

Promoting youth-driven change

Overview

Young people have the potential to be powerful agents of change. Yet in the Arab region, they often lack the opportunity and support to make an impact, particularly when they come from marginalized communities. Fadi Ghandour, in launching Ruwwad Al-Tanmeya, sought to find a way for the private sector to help mobilize youth and enable them to lead change efforts in their communities.

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- The opportunity for impact
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- How the initiative works
- Progress and results
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● RUWWAD AL-TANMEYA A bold giving initiative



Quick facts

Ruwwad Al-Tanmeya

INTRODUCTION

Ruwwad Al-Tanmeya is a community-based organisation that uses civic engagement, youth activism, and education as pathways to community development and progress. It does so by leveraging partnerships with the private sector, government, and civil society organizations.

DETAILS

Primary philanthropist:

Fadi Ghandour

Established:

2005

Primary geography:

Jabal Al Natheef, Al-Beidha ("Little Petra"), and Al-Tafleh in Jordan; Ezbet Khairallah in Cairo, Egypt; Jabal Muhsen and Bab El-Tebbaneh in Tripoli, Lebanon; and Qibya, Ni'lin, and Der Qiddis around Budrus in Palestine

Primary focus:

Youth and community development

WHY BOLD?

Ruwwad breaks from status quo approaches to philanthropy by providing a channel for the private sector to engage directly with communities; by supporting disenfranchised communities to help drive their own development; and by helping young people to act as agents of change.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR PHILANTHROPISTS



Listen

Invest in listening deeply and securing quick wins to gain the community's trust



Engage the community

Engage citizens to develop better solutions and foster agency



Apply all assets

Demonstrate how to engage beyond funding, by investing time and expertise

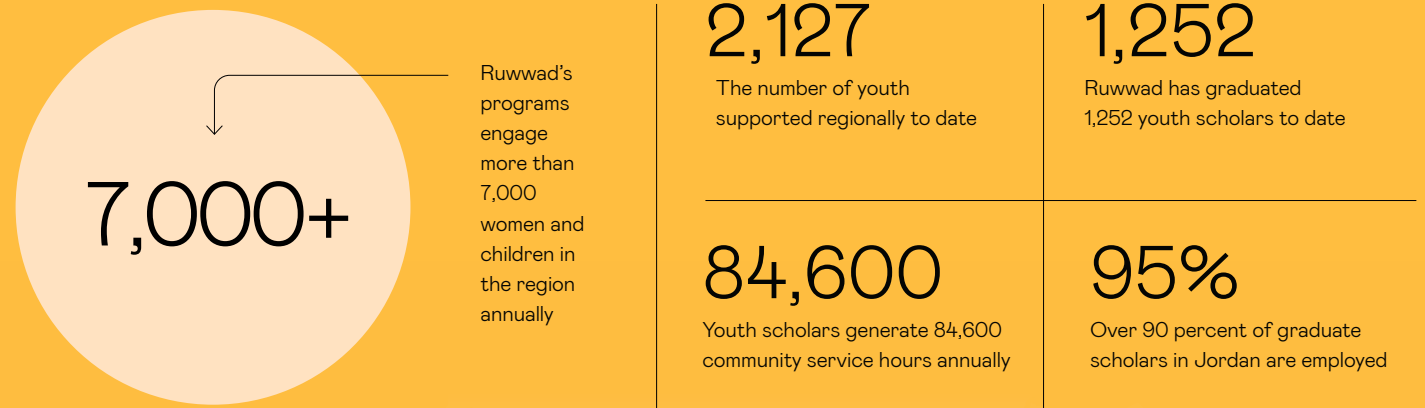
In numbers

Ruwwad

Al-Tanmeya

Ruwwad helps young people realize their potential and become agents of change, creating broader impact in their communities.

FAST FACTS



RUWWAD'S RESULTS IN NUMBERS

Ruwwad's area of focus

2,127

Ruwwad's programs have supported 2,127 youth to date

Year Ruwwad began operations

Cumulative through 2019

- Youth benefiting from scholarships
- Youth scholars graduated
- Youth enrichment workshops/sessions offered

Annual as of 2019

- Women benefiting from literacy programs, awareness sessions and income-generating projects
- Children benefiting from Ruwwad's programs
- Families served by the Community Help Desk

	Egypt 2012	Jordan 2005	Palestine 2012	Lebanon 2012
Year Ruwwad began operations				
Cumulative through 2019				
- Youth benefiting from scholarships	386	1,244	222	275
- Youth scholars graduated	255	810	95	92
- Youth enrichment workshops/sessions offered	216	560	341	281
Annual as of 2019				
- Women benefiting from literacy programs, awareness sessions and income-generating projects	480	412		539
- Children benefiting from Ruwwad's programs	2,100+	3,000+	4,100	604
- Families served by the Community Help Desk		2,000+		1,000+

The opportunity for impact

In November 2005, Jordanian Fadi Ghandour, a founder of global logistics company Aramex International, had decided it was time to push his company beyond its long history of social corporate sustainability work and into a more transformative role in the country's marginalized neighborhoods.

"People on the margins feel that they are forgotten," says Ghandour. "Youth especially feel they are not benefiting from social or economic gains that the rest of society has received."

Ghandour believed that young people, if given a chance, held the potential to lead their communities out of the shadows and towards a tangibly better future. At the same time, he clearly saw the challenges they faced, as Jordan struggled to provide its large youth population with the opportunities and means to become active citizens. Nearly 70 percent of the country's population was below the age of 30, and 22 percent were between the ages of 15 and 24.¹ One third of this group was unemployed and seeking work.²

The challenges were especially acute in Jordan's disenfranchised communities and refugee settlements, such as those in East Amman, which suffered from very high rates of poverty and unemployment. Ghandour understood that government, by itself, could not lift these communities over the myriad obstacles they faced. There was a real need for a more focused, collaborative approach that could enable youth and communities to actively partake in their own progress.

Ghandour thought the private sector could do more in this vein. In his view, most companies simply equated philanthropy with charity and stuck to the status quo, whether donating food at Ramadan or writing checks to NGOs. But Ghandour saw that companies like Aramex had the capital — as well as the networks, influence, and expertise in matching skill sets to market demand for labor — to help address one of the root causes of poverty and high unemployment in marginalized communities. Even more importantly, he believed they had a responsibility to do so.

Ghandour concluded that the absence of potent, private-sector philanthropy in Jordan's disenfranchised communities presented a wide-open opportunity: to match the private sector's potential with a model for impact that centered on enlisting young people as catalysts of social and economic change. ●

70%

When Ruwwad was founded, 70 percent of the country's population was below the age of 30, but one in three was unemployed.



A bold investment in marginalized communities

“People on the margins feel that they are forgotten. Youth especially feel they are not benefiting from social or economic gains that the rest of society has received.”

● **Fadi Ghandour**, founder, Ruwwad



In 2005, Fadi Ghandour invested his own wealth, as well as funding from Aramex, to launch Ruwwad Al-Tanmeya (meaning “entrepreneurs for development”), a community-based organisation that would provide a way for the private sector to partner with government, civil society organizations, and marginalized communities.

He mobilized Jordanian businessmen to contribute to Ruwwad’s seed funding, including Khaled Al Masri — at the time chairman of Cairo Amman Bank and today chairman of Astra Group — who remains vice-chairman of Ruwwad Jordan’s board of directors. Through these collaborations, Ruwwad would work deeply in targeted areas, helping youth who live in economically and socially harsh conditions to access education, volunteer opportunities, cultural nourishment, business skills, and community organizing, in an effort to drive community development.

The goal: to support people in struggling communities, as the experts of their own locales, to reduce inequities and solve problems.

From the outset, Ruwwad broke from status quo approaches in three fundamental ways. First, it took bold steps to focus on and invest in young people, as Ghandour believed they had the energy and capacity to drive change in their communities. Ruwwad would provide scholarships and programs to help youth acquire the knowledge, skills, and networks “to actively pursue their dreams for a better future.”³

It would also enlist youth in community service work to help them “understand how they can mobilize their assets and resources to create the change that they want to see in the world,” says Samar Dudin, Ruwwad’s regional director and head of programs. Further, Ruwwad would create a “safe space” for youth — a forum in the community for them to ask questions, think critically, and develop self-awareness, as they look to their futures. Above all, Ghandour wanted to show the youth in these communities an alternative path and to deliver a positive message: “You are valued.”

Second, Ruwwad focused on a citizen-led approach to community development. It chose to work deeply in a small number of disenfranchised communities, rather than more lightly across many, and refused to view residents as passive beneficiaries. Instead of implementing a traditional top-down approach, which can create a cycle of dependency, Ruwwad would listen actively to discern the community’s needs and help residents feel empowered to jointly design and implement solutions.

“The model is a sincere commitment to listening and being present and co-authoring,” says Dudin, who volunteered at Ruwwad for five years before assuming her management role.

Finally, Ruwwad created a channel for private sector companies and individuals to engage in social development, allowing them to invest not only capital, but also time and know-how. It demonstrated this opportunity through Ghandour’s example, both individually and as CEO of Aramex. “We believed that a company has a role in the society, and the job for business is not only business,” says Ghandour. “We wanted to influence and participate in the development process in the communities that we chose.”

In 2005, while Ghandour was formulating this concept for Ruwwad, he began looking for a place to put his vision into practice. That year, as a board member of the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), he visited the Jabal Al Natheef community in East Amman. Home to over 50,000 people, including an informal refugee settlement, Jabal Al Natheef struggled with poverty and woeful housing conditions, as well as crime, substance abuse, and youth unemployment 50 percent higher than the national average.⁴ ▶

A bold investment in marginalized communities (continued)

1,252

More than 1,250 of Ruwwad's youth scholars have graduated to date.



The stark contrast between Jabal Al Natheef's entrenched poverty and the more affluent communities in West Amman left its residents feeling even more isolated and less valued. Having gained a ground-level view, Ghandour concluded that this was an ideal place to launch Ruwwad's model.

The first step was to invest in building enough trust to develop a healthy partnership. Many of the community leaders were wary of outsiders, having rarely interacted with the private sector. Some feared Ruwwad might have a hidden agenda.

"For them, it was inconceivable that any institution from the private sector wanted to do more than simple charity," recalls Ghandour.

To help turn the community's concerns into confidence, Ghandour organized an initial meeting with community members and asked about Jabal Al Natheef's most critical needs. Under Ghandour's leadership, Ruwwad then followed through on several core issues they had raised. It lobbied for government support to build a police station, a long unmet need. It also rented a space for a health clinic, helped establish a post office, restored a dilapidated school, and established a children's library.

"These were basic needs that we could fill," says Ghandour. "It is how we built trust because I showed that we wanted to work with them."

With these fundamentals in place, Jabal Al Natheef's citizens could focus on tackling the community's deeper issues.

Fast forward more than a decade and Ruwwad has inspired and equipped East Amman residents in Jabal Al Natheef and neighboring areas to seize opportunities to come together, work through challenges in their community, identify solutions, and ultimately advance their neighborhoods' wellbeing.

Ghandour, Aramex and other funders — most notably Khaled Al Masri and Raghida Ghandour Rahim — helped fuel these efforts through their contributions to the "mother model" in East Amman and to expansions to other marginalized communities in Jordan (Al-Tafileh and Al-Beidha).

Elsewhere, Aramex continues to be the regional supporter of Ruwwad in Egypt (Cairo) and Palestine (Ni'lin, Budrus, and Qibya). Entrepreneur Hala Fadel led the establishment of Ruwwad Lebanon in Tripoli in partnership with Fadi Ghandour and continues to contribute, along with business people Sami Khouri, Noura Al Jundi, and Michel Helou, as well as Asma Zein, a leader of the professional women's movement, and Amal Ghandour, Ruwwad's regional advisor for communications and strategy.

Across all locations, through its scholarship and community service and volunteer programs, Ruwwad has helped 2,127 young people realize their potential and become agents of change.

Additionally, as Ghandour puts it, Ruwwad has enabled thousands more people in disenfranchised communities by "shifting the community discourse from 'we need' to 'we want to do something about it', and actually working towards solving their own challenges."⁵ ●

How the initiative works

“Ruwwad seeks to help youth understand how they can mobilize their assets and resources to create the change that they want to see in the world.”

● Samar Dudin, regional director and head of programs, Ruwwad

Ruwwad’s early experience in Jordan shaped the core elements of its model. It has continued to build on these elements as it learns and responds to additional community needs. Its program offerings now span the categories of youth organizing, child development, and community support, with cross-sector partnerships being integral to each.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

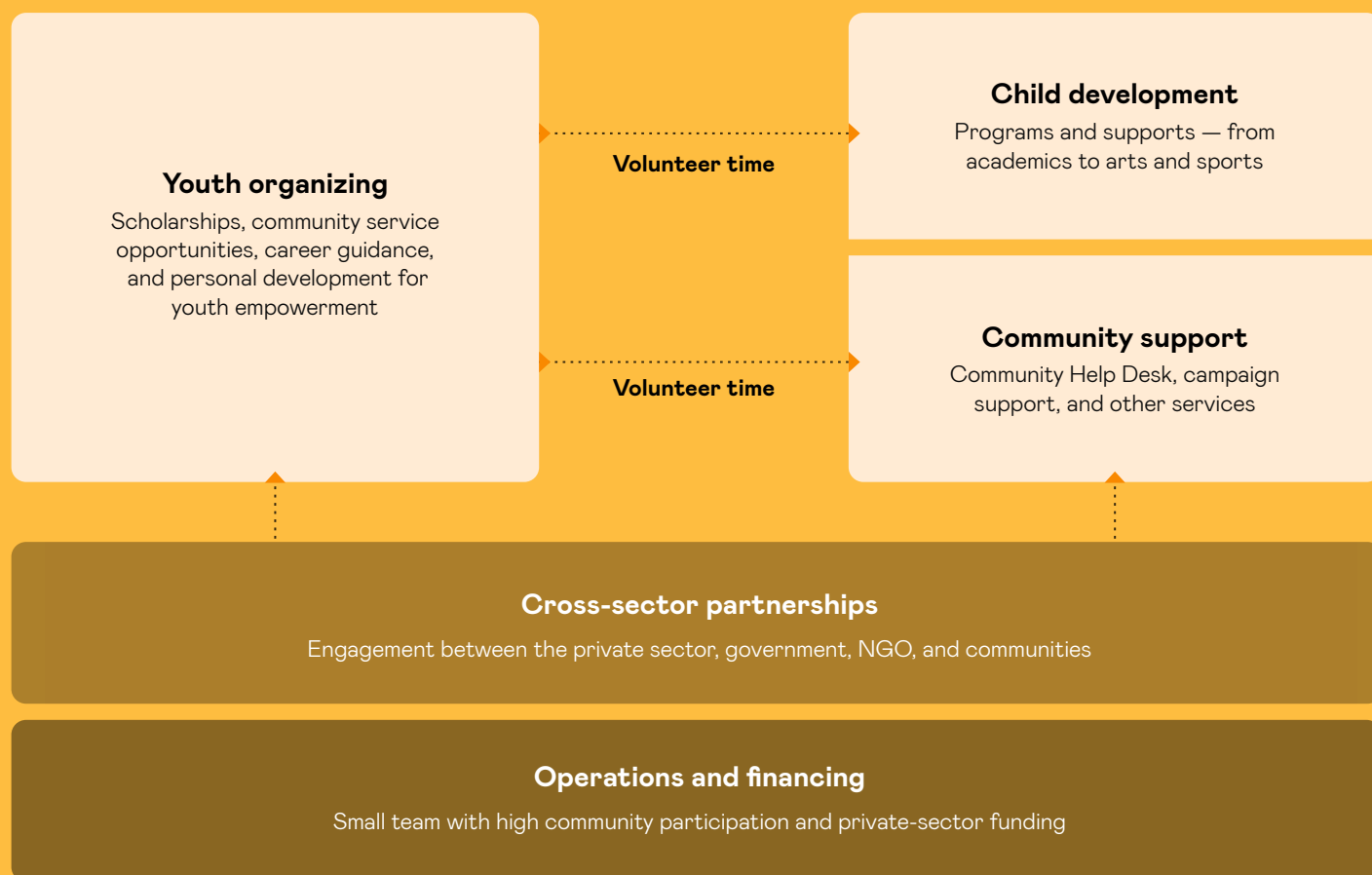
(See “Full set of community programs”, p. 10.)

1. Youth organizing

Believing that “access to a good education is vital for achieving...a dignified life,” Ghandour established the Mousab Khurma Youth Education and Empowerment Scholarship Fund (MKYEF), which he named for a close friend lost in a terror attack in 2005. Ruwwad awards scholarships to young people aged 18 and older, to support them in completing degrees at quality universities and colleges. In exchange for the scholarship, youth spend a minimum of four hours per week throughout their scholarship term volunteering in other Ruwwad community programs.

Ruwwad later connects youth scholars to internship and employment opportunities, provides them with career counseling in their chosen fields, and helps them expand their professional networks; supports that are not often available to students from disenfranchised areas. The organization also helps youth build self-esteem and real-world skills, such as thinking creatively and navigating social situations, so they can become active agents for change. Group discussions among the youth scholars and facilitators, called “Dardashat,” promote free thought and encourage a diverse range of views. ▶

RUWWAD’S MODEL OF COMMUNITY-BASED AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROGRAMS



How the initiative works (continued)

Ruwwad partners with the community to develop programs for children and families.



“The questions at Dardashat start with ‘who are we’ and ‘what sparks the way we see the world around us’ before moving to ‘how do we navigate tensions to transform them into opportunities for problem solving and collective action,’” Dudin explains.

2. Child development

By working with youth, the team realized it could engage them even earlier in their lives. Helping children build strong character traits (such as resilience and compassion) and develop their creativity might better position them for long-term success.

Ruwwad partnered with the community to develop several programs for children aged eight to 13. Youth volunteers implement the programs, which include academic support, creative sessions in art and music, children’s literature, as well as sports and camps. Ruwwad uses inquiry-based learning as a framework for sessions on diversity, and recently introduced coding. It also works with both parents and schools in the community to create safe and conducive learning environments.

For boys and girls aged 14 to 17, Ruwwad provides workshops that focus on creating a safe environment for self-expression and reflection and that are geared to developing problem-solving skills. It recruits these adolescents early as volunteers in the programs for younger children.

3. Community support

After launching the scholarship and youth program, Ruwwad began to hear from young people’s families, with questions and requests on a much broader set of needs. Valuing the input of the community, the organization responded in two fundamental ways.

First, the team set up its “Community Help Desk,” where residents can seek support on anything from financial assistance and health issues, to job opportunities. Community volunteers work with residents to find solutions, often referring and connecting them to available resources, NGO programs, or services through the Ministries of Social Development, Labor, and Health. When the help desk identifies common needs that span the entire community, Ruwwad responds by offering direct services, such as support for improving women’s literacy and income generation.

Second, Ruwwad works to promote civic initiative and collective action among the citizens of Jabal Al Natheef by training and supporting them in launching campaigns for other necessary areas of change. Such campaigns have included:

- “6 Minutes Joy of Reading,” which encouraged families to commit to reading for six minutes each day to their children to put them on an early path to literacy.
- “Safe Homes,” which brought families — especially mothers — together to share stories of domestic violence, evaluated domestic violence cases, and provided training on how to eliminate violence from the home.
- “For Your Sake,” which brought parents together to share stories of — and thereby encourage each other to speak out against — the physical abuse of children in schools and homes.
- “Al Jana”, which grew out of the previous campaigns, reaching out to more than 500 individuals through 20 educators to focus on better parenting, accountability, legal awareness, and intervention, for the sake of child protection.

A common denominator across all of Ruwwad’s programs is Ghandour’s dedication and heavy involvement. He interacts weekly with the regional director and head of programs, frequently engages and brainstorms with staff, and attends important events, such as career mentorship sessions. He also checks in regularly with youth scholars and other community members. ●

How the initiative works (continued)

A journey at Ruwwad

Tariq, a citizen of Jabal Al Natheef, received a Ruwwad scholarship in 2006, which supported him to study communications and software engineering. After graduating, he volunteered with Ruwwad and then joined the team as a full-time employee in 2009. He was eager to give back to both Ruwwad and his community. "As one of the citizens here, I love helping the people from my neighborhood," Tariq says. "I can see the change in youth like me. When we start the change from the child until he graduates as an adult, you can see how we are developing leaders of change for the community."

Tariq's professional path has embodied this change, as he has continued to build his leadership skills while working at Ruwwad. While he started in IT, he is now manager for community affairs at the Jabal Al Natheef Community Center. He also mentors other youth in the community.



CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Ruwwad is a platform for partnerships: its programs come to life through critical partnerships between the private sector, NGOs, government, and the communities themselves.

Individuals from across the private sector dedicate time to support Ruwwad's programs and operations, totaling a few thousand volunteer hours each year. Some lend their expertise to areas such as communications, IT, and finance. Others engage directly with youth, such as through the annual mentoring event for East Amman/Jabal Al Natheef's youth scholars, where they lead breakout discussion groups on various career paths.

Companies, including Aramex, also provide internship opportunities are an integral part of the business skills development program.

Ruwwad also partners with several local NGOs to deliver services. In Jabal Al Natheef, for example, the Justice Center for Legal Aid provides legal assistance to residents and helped organize the "For Your Sake" campaign. Another NGO, Bayt Silsal, enables youth with disabilities to access a safe space where they can express themselves artistically, with creations ranging from art accessories to installations.

Importantly, Ruwwad sees its work as adding to government efforts in disenfranchised communities, as opposed to replacing them. Ruwwad is a partner, not an alternative. "We wanted to work with the most vulnerable, where we can complement the work of government," says Ghandour.

Ruwwad collaborates with government agencies where possible, for example, working with the Ministry of Education on school renovations and vocational training, and the issue of child labor, and cooperating with the Ministry of Labor to identify employment opportunities for residents. As previously mentioned, Ruwwad also facilitates connections to government resources via its help desk.

OPERATIONS AND FINANCING

With young people as the key implementers and other citizens serving as volunteers, Ruwwad operates with a lean staff of 34 full-time employees in its three centers in Jordan. More than 70 percent of the staff are from the community, including some who completed Ruwwad's youth scholarship program and adults who previously volunteered in community programs. Having experienced the power of Ruwwad's model firsthand, they are now paying it forward by helping the next generation build a better future (see "A journey at Ruwwad").

A handful of core funders, including Ghandour and Al Masri, Aramex, and other institutions such as Cairo Amman Bank and Ruyana Association led by Salma Kamal, support Ruwwad's activities; both Aramex and Cairo Amman Bank also sit on the Advisory Committee for the Scholarship Fund. Ghandour uses his private sector connections to identify additional funders who might fuel Ruwwad's mission.

Even as he works to enlist the private sector, Ghandour pushes to keep the organization free from politics. Ruwwad does not accept government funding or conditional aid money, which in Ghandour's view would deprive other NGOs that depend on it — and possibly discourage others in the private sector from supporting Ruwwad's work. ●

Ruwwad

At a glance

Ruwwad helps young people realize their potential and become agents of change, creating broader impact in their communities.

FULL SET OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Youth organizing

Mousab Khurma youth education and empowerment scholarship fund

Scholarship application and selection

Community service

Reflection and counseling sessions

Enrichment program

Cultural

Open discussion "Dardashat"

Debate club

Business

English and IT courses

Employment skills training and internships

Entrepreneurship training

Leadership

Ruwwad internship

Ruwwad fellowship "The Trilogy"

Initiatives

Child development

Inquiry-based learning

Shams Al Jabal Library

Child literature

Creative arts

Creative sciences

Sports

Parental and community support

Summer and winter clubs

Better parenting

School outreach

Literature and creative arts

Maintenance and support

Community support

Partnerships and services

Community Help Desk

Jeeran Station

Bayt Silsal (for youth with disabilities)

Justice Center for Legal Aid

Adolescents support groups

Creative arts

Counseling sessions

Women advancement

Education and awareness

Income generation

Progress and results

“When others are interested in replicating Ruwwad’s model in other communities, we tell them, ‘this is how we do things...if you are able to commit, then we can do it.’ We have to be true to our core beliefs.”

● **Fadi Ghandour**, founder, Ruwwad



Between 2005 and 2010, Ruwwad deepened its presence in Jabal Al Natheef. By 2010, Ruwwad’s scholarship fund had graduated 570 students.⁶ During that time, it also fleshed out its program offerings to include many of the additional elements described above, with the team implementing a wide range of initiatives, including psychosocial support for youth scholars, an interactive discussion forum (an early version of the Dardashat sessions), and child development programming in the local library.

Recognizing the value of Ruwwad’s approach, in 2009 the Sweden-based Anna Lindh Foundation supported its expansion to Beidha (“Little Petra”), a small tribal community in Southern Jordan.

Then came requests to expand more broadly. The Ruwwad team only considered locations deemed to be forgotten communities — places where others did not want to invest — and where entrepreneurial leaders agreed to adhere to the model’s core elements: support for citizen-led change; an emphasis on youth empowerment; and the scholarship program and youth volunteerism as primary components.

“When others are interested in replicating Ruwwad’s model in other communities, we tell them, ‘this is how we do things...if you are able to commit, then we can do it,’” says Ghandour. “We have to be true to our core beliefs.”

In 2012, Hala Fadel, a Lebanese entrepreneur and friend of Ghandour’s, visited Ruwwad’s community center in Jabal Al Natheef, and immediately knew she wanted to replicate the model in Lebanon’s Tripoli. Fadel mobilized the foundational grant to establish a Ruwwad community center in Jabal Muhsen and Bab El-Tebbaneh, areas in the north of Tripoli.

The center is at the heart of the sectarian divide of the city. It hosts an income-generating kitchen that employs women from both sides of the community who have lost sons or husbands. The kitchen not only generates profits which flow to the scholarship program, but also allows the women to heal and engage in dialogue with each other.

That same year, Ruwwad expanded its model to two additional countries. In Egypt, it set up a community center in collaboration with the youth of Ezbet Khairallah, the second largest slum area in Cairo, and it remains focused on youth-led initiatives. In Palestine, Ruwwad set up in four neighboring villages of Budrus, in partnership with the local municipal councils. Ruwwad Palestine has become a leader in engaging youth across all villages in community service and volunteerism.

Across the four countries, Ruwwad has made noteworthy progress in uplifting marginalized communities. The scholarship program now supports about 450 youth across all locations, generating 84,600 community service hours annually. Of the more than 1,252 Ruwwad youth scholars in Jordan to graduate from university to date, 95 percent are employed, with professions spanning industries such as medicine, technology, and education.

“We are youth who walk towards life with hope, taking more steps towards our future,” noted one Ruwwad scholar upon his graduation from university. “We might have entered Ruwwad as receivers of generosity, only to graduate as providers of more generosity. In Ruwwad you learn that when you give, you get more.”

Many Ruwwad graduates are now socially-aware and civically-engaged citizens, as alumni indicate they have been active in their communities. Several have launched or helped establish a community initiative (see “Creating socially conscious self-starters” p. 12) and some, as referenced previously, have joined Ruwwad full-time (see “A journey at Ruwwad” p. 9). ▶

Progress and results (continued)

Creating socially conscious self-starters

The trash littering the streets in her neighborhood of Jabal Al Natheef bothered Hanan, a graduate of Ruwwad's scholarship program. She could see there weren't enough garbage cans to meet the community's needs. With research, she learned there were fewer than 80 garbage bins for over 50,000 residents, much below the required ratio.

To mobilize the community, Hanan recruited radio stations and bloggers to her cause, ran a Facebook campaign, and created an engagement program called "Yalla Shammer" to get more garbage cans — and rally more people to use them.



Ruwwad's child development and community support efforts are also making a difference. Its programs now engage thousands of women and children from disenfranchised communities every year to help them build better lives, and provide them the space and support to stand up for change. Consider the "For Your Sake" campaign in Jabal Al Natheef, which brought together 54 mothers whose 165 children had endured violence in schools. By acting collectively, they were able to report the abuse and, in partnership with Justice Center for Legal Aid, ensure that the schools took corrective action.

"Today, as part of the community, and as part of Ruwwad, I and the people here are thinking of solving our problems," says Tariq, a resident of Jabal Al Natheef in East Amman, who was a recipient of the scholarship fund and is currently Ruwwad's community center manager for community affairs.

NAVIGATING THE LEARNING JOURNEY

Catalyzing true change in disenfranchised communities is not easy, and Ruwwad has learned and evolved its approach along the way. In its early years in Jordan, Ruwwad tested many initiatives. Some proved to be too resource-intensive and did not tap sufficiently into citizens' full potential. Recognizing this, Ruwwad began to focus more sharply on development, and trained its staff in helping local leaders develop their capabilities to overcome challenges. For example, the organization shifted away from running a nursery and focused on effective parenting, through community campaigns, to address early childhood needs.

As Ruwwad expanded to more communities, the team recognized the need to customize programming to fit local contexts. In Egypt, for example, Ruwwad learned it was more appropriate to award youth participants with two-year scholarships for vocational education in areas such as IT — rather than four-year, university scholarships — given the country's available employment opportunities.

The Ruwwad team also recognizes the need to deepen its investment in impact measurement, to provide a clearer line of sight into what works and what doesn't. While its measures to date have focused largely on reach, they are working to increasingly capture Ruwwad's intangible results, such as the extent to which the psychosocial supports enable young people to develop the patience, persistence, and other qualities that will help them succeed.

"You have to...keep asking questions, learning from success and failure, and reflecting," says Dudin.

MOVING FORWARD

In each of its current locations, Ruwwad plans to build on its model for civic engagement and grow its offerings — directly or indirectly through partnerships — as new community needs emerge. "We have become a platform, where there are opportunities for all people [interested in providing a service] to plug in," says Ghandour.

Ghandour also believes Ruwwad's model, with its focus on private sector engagement, citizen-led change, and youth empowerment, can lead to sustainable development in many more countries. To encourage leaders to replicate the approach, the team shares much of its information and experiences, even as it remains focused on the Arab region.

"We are passionate about our immediate geography, and this is where we feel we can have the most impact," adds Ghandour. ●

Key learnings for philanthropists

“Corporates have a role and responsibility towards society. We’re entrepreneurs, we all have capabilities, we all have networks. Can we step up and do something for marginalized communities?”

● **Fadi Ghandour**, founder, Ruwwad



Partner with others

Invest in listening deeply and securing quick wins to gain the community’s trust



From the beginning, Ghandour focused on earning the trust of community members who did not know him or his organization and who were unaccustomed to offers of help from the private sector. The first step was to avoid coming into Jabal Al Natheef with a preset agenda. Rather than immediately provide answers, the team listened deeply to understand the community’s most pressing needs, and valued and respected its input.

Recognizing that trust is won through deeds rather than words, Ruwwad’s team then moved quickly to deliver on basic requests for improving the community’s infrastructure. Some of the work fell outside of Ruwwad’s scope — such as successfully advocating for a long-awaited police station and a much-needed health clinic. However, these successful efforts helped win the community’s trust, which not only gave Ruwwad the space to build its core programs, but also the credibility to enlist citizens in generating change.

Engage the community

Engage citizens to develop better solutions and foster agency



Ruwwad’s team understands that community members are the real experts when it comes to working out solutions, as they are the closest to their neighborhoods’ problems. The team works with residents to design programs that address gaps that can deter social and economic progress. From listening to young people, Ruwwad learned that scholarships and career coaching, while essential, were not sufficient by themselves. Programs such as the Dardashat interactive discussions and the relational dynamics, emotional intelligence, and life coaching sessions grew out of a recognition that young people, by engaging in self-knowledge, group dialogue and listening to diverse perspectives, could make far greater strides in their personal development.

More critically, Ruwwad equips citizens with the tools and supports to implement these programs themselves. For example, it teaches youth volunteers that mentoring matters and gives them the skills to guide younger children. It supports local women in leading community campaigns. Engaging community members not only ensures the work is relevant and sustainable, but also instills a sense of ownership — a requisite for long-term change.

Apply all assets

Demonstrate how to engage beyond funding, by investing time and expertise



Ghandour is a core funder, and he is also heavily involved in Ruwwad’s programs and operations. His personal investment animates the Ruwwad team and advances their knowledge. Importantly, it also serves as an example for other private sector actors.

Ghandour poses this question to his peers: “Corporates have a role and responsibility towards society. We’re entrepreneurs, we all have capabilities, we all have networks. And as employers, we’re very aware of the issues. Can we step up and do something for marginalized communities?”

Under his example, Ruwwad has provided pathways for others in the private sector to support community development, whether by mentoring young people, volunteering in community programs, or supporting Ruwwad’s operations. ●

About the philanthropist: Fadi Ghandour

OVERVIEW

Fadi Ghandour is the founder and executive chairman of Wamda Group, a platform that invests in, nurtures, and builds entrepreneurship ecosystems across the Middle East and North Africa. Ghandour is also the co-founder of Aramex, one of the leading global logistics companies, where he served as CEO from 1983 to 2012, and then as a board member until 2020.

During his 30 years with Aramex, Ghandour built the company, employing more than 15,000 people in over 250 offices in 90 countries. He took the company public twice, initially on Nasdaq — a first for an Arab world company — and then on Dubai Financial Market. Ghandour is a serial entrepreneur. In his career, he has been involved with founding, investing in, and launching tens of companies and nonprofits.

“Some people think that philanthropy should be silent. But I believe that philanthropy should be very vocal. Not for people to show off, but to create role models who can be emulated.”

● **Fadi Ghandour**

Appendix:

references

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