



SUCCESS STORY

Theater and Dialogue Inspire Youth Activism



Participants from Nahnoo's peace-building workshops perform "We're in Babel and we're all in our own bubbles," a play they conceived after receiving theatrical training.

"This is the first time I've seen so many youth actively involved in a conference on such a topic. No political party is able to bring this many youth together for a common cause."

—Dr. Soud El Mawla, university professor and speaker at Nahnoo's Dialogue and Sectarianism conference

March 2009 – In its first official project, Nahnoo, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), engaged more than 300 youths from different educational and sectarian backgrounds to explore how to use theater, journalism, and dialogue for peace-building purposes. The project sought to reduce tensions between youth from three Beirut neighborhoods affected by recent violence—Ras en Nabaa, Chiyah, and Furn el Chebbak.

With support from USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, Nahnoo conducted a series of workshops to help the youths develop creativity, communication, and critical-thinking skills through activities such as analyzing films, writing articles, engaging in dialogue on sectarianism, and developing a theatrical play.

The participants not only gained valuable skills but also built trust within the group and bonds between each other. One youth said, "I now know how to generate meaningful and effective dialogue." Another said, "I learned how to listen and respect others' opinions."

A group of youths, including a number of university students, suggested that workshops be offered to others and proceeded to organize a conference entitled "Dialogue and Sectarianism" for more than 200 students and professors.

In addition, the group that wrote the play performed their production for nearly 300 young people at a theater located near the three troubled neighborhoods. The play depicted Lebanese society and the need for improving dialogue to facilitate peaceful coexistence.

According to Suzi Maddah, Nahnoo's project coordinator, "Youth are hungry for a space to express themselves...we are providing that for them. By sharing and creating together, they have become motivated to do much more as activists."

Bubbling with ideas, participants have devised several new projects, including a university cinema club, a story-telling group, and a newsletter written by students from a Lebanese university with branches in both Christian and Muslim areas. Other participants are distributing questionnaires through universities, Facebook, and e-mails to inform Nahnoo's future projects, asking youths about the kinds of activities they want to be involved in.

The youths leading these efforts have received widespread publicity, attracted many partners to their cause, and built the capacity of Nahnoo to become a sustainable, youth-led NGO.