



PROGRAMME RA

برنامج



# "PROGRAMME RA" A CASE STUDY OF THE FIRST IMPLEMENTATION IN LEBANON



Norad







مركز الموارد للمساواة بين الجنسين  
resource center for gender equality

PROGRAMME RA

برنامج



Program Ra is a newly adapted manual which focuses on working with teenagers and young adult men on Gender, Masculinities, Femininities, and Gender Equality. The manual was originally developed, and named Program H, by the Brazilian Gender Justice NGO, Promundo. It has achieved substantial success not only in Brazil, but in the many other countries, cultures, and contexts in which it had been adapted. It was thus seen as the optimal tool to further Abaad's work with young men and boys on promoting Gender Equality, equity, and justice.

This manual was rigorously adapted for the Lebanese context through expert reviews of the manual, and validation trainings with Masculinities trainers in Lebanon as well as with young men and boys residing in Lebanon from Lebanese and refugee populations. This process is elaborated on in the beginning of the manual, and the manual itself can be found online on the ABAAD website (in both Arabic and English) at: <http://abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1474621426.pdf> (English Version) <http://abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1494396361.pdf> (Arabic Version)

The following is a case study of the first implementations of Program Ra in Lebanon. This case study will cover the successes, obstacles, and lessons learned from these crucial experiences. This case study will conclude with recommendations for future implementations of Program Ra trainings with young men in Lebanon. Most importantly, this case study is meant to be read in the spirit of yet another step in the learning process of how men and boys can be engaged for the cause of Gender Justice.

**Every session in the field, every discussion with young men, every difficulty that presents itself, and every harmful practice ceased is a brick of knowledge in the path of discovery of how to create young men allies for Gender Equality.**

The first 2 implementations of Program Ra happened simultaneously. One was held in a high-school in Beirut, while the other was held in a community center in the South of Lebanon.

These two settings are very different with respect to socio-economic status, geographical location (rural and urban), age of participants, and ethnicity of participants. These two settings also have one very important thing in common: They are boys (and girls in one setting) who live in Lebanon. They all are under pressures and expectations from their respective environments to act in a particular way and believe particular things. They are all boys still discovering the all important question: "What does it mean to be a man?".

Program Ra was developed for young men and boys irrespective of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical location, or religious affiliation. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the validation process specifically focused on the universality of the trainings within the manual for any and all young men and boys residing in Lebanon. Thus, this case study will compare and contrast these two implementations of Program Ra in Lebanon and draw conclusions of the effects of the training in light of the similarities and differences between the two implementation sites.





# SETTINGS

Before discussing the results of the Program Ra interventions, the contrasts between these two settings must be outlined.

### **South of Lebanon Site:**

The boys who took part in the Program Ra training in the South of Lebanon were a group of seven participants in total. Half of these boys were recruited from an orphanage in the South, while the other half were recruited from a low-cost boarding school for families from villages in the outskirts of Lebanon who do not have the means to cover daily transportation for their sons to learn at the school. The boys' ages range is from 14-18.

### **Beirut Site:**

The boys who took part in the Program Ra training in Beirut are attending a prestigious high school in Beirut with high yearly tuition costs. The boys were taking part in the training as a qualification of their school program for community outreach concerning a social issue as part of the priority set by the school in fostering a spirit of social and community responsibility for human and environmental rights in their students. The age range of the boys in the group is from 13-14.

It is also important to note that the implementation of Program Ra in Beirut was done with boys and girls from the school. This decision was taken by Abaad and the School Administration. This decision was taken for two reasons. First, the school and Abaad wanted to provide an intervention for the boys at the school as well as the girls. Program Ra was designed for young men, but since the focus of the sessions are primarily about gender and the different effects of gender role socialization in young peoples' lives, it would be suitable for girls as well. Abaad spoke to the Promundo, who were partners on this project as well as the original developers of the manual, and they agreed that they have had experiences in the past where girls were included in Program Ra training with very successful outcomes. Thus, it was decided that girls

and boys would take the trainings in the Beirut setting together. Boys and girls were only separated for 4 of the 12 weeks when the topics of 'Sex' and 'Drugs' were the main topics of the sessions (as these youths might be less prone to speak transparently about such topics in front of the opposite sex). Second, trainings on Gender, Masculinities, and/or Femininities often benefit from rich inter-sex dialogue. When presented with the opportunity to do so (culturally appropriate), trainings on these topics benefit from the inclusion of both sexes rather than their segregation. As this opportunity was provided and appropriate, the setting in Beirut was done with both boys and girls.

The participants from the two sites shared many similarities. To begin with, boys at both sites are in a very important developmental phase in which they are learning what type of 'men' they wish to become. Boys from both sites acknowledged that it is very important to understand the obligations and expectations of them as men, so that they could be useful and important members of their community in the future. The motivation of 'Pride' for their families was also things that boys from both locations spoke about. They wanted to be able to play the roles expected of them as men so that their parents and family could be proud of them. Moreover, the major cultural influences pertaining to gender is the same for all of the boys at both sites. All young men in Lebanon, generally, are exposed to the prescriptive gender roles that expect men to be tough, unemotional, have the ability to use violence, value wealth and power as a measure of their self worth, etc. Many of these patriarchal gender roles have very negative effects on the young men. Young men who are held to these expectations: have negative mental health behaviors as they feel they should not express normal human emotions such as sadness, fear, or anxiety; they are more likely to engage in and admire risk taking behavior (reckless and fast driving, putting oneself in overly dangerous situations as a display of a no-fear attitude; they are more likely to feel the pressure (and often succumb to that pressure) to try, use, or abuse drugs or alcohol; they are more likely to display violent attitudes and behaviors as a response to conflict

or as a showing of dominance and power; and they are at greater risk to hold and express sexist and intolerant views against anything that is different from their hetero-normative understanding of their surroundings. The boys at both of the sites of our intervention, generally, had these imposing expectations placed upon them. Some of the boys were already displaying the negative mental health, violent and sexist attitudes and behaviors. In this respect, sadly, the boys at both sites were much more similar than they were different. Furthermore, none of the boys at either site had taken any previous training on 'Gender'. The information given during the Program Ra training was the first time the boys at either site had discussed even basic concepts relating to gender, such as how 'sex' and 'gender' differ from one another. Last, boys at both of the implementation sites stated a fear from consequences of their communities if they act outside of prescribed gender roles. This is a very important point as boys are expressing fear about changing these gendered beliefs and actions, not resistance to the concepts themselves. Boys at both sites stated that they feared being bullied by other boys, being outcasts in the eyes of their peers, and negative perceptions from girls of their age as they would not be attracted to men who are deemed 'less manly'.

Despite their similarities, there were also quite a few differences between the sites. The first obvious difference between the two sites of implementation is the geographical area of each site. One was carried out in an urban high school in Beirut. The children that attend the school also live in the more metropolitan surroundings of Beirut. They are, thus, exposed to a more diverse range of cultures, people, and lifestyles than their rural counterparts. The boys from the rural area are predominantly from small villages. These villages, aside from having small populations, display much more historically traditional practices. Likewise, they are also much more traditional when it comes to the division of roles of men and women. Second, the two places of implementation differ very much in terms of socio-economic standing. The boys from the site in Beirut come from very privileged backgrounds. Their families are wealthy or

at least upper-middle class. They live in homes with access to the latest technologies, the internet, and television. Many of them have traveled the world, many of them have lived outside of Lebanon, and many of them are the sons of politicians, doctors, and lawyers. Most of the boys at this site witness their mothers and fathers work outside of the home. The young men at our Beirut site have privilege and with that a sense of agency and power to change things, at least to a greater extent than their counterparts at our rural site. What further increases the gap between the participants of the two sites is that the boys who took part in Program Ra from our rural site have a very different reality from the boys at our Beirut site. Many of the boys at our rural site are orphans. The other boys were recruited from a local boarding school in the area. The boys who attend this school come from far away villages. Their families are unable to pay the daily transportation costs in order for their children to attend the school, so the boys live at the school (under very modest means) in order to be able to afford their high school education. These boys have, primarily, only the experience from their respective towns and villages from which to understand the world. The two implementations also differed in the fact that one training had a same-sex format while the other was a mixed group. The training site in Beirut had both boys and girls in the group. The training site in the rural area had only boys participating in the trainings.

# CHALLENGES

A person is shown from the chest up, wearing a grey hoodie, writing on yellow sticky notes with a blue pen. The sticky notes have handwritten text: 'MS Water', 'Sweet', and 'any an'. The background is a blurred indoor setting with other people. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grid of dark red and blue squares.

The trainings in both settings did not come without various challenges. To begin with, even when the boys understand and agree upon the core concepts of Gender Equality, the practice and behaviors that follow that attitude need more time. It is wonderful that, on a cognitive level, boys are seeing the flaws of patriarchal gender roles on themselves, women, and society. True change, however takes time. The 3-4 months that was spent with these boys discussing Gender was a golden opportunity that has had an impact, but without any formal mechanism for follow up, the sustainability of that change or the manifestation of that attitude change into real action in their normal lives is unknown. Furthermore, these boys will be challenged throughout their lives by a society that will not necessarily reinforce those attitudes, and are likely to criticize them. Second, many of the boys from the rural site of implementation were very skeptical of the societal change necessary in order for Gender Equality to exist. These boys live in environments where tradition is very highly valued, and dramatic change is often regarded as a loss of cultural identity. The Gender Equal perspective on roles and relationships between men and women is contrary to many of the traditions or practices that are prevalent in the rural villages from which these boys come. For this reason, the boys did not feel that the societal changes that are needed for Gender Equality to exist were very realistic. Third, the boys from the rural site of implementation were either orphans or they live away from their parents in a boarding school. The effects of the parents in a household have a dramatic direct and indirect influence on the attitudes and behaviors of their children. This effect can be positive or negative, but the boys at this implementation stated several times about how they have no parental guidance or examples of how men could act within the family. They felt they would have had a better base for discussing roles of men in the household or roles of fathers if they had such individuals in their lives on a continuous basis. Fourth, recruitment was a challenge in the rural site of implementation. This often required visits from the trainer to several institutions in the area to try and see the possibility of conducting Program Ra with the boys to which the institutions had access. Often the institutions were a bit anxious about the topics that are discussed throughout the

Program Ra trainings (this will be elaborated on further, below). Other times the institutions were interested, but either did not have enough boys of a similar age to be able to meet the minimum group requirements (8 boys) or the boys were not able to commit to a weekly session at a set time. Many of the boys at the rural site had to work in order to support their finances or to help their families, and this created logistical difficulties in finding an adequate time for all of the men in the group to meet weekly for 3-4 months. Fifth, many of the institutions we spoke to about Program Ra, in both rural and urban areas, were uncomfortable with the fact that the manual speaks to boys about topics such as 'Sex and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)' and 'Drugs'. These issues are very taboo in Lebanese culture and institutions had the following fears:

- The parents of the boys (and girls) would be upset if they discussed such topics.
- Discussing sex and SRHR with boys would cause these young to become more sexually active or have them give more attention to sex and SRHR than they had before.
- Discussing drugs and drug use with boys will open their eyes to different types of drugs and the effects of those drugs to which they were previously unaware. They were afraid that this would actually increase drug use among boys and that such topics were better left unaddressed.

Lastly, when discussing men's use of violence as a method of protecting women, boys from both sites felt that it is a 'necessary evil' in modern day Lebanon. The latent or lack of responsiveness on the part of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) was the logic behind this reasoning. Boys from both sites felt that if someone you care about is in danger (specifically of the female sex) that you often have to handle the threat on your own by any means necessary. They often used this reasoning to justify social norms of women's reliance on men for protection, the absence of the freedom of mobility of women who are not escorted by a man (especially at night), and seclusion of women to private spaces (the home) instead of public spaces.

# SUCCESS

Despite the challenges, the trainings resulted in solid successes. In the Beirut site for our Program Ra implementation, the boys and girls were able to discuss issues that scoped beyond the hetero-normative discussions of the Gender Binary. The youth in this group were able to discuss discrimination and the human rights freedoms of individuals from the LGBTI community, and their lack of human rights in Lebanon. This was an excellent sign that the discussions had catalyzed critical thinking among these youth about constricting views on Gender from a patriarchal perspective, and their understanding of all peoples' human rights. To add to that, the boys at both sites of implementation critically thought about Gender and the roles that that had been led to believe was essential to their value as men. They agreed, essentially, about the negative aspects of patriarchal masculinity and the discrimination and violence against women that was a result of it. Most importantly most, if not all of the boys, at both implementation sites asked the important questions that are at the heart of these trainings: "how can I change" and "What can I do".

The boys at both of the implementation sites verbalized an understanding of the negative aspects of violence, their understanding of the socialization of violence for boys in a patriarchal society, and the effectiveness of non-violent strategies for conflict resolution. The boys shared many stories and experiences of violence that they had witnessed or heard of. The boys saw how, in most cases, violence only brought upon more violence. This is one of the most important objectives of the Program Ra trainings, and a great foundation for future work with these boys should that opportunity arise. Furthermore, throughout the Program Ra trainings, it was evident that the young men had their awareness raised on topics of gender and GBV. The boys also became better acquainted with specific diction and terminologies associated with Gender Equality.

Of the most important successes of the Program Ra implementations were the community outreach projects that were an added activity and outcome of the trainings. In the planning phases for both pioneer



A group of people are seated in a room, viewed from behind, looking towards a whiteboard. The whiteboard is covered in handwritten notes and diagrams. The room has a wooden door in the background and a stack of papers on the right. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent geometric pattern of orange and yellow shapes.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

These pilot trainings allowed us to present a series of recommendations for future trainings. The community outreach projects that were done by the boys (and girls) during these pilot implementation of Program Ra were major contributions to the success of the projects. They also serve as an excellent measure of impact for the project. These community outreach projects give the boys a greater sense of ownership for the cause of Gender Equality, as they have now become messengers in that goal. Furthermore, it instills a sense of agency, especially in their own community, that they can act as agents of change for Gender Equality.

We now can see how the discussions in Program Ra about sex and drugs are very important for boys to have. To facilitate this process with stakeholders or gatekeepers, it is recommended that the main arguments for having such components for the training focus on two points. First, if the boys do not learn and openly speak of such issues in a safe and controlled environment, they will learn of such information from other unreliable, and possibly harmful, sources. In modern day Lebanon boys are inundated with messages about sex and drug use from a number of sources including media advertisements, pornography, movies, television, and peers. If we leave boys to learn from such unregulated and unreliable sources, the boys may learn harmful practices concerning sex and drugs. Second, focus on the primary prevention aspect of these trainings. These trainings will be relevant for the boys in their lives while taking the training, but more importantly they are things that the boys will find helpful throughout their lives in their transition into manhood. Thus, issues such as sex or drugs will be framed for boys to think about their future lives and relationships, and will not 'endorse' actions around such behaviors at the age of the training.

It is now clear that more time is needed to work with the groups.

Working with the institutions in the areas and the communities that the Program Ra is being implemented. This is very important, especially in rural areas where the boys perceive societal change to be too difficult to change, so that the boys can:

- Stay involved in the topic after the Program Ra trainings through these institutions.
- These institutions can continue to work with other organizations and boys on topics of gender in the community for many years to come.
- The boys can gain a greater sense of agency by acting as a “community of practice” in changing harmful and discriminatory things they see in their environments.

When possible, culturally sensitive, and appropriate, trainings containing boys and girls will always add an added benefit to the Program Ra trainings. The inter-sex dialogue, the sharing of different gendered experiences and challenges, and the understanding of greater similarities between men and women than differences is quite enriching and adds value to the training, as boys and girls can hear each other’s opinions and have a clearer idea of each gender’s experiences.

Most importantly, this training asks boys to look at their own attitudes and behaviors and changing these behaviors before moving on to a greater community, national, or theoretical approach to change. It is the personal experience of “change begins with you” that is at the heart of the Program Ra training and that has to be taken into account for future trainings, as it creates a more sustainable change.

These implementations were made possible partly through a project with partners Promundo as part of the Womanity Fund Award, an award which supports innovative programs aiming to end violence against women and girls globally







Furn El Chebbak, Sector 5, 51 Bustani Str. Najjar  
Bldg, P.O. Box 50-048 Beirut Lebanon  
+961 1 28 38 20/1 | +961 70 28 38 20  
[abaad@abaadmena.org](mailto:abaad@abaadmena.org)  
[www.abaadmena.org](http://www.abaadmena.org)

    /abaadmena