

## **Field report**

February 25, 2024

Assessment of the 2023 BLN project at the Sawa for Development Association (SDA)  
on behalf of the Association Ushagram Suisse

This report is prepared by Daoud Matta on February 25, 2024, provides an overview of the Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) program delivered by the Sawa Development Association (SDA) in Lebanon, aimed at Syrian refugee children. The report, prepared for Ushagram Suisse, is based on document reviews, meetings with SDA staff, and the author's prior knowledge of the program areas. Despite challenges such as security concerns, local tensions, and logistical difficulties exacerbated by the war in Gaza, SDA has made significant strides in providing education to refugee children.

The BLN program, endorsed by UNICEF and the Lebanese Ministry of Education, operates in Mansoura, Qabb Elias and now Khiara, serving a demographic of 200 Syrian pupils with a female majority. It emphasizes in-person teaching in specially equipped tents, covering subjects like Arabic, English, Math, and psychological support, aiming to integrate these pupils into the Lebanese schooling system.

Despite the operational challenges, including security issues, local economic hardship, and cultural barriers affecting student attendance and retention, SDA has maintained a strong program. The NGO has navigated bureaucratic hurdles, coordinated with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, and successfully facilitated student enrollment in schools. This report also highlights potential areas for program expansion, including broader geographical reach, additional educational categories, and skill-building courses to cater to a wider audience and enhance community development.

Recommendations focus on improving program evaluation through more rigorous Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), further training for teachers, exploring hybrid learning models, and maintaining financial discipline to maximize resources for educational purposes. This report also suggests comparing SDA's performance with similar regional NGOs, leveraging technology to improve program delivery, and preparing for potential future disruptions through contingency planning.

### **Background**

I possess a deep familiarity with the camps where Sawa conducts its courses, having visited these sites previously and recognizing most of the teachers from our meetings. To provide some context on the area: Mansoura is home to approximately 8,000 Syrian refugees, while Qabb Elias and Khiara host around 50,000 and 10,000 refugees, respectively. This year, the situation has been further complicated by deteriorating conditions in the south and escalating tensions between locals and camp residents. Compared to last year, the municipality has imposed more stringent access controls to the camps, necessitating more frequent renewal of permits. Additionally, tensions between local residents and refugees have sometimes led to sporadic confrontations. These factors collectively add layers of complexity to the administration and implementation of the courses.

The primary goal of the project is to reduce illiteracy among Syrian refugee children aged 8 to 14 and to support their eventual integration into the public education system. With the

rising number of eligible pupils and the limited capacity of public schools to accommodate them, the Lebanese government has now permitted private schools to admit Syrian candidates.

## **The program**

The Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) initiative, championed by UNICEF and authorized by the Lebanese Ministry of Education, targets the educational upliftment of Syrian refugee children.

**Locations:** The program operates within the Beqaa Valley, specifically in Mansoura, Qabb Elias, and newly included, Khiara. Mansoura, a quaint village, has been a refuge for approximately 8,000 Syrian refugees since 2011, while Qabb Elias shelters over 50,000 refugees. Khiara, the latest addition, further expands the program's reach.

**Student Demographics:** Aimed at supporting 200 Syrian pupils, the gender distribution includes 60% females and 40% males. The structured program spans three terms, each lasting four months, prepping pupils for integration into the Lebanese public education system, contingent upon passing all three levels. Oversight is provided by UNICEF alongside the Lebanese Ministry of Education, which also facilitates student enrollment in both public and select private schools.

**Educational Staff:** The program's courses are imparted by eight qualified teachers, all of whom possess university degrees, have received specialized training in social work and child education, and have previously collaborated with other NGOs.

**Curriculum Offerings:** The educational content encompasses four main subjects: Arabic, English, Mathematics, and Psychological & Social Support (PSS).

**Instructional Sessions:** Each student receives four 50-minute sessions daily, across five days a week over a three-month period, culminating in 250 hours of instruction required to advance through each of the three levels. Following completion, SAWA works to facilitate the pupils' admission into the public schooling system, securing necessary approvals from the Ministry of Education.

**Delivery Method:** Marking a shift from previous years' online instructions due to the pandemic, this year's classes were conducted in-person, within specially designated tents, accommodating 25 pupils each, to enhance the learning experience.

**Supplementary Resources:** Sawa provides all necessary educational materials, including books, stationery, and snacks, to the pupils at no charge, ensuring they have everything needed for their studies.

## **Assessment**

### **The NGO & Staff Structure and Operations**

The organizational structure and board composition of the Sawa Development Association (SDA) have remained consistent with the previous report, featuring a seven-member board. The project's execution is managed by three paid staff members, including a marketing assistant, short-term contractual pupils, and over fifty seasonal volunteers. Evaluating the

board's governance and oversight of the NGO's field programs and activities falls outside my assigned scope.

## **Program Challenges**

The BLN program faces significant operational challenges due to its location in a remote area of Lebanon:

**Security Concerns:** Restricted mobility and access to the camps, along with challenges in meeting with pupils, pose considerable difficulties. Nonetheless, SDA's teaching staff have excelled in establishing and maintaining communication with both pupils and camp administrators, known as Shawish.

**Local Economic Hardship:** The worsening economic situation in the region, with an increasing number of children leaving school to assist in agricultural work, impacts the local Lebanese population, who do not benefit from this program aimed exclusively at Syrian pupils.

**Municipal Relations:** There exists a level of dissatisfaction among local municipality leaders who argue that working NGOs do not adequately coordinate with regional authorities or maintain transparency in their aid initiatives.

**Cultural Factors:** Cultural norms and practices occasionally disrupt program administration, adding to student hardships. For instance, pupils may be pulled from classes to assist in agricultural labor during peak seasons, and early marriages for girls, starting as young as eleven, lead to school dropouts.

**Coordination with UNICEF and Government Agencies:** UNICEF organizes monthly meetings with NGOs to address challenges and progress. These meetings also facilitate collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Education and other government bodies to advocate for the NGOs and assist in project facilitation.

**Public Sector Disruptions:** Strikes and demands for salary increases among public sector employees disrupt the provision of necessary services. SDA has encountered delays due to these disruptions, necessitating frequent visits to the Ministry of Education and other ministries for paperwork processing.

**Capacity Issues:** SDA has successfully secured placements for pupils within the public schooling system, but faces challenges with limited capacity. The Ministry of Education's decision to allow private school enrollments has eased some pressure but has not fully resolved capacity issues. Both Lebanese and Syrian pupils are dropping out due to poor grades and difficulties in adapting to the curriculum.

## **Scaling the Program**

In contemplating the future growth of the Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) program, the following enhancements and extensions are proposed to broaden its impact and reach:

- **Geographical Expansion:** There's a significant opportunity for the BLN program to extend its services to encompass additional areas, specifically Saadnayel, Majdal Anjar, and Ghazze.

Given the sustained high demand, expanding into these regions could provide critical educational access to more children currently outside the scope of the program.

- **Early Childhood Education:** Incorporating a preschool component could address the educational needs of younger children, preparing them for formal schooling. This expansion would fill a crucial gap in early childhood education for children in lower age brackets.

- **After-School Support:** Implementing an after-school program could significantly improve student retention rates. Such a program would offer crucial support to pupils struggling with the curriculum, providing them with the extra assistance needed to succeed and progress through the levels of the BLN program.

- **Skill Development Courses:** Recognizing the diverse needs of the community, there's a demand for vocational and life skills training. Courses in financial literacy, crochet, tailoring, makeup, beauty, IT, automotive repair, and agriculture could equip older participants with valuable skills for employment and self-sufficiency. Additionally, introducing art therapy sessions through music and poetry could offer therapeutic benefits and cultural enrichment.

- **Permanent Community Center/s:** Transitioning from temporary tents to a permanent community center could enhance the learning environment, reduce parental interference, and offer a stable venue for broader community engagement and education. Such a center would also facilitate increased awareness and educational programs for parents, further supporting child development.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

In summarizing the assessment of the Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) program, several key observations and recommendations emerge:

1. **Value to the Community:** The BLN program is highly beneficial for the vulnerable refugee population, especially children and women, in the region. It not only aids in education but also supports the economic conditions of unemployed youth by providing jobs and volunteer opportunities that offer exposure to developmental work. However, there's a need for enhanced evaluation methods to accurately measure the program's impact. Implementing additional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and conducting comprehensive surveys involving all stakeholders could provide deeper insights into the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

2. **Quality of Instruction:** The program benefits from dedicated and competent teaching staff. Nonetheless, continuous professional development is crucial for maintaining high teaching standards, particularly in ensuring teachers are well-prepared to instruct across the various subjects offered by the program. Further training and assessments for teachers in their respective and additional teaching fields can augment the quality of education provided.

3. **Innovative Delivery Methods:** The potential for augmenting the program's effectiveness through innovative teaching methods is significant. The introduction of digital resources such as videos and audio recordings, accessible through platforms like YouTube or a dedicated website, could enhance learning opportunities outside the classroom. Additionally, exploring hybrid learning models that combine in-person and online instruction could offer flexible and more effective educational experiences.

4. Financial Management: Maintaining fiscal discipline is essential to ensure the sustainability of the program. It's important that a significant portion of the budget is allocated to directly support educational activities, particularly teacher compensation, to maintain a motivated and high-quality teaching staff.

Further Areas for Investigation:

- Benchmarking with Similar NGOs: Understanding how similar initiatives by other regional NGOs perform could uncover valuable lessons and opportunities for collaboration. This could lead to shared efficiencies and enhanced program outcomes.

- Leveraging Technology: Investigating the use of internet and mobile communications for educational delivery and program management could present new avenues for enhancing access to education and improving program administration.

- Adapting to External Changes: Continuous monitoring of the external environment is necessary to anticipate and mitigate risks related to security, political, and social upheavals. Developing a contingency plan, including the option for online teaching, would prepare the program to continue its operations under various scenarios.

Daoud Matta  
February 25, 2024

full period / from 01-07-2022 to 15-07-2023														
Report Date 30-12-2023														
Final Report														
Program	Partnership	Benef	Amount Transf	Sawa Payments	Period	Activity Expenses							Amount paid by partner	Actual Activity Cost
						A- Person	B- Teach	C- Location	D- Supplies	E- Food	F- Bank	G- Transp		
Total -1						\$3,350	\$7,560	\$3,800	\$5,800	\$4,300	\$1,034	\$0	\$24,000	\$25,844
Total -2						\$3,300	\$19,200	\$9,600	\$7,583	\$12,000	\$1,500	\$800	\$49,083	\$53,983
Total 1+2				\$6,744		\$6,650	\$26,760	\$13,400	\$13,383	\$16,300	\$2,534	\$800		\$79,827
				\$74,000									\$73,083	
						13%	29%	15%	22%	17%	4%	0%	93%	100%
						6%	36%	18%	14%	22%	3%	1%	91%	100%
						8%	34%	17%	17%	20%	3%	1%	92%	100%
						554	2,230	1,117	1,115	1,358	211	67	6,090	6,652