

FEUDING YOUTHS BECOMING CHANGE-MAKERS

MARCH / THE BEB EL DAHAB INITIATIVE, TRIPOLI
LEBANON



CATEGORIES

- E** Joint local engagement for the common good
- F** Formats overcoming conflicts & division

PRESENTER

Kinda Majari, Project Coordinator

DESCRIPTION

The programme counters conflict and radicalization among youth from two feuding neighbourhoods in Tripoli-Lebanon's northern capital, by addressing the root causes of sectarian violence and extremism and creating a counter-narrative that empowers youth and provides them with a sense of identity and belonging.

MOTIVATION

MARCH's work seeks to promote social cohesion and long-term stability in addition to personal freedoms while advocating for equal rights through peace building and conflict resolution, mainly targeting the youth. MARCH's ultimate aim is to steer the youth away from violence and division.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The main issue this practice address is the rise in sectarian violent conflicts, which happen due to marginalization, state neglect, and a deep sense of hopelessness that makes the youth vulnerable to radical ideologies and violent and sectarian narratives.

Due to Tripoli's social ecosystem, the area has constituted fertile grounds for conflict. Local youth have been subjected to extreme socio-economic conditions that have transformed them into the perfect targets for radical religious and sectarian narratives that capitalize on these vulnerable communities.

MORE DETAILS

Beb El Dahab began in 2017 in Tripoli, a city that had long been ravaged by violent sectarian clashes, as a means to try and reconcile two feuding communities that had been fighting their own version of Syria's civil war: the Alawite neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen and the Sunni neighbourhood of Beb El Tabbaneh. Similar to other volatile or at-risk regions across the globe, these two communities had been plagued by cross-generational resentment due to preconceived notions of the "Other" which had generated animosity and fertile grounds for conflict. Extreme marginalization and poverty left these young men and women longing for a sense of identity and belonging, easily succumbing to the claws of a radical religious discourse that capitalized on Tripoli's social ecosystem. This rehabilitative project therefore aims to empower local youth by developing both their soft and hard skills thus making them more resilient and transforming them into agents of change within their communities. To do so, MARCH has adopted a unique and holistic approach that utilizes arts and culture- focusing on the individual as a whole- to promote long term sustainable peace.

The organization identifies and enrolls vulnerable youth such as ex-fighters who had taken part in the clashes, individuals who had been incarcerated, and young women who had fallen victim to the war. Under MARCH's supervision, the selected group is given capacity-building workshops that range from construction to graphic design in addition to psycho-social support, language classes, and cultural activities/workshops to help the youth process and constructively channel their emotions. Through the organization's support, these individuals actively contribute to the rebuilding process of their community. MARCH launched the Beb El Dahab initiative by resuscitating a marketplace that was destroyed by the war through the youth's collaborative efforts. The men worked on rebuilding and renovating the shops while the women worked on designing and producing all the branding material. Relying on a cyclic model of social impact, Beb El Dahab employs local craftsmanship and focuses on developing the youth's potential.

OUTCOMES

The practice was able to reconcile and grow the skills of over 300 youth (200 former fighters among them), increase their resilience, and allow them to build a better future for themselves. It has also contributed to empowering young women and expanding their skills and in a patriarchal and conservative environment where they suffered from extreme marginalization.

The practice has further allowed them to rebuild and enhance the neighbourhoods ravaged by a long sectarian war that they had themselves participated in. Over 350 shops were rehabilitated on former demarcation lines, public and green spaces were created, and streets were enhanced at the hands of young men and women from communities previously at war.

LESSONS LEARNED

Tripoli – like many other marginalized areas – is a well of untapped potential. Young people need opportunities to develop their skills and the necessary tools to become active contributors to their surroundings. In order to sustainably impact beneficiaries' lives and generate long-term change within their communities reinforcing a positive and constructive narrative by offering a holistic approach to peacebuilding is crucial. Providing short-term relief is a strategy that has long been utilized by CSOs and has proven to be insufficient.

Cooperation is key. MARCH does not exist in an isolated bubble – change is not unilateral. Building sustainable socioeconomic resilience requires the collaborative efforts of diverse stakeholders. Merging different expertise allows us to maximize our impact. Cross-sectoral alliances have always been an important element of MARCH's initiatives. Over the years, the organization has managed to join forces with both private and public institutions. This has allowed for the facilitation of its work and improvement of its approach.

Having women peace-builders in the field is an essential asset and not a liability, even in extremely conservative environments. We must therefore recognize them as capable negotiators, mediators, facilitators, and strategists even in extremely dangerous and difficult contexts.