Turning Palestinian girls into youth entrepreneurs



By Hanan Michael and Catherine Weibel

AWARTA, State of Palestine, 24 March 2016 - While adolescents can be impacted by a range of social issues, they can also be taught to take action on them.

Children and young people have a role to play in their own development as well as the development of their communities. That role is not only about raising their 'voice'; it is also about taking action.

"Adolescents have a wonderful potential to become leaders and agents of positive change in their communities and society. This programme builds on this to further strengthen and nurture their creative, innovative and social entrepreneurship skills. The results are inspiring." June Kunugi, UNICEF State of Palestine Special Representative, says.

Baian attending a training in leadership and entrepreneurship skills funded by Japan at Awarta secondary school for girls.

With support from Japan, UNICEF and partners Injaz and Al Nayzak are providing Palestinian girls living in vulnerable areas of the West Bank with opportunities to use their creative energy to the benefit of the community, while developing coping mechanisms and employability skills.

The programme helps young girls develop critical skills and competencies to positively engage in society, exercise leadership and become involved in social change. It builds on a positive youth development approach which advocates for young people to achieve their full potential as the best way to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviour.

In Awarta, a village near Nablus in the northern West Bank, 37 students from the secondary girls school are learning to become agents of change and to develop their own businesses – including how to secure a small amount of money to start, how to prepare a budget, how to develop and sell a product, and how to evaluate and discuss the results.

"The training has changed the way I see things. I feel more self-confident. I want to become a journalist, so I can inform people and help them change for the better," says 15-year-old Baian, who is developing an initiative to promote local products on social media.

Her teammate, 15-year-old Nisreen, says she is no longer afraid to speak out and express their views. “I am ready to be a leader,” she tells.



Sixteen-year-old Wala’ sees the training as a powerful tool to help Palestinian youth unite for the greater good. ”What we learnt will help Palestine to become economically independent,” the student says.

For some of the girls, the training is a tool to try and change mentalities.

15-year-old May and Sajeda joined forces to speak out against a practice which detrimentally affects some girls her age – early marriage. To that end, they designed a plan to educate people on the detrimental consequences early marriage has on young girls, hoping her community will eventually reject this practice.

“Early marriage strips girls of their childhood and forces them to become mothers too early,” May says. “We spoke to a group of mothers, telling them they must protect their daughters and refuse to marry them until they’re old enough.”

Baian and Nisreen attending a training in leadership and entrepreneurship skills funded by Japan at Awarta secondary school for girls.

May and Sajeda say that even after the training ends, they will do home visits to convince more mothers to reject early marriage in their neighbourhood.

“We want to make change happen,” Sajeda tells. “The training taught us to be strong, effective and self-confident. May and I are more determined than ever to put an end to early marriage in our society. We will fight for what we believe in.”

Teachers and educators say they can already see the difference the training makes.



“Our students have become more self-confident, better organized, able to think in a more creative way,” Samia Al Deek, Awarta’s school principal, says. “The training has not only enhanced their leadership skills, but also instilled a volunteer spirit in students.”

The entrepreneurial programme, funded by the government and people of Japan, reached nearly 13,000 Palestinian adolescents in 2015. It is implemented by UNICEF and Injaz together with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) and the Palestinian Higher Council of Youth and Sports (HCYS).

May took action against early marriage.

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