



## SUCCESS STORY

### Citizenship Clubs Unite Students in Baalbeck



High school students in citizenship clubs from schools near Baalbeck planted trees around basketball courts and other public facilities.

***“The academy...gives us English and computer skills, and helps us learn life’s lessons, especially those related to conflict and tolerance.”***

***—Hadi, a youth participant in LOST’s citizenship academy***

**April 2009** – More than 2,000 students from 24 high schools in Baalbeck participated in a unique “citizenship academy” designed to empower youth with marketable skills and open doors to civic action. In addition to providing instruction in English, information technology, and civic activism, the academy set up citizenship clubs to organize apolitical activities, which are rare in the area.

Club members flourished in their roles as youth leaders, encouraging youth talents, promoting peace and tolerance, and building the idea of a united Lebanon. “Now my classmates view me with respect,” one club member said. “They appreciate that I connect them to new activities and opportunities.”

The academy was led by 22 youth coordinators associated with the Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST). The facilitators had been trained under a grant from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, and the academy model built on successful approaches previously employed by LOST.

In a popular program organized by the clubs, students from one school hosted students from different schools and religions in their homes. The activity has established ongoing friendships across sectarian lines.

Clubs organized a basketball tournament and a 5-kilometer race on streets draped with banners depicting the country’s struggles and successes since independence. Activities also highlighted youth talents and included an exhibition of themed art work (poems, drawings, and poetry) that saw about 300 attendees. Mohamad, one of the artists, said, “This is the first time anyone showed an interest in my talents and encouraged me to develop them.”

The citizenship clubs launched two advocacy campaigns, an anti-smoking campaign, and a tree planting campaign, which was rolled out at a public ceremony attended by Lebanon’s Minister of Agriculture who donated 4,000 saplings to the effort.

To provide a platform for youth voices, LOST also produced a newsletter. The first edition quoted students saying, “The academy is a model of what our country should be,” and the project “helped us meet people from other sects and have fun while learning new skills.”

After seeing the youths’ desire to express themselves, LOST has decided to continue publishing the newsletter, and the organization has also made plans to establish a volunteer unit to engage club members who are eager to be a part of ongoing activities.