

A Partnership for Development

The Middle East suffers from a highly complicated set of problems and challenges that reflect directly on issues of security and political, social, and economic well-being. Some of these problems are of a traditional nature with well-known solutions, whereas others have historical, political, and social dimensions requiring participatory and innovative solutions. Today, we stand at a crucial crossroads where the choices we make will contribute to the future of the region; we either head toward poverty and unemployment, or we invest strategically to secure the well-being of promising youth and take part in releasing their full potential.

The strategic interaction option is not devoid of difficulties. If we take into consideration just the factor of natural population growth, it is apparent that this alone imposes grave challenges. The World Bank's International Development Report of 2007 indicated that youth under the age of 24 make up approximately 60 percent of the total population of the region. In addition, the major social challenge will be the need to create at least 100 million job opportunities by 2020 to maintain unemployment rates at their current levels, which are already high.

The countries of the region, within the framework of confronting these problems, have mainly depended on the efforts of governments. In addition to controlling both political and economic domains, governments have also assumed complete control of the social development agenda, which has led to limiting the private sector to providing only nominal efforts through charity donations and aid.

Until recently, governments have identified priorities, development plans, and policies based on immediate political considerations, after which the private sector is required to participate financially in the process—and then only to a limited extent.

The initiatives of the private sector have been marginal and modest, and the private sector has not considered such efforts to be within the realm of its strategic objectives. The efforts of civil society have also, sadly, remained on the margins

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of the development process. It is very unfortunate that the efforts exerted to support government performance have remained feeble with very limited and superficial effect.

The magnitude and complexity of the challenges calls for a fundamental change in approach. It is clear that disentangling the immense social and economic challenges requires establishing strategic and active partnerships between gov-

ernments, the private sector, and civil society to stimulate a development process in which each party plays a vital role within a framework of coordination, firm cooperation, and inventive integration.

We believe that an effective development process cannot be realized without a partnership between local communities, private sector establishments, and government institutions. Also it is important to note that such an effort cannot be successful or sustainable if companies do not achieve economic growth that ultimately benefits them and the economy as a whole. This economic growth guarantees the availability of a productive, creative, educated, and prosperous labor force that participates in the process of social change.

Effective participation in sustainable development and local community service, in addition to

eventually having a positive economic benefit for companies, is fundamentally a civic responsibility and a national obligation that both individuals and companies share. We stand before options of which the most important is our duty and responsibility to shape the future of this region as active partners in the process of change.

We either allow the region to slip into poverty and unemployment, the consequences of which are all too evident, or we invest in the considerable potential of our youth and in the core capabilities of the private sector and utilize these in a process of cooperation and integration that is aimed at advancing and developing the well-being of communities.

It is worth mentioning that Arab companies operating worldwide are now compelled to support communities within those countries and to adhere to inter-

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national standards in this regard. It would not be acceptable that these companies should serve those communities while their own countries and communities suffer from high unemployment rates and poverty, not to mention immense difficulties resulting from political conflicts, wars, and various forms of environmental pollution.

In my capacity as a citizen and a member of a social and business community, I believe that the private sector, with the access it has to economic, commercial, technical, and scientific knowledge, in addition to financial resources and accessibility to markets, owns the tools of change and influence that can and should play an essential role in the process of social change in the Middle East. Since the activities that the private sector is engaged in are one form of effective citizenship, and since the private sector has the potential and the entrepreneurial spirit to take risks and be proactive, it can play a vital role in proposing innovative and practical solutions to the challenges faced within the development process.

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We must also not overlook the fact that private sector companies, as profit-making entities, are more efficient in driving the process of economic development of communities. It is high time we fulfill our responsibility to put forth sustainable solutions and utilize our substantial capabilities to partner with the government and civil society within a unified framework of common strategies. This partnership will in turn lead to the empowerment and motivation needed for people to unleash their potential capabilities and their proactive natures, thereby prompting qualitative change and paving the way for sustainable social development.

It has been said that sharing in the process of social responsibility is a difficult process that entails many impediments and disappointments. But despite the presence of some skepticism about its effectiveness, I believe that active citizenship (notwithstanding the unfortunate absence of its role in our region) has proved its viability, usefulness, and sustainability in the experiences of many countries worldwide.

Personally, I consider citizenship a duty and a responsibility, and believe that activities that reflect the social responsibility of the private sector are a form of active citizenship. Based on my experience as a dynamic member of the community, I believe that collective efforts bringing the government, civil society, and the private sector to work together in the framework of common strategies to moti-

vate people to take initiative and play an active role in realizing their potential are capable of producing effective qualitative change in the Middle East.

It is this belief that led to the launch of the Ruwwad initiative in 2005. The work started with the establishment of the "Corporate Social Responsibility Department" at ARAMEX in the second half of 2004 to assist us in institutionalizing the company's community related initiatives, which had started with ARAMEX's establishment twenty five years ago and prior to the spread of the concept of corporate social responsibility. Ruwwad came about as a continuation of this ethos and stemmed from the belief that ARAMEX has an ethical responsibility to lead the process of social investment and community partnership.

After extensive research by the Corporate Social Responsibility Department at ARAMEX in several communities, it was clear that Jabal Al-Nathif was the community with the most pressing needs. A marginalized neighborhood of 100,000 people, Jabal Nathif is situated in the old center of Amman, Jordan. When we began our work there, Jabal Nathif lacked even the most basic security, health, education, and culture services, forcing its youth to become easy prey to drug abuse and criminal activity. Men in the community were mostly unemployed, and women worked hard to find an income to sustain their families.

It can also be said that the problems that exist in Jabal Nathif are similar to the challenges faced by marginalized communities in general. The area seemed all but forgotten and lacked a health center, a police station, a post office, a bus service, and it had no open spaces or cultural or recreational activities for children. This area, due to lack of services and outlets for young and old in addition to poor and cramped housing conditions, had become a refuge for poor families as a result of relatively low-rent costs. Some of the residents of Jabal Nathif who were driven by need and a lack of income resorted to accepting charity contributions, or turned to illegal means to escape their reality through drug and alcohol addiction and crime. Young people, lacking access to educational and employment opportunities, were frustrated by their perceived self-image as victims of circumstance.

In that context, ARAMEX started the implementation of the initiative and the project in Jabal Nathif. The programs were determined through a process of communication and trust building with the residents of the area. After the initial prioritization and implementation process, results started to become apparent on the ground, and we sought partners in government and the private sector to spread the concept and transfer this initiative to a more advanced and comprehensive level. In April 2006, Ruwwad was established as a national non-profit organization aimed at encouraging the private sector to participate in the development process with the purpose of empowering community members to prioritize and meet their self-determined needs. Ruwwad is currently supported by several companies and individuals from Jordan and the Arab World, and is considered the first and only organization in Jordan that is fully funded by local individuals and companies.

Raghda Butros, the Founding Director of Ruwwad, worked to translate these concepts on the ground. It was during the initial prioritization and trust-building

visits that she conducted for a year prior to implementation that we came to know the residents of Jabal Nathif—to communicate with them, and understand their problems and challenges. We visited their homes, listened to their issues, and met children who roamed the streets fighting and harassing passers-by. We met fathers who were unemployed and helpless and some tried to escape their reality by taking tranquilizers and various kinds of cheap but devastating drugs. Women were queuing at the doors of charities for a few dinars, not sufficient to buy bread for their families. We also met many young people who carried their books to the coffee shop where they worked as waiters to help pay for their college tuition, and others who could not pursue their studies and achieve their aspirations due to financial difficulties.

By the end of the year, the field visits had helped shape our vision, in line with the needs and requirements of this area in particular and urban communities in general. From the start, our strategy was founded on the participation of individuals from the community in the development process, since we believe that ready-made and “packaged” answers do not offer sustainable solutions. In addition, our strategy is based on the principle that the process of change is a self-driven, gradual, and cumulative process, and on the premise that working with partners from civil society and community-based organizations would help us arrive at a more complete and integrated process.

Realizing the difficulty of the situation and the enormity of the needs, the preliminary plan that was set in motion during the first phases of launching Ruwwad in Jabal Nathif included securing sustainable funding in order to ensure the continuity of the proposed programs and projects. Accordingly, a network of connections between companies and individuals within the private sector was established. In utilizing its potential and its strategic planning capabilities, the private sector became a key partner in providing financial resources to fund the desired sustainable development process in the area.

The restoration of Atika Bint Zeid School was one of the first initiatives undertaken in the community. This established confidence between Ruwwad and the residents of Jabal Nathif, as the school was at the top of the list of requests by the community since it affects the lives of over 700 families in the community whose children attend the school.

Atika Bint Zeid was one of the first members of the community who sought to cooperate with us to improve the miserable conditions at the school. The school was established in 1959 and is a coeducational primary school up to grade three, and a girls’ school from grade three to grade seven in two shifts. The Ministry of Education’s policies prohibit it from spending money for the purpose of maintaining rented school buildings, and so Atika Bint Zeid School had not received any periodic maintenance or restoration during the past 49 years! Moreover, the classrooms were very small and overcrowded, all of which led to low attendance and deteriorating academic standards.

“Shababeek” (Windows)

Teach, learn, and participate with others: these are the basic principles of “Shababeek” that started with a spontaneous initiative by Mohammed Nitham, one of the university scholarship recipients who developed a word game with a group of children to teach them Arabic spelling through play. Mohammed continued to work with the group for over three months and other workshops started to emerge. The program seeks to open windows of opportunity for the children to discover their talents and skills by exposing them to various kinds of extracurricular activities based on their talents and interests. These workshops present children with an alternative to watching television or playing out on the streets. Volunteers from Jabal Nathif and elsewhere conduct workshops, some of which help children to learn Arabic, English, mathematics, logic, and geography, while others focus on art, theater, music, photography, sports, and crafts.

The program has been able to organize over 30 workshops for 300 children during 2007, and the talents and interests that emerged during the workshops are presently being nurtured and directed through specialized centers or individuals.

I made a doll out of fabric; in the beginning I was embarrassed to say that I enjoyed the workshop because I thought dolls were only for girls, but then I saw that there were many other boys with me and it was okay".

Ziyad Allouzi, 12 years old

The development process at Atika Bint Zeid that was undertaken in coordination with the Ministry of Education was not limited to restoring and repairing the building, adding new restrooms, renewing all the furniture, maintaining the playground, and painting the walls. It also included providing training courses for teachers on modern educational advances to enhance their capacities in organizing extracurricular activities with the children.

By the end of 2007, Madaress (meaning schools) became a clearly defined program at Ruwwad, with activities that include constructional development of the schools in the area, training of teachers, as well as supporting the students via the back-to-school campaign at the beginning of each scholastic year. This program also covers school tuition fees and provides school bags and stationery for students who need this kind of support.

In an effort to help young people in Jabal Nathif to access better opportunities and to encourage them to become agents of change, a program was put in place that centers on developing their skills and capacities, continuing their university education, and supporting their economic or social projects.

The hotel bombings in Amman in the winter of 2005 came as a horrifying shock for everybody who lived through that experience. The bombings shook the

serenity of Amman. I lost one of my good friends, Mousab Khorma, who was the Deputy Director of Cairo Amman Bank. He had a vision for, and made contributions, to the field of social development in both Jordan and Palestine. As a result, the initiative that was aimed at supporting youth at Ruwwad was named the Mousab Khorma Youth Empowerment Fund, in memory of a person who cared for young people in particular and the issues of development in general.

During its first year, Ruwwad provided 130 scholarships to students in Jabal Nathif who wished to attend university and college. Now the program is providing 250 scholarships that include educational loans, training courses in computer skills and the English language, and internship and training opportunities at companies. Moreover, the youth participate in weekly discussions (every Saturday) through "Dardashat" a program in which they discuss issues of interest to them, whether social, political, economic, or related to the media and the arts. They also have the opportunity, as part of Dardashat, to interact with decision makers and government officials and discuss pertinent issues with them.

With the realization that the development process is a participatory process, and in order to create a reciprocal process of giving, it was crucial to launch an initiative to activate the participation of youth recipients who benefited from the scholarships, by requiring that they volunteer and give their time to the community. As a result, each student who receives a scholarship through the Mousab Khorma Youth Empowerment Fund devotes at least four hours a week to volunteer work in his or her community.

I attend some of the Saturday Dardashat meetings and take part in the discussions, which have opened channels of dialogue with the youth of the area. Their stories, related to working with children or neighbors, are always a pleasure to hear and read. It is wonderful to hear that Hamzah was so committed to his volunteer work at Um Isra'a house that he carried on painting in spite of the rain; or to see Samar working with a group of children to create a picture using corn, almonds, and watermelon seeds; or to listen to Mohammed's creative language games that encourage children to progress and excel in Arabic. Sharihan's strong statements and liberal ideas during the Saturday meetings capture my attention; and I laugh when I hear stories about the work of the young people at Um Iqab's house and the never-ending layers of carpet that she had collected over the past twenty years, and which they had to remove when renovating her house. I am delighted when I run into Hiba, an intern at ARAMEX for over a year, on the stairs leading to my office. Mousab's bold dreams are deeply rooted in Jordan, but his desire for diversity means that he is thrilled to have the opportunity to travel to the United States for training next summer.

Shams Al-Jabal Public Library was established in response to a request from the children of Jabal Nathif. The concept of establishing a public library was linked to a plan that seeks to allow the children to discover and strengthen their talents and interests. At the time, we were not aware that this library would become our gateway to the whole community of Jabal Nathif. Children are the key to the

Jeeran (Neighbors)

“We work together because we are partners in responsibility”

The evolution of “Jeeran” was a natural progression, which occurred as a result of the presence of Ruwwad in Jabal Nathif and the fact that we consider ourselves part of the neighborhood. As part of the program, various requests from the residents of the community, such as medical, educational, or housing assistance, are received, evaluated, and followed-up on. In addition, field visits are conducted to reach out to as many people as possible in the community and determine the situation on the ground. These visits are very informative and helpful in identifying the problems of the local community, and determining their root causes through continuous discussions with the people. The visits are fundamental in achieving the highest possible degree of integrity and fairness in the decision-making process in terms of the support we provide whether in the form of scholarships, home renovations, medical aid, or otherwise.

One of the projects that emerged from this program is “Al-Shuraka’a” (Partners) which acts as a link that connects those who need assistance with companies or individuals who are willing to provide such assistance. This project has provided medical care to more than 100 people, ranging from medication to surgical procedures to providing financial support to securing state health insurance for the elderly. Another project, which falls under this program, is entitled “Jeeran Al-Shabab” (Youth for Neighbors), which endeavors to improve conditions in some of the houses that are in need of small repairs to control the problems of humidity, poor ventilation, and other urgent issues. Ruwwad provides the necessary construction materials such as cement, bricks, and paint, and the volunteers who have received scholarships carry out the work along with neighbors willing to help and the home owners. The program has completed improvements in 13 houses from the time when it was launched in the summer of 2007 until the end of that year, and 40 houses are planned for 2008. Using colorful paint for the outer walls of houses has had a positive effect in strengthening the relationship between the residents and the place they live in.

neighborhood and they were able to spread the word about Ruwwad to their friends and families. We were also not sure whether the library would eventually become a place where the children would actually come to read! At the beginning, it was more of a refuge for children from the heat of the summer of 2006 and the bullying of older children. One and a half years later, the library is filled with children reading books, writing journals, and doing research; it is a place visited by over 150 children every day, with the number doubling during weekends and school holidays.

A Partnership for Development

At Shams Al-Jabal Library we endeavor to create a space for human interaction and discovery of knowledge. The concept of establishing a public library was inspired by the need to have a friendly and interesting place where children could spend productive time and through which their cognitive needs could be met. The library fosters the development of children's personalities by allowing them to acquire and strengthen their skills and advance their mental, social, and intellectual capacities. This is achieved by free reading and writing outside the limitations of the classroom. The library dedicates a large area to drawing as a tool for expression and self-discovery. The diversity of activities encourages children to abandon their fear and shyness and to voice their feelings through dialogue within the context of workshops for educational and non-educational purposes, all of which emphasize the idea of learning through fun.

The children come up with new ideas for workshops in coordination with the students receiving the Mousab Khorma scholarships, whom they regard as role models and mentors. The students receiving scholarships find their experience in dealing and connecting with children to be an opportunity to discover and express new abilities within themselves. The joy of positively connecting with others provides everybody with a chance to explore a new way of dealing with other people and of looking at their own relationships within their families and at school.

At the Shams Al-Jabal Library, you can see children writing their daily journals or reading stories or exploring atlases, encyclopedias and other reference books. In addition, workshops with volunteers from within Nathif and elsewhere contribute to helping children with their homework and their understanding of mathematics, English, and Arabic, among other subjects.

The establishment of the library and Ruwwad's offices coincided with endeavors to mobilize government support to provide basic services in the community. We approached Jordan Post requesting the establishment of a post office in Jabal Nathif, through which people could pay their bills and access government loans and services. Jordan Post's obstacle to starting the post office was the fact they could not secure a location, and so Ruwwad provided the first floor of its building which now hosts the only post office in the area.

Advocacy efforts continued, including a request to the Ministry of Health to establish a much-needed health center in Jabal Nathif, which was at the top of the list of requests by members of the community. We reached an agreement with the ministry, whereby Ruwwad would make space available that will host the health center, and the Ministry of Health would provide the necessary medical staff and equipment and would run the center. The Jabal Nathif Health Center will be inaugurated in 2008.

In addition, we communicated with the Ministry of the Interior to establish a police station in the area, which the members of the community had been requesting for decades to help keep the peace and maintain order. This prompted the Ministry to establish a police station in the community that was inaugurated less than a year later. These accomplishments are examples of what a partnership

Dardashat

We anticipate that through Dardashat we will be able to bring about positive change in the attitudes and mindsets of the students who benefit from our scholarships. These scholarships are not aimed at simply covering tuition fees, but rather at providing an opportunity for young men and women to meet and discover who they are and how they can participate effectively in the development of their communities. Dardashat meetings are held every week, sometimes to hold a discussion with a public figure, an artist, or an activist, while other times they are geared at discussing issues of interest on the national or international scene. The meeting utilizes dialogue as a tool for the young people to listen to each other and exchange ideas and points of view. Saturday meetings are not only a platform for free speech, expression of opinions, and listening to others; it is a place to build friendships and discover new horizons that contribute to developing and changing the way the young people perceive themselves and others. When students from diverse backgrounds meet, their circle of acquaintances expands and they are exposed to the experiences of others. Dardashat adds a special human and cultural dimension to the experience of the students receiving scholarships and strives to establish a language of effective communication and dialogue.

between the business community, with its connections and access to decision-makers, the government, and the local community can achieve in a short period of time.

As an integral part of Ruwwad's strategy to support the communities where it operates and to build their capacity, the team on the ground was recruited from within the local area, which ensures that we keep our fingers on the pulse of the community and that our programs continue to reflect its needs and priorities. Despite the obstacles linked to this strategy, such as maintaining the thin line between the personal and the professional, and the difficulty of finding individuals with the necessary practical experience, we were able to form a 25-member team, 80 percent of whom are from within Jabal Nathif and in which every member is an active contributor to the development process of the organization and the community.

On a different front, the magnitude of the challenges ahead was revealed during our rounds and field visits in Jabal Nathif as part of our community outreach program, where we found that many residents of the community live in houses that are extremely small and lacking basic sanitary services. These visits also allowed us to better experience first-hand the spirit of the community and the feeling of shared purpose that exists within it. This led to the launching of the "Jeeran" (Neighbors) Program. The program seeks to activate the role of the local community in finding effective solutions for the problems facing them through working with the members of the community not only as beneficiaries, but also as partners

in the development process. The program started with the idea of activating the participation of young men and women who have received scholarships in improving the conditions of houses in the area that are most in need. Jeeran has now become a real symbol of the principle of partnership regardless of financial resources. Youth lacking financial resources became key participants in assisting other members of the local community, and volunteerism became a regular and expected act by the youth of Jabal Nathif.

From the start, Ruwwad's doors were open for volunteers from within the community and from elsewhere who are willing to provide technical and educational expertise to university students and children visiting the library through a program called "Shababeek" (Windows). Through this program, training workshops are held to discover the creative potential of both the volunteers and the participants. During these workshops, communication with the children seeks to help them discover their dreams and confront their fears.

The "Dardashat" sessions held every Saturday have given us the opportunity to meet with students from various Jordanian universities majoring in different fields. This has generated a new kind of culture, namely, the culture of place and specializations. Through this program, we meet and get to know some public figures and to hear new experiences and success stories. It is here that I discovered an old concept in a new form. I had never really considered the importance of volunteerism before, but now I've found a true sense of enjoyment in being socially responsible. It also allowed me to discover my inner self, talents, and skills, as well as spending free time in a more advanced and proactive way, not to mention learning the skills of constructive dialogue and confidently presenting one's point of view.

It is worth mentioning here that this initiative has faced many difficulties, as well as resistance from the outset by some individuals and groups within the community. This was expected, as we were strangers to the community of Jabal Nathif and doubting our intentions was normal since there were no examples of similar programs in the area. As time passed, however, and with continued interaction with the community, and by fulfilling the promises we made and striving to offer creative solutions inspired by the identity of the area, the residents of the community now take it upon themselves to defend the organization and its presence.

By presenting the private sector as a serious partner and a major player in the field of social development, Ruwwad has paved the way for a real partnership between the private sector, civil society, and the community

There is no doubt that the continued success of Ruwwad requires constant hard work and that many challenges still lie ahead, but the results are certainly worthwhile. This initiative has worked hard to create innovative solutions to meet the needs of the local community in harmony with their priorities, mobilizing all parties in the framework of an active partnership where all the roles are integrated. In addition, Ruwwad has had the foresight to view the local community as an active partner in the process of change, instead of as a web of complex and isolated problems.

I can safely say that a new phase has begun, led by the private sector, with a true realization of its responsibilities to support the process of development. Ruwwad's programs are an integral part of the daily life of the community in Jabal Nathif through the partnership program with the schools, Shams Al-Jabal Library, the Mousab Khorma Youth Empowerment Fund, or Shababeek and Jeeran.

Today, when I have some spare time away from work, I head for Ruwwad. I recall a question asked by one of the contributors who had visited Jabal Nathif at start of the project, and who visited us recently. After we took a tour around the two buildings and observed the various activities of Ruwwad, including the nursery, the furniture repair workshop, the computer lab, and others, and after we witnessed children of all ages, university students, and more than 25 employees working as librarians, trainers, and social workers, he turned to me and asked, "How could all this have materialized in just two and half years?!"

When I drive down to Jabal Nathif, by the time I reach Ruwwad's offices, I will have stopped several times to ask Abu Ali about the latest developments in the Jabal, and to be greeted by Abu Ahmad, Abu Yahya, Mohammed, Nora, and other friends and neighbors. I have a very busy life and had not been looking for new friends, but I cannot deny that the experience of Ruwwad has added a new dimension to my life that I could not have anticipated.

The significance of this project is not limited to the development taking place in Jabal Nathif or other communities in which Ruwwad is working, such as Beidah in the south of Jordan, and other areas in the Arab World, nor to the impact it has on the people who are in direct contact with the organization. It goes far beyond that. By presenting the private sector as a major player in the field of social development, Ruwwad has paved the way for a real partnership between the private sector, civil society, and the community. That partnership ensures the sustainability of the development process. The private sector can play a key role not only as an advisor to government and civil society organizations with regard to development policies, but also as an active participant in policy implementation.