



*United Nations Alliance Of Civilizations
Fellowship Programme 2017*

-

*Final Reports of the 2017 MENA Cohort
“The role of Media and Civil Society
in combatting hatred and fostering inclusion”*

Table	
Report I:	p. 2
Report II:	p. 10
Report III:	p. 22
Report IV:	p. 27
Report V:	p. 35

Report I

Hayder Al-Shakeri and Emadeddin Badi

Introduction

Based on the visits of the MENA fellows to 4 countries from Europe and North America, it was obvious that; despite the diversity and differences in terms of organizations visited, all, in their own way, attempted fostering inclusion through their own line of work, be it in the fields of civil society or media.

One key aspect that this report will focus on is conflict sensitivity, and more specifically *how much contextual factors, whether local, national or regional, should shape the policies and strategies of governments, civil society organizations or media institutions.*

This topic was chosen based on the field of specialty of the authors as well as the increasingly important and complex macro-dynamics affecting the countries that the MENA cohort visited, namely: the US, Germany, France and Spain. Moreover, almost all CSOs/governments visited are attempting to tackle issues related to development/integration/aid whether on the local level or the international one. Media organizations are however, for most, unaware of the role they play in this narrative and the importance of their educated and bipartisan portrayal of all issues they discuss.

We will attempt to dissect the importance of contextual factors and a conflict sensitive approach to tackling/reporting on these issues through dividing this report based on the countries visited and with specific examples from the different types of organizations visited.

The objectives of the report will be to:

- Assess governmental, INGO, local NGO and media organization's approach to understanding contextual factors in countries visited
- Determine the effectiveness of this approach and whether the contextual factors are actually taken into account when implementing
- Advice on best practices to adopt a more conflict sensitive approach to implementation/reporting

Visits and Impressions

United States of America – Washington

a) Governmental Organizations

Governmental organizations in the USA, whether it be the State Department's Office of Religious and Global Affairs (RGA) or the United States Department Commission on Religious Freedom, appear to have an exclusively outward lens in terms of their approach to religion and issues revolving around it. Although falling under the same "umbrella", with many overlapping objectives including advising the State Department/The President on issues of foreign policy as they relate to freedom, there seems to be very little connection between both entities.

In terms of actual impact, the RGA appears to exclusively engage with religious leaders/government officials and offices through embassies abroad based on their own assessment. This approach may result in biased data as religious leaders often have very different opinions/religious ideals when put in perspective with citizens. If policies are exclusively based on the engagement with these individuals, then the engagement is not conflict-sensitive, and resulting policy advice and adopted policies cannot be reflective of what religion truly represents in countries of interest.

The USCIRF, monitoring religious freedom violations abroad is actually a great source of analysis and has very solid reports. However, despite the facts this Commission is mainly supposed to be composed of bipartisan members, from the discussion, the contextual factors and data gathered by the commission does not necessarily dictate USA's/The President's foreign policy towards countries that are main perpetrators of religious freedom violations. Unlike the RGA, contextual factors here are deeply analysed, and the fact members are bipartisan helps in making this analysis objective, however the result is again non-conflict sensitive actions as other factors such as economy or geopolitics may dissuade the US from imposing sanctions on these countries, making the USCIRF's work, in a way, non-conflict sensitive and redundant.

b) Search for Common Ground

SFCG's work as a peacebuilding organization is well-known throughout the world. One of the concepts deeply embedded in SFCG's approach is conflict sensitivity, and especially in terms of building an understanding of the context of a specific country prior to launching projects there. Ways of collecting information about countries vary from

quantitative to qualitative, meeting with individuals from the country itself prior to launching projects there.

Moreover, it was also interesting to highlight the intersection between the use of media and a peacebuilding INGO's work as was shown through the short movies that SFCG helped producing through local partners in various countries including Palestine and Tunisia. Through understanding the context and culture, and partnering with local grassroots organizations, SFCG tackled sensitive issues such as religion and gender via shows such as Madam President for instance.

One of the weaknesses of INGOs is their dependence on funding, threatening their sustainability. This was explicitly shared by SFCG, who are forced, sometimes, to apply to projects in order to sustain their financial stability more than for their actual impact on society. However, it was mentioned that despite this, SFCG still tries to find a balance through which they are able to select the projects that are most conflict sensitive and that would not hinder the organization's reputation.

c) Middle East Broadcasting Network

Financed by the US government yet completely independent, MBN operates two media platforms targeted at the Middle East that inform on the US and its policy developments abroad while also discussing topics linked to American values such as human rights and freedom of speech and religion.

The main goal of MBN is to familiarize the Middle East and North Africa with the West, which it does through Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, its main two channels to connect with the communities in MENA. Although MBN's approach is neutral and they do not consider themselves an activist organization, they do not have the same popularity in MENA as AJ+ or France 24.

This disconnect between MENA audiences with MBN in particular actually unveils a key concept regarding contextual factors that may be relevant to the wider media environment aiming to operate in the region. Considering the proximity and history with France, it is important to understand that several historic/cultural/linguistic factors influence the engagement of audiences with their media channel. However, AJ has not only pioneered the field of « interaction with the audience » due to their use of advanced editing technology and consumer-friendly layouts, but also their engagement with local activists/artists that can communicate their message while being closer to the actual targeted communities. Although they do behave as an “activist organization”, AJ is not

very different than MBN in the sense that the latter also attempts shedding light on American values, but does so “shyly”.

d) ADAMS Center

All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center’s approach to Islam and its values in the US stems directly from an in-depth reflection of how Islam should evolve, be communicated and practiced in Washington DC, given the city’s social fabric. An interesting aspect that highlights in-depth contextual understanding of not only the US but also of the world is that ADAMS does not “generalize” nor “advocate” for this liberal approach of Islam to be adopted in all Western societies. Other Islamic Centers in the area have “stricter” regulations and ADAMS recommends that members of the community who do not agree with the centre’s approach to Islam to engage with those. This is a good example of how conflict sensitivity and understanding one’s environment can “morph” even the most rigid of interpretations of religion.

However, the centre does have challenges that are difficult to tackle. Although it promotes a more “liberal Islam”, ADAMS center (and all Islamic centers/preachers that may advocate for a similar “Islam”) will be challenged by conservative diasporas abroad. Considering the fact Islam also revolves around community’s interaction with preachers as well as diasporas confusing their “Islamic engagement” with a “cultural heritage” they must hold on to, such a liberal approach to Islam can actually “backfire” and catalyse extremism, especially if preachers are not “vetted”.

Another challenge is also the diversity of the doctrines within Islam that may not feel represented within ADAMS center. Although it was mentioned that the community’s cohesiveness is strengthened by the fact the Islamic community is small, it can be argued that, in a community with a larger Muslim community, the ADAMS center model cannot be replicated.

One main consideration to therefore take into account when approaching Islam in the United States or any other country is to take into account the culture, social fabric, history and diversity of the Muslim community that will be engaged. Considering the global challenges and contemporary narrative around Islam, challenges such as extremism and radicalization will also have to be considered according to contextual factors.

United States of America – New York

a) UN Youth Envoy- UNDPI’s “Together Campaign”

The visits to the youth envoy office as well as UNDPI’s campaign both presented key points of improvements within the UN system.

Although the Youth Envoy’s office mainly works on advocacy for youth inclusion at different levels, the lack of integration the Envoy’s office has with the different missions challenges its work as well as the impact. Understanding the context of the UN, this shows why there is need for an internal redesign of the UN system to be more integrated and less bureaucratic, allowing the organization to truly, in this case, be a youth inclusion pioneer.

UNDPI’s Together Campaign, although attempting to shed the light on refugees’ plight, failed to highlight to the fellows how to coordinate with the relevant authorities in their home countries to engage in the campaign. Although several fellows are based in countries where there are thousands of refugees, UN agencies within the countries are not responsive to them when they reach out, especially using the argument that the mandate they operate within does not allow for them to engage in specific activities (such as the Together Campaign).

This highlights the disconnect between the UN missions’ HQ and affiliated missions abroad, and shows a lack of integration, which results in non-conflict sensitive measures. Although the UN understands the problems faced and implements activities that have the potential to impact change, in these cases, the trickle effect and lack of integration within the UN system does not allow for effective implementation.

b) Bronx Documentary Center

The Bronx Documentary Center was one of the fellows’ highlights in the visit to New York. It not only showed that grassroots organizations can work with very little resources and grow overtime, it also showed that growth in a difficult environment is all the more possible when community’s buy-in is sought after. Through understanding the context, history and developments within the Bronx, the BDC has been able to engage youth from the Bronx itself to change narratives about the area and spread a message of positivity while also highlighting cultural/social customs that engage the wider diaspora in New York.

Through this visit, it was shown that an understanding of local context, despite the diversity of ethnic backgrounds in Bronx, can actually positively portray the melting pot that New York is in a positive light. However it has also shown that engaging youth and the community through photography and storytelling is a challenging task, and will need customization if replicated in countries of the MENA region where this culture is considered a “new” trend.

Germany – Berlin

a) Visits to Civil society organizations

There were two kinds of organizations with two different approaches. The first is an old style civil society faith based organization that work on various issues and tried to incorporate emerging issues and work with them. The second are recently formed organizations that were created to target particular issues and they established themselves through that.

Visiting Caritas showed that they are aware of the contextual factors regarding the various issues facing refugees in Germany and they are allocating some of their resources towards the issues. But the fact that they were not transparent enough during the visit by dodging some questions show that they are not fully using all their resources to target the issues while acknowledging that there is a problem that needs to be prioritized. Caritas need to use their role as a huge Faith Based Organization to tackle issues related to fostering inclusion and combating hatred amongst Germans and refugees.

The other civil society organizations in Berlin which are Kiron, Dialogue with School, Give Something back to Berlin and “Über den Tellerand” were formed recently and in response to the changing dynamics in Germany with more than a million refugees coming to the country. Terms like refugee ‘crisis’ and integration were introduced and the civil society responded with projects like these. All organizations have different purposes but the fact that they all work towards preparing Germany to host the people it received and potentially host more. Their role seemed very necessary and conflict sensitive to a certain extent because of the timing of their formation and until now. Contextual analysis from the formation is still relevant and their missions and visions are adapting to the changing situation making them conflict sensitive and effective when it comes to both Germans and refugees.

b) The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The German state seems to be more engaged than most other states in the topic. They are trying to gather information as well as take actions such as funding programs like this and other initiatives focusing on religious tolerance. Even though it is too early to tell the lasting impact from such initiatives but it is safe to say that the German state are trying to understand the contextual factors within diversity issues and applying what they understand to foster inclusion and combat hatred. One clear criticism can be mentioned is how programs like this are only targeting elites and not spread to grassroots or very local level. This can be treated by making sure that the elites are working towards these issues with their communities.

c) Media institutions in Berlin

There is a huge difference between Deutsch Welle Arabic and Die Welt. The two media institutions the fellows visited during their days in Erbil. Both outlets can be seen as active and are trying to shift opinions in a certain direction. DW Arabic targets audience in the Arab world and cater to their needs based on liberal views that they are trying to spread. While Die Welt are working towards spreading their own ideas, which lean more towards the right and tailored to a German audience. Both seem to have noticed and aware of the contextual factors related to conflict sensitivity. While DW Arabic believe that they are working to spread liberal ideas especially their show Shabab Talk, they do understand their approach might be dangerous and are mitigating the negative impacts. Die Welt are also aware of their effect when it comes to conflict sensitivity and are willing to explore issues further and discuss them (which is why they agreed to meet with us in the first place). However, their approach to the issue is different since they believe that their values are more important than being conflict sensitive and they are willing to defend their values at the expense of being conflict sensitive any day.

France – Paris

a) Civil society organizations

Singa and Association Enquete are two organization's that work towards fostering inclusion and combating hatred in their own way. While Association is focusing on raising awareness regarding different religions to compliment France's Laïcité approach. Singa is working towards fostering refugee inclusion in France and other countries. Both organizations have emerged quite recently due to what has been happening in France in the past years so their contextual analysis and approach towards conflict sensitivity has

been quite recent. However, it is obvious from Enquete's work that they are still exploring various ideas but such an idea needs to be institutionalized for a more sustainable effect. Additionally, Singa's work has been outstanding and thus spreading to other cities and countries but their focus is quite broad making their impact somehow vague.

b) Media institutions

Visiting TFI, TFI Foundation and Le Monde showed us how media institutions can play a major role in a country. Both Le Monde and TFI are huge organizations with a tremendous outreach hence their influence can be big. However, both organizations don't understand the contextual factors in their reporting leading to an approach that is not conflict sensitive. TFI Foundation on the other hand has been trying to balance TFI's influence and to a certain extent it is succeeding since their approach is conflict sensitive because they understand the contextual factors which led to their formation and they work on a small scale.

Conclusion and Recommendation

After going through specific cases of organizations and institutions in the United States of America and comparing and contrasting organizations and institutions in Germany and France. We can conclude that most of them are aware of the contextual factors, however they differ in how they approach conflict sensitive issues depending on when they were established, who works there, and what do they work on. Even though conflict sensitivity should be considered at all times when dealing with issues of combating hatred and fostering inclusion but not all institutions are treating the issue as a priority.

As a solid and feasible recommendation, the UNAOC alumni network can form a small voluntary committee from all the fellows' countries. This network can be part of the online platform where each country will have one or two members who can assess how conflict sensitive is the work at their countries when it comes to combating hatred and fostering inclusion. Depending on funding or availability of experts, there will be mapping of various countries media institutions, civil society organizations and even government institutions and how they approach conflict sensitive issues. This can lead to the writing of a report which can be used to advice UNAOC for further work or even the organizations assessed.

Report II

Sara Tallawi (Egypt), Ihab Salameh (Jordan),

Hafssa Ait Tabamoute (Morocco), Ahmed Ben Nejma (Tunisia)

The role of media and civil society in combatting hatred and fostering inclusion has been long a topic of intense discussion.

In this paper and based on our experiences in our respective countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia) as well as the visits we conducted during our UNAOC fellowship in the United States of America (Washington DC and New York) and Europe (Berlin, Paris and Madrid), we shall attempt to decipher the main points of contention as well as provide recommendations on how to tackle the issue at hand.

Through this paper, we focus of youth tokenism -- particularly the millennium generation's disconnection from media, civil society organizations' agenda.

The paper is divided into two sections:

- Part 1: Youth tokenism in the media
- Part 2: the role of civil society in the phenomenon of youth tokenism

Each part will include recommendations to help solve the issue- discussed in this paper- based on both our on-the-field experience and the outcome of our UNAOC fellowship.

Part 1: Youth tokenism and media

Traditional mainstream media venues are facing increasing challenges with the ever-increasing reach of digital media. With this in mind, many organisations have turned to experts in an attempt to draw youth to their dwindling readership/view-ship.

Major organisations are turning its content into digital one, hoping to attract a more youthful audience. Many are allocating a large part of their resources to their digital platforms; For instance, the media channel "Al-Huraa" - funded by the American Congress and broadcasts mainly in Iraq - has expanded its digital team and are collaborating with over 20 reporters from the MENA region to produce digital videos from the field. Another example of the digitalization phenomena is the German TV channel Deutschce Welle - funded in part by public money - increased the number of its digital reporters to meet the demand for digital media and focused on speed of content delivery; posting on their website and then TV, and sometimes producing material primarily for their website.

Not only TV channels were impacted by the switch to the digital world, but also radio channels. The best example we witnessed is NPR: one of the US oldest broadcast stations, which has turned to podcasts shared on social media and online platforms in

order to draw a more youthful audience, rather than focusing mainly only on FM broadcasting.

Thus, almost every media organisation is turning to digital content because they see it as the future.

The question remains whether they are succeeding or not.

Youth and media challenges

The MENA region has a very youthful population; The United Nations' Population Reference Bureau in 2011 indicated the median age of the MENA population is between 17 and 32, with an expected growth to 92.7 million of young people between 15-24, in 2040.

Young people are the future, so why can't mainstream media reach them?

1. Young people prefer digital media:

The BBC trust announced in 2017 that the median age of its TV viewers is between 59 and 61 while the French TV channel TF1 - in a meeting with UNAOC fellows- stated that theirs is 55. Young people are no longer tuning in to TVs, rather digital content.

Young people log online for their informational needs, which they try to find it in a very direct way, without even looking for other connected resources. In the meantime, there is a widespread belief that such content should be freely accessible.

eMARKETER in 2013 stated that "Google and Booz & Co. surveyed Internet users between the ages of 15 and 35 (an age range believed to make up 40% of the population)" in different Arabic-speaking countries and found out that "83% of these internet users reported using the internet daily. And when users went online, they stuck around, with 99% of daily users spending over 30 minutes online, well above the 82% who spent over 30 minutes watching TV."

Consequently, we can understand through all these facts that digital content is the future of media. This leaves mainstream media organizations in a bind as they try to cater to online needs by courting the attention of youth, while unable so far to make money off their online products to cover their expenses.

2. Generational gap in in media organizations:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated young people between the ages of 15-29 to "exceed 30% of the working-age population in most MENA countries", in its 2016 report titled "*Youth in the MENA Region; How to bring them in.*"

Of these 30%, are the young media professionals trying to make it on their own in a very competitive field. Throughout the meetings held at media organizations by the

UNOAC fellowship, it was clearly noticed that editors- in- chief and line managers were well above 50 years old. Thus, the editorial policy, seeking youth engagement, is set by people twice the targeted age; many media organizations talk about and at youth, but do not give them the chance to take charge of media content that attracts them and their peers. The generational gap can be clearly felt in mainstream media venues.

3. *Alternative media venues:*

Young people are tuning into alternative media websites to get their information such as BuzzFeed, Washington’s Blog, Medium, etc.. Some even tune to satirical comedy shows, which have proven to be quite informative on current political and social issues.

Others tune into social media for their information needs, following certain pages, groups or figures they trust. With the rise of social media, young people can now pick and choose whom to follow, based on their individual interest. They range from the far right to the extreme left of the political spectrum. News consumption habits have shifted in the last decade. According to The Northwestern University in Qatar, news consumption in the "Arab region" is strongly shifting towards digital media, particularly using their smartphone; “Over three-quarters of nationals get news on their phones." This is because, according to the survey, 84% of Arab nationals own a smartphone and have quite a permanent access to the Internet.

Recommendations

Youth participation in media outlets can't be a token any more. More and more youths are turning away from mainstream media in favor of alternative sources and digital media.

Major news organizations need to employ young men and women whom other youths can relate to; who can focus on topics that concern them and can draw their attention to the corresponding news outlets. Editorial positions should also be more accessible to those under 40, in an attempt to bridge the generational gap found in many newsrooms.

Digital media is the new source of information. News organizations need to pool their resources towards digital media and find ways to make it lucrative. Many people believe that online content should be free of charge. There is a lot of debate going on in many news organizations on how to have a successful business model out of digital media and every media outlet should be part if this debate. Their survival depends on how well they can adapt to change.

The belief that digital media is only consumed by young people is not completely accurate; with the availability of smartphones, people from different generations are now

consuming their news via digital mediums. Thus the focus on digital media is bound to draw more viewership to any news outlet.

Visual content is currently viewed as more attractive to Internet users, more so than written articles. In this fast-paced world, if a page on a website doesn't draw users' attention in the first five seconds, they are bound to just "flip" to another website. This causes a lot of pressure on news outlets to keep their websites as engaging as possible.

Finally, young people are the future, as many like to say.

If news organizations don't seriously consider taking concrete steps to make them an integral part of their respective organizations, within the next 20 years the current generation they are catering for-- in traditional mainstream-- venues will no longer exist. They will end up with a small readership/viewership that has otherwise shifted its attention to online content and alternative media sources.

Part 2: Youth tokenism and the role of Civil Society

Civil society plays an integral part in the development of societies, through the diverse programs targeting community development, education and humanitarian aid. They are an integral part of the growth of their respective societies.

When it comes to youth inclusion, the civil society is present via projects, activities, and different programs designed to create the much-needed interaction with young people, depending on their situation in their community. This explains the diversity of the work the CSOs (civil society organizations) are doing on the grass root level, depending on the different contexts/communities they are serving.

The governments mostly focus on priorities related to serving their citizens. For instance, in Jordan, the ministry of education is focusing on infrastructure challenges in that sector. Based on this decision, civil society organizations step in to provide support which the ministry is incapable of due to limited resources; extra curricula cultural activities, sports, music and for countries hosting refugees; socio-emotional support for students suffering from trauma.

Partnering with civil society and giving them more freedom in working with the citizens helps promote inclusion among the different parts of the society while reaching the ultimate goal, of raising youth awareness to what is happening around them, fostering their participation, and most of all giving them the right to create their own methods of inclusion because they can come up with better solutions.

The very first objective of any Civil Society worker is to promote different social changes through their actions while cooperating with citizens, governmental institutions and decision-makers, media and any other actor involved.

During our UNAOC Fellowship, we had the opportunity to visit several CSOs, which allowed us to learn about the work they are doing and the current challenges they face in their respective societies.

It was incredibly interesting to see the huge effort of grassroots organizations to help refugee inclusion, by not only working on adjusting their legal residency in Germany, but most importantly working on their inclusion in society; on the educational, social, and economic levels by designing different projects that help refugees gain an academic degree, create social engagement, improve integration through cultural exchange.

Below, we mention some of the issues that was noted down during our meetings:

- *Integration of the less privileged youth or people of color in their community:* we visited The Bronx Documentary Center, established in one of New York's more violent areas.. The center allows youth to tell their stories through photography projects and thus help wit their integration. Furthermore, they were able to attract people from other neighborhoods to come and visit their photo exhibitions as well as professional photographers who lend their work to the center so people from the Bronx can get access to the finer art.

This shows how organizations from civil society can use cultural aspects in combatting hatred and fostering inclusion even among the same community members. Civil society and media should cooperate to give more coverage to such projects.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the Bronx organizations' representative



- *Integration of refugees in hosting communities:* Our visit to a few grass root organizations in Berlin showed that there is a big problem with regards to refugee integration in the German community. The main issues were related to language, access to education, housing, the skeptical way they are perceived of in several communities in Germany. Seeing how some civil society organization are trying to help them and have the refugees socially included in the community was something that emphasized the important role that they are doing of filling the gap that the government is unable to address:
 1. “*Give Something Back to Berlin*”: is a social center where people meet to engage in activities for better social integration in Berlin. Thus, they have used a big network of volunteers to support several initiatives aiming to

enhance refugee integration, such as open dialogue sessions in which they create a safe space for everyone to share their opinion.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with Give Something Back to Berlin



2. “*Cooking Class Academy*”: is another initiative working with Syrian refugees. The organization partners refugees with a language buddy and through that they have them learn about each other’s culture, the differences and similarities so they are able to live together in their community. The open kitchen began when African migrants occupied a square in Berlin and the organization supported them in their cooking needs, thus discovering cooperation through cooking. Now their activities have expanded to include catering with the main idea still intact; to connect people.

- *Educational programs*: Several CSOs identified the gap in national curriculum system and designed programs to tackle educational needs of immigrants and refugees.

During the UNAOC Fellowship, we met with organizations working with schools, online universities, and cultural exchange program:

1. “*Soliya*”: with it is virtual exchange programs designed towards university level students, they are connecting communities using technology to have them learn about one another, clear misconceptions that they have of each other . They aim to humanize people and let them tell their story. Giving such an opportunity for young people enables them to support their community and be able to present themselves to other cultures thus building empathy.

The most important part is that Soliya goes where youth are (virtual world) and use it to educate them, something that many other CSOs lack. In fact, the simple

act of digitization doesn't mean necessarily that they are targeting youth. Not only does the form matter, but the content as well. Soliya succeeded in creating a youth-target program based on technology and in an attractive interactive way. Still, the only issue that is left is reaching young people in remote area where they can't access the Internet and TICs.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the Soliya program representative



2. *“Search For Common Ground”*: work on peace building in conflict areas and on conflict transformation and social inclusion. SFCG have successfully decentralized the work they do between their headquarters in the US and the regional offices. However, the success of reaching youth differs from a country to another. For instance, the work they did in Jordan and Palestine by filming a comedy TV series on politics was a good idea to reach young people fed up with the usual way of the consumption of political information. On the other hand, such initiatives are not seen in other countries like Tunisia and Morocco where their work only focuses on trainings and seminars, which can attract a lot of youth but with a very low efficiency on their political commitment.

3. *“Kiron”*: They enable access to higher education for refugees through the use of technology. They identified the problems refugees settling in host communities face that prevent them from attending universities. As a matter of fact, according to the statistics, only 1% of them do attend university.

One of the biggest barriers to accessing higher education is language, which is expensive to learn it. Thus, Kiron are providing language classes via online forms, as well as college-level session that help refugees enroll in universities.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the Kiron program representative



4. “*Dialogue with Schools*”: is one of the projects that stuck in the mind because of its focus on teaching students about democracy in order to create a generation that understands what civic engagement is and teamwork in an environment where cultural diversity is the main concern.

During our UNAOC Fellowship, we had meetings with officials from the different Ministries of Foreign Affairs in every country we visited. One challenge to highlight in about those meetings is the fact that they are focusing on their political/economic priorities rather than youths’ needs. For example, upon our visit for Freedom of Religions’ office in Washington DC, we learned about all the research they do and the fact that at the end, all is being decided based on Department of State strategic ties with a country (ex: No sanctions on specific country that violates religious freedom principles, because of the political / economic tie the country has with the U.S administration). On the other end, there are good steps taken to understand what is happening on the ground and listening directly to youth. For instance, it was good to see how the German Foreign Affaires’ Ministry is willing to hear from us on what is happening on the ground and how they can better adjust their programs to achieve the best outcomes.

Through the different foreign affairs offices, we can say that there is still much more work to do to create better communication between governmental agencies and civil society to foster an efficient methodology for youth inclusion in society, whether they are refugees, migrants, or living in underdeveloped areas. Most importantly, engaging young people so they can create their own way of inclusion is essential; interacting and connecting with them while designing projects and programs for them, encouraging them to take part in civil society are only some ways to build a connection with youth.

Our visit to different UN offices conveyed few things on their work. First of it all, the visit to the UNAOC office gave us a better understanding of the initiative supporting grass root civil societies to implement programs promoting empathy and mutual understanding among societies. Our meeting with the UN Youth Envoy & the “*Together*

Campaign” representatives showed that there is a disconnection between their work and what is happening on the ground.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the Norwegian UN ambassador



UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the UN Youth Envoy



Actually, what we have noticed is that most of the official bodies and UN organizations’ programs don’t meet the real needs of youth. We think that the problem is primarily identifying the problems and the needs of young people. Being members of civil society organizations and media outlets, we can identify how the UN agencies usually work on their programs.

The divergence starts with the top-down methodology they use, because they are the ones who identify and make the studies and then, based on the results, they conceive and design a program for youth. However, the best approach is to go with a bottom-up approach where the youth themselves take part in the decision making process of designing of the programs themselves.

Role of religion

Moreover, our visits to some Islamic centers emphasized the importance of the religious leaders and centers in their respective communities. Our visit to The Adam Center highlighted the importance of having an interfaith dialogue and how religious leaders can

play a big role in integrating people from different ethnicities in their communities. A main factor of success is to open the door to all people regardless of their background or ethnicity.

As a matter of fact, a society that accepts religious diversity on a multi-level (religious, cultural, etc....) is a society that can peacefully coexist and achieve stability, with citizens advancing their communities. Advancing intercultural and interfaith dialogue enables societies to go further in establishing democracy. The Adams Center was a good example that works on promoting the importance of respecting each other, accepting religious diversity, fostering dialogue between communities regardless their cultures and faith. Through intercultural and interfaith dialogues, people tend to change their negative perceptions; they become more acceptable of others' differences and can develop into perceiving these differences as points of strength for the community as a whole.

For instance, our meeting with The Islamic Relief Organization showed how they are not serving only Muslim community, but the whole society when there is a crisis regardless of their religious beliefs. Besides the center's focus on charity work, they also foster inclusion through shifting their mission from charity to capacity building in order to guarantee sustainability and independence of their projects.

UNAOC MENA Fellows meeting with the Islamic Relief organization



Recommendations

Civil society organizations are exerting concrete efforts to reach young people, but there is still much room for improvement so they can better serve their communities and support it in an efficient way.

The main problem is the ability of these organizations to act as a solid support frame to their government in areas where governments cannot do much because of their priorities and capacities. There is the challenge of people living in one community engaging with another different community; people lack the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue that will enable them to build mutual understanding and in turn tolerance.

Below are few recommendations based on the knowledge we gained during our UNAOC fellowship:

- *Better collaboration between civil society organizations*: there are a lot of initiatives covering different topics such as education, youth empowerment, intercultural dialogue, humanitarian support etc... and sometimes these organizations wind up doing the same programs, sometimes even in the same area. There should be an effort taken from funders and likeminded organizations to sit together and share their goals and what they are working on so they can better align and provide an enriching experience for the people they serve.

- *Sustainability*: during program implementation civil society organizations are providing a lot of support during implementation with their staff members on the ground. There should be a sustainability plan put in place to build local capacities and give community leaders the chance to lead and have a social change in their communities.

- *Intercultural exchange*: As part on any initiative, beneficiaries should connect with other communities and have an opportunity to learn from one another, share challenges and reflect on success stories. This should be something to tackle throughout the work cycle.

- *Involving young people in civil society organizations*: it is so crucial to have the voice of youth in the design phase , which is missing, or not being taken into consideration at times. CSOs should have youth representatives in their organizations and implement human centric design to learn about their community needs. One of the best ways that helps facilitate this inclusion at all levels is developing youths' participation in civil society through which they can build their capacities, expand their skills, discuss the issues happening around them and problems from which they suffer, talk about their concerns and come up with solutions themselves. By allowing the youth to take the lead to create the change they wish to see in their community, any society can guarantee positive transformation. This is where civil society plays a primary role by collaborating and working hand in hand with young people to bring on that positive transformation.

- *Partnering with Media*: Media plays an integral role in telling the stories and there should be a joint effort to enhance their collaboration, to highlight what is happening in their communities in terms of CSOs' work.

- *Fellowships*: Such exchange programs and opportunities, are very important to give exposure and connect fellows with their peers and alumni network to see likeminded people work with them on such issue.

We also need to take into consideration that fellowships and exchange programs can be made between people from the same region in order to fight stereotypes. We do believe that as much as EUNA – MENA fellowships are needed to reach our goal of combatting hatred and fostering inclusion, we do also need as much MENA – MENA

fellowships and EUNA – EUNA fellowships. People sometimes lack cultural and background knowledge about the different countries in the same region and do, based on that and on the media outlets, start to create their own stereotypes about different countries. Those stereotypes are also emphasized by the fact that people live in that region, thus assuming that they know their region very well, which has been proved to be a wrong statement most of the time.

- *Resources*: Skilled and trained human power is the most important asset to deliver successful CSOs. There should be programs and commitment from senior leadership to invest in youth and provide them with power skills that enables them to do their work in the most efficient way. Besides, funding is important to sustain local CSOs and help them to work autonomously is needed.

MENA Fellows meeting at the UNAOC



We would like to thank the United Nations for offering us an opportunity to enhance our knowledge and enlarge our professional and personal network through the participation in the United Nations Alliance of Civilization fellowship. We hope that such programs, particularly for young leaders, continue in order to create a better future.

Sara Tallawi
(Egypt)

Ihab Salameh
(Jordan)

Hafssa Ait Tabamoute
(Morocco)

Ahmed Ben Nejma
(Tunisia)

Report III

Fatima Al-Banawi

Introduction

On October 15th, the two groups of the UNAOC 2017 Fellowship, one being from the MENA region and another from EUNA, gathered for the closing remarks and an exchange of reflections. To me, this brief, one-hour-long meeting, exposed results of a prolonged one-sided global media narrative about the MENA region, Islam, and Muslim communities, and raised immediate concerns to myself as an insider, a member of these communities, and as an outsider, a direct witness of this unfolding of emotions.

The emotions I am referring to are ones that were stirred throughout the MENA group's trip to Europe and North America, right before the commencement of the EUNA group's trip to Morocco, Egypt, and Qatar. As fellows from the MENA region provided the latter with useful tips and advices for their visits, justifications and excuses seemed to be made simultaneously for any uninformed behavior they might be witnessing of these cultures, their very own cultures.

As they spoke wholeheartedly, fellows from the EUNA interrupted: "Did we say or do anything that offended you or showed you our shortage of knowledge about your countries, because we're simply full of excitement to be discovering these new cultures." At this point, I had to interject: "The Arab youth, and as you can see, even the most educated and progressive of us, have internalized oppression and embraced it as a social identity."¹ I conclude by asking the fellows: "It was, for a few MENA fellows, the first time to visit Europe & the U.S. However, why wasn't there a need for any explanation nor justification to be made to them?"

In this report, I attempt to tap on this newfound identity as a result of three main pillars:

1. Media and its shortcoming in combating hate and fostering inclusion,
2. A language barrier in the growing, up and coming New Media from MENA, and
3. An age gap between youth content creators in MENA and policy makers in the West.

¹ Internalized Oppression: Any group, used to hearing negative remarks about its character from other societies, or the media, begins to feel that this misinformation is in fact true. By that, they turn the oppressive narrative inward. Internalized oppression can prevent group members from connecting to one another too, and stir intragroup conflict. We can see these patterns when group members begin to disassociate themselves from the larger group, prefer to speak a different language, and/or raise internal stereotypes and misinformation about one another.

1. Media and its shortcoming in combating hate and fostering inclusion

Let's take the following two words and define them in relation to one another and in relation to the media industry. **Objectivity** is often linked to reality and truth, as they are, and to reliability, and it is often also compared to its counterpart, Subjectivity. **Subjectivity**, on the other hand, is the interpretation of reality or truth shaped by the messenger's personal experiences and influences. Between the news agencies that we visited; *Middle East Broadcasting Networks*, *National Public Radio*, *Die Welt*, *TF1*, *Deutsch Welle*, *Le Monde*, *El Mundo*, *Radio Televisión Española*, all of them claimed objectivity, and slightly projected a negative connotation to any news that is subjective.

For the sake of the argument only, I would like to assume that these are a few of the largest leading news agencies in the Western world. Let's now question how it's become possible that all of them have somehow shared the same objectivity, the same truth and reality, of about 381 million different people that constitute 6% of the world population, known collectively as the MENA region.

One would assume that changing a discourse is attainable simply when journalists begin to cover stories from a different viewpoint. When a fellow does ask a journalist at *Le Monde* why she hasn't done so already, despite her worry of the constant misrepresentations, the journalist responds: One time, she wrote a story about French bakers who infuse the mornings of Paris with the smell of fresh *croissant*. It was an objective portrayal of bakers and the importance of the *boulangerie* in French society, which according to her findings, was an occupation mostly occupied by people from North African descent. Though, when she submitted the work to the editor in chief, he asked her if she genuinely thought they had time for that.

His response is not only a rejection of a story, but also a rejection of efforts toward combating hatred and fostering inclusion. For three weeks, fellows from the MENA group argued the possibility of journalism to immerse itself with activism. That, however, was considered a form of subjectivity and was thus constantly denied. One would come to discover that activism was argued for solely for the lack of a better term, as it generally supported the group's dire need to see better representation and more efforts for inclusion.

2. A language barrier despite the growing, up and coming, New Media from MENA

*Deutsch Welle*² and *Middle East Broadcasting Networks* were the only two from the abovementioned agencies that produced programs, which interacted directly with the

² Deutsche Welle is Germany's public international broadcaster. The service is available in 30 languages in order to further promote German culture and interests to an international audience. (<http://www.dw.com>)

population at hand, the MENA region, and thus offered a more balanced representation. Nonetheless, although *Shababtalk*, of *Deutsch Welle*, is a youth oriented talk show with an interactive approach to tackling social topics, the program is in Arabic. The producer's language selection limited the viewership to the MENA region; a region already offered with a wide variety of media options to select from and consume, and thus, weakened its usefulness for combating hatred and fostering inclusion inside Germany.

If we agree that Media is the diverse body of communication channels through which information is disseminated, we must then agree that today's body of communication channels had trespassed the traditional. Individuals are today's new mediums that are carrying and disseminating information too. Having been part of Saudi Arabia's social network industry since 2009, I saw how it transformed from relationship oriented to a strong force of content and information, and thus becoming an independent media channel of its own. With about 64% of the population being active Internet users, Saudi Arabia has the highest penetration of Twitter users in the world. It also has the highest per-capita consumption of YouTube with 90 million daily views and a 40% increase in hours per day of uploaded videos year on year (table 2).

Are Americans and Europeans watching this? I suggest two responses to this question:

Firstly, findings show that Internet users in the developing world are more frequent users of social networks compared with the U.S. and Europe (table 1). When I inquired about this during our visits, the responses I received revolved around: "youth in the developing world need platforms for expression, and have thus found refuge in the Internet, and later in these social networks." This answer however shows that big media agencies are still not aware of what we had seen and heard from their Civil Society counterparts. Aside from funding, there was a clear disparity between civil society and big organizational structures in the West in regards to efforts of inclusion. Most Civil Society NGOs have resorted to alternative blogging methods to represent their content and their people. As a representative from *SINGA*³ said: "I prefer no media coverage at all than a misinterpreted or misrepresented one."

Secondly, most content, if not all, that is produced in MENA, is in Arabic, making it difficult for a global, particularly Western, audience to engage and participate. Henceforth, although so much transformation is happening in the region, Western mainstream media is still detached and is leading in the shaping of perceptions through the power of headlines.

³ Initially a citizen movement, *SINGA* creates opportunities for refugees and their host communities to meet and cooperate. (<https://www.singafrance.com>)

3. An age gap between youth content creators in MENA and policy makers in the West

Alternative voices are rising in the MENA region, thanks to youth that pursued an untapped path, creating new job and investment opportunities. The field is still relatively new as it came with its own game players and structures. There is also a clear age gap between a majority youth population content creators in the Arab World and policy makers in the West, which allows for Western media to continue its monotonous narrative about the MENA region. In the meantime, the average MENA person, fully occupied with social network channels, remains unaware of this representation, and only a well-informed person will respond with immediate interference to that and to efforts taken toward inclusion.

I observed how a term, such as *Refugee Crisis*, was problematic; a discomfort immediately felt and rationalized by the MENA group: “How could the arrival of people to countries most in need of young energies and youthful resources, be referred to as *crises*?” While traditional inclusion efforts invite people to learn languages, exchange cultural visits, and facilitate obtaining tourist visas, informed youth still care about representation. They realize that efforts toward fostering inclusion and combating hatred can only advance with a better representation, from both sides. Hence, unlike social network channels produced in Arabic, we find Arab filmmakers creating content that is local in authenticity yet global in approach, in order to facilitate the forthcoming of a new global narrative about them.

Recommendations

Traditional media agencies are dealing with the competitive force of social networks, not realizing that it is in their hands to shift the conversation and balance the competition by inviting new faces and authentic stories on to the screen, through direct partnerships with civil society. The UNAOC has a wide network of fellows that come with expertise and backgrounds complementary to one another, exactly as the exchange of knowledge that travelled historically between the East and West through translation processes.

Since representation is foundational for fostering inclusion and combating hatred, one must look for common grounds that highlight expertise and benefits. Through organizational support, the UNAOC can advance and monitor its network’s partnerships toward sustainability. With the unfolding of success stories, inclusion is to be gradually fostered and hatred is to be combated.

[Appendix 1](#)

Table 1: Internet users in developing world are more frequent users of social networks compared with U.S. and Europe

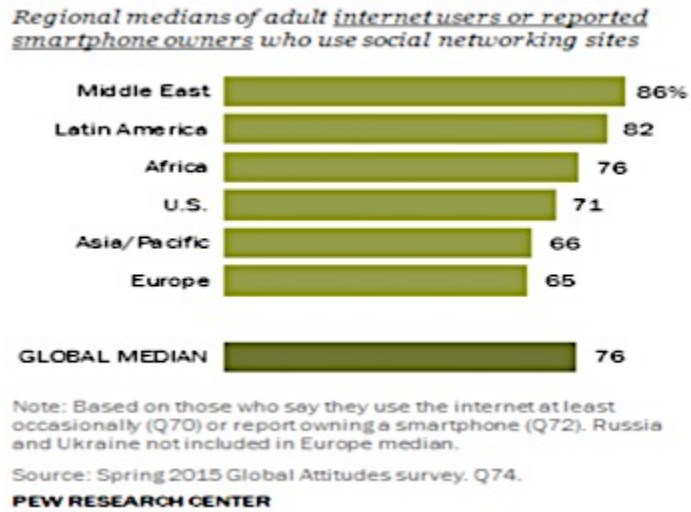
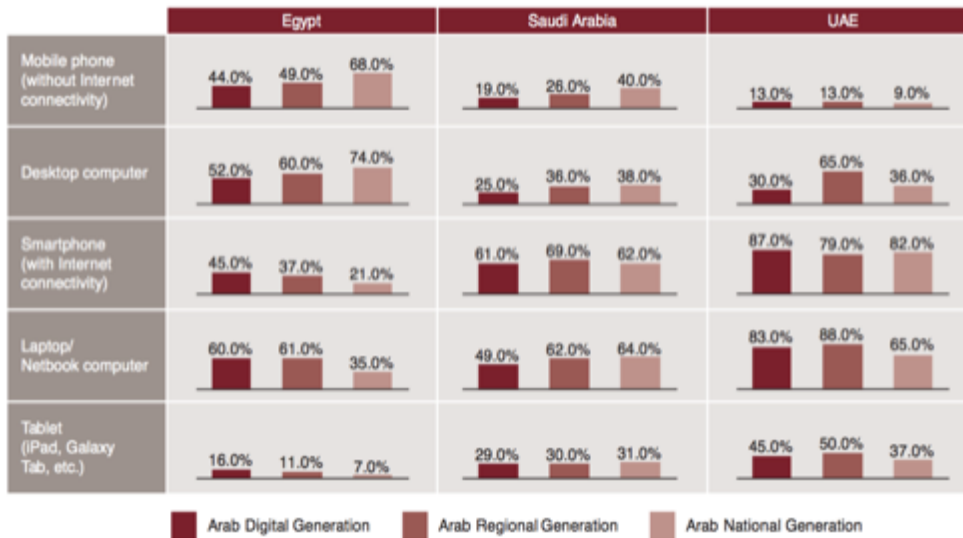


Table 2: Electronic/Communication Devices Usage (Percentage of Respondents, 2013)



Report IV

Abdelsamee Abdallah Abouelhamd

The 2017 UNAOC Fellowship program was revolving around “The role of Media and Civil Society in combating hatred and fostering inclusion”. In the period of 18 days from October 1st to October 18th 2017, the fellows visited several organizations in 4 different countries; the key actors were from officials, politicians, media platforms and civil society organizations. The following points will present a conclusion of the main and common issues we talked about during the fellowship in each country/ city.

Washington DC

In Washington, the fellows met the State Department, USAID, Search for Common Ground, Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Alhora TV, Radio Sawa, and MBN), USCIRF, PS, ADAMS Center and IR-USA.

The key actors expressed that the United States of America has a successful experience in global scale, in particular in the relationship with the Middle East, and there is a significant progress has been made to build and retain diverse in the American society especially in terms of religious and cultural diversity.

On one hand, supporting people in disasters and Diasporas is decreasing hatred, on the other hand, the role of media is promoting social inclusion through working for more understanding and respecting for other cultures where more immigration and refuge.

Also the interfaith organizations told us about their role in providing more evidences on how religions can foster inclusion and counter hatred.

New York City

In New York, the fellows met Soliya, The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Office of the UNSG Youth Envoy, UNDPi about their campaign (TOGETHER), The Permanent Mission of Norway, NPR-WNYC, City University of New York Journalism School, Bronx Documentary Center.

The visits were very divers and provided us with more information about the role of civil society in fostering inclusion through activities and projects integrating people from migrants, new comers with people from host communities like what Bronx Documentary Center is doing through arts and culture.

Also there were discussion related to the role of the UN organizations such as UNSG Youth Envoy in advocating for youth integration in decision making, and the TOHETHER campaign that aims inclusion and understanding culture of migrants and fostering enriching communities through diversity.

Berlin

In Berlin the participants visited Kiron Open Higher Education and they presented to us their work in integrating refugees into the formal education through their online platform and offline face to face activities and enrolling qualified refugees to partner universities in Europe.

In Deutsch Welle, we met the Head of the Arabic editorial department Mr. Naser Schruf and the host of “Shababtalk” Jaafar Abul Karim to talk about the role of the association as a German entity in clearing the image of Germany in the Middle East, but Die Welt reflecting their perspectives related to MENA.

Dialog Macht Schule as an organization working in fostering social and political dialogue is increasing awareness towards understanding democratic environment in Germany, in addition to Give Something Back to Berlin and Über den Tellerrand that have common concept for opening dialogue and fostering inter-culturality and social cohesion between host communities in Berlin and refugees, through conducting cultural events and cooperative socioeconomic solutions such as social kitchens and finding solutions to host new comers and asylum seekers.

Caritas-Berlin as a welfare catholic organization is working from their religious perspective to support vulnerable people and asylum seekers from the not organized migration, they are not only providing charity and community services such as medical care, food distribution and shelters, but also they are providing social and legal awareness.

Paris

In Paris, we met media platforms supporting cultural diversity and fostering racism throw focusing on the positive aspects in a diverse society like France; they are combating exclusion in while the popularity of the authority of the right wing has increased.

Civil society is working there in building a coherent community through raising awareness towards respecting religions, cultures and diversity, also they are supporting refugees and vulnerable communities by empowering them to create their micro business and cooperative innovative economic solutions in addition to building networks between innovators in Paris and the several European communities.

The agenda of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs is focusing on building good relations with MENA region and supporting the states there in their development plans and democratic transition.

Madrid

The official and political level in Spain working in developing good relations with MENA in particular with Maghreb countries, media is focusing on stopping the flood of not organized migration to Spain by increasing awareness related to legal statement and the endangers of this kind of displacement.

Civil society in Madrid is active in supporting respecting religious diversity, social cohesion and supporting refugees legally and through creating job opportunities.

Conclusion

The EUNA region facing different kinds of problems related to exclusion and hatred because of refugee crises and the bad economic and complicated political situation.

Media and civil society are working in supporting cohesion and dialogue in addition to economic and cultural solutions for fostering inclusion and combating hatred.

The Role of Media and Civil Society in Fostering Inclusion and Combating Hatred in the Educational System in Jordan

Background:

Jordan is one of the most strategically positioned countries in the region and however considered to be one of the most stable countries. Jordan's challenging geopolitical position is making it extremely vulnerable to social, political and economic troubles. This is evident by the repercussions on Jordan's infrastructure and security resulting from the neighboring crises, influx of refugees and imminent security threats across the border⁴.

As the Syria crisis is into its sixth year and has further destabilized the humanitarian, economic, social, and political situation in the Arab world; more than 9 million Syrians have left their homes since the outbreak of the war in 2011. In neighboring countries, including Jordan, public services are overwhelmed, infra-structures are strained, economic growth is decelerated, and unemployment is rising. Further, increasing tensions between the local communities and refugees are creating a fertile environment for violent narratives and exclusion. Jordan is a special case for this as it hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world. It is imperative to consider the factors relating to youth and violent extremism in the most holistic way possible.⁵

The following part of the paper is presenting the statement of social cohesion in the educational system in Jordan including main issues affecting inclusion. As well as it is presenting recommendations to solve the problem and increasing social cohesion between children and parents from the host communities and refugees.

Objectives of the report:

- To assess the current statement of the role of education in social cohesion in Jordan.
- To explore the root cause of social exclusion and social conflicts between the school students in Jordan after the Syrian crisis.

⁴ Enhancing community security and access to justice in host communities and other fragile areas in Jordan- UNDP 2015

⁵ ActionAid ARI- 2017, Social Cohesion Framework

- To find suitable recommendations for participatory and community driven solutions of the main root causes of hatred and exclusion in the Jordanian schools.
- To identify specific steps to social change.
- To Identify the role of the UNAOUC Alumni in conducting the recommended action plan

The case of exclusion in education in Jordan:

Education in Jordan is one of the main services which have been affected by Syrian crisis and the huge number of children from refugees who suppose to enroll to schools.

The issue of diversity is actually very connected to privilege. Interviewed groups indicated that being classified based on race, nationality, religion, or tribal background is a fear for everybody because it might deter them from access to a certain opportunity one of them is education.

The effectiveness of humanitarian aid to transform those marginalized communities is a main element to be discussed in this regard. People from local communities asserted that aid programs are also contributing to the exclusion of Syrians by doing programs only for Syrians, which raised the gap between both of groups and increased sensitivity between children in schools.

Access to education

There are almost 1.3 million Syrians today in Jordan, a country of 6.6 million citizens. Their arrival, and specifically that of Syrian children, since the outbreak of conflict in Syria in 2011, has spurred Jordan's Education Ministry to take a number of steps to accommodate their educational needs. These include hiring new teachers; allowing free public school enrollment for Syrian children; and having second shifts at nearly 100 primary schools to create more classroom spaces. In the fall of 2016, the ministry aims to create 50,000 new spaces in public schools for Syrian children, and to reach 25,000 out-of-school children with accredited "catch-up classes."⁶

Tension and education

Due to the fact that schools provide a platform where young Syrians and Jordanians converge, which can lead to conflicts emerging between the two communities.

Schools are the places where issues of lack of coexistence and exclusion arise. Children are consistently suffering from bullying because they are 'different'. Meanwhile parents from minorities and majorities expressing that they would like to have their children enrolled in schools where students come from the same background.

Key stakeholders:

⁶ Human Rights Watch Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan, page 2, Read ([The full report](#))

Decision makers: (Ministry of education, The Jordanian Parliament)

Educational Associations: (Informal and non formal education associations, National Schools)

Media: (Local and National media, Social media)

Communities: (Parents from refugees and host communities)

Key recommendations:

1. Advocating for more inclusion between Jordanian and Syrian children in local schools
2. Supporting social inclusion through educational activities
3. Raising awareness among Children in the local schools toward cultural diversity and respecting differences between each others.
4. Raising awareness among parents from both groups towards the importance of social cohesion and coexistence

Recommended Action Plan

Key recommendations	Key Community Action	Activity	Location	Resources needed
Advocating for more inclusion between Jordanian and Syrian children in local schools	Organizing Advocacy campaign using social media and offline actions	*Social media activities using Twitter and Facebook	Online	Internet Social media specialist Graphic designer
		*Producing Video series promoting inclusion in schools	Online	Film Maker Filming equipment
		*Developing policy paper and presenting	Ministry of education	Advocacy specialist

		it to the ministry of education about integrating children from Syrians and Jordanians in the same shift		Educators Lawyers
		*Organizing Workshop with informal education associations to find solution for more integration in education.	Informal education associations	Activity and communication Coordinator
Supporting social inclusion through educational activities	Educational Activities in peace building	*Developing manual in intercultural citizenship education and peace building	CSO	Educator/ trainer specialist in peace building
		*Conducting series of trainings for school students including Syrians and Jordanians in the national schools in the topics of peace building,	National schools	Educator/ trainer specialist in peace building

		conflict resolution and intercultural citizenship		
	Creating social initiatives by school students from Syrians and Jordanians	*Developing training manual in initiatives management	SCO	Educator/ trainer specialist in Social projects management
		*Conducting trainings in initiatives management	National Schools	Educator/ trainer specialist in Social projects management
		*Providing support to at least one initiative in each school, the initiatives must be established by Jordanians and Syrians together.	National Schools	Advisors Financial resources
Raising awareness among Children in the local schools toward cultural diversity and respecting differences between each others.	Organizing Artistic Activities promotes peace and social inclusion	*Producing theater play for children talking about the importance of being equal and united. *Performing in different schools and	National Schools	Theater team Financial resources

		opening discussions with children.		
		*Conducting one day artistic workshop focusing on unity and group work concept.	National Schools	Artists Material
Raising awareness among parents from both groups towards the importance of social cohesion and coexistence	Media activities	*Producing and broadcasting media spots	Radio, TV and Online	Partner media platforms
	Organizing Awareness Activities	Organizing Awareness sessions and discussions for parents	CSO	Facilitators Partner organizations

UNAOC Fellowship Alumni Recommended roles:

- **To support in building social media plan for promoting inclusion**
- **To support in building peace-building training manual**
- **To support in building initiatives management manual**
- **To advise in conducting activities promoting and fostering inclusion**
- **To create guidance in conducting media activities fostering inclusion**
- **To cooperate in conducting the activities**

Report V

Marwa Shabbar

The media landscape has shifted rapidly following World War II and then again after the fall of the Soviet Union as the world witnessed the shift from publicly owned and funded media outlets towards a global move for privatisation. In theory, private media outlets should be relished as they are less likely to succumb to political pressure and more likely to assert media independence. However, the 21st century has proved that the theory does not necessarily translate to practice. Prior to embarking on the UNAOOC Fellowship, my dealings with the media have always been in ‘damage control’ capacity, such as in circumstances where an inappropriate report has been published about people from Middle Eastern background and I need to provide a statement to correct the narrative. As such I was always in constant battle with the media and it was very rare that positive reports were published on migrants or refugees from Middle Eastern and North African backgrounds. As such I found the theme of the fellowship very interesting and I was eager to have candid discussion with major news and media outlets with the aim of working together with civil society to foster inclusion and combat hatred. Admittedly, I embarked on this fellowship with a certain naivety that if the journalists were able to understand the negative impact of their reporting on everyday people’s lives then they would be motivated to adopt different approaches. I also embarked on the fellowship with the idea that hate fuelled reporting was more profitable thus if we can discover ways that make alternative reporting equally profitable then we may be able to successfully promote a positive, socially inclusive narrative. At the conclusion of the fellowship I have reached a different conclusion in relation to the driving force for negative reporting. I have also changed my initial perception as to the best way to bridge the gap between media and civil society. I have come to the realisation that inviting the media to engage in positive reporting is unlikely to succeed, instead we need to introduce diversity to our newsrooms and start thinking about media as more than just news.

During the course of the fellowship we visited different news and media agencies and met with various high-profile personalities that focus on both the MENA region as well as the wider audience. The fellowship commenced in Washington D.C. arguably the epitome of western foreign policy. We had the opportunity to meet with various government organisations as well as NGOs. Unfortunately, the meetings were very clinical and sanitised, these meetings were conducted by the officials that were likely to prepare the very reports that would be quoted in the news, as such this detachment and clinical approach in Washington D.C was bound to seep through the media channels that deal with sensitive issues such as social inclusion. The Government Departments also appeared to do very little to educate the media. When the representatives of the United

States Department Commission on Religious Freedom were questioned about their domestic efforts to change the American people's perception of Islam and of people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, they noted that this was outside the scope of their mandate. While this may be the case, however, it is highly hypocritical and counterproductive to question other countries practices towards religious freedom whilst persecuting religious minorities in America. Sadly, the recurrent theme amongst the Government Departments was the "saviour mentality" and an overall sense of superiority, both themes of course are echoed in American media. As for the Islamic Relief and the ADAMS Centre, they both shied away from questions regarding their religious teaching and how they promote social inclusion within the various Islamic faiths. Neither of the organisations provided a direct response which makes the concept of fostering inclusion and combating hatred harder to grasp when the very organisation that should promote it cannot effectively apply social inclusion in their practice or teaching. I had the first experience with the strong media aversion to the word "activism" at Middle East Broadcasting Network, where I first learnt that news outlets are strongly against being associated with activism even when they engage in activism.

In New York, we had the opportunity to meet with NPR-WNYC studio a radio station that enjoy global recognition and diverse fan base. As a devoted fan to Freakonomics, a show produced by WNYC Studio, I was looking forward to our meeting. We met with Mr Arun Venugopal, a reporter whom WNYC Studio describe on their website as the host of Micropolis a show that focuses on sexuality, identity and race. With this background, I expected that Mr Venugopal would be open to discussing the lack of diversity in mainstream media. Unfortunately, our questions especially those that focused on the benefit of programs as well as the lack of diversity in media were met with great disdain. Mr Venugopal shared a story that recently his African American friend had told him that he could not speak on radio the way he would speak in his community but had to modify his talk and speak differently although he wanted to present authentically. Fortunately for Mr Venugopal's friend, he recently became a host of a new show that allowed him to present in the manner he felt most comfortable and authentic. Despite this example, Mr Venugopal was offended when I said that WNYC Studios are afraid of being associated with issues such as islamophobia as they worry that the topic is not accepted within the community. I provided the example that thirty years ago radio stations would not public support marriage equality or women rights, however in present times it has become 'cool' to support such causes, yet we don't feel passionate enough about the equal rights of other minorities. Mr Venugopal denied that was the case but when asked to provide one example of a program that supports rights of Muslims or people from CALD background, he was not able to do so. Unfortunately, it was evident that American media as well as Government Departments are simply not ready to have a frank discussion unless this discussion glorifies their good work. It is difficult to promote change when the other party does not believe that change is necessary.

We then travelled to Europe, with our first stop being Berlin then Paris and finally ending the fellowship for the MENA cohort in Spain. The Europe experience was very different from the American experience. The meetings in Berlin were very diverse and interesting. We met with two news channels, Deutsch Welle and Die Welt, the two being almost polar opposites. Deutsch Welle caters for the MENA region thus it has a very multicultural staff. They also sponsor programs that are very relevant in the MENA region, programs that arguably foster social inclusion and combat hate as they tackle somewhat taboo topics and attempt to create a dialogue around those topics. On the other hand, Die Welt is a right wing, predominantly white, news channel that requires employees to pledge allegiance to Israel thus undoubtedly ostracising diversity from the MENA region. Despite the foundational principles of the newspaper, yet the management insisted they were not an activist newspaper notwithstanding their support for Israel. This was a clear example of how the word activism was a taboo in the media industry that even when a newspaper's conduct is clear activism the newspaper denies participation in activism. Unfortunately Die Welt were participating in very controversial activism that may have contributed to their almost all white newsroom and their troubles to attract diverse staff as confessed by their journalists.

The experience in Paris perhaps was the most illuminating and one that has caused me to re- think my initial idea, that the easiest way to foster inclusion and combat hatred is to promote a positive coverage of diversity. We first met with TF1 and learnt about their foundation that provides individuals from low socio-economic background with opportunities in journalism, a profession dominated by the elite. Many of the program participants come from migrant background, being second or third generation migrants, mostly from Maghreb and Africa. After the completion of the program, some of the participants are offered employment contracts with TF1. The program is very well designed and given its history, it has proven to be a successful model of diversifying the media newsrooms. Unfortunately, the program does not target refugees or emerging communities, and upon discussions with Ms Djaoudi, it appears that it is unlikely to incorporate these communities in the near future as these groups are not TF1's target groups. We then met with a journalist from Le Monde, who explained that Le Monde was one of the first major newspapers that was responsible for mainstreaming the use of ethnicities and skin colour in reporting. At the time the newspaper adopted the use of ethnicity and skin colour, it was intending to shed light on the inequalities that contributed to the French riots. However, Ms Vincent admitted that currently, the use of ethnicity in reporting is often associated with negative reporting. Personally, I always found the use of ethnicity and skin colour in reporting is very problematic as it attracts many public negativity and stigmatization of the particular ethnicity. We did not receive sufficient data on the ethnic diversity of Le Monde staff, it would be interesting to consider whether a highly diverse workplace would have taken Le Monde approach in mainstreaming the use of ethnicity and skin colour in reporting. The liberal use of terms

that could lead to community stigmatization may be one of the reason for the high anti-migrant sentiments amongst the French community. We then met with Ms Nadiya Lazzouni, who found her community underrepresented in the media and have embarked on the task of producing her on show on YouTube to promote diversity and create a platform for underrepresented individuals.

The MENA cohort concluded the fellowship in Madrid where we had the pleasure of a very honest conversation with journalists from El Mundo. They advised that in their experience that positive stories about minority communities do not attract readership despite their ongoing efforts to promote such stories. However, despite the readership pressures, they refuse to engage in negative reporting. They were a model example of a newspaper that refuse to engage in negative reporting, however contrary to my initial beliefs, from their perspective that was not enough to change the narrative.

At the conclusion of the fellowship, it was clear that the media outlets were struggling with two issues, lack of diversity and lack of responsibility. These issues will continue to hinder social inclusion if not addressed. Media outlets have all (with the exception of El Mundo) resisted the idea that they should be participants in social activism. Almost all journalist, including fellows who are journalists, argued that their profession should remain objective and if they take side their independence is compromised. It is interesting how our media outlets still consider issues of basic human rights, social equality, fostering inclusion and combating hatred as matters that are open for perception and opinion and they need to remain objective on these issues. As agents of change, we require newsrooms that are able to prioritise human life and basic human rights without politicising the issue. Almost every news agency would have no issue in promoting a campaign against domestic violence because we, as humans, accept that violence is wrong, yet most newsagencies refuse to promote the resettlement of refugees, because helping refugees is considered activism. In my opinion, media outlets hide behind neutrality to avoid responsibility, as it is easier to deny responsibility and to gain credibility amongst investors and funders. Given the financial aspects of the media business, I have come to the conclusion that it would be unproductive and a very slow process to seek to change the journalists' mentality. On the other hand, the much more effective method is to introduce diversity to newsrooms, journalists who would not share in the popular view or can contribute an alternative way of reporting, one that does not vilify or stigmatise their communities. To implement this, media outlets could incorporate a similar program to that designed by TF1 Foundation. Alternatively, we could introduce quotas for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background. Australia has proven that quotas are highly successful, as we saw and dramatic increase in women and indigenous people assuming leadership roles as a result of quotas. A similar approach could increase diversity in newsrooms. Firstly, diversity would foster inclusion not just in media but is likely to create opportunities on a larger scale. Secondly, we would not be able to combat hate if we do not don't listen to the

alternative point of view.

In summary, the fellowship helped me re-evaluate my approach to changing the narrative in the media. I now appreciate that it is not easy to change the media narrative in circumstances where media corporations refuse to take responsibility for social change.