WEEK OF COMPASSION SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT REPORT

For Global Ministries

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SECTION 1: Basic Information

Area Office	
Date of Proposal Submission	June 26, 2023
Project Title	National Workshops on Religion, Culture, Higher Education, and Digital Transformation in the Middle East towards Inclusive Citizenship
Project Period	July 1 - December 31, 2023
Name of Local Partner	Dar al-Kalima University (DAK)
Location- *City/State/Country*	Bethlehem, Palestine
Total Amount Received from WoC	$10,000.00
Person Completing Report	Rana Khoury
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SECTION 2: Project Summary

Project Goal

Referring back to your original proposal, what is the overall goal of the project? If your plans have changed from the original proposal, please describe.

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to having more peaceful, resilient and inclusive societies in the Middle East that ensure gender equality, human dignity, justice, and freedom, thus embodying UN's Sustainable Development Goal #16 (to Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies).

To reach the goal, there are two key objectives of this project:

Objective 1: The narrative of religious communities (especially Christian communities) and marginalized groups/individuals (especially women and youth) is appearing in formal public discourse, specifically in academia and culture (popular culture, digital culture, …).

Objective 2: Christian women and youth in the Middle East are implementing community initiatives that help individuals/communities develop resilience and that embody UN's Sustainable Development Goal #16 (to Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies).

Primary Activities Implemented

Describe administrative and programmatic activities implemented in your request for funding.

Four national youth workshops were carried out that followed a June round table in September 2023 in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. The overall total participants were 87 people, with 48 women and 39 men. The theme was similar to the conference, which was: "Culture, Religion, Higher Education, and Digital Transformation in the Southwestern Asia and North Africa/Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities".

The Lebanon workshop was held on September 30, 2023, with 14 participants (10 women; 4 men). Several training segments were facilitated, and dialogue sessions held with the youth, which addressed the following issues: What are the main challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in the realm of arts and culture in Lebanon? How does digital transformation impact activism, and what are the challenges and opportunities it presents for activists? What tools and platforms have redefined activist engagement in the digital era, and what complexities does digital activism face? What is the significance of art in societal development and individual self-expression, especially during challenging times? How can digital transformation amplify the reach of artistic ideas, and what role does social media play in this context? What practical guidance is provided for utilizing Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) for home recording and digital art creation? How has storytelling evolved and remained relevant in the digital age? What impact can compelling storytelling have on one's online presence, and how can it make your work stand out? What are the various applications of AI-generated art, and how does it intersect with traditional artistic creation? What ethical considerations are associated with AI in art, including copyright concerns and biases within AI algorithms? How will participants actively create AI-generated artwork and explore the ethical challenges of this art form? After the workshop, a WhatsApp group was created for follow-up, networking, and future collaborations.

The Jordan workshop was organized in partnership with the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies in Amman, Jordan on September 11, 2023. During the workshop, 9 participants (4 women; 5 men) from different backgrounds were trained. The workshop included interactive dialogue sessions focused on

digital transformation and scientific research; new avenues for reforming Arab education (including opportunities and challenges of digital transformation in higher education); digital transformation and societal/religious discourses with papers presented on models of religious identity among young people and their digitization, and the impact of the proliferation of social media on the issuance of fatwas, highlighting numerous risks and complex drawbacks. The last session was about digital transformation and its impact on culture, particularly in visual and fine arts, and the dominance of digital culture in aesthetics and the arts. Discussions followed the talks, and two hands-on activities took place: one with drawing and colors and another with movement.

The Egypt workshop was held on September 28, 2023, in partnership with 5DVR organization. A total of 27 persons (19 women; 8 men) participated in the workshop, and dealt with the following issues: the challenges and opportunities of preserving cultural heritage in a digital age, along with innovative approaches to cultural adaptation and preservation through technology; digital technology's role in democratizing culture, outreach, cultural access, and online discoverability; the digital transformation of cultural heritage and practical collaboration; the challenges and opportunities of incorporating digital transformation into higher education, sharing best practices and success stories; how to nurture creativity and innovation in higher education through digital innovation, collaborative thinking, and strategic planning.

The Palestine workshop was organized over a two-day period, which took place on September 1-2 in Ramallah, Palestine, with 37 participants, (15 women; 22 men), and 6 facilitators (4 women; 2 men). The participants comprised 40.54% of young people aged 23 to 29. They were academics, practitioners, and artists considered opinion leaders who could influence others, particularly the youth and women populations. The purpose of the workshop was multifold: It was necessary to introduce educators and opinion leaders/makers to the potential and capabilities of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and the emergence of ChatGPT, as part of the digital transformation that is profoundly impacting not only higher education but also culture and arts sector in Palestine. It was also critical to examine the challenges the participants faced in the digital transformation process, including ethical/religious considerations and academic integrity. A third goal was to launch a space where stakeholders could explore together collaborative efforts, including classes and interdisciplinary cognates, as well as community outreach programs and artistic endeavors where these technologies could be integrated and employed to support innovation in teaching delivery for teachers further, learning for students and expressions for artists. Finally, aside from providing a nurturing space for exchange and collaboration, connecting these participants and planting seeds for a shared group identity whose work highly influences youth and women was essential. The goals and overall purpose were translated into four main themes: strategic, organizational, cultural, and people-related. These workshop themes were effectively communicated by employing different formats and techniques in their design. Plenary lectures, small group discussions, team building exercises, reflections/recommendations, and a field visit. Informal discussions were also a critical feature that contributed significantly to the workshop's success.

Challenges and Actions Steps Taken to Resolve

Summarize what organizational and environmental (political, social, infrastructural, etc.) challenges arose during this past year that hindered the project achievement of its goals. Also, include how the project/program addressed them.

During the time of implementation of the activities, there were no challenges worth noting. However, soon after, and within very few weeks of completing all workshops, the latest chapter of a series of wars on Gaza was launched during October 2023, and proved to be unprecedented in its scale in terms of the loss of life, the destruction of infrastructure and the extreme scarcity of food and basic needs. To date,

according to the UN statistics, close to 34,000 fatalities and 75,000 wounded have resulted from the war, with a large percentage being women and children. Also, more than 75% of the population (1.9m) have faced internal displacement due to targeting areas first in the north of Gaza and now in the south. In addition, education in Gaza has been discontinued and most of the universities and schools have been used to shelter the displaced population and/or destroyed by shelling and attacks. The situation in the West Bank is no better as the community, including the young people and women, has also been suffering as they observe the continuous bombing of civilians and results in feelings of anger, fear and desperation. In addition, the community has been subjected to a dramatically increased daily use of Israeli military force and exposure to Israeli settler intimidation and settler violence, not only when travelling on the West Bank roads but close to their homes within Palestinian towns and cities, which has caused a rise in the killing and imprisonment of young people. As a result, in the last quarter of the year 2023, it was difficult to implement any in-person activities, due not only to safety concerns but also to the trauma and anxieties that have emerged as a result of these horrid conditions.

In the rest of the project countries, the situation was not better. Almost daily demonstrations have taken place in Jordan, and to a lesser degree Egypt, calling for immediate ceasefire, while in Lebanon the population has had similar concerns of increased threats of a possible war with Israel. As a result, any activities that appear to be of a 'political' nature have been severely curtailed, and even more restrictions on civic spaces than before are now being practiced.

As such, for 2023, the project activities were implemented prior to the War on Gaza, and therefore, there was no need for action to enable implementation. However, DAK began to work intensively during the first quarter of 2024 to prepare for the year and to ensure that future activities, including workshops, be implemented smoothly and timely. Thus, it has undertaken the following steps:

- DAK has launched a critical program called "Healing War Trauma: Art Therapy and Psychosocial Interventions". DAK University, with the only graduate program in Palestine in Art Therapy, has been providing training to students and caregivers (and here we mean teachers, parents, medical professionals, etc.) on how to do PFA and art therapy not only in the West Bank but even in Gaza within the different shelters. In addition, DAK has been offering group counseling to students, faculty, students' families, and other communities we serve, as well as psychosocial activities and awareness raising public presentations that are carried out through webinars by experts in the field. At the same time, DAK is developing a guide in Arabic for all to use regarding tools and mechanisms to deal with anxieties and fears. This program is growing on a very large scale.

- Since February, DAK made the decision to have the activities in person again, but also offering a hybrid format for those who cannot reach the activity for any reason.

- DAK has been coordinating very closely with all partners in other countries regarding the future workshops and all agree that the first phase of the shock has subsided and now it is time to plan the next cycle while addressing and mitigating any challenges that may emerge as a result of the war.

SECTION 3: Project Results

Client/Participant Success Story <u>or</u> Details of a Program Achievement

Two significant outcomes materialized as a result of this workshop in Palestine, despite the War on Gaza. The first was a collaboration between the Dar al-Kalima University and the Higher Council for Innovation and Excellence, a governmental body that provides critical access to know-how, resources, and networks. The second outcome was a series of workshops involving Techno Park, to upgrade the capacities of DAK University faculty, students, and artists.

Short and Long Term Results

Realistically link program activities to the difference they are making. Describe how the project's activities are making a difference in the short and long-term for both the client and the community.

When we examine the overall impact of the workshops as activities that have been implemented under the Religion and State program, we note the following short and long term results:

Short-term:

- Working with Christian women and youth through the national workshops qualified them to lead and/or participate in implementing community initiatives that seek to reach the SDG goals#5 and #16. Based on feedback directly from them as well as the partners, more than 60% of those who were trained in 2023 were actively involved in different initiatives.

- Having a greater number of participants in the workshops than originally set (87 instead of 80) with 55.17% women representation is indicative of the high demand among the different groups for such trainings, the good reputation of the program and DAK, the appreciation of the uniqueness of the workshops' themes and topics, and recognition of the value for such training. These workshops were critical to qualifying the participants to formulate, lead, and/or fully engage with community initiatives that are inspired by and embody SDGs #5 and #16.

Long-term:

- The visibility of active young Christian leadership in the project countries is enhanced, represented by the young men and women who participated in the national workshops and were actively engaged in the launching/leading community initiatives and other types of activities in their societies. Several participants from different backgrounds have commented on their appreciation of meeting, for some of the first time, Arab Christians and other minorities.

- Safe and courageous spaces have been created where people from different backgrounds and contexts come together to discuss, debate and ultimately work together towards shared values regardless of their political or religious views and affiliations. The project's leadership purposely selected participants that represented different backgrounds and contexts. This is so as to expose the target groups to 'others' with the aim that relationships and networks are built, and common interests are developed, and so they begin to collaborate and as such stereotypes that may lead to discrimination against each other is reduced. This rationale worked and it was clearly demonstrated among the young people as they went about jointly developing the community initiatives and working on different community events. The high number of participants and the high representation of women in those activities also demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach.

- Concepts such as gender equality and justice, pluralism, inclusive societies, Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and so on have become more familiar and part of the everyday language and conversations among the target groups and their communities as they sought about implementing community initiatives and community activities, the framework of which are the SDGs #5 and #16.

Best Practices*:*

Please Identify and Describe processes or practices that you implemented in this project that were successful, and that you recommend for use in similar situations.

The three main important processes and practices that were implemented that are recommended to use in the future, especially now with the War on Gaza are the following:

- Art continues to be a powerful tool in communicating self- and group expressions, challenging the conditions that the region goes through, including wars and authoritarianism. Its power stems not only from the spaces that it creates for creative, free expression and dialogue but also its ability to nurture deep long-term relations despite the differences and reach out to the masses with critical civil society and cultural values and issues.
- Digital transformation is key to maintaining momentum when in-person activities are not an option. As the war continues, connecting with partners and participants has been critical, and without the digital platforms, this would not have been possible.
- In relation to digital transformation as well, it has its obvious benefits but also threats. It became clear that the digital transformation would necessitate looking for a new approach that harvests the benefits while being critically aware of the threats. This would need further examination when planning the next phase.

Quantitative Results

Provide*" numeric indicators" of your work in serving people and implementing project activities.*

PEOPLE Served *Avoid Duplicate Counts between Categories*	# of People Served	Comments or Description
Women *age 18+*	48	
Men *age 18+*	*39*	
Youth *age 13-18*		
Children *age 0-13*		
Families/Households		

Disabled			
Other: *specify such as employed, unemployed, immigrants, etc.*			

ACTIVITIES Implemented *-Specify Activities-*	# of Activities or Service Units	# of Participants or Beneficiaries *If applicable*	Comments or Description
Workshops	4	87	

Examples of Activity Descriptions: food distribution, legal assistance, trainings, workshops, clinical services, TB screening, intakes, pigs raised, wells dug, school supplies provided (units), etc.

SECTION 4: Financial Management

Required Attachment: How was funding used?

Provide a financial report of how gifts were put to use in support of your project. A template for this financial report is attached for your reference. Any report that does not follow this template will not be considered a completed report and not eligible for applying for WOC Sustainable Development grant.

Please see attachment.

National Youth Training Workshops 2023
(Palestine, Jordan, Cairo, Lebanon)
1/7/2023 - 31/12/2023

Budget Line	Budget	Actual	Deviation	Deviation %	Comment
National Youth Training Workshops	$ 10,000.00	$ 10,000.00	$ -	0%	
Travel, Accommodations and Meals	$ 6,000.00	$ 6,199.00	$ (199.00)	-3%	
Honoraria/fees for trainers	$ 2,400.00	$ 2,375.00	$ 25.00	1%	
Coffee/tea breaks	$ 1,600.00	$ 1,426.00	$ 174.00	11%	
Total	$ 10,000.00	$ 10,000.00	$ -	0%	