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Photo source: betterplace.org

The April edition of the Global Cooperation Newsletter profiles activities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The article written by Dr. Moussa Charafeddine describes multiple challenges facing the Friends of the Disabled Association, a non-governmental organization affiliated with ICSW. The organization deals with the social protection of one of the most vulnerable groups in Lebanon—persons with disability. We are also publishing information about a recent study on social protection issues in the region.

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW Executive Director and Editor of the Newsletter

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FRIENDS OF THE DISABLED ASSOCIATION

**Advancing the rights of persons with
disability and their families: forty
years journey**

By

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[https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOf
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Increasing public awareness of disability issues in Lebanon and concern about the rights of children and adults with physical and intellectual disabilities has become an important part of the political agenda of the country.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, the National Council on Disability, and the National Organization on the Rights of the Disabled has undertaken serious measures to acknowledge the rights of such children. In the light of this, a special identification card has been issued to every individual with physical and/or intellectual disability, so as to facilitate the provision of medical services and acceptance in various institutions. The total number of ID cards issued to date is estimated at 98,000. According to the data of the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs the prevalence of individuals with all kind of disabilities is 5-10% of the total population. The World Health Organization estimates that about 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. This global estimate for disability is on the rise, owing to population ageing and the rapid spread of chronic diseases, as well as improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability.

[http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/
2011/report/en](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en)

The current situation. Rehabilitation services in Lebanon are mostly run by non-governmental organizations (NGO's). It is estimated that only 7% of the people with disability in Lebanon receive rehabilitation and educational and vocational training services from the NGO institutions and day-care centers. The Disability Identification Cards holders receive medical and paramedical services from the related public sectors. Beside that, ID card holders have various other services such as wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, artificial limbs, hearing aids, tax exemptions and discounts on public transport. We don't offer any kind of financial aids or cash transfers. Persons with disability don't receive any kind of clinical, or dental services. The National Social Security Fund (NSSF) covers medical, maternity, and clinical services only for those who contribute to the NSSF. The present situation reveals that the rehabilitation sector is facing various problems in Lebanon, some of which are:

- a) Lack of accurate data. The compilation of precise statistical information on the number of children with disabilities is impeded by the reluctance of parents to participate in data collection owing to the social and psychological impact on a child and his family as a result of the disability.
- b) Shortage of professional help. Although there is a growing awareness among the populace concerning intellectual disability, the lack of professional help for families remains a huge challenge, and much support is needed to raise the level of understanding and skills required to deal with a child with disability
- c) Deficiencies of social inclusion. The absence of a coherent integration policy aimed at children with disabilities in Lebanese schools puts new demands on the existing rehabilitation institutions, forcing them to expand their services to embrace all students with different disabilities.
- d) Shortage of special educators and therapeutic personnel. The scarcity of specialised qualified personnel in the field of special education and clinical therapies is yet another problem facing rehabilitation institutions in Lebanon. While two local universities offer programs aimed at

preparing educators for teaching children with disabilities, in practice these programs are more directed towards children with specific learning disabilities.

- e) Low level of clinical services and poor equipment. Medical consultations, laboratory tests, dental services are not covered by the Government. The low level of care received by the persons with intellectual disabilities and inadequate support provided to their families is rampant. In some cases it is appalling low. This is often combined with the fact that all types of available institutions are forced to share facilities, which creates additional obstacles in the provision of care.
- f) Skewed distribution of services. Concentration of special care and rehabilitation centers in the Central Beirut and Mount Lebanon districts creates some lacunae, leaving the suburbs and certain regions like the South and Chouf Mountains almost without service. The lack of nationwide reach of specialized services has debilitating effects on persons with disability. Ignorance, poverty and bias against persons with disability increase the burden on them and their families.

The Association

The Friends of the Disabled Association is a lay-community, non-profit, and non-political association. It was founded in the year 1978 by a group of concerned parents whose children had various disabilities. In the last 40 years, the association has been generously supported by many prominent members of Lebanese society, enabling it to help destitute and disadvantaged families.

The basic orientation of the Association is geared towards advocating the rights of persons with disability and their families, empowering parents to seek and obtain information, discuss common concerns and decide on the best environment for their children. The achievement of this objective is sought through family support groups and counseling specifically designed to promote the active participation of these parties in the learning process. Such groups thus play a key role in enhancing the quality of the delivered services. Their involvement aimed at inclusion

will ensure that these unusual children will, in due course, be fully integrated into society.

Over the past forty years, the Association played a pioneering role in placing an emphasis on the need to promote inclusive education and speed up rehabilitation for children with different abilities. By the same token, the Association promoted and stimulated family counseling and public awareness, and drew attention to the right of every child to get an appropriate education to increase his or her life chances. Simultaneously, the importance of preventive measures and the viability of early intervention became accepted concepts and, in the process, the Association was able to help students reach their full potentials through special programs and vocational training allowing them to play a decent and productive role in the community.

Over the past 40 years, the Association has grown from a single operating site to three separate residential facilities that are not adequately structured for the use of rehabilitation centers. We started services from a very small service center and now we have a multidisciplinary referral institute that provides comprehensive services for persons with disability. In a sense, the Association has been able to survive while facing all the challenges that persons with disability were facing. The armed conflicts and turmoil that Lebanon has been facing over the past 30 years created additional obstacles, increasing the burden on children with disabilities, not least owing to the absence of public funding. During these tragic years the Association was dependent on international support provided by international funding agencies and some local supporters. Today, Friends of the Disabled Association serves 124 students, using a state-of-the-art 7300 sq meters building. This building brings under the same roof a variety of programs (1) special classes, (2) early intervention, (3) paramedical rehabilitation section, (4) sport section, (5) autism section, (6) vocational training school, (7) gardening section (8) community outreach section and (9) administrative section.

Mission

The mission of the Friends of the Disabled Association (FDA) has been set with the goal of meeting the individual learning needs of

children and youth with disabilities, enabling them to:

- 1) identify and realize their potential;
- 2) develop skills and attitudes compatible with lifelong learning;
- 3) align work in the realm of learning with academic subjects;
- 4) provide scope and abilities that will make them for life, even
- 5) though within narrow limits;
- 6) be involved in production to increase their social interaction
- 7) with the community; and
- 8) become knowledgeable, self-assured and productive citizens.

Target Groups

Services are provided to the following target groups:

- 1) Intended Beneficiaries: Infants, children, and adults with learning disability, physical disability, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, brain damage, and multiple handicaps.
- 2) Personnel preparation who undergo capacity-building and continuing education: Individuals working with these children and/or students working towards their degree in Special Education, community para-professionals, family members, and out-patient cases.

Objectives

Objective 1

Education and rehabilitation of 152 students with disabilities.

Objective 2

Creation of a model-unit for vocational training.

Objective 3

Procurement of residential dormitories to prepare students to move to their

communities where they become a part of the daily living of others.

Objective 4

Awareness-raising campaigns prepared and conducted for families, volunteers, and community personnel.

Objective 5

Inception of an Inclusive Early Intervention Unit.

Objective 6

Development of an Out-patient Department.

Objective 7

Participate and assistance in the establishment of mini community-based centers for rehabilitation.

Objective 8

Organization of a comprehensive training program to provide instruction in various arrays of special education subjects for resource people in the field of inclusive education.

Objective 9

Campaigning for inclusive education with policy makers so as to secure inclusive quality education for all

In the year 1992, the FDA saw that the level of need had risen at a faster rate than the level of services provided by existing social welfare institutions, particularly given the war and turmoil, which has prevented care-giving institutions from remodelling or developing. Since then, the FDA has been planning to develop its level of services and extend it to a greater number of beneficiaries. Concurrent with that, the Association included in its overall development plan an increase in the quality and quantity of specialized manpower trained to provide services to children, particularly in professional capacities.

New study

Social Protection After the Arab Spring

International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, Brasilia, Brazil 2017

The above study prepared by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

explores the current state of non-contributory social protection in the MENA region as a whole, as well as in some specific countries. The Centre represents a partnership between the United Nations and the Government of Brazil to promote South-South learning on social policies. The IPC-IG specializes in research-based policy recommendations aimed at fostering the reduction of poverty and inequality, as well as the promotion of inclusive growth.

This issue of the Policy in Focus series comprises articles from leading scholars, researchers and practitioners to discuss challenges in social protection schemes from various perspectives, including how MENA countries have been coping with and learning from the recent economic and humanitarian crises. The authors go in depth to explore the historical roots of social-welfare systems in the region, including the important role of religious charities, as well as to analyse current gaps in social protection coverage. One of the lessons learned is that the huge humanitarian assistance framework set up to deal with millions of IDPs and refugees can offer valuable lessons to social-protection reformers in MENA countries. The authors come to the conclusion that a range of policy instruments created to support refugees can drive innovations in traditional social protection systems.

For more details:

http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/PIF40_Social_protection_after_the_Arab_Spring.pdf

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