The socio-economic crisis that Lebanon has been facing for the past few years, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, augmented the deterioration of the living conditions which led to an unprecedented rise in the number of domestic violence victims. Moreover, the access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services including family planning became more difficult and unaffordable to the average Lebanese families. In this alerting context, the need for raising community awareness about SRHR and VAWG is necessary more than ever.

Search for Common Ground (Search) is implementing the Partners for Justice project in partnership with ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD) to reduce VAWG in Lebanon by shifting the community members perceptions and attitudes towards patriarchal norms that define masculinities, and addressing the root causes of VAWG.

**Under the project’s first specific objective:** Empower men and boys to work with women to become allies and champions of gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls, 20 youth leaders from 10 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) received a training of trainers on Program Ra and cascaded this training to 220 youth from different Lebanese communities, including Mount Lebanon, North, South and Bekaa. The training focused on raising awareness about SRHR and gender related topics, with the aim of creating more allies for gender equality and prevention of VAWG.

Following the awareness raising sessions, 79% of the youth from the communities reported an increase in their knowledge on SRHR, masculinities, and gender related issues; 67% of the males and 86% of the females. Furthermore, 95% of them expressed that these activities provided them with a safe space to learn and discuss SRHR related topics. As many of them mentioned, these topics are most often considered as ‘taboo’ or socially unacceptable to be discussed. However, these sessions allowed them to understand the importance of SRHR and its effects not only on the individual, but also on the community.

"This training was an opportunity for me to learn about sexual health, since these topics can't be discussed usually.

- Male youth community member from the North"

After completing the implementation of the training, Nabad organization in the Bekaa received requests from about 400 community members who heard about the training from the participants and who expressed interest in joining the SRHR training and learning more about the topic. So, the youth leaders in Nabad started an SRHR awareness raising program led by their CSO as a continuation of the Program Ra cascade training targeting new participants from the region.

"After finishing the training, 10 participants who refused discussing these topics at the beginning ended up inviting members from their families and relatives to attend the training as they realized the importance of SRHR. So far, we have received about 400 participation requests from Ali Al Nahri area.

- Mohamad Ismail, male youth leader representing Nabad CSO from Bekaa"

The youth champions under the Partners for Justice project utilized a conflict-sensitive approach in their outreach in the community under this activity. Many youth champions did one-to-one meetings with youth in the community and their parents to explain the details of the training sessions and the importance of SRHR. They also convened with influential figures in some communities such as religious leaders to ensure their support to the dissemination of these sessions.

This conflict-sensitive approach that the youth champions utilized increased their credibility in the communities as a high number of youth, with the support of their parents, showed their willingness to attend the sessions.

"A larger space with more seats was needed due to the unexpected high registration where we tried to reach only 20 participants but we ended up having more than 120 youth willing to engage.

- Focal Point in North"

"You are teaching our children and helping them develop their knowledge on such sensitive subjects which are very important for their protection and we want to continue engaging in such activities.

- One father from Bekaa"

At the end of the training, the youth leaders representing the Learning Through Action (LTA) CSO in the Bekaa created a Whatsapp group including themselves and the participants; males and females; as a safe communication channel for sharing any information or questions about SRHR.

"I'm very interested in continuing to deliver this training since I believe that I can make a change. My colleagues and I at LTA are planning to give a ToT for the cascade training participants to capacitate them to deliver this knowledge to their communities.

- Badiaa Hussein, youth leader representing LTA CSO from Bekaa"

Another success to highlight is the desire of some female participants who are about to get married to share their personal concerns and ask for more information about family planning and sexual health in the plenary without feeling any shame or timidity.

"Young women communicated with us following the sessions to ask about SRHR services availability in the area.

- Kamar Houjairy, youth leader representing Josour Al Nour CSO from Arsal, Bekaa"

Moreover, the sessions witnessed the participation of health specialists such as nurses and local midwives who shared their appreciation of such awareness raising sessions and stressed on their importance across the communities.
As the youth champions of the Partners for Justice project continue to cascade the knowledge they learned to their fellow youth community members, a gender-sensitive young generation is being created. One that is able to reflect on their own gender identities, to make their own decisions relating to their health, and be encouraged to help those in need and spread awareness around VAWG.

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The training is very useful! I work as an activist in women’s health awareness raising, so this is an opportunity for me to ensure that my information is correct and updated.

- Female youth community member from Bekaa

After completing the implementation of program Ra, we received new volunteering requests that showed the interest of youth in joining our team.

- Najib Matar, youth leader representing Centre de Lecture et d’Animation Culturelle in Kaa, Bekaa.

Search is the world’s largest dedicated peacebuilding organization, and supports programming in 32 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, the Middle East, and the United States. Search’s mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict from adversarial means to shared solutions. Search has worked in Lebanon since 1996 through a diverse array of programming, including social cohesion, peace education, and media production.

ABAAD is a non-governmental organization that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable social and economic development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region. ABAAD advocates for the development and implementation of policies and laws that enhance women’s effective participation. With the purpose of ending gender-based violence, ABAAD further adopts a holistic care approach providing protection and support services to Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors.