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# Integrating Community Service into Scholarship: Youth Engagement by Active Participation Case Study of Ruwwad

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Integrating Community Service into Scholarship:  
Youth Engagement by Active Participation  
Case Study of Ruwwad

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## **Abstract**

This research project applies Asset-Based Community Development theory to Ruwwad, a community-based organization in Al-Natheef. As a marginalized community, the approach to community development must be investigated to ensure that it does not worsen the community dependency. Through the Myoub Khorma Youth Education and Empowerment Fund, Ruwwad provides scholarships for youth from the neighborhood and surrounding areas. The impact of the scholarship on youth was investigated through conducting student interviews and collected material culture published by the organization. Ruwwad exemplifies an example of asset-based community development in the Middle East and youth have shown that they feel empowered through an increased sense of agency after being involved with the organization. The organization can show that supportive role does not mean ineffective community initiatives seen by its achievements in Al-Natheef. Within the youth, the scholarship project has been able to teach technical skills and professional development, importance of adult guidance and support, value of continued learning, psychosocial support, wish to mentor others, and a passion for civic engagement. This research project reinforces the importance of placing youth in the center of community development and should urge more communities to invest in building the capabilities of their young generation. Through resource allocation and instilling a sense of agency, youth will carry that responsibility forward and create another round of leaders in their community. Ruwwad shows that youth as an asset in community building creates sustained community mobilization.

**ISP Keywords:** Youth, Community Development, Development Studies, Empowerment, Regional Studies: Middle East

## **I. Introduction**

The Oxford Dictionary defines community as “a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.” Location is a factor in defining one’s community, which is an important aspect when designing community interventions. Especially to undertake cycle of poverty, geographic marginalization creates concentrated pockets of poverty especially among urban areas (UNDP). However, physical proximity is an insufficient resource to create relationships. Community development requires belief in a common purpose and utilization of informal social networks. It depends on existing social capital in the community using relationships as a foundation for community-based projects. Development does not only come from the physical space, but it relies on creating structure for improvement and changing the behaviors of residents. In marginalized communities, people usually feel alienated from the larger society and from each other. Rather than bringing people together, deterioration of communities through economic downturn brings competition and a fear of violence and crime in the neighborhood (UNDP).

These types of communities do not nurture growth and development for youth who often grow up embodying the frustrations felt in their communities. The Arab Foundation for Sustainable Development “Ruwwad” is a community-based organization based in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhood called Al-Natheef in East Amman. It is one of the neighborhoods that had been picked to represent urban poverty for Jordan Human Development Report in 2004. The report included perspectives of the poor from eight different disadvantaged communities from all over Jordan to recommend a pro-poor approach to address poverty for the government and community-based organizations. The presentation on the organization’s model intrigued me during a field visit with the School of International Training

in Amman, Jordan's Health and Community Development Program. Sustainability was a central theme to organizational structure with maintaining corporate partnerships and using youth as their community labor force.

The use of community service to develop leadership was similar to my own experience at Emory University becoming involved in the school community and environment. Growing up, I felt frustrated being a leader in my community, because other adults never trusted or respected my role. They believed that, due to my age, I was lacking in motivation and accountability for successful project completion. Not only were they reluctant to include me in most projects, but they were also forbidding me from participating in decision-making. Adults use the lack of experience as an excuse to restrict youth involvement and leadership in community initiatives, but Ruwwad did not do the same. Instead of creating barriers, they were seeking ways to help youth become more involved. It was refreshing to see an organization that mobilized youth as a community asset and also see how this approach created operational sustainability.

Arriving in Jordan made me consider different research projects. Living with a financially comfortable Jordanian family and commuting to School for International training building in Abdoun circle portrayed a skewed and privileged image of Jordan. We were reading and learning about social determinants of health, but we were living amongst ex-patriots and the wealthy. Visiting Ruwwad made me realize how Amman hides its marginalized communities using the tool of geographic isolation. The differences between East and West Amman showed me that forgotten narratives existed in East Amman. I wanted to hear the story of those living hidden away from the eyes of the tourists and those who can fill in the gaps to understanding a holistic experience of life in Jordan.

Personally, I feel invested in this research to fuel my professional development through expanding existing understanding impact of different styles of community-based organization. I aspire a professional career in non-government sector especially organizations based in the communities either domestically or internationally. In my opinion, Ruwwad's model for community development is the new direction for all non-profit organizations because it involves structural collaboration between the three sectors of civil society. I hope that investigating youth perceptions on their experiences will allow inform me about Ruwwad's influence on individual growth. As participants in the program, they will be the best agents to narrate their own experiences.

The project is appropriate for the region since it is a program based in a marginalized area in Amman, Jordan. Poor communities are often forgotten and unaccounted for in national reports, which is a problem for national budgeting. Without having an accurate number for the poor, the government cannot provide enough services and resources (UNDP). The non-government organizations in Jordan have an important role in providing services to Jordanian citizens in coordination with the public and private sectors. Investigating sustainable NGO models is important to ensure that organizations do not leave marginalized communities more vulnerable by starting initiatives that worsen the dependency on outside actors. It is especially important to focus on organization that concentrates on youth, who will be future leaders and visionaries for the community. Therefore, investigating the impact of Ruwwad through youth experiences becomes an important project to conceptualize the effect on the area.

The research project will specifically focus on the youth who are receiving the Mousab Khorma Youth Education and Scholarship Fund. The fund provides opportunities to pursue higher education for students who are highschool graduates from the community in exchange for

four hours of community service per week. I would like to focus on youth who are in second or third year of scholarship, so that my research will not be impacted by unfamiliarity with program operation. The experience of narrating can provide reflection for those who have completed the community service for multiple years and provide a safe outlet for self-expression. I hope that my research project will be able to bring attention to the meaningful work of Ruwwad in Al-Natheef and focus attention on how to bring other communities the same level of empowerment. The information from the interviews will be supplemented from material culture to create a foundation for background on the organization and its missions.

Through reading existing literature, I predict that community service has enhanced a sense of citizenship in youth through enhancing community investment. It should have influenced their sense of agency in their own future and creating change in the neighborhood. I also expect that it has brought a partnership between youth and staff members rather than having an authority-driven relationship. Having the community service component makes organization more sustainable and enhances youth development, showing that more community-based organizations should use youth as an asset in projects.

The theoretical foundation for analysis will be asset-based community development. Asset-based community development is a new approach that emphasizes starting with existing resources rather than bringing resources and outside agents into the community. By using this approach, youth are not seen as resource-draining and dependent but as capable citizens who have the potential to contribute to the community (Sutton 2007). Youth are a resource rather than a problem. A vital phase of this approach is empowering the citizens and resources to be able to invest and be part of the mobilization. Marginalized communities over lost their belief in themselves and their capabilities through years of being defined as a problem. To counteract the

consequences of negative perception, positive empowerment must restore their faith in their communities. Otherwise, a top-down approach to community development process can leave the disheartened behind creating a smaller community of marginalized and forgotten.

## **II. Literature Review**

### *Asset-Based Community Development*

The theory of asset-based community development was developed by John McKnight and Jody Kretzman at Institute of Policy Research (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). Asset-based community development is a theory developed in opposition of needs-based community development used frequently by programs by the government and non-government organizations. Needs-based community development starts with a community needs assessment to research the neighborhood. However, the community needs assessment focuses on the potential problems and weaknesses in the neighborhood. Asset-based community also conducts a community evaluation, but the focus is on identifying potential resources rather than discovering the problems in the neighborhood (Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

The World Bank has developed a similar approach to their projects in developing countries coined Community Driven Development since the 1990s. Community Driven Development has similar principles to Asset-Based Community Development. Through this approach, the World Bank aims to have more “local empowerment, participatory governance, demand-responsiveness, administrative autonomy, greater downward accountability, and enhanced local capacity” (World Bank). However, the World Bank focuses on having more institutional reform in the local governments and community-based organizations to allow for more autonomous governance in communities (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). Asset-based community development focuses more on community mobilization rather than institutional reform.

Inclusive community action destroys the idea that the community is the problem and rather, its residents become an ally for development. Organizations using asset-based community development focus on ways to include the community with active participation in their projects

and programs (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). The foundation of asset-based community development is to identify resources and capabilities within the community to outgrow the problem. It is important for the resources to come from within the community, because needs-based community development worsens the dependency on outside agencies. Receiving aid from outside agencies and government perpetuates the ideology that outsiders are the only ones who can help the community (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). The ideology of outsiders as heroes diminishes residents' own experiences and power to help themselves; it is another barrier between the marginalized community and the rest of the world.

Community-based organizations (CBO) have an important role in implementing asset-based community development. They must be the “inside actors” who are familiar and connected with the community. The role of CBO is to recognize and mobilize the assets in the community especially focusing on identifying informal networks that formal networks can utilize to establish themselves (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). The use of community-based organization reinforces the importance of social capital in this approach. Social capital is defined as “talents of individuals but also the relationships such as associations and informal networks” (UNDP). By being familiar with the local social capital, the CBO should advise local governments and civil organizations on ways to fulfill their duties to the population. However, CBO is also responsible to make sure that the local community maintains their autonomy while receiving civic aid (UNDP). In a similar manner, CBO should provide resources and opportunities to build capacities for community and its residents, but their role is not to govern the community. They must step backwards and make autonomous community leadership possible.

A community asset that is often overlooked is the youth in the community. Youth are usually perceived as resource-draining and as a problem rather than as potential agents of change in the

neighborhood (Sutton 2007). Youth are also the most vulnerable population in marginalized communities, because according to data from the United States, poor youth are more likely to drop out of school, enter juvenile justice system, and be trapped in poverty as adults compared to their peers (Zimmerman 2007). To improve youth's situation, community development strategy must also simultaneously empower youth's position in society. An approach should be able to develop youth abilities, improve adult perceptions of youth, and encourage positive involvement in the community (Stewart 2011). Asset-based community development would be able to engage youth and it would be a valuable accomplishment for sustainable improvement.

#### *Youth Participation in Community Service*

The benefits of youth engaging in leadership through community service have been thoroughly researched in the United States. Documented evidence states that community service has positive impact on youth. Youth have self-reported that community service has increased their positive attitudes about school and therefore, improved their engagement with academics (Stewart 2011). Having a civic duty enhanced optimistic attitudes toward their futures rather than perpetuating hopelessness and fear. Community service has instilled a sense of self-efficacy and through a sense of autonomy, improved the youth's self-confidence and self-esteem (Stewart 2011). The benefits do not only extend to personal development, but they also include improving the relationships between the youth and parents (Stewart 2011). Parental relationships have shown to progress through increased trust and communications. In some cases, the community service projects do not finish at the end of service term. Participating in one community service projects have also encouraged youth to create and implement other service opportunities beyond their initial service project (Stewart 2011).

An important component of community service is youth empowerment. The Oxford Dictionary definition of empower is “to give someone the authority or power to do something.” Empowerment comes from a partnership between the youth and supportive adults where they need to relate to the youth as partners and peers rather than exist as authority figures (Sutton 2007). Youth do not feel empowered by increased involvement in community service through devoting more time but through receiving guidance from surrounding adult figures. They also need appropriate guidance for their cultural context and development capacities, so these factors need to be considered when determining mentors for youth leaders. Youth empowerment should represent collective, democratic, and prosocial engagement of the youth in which they are involved in the decision making process (Morton and Montgomery 2012).

Through empowerment, youth have self-reported benefits. Empowered youth describe differences in their sense of identity through being able to develop new ideas of their characters. They are able to feel more recognized in their communities and identities, which increases their sense of self-efficacy. Feeling sociopolitical control in their own environment allows individuals to feel supported regardless of existing level of social support (Christens and Peterson 2012). Understanding the impact of empowerment, it becomes important to emphasize feelings of sociopolitical control especially for individuals who grew up in unsupportive ecological environments. The role of empowerment in growth becomes an important consideration for sustainable change especially those with marginalized backgrounds.

#### *Background Information on Al-Natheef and Jordan*

Jordan Human Development Report in 2004 is a report in a pro-poor perspective on development to dismantle the pattern in which previous development schemes have worsened the

marginalization. A major challenge to the Jordanian policy maker is that there is no reliable data on the poor (UNDP 2004). Without knowing the extent of poverty in the country, it is impossible to address the problem through policy. An important step in poverty alleviation is identifying the “pockets of poverty,” the geographic locations where concentrated poverty perpetuates in a cyclical fashion (UNDP 2004). These are the regions overlooked in development and human development reports, because the population in these regions are silenced. Especially in light of the regional political climate, the poor deserve more attention. Compared to the rest of the population, poor are particularly vulnerable to political and economic shocks since they do not have an economic safety net to absorb shocks and fluctuations (UNDP 2004). Lack of attention to marginalized communities is a hindrance to Jordan’s country development.

Despite the existence of the poor, Jordan scores as one of the highest on the Human Development Index. Human Development Index was developed by United Nations Development Program to be able to incorporate humans and their capabilities into calculating a country’s development rather than relying solely on economic growth (UNDP 2014). In 2013, Jordan’s HDI was reported as .745 (UNDP 2014). Most of the other Arab countries that score highly on HDI have revenue from oil extraction, so it is remarkable that Jordan is able to achieve a high livelihood for its population without the stable national GDP (UNDP 2004). Jordan’s high HDI is attributed to its high life expectancy and education attainment levels. The country has achieved universal healthcare with 98.5% of the population having access to healthcare services in 2004.

The population distribution in Jordan shows that it is a very young country. 35.8% of the population is 0-14 years old and 20.4% of the population is 15-24 years old (CIA 2014). Half of the population is under the age of twenty-four, which has benefits and consequences. Young population means a new labor force to sustain growth. However, youth need investment in

education and health from the government to reach their full potential and be capable citizens (UNDP). A challenge arose in 2004 in which Jordan must be able to create employment for the new incoming youth labor force of 40,000 while providing for the 194,000 unemployed in the country (UNDP). In 2014, it still remains a challenge. Although advances and investment in family planning reduced the fertility rate, population growth rate remains stable. Providing for the youth and taking full advantage of youth abilities will need to be a national priority for strategizing sustainable development in Jordan.

Al-Natheef is one of the seven different communities highlighted in the Human Development Report to represent existing urban poverty. The community was also selected to investigate the impact of migrations on exacerbating poverty. It is a community located in East Amman and marked by dense population of 54,000 (UNDP 2004). Due to lack of profit in rural livelihoods, most of the people living in rural areas sold their livestock and moved to urban cities. However, the migration perpetuates a sense of powerlessness. Since professional skills in rural livelihoods do not translate to jobs in cities, it creates a sense of helplessness (UNDP 2004). The fear in older generation is also passed down to younger generations With fathers expressing their feelings of incompetence, it becomes embedded into young boy's minds as well (UNDP 2004). The sense of helplessness hinders personal growth and capacity building for youth even before entering the labor force. Al-Natheef residents expressed that they do not feel capable as their peers because they are not equipped with skills for tourism as those who have grown up in urban areas (UNDP 2004). This feeling in the community represents the need for vocational training to empower the youth and equip them with appropriate skills to flourish in their environment.

The community has also been impacted by migrations due to the Gulf War and influx of refugees due to regional conflict. The migrations due to Gulf War were beneficial for residents of

Al-Natheef since they could have short-term construction jobs to account for increases in population (UNDP 2004). However, there was a problem of feeling displaced by the migrants. New residents increased the price of rented spaces due to increased demands. Landlords were also reported evicting more economically disadvantaged natives in exchange for more financially secure Gulf immigrants (UNDP 2004). The loss of homes and increased prices of housing worsened the overall feelings of marginalization and poverty in the area. Aside from the Gulf War migrants, Al-Natheef has an informal refugee camp called Mohammad Amin Refugee Camp (Ruwwad 2010). The refugee camp hosted Palestinian refugees originally, but due to recent regional events, they hosted refugees from different nationalities.

Poor communities become a different area for community development. As the economic situation in the neighborhood worsens, social capital also faces a similar decline. Instead of relying on each other during difficult financial times, people are reluctant to leave their homes and interact with their community due to increased fear of existing crime and violence (UNDP 2004). Asset-based community development becomes more important to foster the decreasing informal social networks and instill the idea of togetherness and community. Due to the lack of social capital, it becomes more important to have a trusted community-based organization leading the upcoming changes. The situation in Al-Natheef requires a community-based organization to lead its asset-based community development especially take advantage of youth as a resource.

### **III. Methodology**

The fact that Jordan has such a thriving non-government organization sector made it difficult for the researcher to pick a particular place to investigate. Critical criteria were for the non-governmental organization to be a community-based organization and have been integrated into the area for at least five years. The organization should also show sustainability within its organization model rather than perpetuating dependency from the marginalized residents through fluctuations in funding. Visiting the organization with the School for International Training Health and Community Development Program, researcher determined that Ruwwad established an integrated and sustainable role in the community.

The Arab Fund for Sustainable Development “Ruwwad” is a community based organization in Jabal Al-Natheef in East Amman dedicated to “help disadvantaged communities overcome marginalization through youth activism, civic engagement and education.” (2012 report). The organization was started in 2005 and in the beginning, they focused on bringing essential services to the marginalized population. Ruwwad established the neighborhood’s first police station, health clinic, post office, and completed renovation projects for neighboring schools (Ruwwad 2014 Presentation). They have also been successful at providing legal aid services and establishing Shams Al-Jabal library, the first library for children in the neighborhood (Ruwwad 2014 Presentation). It bridges the gap between the private sector and marginalized community by also requiring corporate responsibility beyond simple financial support. Its private donors include Aramex, Abraj Capital, and Cairo Amman Bank, who provide the organization and its youth with internships, speeches about the working environment, and IT and English skills to better equip them for the real working environment (Ruwwad 2010).

An essential financial assistance provided is the student scholarships for higher education Mousab Khorma Youth Education and Empowerment Fund. Students in Al-Natheef and neighboring communities are invited to apply for the scholarship that will provide them with financial assistance to continue education beyond secondary school. The scholarship does not select students solely based on academic merit, but selection is also based on following traits: sense of initiative, feeling of responsibility towards community, positivity, leadership, and interest in a specific field for study (Ruwwad 2011). The selection was modified to include alternative factors outside of academia to be mindful of the fact that children growing up in marginalized communities might not have had the opportunities to achieve the highest academic excellence. In exchange for the financial assistance, scholarship youth must complete four hours of community service per week in one of the three focus areas. Three focus areas include: psychosocial support, women empowerment program, and child program. Ruwwad uses the scholarship youth as their community force to implement and sustain community programs for the neighborhood. In 2010, Ruwwad approximated that it saved 61,710 JD by not having to hire seventeen full-time staff members and using their youth force instead for community development projects (2010 report).

Researcher decided to focus on capturing the student experiences within Ruwwad since the scholarship is a core foundation for organization's sustainability and role within the neighborhood. Under the guidance of her research mentor, researcher was able to identify key variables to investigate during the student interviews such as asking about education levels of parents to allow for more holistic analysis of student experiences. In the beginning of the research period, investigator wanted to interview two study populations of students and staff members. However, given the short timeframe of the research project and the fact that data

collection period occurred at the same time as the scholarship graduations, it was unreasonable to ask for staff interviews from the organization. As the study progressed, researcher decided to use material culture as an alternative information source for the organization to consider the professional image of the organization. The material culture was provided for the researcher through one of the volunteers working in evaluation and management of the organization and through use of online search engines. The resources include annual reports from years 2010, 2011, and 2012, powerpoint presentation from 2014, and Purdue University student publication on a service project with Ruwwad.

Ruwwad was able to connect researcher to the study population by finding students for the researcher. The researcher decided to choose third and second year students in the scholarship especially since the final year students would be busy with preparing for graduation and upcoming exams. However, it was important to collect a student population who has had sufficient experience with the scholarship as to not let the unfamiliarity impact the student opinion on their experience. Three years was an appropriate amount of time to become accustomed to the program and realize its positive impacts on self. Since the students will be from surrounding neighborhoods and come to the organization's headquarters to complete their community service, researcher decided to conduct her interviews in a private space provided by the organization. Although the space was meant to be private due to limited space of the organization, a few staff members were present during the student interviews. The lack of complete privacy was a challenge to ensuring full protection of student opinions and responses.

Due to the limited language skills of researcher, students were given an option of using a translator to speak in Arabic to ease their discomfort. Ruwwad provided the translation services for the researcher by using one of their student volunteers or one of the staff members.

Researcher decided to use a translator to prevent language from being a barrier to freedom of expression and decrease the potential for miscommunication and misinterpretation on both sides of communication. During the interview, researcher asked for follow-up questions and clarifications from both students and translator if any responses appeared to be unclear. The use of conversation-style interview allowed the researcher to limit the chances of misinterpretation.

While staff members and those affiliated with the organization were present during the interviews, researcher made sure to explicitly state that their responses to the questions would not affect their scholarship or relationship with the organization. By presenting the consent form and proposed outcomes of the project in a transparent manner, researcher validated that every participant realized that investigation was solely to hear their experiences without an anterior motive. The students had the choice to wait until completion of the interview to sign the consent form in which they could opt to protect their identity or to be referred to by name throughout my paper. The consent form was translated into Arabic to ensure that students will understand the document completely before signing to protect their rights.

An obstacle that arose during data collection is due to harsh weather conditions that occurred on one of the data collection days. The weather prevented two of the eight intended informants from showing up to the organization since driving was very dangerous. The weather reduced my sample size from eight informants to six informants, limiting the amount of available information. Originally, another one of my informants cancelled last minute, but the organization was able to find another interviewees last minute. The last replacement informant was only a second year, but the researcher recorded data on the participant requiring a slight variation on the population of interest. The data pool decreased from eight intended interviews to six interviews.

The fact that the researcher's data collection period took place within the final week of preparation for this year's graduation presented a challenge. Due to the busy schedules of the organization staff members, it was impossible to find available times for staff interviews. Researcher had to reconsider her study population and scope of her project. Without staff opinions, the research project is limited to individual perceptions and narratives in the scholarship. Researcher increased the number of student interviews from four to eight projected interviews to allow for more data analysis. She also requested more material culture from the organization to have another source of information outside of student interviews for more robust analysis.

Another obstacle to research was the required time period to receive organization clearance. The project was delayed since investigator had to gain organization approval after IRB approval had been attained. With more time to collect data and more time before the student graduations, researcher would have been able to have a bigger sample size and therefore finalize more significant results using quantitative analysis. With the time restraint of the research project, obtaining organization approval delayed data collection for another week, which rushed the project.

A long-term volunteer from Australia who is working for a year with Ruwwad to assist with monitoring and evaluation supervised and advised my interviews. She had experience conducting interviews and provided me with feedback after my first day of data collection. While she approved of my interview questions, she told me that modifying the questions so that they are more open-ended would allow for more creativity and active thinking from informants. She also advised me that leaving the questions more open especially when asking for background about education levels of parents. Open questions would be more sensitive to the emotions of the

informants rather than making them feel embarrassed about their background. Before my second data collection, I altered my questions so that I could be broader in my initial question then ask follow-up questions if the information is not willingly provided by the informants.

Changing of the interview questions created variations in data collection. Having such a small sample size, the changes in research questions weakened the data analysis if the answers were to be quantitatively analyzed. To honor the perspectives and experiences of individual informants, the data will be presented qualitatively. Rather than being able to evaluate the success of the organization, the data will allow me to give highlights on how the scholarship has impacted the student population. It has weakened the depth and breadth of the research although individual stories from the organization are important assets and values to understand to assess impact of the CBO. Relying on material culture as an alternative source of information also introduces positive bias into the study since organizations will attempt to represent itself in the most impressive manner.

Due to the restrictions of space for the interviews, the presence of staff members could have influenced student responses. It has definitely decreased the legitimacy and quality of the data collected and analysis. When asked about what she wanted to change about Ruwwad, participant six looked at the translator and around the room before replying that she did not want to answer that question. Not having the staff perspectives also reduced the depth of the project since student-teacher relationships cannot be discussed. Comparisons between population perspectives cannot be completed within this research project since staff members were too busy to meet with the researcher.

#### **IV. Results and Analysis**

Asset-based community development theory is a positive outlook on available resources in a marginalized community to allow building upwards rather than ruminate on existing problems. The belief is to support development through mobilizing its assets rather than implementing a top-down approach in which community sits idly waiting for help to come. It presents community development as an active process involving the residents rather than a passive progress. Ruwwad has shown the success of using the youth as an asset for community building in Al-Natheef not only by its successes achieved in the community, but also by its students' reported positive outcomes. The research project has reinforced the idea that focus on strengths of the community nurtures growth as much as starting with addressing the existing problems in the area.

Community projects were accomplished by partnerships between project staff, community members, other community organizations, and youth. Ruwwad had the role of supporting initiatives and projects proposed by the community members and youth. Sometimes, it provided resources through recruiting international partners and volunteers to address needs as seen with the waste management project with Purdue University (Frank and Rosenthal 2012). The organization's commitment to existing merely as a community-based organization rather than an authority figure in the community is exemplified through the extent of their involvement in community projects.

The organization launched "6 Minutes Campaign for Joy of Reading" in 2011 through the Arab Literature Project. The project was created to address the problem of illiteracy in the community, which is only exacerbated by having a high school drop-out rate of 17 percent in Al-Natheef (Ruwwad 2011). The leadership teams consisted of people from the community –

mothers, librarians, education professionals from the community, and teachers. They were the leadership team that investigated the root cause of the issue. The teams conducted research and through data analysis, they decided the approach to increase reading by involving families and promoting reading for leisure. Ruwwad took a secondary role throughout the project and only facilitated the project's implementation. It was responsible for providing trainings for leadership teams, staff members for support, in-kind and financial support such as meeting spaces (Ruwwad 2011). The project also utilized different areas of Ruwwad's reach and utilized the regular school outreaches as a platform for the six minutes campaign. Even without the organization's leadership, the program celebrated its achievements. The initiative was able to recruit 1735 women who committed to creating women's reading circles and read daily to their children (Ruwwad 2011). Working with other partners on the national initiative, Ruwwad amplified its impact by connecting its child library with eight other libraries in Amman to share resources and ideas in the future.

The importance of sustainability in Ruwwad operation is emphasized through program design and its long-term vision. Ruwwad oversaw the Jeeran Station, a program that distributed donations from the community and outsiders for the neediest residents. It started merely as a service delivery operation, which would not provide a sustainable solution to the problem but would exist as a quick-fix method. Ruwwad invested its resources and funding to identify 165 families who continually returned to Jeeran Station to find out the causes for their marginalization (Ruwwad 2011). Every family had a different story, but common themes could be identified. Investing time and energy into research allow for Ruwwad to be able to create robust change for these marginalized families and create specific plans for empowerment. The decision to conduct research embodies Ruwwad's commitment to building a sustainable

approach to community empowerment and unwillingness to settle for providing service delivery (Ruwwad 2011).

Ruwwad trusts their youth and invests their resources to support their growth. In their 2012 annual report, they decided that youth are the best vehicle to distribute messages to the community, because they are “receptive to new ideas and willing to invest more in change” (Ruwwad 2012). The scholarship is continued with new group of 150 students coming in every year with the graduating class. Not only do the youth have a role in the community, but they also have the ability to demonstrate leadership in areas including organization structure. Youth lead an initiative to evaluate the role of gender in various aspects of livelihood including education, economics, politics, and health in “Youth Engage in Gender Mainstreaming Project” (Ruwwad 2011). Ruwwad brought Gender Expert Mr. Yousef Saade in for the project to analyze and evaluate gender equity across all three programs. Although it was a youth initiative, the project finalized into changing organization’s approach to program implementation by adding a gender mainstreaming tool to evaluate and monitor each phase of the project. The yearly projects do not conclude at the end of the year, but also contribute to organization in a long-term way by inspiring structural change.

The interviews revealed positive experiences from the student scholars at Ruwwad through the Mousab Khorma Youth Education and Empowerment Fund. Youth commented on the professional experiences gained from participation with Ruwwad through community service projects. Informant one and informant six chose child program to gain more experience working with children to further their goal of becoming teachers. Although they have not taught directly with child program, working with children allows these two women to be more comfortable interacting with students. It is not only through experience, but Ruwwad also provides technical

resources. Through the use of their corporate sponsors, Ruwwad provides free IT and English courses for their students to make them more robust competitors in the future (Ruwwad 2011). These corporate volunteers also hold meetings about various topics about the working environment with scholarship youth periodically (Ruwwad 2011). For informant two, Ruwwad was special, because he was able to learn about working environment. The organization has also made the direct connection for entering the working world. Ruwwad provided the chance for informant three to intern with Aramex through their partnership that lead to a job offer following graduation.

The programs provide opportunities to serve while receiving adult guidance through program officers and trainings from staff members. Some of the students are drawn to specific programs that provide such trainings as a way to develop their capacity to serve. Informant four wanted to switch to psychosocial support program from tutoring, because she wanted to have a program with more structural support. If possible, she wanted to add multiple levels of trainings so that she would be able to improve her skills rather than be satisfied her current abilities. The wish for trainings and skills demonstrate the youth's desire to build their capabilities to become tools in their community. To gain sociopolitical control over their environment, youth realized that trainings and adult support was required. Informant two struggled with connecting to children in the beginning of his scholarship, but his program officers were the first to support him and help him improve his relationships. Now with stronger connections, he has begun to enjoy his service more. The results from this interview support literature finding that youth flourish with appropriate adult guidance rather than increased time involved in service (Sutton 2007).

Common theme across the interviews was the increased appreciation for education. Most of these students had not planned to pursue their education since they did not value continued

studies before they were given the financial support. Informant three had been working as a waiter while studying simultaneously during highschool and he did not realize that he would be continuing his studies after secondary school. He valued financial independence rather than education to support his family. Receiving the scholarship made him realize that financial independence and studies were possible simultaneously. His realization does not only extend to an university degree, but he plans to continue his schooling after a couple years of work experience to obtain a doctorate in Chemistry.

The appreciation for learning is not only limited to academic subjects. Through having exposure to new topics from professional speakers, informant six has realized that learning is continuous. Daradashat is a program to promote freedom of expression through providing the space and opportunity for cultural discussions. Through Daradashat, students are able to meet leaders in the community and corporations. Meeting these critical leaders in the community inspires action and motivation to become leaders. Sharihan Alnsour recounts her experience: “We met government officials and had the chance for our voice to be heard, and to see our voice translate into actual results that benefited our community. Because we had such unprecedented exposure, we also felt we had responsibility to our community to bring their voice forward and hence made a bigger effort to speak and understand the struggles of all different categories of our community” (Ruwwad 2012). Connections to important figures and leadership bring another sense of importance and validity often lacking in marginalized communities like Al-Natheef. Especially for youth to have their opinions and ideas taken seriously by community leaders allows inspiration for the future. With his dream of becoming an entrepreneur in mind, Ala’ a Alsallal discussed his ideas with Mr. Fadi Ghandour who put him in touch with a team of advisors in the corporate world (Ruwwad 2012). This team was his mentors as he progressed

through establishing his own business and implementing his ideas. They provided realistic feedback but supported him both through advice and financially by starting a beginning fund for him (Ruwwad 2012). The ability of Ruwwad to connect students with different types of adult mentors supports youth's visions and potential for growth beyond their limitations created by their socioeconomic background.

The psychosocial benefits of participating in community service were evident in student responses. Through working with adolescents to provide psychosocial support, informant four also mentioned feeling individual benefit as well. Although she had been part of two other community service projects, she felt that she enjoyed psychosocial support the most because she could feel supported while providing a service for the adolescents. Ala'a Alsallal felt uncertain being one of the first volunteers for the newly established IT program when he started his scholarship at Ruwwad. However, through volunteering, he gained skills and confidence in his abilities (Ruwwad 2012). As an IT officer, Alsallal strives to instill the same amount of empowerment in his volunteers. He exchanges his role with his volunteers, giving them the opportunity to have his to give them a sense of responsibility beyond their existing duties (Ruwwad 2012). Being able to explore new possibilities encourages more and bigger dreams. During his interview, informant three briefly mentioned how Ruwwad has transformed his perspective on life: "I realized that I was able to do much more than I thought I could." The sense of hopefulness about his future is a valuable outcome due to the empowerment that he has experienced through Ruwwad. He feels that he has a sense of agency and capability to move forward in his future and dream of new possibilities.

Creating leaders means that empowerment does not end with these individuals but they are passed on to the next generation. In all of the interviewees, there was a desire to teach others and

mentor them as they had been mentored. The sustainability of empowering youth is that they learn how to give to others: “[We] entered Ruwwad as receivers of generosity but leave as providers of more generosity” (Ruwwad 2012). Informant one and six expressed a desire to be the source of information and knowledge for children as their motivation to become a teacher. Even without committing to teaching as profession, students are motivated in ways to contribute to children. Informant three saw similarities between his past and the children in Al-Natheef that motivated him to devote more time to community service: “they had the same hunger I had when I was younger.” Emulating his own struggles in the situations of these children, the responsibility he feels for them is strengthened: “If I turn my back on them, I turn my back on myself.” Given the opportunity to grow beyond their own social position has left these youth with a sense of responsibility to help others realize what they had through Ruwwad. A sense of sociopolitical control – key component of empowerment – requires a desire to engage in policy control to create change in the current environment (Christens and Peterson 2012).

For some students, they had not been exposed to community service before coming to Ruwwad. The mandatory service has awakened a new passion. Informant six has taken on her own personal initiative to tutor two girls from the neighborhood during her free time. Informant four wants to start her own company incorporating community service in another marginalized community similar to Al-Natheef. Ruwwad inspired these individuals to commit more time than required to the community and the organization. All of the interviewed students except one medical school student devoted more time than the mandatory four hours. Students spending more time than required demonstrate their dedication to the organization beyond fulfilling their duties. After joining Ruwwad, the medical student researched another similar community-based organization named Jinjaz to volunteer his time before his studies became his priority (Interview

Four). There is an undeniable trend of seeking more community service with the community after joining the organization: “it taught me to think beyond myself – [to think] about the community” (Interview Six). The wish to continue community service beyond the required amount has also been shown in the literature, so the sustained motivation marks another success of Ruwwad’s programs.

Ruwwad has demonstrated its commitment to asset-based community building through using youth as a community asset. The mutual benefit for youth and the community shows that social capital has been established in Al-Natheef and utilized to maintain sustained action. A relationship is built between the students and Ruwwad. Five out of the six informants affirmed that they felt that they were a member of Ruwwad and when asked whether they felt connected to Al-Natheef, one of the students said: “When you are part of Ruwwad, you are part of Al-Natheef. You cannot be part of organization and not the community, because Ruwwad is the community” (Interview One). The idea of change is not only limited to individual growth but for a greater community vision. As an Al-Natheef resident, participating in community projects has changed a student’s relationship with others in the community. Student has learned how to turn her blame for community residents and negative feelings towards the community into incentive for positive personal change (Interview Six). Instead of blaming others, she wants to find ways to lead others in her effort for community change (Interview Six). The sense of belonging and empowerment is fuel for positive change and energy for mobilization, which are undeniable forces for community organizing and development.

By having varying methods of integration and empowerment, Ruwwad succeeds in making the students feel that they are agents of their own future. Community service provides a critical role of embodying the youth power in the neighborhood. Bringing in community leaders as

mentors and speakers also enhanced a sense of importance and mattering especially for individuals growing up in a marginalized community. The impact of trusting and empowering youth and the community members can be seen with the successful project completion that produces results and leaves individuals looking forward towards the next obstacle. The case study of Ruwwad has been successful in showing how asset-based community development would work in a marginalized community in Jordan.

## **V. Conclusion**

Familiarity and trust are important elements to make community building and development possible. Ruwwad has established themselves over the years from service providers to community partners to sources of empowerment. All of the interviewees report changes in their perspectives on the organizations over the years of involvement. The sustained effort of the organization has granted the community and youth's trust. Only through the relationship building would Ruwwad be able to work as the community-based organization to accomplish asset-based community development. The relationship building at Ruwwad nurtures social capital especially in marginalized areas where most people are afraid to socialize for fear the danger present in the neighborhood. The feeling of safety and comfort changed a student's sense of belonging in the organization: "Ruwwad is a place where everyone interacted with each other in a safe manner. It is a safe space" (Interview One). The feeling of trust and belonging at Ruwwad show that asset-based community development creates a network of community agents rather than a relationship between an organization and its clients. The supportive environment is an unique benefit of this approach to community mobilization that is unattainable through needs-based development.

The research hypothesis that Ruwwad succeeded in mobilizing citizenship in students through community service was proven correct. However, it was not solely the service that nurtured these youth into leaders. Community service had to be supplemented with adult mentors and safe space to engage in conversation and reflection. The successes presented by Ruwwad in Al-Natheef shows that youth as an asset in asset-based community building has potential in the future development of Jordan. Ruwwad boasts successful community projects even while taking a supportive role rather than authoritative one. It has also achieved instilling value of adult mentorship, learning, psychosocial support, to mentor others, and be engaged in community

change within its scholarship students. Not only has the scholarship changed the youth's perspective in the world, but it has also succeeded in equipping the young minds with technical skills and adult mentors beyond graduation into the working environment. Engaging youth in community development, considering the young population distribution, would give Jordan an experienced labor force in the future.

Sustainable organization design through corporate partnership also allows Ruwwad to collaborate with existing community initiatives rather than compete for funding for the same population. Having international and national volunteers aside from student volunteers grants the organization with the capacity to accomplish all of the community projects with skilled professionals. Ruwwad is a true example of the power of relationship building for community mobilization in different levels of organization involvement and among existing sectors. Every individual needs the other agents in the organization to be able to accomplish its mission, which allows for true collaboration and cooperation in their projects.

## **VI. Study Limitations**

The independent research project has biases and limitations that must be addressed. First of all, having the presence of staff members may have created positive bias in the conducted interviews. Even when the staff members left the room, a long-term volunteer was present who supervised the interviews for her own observations. The space for interviews should have been more private and researcher should have emphasized the importance of privacy and confidentiality of student responses when communicating with the organization.

The researcher should have also brought an independent translator for the interviews rather than using a student volunteer from the organization. Although the student volunteer has professional experience with translating for the organization, it could be a conflict of interest to use the volunteer instead of a third party individual. It could have created discomfort in informants as well as peer pressure to have one of their friends hearing and translating their responses. With the translator's affiliation with the organization, he could have also interpreted the questions and responses differently. This problem of miscommunication and re-interpretation is present whenever a translator is used, so language barrier between informants and researcher presents another limitation for the study.

Rather than using convenience sampling from the organization, the investigator should have used random sampling method. With the organization choosing the informants, there is a possibility that they only chose those with a positive experience or those who display commitment with Ruwwad. The sample size is also too small to make reliable conclusions, so researcher should have looked for ways to expand her population such as conducting more interviews or distributing a survey to all of the student scholars.

## **VII. Recommendations for Future Studies**

The present study has only investigated one aspect of Ruwwad's asset-based community building on Al-Natheef. Since it was a small-scale project, it would be important to recreate the project with a bigger sample size. Future investigations are needed to determine the ultimate role of Ruwwad in the surrounding neighborhoods. For a more thorough analysis, the next research project should look into different levels of involvement in the organization. Potential populations for future studies would include staff members of the organization, volunteers for the organization, parents of children involved in the scholarship, and corporate volunteers from the private sector. The definition of the neighborhood should also be widened to include other communities outside of Al-Natheef since students are accepted even when they live in other areas surrounding Al-Natheef. To understand Ruwwad's effect, impact area should be defined clearly in the subsequent independent projects. Another potential for future study is to compare Ruwwad's approach with another similar community-based organization in marginalized area to do a comparative analysis of their approach. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study on a student's transformation throughout their four years of scholarship especially looking at factors such as sense of responsibility, leadership, citizenship, and psychosocial benefit of the organization.

Although the study has observed positive impact of Ruwwad on Al-Natheef, a thorough investigation is required to evaluate the holistic effect on the community. It is important to research Ruwwad's model as the organization expands its reach nationally and internationally. If this approach proves to be successful in mobilizing communities and creating sustainable change, it should be also incorporated into a national strategy to alleviate poverty.

## VIII. Works Cited

### a. Primary Sources

Interview One – Female, Twenty-One, Third Year

Interview Two – Male, Twenty, Third Year

Interview Three – Male, Twenty-One, Fourth Year

Interview Four – Female, Twenty-Two, Fourth Year

Interview Five – Male, Twenty, Third Year

Interview Six – Female, Twenty, Second Year

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## IX. Appendices

### a. Consent Form

# SIT Study Abroad

a program of World Learning



## CONSENT FORM

### 1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to investigate student perspectives on their experience in Mousab Khorma Youth Education and Empowerment Fund provided by Ruwwad. The purpose of the research project is to be able to understand the impact of Ruwwad on their students and their future goals in order to understand the success of the organization.

### Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

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Participant's name printed

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Participant's signature and date

Interviewer's name printed

Interviewer's signature and date

## b. Interview Guide

1. What is your name? How old are you? Are you from Jabal Al-Natheef? Which university do you attend? What year in university are you?
2. Please tell me a little bit about your family.
  - a. Education levels of parents
  - b. Number of siblings
  - c. Jobs of parents
3. Are you the first in your family to receive the scholarship? How did you find out about the scholarship?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about the selection process? If you could change anything about it, what would you change?
5. What are you studying? Tell me about how you chose that subject.
6. Which program are you part of for Ruwwad? Please explain to me a bit about the program and what you do.
  - a. If you could change the program, what would you change?
7. Have you done community service before Ruwwad? Do you do community service outside of Ruwwad now? Would you continue with community service after you graduate from university?
  - a. What projects have you done?
  - b. How many hours per week do you do for Ruwwad?
  - c. Would you do more hours? What is stopping you from doing more hours?
8. What do you think of having reflection after community service?
9. After your three years here, do you feel that you are part of Ruwwad? What does that mean?
  - a. How has your experience changed over the years?
10. Do you feel that you are a part of Jabal Al-Natheef? Has being in Ruwwad changed your views?
11. What are your future plans after graduation?
  - a. Do you want to stay in Jabal Al-Natheef? Do you wish to go abroad?
12. How has being part of Ruwwad influenced your future plans?