A youth dialogue through experiential learning

Within the framework of Afkar 2 Program funded by the EU and managed by OMSAR
Hewarna Project: A Youth Dialogue Through Experiential Learning

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Table of Contents

Foreword 3

Introduction: background, project objective, implementing bodies 4

Major Outcomes and Results 5

List of participants 7

Acknowledgements 8

Workshop proceedings: guest speaker, case study and common grounds 10
Youth is considered as a core society foundation on which values and culture are sustained. In fact, future generations shape the development and prosperity of a nation. For more than 15 years, the Association for Forests, Development and Conservation (AFDC), which is a Lebanese NGO, has worked on developing youth capacities mainly through its Advocacy Program that aims at improving environmental policies as well as encouraging youth involvement and participation in environmental and development practices.

As a result of an extensive work conducted by AFDC in this respect, 17 voluntary units have been created all over Lebanon. These units which are mainly located within forest sensitive areas basically implement different project and program activities related to forest fire fighting, environmental education and awareness, eco-tourism, and environmental conservation and advocacy, among others. A success story of such initiatives has been recently demonstrated through the launching of “Youth Declaration on Environmental Policies”.

Consequently, the Hewarna project was implemented within AFKAR II program which is a pioneer initiative funded by the EU and managed by OMSAR to strengthen the Lebanese society at large. More precisely, the project targets the Lebanese youth who are in an urgent need to be involved in positive dialogue among each others. This will help them to understand that the difference of opinion is a source of richness rather than opposition.

Within Hewarna project around 180 Lebanese youth from all the Lebanese regions and representing all leanings were intensively trained on communicating a successful dialogue using experiential learning. It is to be noted that experiential learning is a pioneer interactive academic method designed to reach the ultimate objective of creating an environment for constructive dialogue and improved communication between Lebanese youth through developing their leadership, communication, problem-solving and teamwork skills.

With the completion of Hewarna project, both AFDC and the youth have achieved far beyond the original objective of the project. Numerous participants have in their turn spread the word and the acquired experience of positive dialogue to others.

My acknowledgements go to the team of AFDC and their many collaborators for their dedication and commitment. It is hoped that this booklet will further enlarge youth common grounds and develop their aspirations. AFDC will be always committed to support the youth who are the leaders of tomorrow.

Sawsan Bou Fakhreddine
Director General, AFDC
**Background**

Within the framework of the AFKAR II program which aims at strengthening the Lebanese civil society. “Hewarna” pioneer project was implemented by the Association for Forests, Development and Conservation (AFDC) funded by the EU and managed by OMSAR.

**Project Objective**

Hewarna aimed to create an environment for constructive dialogue and improved communication between Lebanese youths of different political, religious and cultural leanings by arranging dialogue series and equipping them with skills they need to do so successfully through teambuilding and personal development training.

**Implementing bodies**

The project was implemented under AFDC’s Advocacy Program, aiming at reforming and changing environmental policies as well as encouraging youth involvement and participation in environment and development practices. The project participants included more than 180 Lebanese Youth representing more than 25 universities and technical schools, 9 NGO’s and 6 companies in Lebanon from all regions, backgrounds and leanings who partook in a total of 9 workshops with 9 different guest speakers and more than 12 technical assistants.
Major Outcomes and Results

Development of an experiential learning center within the Mediterranean Forest Development and Conservation Center of Lebanon (MFDCL) premises with three large outdoor ropes and obstacle courses and seven indoor activities.

Development of project website, brochure, application form, survey and booklet.

Organization of nine, three day workshops dialogue series with specific issues on the agenda such as the environment, the political process or human rights. The workshops centered on positive dialogue using experiential learning techniques to develop the participants’ leadership, communication, problem-solving and teamwork skills.

This booklet contains the final results consisting of:

1- Project presentation: Preparation phase, implementation phase

2- Project workshop outcomes for 9 dialogue series each including: guest speaker, case study presentation, youth dialogue, youth common grounds and testimonies

Preparation phase
1- Program design: the program was tailor made for positive youth dialogue development with the collaboration of Mr. Oussama Safa (General Director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, an expert and senior trainer in the domain who used his creativity to ensure the flexibility of the program. As such the program included the design of specific case studies to address 9 topic of interest to youth.

2- Infrastructure: the Mediterranean Forest Development and Conservation Center for Lebanon (MFDCL) in Ramlieh, Aley district underwent a makeover to host the Hewarna workshop series and was equipped with the needed facilities to support the experiential learning center.

3- Experiential learning center: The design, development and building of the unique

9 Hewarna topics
- Environmental policies
- Economic growth
- Women and rural development
- Youth and peace building
- Community Development
- Electoral reforms
- Media
- Immigration
- Forest Conservation & development
Major Outcomes and Results

Experiential learning center in Lebanon was implemented with the collaboration of Mr. Tarek Salman and Lebanese Adventure team who are excellent professionals in the field. As a result, 3 outdoor and 7 indoor team-building, experiential learning activities, games and obstacle courses were installed. Experiential learning was used as a distinctive academic discipline to improve the communication skills among the youth and develop their leadership skills.

4-Networking & Marketing: to reach the highest number of representative target, a networking plan was developed and implemented with universities, NGO's and the private sector. A marketing plan was also put to action comprising the creation of a tailor made website, brochure, application form, survey and facebook group.

5-Trainings: two extensive trainings were given to the Hewarna project team; one centered around technical safety supervision which included: teambuilding, psychology of the group, knots and ropes, briefing and debriefing, harness and security, field work, rescue techniques, working with guests. The other training of trainers included: communication skills, negotiation, convening, facilitation and consensus building etc.

Implementation Phase
From the 18th of July 2008 till 24th of May 2009, nine workshops were implemented, each a three days dialogue series, included the below schedule:

The 1st day involved capacity building training on communication, negotiation, conflict resolution and difference between dialogue and debate.

The 2nd and 3rd day involved youth dialogue which includes a visit of a guest speaker, group work on case study and role playing. All three days include experiential learning activities such as rappelling and sky walking, as well as fun group activities designed for teambuilding and personal development and leadership.

These enlightening workshops focused on dialogue as a process, while providing the youth with a lifetime experience using experiential learning activities and hands on activities and tools to promote mutual understanding and respect among the participants. Moreover, the learning methods used presented an opportunity for the participants to develop their leadership skills and enabled them to work together on common grounds that will benefit the youth in their surroundings and Lebanese community in the end.

Hewarna workshop Proceedings
This section presents the youth common grounds and outcomes of 9 workshop series each section is divided into 4 categories:

1. Dialogue / Hewarna topic and date of implementation
2. Guest speaker introduction and main presentation points
3. Topic case study
4. Youth Dialogue Common grounds
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Although Hewarna project is closing down the curtain on the official activities after 24 months of project implementation, the project’s title means dialogue and the latter remains open ended. Hewarna achievements and lessons learnt such as common grounds, testimonies, creation of dialogue and environmental clubs in universities, facebook group contacts, etc are as versatile as the diversity of topics.

These accomplishments would not have been made possible without the dedication and support of:


European Union management and team

Hewarna Project Consultants Messieurs: Osama Safa, Tarek Salman, Serge Soueid, Andre Bechara, Gilbert Moukheiber

Hewarna Guest Speakers Messieurs: Fadi Hajjar, Monir Bou Ghanem, Dunia Khoury, Oussama Safa, Fadi Bou Ali, Lamia Mansour, Noha Roukoz, Zeina Daccach

NGO’s, Universities and Companies: Lebanese Universities, Beyond Association, Caritas, Kafa, Green Hand Organization, Lebanese Youth for tolerance, Hariri Foundation, Mouvement Social, JCI, Common Efforts, YMDP, Safadi Foundation, Masar, Dunkin Donuts, Cadbury, SKB, Starbucks.


In the name of AFDC and all the participants thank you making this project a success story.
Hewarna-Participants
Todays youth-tomorrows leaders
Case Study
The role of youth in communities that emerged from war or conflict is important. Today, youth can help in the prevention of conflict and the establishment of peaceful communities. What’s more, youth play a role through their civil community, schools and universities through their influence in decision making. In particular, they can rally for the amendment of reforms that support the youth and the community.

In Lebanon, youth between 15 and 35 years old are the majority of the population, making up over 40% of the country.

Lebanon recently recovered from a civil war and more wars that followed counting until May 2008. The role of youth was not fully developed because there was no effective strategy for peace building allowing them a major role in the country’s revival. Such a strategy can enable the youth to act on a national level and overcome political and sectarian boundaries. If they join their abilities, youth can form a power force and work towards the prosperity and progress of the country.

However, some argue against this role and consider the Lebanese youth not mature enough to hold such responsibilities. Peace building is more suited to political leaders on the first degree and the government at the second degree, after which cooperation with youth groups can happen.

The strategy for peace building is comprised of a group of issues focused on reconciliation, reconstruction, the return of immigrants, erasing the effects of war and amending the nation on an economic, political, security and educational level.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Fadi Hajar
Consultant on Conflict Resolution and Youth & Peace building

“Youth these days are more aware of new approaches and solutions and they are partly responsible for building their own futures.”

Mr. Fadi Hajar shared his expertise with the group and focused on the following points:

• The importance of decision-making in peace building
• The dynamics and process of peace building
• Decision making in peace building: youth versus authorities
• The capacity of youth in peace-building

It became more evident, after the discussion with Mr. Hajar, that the young Hewarna members preferred a cooperative process between younger and older generations.
And the Dialogue Begins!

**Authority vs. Youth: Who will hold the reins?**

In two groups – representing youth and authority – the Hewarna members set on a mission: to find common grounds and build a strategy for peace building in Lebanon that determines the role of youth within the pyramid of decision making.

The two groups expressed their ideas by creating posters and drawings representing their views.

**Authority**

- “Collaboration between youth and authority is the best option.”
- “Youth have responsibilities and influence during the war, especially their involvement in recent wars and conflicts.”
- “A transition stage would help transfer the power of decision making from its current leaders, to the youth.”

**Youth**

- “Youth have an active impact in their communities, politically and culturally, and they are interested in forwarding a positive future.”
And the dialogue continues

When the two groups merged for later activities, they reached more positive results especially when it comes to youth. Hewarna members had a dialogue around awareness, general citizen responsibility and participation, and the need for ending sectarianism, building a concept of identity, increasing justice and equality and empowering youth in efforts to build peace.

Common ground

After the various rounds of mobile dialogue shifting from the Lebanese Parliament, Saint Clou, to Doha, where the politicians discussed their different points of views, a need has arisen for the Lebanese youth to meet and independently discuss the current situation. This unprecedented dialogue took place at the Mediterranean Forest Development Center in Lebanon in Ramlieh, Aley within the project “Hewarna” which is funded by the European Union, managed within the framework of Afkar 2 Program by Office of Minister for State of Administrative Reform (OMSAR), and executed by the Association for Forests: Development and Conservation (AFDC).

Experiential Learning is a novel method that added a unique aspect to the project and helped in equipping the participants leadership, communication, group work, and conflict resolution skills through unconventional activities in nature that resulted in a “positive” dialogue around youth and peace building in its first workshop.

After three days of communication, the participants who represent different sects of the Lebanese society agreed that continuous and honest dialogue is essential to the peace process. As such they reached the following common grounds concerning youth and peace building topic:

- Youth have a key role and should have a fair participation in shaping and implementing policies and decision making
- Peace-building requires real cooperation and a genuine partnership among all stakeholders of the society: youth, private and public authority as well as the civil society.
- Necessity to promote the concept of citizenship, nationalism and democracy whereby giving priority to public interest over personal interest.
- Need to have conscious youth that takes responsibility for its actions.
- Need to empower the youth and give them confidence through a transition period for them to be able to assume their leadership responsibilities.
- Requirement to provide common grounds for peace among all the society
- Mainstream the culture of dialogue within all the levels of the society.
- All concerned parties have to recognize their errors and provide proper environmental grounds for peace
“I like participating in youth activities because I believe in youth and their capacity for change and working towards a sound society. This is why I participated in Hewarna.”

Salim al Lawzi

“Dialogue among youth would enable them to contribute more successfully to the peace-building process. Opportunities of dialogue are essential to creating a step forward in the peace-building process because they open doors to communication, not only within youth but also between youth and authority.”

Youth Feedback
Case Study
Lebanon’s many mountains, valleys and natural forests mark the country as a natural treasure. However, these forests are in constant struggle against time to and factors that threaten them such as construction, uncontrolled urban expansion, and government neglect towards natural disasters. In addition, forests suffer from the impact of stone quarries which operate under no regulation or legal enforcement.

The accumulation of flawed environmental policies lacking clear long-term planning, in addition to neglect by the concerned entities, political interference and the involvement of private profit into public affairs have led to an unenviable environmental condition in Lebanon.

The Ministry of Environment has recently been active in developing public policies to ease the deteriorating environmental situation in Lebanon; however, it did not accomplish great achievements because it is a small ministry with minor financial and political support. Moreover, environmental policies in Lebanon are not of the top priorities.

Various civil service organizations have attempted to support the Ministry in its efforts; however, their impact remains to be insignificant. Even with the cooperation of concerned international organizations that provide the Lebanese community with tremendous expertise and capacities, the existing policies do not ease the work of such efforts because of the complete disregard of the political parties towards the environmental policies.

The Lebanese constitution does not draw out a general policy on the environment and it is common knowledge that the position of Minister of Environment in Lebanon was appointed as a result of a political arrangement. There is no environmental political party in Lebanon active as there are in European countries that have progressed in this area.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Monir Bou Ghanem
Founding member of AFDC and deputy manager of Performance Management Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi

“The biggest environmental problems in Lebanon would be solved by thinking about the resources as much as the process; it is as important to think about where the solution lies as well as how.”

Mr. Bou Ghanem had an interactive open panel discussion with the participants that included:

- The environmental problems in Lebanon and the policies addressing them
- The key elements and stakeholders needed for environmental policy making and implementation to reach the desired state
- The drawbacks as well as advantages of neglecting or improving the environment
- Policy making and advocacy should be in the hands of who: the government or the civil society organizations
And the Dialogue Begins!

“Who makes decisions for environmental policies: the government or NGOs?”

NGOs or the Government?
Armed with information and a case study, the Hewarna members split into two groups to choose sides of either the NGOs or the Government by answering the question:
The two groups expressed their ideas by creating posters and drawings and presenting them. The following are some excerpts of their presentations:

Government
“The government can reach all citizens, where as NGOs are not as well known by everyone.”
“The government can put regulations, and can ensure they are followed.”
“The government can reach specific goals within the national budget and implement specific programs with specialists and experts, whereas NGOs mostly consist of unspecialized volunteers.”

NGOs
“The community is more aware of environmental realities because they are more involved in them within their work.”
“Civilians are responsible in implementing policies: We are the initiative.”
“Focusing on sustainability in Lebanon will help the rebuilding of the environment.”
“There should be stronger solidarity between NGOs which would help their work be more effective within the national program as a whole.”
And the dialogue continues

Over time, both groups listened more to each other and were able to reach a middle ground. Moreover, they were involved in dialogue sessions around saving the environment in Lebanon, the role of the civil community, the role of the government or decision-makers, and the priority of environmental policies over other general government policies.

Common grounds

At the end of the brainstorming session the participants of the Hewarna “Environmental Policies” dialogue series agreed that permanent open-ended and transparent dialogue has a primary role in applying environmental policies. Moreover, the participants reached common grounds on the following:

- The government and civil society have to collaborate and create a balance between their roles in contributing to the improvement of the environment.
- The environmental problems have to be specified, the government should address a long-term plan for a better environment with the collaboration of experts in the field.
- Awareness should be aimed at large numbers of people, using resources such as telecommunication media in parallel with governmental and civil society projects.
- Development of sustainable environmental solutions that can be implemented as one bulk or by priority.
- All citizens are responsible and should keep a vigilant eye towards the environment.
- The government should formulate and agree upon regulations to help the civil community reach a better environment.
- All parties concerned should be held accountable (government, communities, organizations).
- Insurance of continuity in the work plans set within the Ministry of Environment regardless of who is the Minister.
“Focusing on sustainability in Lebanon will help the rebuilding of the environment.”
“There should be stronger solidarity between NGOs which would help their work be more effective within the national program as a whole.”

“The workshop was more than I expected, concerning methodologies and topics learned. Things I learned the most: principles of negotiation, dialogue and gaining from experiential learning.”

Pascale Hamzah

Youth Feedback
Case Study
There is a lot of debate on the role of rural women in Lebanon, especially on their contribution to the country’s socio-economic development. A woman’s role ranges from micro-credit management and household management to involvement in the political arena and presiding over important posts.

However, as much as a woman does to bring about development, her role will remain limited unless laws and policies are adjusted to promote full equality between men and women.

Despite the liberal system in Lebanon, the Lebanese society remains a conservative one, where women can not compete directly with men: this is seen especially in political – economic and social fields which are directly related to the development process.

Meanwhile, some liberal currents believe that women have an equal role to that of man. As such, a woman is not only responsible for the family in rural areas, but also has leading role in her community which applies to all fields including local and public responsibilities etc.

Opposing the liberal view, some believe that a woman is an assistant to a man and can not be equal to him. In fact, there are even several women’s organizations that support this opinion. But the reality is that rural woman is very much the one in charge of the family budget in addition to raising the family, hence she works and generates the income of her family.

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Dunia El Khoury
president of the Women’s Association of Deir el Ahmar (WADA) NGO.

“Women should be encouraged in decision-making and both men and women should be aware of the importance of their participation in local municipalities and support it.”

Mrs. Khoury shared her extensive knowledge and firsthand experience in the development and advancement of rural areas especially in the area of her local community of Deir El Ahmar, in the Bekaa Valley, which witnessed a noticeable progress through the contribution of the rural women.

The presentation focused on Women’s:
• Empowerment, through financial security
• Education, developing skills and building capacities
• Awareness, especially of their role in decision making
• Using rural resources and cultural heritage
• Encouraging full participation

“The roles of women as well as youth are marginalized and should be better represented through participation in politics, for example to establish a quota for women in the parliament, through an updated electoral law.”
And the Dialogue Begins!

Conservatives vs. Liberals:
When the above questions were asked, different contradicting view points began to emerge. Some Hewarna members agreed, some disagreed and the discussion started to heat up. The Hewarna members tackled on the questions in two groups: Conservatives and Liberals.

Conservatives
“Women are restricted from being fully equal to men in all domains by their biological and personal tendencies; as such their priorities should be taking care of their families to contribute to community building”

Liberals
“Women should have rights put into effect on social, financial and national levels.”
“Women should be aware of their abilities, especially when used to improve their financial situation”
As the dialogue sessions continued, participants discussed various aspects of women’s roles in the community and in its development, and the limitations of that role.

“Does the role of a man complement the role of a woman, and vice versa and how?”

Lebanese women in general, and especially women in rural areas, must be guaranteed basic rights (such as citizenship for children of foreign fathers):

- Rural Women have a right to social security; on condition they are active at home as providers or working in their communities.
- Rural women should pursue their right to education along with men, to be better aware of their rights and duties.
- Private and public sectors should provide incentives such as small loans (microcredit) to rural women.
- Collaboration between women and men in decision making should be promoted as a concept.
- The government has a primary role in the development of women’s capabilities in making decisions
- Women should exercise their right to attain prominent positions in their fields of their work.
- The civil society should have a role in advocacy for better social policies for women.
- There should be an active involvement to protect women from domestic violence.
- Women have a role in preserving the traditions and the Lebanese identity.

Everyone agreed that the mentioned factors were necessary to improve the role of women in rural development.
When I came here, I wanted to participate more and to be less shy. I think I have reached my goal throughout this experience. The most thing I have learned from this was to listen to others and to cooperate with them, no matter what their opinions were, "I wished some others did the same". Finally, I want from "Hewarna" to be for a bit longer period of time, week for example. AND REALLY FINALLY, THANK YOU "HEWARNA".
Guest Speaker: Mr. Osama Safa, General Director of the Lebanese Center for Political Studies and political analyst.

“Politics, varying from extreme left to right, affect public policies and our efforts should go towards changing policies.”

Mr. Safa’s presentation included the following elaborations:

• The difference between politics and public policies
• The electoral systems in Lebanon
• The different electoral reforms implemented in Lebanon in 50 years
• The need for a national census to specify the electoral districts
• The impact of lobbying and advocacy

“Electoral reforms aim at equality and justice for candidates, ensuring a secure voting process with an electoral board, and transparency without corruption.”

Case Study
Lebanon had its first elections in the year following the civil war in 1992. Other elections followed in 1996, 2000, and so on. Every time, the elections were held with a new electoral law that did not truly represent the Lebanese people or objectively balance the regions. Instead, certain groups were marginalized within society.

The electoral laws were unfairly put into effect by the foreign authorities supported by the ruling political elites.

The Taif agreement ended the civil war and modified the electoral districts in Lebanon based on a new demographic system reflecting the evolution of the Lebanese society. In addition, it worked towards a new law that strengthens the decentralization of local government councils. It stated the need to have a new electoral law that is balanced and ensures equal representation and participation of all political entities in Lebanon. Except for the last issue, none of the reforms were followed in a serious manner.

In reality elections continued to take place without addressing the right representation or adjusting the role of the women or youth. The parliaments that emerged after the war were represented by political families that kept their power and authority through bribery. To outsiders, the Parliament appeared to be a club for the rich and elite. Voters vote from a list of candidates without even knowing who they are. This led to the construction of sectarian and religious-rooted political class that would promise services only to gain power in addition to the fact that it doesn’t accurately represent the people’s wishes.

The political quality of life in Lebanon has been affected significantly. The best example is in the fact that a candidate no longer has to present a political program to be elected. Instead, he
can secure a position by appealing to emotions and promising favors in exchange of votes. This corruption made the parliament lose its ability to pass legislations.

The Lebanese Government has recently commissioned a panel of experts to produce a draft of a new electoral law that improves parliamentary representation. The new law aims to emphasize free and fair elections consistent with international standards and the decrease of electoral corruption as well as political influence of money. It also calls for fair competition among the candidates.

And the Dialogue Begins!

The Hewarna members took roles advocating three different electoral laws: **Ratio Law**, **Caza Law** and **Boutros Law**. Using charts and posters, each group presented the advantages of the law it wishes to implement.

**Ratio Law**
“The number of seats is proportional to the number of votes, this makes the law democratic.”

“Candidates are accountable for their actions in the next elections”

**Caza Law**
“Democracy is practiced through majority rule. Caza law takes into account ethical and religious considerations. The concept of change should be in education and awareness.”

**Boutros Law**
“We need some reforms to improve the electoral process in Lebanon.”

And the dialogue continues

With more discussions and dialogue sessions, the Hewarna members developed their knowledge of the different sides of the topic and this helped them get closer to agreement. Different topics were discussed concerning the reform of the electoral system to satisfy all sides and the hope for Lebanon in progressing through electoral system.

“In Lebanon, the Majority law creates division and causes difficulty in decision making. The Taif agreement divided Lebanon based on religious leanings and this was the solution based on parliamentary democracy. With Caza law, smaller circles are created which fosters the development of laws.”
Common grounds

After a brief dialogue, the participants agreed on the importance of unifying the history represented in school books in a topical, transparent way, over an appropriate period of time. They also drafted the following declaration:

Within the framework of Hewarna project that is implemented by AFDC within AFKAR II program which is funded by the E.U and managed by OMSAR the Hewarna workshop on electoral reform took place from the 12th till the 14th of September with more than 21 participants from all over Lebanon representing NGO’s, universities, CSO’s, etc.

After three days of consecutive work and dialogue the participants reached the following common grounds based on the two questions:

“Is there hope to develop Lebanon through the electoral reform?”
“How can we reform the electoral laws in a way where all parties involved agree?”

Lebanon is a country based on a democratic parliamentary system where the people are considered the source of power, as such the legislative authorities are considered the corner stone for the nation from which stem the remaining authorities. And since a deputy represents the whole nation, he should be held accountable on the basis of his electoral program The above mentioned points emphasize the importance of electoral law in the process of Lebanon’s development.

However, this law should be accompanied with a comprehensive reform program which includes:

1 - Activating the role of civil society, including the establishment of a culture of dialogue and awareness.

2 - The abolition of political sectarianism, as initially set out as a national goal in the introduction to the Constitution.

3 - Re-division of the Mohafazat after conducting an in-depth demographic study as well as adopting proportional voting on the basis of this new evaluation.

4 - Establishment of an independent authority to monitor the elections.
5 - Re-activate the work of the Constitutional Council.
6 – Identify and control electoral spending by the independent authority. Develop a modern media law that provides equal media appearance to all candidates.
7 - Reduce the voting age to eighteen years old and allow expatriates to vote.
8 – Identify a quota in the parliament for women.
9 - Complete the voting process in a single day, with voting to take place in the place of residence on the basis of identity card or passport. Moreover, screening of results should take place outside the polling place.
10 - Consolidate the history book in an objective and transparent way.

The participants of the Hewarna “Electoral Reforms” dialogue series agreed that permanent open-ended and transparent dialogue is essential to facilitating the progress of the elections in Lebanon.

Youth Feedback

I met new people and learned the effectiveness of active listening
The Hewarna members had the opportunity to discuss the state of the environment in Lebanon and in specific, the forests. They discussed:

- The natural resources in Lebanon
- The benefits in protecting and investing in sustainable natural resources.
- The threats forests face in Lebanon

“People take advantage of their natural resources, sometimes without considering the impact”. Ideally, nature should integrate people with proper management and involvement of the local community.”

“It is necessary to work towards changing the mentalities and attitudes that stem from old practices”

Case Study
Natural Forest Resources: For Conserving or Investing?
Ramlieh and Geographic Areas
Ramlieh lies in the south east area of the Aley Caza in Mount Lebanon. It’s a small rural town with a population not reaching over 1500. The town is around 22km far from the Aley district city center and around 45 km away from Beirut. The real estate area of the town spans around 3.5Km2 and the distance from east to west is around 2.7 km and north to south around 1.7km.

Natural Resources in Ramlieh
Ramlieh is characterized by its sandy soil that grows pine trees and rich brown soil which is suitable for growing diverse plants. The town also has rock masses that cover many parts of the area. In addition, Ramlieh enjoys supplies of water from 15 springs, from the branch of the Damour River that runs through it, as well as 27 Artesian wells that have been dug.

As for the green cover, the village is abundant with pine and oak trees, and various other plants. The forests make up 65% of the general area, covering 228.5 Ha of the of Ramlieh’s 350 Ha of land. The forests are distributed between two main kinds: pine forests which cover around 135.5 Ha and oak forests which cover 89 Ha. Just like many other areas in Lebanon, Ramlieh is characterized with rich biodiversity. There are over 300 kinds of wild plants some of which have economic values, such as thyme, asparagus and others that grow under pine trees such as callicotome villosa and Spanish broom, among others.
And the Dialogue Begins!

*What would you do with Ramlieh?*

The Hewarna youth were given the option of conserving or investing in Ramlieh, with 1 Million USD at their hands to manage the resources.

*How should Ramlieh be managed: with human intervention or as a reserve?*

After extensive discussion, the youth came with the results and two groups presented their posters and drawings illustrating different but convincing ideas.

**Green Forever**

As an NGO, the group wanted a specialized project emphasizing sustainable development and creating a reserve to benefit the community. The group wanted to encourage development through eco-tourism, volunteering and preservation of local heritage.

“We need to build a mechanism that would encompass all aspects of the project and promot development in a way to encourage villagers who emigrated to support the locals.”

**Green Industry**

As a company, this group presented a 5-year plan to encourage tourism in Ramlieh by building a resort for tourists to enjoy the greenery and mountain activities. Economic growth can come from agriculture such as through olive press, harvest of plants and training for local women to contribute to the rural development of the area. “The resort would be environmentally-friendly, with power generated from solar electricity systems.”

The Village Residents

The population is recorded at 1346 people, with males making up 51% and females 49% of the village dwellers. The villagers have a high level of education. Around 25% of them live in the village throughout the year, while a large percentage lives in surrounding areas in Aley and Beirut, in addition to those who live abroad such as in the Gulf countries, European countries and the United States. Village residents migrate due to the lack of work opportunities in the area; thus, a large number of people live in Ramlieh but work in other areas. Ramlieh residents make an earning through financial returns from expatriates, working in vocational fields, employment, and light industry work. Trade is concentrated on some small stores that provide for the needs of the village. Few of the villagers depend only on agriculture because it does not provide a good income for families. As such, farming is considered a supplementary activity to other jobs that provide a better income.
With more discussions and dialogue sessions, the Hewarna members developed their knowledge of the different sides of the topic and this helped them get closer to agreeing. They presented a sketch of a farmer, an investor and the nature having a dialogue to further the interests of everyone. Finally, they began to understand each other and this helped them in reaching the following common grounds.

**Common grounds**

Acknowledging the value of sustainable development is in the interest of all parties.

- Putting into effect a partnership between the conservation NGO and industrial company using their know how towards achieving sustainable development.

The partnership aims towards:

a – Involve the local communities in the conservation of natural resources through projects that provide income to these communities.

b - Activating the role of Farmer’s cooperatives and the use of available expertise to take into consideration the environmental regulations.

c – Industries should allocate a proportion of their profits in projects that benefit environmental protection.

d - Adapting laws to require private-sector employment of a proportion of profits in projects to protect the environment.
Youth Feedback

“I like the new experiential learning method. It allows us to remember things for ever.”
Case Study
Rural and community development in Lebanon would be almost negligible had it not been for the commitment and work of some organizations and municipalities. Development is necessary because it leads to the growth of areas isolated from the central city that do not always benefit from government policies.

When it comes to projects for local community development, there are two different approaches: either urbanizing rural areas or preserving them. People who support preservation advocate local projects that conserve the heritage and simultaneously retain the sustainability of rural life.

Supporters of urbanization encourage development projects that take advantage of local resources and help activate farming and local production and well as marketing of the products. Notably, programs such as these require extensive training and some modest equipment.

The latter supporters believe that policies for local development can lead to economic growth. In addition, people become discouraged from planting illegal crops (such as cannabis, opium and others) when they are presented with convincing alternatives that are also beneficial and sustainable. However, some disagree with the last point, maintaining that most development projects in local communities fail due to the lack of follow-up and the government’s minimal input.

Nevertheless, rural areas would benefit from new roads and buildings and other amendments, and this is part of the required administrative decentralization in Lebanon.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Lamia Mansour
Team Leader of GTZ (German Society for Technical Cooperation), an international cooperation that develops sustainable projects in Lebanon

“Women should be encouraged in decision-making and both men and women should be aware of the importance of their participation in local municipalities and support it.”

In her presentation, Mansour focused on some key points:
- The best methods for interacting with the local community
- Assessing projects and introducing environmental aspects to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
- Having a broader vision concerning developing local communities and the methods and tools used in the process
- The role of youth in this particular issue and the collaboration of the youth
- A guide for local community development

The Hewarna youth discussed projects in their community with Dr. Mansour who shared with the participants her firsthand experience and suggestions in the field.

“Using a collaborative approach based on clear plans, social and economic studies and PRA, people who have the needs to activate the community can transfer it to projects.”
And the Dialogue Begins!

**The Liberals:** Association of the Environment for All

**vs. The Conservatives:** “Reefuna” – Our rural community

*Both groups used skits and sample companies as well as NGOs’ to portray their points of views with respect to a particular rural area:*

**The Liberals**

Rural people have problems:
- Farmers have no marketing for their products
- People in rural areas move to the city for lack of job opportunities

Solution: Creation of an association that will support the farmers output and a cooperative supermarket to promote produce and create working opportunities.

**The Conservatives**

The importance of maintaining environmental and cultural heritage of rural areas through:
- Creation of an eco-loge able to host 50 people
- Respecting cultural heritage of the area
- Section for sale of local goods, handmade products
- Eco-tourism activities

“The marketing of the project will attract tourism through a website. Environmentally, the project will be beneficial because it will be powered through a river for energy saving and this will help it financially as well.”
And the dialogue continues

As the youth had more opportunities for dialogue, they discussed development in terms of the role of the community and youth, the government’s role and the possibility of sustainable local community development.

Common grounds

The 6th Hewarna youth dialogue series had a main topic “Community Development”, where the participants expressed several points of view and where split into two groups: liberals and conservatives.

Liberals adopted the idea of urbanization through the introduction of development projects that provide the needs of the local population.

As for conservatives, they focused on initiating projects that meet the needs and services of the local population while preserving the rural, cultural and environmental sustainability as much as possible.

Using the tools and techniques acquired through Hewarna project such as communication and dialogue techniques, the participants unanimously reached the following common grounds:

- The success of development projects is related to their sustainability and follow-up
- Relying on participatory approach and dialogue in the projects
- Meeting the needs of each specific area in particular and Lebanon in general
- Participation should include all stakeholders and should have as basis common grounds

After studying the case, the participants reached the following common grounds:

A. Regarding the role of the government in Community Development:
- Encourage individual development efforts
- Support local community and local production (e.g. Souk el Tayeb)
Community Development
13-15 March 2009

- Provide funding for projects (financial support and local resources)
- Activate public institutions and guarantee work opportunities for individuals
- Adoption of administrative decentralization (to expand the powers of the municipality)
- Support investments (to reduce taxes on foreign investment)
- Organize awareness programs (social-health-environmental)

B. Regarding the role of the youth:
- Give ideas for local sustainable development projects
- Raise awareness around the importance of development
- Implement development through field work in cooperation with the civil society

C. Regarding the role of the local community:
- Secure material and moral support for development projects
- Contribute to the support of youth’s ideas and implement them in the appropriate ways
- Invest in the varied skills of the youth from all leanings
- Develop a network for youth for following up on projects

D. Lastly, the role of local authority:
- Facilitate the process of implementing the proposed project (decentralization)
- Participate in monitoring the implementation of these projects in respect to the project aims
- Create a specialized section for following up the projects (community officer) that takes into account environmental systems.

All agreed that the success of development projects lies in the group effort to ensure achieving the desired goals.
Guest Speaker: Ms. Noha Roukoz
Awareness Coordinator at Migrant Center in Caritas, Lebanon.

The interesting and interactive presentation covered the following key points:
• Definition of immigration
• Causes of immigration
• Types of immigration
• Positive and negative effects of immigration
• International conventions, rules and regulations
• Migrant workers in Lebanon

At the end of the presentation more time was given to the participants to ask open questions such as what is our guarantee to stay in Lebanon? What to do in a complex situation when you love your country, yet you have no source of income because of the economic situation? Can the upcoming elections make a change?

Case Study
Since early times migration has been and still is a key concern in Lebanon. As such the number of Lebanese living overseas is four times the number residing in Lebanon. In the past, immigration was considered a negative thing causing a loss in intellectual, financial and social capacity in Lebanon. Still, some believe that immigration helped Lebanon gain special recognition in the world through renowned individuals that immigrated and spread Lebanon’s name abroad. These include Gibran Khalil Gibran, the surgeon Michael Dabagh, the presidents of the Republic Latin American Jamil Mouawad and Abdullah Bou Karam, and the inventor Hasan Kamal Assabah, among others. These individuals represent a power force that has affected the world, and without immigration they would not have reached this level of success. However, the basic concern remains in the loss of Lebanese citizens or the so-called “brain drain” to other countries and continents. For it is thought that Lebanon is a country of limited resources that does not offer its citizens the opportunities to stay and excel or to innovate and as such citizens choose to emigrate.

Others believe and are quite sure that the political, sectarian, and religious situation in Lebanon increased the need to immigrate among the Lebanese and to seek opportunities based on their abilities not on sectarian connections and quotas. The sectarian minorities hold this opinion and have become afraid of losing their identity and representation in the Lebanese system.

Still others believe that it is the declining economic situation that has forced many people to seek a better quality of life abroad for themselves and their families who have stayed in Lebanon. Lebanon has seen the benefit of these immigrants...
who transfer about $4 Billion to Lebanon each year and this has become a significant contribution as well as an urgent necessity to Lebanon's economy in general and in terms of foreign currency income.

With the absence of statistics and studies, unstable political and economic situation as well as fear among Lebanese communities, immigration remains a source of concern rather than an advantage reflecting richness and diversity to Lebanon.

**And the Dialogue Begins!**

The participants were divided into two groups of opposite interests. The “Immigrant” group, according to the case study, had the interest in traveling abroad since this is better for the economy and for each individual. The “Local” group was more interested in staying and developing within the country to conserve Lebanon’s culture as well as to maintain the sense of homeland.

**The Immigrants**

Using a sketch to present their point of view the group portrayed two friends: one’s life is stuck in Lebanon with no job opportunities due to the situation while the other is flourishing abroad, without having to seek politicians for help. “You can love Lebanon and still live abroad, have a good position, work honestly and live your dreams.”

**The Locals**

Using another sketch the participants displayed a strike among young Lebanese at the airport entrance claiming that they will not leave the country because it is worth more than money. “As young people it is important to seek a secure future, however, since we are Lebanon’s future, we are committed to work even in unfavorable conditions to build a country that is prosperous and peaceful.”
Common Grounds
After a constructive dialogue, the participants reached a common ground highlighting the importance of the role of immigrants and residents in building the Lebanese society, economy. Moreover, the participants agreed on the need to develop plans to raise awareness and make a change in the Lebanese society for a better future full of opportunities at all levels. Participants agreed that immigration has its pros and cons. Following are the main highlights that can be summarized as follows:

1 – Negative aspects of immigration:
On the economic level:
• The absence of educated and productive young people
At the social level:
• An inequity in the gender balance
• Dispersal of families

2 - Positive aspects of immigration:
• Economic gain from money transfers made by immigrants to their families
• Representation of Lebanon abroad; thus promoting tourism
• Benefit from the successful experiences abroad and transferring them in accordance to Lebanon

General Recommendations:
At the legislative level:
• A review of the existing related laws in addition to their application and follow-up.
• Administrative reform through the development of management programs to serve public interest and automation in the public administrations to activate and alleviate obtaining legal documents and processes.
• Create jobs by encouraging foreign and local investments in the country which reduces immigration. For example: supporting small and medium enterprises by exempting them from taxes for certain periods of time.
• Strengthening the role of syndicates and social institutions towards lobbying politicians, decision makers and Lebanese public groups to promote equity among citizens and to facilitate the demands of citizens such as:
  • Develop social security
  • Pensions for elderly
  • Medical insurance card
  • Emphasize on capability and performance as a measure in job recruitment
  • Implement and develop a civil law

On the social level:
• Develop a sense of patriotism among the youth through educational institutions, companies, media and the civil society.
• Promote awareness among residents on the importance of good citizenship and among immigrants on the negative impacts of immigration.

On the economic level:
• Establish and develop specialized research and consultancy organizations that attract investors and facilitate their work in Lebanon.
Guest Speaker: Ms. Karine Zoghby presented the topic using the Forest Fires Toolkit prepared by AFDC.

In the presentation, Zoghby discussed various aspects of the Lebanese forests including:
- Environmental problems in Lebanon
- Economic value of forests
- Environmental and social significance of forests
- Causes and impact of forest fires
- Prevention and management of forest fires
- Balance between conservation and exploiting forests

Case Study
same as on page 26
And the Dialogue Begins!


Conservation Group
“Welcome to our village.”
The project they presented was “Ramlieh – Heaven on Earth”
“Through farming, natural resources and production, we can:
• Regain the villagers that left.
• Increase local services and generate income through eco-tourism.
• Invest in the youth.”

Investment Group
The bottling factory: “It’s my Maiy”
“It creates job opportunities; the cost is minimal compared to the profits, with the right media promotion it would sell nationally and internationally. Moreover on the environmental side, the factory promotes recycling of bottled water.”

What would you do with Ramlieh?
The Hewarna youth were given the option of conserving or investing in Ramlieh, with 1 Million USD at their hands to manage the resources. How should Ramlieh be managed: with human intervention or as a reserve?
And the dialogue continues

With more dialogue sessions, the groups discussed with a “donor” and the “government” to improve their projects, and with time found they had some common interests for the village.

Common grounds

As such the participants merged both projects within one company called “My Mouneh” and came up with the following Common Grounds:

- Merging both projects will provide more work opportunities and prevent or at least reduce immigration rate among the locals.
- Using pipelines from the water factory and extending them to reach agricultural lands to be used for irrigation.
- Marketing and distributing products of both projects collectively.
- Running the factory with environmental standards, such as installing filters and growing organic produce.

The role of the youth: Youth has an important role with its creative and productive contributions towards development. One of its responsibilities can be marketing the products in the cities to ensure the sustainability of the projects.
Youth Feedback

This project is simply perfect and I had an exceptional experience. Thank you for this opportunity.
Guest Speaker: Zeina Daccache
Director of Catharsis, The Lebanese Center for Drama Therapy.
Also: actor, producer and drama therapist

In her visit, Ms. Daccache explained her personal experience in the media, especially in television and theatre, most recently in the Roumieh prison through an AFKAR II project aimed at rehabilitating prisoners.

Her discussion covered various points:
- The impact and importance of media
- The issues in media in Lebanon
- Using theatre as a real life experience to develop acceptance
- Using the media for positive causes, such as drama therapy and awareness

Case Study
With the spread of various forms of media, especially the widespread use of internet, access to programs and information has become limitless. In fact, the computer can link you to any page in the world within seconds. With better accessibility, more programs on cultural and political topics became available.

This wide spread of information and technology has directly impacted local communities in what is known as the globalization of information and convergence of cultures which resulted in a better interconnection between cultures. However, all this advancement created a dispute. Society has become divided between those who are worried about their cultural heritage and those open to new trends. Finally, there are religious conservatives who reject change and consider these programs a violation of the sanctity of religion.

Several attempts have been made to organize and manage media stations in Lebanon. However, due to the country’s liberal system and the multiplicity of sects, it was not possible to establish any kind of management to what people watch and read. With the cultural scene in Lebanon changing, there is need for the media to modify educational and cultural programs to be in line with the interests of new generations.
And the Dialogue Begins!

“What is the goal of the media: information or entertainment?”

The participants were divided into two groups: conservatives and liberals. Using skits and charts both groups presented their points of views as follows:

1. Conservatives
   “Our children are impacted by negative images!
   Censorship can be placed while still respecting free expression!”

2. Liberals
   “Self-censorship is the better option than forced censorship.
   Parents have to educate their children. What is forbidden becomes desired…”
Common Grounds
After a constructive dialogue, the participants reach a common ground highlighting the importance of media and information in building the Lebanese society. After several rounds of dialogue, many common grounds were reached.

- Yes to maintain the tradition and culture
- No for political control on the media
- Objectivity in spreading the news and with the use of advertising that has good impact.
- No to grown up’s censorship
- Parents play a major role in the upbringing and guidance of their children (under the age of eighteen)
- No for advertisements that are immoral and have a negative impact on children especially before eight o’clock in the evening.
- Yes, for placing a statement and parental guidance sign before and during the screening of the film.
- The social environment and community have a role in guidance.
- Self-censorship is the foundation.
- Yes, to media regulation.
- Yes to sex education.
- Yes to the application of the laws related to information and media, especially in terms of funding.
- The Government and all the Ministries are concerned when it comes to supporting the media, and the ministries have the following roles:
  - Ministry of Interior: Awareness and Caution
  - Ministry of Culture: Festivals and Advertisements
  - Ministry of Tourism: Television programs and festivals
  - Ministry of Environment: Advertisements
  - The aim of this support is to send awareness messages while maintaining freedom of speech and updating related laws. This can happen by collaboration between media organizations and the specialized ministries such as funding, follow up, and allocating a specified amount of time to show these programs and advertisements
  - Organizing the media while maintaining freedom of expression
    - Organizing and orienting the media will control the present chaos. This will be implemented through a code of conduct among all the concerned entities. The code of conduct that will be managed by the Ministry of Media will include clear laws while maintaining freedom of opinion.

The Role of the Parents and the Community in Education and Awareness about Media
- There is a direct connection between the media, parents and community/society. While parents and
the community are at the cornerstone in shaping up the personality, the media is a reflection of what actually happens in the community and with parents. Therefore, parents and the community are role models.

- Parents create awareness among their children through orienting them to watch certain television programs that are useful for their knowledge and can develop their thoughts. They should also specify a time for watching and be present to explain. The parents should also use the media to communicate with their children since it is such a great influence.

- Through the community/society, programs that are not up to the required standards and do not involve new social topics can be boycotted and removed. The role of society is also to activate the role of civil society organizations through demanding the implementation of laws. This can be done through awareness campaigns in schools and education programs to inform the children about the importance of media as a national authority using non-formal education.

The importance of placing a code of conduct for the media

- Having a media Code of Conduct plays a significant role in organizing and sending a clear, accurate and objective picture. The code of conduct could include the following points:
- Maintaining a minimum standard of truthfulness and objectivity, leading to reduced political tensions in Lebanon, especially to the nonoccurrence of conflict between political parties in Lebanon.
- Activating the cooperation between media institutions, leading to the exchange of experience, credibility, a better standard and a more diverse range of cultural, educational programs.

“...It was a nice experience and a new chance that I never had before, I had a lot of fun, met new friends and the most important this is that I got a lot of knowledge on dialogue...”