights – which is all about spreading the ideology of the West.*" He did believe those topics were important, but he said it also meant that there was not funding for more needed projects.

3.5.3. Other suspicions and conspiracy theories

During my stay in Lebanon, I heard several suspicions and conspiracy theories related to why the donors were pouring so much money into the NGOs in Lebanon.

Some people believed that certain NGOs were passing on information to the Israelis, although they were sure that they themselves could avoid this in their own NGOs. For example Afif, president of the NGO Aie Serve, said that the U.S. especially gave funding for the 'hot zones' in Lebanon, where they believed there was danger, but where American soldiers or agents would not be allowed in. So they created youth groups and NGOs that could send them back reports of the trainings or events, and they could get the names and write lists of contacts that could be useful for the U.S. government. In order to avoid that this would happen with his own NGO, he said: "*We have our own tools, or our own procedures who is who, and who to trust. Whatever Aie Serve might not notice, then Na-am* [another NGO] *might notice, and they would inform the others. So we have our internal communication.*"

Abbas, who was also from Aie Serve said that he somehow believed the conspiracy theories, because why else would other countries be interested in helping to develop Lebanon? He thought they did it "*for gathering data, for dominating them [the Lebanese] in new ways, with new tools. Instead of financial tools, it could be in mind tools.*" As an example he mentioned the Iraq war, and how after the war all the well-educated Iraqis went to the U.S. The U.S. needed them, so it was a clever strategy to just 'harvest these kinds of people'. When I asked Abbas how the donors could 'harvest the people' he said: "*they empower them, work with them and give them scholarships which they will take. Then they will put them in their own communities where they will work and benefit that country and not return home.*"

This should be understood in the context of the important problem for Lebanon that many educated young people move abroad. Abbas however said that he would not move abroad like the U.S. government maybe wanted him to do, even though he was planning to study abroad: "*So I'm going into this loop, but I know I have my own plan, so I can come back to the loop and go back to Lebanon. I'm going into NGOs and going into community development, but then I will come back to Lebanon to work on the development of this community.*" Thus Abbas was another example of how the young people working with NGOs believed they could manage and use the funding to their own benefit regardless of the 'hidden agenda' of the donors.

3.5.4. Consequences of the suspicions

The consequences of these suspicions are that some NGOs do not accept USAID funding, and many young people do not participate in the NGO projects. Some NGOs do accept USAID funding but are still conscious of the possible intentions and believe they can work around them and make the best of it. This goes for Western funding in general.

In the projects that do receive USAID funding, it can be a challenge to find volunteers. In the six month USAID funded project I followed in South Lebanon, it was difficult to get young people to join the trainings. Many of the participants came from communist families, which was only a small part of the inhabitants. I knew their background was communist from talking to them and could for instance also see that almost none of the girls in the project were veiled – in spite of most girls generally being veiled in the South. Young people from communist families in general seemed more willing to participate in USAID funded projects, since they are generally less critical of the U.S. than the young people supporting organizations such as Hezbollah.

A girl who had also participated in the same project the year before, but in other villages, told me that they had started out with 45 volunteers, but when people came and heard it was funded by USAID, it went down to 25. By the end of the project they were only 12 volunteers.

USAID funded programs were more problematic than European ones. For instance, some organizations that did not accept USAID funding had no problem with receiving European funding. Hashim, a guy who was the president for 'Rabita', an NGO in Nabatiye in the south, was getting funding both from USAID and from Europe. He told me that if a project was funded by USAID only, he would tell the young people that it was also funded by the Europeans – then there was a higher chance that the youth would participate. He believed the intentions of USAID were to try to diminish the hate against the U.S, however he did not think they, at least until now, had succeeded. In spite of working with USAID funded projects, he was still critical of U.S. politics, but said he just had to use the money the best way possible for the development of his region.

3.5.5. Implications for MS

MS is encouraged to do the following:

- **clearly communicate to the young people in Lebanon that it is an independent NGO that works around the world with genuinely altruistic goals such as supporting youth empowerment and the rights of the poor.** The nature of NGOs in Denmark may not be well understood in Lebanon where NGOs are largely affiliated to political and/or sectarian parties and organizations. MS may need to emphasize that it is possible to be independent of its donors, including the Danish Government, even while receiving funding from them. (In fact this is similar to the above-mentioned NGOs that receive USAID funding but claim not be supporting U.S. policies.)

- **clearly explain that while MS may have many activities that seem similar to those of USAID/OTI, it works entirely independent from them and has its own set of goals and objectives.** MS should in this connection emphasize its focus on youth empowerment, in order

to advocate for political reforms, which is different from the focus of other organizations, which might focus more on keeping young people busy to keep them from being recruited into extremist groups.

- **be as transparent as possible about its goal, objectives and official views and actively communicate and explain these to the young people in Lebanon to avoid suspicion and conspiracy theories**. While emphasizing its political neutrality, MS staff should be encouraged to share their personal points of view and sympathies regarding core issues which young people in Lebanon care about such as the Israeli/Palestinian issue, etc. MS' own advocacy vis-à-vis the Danish Government, for example its article criticizing DAPP for being too focused on anti-terrorism, could also be emphasized.

- **consult closely with its local NGO partner, including on its Lebanon-specific plans.** This could help ensure acceptance of MS work while also increasing its chances of success by using local knowledge and views mentioned in the first challenge above. Some negative views often do not make it up to the key decision-makers that decide on overall programme strategy.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that MS with their leader training in Lebanon did reach their aim of engaging young people in civil society while 'strengthening their ability to organize, advocate, and act by themselves' since some participants used the concrete skills obtained in the training to develop their own projects following the training.

The biggest challenge for NGOs wanting to engage young people in civil society is that the civil society that they are encouraged to engage in after the trainings is not seen by the young people as a platform for making any significant change in society. Rather, NGOs operating in Lebanon are largely seen as working according to the agenda of foreign donors and not according to the needs of the Lebanese people.

Thus, it is essential for NGOs such as MS to supplement (or even substitute) trainings with supporting larger campaigns or projects, which could help demonstrate to young people in Lebanon that civil society can make a difference on issues that the Lebanese care about. Even though some youth trainings are followed by support for small scale projects, these projects are simply too small scale to give the young people a feeling of being able to make a significant difference.

Nevertheless, both the trainings and the smaller projects that often follow them do give the young people different skills, which helps motivate them to participate. Other reasons for their attendance include e.g. meeting friends and other likeminded young people, networking, and strengthening their CVs, which should also be recognized as important benefits of the trainings.

In order for MS to better engage young people in civil society through trainings in Lebanon, below is a summary of the key implications of this report for MS as described earlier in this report:

In relation to **the difficulty of measuring outcomes**, MS is encouraged to:

- carefully decide on its indicators for success.

- if participation is one of those indicators, try to identify the reasons for the young people's participation in the trainings.

- ensure trainings are followed up and are linked to specific campaigns

- establish ways to ensure that also the challenges of the trainings are brought to light.

In relation to **identifying the right local partner organization**, MS is encouraged to:

- recognize that it in order to reach out to a broad group of engaged young people, MS will have to continue to make some compromises, especially with regard to its own neutrality and the professionalism of its partner organizations.

- continue its current relatively well-balanced approach to addressing this challenge.

In relation to **encouraging volunteerism**, MS is encouraged to:

- move its emphasis from 'volunteerism' to 'activism' in the way it describes its projects

- recognize that potential volunteers are sought after also by the political parties and that NGOs like MS therefore need to ensure the usefulness of the trainings for the volunteers.

In relation to **addressing the needs of young people in Lebanon**, MS is encouraged to:

- accommodate the young people's needs for concrete job-related skills to the extent possible

- make sure that the projects the young people engage in are meaningful to them and not too small scale

- coordinate and collaborate on efforts with other NGOs

- consider whether trainings are indeed the best way to meet both the needs of young people in Lebanon as well as MS' own goals and objectives

Finally, with regard to **dealing with suspicions that MS was working as part of a broader pro-Western agenda in the Middle East**, MS is encouraged to:

- clearly communicate to the young people in Lebanon that it is an independent NGO that works around the world with genuinely altruistic goals such as youth empowerment and international development

- clearly explain that while MS may have many activities that are similar to those of USAID/OTI, it works entirely independent from them and has its own set of goals and objectives.

- be as transparent as possible about its goal, objectives and official views and actively communicate and explain these to the young people in Lebanon to avoid suspicion and conspiracy theories.

- consult closely with its local NGO partner, including on its Lebanon-specific plans

By keeping in mind the challenges identified in this report as well as the above recommendations, MS should be in a stronger position to decide on and plan any future effort to engage young people in civil society through trainings in Lebanon.

ANNEX 1: Overview of data collected

- Recorded interviews with 11 different NGO youth (1-2 hours each)
- 2 Focus group interviews (Development Initiative by Youth and Kafa) (1 and 3 hours)
- Email correspondence between myself, MS and other NGOs throughout 5 months
- Publications, Folder, Flyers, Project Descriptions and Reports from NGOs.
- 5 Notebooks of handwritten notes and 236 Pages of computer field notes from the following events and meetings:

Notes from formal meetings / interview with 15 NGOS:

Association for Volunteer Services, AL Majmoua, Arab Ressource Collective, Development for People and Nature Association, Bluemission Organisation, Massar, Civil Society Movement, Kafa, Democratic Womens Assembly, IndyAct, Nahwa al Muwateniya, Union for Lebanese Democratic Youth, Movement Sociale, Save the Children – Sweden, Lebanese Transparency Association, Association for Human and Humanitarian Rights

Notes from meetings/interviews with 7 youth organisations/clubs (not NGO registr.):

Development Initiative my Youth, Sarkha Organisatoin, Secular Club AUB, Talaba Student Movement, Aie Serve, Rotaract Beirut Club, Rotaract Metropolitan Club
Notes and pictures from 16 NGO events

6 Naam el Hewar Discussion Evenings, Man in the cube Cop15 Event, Kaffa Recruitment of Volunteers Day, Secular Club Event, Sarkha launching of organisation, Youth Volunteer Day in Saida, Human rights Award Ceremony, International Youth Day, Vote 350 Event Student Talaba Movement, Rotaract Smoke Free Gemayze Night

Notes and materials from a total of 27 days of attending 10 different trainings/Workshops

5 days	Peace ambassador training (DPNA) Gesine Area,
1 day	Workshop on how to formulate your project (Aie Serve, Middle East Expedition)Beirut
1 day	Study Session on how to do research for a project Proposal (Aie Serve) Beirut
2 days	Leadership training (Bluemission) Saida
2 days	Project Management training (Bluemission) Saida
2x1days	Citizenship training (Bluemission) Houla and Aitaroun in South
3 days	'Tomorrows Lebanon' Workshop (Lebanese Transparancy Association) Chouf
4 days	Training of Trainers for Leader Training Camp (MS) Mount Lebanon
6 days	Lebanese Danish Leader Training Camp (MS) Mount Lebanon
2 days	Camp about Citizenship (Civil Society Movement) Amcheet

Informal conversations with people from other NGOs mentioned above and also:

LADE (Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections), Red Cross, Souq el Tayeb, Mercy Corps, Palestinian Youth Organisation, Rabita, Youth Link, FCDC (Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue)

ANNEX 2: References

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