



# FROM SELF-AWARENESS TO PURPOSEFUL EMPLOYMENT

Guiding Egyptian youth using arts-based learning

YPE partner Alwan wa Awtar (A&A)'s youth programme supports young people to shape their prospects through professional and soft skill development, safe learning space and non-formal education. A&A has learned important lessons throughout its journey. A safe learning environment, flexible learning techniques, visual and performing arts in education and participatory management are key approaches for successful youth programmes. During the COVID-19 period, many of the professional development programmes have been delivered online, which was a good example of adaptation to changing circumstances that ensured the sustainability and continued effectiveness of the programme.

© Oxfam International August 2021

This case study was written Yasmine Ahmed AlGarf, an external consultant appointed by the Youth Participation and Employment (YPE) Programme. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of the YPE Programme Management Unit (PMU) and the Programme Team in Egypt in its production. It is part of a series of case studies written to inform public debate on youth participation and employment issues in the MENA region. The YPE programme is part of the Arab Danish Partnership Programme (DAPP) and is funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email Shekhar Anand [sha@oxfamibis.dk](mailto:sha@oxfamibis.dk) and Ahmed El Assal [a.elassal@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:a.elassal@oxfam.org.uk).

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. Email [policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk).

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under  
ISBN 978-1-78748-793-2 in August 2021.

DOI: 10.21201/2021.7932

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

Cover photo: Youth participants at the Youth Hub of Alwan and Awtar. Credit: Alwan and Awtar Association.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In partnership with YPE, Egyptian NGO Alwan wa Awtar (A&A) launched its youth programme in 2018, building on its experience helping underprivileged children in Cairo discover their potential, enhance their creativity and boost their critical thinking. The youth programme helps participants aged 18 to 30 to understand more about their capabilities, develop their professional and social skills, navigate the job market and explore fields they might be interested in.

Guided by its core belief that art is essential to the learning process, A&A has developed a wide array of programmes using performing and visual arts to enable children to develop confidence, communication skills, self-expression and an understanding of what they are good at. Building on this experience, the A&A youth programme was launched, initially to help A&A's former participants, who now needed further support. Through the use of different spaces and tools, the youth programme supports young people to shape their future prospects. The programme comprises three parallel pillars of support, outlined below.

## THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Departing from traditional professional development activities, A&A created a programme which equips participants with professional skills such as CV writing or passing interviews, but also focuses on essential social and self-awareness skills. This empowers young participants to develop themselves as needed, building on their strengths and identifying areas needing improvement. As its Arabic name *Al Siyaq* ('The Context') suggests, the professional development programme allows participants to explore themselves depending on their specific context, guiding them towards a path right for them.

Throughout the year-long programme, participants build their professional capacities through training and internships. The programme includes language training, professional skills and career coaching sessions to help participants identify their abilities, interests and fields that best suit them, and to seek related employment. Halfway through the programme, all professional training comes to a stop and the artistic track begins. This gives participants time to absorb all the knowledge from the programme and use artistic tools, such as community theatre or creative writing workshops, to articulate their development through the programme up to that point and how they see themselves moving forward.

After the programme, participants with an aptitude for working in community development through arts and culture can apply for internships at A&A to learn more about working in this field.

## THE YOUTH HUB

A&A's youth hub provides a safe, open learning space for youth aged 15–30, where they are encouraged to speak out and demonstrate their abilities. The hub provides a platform for exposure, exchange and creative action, either through dance and theatre events or simply by offering an open space where youth are invited to use resources and interact. It is also designed as a lab for developing participatory management skills, where young people gradually become involved in the planning and implementation of the hub's activities, with the necessary mentorship and support. The hub's yearly programmes are discussed with participants and adjusted according to their comments, while a mapping event allows them to showcase their skills, talents and ways they can help with the hub's programming. This ensures that future hub activities are built both on external resources and on young people's capabilities.

## THE EDUCATOR'S SCHOOL

The Alwan Morgan School for Practitioners of Non-Formal Education was initially launched to address the need for well-qualified practitioners to help with community development and non-formal education in Egypt. It soon evolved to become a core activity of the A&A youth programme, aimed at helping young women and men who would like to pursue a career in the non-formal education sector understand more about the field and obtain the necessary skills and networks. Through the YPE partnership, A&A is offering several full and partial scholarships to help qualified young people become facilitators in Egypt's non-formal education sector.

The Educator's School runs a six-month learning programme combining educational theory and practice with a constant emphasis on participants' own personal experiences and beliefs. The programme culminates in the development of an individualized learning plan by each participant, with the support of a network of partners and specialized practitioners, which allows them to pursue the exact area in which they would like to specialize.

The school helps shape the landscape of opportunities and support for youth to advance their community participation and employment, while enhancing the organizational capacity of A&A itself and other entities in the non-formal education sector. To help players in the non-formal youth education sector, A&A disseminates the Educator's School model through knowledge-sharing sessions, allowing for replication of the school's curricula elsewhere, effectively addressing the shortage of qualified personnel and reaching a larger cohort of youth willing to specialize in this field.

Through these approaches, A&A has created effective mechanisms and pathways for youth participation, capacity development and job creation. Participants have gained essential communication, civic and self-empowerment skills to enable them to actively engage with society.

## **2 KEY LESSONS FROM A&A'S APPROACH TO TACKLING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, CAPACITY BUILDING AND EMPLOYMENT IN EGYPT**

### **PROVIDE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.**

A safe learning space that nurtures young people's sense of belonging and self-belief is crucial to addressing the needs of youth unsure about what they want to do. A&A has been extremely attentive to providing safe and supportive learning spaces, allowing participants the freedom to voice their thoughts without fear of judgement or rejection. This leads to empowerment, improved social skills and better pathways to employment.

### **ENSURE FLEXIBLE LEARNING TECHNIQUES.**

A&A's support is designed to promote an individualized approach to learning, based on each participant's skills and interests. The modules integrate individual experiences and points of view, rather than offering one-size-fits-all content. This flexibility ensures that each participant is best aided to discover and pursue their own path. This high degree of flexibility has been especially beneficial during COVID-19, allowing the youth programme to continue with a few alterations. Although the youth hub's open space had to shut down, scheduled events and workshops continued with social distancing precautions. Many of the professional development programmes and the Educator's School sessions were delivered online, with the trainer checking in on participants' well-being. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances has ensured the sustainability and continued effectiveness of the support A&A provides.

## **HARNESS THE POWER OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS IN EDUCATION.**

The integration of the visual and performing arts in A&A's youth programme has been an important catalyst for youth engagement, capacity building and employment outcomes. The use of arts in learning helps participants develop qualities such as creativity and confidence, while allowing them to derive maximum benefit from the programme's technical content by enabling them to connect new knowledge to personal experience and express what they have learned.

## **ADOPT PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT APPROACHES.**

Young participants are systematically involved in decision making and management at A&A, either through the participatory management of the youth hub, or the internships and employment offered to some of the participants. The participatory management approach offers mutual benefits, enabling participants' needs to be better addressed through A&A programmes, while helping A&A to more effectively achieve its mission of youth self-empowerment, capacity development and employment. By fostering participation and engagement from young people themselves, organizations can improve the quality of their support and increase their effectiveness.



## OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 21 organizations, working with its partners and allies, reaching out to millions of people around the world. Together, we tackle inequalities to end poverty and injustice, now and in the long term – for an equal future. Please write to any of the agencies for further information or visit [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)

