

RESEARCH REPORT

MASHROU3 INSAN:

A Participatory Action Research Project to Ground the Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Lived Experiences of Refugee Youth

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MASHROU3 INSAN: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO GROUND THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE YOUTH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Project Overview

A fundamental advancement over the Millennium Development Goals, upon which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are built, was the decision to reduce inequalities in policies, through targeting those *left furthest left behind*¹ first, instead of merely attempting to improve national or global averages. Participatory Action Research (PAR) models are endorsed as a means to increase citizen participation for the localization of the SDG agenda (Care International, 2015; Dlouhá & Pospíšilová, 2017; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2015; Fox & Stoett, 2016). A second significant development in the SDG agenda was to acknowledge the individual and societal burden of mental illnesses and diseases, and to recognize that mental illness is a major challenge for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The current PAR project includes a group of 22 Syrians (Syrian-Palestinian and Syrian-Kurdish) and Iraqi refugee co-researchers, between the ages of 15 and 29. An innovative four-phase theater-based PAR model was used to co-identify their priorities, and link them to SDG achievements in a way that can benefit policymakers.

The project was guided by three main questions:

- ▶ What are the inner challenges and concerns of youth refugees living in Lebanon, and how do they relate to SDGs?
- ▶ What are refugee youth's policy-relevant recommendations for community development?
- ▶ Does the current PAR model have the potential to engage furthest left behind refugee youth in the localization of SDGs?

Methodology

Research design

The focus on youth mental health in the current study is a response to worldwide statistics reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), which estimates that one in four people in the world will be affected by mental health illness over their lifetime. Although this statistic may seem inflated, it is in fact a very conservative estimate given that many youths, especially in the Arab and Middle Eastern regions, often remain silent about their mental health needs and thus remain neglected. In Lebanon, a study

conducted in 2008 estimated that approximately 25.8% of the Lebanese population is afflicted with a mental health disorder (Karam et al., 2008). Refugee populations fleeing from war and those left furthest left behind are further at risk due to the rise in conflict and socioeconomic instability in the Middle East and North Africa region, which has significantly contributed to an increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse among youth.

Participatory Action Research framework

PAR is an epistemological approach and a legal commitment that sets up a space for those who are considered the subject of research to become the researchers themselves. In PAR work, it is usually those most impacted that come together as a research collective to define for themselves the research question, the research design, methods of data analysis, and what should be done with the results (Fox, 2016, p.47). In the first phase of the project, Participatory Theater, namely Playback Theater (PB), was used as a means to explore youths' innermost needs, to generate communication and understanding between participants, as well as to create a safe space for theatrical dialogue about societal problems. In the second phase of the project, this dialogue was used to inform the development and administration of four community surveys that investigated SDGs. In the third phase, the experiences and data gathered during Phases 1 and 2 were used to develop and perform a Forum Theater (FT) play that vividly displayed youth's challenges, and invited the audience to discuss the deeper systemic challenges that the play posed, as well as offer solutions to the conflicts posed.

Results

Family as the core unit for overcoming challenges

Our findings clearly suggest the centrality of healthy family systems for individual and community wellbeing and social initiatives. The following challenges were of most concern: child abuse, restriction on women rights (including forced marriage), and access to education.

Gender-based discrimination

The restrictions on individual freedoms that arise from traditional cultural norms and discrimination were most accentuated in the case for women; In particular, through forced marriages, pressures put on appearances, and the choice of education or job.

Access to education

All youth participants expressed major difficulties in continuing their education. The major hindrances to continuing education were: gender-based

¹ For the purposes of this report, *left furthest left behind* is defined as first generation refugee youth at risk of mental illness.

discrimination, non-transferable educational degrees/credits, the necessity and pressure to choose work over continuing education, lack of access or loss of documentation, significant language barriers, official residence documents, heightened competitiveness in the education sector due to limited funding and resources, and financial barriers.

Access to safe spaces and psychological support

During the PB workshop, some participants shared their occasional thoughts of suicide during their life, their need for someone to listen to them without judgment, and their need for a psychological support system. They all shared feelings of loss (e.g., of property, of wealth, or loved ones), grief, isolation due to war, displacement, or death of loved ones. Most youth expressed their difficulty in trusting others.

A main message that came out of the workshop and reflection meeting was the youth need for a place to breathe, spend time safely, and in friendly company.

Discrimination

Refugee youth suffer widely from discrimination, especially in the context of work and education sectors, and has resulted in a loss of self and deep chronic angst.

Recommendations: SDG Priorities

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- ▶ Employ youth refugees, including youth leaders in furthest left behind communities, as co-developers and co-researchers in community and personal development initiatives.

Goal 3: Seeks to ensure health and wellbeing for all, at every stage of life

- ▶ Provide furthest left behind youth and their families access to locally sensitive psychological support, which addresses family systems and processes, such as: communication, support for career choices, psychological impact of restrictive cultural and religious practices on youth development, gender-based discrimination in the family context, authoritarian parenting practices, sexual development, and verbal/psychological/physical abuse.

Goal 4: Education and lifelong learning

- ▶ Certification and accreditation: Establish certification programs and equivalences between Lebanese and non-Lebanese degrees.
- ▶ Tertiary education facilities: Promote programs for individuals to re-enter the school system and provide

access to certified, high quality, non-traditional learning opportunities.

- ▶ Scholarships: Offer scholarships that reflect the current interest of youth, especially in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- ▶ Legal reform: Set a minimum age for marriage.
- ▶ Awareness initiatives: through workshops and campaigns on women empowerment and human rights.
- ▶ Scholarships: Empower women through targeted workshops.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

- ▶ Kafala system: Reform the sponsorship policy.
- ▶ Regularize construction work: Establish mechanisms to monitor employment of construction workers and give them access to labor rights.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- ▶ Establish mechanisms to monitor professionalism of public and private administrations, in particular in the education and medical sectors.
- ▶ Adapt and simplify participatory theater methods for youth to share their lived experiences of discrimination via story telling.

Conclusion: The way forward

Minding the skills gap

- ▶ Any implementation of this PAR model must be accompanied through an extended training process to ensure skills are not a barrier to full participation of community members.

Legislative theater

- ▶ We recommend the use of other interactive theater techniques. Legislative Theater (LT) aims to open dialogue between citizens and institutional entities so that there is a flow of power between both groups. It moves beyond community building and awareness-raising by using theatrical techniques to create concrete and specific sociopolitical impact.

Anchoring PAR process in local communities

- ▶ Given the importance of the cultural and social context, we emphasize the importance of embedding PAR within local communities. This would facilitate the process of identifying concrete and shared issues, and give access to the varying stakeholders that would be involved in a solution to the challenges, feeding directly into policymakers' action plans.

Include a mental health/wellbeing focus to SDG localization projects

- ▶ Creating and sustaining a safe space for exploring the inner lives of the participants, and their innermost needs, is a powerful springboard for engaging in social action and policy development because there is a natural toggling between personal interest and collective interest. We recommend that youth be provided with more opportunities to process and hold in emotions that arise in the context of youth-driven projects because they will strengthen them psychologically, clarify their relationship to others in their lives, and allow them to act within the field of human development with more clarity and purposefulness.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

FT	Forum Theater
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OHS	Oxford Happiness Scale
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PB	Playback Theater
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental advancement over the Millennium Development Goals, upon which the SDGs are built, was the decision to reduce inequalities in policies, through targeting *the furthest left behind*² first, instead of merely attempting to improve national or global averages. In that view, SDGs were designed to provide the normative framework to help each country contextualize the national and local challenges for reaching sustainable development, and to develop multi-stakeholder policies with the active participation of citizens from all walks of life. With these overarching aims, PAR models of reaching citizen participation were encouraged (Care International, 2015; Dlouhá, J & Pospíšilová, 2017; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2015; Fox & Stoett, 2016). A second significant development in SDG was the acknowledgement and inclusion of mental illnesses into the new development goals, targets, and indicators:

To promote physical and mental health and well-being, and to extend life expectancy for all, we must achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care. (...) We are committed to the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including behavioral, developmental and neurological disorders, which constitute a major challenge for sustainable development (paragraph 26) (United Nations, 2015).

Committing to working with the furthest left behind groups, on issues related to personal and community wellbeing, presupposes that the following questions have been answered: which social groups qualify as furthest left behind, how to reach them, how to involve them meaningfully in the assessment of their priorities and the decision-making processes for better development policies?

In the current pilot project, we identified youth and young adults between the ages of 16-29 at risk of mental health issues as a population of furthest left behind. In particular, we worked with youth and young adult refugees living in Lebanon. The three main questions that guided our work were:

- ▶ What are the inner challenges and concerns of youth refugees behind living in Lebanon, as they relate to SDGs?

- ▶ What are refugee youth's policy-relevant recommendations to improve the daily lives of refugee youth living in Lebanon?
- ▶ Does the current PAR model have the potential to engage furthest left behind youth in the localization of SDGs?

In what follows, we provide a short literature review about the need to attend to youth mental health, especially among the less studied at-risk youth refugee populations. This will be followed by a discussion of why mental health and mental illnesses need to be considered, if we are serious about working towards the localization of SDGs. Finally, we review the need for PAR research and its utility in supporting the localization of SDGs among furthest left behind populations, and how participatory theater has been used in PAR models.

Youth Mental Wellbeing in Lebanon

We begin this section by looking at youth mental health, in general, and then turn to look more closely at the research on refugee populations. The focus on youth mental health in the current study is a response to worldwide statistics reported by WHO, which estimates that one in four people in the world will be affected by mental health illness over their lifetime (WHO, 2001). In the MENA region, those who reach out for help do not receive the much-needed support and care, mainly due to underfunding, stigmatization, and the lack of professional care (Whiteford et al., 2013). Social stigmatization, which is very high in Middle Eastern societies, promotes exclusion of the mentally ill, which drastically lowers the quality of life of those suffering (Corrigan, Edwards, Green, Diwan, & Penn, 2001; Corrigan & Penn, 1999; Link & Phelan, 2001; Saxena, Thornicroft, Knapp, & Whiteford, 2007; Sewilam et al., 2015).

In Lebanon, a study conducted in 2008, estimated that approximately 25.8% of the Lebanese population is afflicted with a mental health disorder (Karam et al., 2008). More recent evidence from Lebanese youth samples reports that 13.1% of youth have anxiety disorders and 10.1% have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (10.1%), while 15% of 13-15 year olds considered suicide, and 13.5% have attempted suicide (GSHS, 2011; Maalouf et al., 2016; Mahfoud, Afifi, Haddad, & DeJong, 2011). Suicidal ideation is more common, and reported at 16% among 13-15 year olds. Furthermore, there is a growing trend for substance abuse in youth, with the most recent figures estimating 16% of youth consume harmful

² For the purposes of this report, the *furthest left behind* is defined as a first generation refugee youth at risk of mental illness

amounts of alcohol, and show alcohol dependence and bingeing patterns (Salamé, Barbour, & Salameh, 2013). Additionally, the abuse of commercialized (e.g., tobacco and tranquilizers) and non-commercialized drugs (e.g., heroin and cocaine) has shown to be increasing in prevalence (Karam, Ghandour, Maalouf, Yamout, & Salamoun, 2010; Merabi et al., 2016). The latter is highlighted in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2016 report, as there is an increase in the use of Ecstasy, Captagone, and other drugs since 2011 in Lebanon; and more so in the 2014 UN/Save the Children Situation analysis of youth affected by the Syrian crisis, where 17 percent of youth were estimated as the percentage of youth refugee consumers of alcohol and drugs, and that the number of users is higher for older male youth (UNODC, 2016; United Nations Population Fund, 2014). Taking all these figures into consideration, recent figures posit that an estimated 25% of Lebanese youth suffer from psychiatric disorder (Maalouf et al., 2016).

Mental Health among Youth Refugees

The significant societal challenges discussed, in addition to the rise in conflict in the MENA regions, amplified mental health issues in refugee populations and have been shown to increase the prevalence of depression and anxiety among youth (Ferrari et al., 2014). Other sociopolitical transitions, peaceful or otherwise, such as the Arab Spring, raises challenges for Lebanese identity and coexistence (Bahout, 2013). Chronic warfare and conflict increases the number of refugees seeking asylum, thereby increasing the number of local stressors, which, in turn, leads to worsening the public's mental health status (Ferrari et al., 2014). The effect of chronic violence and conflict influence mental health across lifespans and generationally with a strong positive association between the number of conflict-related traumatic experiences and mental, behavioral, and emotional problems in the Middle East (e.g., Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon) (Dimitry, 2012; Mollica, Brooks, Tor, Lopes-Cardozo, & Silove, 2014; de Benitez et al., 2003; Leiner, 2009; O'Brien, 2007).

Looking closely at the Syrian conflict, specifically at those living in refugee camps, the prolonged exposure to traumatic and adverse experiences has led to extremely high levels of psychological stress (Abou-Saleh and Hughes, 2015; Hassan, Kirmayer, Mekki-Berrada, Quosh, El Chammay, Deville-Stoetzel, Youssef, Jefe-Bahloul, Barkeel-Oteo, Coutts, Song, & Ventevogel, 2015; see also Shuhayb, Makkouk & Tuttunji, 2014). Anxiety and depression are estimated

to impact 42% of refugees, and 89 % of refugee youth describe themselves as depressed, anxious, or afraid, while 17% report suicidal ideation, and 24% thought of finding ways to end their life³ (Jefe-Bahloul, Moustaga, Shebl, and Barkil-Oteo, 2014; United Nations Population Fund). Moreover, post-traumatic stress disorder is approximated at 33% (Alpak et al., 2015). Research also suggests that tension in the family has increased, as stated, by 62% of the youth surveyed, while 50% report feeling insecure in Lebanon (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). The following challenges are widespread in the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon: emotional stress due to parents' socioeconomic conditions and deterioration of livelihoods of displaced persons in Syria—70% of displaced Syrians were reported below the poverty line in 2014, an increase of 20 percentage points from 2013, while 50% do not have the necessary income to satisfy their most basic needs—violence and neglect from school administrators, teachers, and parents, as well as gender-based violence in the family, justified as a form of protection (e.g., house confinement, discontinued schools, and early marriage), and child labor (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). Finally, a strong correlation between conflict, unemployment, and poverty where 32 percent of Syrian male youth aged 19–24 years know people who have returned to Syria to rejoin the fighting for (a) economic conditions, (b) the inability to find work, (c) tension within the family, and (d) pressure from the host community⁴. Unfortunately, little is known about refugees living outside camps, despite the fact that they constitute a large proportion of refugees in Lebanon (Abbara et al., 2016). This lack of knowledge is in part due to the government's policies regarding the initial reception and ongoing position towards the refugee influx.

Linkages between Mental Health and the Localization of the SDGs

There are three main justifications for linking mental health challenges to the localization of SDGs in youth refugee populations. The first justification concerns the need for culturally appropriate mental health research, including research on the efficacy of interventions, to alleviate the profound lifespan and generational negative ramifications on the psychosocial and developmental programs. Systematic evidence-based research on refugee mental health, especially for the furthest left behind, is sparse yet needed for remedial interventions and programs to avoid futility, counter-productivity, and unethical interventions. The dearth of basic knowledge

⁴ UN and Ministry of Labour (2015). Temporary employment of persons from Syria (draft)

regarding the youth's psychosocial development and the influences of social and cultural factors on mental health and wellbeing obstructs our ability to localize SDGs, effectively intervene, and positively impact national policy. The second reason for linking mental health to the localization of SDGs is because mental health is, in and of itself, a "prerequisite for physical health and strongly interlinked with other development factors such as poverty, work and economic growth or peace and justice" (Votruba, Thornicort, & FundaMentalSDG Steering Group, 2016). Furthermore, mental health directly contributes to achieving social inclusion and equity (Goal 16), economic growth (Goal 8), safe cities (Goal 11), access to justice and human rights (Goal 16) (WHO, 2011; Chatterjee et al., 2014). The third justification for linking SDGs with mental health and wellbeing entails our commitment to serving the psychological needs of youth throughout the duration of the study. It was important to the research team that the participating youth have a supportive environment to explore their inner landscape, to meet one another in a deeply relational healing space, and to use this space, each in their unique way, for personal development.

Participatory Action Research Framework

Participatory Action Research is an epistemological approach and a socio-legal commitment that sets up a space for those who are considered the subject of research (traditionally those excluded via history, underfunding of education, oppression, prejudice, cycles of cultural trauma, and violence) to become the researchers themselves (Fals Borda, 1979; Friere, 1970; Guishard, 2009; Hart, 1992; Lykes & Mallona, 2008; Torre et al., 2001; Tuck, 2009). In PAR work, it is usually those most impacted that come together as a research collective to define for themselves the research question, the research design, the methods of data analysis, and what should be done with the results (Fox, 2016). We are deeply committed to the view that the pursuit of research is primarily to ask important, locally relevant questions, and then seek answers among neighbors and those most directly impacted (Appadurai, 2006). Appadurai calls this type of work the right to research, the right to be researchers, even with no academic training, and the right to engage in sustained critical inquiry about the conditions in which you live. When those most affected are central to determining the questions and analyzing the answers, we believe that we can collectively construct research with deep validity and a greater likelihood of producing meaningful action (Stoudt et al., in press). Adding to the above, our work is also aligned with scholarship and research which empirically shows that adolescents' and

young adults' participation in community research meaningfully influences and shapes society (see Fox, 2016; Stoudt, Torre, Bartley, Bracy, Caldwell, Downs, Greene, Haldipur, Hassan, Manoff, Sheppard, & Yates, J. in press; Katsiaficas, Alcantar, Hernandez, Samayoa, Gutierrez, Rodriguez, Williams, & Williams 2016; Kirshner, 2007; Su 2009). Our work is also aligned with calls for PAR work from the international humanitarian and human development community which endorses the use of PAR models for youth-led forms of knowledge production and youth-led solutions to personal and community development (Care International, 2015; Dlouhá & Pospíšilová, 2017; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2015; Fox & Stoett, 2016).

Participatory Theater in PAR and Human Development Research

In this section, we offer a brief background on participatory theater and how it was embedded in our PAR model, and how it was used to generate SDG-relevant policy recommendations.

Theater is a multi-sensorial experience that helps to enhance the emotional and psychological impact of drama methods and performance. This in turn allows theater—especially participatory theater—to be a powerful and effective medium for catalyzing change at the level of thought and action. Participatory theater is built on a paradigm that views audience members as active, co-researchers with expert knowledge. In a PB event, one of the participatory theater forms used in the current project, audience members are encouraged to share true stories from their own lives. After a volunteer Teller is selected, the event facilitator, known as a Conductor, asks that person to join them onstage, where they are subsequently invited to share their story. The Conductor assists this process by asking simple questions that help to establish the important events, feelings, meanings, and context of the story. Meanwhile, a group of four or five actors and a musician listen. At the conclusion of the interview, the Conductor invites the actors to perform the Teller's story. In addition to the use of PB for public performance, it can also be used in workshop settings to generate communication, understanding, and relationship building between participants. From the early years PB's ability to promote community cohesion through inclusive practice, personal storytelling, and performance by non-professional citizen actors, was recognized and embraced by pioneer practitioners (Salas, 2013; Fox, 1994).

In addition to PB, FT practice was also employed in the current study in order to enhance the research

team's capacity to analyze local problems and to present them to an audience, which will explore solutions in a creative and constructive way. In this way, Forum Theater "exercises social imagination and creative problem solving, whilst simultaneously holding in mind one's immediate interests and the larger interests of the community as a whole" (Schrowange, 2014, p. 19). In Forum Theater, a group of actors perform a short play, based on an unresolved experience, conflict, or oppression from everyday life. After the initial enactment, select scenes are performed again. This time, however, audience members are urged to intervene and replace one of the actors. In role, they can then enact their own ideas on how to transform the situation. The theatrical act is thus experienced as "a rehearsal for social action rooted in a collective analysis of shared problems" (Brecht Forum, 2017).

In the current project, we used participatory theater methods within the context of PAR research, an approach, which was first introduced by Kathleen Gallagher (2011) and developed in the Polling for Justice Project (PJ) (Fox & Fine, 2011; Stoudt et al., in press).

By using participation theater methods, we were able to tap into multiple experiences of variously positioned youth co-researchers and other members of the research team. In traditional conceptions of science, it would be problematic to integrate knowledge based on the individual experiences of the researcher(s)/co-researchers, such as knowledge attained through participatory methods, with other knowledge and data. Traditional positivist science dismisses individual and phenomenological experiences as anecdotal, unreliable, and even invalid. Fox (2016) argues that admitting one's humanity/politics/experience of one's self as the researcher is considered biased research and simply unscientific. In PAR, because there is an explicit alignment between the subject of the research and the researcher, individual experiences of the researchers provide valuable interpretive frames, especially in the context of large research collectives that engage in critical inquiry. In the current project, we acknowledge that knowledge production and valid research is strengthened by privileging the perspectives of those most impacted by the research, who are often traditionally excluded (Harding, 1992). We agree with Kathleen Lynch (1999) "Unless it is shared with those who are directly affected by it, research data can be used for manipulation, abuse, and control. The importance of democratizing research arises therefore because knowledge is power" (p. 55). The use of

participatory theater within a PAR approach allowed us to produce analyses in the service of science and human development initiatives, and it also served our wellbeing, our families, and our communities.

In summary, the current pilot project is a grounded bottom-up research initiative, which explores and privileges the inner experiences and emotional lives of youth as a means of orientating them to the SDG framework, and develops solutions to SDG challenges, which are firmly grounded in their personal and collective lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The current study employs a four-phase PAR design that involves research-related activities, data collection and analysis, and interactive theater. The methodology can be broken down into five main activities, which will be elaborated below:

- ▶ Participant recruitment.
- ▶ PB Workshop + Reflection Meeting.
- ▶ SDG mapping and Survey Development Days.
- ▶ Development and performance of Forum Theater Play.
- ▶ Reflections and Evaluation.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Lebanese American University approved the research design.

Participant recruitment

Recruitment was conducted over two weeks in total. We requested contact with interested individuals for the project from forty-five non-governmental organizations (NGO), who have refugee programs, one branch of the ministry of social affairs, and direct individual contacts of the core research team. Additionally, we asked applicants to suggest other potential applicants, and we shared posts about the project on Syrian Facebook groups. In our letter of invitation, we requested the following criteria be used for recommending youth:

- ▶ Care deeply about the wellbeing and personal development of themselves and others, wish to work and collaborate with both participatory theater actors and trainers, as well as local and international researchers.
- ▶ Like to hear others' stories, and narrate their own stories.
- ▶ Have a passion for expressive/theatrical arts.
- ▶ Are highly motivated about being part of creating social change.
- ▶ Feel marginalized and are looking for an opportunity to have their voices heard.
- ▶ Refugee youth between the ages of 18-25, who may be at risk of mental health problems.

In total, 75 youth were contacted, of which 28 were shortlisted for an interview⁵, and 22 were selected to take part in the project. The majority of the youth were interviewed in person, and a few were interviewed by phone at their request (family and job limitations restricted them from meeting face-to-face). The interview started with a brief introduction to the project, followed by a set of questions to determine their levels of commitment to, and interest in, the project, followed by a set of demographic questions, and ending with a mental health screening, which included the following assessments: self-report on neurodegenerative diseases, Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), and Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ) (Binary version) (Almuneef, Hollinshead, Saleheen, AlMadani, Derkash, AlBuhairan, Al-Eissa, & Fluke, 2016; Sawaya, Atoui, Hamadeh, Zeinoun, & Nahas, 2016).

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- ▶ Ability to articulate the main goals, aims, and objectives of the study.
- ▶ A commitment to attend 18 days of the project over a period of 4 months.
- ▶ Interviewee wishes to learn more about the project or asks interesting questions about it.
- ▶ Have conducive characteristics: they like to hear others' stories, they like to narrate stories, they enjoy expressive/theatrical arts, they heard about it from a trusted friend or adult, they like the idea of being a part of social change, they think it would be good for their personal development or career development, they have personal or family experience with mental illness, and they are curious about the role of science and art in personal and social change.
- ▶ The interviewees' involvement contributed to the diversity of the group with respect to several of the following dimensions: gender, socioeconomic status, minority status, native language, second language, group identification, religious identification, and regional representation.

Twenty-two of the 28 individuals interviewed were selected to take part in the project. Their demographic information is as follows (see Appendix 1 for full details):

⁵ For the purposes of this report, the *furthest left behind* is defined as a first generation refugee youth at risk of mental illness

Sex	13 males, 9 females
Age	Participants were between the ages of 16 and 29 (mean age: 23.41)
Nationality	16 were Syrians, 3 were Iraqi, 2 were Syrian Kurdish, one was Syrian-Palestinian
Place of residence	14 lived in Beirut, 2 lived in Mount Lebanon, 5 lived in North Lebanon, and one lived in the Bekaa
Educational level	12 completed/are completing their undergraduate degree, 4 completed/were completing their high school degree, 3 completed elementary school, 2 were completing their master's degree, one completed some high school

Playback theater workshop

A two-day PB workshop was conducted to create a safe space for telling personal stories, promoting dialogue between different voices, and recognizing the collective nature of the participants' experiences. The workshop was the first gathering of all the participants, and was initiated by a general introduction about the SDGs, with a suggestion to focus on the four goals we had pre-identified (i.e., Goals 3, 4, 5, and 16). During the workshop, different physical exercises were facilitated in order to help participants be in touch with themselves and be inspired to share their personal struggles. At the end of the two-day workshop, the participants used sociometry action methods (Moreno, 1951; Moreno, Blomkvist, & Rutzel, 2000) to explore their relationship to the stories told by others, and to vote on their personal importance and the importance they may hold towards individuals close to them. Using sociometric action methods together with ethnographic observation from three observers, the following themes emerged from the teller's stories and the youth's reflections, directly after the enactments. Please note that the emerging themes below were not filtered or enforced but derived from a grounded approach. The SDG framework was not introduced in detail to the research team and co-researchers until Phase 2 of the project.

- ▶ Challenging family relationships affecting personal growth: difficult communication and felt alienation.
- ▶ Oppressing social norms affecting the expression of individuality: social traditions and fanaticism imposing personal behavior.
- ▶ Gender discrimination (female/ male) conditioning in daily life: at work, at home, and in education particularly.

- ▶ Physical loss of family members or loved ones: due to death or emigration.
- ▶ Racial discrimination, exacerbated by their status as refugees: discriminating immigration laws, experience at the borders, discrimination in recreational places, and the lack of psychological support.

Post playback theater reflection meeting process

After the PB workshop, a three-hour reflection meeting was held to extract the most important themes that came up during the workshop, to guide the survey development and SDG mapping. Six of the initial participants from Phase 1 attended the meeting, along with seven members of the research team and theater troupe. Two additional students from the Syrian community in Lebanon attended because they had knowledge and experience about the issues faced by displaced youth in Lebanon.

At the beginning of the meeting, all the themes that came up in the PB workshop were briefly examined (i.e., the themes mentioned above). A majority vote was then carried out to select the four themes that the youth were most interested in investigating. All the members of the meeting then divided themselves into four groups (within each group there was at least one member from the research team) to brainstorm specific measurable indicators and research questions related to their theme. After having worked on the corresponding theme, a member of each group presented the group's work. The selected themes were as follows:

- ▶ The relationships within families, including lack of affection and communication, and its negative effect on the children's self-development and self-realization; the inability of the parents to fulfil the children's needs due to their extreme religious beliefs and references; and parents' relationship and mental health and their effects on the children's psychological state.
- ▶ The issue of a lost identity and the problems that arise from living in Lebanon with a Syrian, Palestinian, or Iraqi nationality, including the difficulty of receiving medical or psychosocial support, getting a job, and the negative psychological impact that arise from such situations.
- ▶ The issues that arise from traditional norms, and the negative impact they have on daily life, including lack of freedom, religious impositions, and gender discrimination, especially within the context of family processes.

- ▶ The loss and grief that arise from war and/or displacement, and their impact on youth's mental health.

Subsequently, a vote was carried out at the end of the meeting; identity was deemed less of a priority and thus dropped from further consideration.

SDG mapping and survey development days

These three days were organized for the purpose of introducing the participants to the SDGs, the basics of research (including research questions, hypotheses, validity, reliability, representation, sampling, survey methods and their limitations, confidentiality etc.) and to train co-researchers in the development and administration of a community-based survey. The main outcome was the development of surveys that addressed the themes of interest to the participants. The second outcome was to enable the participants to systematically collect data and engage in social exchange about their concerns in their communities. Fourteen youth who had participated in the PB workshop participated in one or more days of this phase of the project; they will be called co-researchers for the rest of the paper.

Day one

At the start of the first meeting, the group of participants was introduced, via a PowerPoint presentation and discussion, to the SDGs, and the mapping of indicators to the emerging themes from the PB workshop and the Reflection Meeting. Next, there was an introduction participatory action research and survey development, which started with an exercise on personal happiness, followed by a presentation on the Oxford Happiness Scale (OHS) and its limitations in terms of cross-cultural use (Hills & Argyle, 2002). The scale was self-administered and, subsequently, we had a group reflection on its validity and cultural sensitivity. The OHS was used to show co-researchers an example of a short survey, which was designed to assess relatively invisible psychological processes, similar to the processes that they were attempting to assess such as discrimination, felt closeness to family members, etc. It was chosen because the survey questions were easy to understand and translate, and because it assessed emotions, thoughts, and actions in a concrete way. A role-play was performed to illustrate how the OHS should be administered and a discussion followed critiquing the methods used in role-play. The meeting ended with a presentation on research elements such as demographics, validity, reliability, confidentiality, sample, and quantitative and qualitative data.

Day two

The goal of this day was to design the first draft of the surveys. The participants first divided themselves up into six different groups—depending on interest—to work on different themes they chose from the previously mentioned mapping: gender-based discrimination, restricted personal freedom due to social pressure, displaced youth's mental health in the context of war, lifelong learning, the lack of accessibility to quality-education, and child abuse. The six groups then worked, with the help of a facilitator, on preliminary research questions, which were then presented and discussed with the larger group. A vote was carried out to select the final themes of the surveys. Based on the votes, participants were divided into four groups, developed a research question and associated survey items. Each group presented its work at the end of the day, and it was agreed that each co-researcher would pilot the survey in their close circles. The final research questions were the following:

- ▶ How does experiencing discrimination impact mental wellbeing?
- ▶ How does physical and psychological abuse experienced during childhood impact psychological wellbeing of youth?
- ▶ How does war impact mental health and the ambitions of youth and their development?
- ▶ How lifelong learning of youth is affected by their parents' culture and the opportunities for development that they are offered?

Day three

The final research day aimed at finalizing the questionnaires. It started with a discussion with the larger group about the piloting of surveys that different co-researchers conducted. Participants then continued developing the surveys in groups, with the presence of a mentor for each group, and based on feedback received. Two of the surveys were then piloted in a live data collection interview with two members from the Furn el Cheback neighborhood (where the workshop was being held), and feedback was received from them. The four groups then worked again together to set the sampling frame and finalize the surveys. The day was closed with a decision on data collection details and schedule, followed by a theatrical exercise—lead by one of the theater troupe members—to launch the survey and discuss ethical data collection. After day three but before data collection, the core team met with various groups to finalize

the draft of the surveys. Three research mentors with experience working with refugee populations (two graduate students from health sciences, and a psychology graduate student employed by an international governmental organization) were brought in to give feedback to the youth participants on the final drafts. The surveys were finalized with the input of the core team.

Data collection

Following day three’s activities, the co-researchers collected data from individuals in their communities. Almost all co-researchers helped with data collection, and those who didn’t were either uncomfortable asking questions to strangers or did not have the time to do it. Two co-researchers, one whom had little functional literacy and our youngest participant (16 years old) did not have the confidence to administer the surveys on their own, and preferred they do it in pairs. However, given our time constraints, this was not possible. We agreed with participant researchers that they would collect data within their circles and neighborhoods. In PAR, researchers are often from the communities they research, and although this raises various ethical considerations, our view is that, with adequate training, the potential to improve the validity, usefulness, and impact of the research outweighs potential ethical violations and conflicts of interest (Stoudt et al., in press).

Due to the very limited time of the co-researchers, and their work obligations, they were not able to set a specific day for data collection and the core research team was therefore not able to accompany them during the process. This practical constraint had a direct impact on quality control in data collection. Future research will need to address the issue of quality control by developing methods to check data collection procedures are appropriate, and effective ethics training needs to be explored.

In total, 127 interviews were conducted, distributed between the different topics. The conditions within which the co-researchers collected data, the small sample, and the lack of control on data quality made inferential analyses unwarranted. We describe below the main qualitative results of the surveys.

Survey result summaries

Discrimination survey

This survey asks each of the several sectors whether the respondent or family member was subject to discrimination, the way they were discriminated against, and perceived reasons for discrimination, as well as the impact on their wellbeing. The sectors

were workplace, access to healthcare and educational services, public transportation, public spaces, public institutions, and lodging.

Sample Information: N= 24 (N=14 females, N=10 males), Age range: 17-31, Average Age: 22.9.

RESIDENCE COUNTRY LENGTH OF STAY IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE MEAN=9.55 (RANGE 1-23 YEARS)	BIRTH COUNTRY		
	Lebanon	Outside	Total
Lebanon	4	18	22
Outside	0	2	2
Total	4	20	24

Overall, the results suggest that the majority of respondents in the co-researchers’ circles experiences all forms of discrimination, and that this discrimination is reported, by at least a third of them, to have a moderate-to-extreme effect on their mental health and wellbeing. The most prevalent sectors where discrimination happens are in the workplace/ job market and in lodging. There were no clear differences between genders in the answers, but the sector for which the highest number of women (11 out of 14) answered that they faced discrimination when dealing with public institutions. Most suggested solutions revolve around spreading awareness about human rights, peace, and solidarity, or around parents transferring those values to their children. Others recommended enforcing laws and policies that limit discrimination and exploitation of refugees.

Mental health survey

The survey asks respondents to rank their agreement from one to five with a number of statements regarding their past and current ambitions, levels of anxiety, belief in oneself, ability to engage in self-development, and their role in society.

Sample Information: N=35 (N=16 females, N=19 males), Age range: 18-31, Average Age: 22.9.

RESIDENCE COUNTRY LENGTH OF STAY IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE MEAN=9.8 (RANGE 3-23 YEARS)	BIRTH COUNTRY		
	Lebanon	Outside	Total
Lebanon	9	26	35
Outside	0	0	0
Total	9	26	35

The results suggest that some respondents experience significant distress, yet most report remarkable resilience and hopefulness. The solutions they suggest for improving their situation focus primarily on different forms of psychosocial support (individuals in their lives, psychological services, and personal self-

development opportunities), career or work related support, and continuing education. It is notable that legal and financial solutions did not receive significant attention in the solutions, even though financial difficulties were reported by 77% of respondents as barriers to self-development.

Child abuse survey

The survey asks respondents to report whether they have been subject to physical, psychological, or verbal abuse by family members, whether this occurred before they turned 18 or later. It asks them what their conflict management strategy is, and how likely they are to hit or insult them. And finally it asks about their comfort with relationships with others.

Sample Information: N=59 (25 female, 33 male), Age range: 18-31, Average Age: 23.25

<i>RESIDENCE COUNTRY LENGTH OF STAY IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE MEAN=14.48 (RANGE 0-30 YEARS)</i>	<i>BIRTH COUNTRY</i>		
	Lebanon	Outside	Total
Lebanon	29	30	59
Outside	0	0	0
Total	29	30	59

The results suggest that verbal and physical abuse is prevalent before the age of 18, while psychological abuse is more prevalent after the age of 18. However, it is not clear how this affects the intra and interpersonal functioning. Solutions focused on different psychological and social support initiatives for the individual and families, while protective policies come later.

Family-based support for life-long learning and wellbeing survey

The survey asks respondents to report their level of education, whether their parents encouraged them to stay in school, whether their parents are engaged in learning, and the opportunities for learning that are available to them.

Sample Information: N=29 (N = 17 female, N = 12 male), Age range: 18-31, Average Age: 24.3.

<i>RESIDENCE COUNTRY LENGTH OF STAY IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE MEAN=10 (RANGE 1.5-31 YEARS)</i>	<i>BIRTH COUNTRY</i>		
	Lebanon	Outside	Total
Lebanon	5	24	29
Outside	0	0	0
Total	5	24	29

The results suggest a clear call to support youth and young adults in life-long educational opportunities

that will be recognized regardless of the place of residency (e.g., in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, or outside the region). However, there is no clear relationship of their access to opportunities with parental affinity, with lifelong learning.

Development and Performance of Forum Theater Play Introductory forum theater workshop

Following the research and data collection, a subgroup of the co-researchers were available to participate in a three-day workshop that introduced them to Theater of the Oppressed and Forum Theater. During this workshop, different exercises initiated the discussion about what oppression means, and how one could recognize it in the contexts of the themes carried forward from the PB workshop and the research. In interactive exercises, the group analyzed and enacted images of stereotypes and relationship moments as they related to the emerging themes. Through the exercises, the participants were asked to elaborate on the challenges and systems that keep the issues from being resolved. Special emphasis was shed on exploring the lived reality of each participant, making visible the cultural systems that perpetuated gender discrimination in the family, marital violence, discrimination at work, and the persecution of minorities. The workshop ended with initial ideas for the themes of the FT play to be.

The suggested themes were:

- ▶ Management of the authority at home, and its impact on women and their life choices.
- ▶ Marital violence.
- ▶ Discrimination at work.
- ▶ The persecution of minorities.

Play development

The workshop was followed by eight days of play development with the six co-researchers from the group who expressed their ability to commit to the intensive schedule. This work entailed the identification of the final themes to tackle in the play, the iterative and intricate development of the play characters, and their life options as they go through the encountered challenges, as well as the training of the co-researchers on how to deliver credible performances and be able to improvise and react to suggestions and scenarios posed by the audience.

Play Description (See Appendix 2 for Play Script): The play tells the story of two siblings, Mona and Fadi both

of whom wish to continue their college education. However, due to their financial situation and their vulnerability as Syrian nationals living in Lebanon, they face different challenges at work and in their personal lives. Topics of interest to youth such as family dynamics, forced marriage, access to education, work discrimination, and mental health were covered.

Forum theater play performance

After the first enactment of the play, the joker, whose role is to facilitate the interactive play, informs the audience that the play will be played again, and invites the spectators to intervene whenever they think they can positively change the story's course of action.

In total, eight different audience interventions were taken and constituted the opportunity to better understand Fadi and Mona's options, as well as the challenges they face. For instance, Fadi, who was being denied his salary from his supervisor, tried to find allies in his network of acquaintances to a) denounce his supervisor at work: however, when the scene was played, the supervisor denied Fadi's allegations and the situation became unresolved when it turned into a confrontation between the supervisor's word against Fadi's, who had no proof; b) search for another work site: However, according to Fadi's experience, the risk of ending up with similar discrimination is high; c) or ask to borrow money to pay his bills: however, his family is already in debt, and he is not able to find someone to lend him the full amount. One audience member suggested the possibility for Ismail, a Lebanese worker at Fadi's site, to play a heroic role by confronting the supervisor. This kind of intervention would strengthen Fadi's version, however, the audience members considered that, given Ismail's vulnerability, we cannot always expect such heroic behavior from co-workers.

Next, Mona's options were explored. a) She could buy time before marriage by agreeing to an engagement with her cousin before marriage, however this holds the risk that her cousin or his family consider this as a trick; b) She could take up a job in parallel to her studies, however this might affect her responsibilities within the family and her performance at school.

Through the interaction with the actors, each intervention revealed its potential and its limitation, and a discussion about the plausibility of events and the prevalence of certain situations was discussed with the audience.

Reflection and Evaluation of the Overall Project with Youth Participants

We concluded the work with participants with a three-hour reflection session where we asked these participants to share their views on the project, commenting on their personal experience, the project's potential for the identification of community priorities, as well as the concrete activities that might be implemented in driving forward the agenda for change.

At the personal level

Most participants emphasized the feeling of serenity that the PB workshop enabled in them, thanks to its ability to create the safe space where they were able to share their inner self, and bond with others at a deep level in a short period of time. Those that were not able or willing to share their stories noted that they needed more support in order to offer their stories to the group. The majority of the participants reported that there was a deep connection between the participants, a shared sense of humanity, and a shared plight. Several participants revealed that they would not have expected themselves to be able to share the very painful personal stories that they had shared. In addition, all participants reported, as if it was a eureka moment, that they learned to listen to others' stories without judging them. Several participants also pointed to eureka moments during the science days and FT training, in which they realized how different points of view can regard the same experience and effort needed to objectify one's social condition. Others mentioned that they had a new awareness about their oppression that they had considered normal before the project. The project was also an occasion for several participants to discover the new abilities that they have when communicating or acting. All in all, the project was emotionally intense and several participants felt overwhelmed at different times in the process. Many considered that they were not trained enough to deliver such intimate surveys, which triggered emotional responses both in them and their interviewees, and this was the main limitation that made them stop collecting data. Others reported enjoying the data collection process because it allowed them to see more clearly how others are living and managing their lives. There was a general consensus that data collection could also be used as a means to raise awareness and trigger constructive discussions about various issues, however, the data collection methodology needed further consideration for the future.

With respect to the FT play, several members felt that, given time, they could have gotten deeper into the nuances of the issues raised. There was a general

consensus that FT is a novel and powerful way to explore themselves and their communities.

At the community level

The discussion around their priorities revolved around: The broken ambition of many, due to their inability to prove their education level or get the certification equivalence from schools; Family violence towards children and its impact on their development; Women's education and rights as a precondition for all family members' empowerment; The harsh realities of the kafala system and, in general, the refugees' legal papers that put them at the mercy of abusers and exposed them to discrimination. The surveys development allowed several participants to explore topics close to their reality, and probe other people's perception and experience within their communities. For them, even reading the questions of the surveys was an eye-opener for some interviewees because it raised their awareness about the interconnectedness of different realities. Due to their participation in the development of the surveys, some participants felt empowered to hold discussions with their family members about the consequences of certain behaviors.

At the end of the reflection meeting, the youth spontaneously proposed solutions for the various challenges they are personally and collectively facing. There was considerable emphasis on getting actively involved in leading projects and obtaining training so that they could be mediators between large organizations and those furthest left behind. There was the feeling that they know their communities best, and that they are best able to coordinate and adapt international and local human development projects, which aspire to direct action and policy changes. There was also the suggestion that the most efficient work needs to engage children rather than adults. There was some debate about the utility and efficiency of working with their parent's generation. Although there was debate about the role of mothers in localizing specific SDG indicators; most believed that the education of mothers would change things from within the family—the social unit that mattered the most to the youth participants as evidenced by their work at all three phases of the project.

Project Limitations

The duration of the project was perceived as a major limitation that had consequences on personal comfort, as well as on outcome. Many felt that the project did not harvest all the potential fruits of the collaborative work. In particular, they felt that the FT play should be performed multiple times within

their own communities, and different plays should be developed regarding different identified issues. The data collection was also impacted since many ran out of time to finish their tasks. At the personal level, on one side, participants had a difficult time handling their emotional responses, and on the other, the short timespan didn't allow them to fully acquire the skills that they were trained in.

RESULTS

Priorities, reaching the furthest left behind, and SDG recommendations

Priorities were collaboratively identified, selected, and deeply explored using theater and scientific methods at different phases of the project. First, a set of priorities emerged from the personal stories that were shared during the PB workshop. Later, specific scopes and indicators were elaborated during the research workshop days, and third, selection of priority topics were embedded in a FT play to collaboratively explore the opportunities for change. Finally, priorities and avenues for change were reflected upon through the lens of the process. The different phases allowed for a multi-perspective and nuanced discussion. With each phase of the project, the themes did not change significantly but rather different tools were used to deepen our understanding of them, at the personal and collective level. This interactive practice also set up a clear and honest intellectual and interpersonal space to discuss potential solutions.

Below, we summarize and discuss the priorities that stood out, and the lessons learned for reaching the furthest left behind. We then formulate policy recommendations to attaining the SDG, and conclude.

Family as the core unit for overcoming challenges:

A major theme underlying almost all other themes of concern for youth was the impact of family relationships on wellbeing, empowerment, and personal growth. From the onset, several PB workshop participants expressed their feelings of lack of affection during childhood, or pointed to the enduring effect of the communication challenges, within their families, on their levels of distress. In addition, family dynamics were at the heart of the restriction on women freedoms in regards to imposing their clothing norms and self-perception, forcing them to marry, or impacting their education level, or their access to jobs of choice. The impact of religious impositions was so severe on one woman that she reported that even after she became outside the direct sphere of influence of her parents, the impositions were internalized and she is unable to make personal choices; instead, she now relies on her husband, even in the most intimate choices. Authoritative family dynamics were also perceived as a main factor in conditioning aggressive behavior for some young men.

Family relationships constituted a dominant theme in two different surveys that the co-researchers developed: the lifelong learning survey, which aimed to understand how the generational gaps between parents and children might affect the children's self-development and self-realization, and the child abuse survey, which aimed to understand how violence or abuse towards children might affect their self-confidence, psychological state, and ability to form meaningful relationships throughout their lives.

Neither survey provided clear answers regarding the sought correlations (see limitations for more information), but instead they provided the opportunity for the co-researchers to engage with their community members on these issues. This fact was a direct feedback from most of the co-researchers who administered surveys, and who considered that the questionnaires provided them with a tool to candidly open discussions of value to them, particularly with their family members. This was particularly the case for the child abuse survey: for instance, one co-researcher emphasized that it helped him engage, for the first time, with his sister on her education of her own children and raising questions in her mind about how her current approach might be affecting their self-confidence and psychological state.

The FT play was also centered on how one Syrian family dealt with educational and financial challenges that confronted them. In particular, it exposed how the management of the authority at home impacted Mona and her life choices.

When Mona couldn't collect the needed money to pay her tuition fees, her family pushed her to marry her cousin. Although there was no emphasis on whether she was forced or only encouraged to marry him, the actors portrayed this decision as clearly inappropriate. It was made clear that Ibrahim (the cousin) and Mona do not share particular affection towards each other and, more importantly, that they have very different expectations in life. The marriage and the birth of Mona's baby led to the discontinuation of her studies and her falling into acute depression. The play provided the opportunity to discuss possible escapes from this course of action within the family: Several audience members suggested a recourse to dialogue within the greater family to explain Mona's ambitions and how the greater family can work together to reach them. It was also suggested that the core family could work together to allow Mona to work and get the money needed to pursue her education.

Gender-based discrimination and personal freedoms

Women's rights were a priority for all participants (females and males). In the PB workshop, several female participants shared their stories about how the hijab was imposed on them, and the personal and social implications that ensued. A number of participants were worried that discussion of the hijab would criticize religious beliefs; while others insisted that the restriction on freedoms was due to social pressure and not religion. Some participants, who used to live as minorities in Syria, talked about how this affected their appearance and behavior in public because they wanted to blend in. According to all youth who felt these impositions, these pressures lead to the loss of self, which in turn leads to deep chronic angst.

No survey focused on gender discrimination specifically, although the theme was present in the discrimination survey. However, the sample was too small to disaggregate the answers by gender and no clear pattern arose. There were indirect mentions of how access to jobs and education is affected by gender; mainly, the influence social pressure has on the education of women. Indeed, several young women shared how they either interrupted their studies or went into a field of education because their parents dictated to them the choices that fit into the gender norms and social expectations. The levels of control varied: from being forced into marriage to strongly intimidating them into those choices. The consensus was that after a certain age, their families didn't feel like education is a priority for the female, rather, marriage is.

Young women shared their stories of discrimination, but it is noteworthy that young men considered it as a priority for them to promote women's rights. Indeed, some participants highlighted the psychological impact it had on them growing up with a mother whom they felt was deprived of her rights to pursue her education.

Discrimination

The issues that arise from the social pressure imposing dominant and traditional norms on individuals was a main theme during the PB theater, and impacted especially women and minorities (religious or ethnic) in their daily lives.

Discrimination was the topic of one of the four surveys. It explored the different places where discrimination is exercised, the perceived reasons behind it, and the perceived impact it has on wellbeing. Although

inconclusive, the results of the survey suggests that workplace and lodging related discrimination are the most prevalent and the most impactful on the perceived distress and wellbeing of youth who suffer from it. These are followed by discrimination in the education sector, public/gathering spaces, both in terms of prevalence and negative impact, and, finally, in the healthcare system.

Nationality was the strongest reason for discrimination across all sectors, followed by religion, or appearance based on sectors, and, in some instances, based on gender, such as public spaces, public transportation, or education.

Discrimination was tackled in the FT play. Fadi is discriminated against at work by his direct Lebanese supervisor, who withheld his salary from him, falsely claiming that it wasn't available yet when he had distributed everyone else's salaries. A few young men described having experienced this type of discrimination. And one participant described being pressured more than other co-workers to take safety risks within his job.

The kafala system was mentioned as a main factor contributing to the vulnerability of foreign workers to exploitation in Lebanon. In the play, it added a financial burden on Mona's family, which was indebted to her cousin's family, who was paying for her mother's sponsorship. During the reflection session several young men described how the system put them at the mercy of their sponsor, and they did not have recourse to get another sponsor.

Access to education

All participants expressed significant difficulties in continuing their education, although not all of them considered it one of their personal priorities. In the case of Iraqi and Syrian refugees, a main reason for discontinuing, diverting, or slowing the course of their education is their displacement due to war. Some lost years of education from previous schools in other countries (Syria) because it is not accredited in Lebanon, and had to re-launch their education through the Lebanese system. But here many hurdles came in the way. First, some fields are not accessible to non-Lebanese citizens. There are also language barriers, for instance, with science degrees in Lebanon being heavy on English or French language pre-requisites. In addition, some participants had lost their official documentation showing their level, and were downgraded to a much lower level such that they preferred to quit. Yet, other participants did not have official residence documents and preferred to work

informally instead of continuing their education.

The high tuition fees or the high competitiveness at the Lebanese public university constitute another challenge to their access to education.

The topic of education was tackled across different surveys. In the lifelong survey, co-researchers wanted to know how their parents' education might affect children's opportunities. In that survey, the vast majority of respondents considered that they did not have enough opportunities, if at all, to develop their abilities. The main reasons listed were financial, language-barriers, legal issues, the lack of accreditation opportunities, and the lack of nearby opportunities.

Discrimination in the education sector was also tackled. The main perceived discriminatory ways mentioned were: rejection of applications, peer discrimination, unfair entrance exams, increased tuition, and discrimination by an institution staff.

In addition to enacting proper policies, education itself and spreading awareness was considered one of the solutions to end discrimination, in particular at the infancy level.

The FT play touched on access to education from the financial barrier part, whereby Mona, who did receive a partial scholarship to continue her studies in the field of engineering, was still not enough for her to pay the tuition.

Access to safe spaces and psychological support

During the PB workshop, some participants shared their occasional thoughts of suicide during their life, their need for someone to listen to them without judgment, their need of a psychological support system. They all shared feelings of loss (e.g., of property, of wealth, or loved ones), grief, isolation due to war, displacement, or death of loved ones. Most youth expressed their difficulty in trusting others. A main message that came out of the workshop and reflection meeting was the youth need for a place to breathe, spend time safely, and in friendly company.

One of the surveys aimed at studying the impact of war on mental health, wellbeing, and the ambitions of youth and their development. However, due to the small sample size, the results don't give us much insight on this relationship. Instead, it suggested that youth manifested resilience towards their situation and sustained hope towards the future.

In the FT play, the issue of mental health was tackled as a consequence of Mona's ill-advised marriage to her cousin, which led her to give birth to a child against her will, and to discontinue her studies. Mona fell into depression and started medicating herself, a condition exacerbated by her mother's absence, which was her main support (because she traveled to Syria), and her husband's insensitivity to her situation. Indeed, Mona's depression was the final scene of the unresolved FT play, in which the audience repeatedly intervened to prevent that ending.

Lessons learned for engaging furthest left behind Skills gap

We observed in our project the difficulty of some participants in following-up with the intellectual or emotional activities that we implemented. For instance, more than one participant expressed at the end of the project that they wanted to share their stories during PB but felt that they needed more time and encouragement. Others felt that the survey development phase was too hard for them, and they weren't as educated as others. Finally, participant-actors, who acted in the FT play, felt that it was too emotionally intense and that the process perturbed them. In future, we recommend that an extended training process that would ensure skills are not a barrier for full participation of the community members accompany any implementation of this PAR model.

Time-limitations

During the project, we had people temporarily dropout of the project, in particular those who had strong work commitments.

Safe Space:

One of the main reflections of the youth at the end of the project was the importance of having provided a safe space for them to share their experiences to non-judgmental ears. In addition, during the PB workshop, participants requested that all stories be treated with confidentiality. Many said that they discovered the importance of not judging others during the project. This is essential to enabling vulnerable youth to share their voices.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SDG PRIORITIES

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- ▶ Employ youth refugees, including youth leaders in furthest left behind communities, as co-developers and co-researchers in community and personal development initiatives.

Goal 3: Seek to ensure health and wellbeing for all, at every stage of life

- ▶ Provide furthest left behind youth and their families access to locally sensitive psychological support, which addresses the following family systems and processes: love and affection, support for career choices, transparent communication, the short- and long-term psychological impact of restrictive cultural and religious practices on youth development, gender-based discrimination in the family context, authoritarian parenting practices, psychosocial consequences of aggression, sexual development, and verbal/psychological/physical abuse.

Goal 4: Education and lifelong learning

- ▶ Certification and accreditation: Work on establishing certification programs and equivalences between Lebanese and non-Lebanese degrees, and develop a system for accrediting non-traditional forms of education and skill development.
- ▶ Tertiary education facilities: Promote programs that allow individuals to re-enter the school system and provide access to certified and high quality learning opportunities.
- ▶ Scholarships: Offer scholarships in a variety of fields that reflect the current interest of youth, especially in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- ▶ Legal reform: Set a minimum age for marriage.
- ▶ Awareness initiatives: Raise awareness through workshops and campaigns on women empowerment and human rights.
- ▶ Scholarships: Empower women through targeted workshops.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

- ▶ Reform the kafala sponsorship policy.
- ▶ Regularize construction work: Establish mechanisms to monitor employment of construction workers and give them access to labor rights.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

- ▶ Establish mechanisms to monitor professionalism of public and private administrations, particularly in the education sector.
- ▶ Adapt and simplify participatory theater methods for youth to share their lived experiences of discrimination via story telling.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

Having a mental health/wellbeing focus for localizing SDGs

Making space for the inner lives of the participants and their inner most needs is a powerful springboard for engaging in social action and policy development because there is a natural toggling of personal interest and collective interest. In future work, we recommend that youth be provided with more opportunities to process and hold emotions that arise because it will strengthen them psychologically, clarify their relationship with others in the project and their lives, and allow them to enter the field of human development with more clarity and purposefulness.

Minding the skills gap

We observed in our project the difficulty of some participants in following-up with the intellectual or emotional activities that we implemented. In future, we recommend that an extended training process would ensure that skills are not a barrier to full participation of the community members accompanies any implementation of this PAR model.

Legislative theater

Legislative Theater aims to open dialogue between citizens and institutional entities so that there is a flow of power between both groups. It moves beyond community building and awareness-raising by using theatrical techniques to create concrete and specific sociopolitical impact. We believe that LT would allow policymakers to directly reach out to people because it not only enables people to visualize the situations and forces that impact their lives (similar to FT), it encourages people to analyze the root causes of oppression and life challenges; it explores group solutions to these problems; and it motivates action in line with social justice objectives.

Anchoring PAR process in local communities

The project revealed the major contribution that family relations and customs play in youth's daily lives and wellbeing—even after they have left their family home. Indeed, their stories and interests related much less to the availability of a legal framework to protect them than the presence of a nurturing and supportive social environment that would empower them to follow their interests, despite the challenges. Given the importance of the cultural and social context, we emphasize the importance of embedding the PAR

process within local communities, instead of recruiting participants from multiple demographic backgrounds. This would facilitate the process of identifying concrete and shared issues, give access to the varying stakeholders that would be involved in a solution, and feed directly into policymaker action plans.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE	SEX	NATIONALITY	RESIDENCE	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING
25	male	Syrian	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: Less than mild PHQ: Less than mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
22	female	Syrian	Beirut	High School Degree	GAD: mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: low
23	male	Syrian	North Lebanon	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: less than mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
26	male	Syrian	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
27	male	Syrian	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
21	male	Syrian	Mount Lebanon	Elementary	GAD: severe PHQ: moderate ACE-IQ Active: high
22	female	Syrian	North Lebanon	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: less than mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: low
21	male	Syrian	Beirut	Elementary	GAD: mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
24	female	Syrian	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: mild PHQ: moderately severe ACE-IQ Active: high
24	male	Syrian Kurdish	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: low
27	female	Syrian	Bekaa	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: moderate PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
24	male	Syrian Kurdish	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: less than mild PHQ: moderate ACE-IQ Active: low
18	male	Syrian-Palestinian	Beirut	Elementary	GAD: moderate PHQ: moderate ACE-IQ Active: low
21	male	Syrian	Beirut	Graduate Degree (MA/MS/PhD)	GAD: mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: low

26	male	Syrian	North Lebanon	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: less than mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
24	male	Syrian	North Lebanon	High School Degree	GAD: severe PHQ: severe ACE-IQ Active: high
23	female	Iraqi	Beirut	High School Degree	GAD: less than mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: medium
16	female	Iraqi	Beirut	High School Degree	GAD: mild PHQ: moderate ACE-IQ Active: low
29	female	Syrian	Beirut	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: moderate PHQ: moderately severe ACE-IQ Active: high Neurodegenerative disease
27	female	Syrian	North Lebanon	Graduate Degree (MA/MS/PhD)	GAD: mild PHQ: less than mild ACE-IQ Active: low
18	female	Iraqi	Beirut	Some High School	GAD: mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: low
27	male	Syrian	Mount Lebanon	Undergraduate Degree (BA/BS)	GAD: less than mild PHQ: mild ACE-IQ Active: low

APPENDIX B: MASHROU3 INSAN: FORUM THEATER PLAY

Scene 1

This scene is composed of two conversations: the first is between Fadi, a Syrian student, and his co-worker, and the second between Fadi and his peer at university. The information shared in these two conversations is that Fadi goes to university and works at the same time as a dyer to secure his living; and that his sister, Mona, wants to apply to university to do architecture but her papers are missing. We also learn that his peer's mother is an architect and oversees the project that Fadi works on.

Scene 2

Mona informs Fadi that she was able to submit the missing paper for university and was accepted.

Scene 3

Conversation between Mona's cousin, Ibrahim, and his parents: He wants to marry Mona. His Lebanese father, who is Mona's family's sponsor as Syrians in Lebanon, isn't with the idea for financial reasons but, as his mother suggests, this could solve the sponsorship issue (and the work needed for it), and that she can't abandon her sister (Mona's mother) who is a widow.

Scene 4

In Mona and Fadi's household: Mona is relying on Fadi to pay for the rest of the university fees (LBP 650,000) so that she can complete her registration (to which the deadline is in a week), but Fadi's boss hasn't been paying him his salary, and Fadi is overloaded between his work and his studies. Fadi suggests that Mona registers for a different major—nursing, which has lower registration fees—instead of architecture, which she refuses because of having worked so hard to follow her dream of becoming an architect.

Scene 5

At work, Fadi's boss is on the phone with his supervisor, who gave him the money, claims that he has paid all the employees. Fadi comes in and demands his salary, which has been delayed several times. His boss lies and tells him that he himself didn't get any money either, and that none of the employees had been paid. He gives him LBP 10,000 to quieten him. After the boss leaves, another employee lends Fadi some money, and tells Fadi that he has received his salary.

Scene 6

Mona's mother is asking to borrow money from her sister (Ibrahim's mother), to which she replies that she can't due to all the debts that Mona's mother still has to pay her sister, and due to the problems it's causing between her sister and her husband. Her sister suggests that they arrange a marriage between Mona and Ibrahim, to close the debts, to which Mona's mother agrees and the cousins get married.

Scene 7

Mona is in her new marriage home. She is studying. Her violent husband storms in screaming at her after having discovered that she has been taking contraceptive pills for four months; while he wants a child, she wants to finish her education. He takes her to the room.

After some months have passed, Mona comes back with a baby in her hands. She has postpartum depression. Her husband comes in from work and they fight because she hasn't cooked for him. The scene ends with Mona having a breakdown, holding boxes of pills.



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