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## From Sectarianism to Solidarity: A Vital Role for Social Entrepreneurs in MENA

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### Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is trending in MENA, drawing the attention of state actors, multinational corporations, and multilateral organizations. Seeking ways to catalyse economic development and address the pressures of the region's "youth bulge",<sup>1</sup> these actors tend to focus on the "business" end of the social enterprise spectrum (Abdou et al., 2010: 19). However, economic opportunity does not emerge in a vacuum. Instability and violence – due in part to sectarian tensions in the region – have significantly undermined economic growth (Buckner et al., 2012: 8–10; Mottaghi and Devarajan, 2014: 1).

Do social entrepreneurs in MENA have a role to play in changing the ecosystem (Bloom and Dees, 2008; Abdou et al., 2010: 23) in which they operate? The authors propose they do. Social entrepreneurs are defined in this case as those who

play the role of change agents in the social sector, by . . . adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value); recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission; engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning; acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand; and exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

(Dees, 2001: 4)

MENA economic actors should integrate social entrepreneurship into their thinking because social enterprises can cultivate positive norms around the common good and help foster critical preconditions to economic recovery and growth.

Offre Joie<sup>2</sup> is an example of an indigenous Lebanese movement addressing the perpetual challenge sectarianism poses to Lebanese economic and social development. Sectarianism – the process by which various religious identities are politicized as part of power struggles (Makdisi, 2008) – has contributed to rising tension, violence, and displacement across MENA. With its governance structured on confessional representation,<sup>3</sup> Lebanon has a particularly turbulent history of sectarian conflict, and sectarianism continues to permeate the resourcing and aims of civil society initiatives and organizations (Altan-Olcay and Icduygu, 2012; Clark and Salloukh, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the extraordinary Offre Joie vision is to “gather the entire family of Lebanon, a treasure for humanity”.<sup>4</sup> The Offre Joie movement pursues this vision by “serving with and for the Other” while practicing the core values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love. Its implicit theory of change, Figure 4.1, is that unity in diversity is nurtured through the combination of (1) an inspiring and inclusive vision, (2) practice of the values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love, (3) volunteer service, and (4) intergroup engagement. While not a commercial enterprise, the Offre Joie movement falls within Dees’ definition of social entrepreneurship, which includes a spectrum from social business to venture philanthropy.

This case study is outlined as follows:

- Literature review of relevant themes;
- Description and application of the Offre Joie theory of change;
- Assessment of the scope of mission impact reflected in organizational records;
- Assessment and discussion of the influence of each theory of change element, as measured by surveys, control group comparisons, and participant interviews; and
- Conclusions for MENA social entrepreneurship.

### Literature review

Social psychology research, peace and reconciliation studies, and political philosophy each support the efficacy of Offre Joie’s dynamic

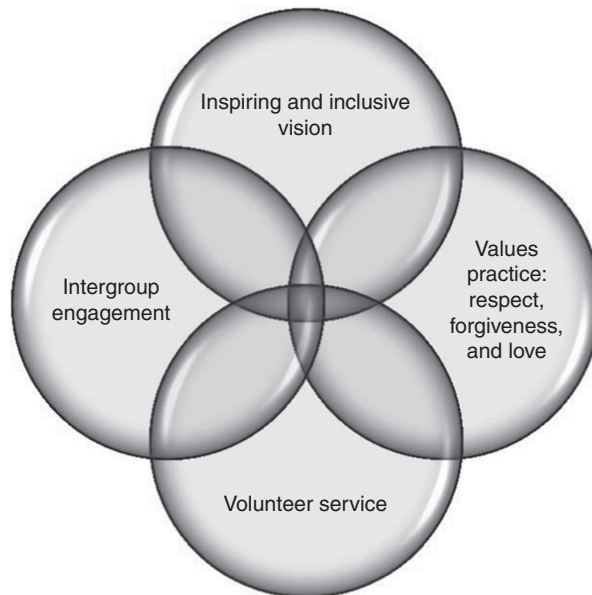


Figure 4.1 Offre Joie's implicit theory of change

theory of change to foster unity through praxis. According to Paulo Freire, reflective action is transformative:

People will be truly critical if... their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the *causes* of reality.

(Freire, 2005: 131)

Offre Joie combines visionary inspiration with three critical dimensions of action: values, volunteer service, and intergroup engagement.

**Inspiring and inclusive vision**

Offre Joie envisions unity in diversity across confessional lines: “to gather the entire family of Lebanon together, a treasure for humanity”. The importance of an inspiring vision is widely recognized in management literature, often referred to as a “BHAG” (Big, Hairy,

Audacious Goal). Management researchers Collins and Porras found that visionary companies use BHAGs to stimulate progress, focus efforts, and catalyse team spirit (Collins and Porras, 1996).

The inclusive and unifying nature of the vision is critical because it presents an alternative to the *status quo*. However, change of an unjust *status quo* typically leads to further conflict unless all parties to the conflict own the vision and values inherent in the alternate value proposition (Haskell et al., 2009: 542–543). In a vision for the common good, everyone must be invited to participate in the development of new win-win agreements. The only spoilers are those who refuse to participate.

#### **Values practice: Respect, Forgiveness, and Love**

Political theory suggests it is reasonable – even necessary – to establish a minimal set of shared values as a basis for engagement in a pluralist context (Schaap, 2006; Rummens, 2009). The *Offre Joie* values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love are especially relevant in a context of sectarian division.

Psychologists have shown that respect unconditionally due to all persons by virtue of their intrinsic worth (as opposed to respect earned by merit) impacts action tendencies towards out-groups with which a participant does not identify (Lalljee et al., 2009). Studies conducted in contexts of intergroup division and conflict indicate that respect for persons is positively related to positive action tendencies and negatively related to negative action tendencies, and that respect is a particularly important determinant of behaviour towards out-groups in contexts of high threat (Lalljee et al., 2009; Laham et al., 2010).

Lebanese-British psychotherapist Alexandra Asseily advocates Forgiveness as the only way to release grievances passed down through generations and to break the cycle of conflict (The Power of Forgiveness, 2008). Post-conflict reconciliation and peace-building literature refer to members of previously hostile groups coming to mutual acceptance as “reconciliation”. However, “forgiveness” goes further in that the victim relinquishes anger and pain, cancels the debt, and moves away from identifying exclusively as a victim, thereby allowing both parties to transcend their shared history of conflict (Staub et al., 2005). Forgiveness affirms the dignity of the victim and calls the offender back to the violated norm when practiced voluntarily

and with the awareness that everyone is by turns both a victim and an offender.

Love is a value that actively unifies across sectarian lines. Freire refers to the praxis of love as the necessary precondition to solidarity:

The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons . . . when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis.

(Freire, 2005: 50)

Love as a unifying value is also highlighted in the open letter “A Common Word between Us and You”, signed to date by over 400 Islamic religious leaders and scholars to their Christian counterparts, over 250 of whom have signed affirmative responses (A Common Word, 2007). The letter calls for love of the One God and love of neighbour as the common basis for reconciliation and understanding between Christians and Muslims, proposing “increased commitment to human equality and dignity as well as collaboration for the common good” (Malik, 2013).

#### **Volunteer service**

Psychology research has shown that volunteers can be changed by the experience of volunteering, exhibiting greater knowledge, less stereotyped beliefs, and greater comfort with issues relating to the subject of their service (Omoto and Snyder, 1995; Omoto et al., 2001). People who engage in significant volunteer activity begin to internalize the role of volunteer as part of their identity, promoting sustained volunteerism (Penner, 2002; Snyder and Omoto, 2008). According to research, volunteerism also strengthens a volunteer’s connections to others directly involved in the volunteer activity, such as other volunteers, coordinating staff, and service recipients (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). Furthermore, volunteers also tend to participate in other forms of community life outside of their volunteerism, including giving to charitable causes, attending fund-raising events, and engaging in social activism (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Omoto and Malsch, 2005).

**Intergroup engagement**

The core hypothesis of “intergroup contact” in psychology research is that contact between groups reduces intergroup prejudice, particularly if the contact situation (1) allows participants to interact with equal status, (2) promotes cooperation and common goals, and (3) has the support of authorities, law, or custom (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Research has shown that successful contact situations should allow for the development of friendships through meaningful and repeated contact (Davies et al., 2011) and that intergroup contact in one situation can reduce prejudice towards the same and other out-groups in different situations (Tausch et al., 2010). Beyond prejudice-reduction, researchers found that intergroup contact prevented violent conflict and facilitated reconciliation, trust, and forgiveness in post-conflict contexts as diverse as Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia (Al-Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013).

**Description and application of the Offre Joie theory of change****Vision and values**

Offre Joie emerged in 1985, during the Lebanese civil war, when a group of young professionals volunteering with the Red Cross and other youth groups developed cross-confessional trust relationships. They recognized that sectarian division was destroying Lebanon’s heritage of ethnic integration. Committing to counter this division, they sponsored a 17-day summer camp for 117 children intentionally recruited from the entire confessional spectrum, appealing to organizing volunteers’ mothers and friends to provide meals. The organizers agreed to adopt the three core values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love as non-negotiable standards of behaviour. Against the tide of conflict, these integrated children’s camps continued year-by-year, forging enduring relationships across confession, class, and district.

Over its three-decade history, Offre Joie developed four categories of activities, listed in Table 4.1. All these categories are designed to be cross-confessional and unifying in tenor.

Offre Joie’s unifying achievements are sustained by local social capital, with minimal organizational infrastructure, finance, and

Table 4.1 Offre Joie activities

	Description	Example
Children’s camps	Inter-confessional integrated children’s summer camps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,200 children participated in a camp where they moved to different locations around the country.</li> <li>• 6,500 children campers participating since 1985.</li> </ul>
Children’s activities	Designed to develop relationships and foster unity across lines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual holiday festivities for 800–1,200 children.</li> <li>• Educational plays about Lebanese history.</li> </ul>
Volunteer workshops	“Builds” (usually construction projects) mobilizing youth volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First workshop (1992): Cleaning and rebuilding an irrigation network (420 youths).</li> <li>• Up to seven workshops annually: Renovating schools, prisons, and conflict damage (usually 30–180 youths).</li> </ul>
Public solidarity and crisis response	Designed to address symbolic civic issues and emergency needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Peace caravans” of youth and children through checkpoints and occupied territory.</li> <li>• Cross-confessional prayer, peace marches, and <i>iftar</i> communal dinners.</li> <li>• Nationwide sweater distribution at prisons (3,000 prisoners served annually).</li> </ul>

technology. Offre Joie has also expanded activity into Europe and Iraq, and is receiving requests from other MENA countries on application of its approach in sectarian contexts.

Dreams InDeed International, the organization directed by the authors, began advising Offre Joie in 2006, when co-founder Melhem Khalaf sought help to develop a structure to sustain Offre Joie’s growth without undermining its grassroots volunteer spirit. In addition to providing executive coaching, Dreams InDeed partnered with Asmae, a French civic youth association, to undertake a

comprehensive, participatory evaluation of Offre Joie, which yielded a clarified vision, theory of change, and strategic plan.

### **Impact assessment**

Offre Joie's records demonstrate significant impact in each component of its vision. Its scale of child and youth participation, its representative mix of volunteers across confession and gender, and its national breadth of reach across Lebanon, together affirm Offre Joie's progress towards its unifying vision.

#### **Gathering: Scale of participation**

One measure of the impact of Offre Joie is the scale of its volunteer mobilization. Volunteer days devoted to workshops and camps have exceeded 3,000 days every year but one since 1999, with surges of violence and turmoil leading to peaks of 8,000–9,000 volunteer days devoted to workshops in each of 2005 and 2006. Leveraging an unprecedented networked approach, Offre Joie forged a cross-confessional civil society coalition, multiplying its previous impact 20-fold by mobilizing an astonishing 172,002 volunteer days in 2013 alone at crisis response workshops nationwide. This spike illustrates the power of a trust-based networked approach already proven to demonstrate collective impact in other MENA contexts (Wei-Skillern and Marciano, 2008). Offre Joie's revenues consist of cash and in-kind contributions received primarily from domestic, grassroots stakeholders. Available records show a slow but steady growth of total revenue from US\$76,000 in 1995 to US\$1 million in 2013, with a one-time spike of US\$1.2 million in in-kind contributions for refugee relief in 2006. Offre Joie also achieves extraordinary leverage of volunteer labour and donated in-kind materials for the public good, rehabilitating damaged buildings for just 10–40 per cent of commercial cost and time estimates. Avoiding sectarian agendas and political entanglements, Offre Joie upholds a policy to turn away donations that may compromise its vision or values. Attracted wisely, leveraged effectively, and multiplied collectively, the modest resources of Offre Joie deliver outsized mission impact.

#### **Entire family: Breadth of draw**

The effectiveness of Offre Joie at gathering the “entire family” of Lebanon is evident from an analysis of the current Offre Joie database



of more than 3,000 volunteers. The database shows a confessional breakdown that roughly approximates the proportions of the population at large as well as balanced gender representation. Given the cultural milieu, this ability to attract participation from volunteers across all confessions and both genders is remarkable.

### **Of Lebanon: Breadth of reach**

Available data suggests that Offre Joie has had notable success in engaging various populations across Lebanon that are otherwise usually clustered by confession. Offre Joie makes its summer camps accessible to children nationwide, intentionally integrating participants by confession, class, and district of origin. Its public displays of solidarity (e.g. public inter-confessional common prayers, *iftar* communal meals, and peace marches) also emphasize inclusiveness and unity. Volunteer workshops have proven particularly effective to transcend divisions with breadth of reach, and have been conducted at conflict sites, schools, prisons, and homes in every governorate but one.

One example illustrates the workshops' transformative impact, both for volunteers themselves and for the public at large. After the November 2012 car bombing in Achrafiyeh, Beirut, Offre Joie mobilized 1,400 volunteers with its "Volunteers Seek No Recognition" campaign, rebuilding 80 homes and shifting public dialogue from political turmoil to national solidarity (Dubai Lynx, 2014). The Lebanese President then awarded Offre Joie one of the nation's highest distinctions: Knight of the National Order of the Cedar.

### **Assessment of theory of change influence on participants**

The scope of Offre Joie impact described above tells only part of the story. The more challenging question is whether Offre Joie activities influence the attitudes and behaviours of participants with respect to the four elements of its theory of change: (1) an inspiring and inclusive vision, (2) practice of the values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love, (3) volunteer service, and (4) intergroup engagement. A series of interviews and surveys was conducted to assess this.

First, 16 children who had participated in the camps were interviewed by telephone, and youths who had participated in workshops responded to survey questions, about their experiences, what they

had learned from the camps, and how they were applying these lessons.

A second youth survey tested whether the elements of the Offre Joie theory of change had impacted participants' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours by comparing Offre Joie volunteers' responses to those of a control group.<sup>5</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with a series of statements designed to elicit attitudes and beliefs with respect to each element of Offre Joie's theory of change, and responses were coded on a one to four scale for statistical analysis. For questions regarding behaviour (e.g. with respect to use of free time and the number of hours volunteered), frequency of choice was compared for the two groups.<sup>6</sup>

The following sections report the results of the interviews and surveys in relation to each element of the Offre Joie theory of change and reflect on the implications for social entrepreneurs in the MENA regions.

### **Inspiring and inclusive vision**

#### *Findings*

Figure 4.2 summarizes responses to the questions on attitudes and beliefs with respect to Offre Joie's vision, revealing a statistically significant difference between Offre Joie and control respondents.

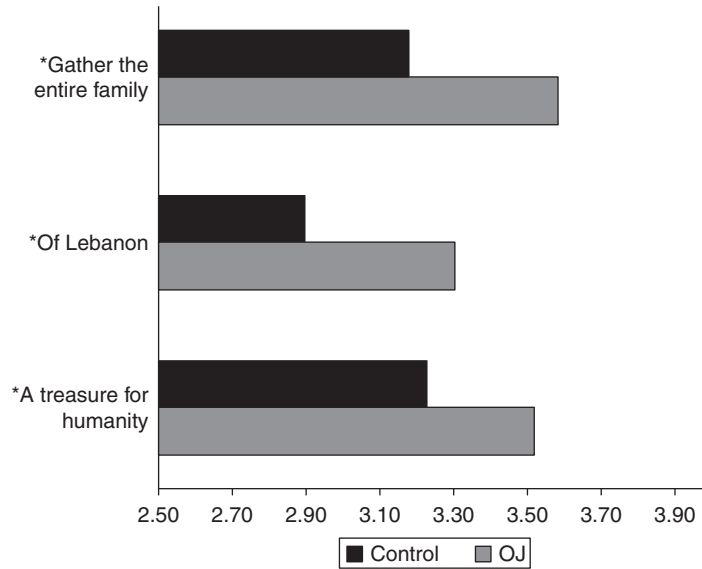
Narrative responses from Offre Joie volunteers and children's camp participants also demonstrated inspiration leading to change. Over half of the Offre Joie volunteers reported personal transformation, including significant changes in awareness of common humanity, discovery, and development of their own skills, and perspective about Lebanese society:

I was thinking that Lebanese people [were] thinking only for their own [good] and they were always in conflict between [religion] and politic[s] but Offre Joie showed me that Lebanese are all united.

(Male, age 17, Beirut)

In 2012–13 I went several times to [a bomb-site rehabilitation workshop]. I realized that our society is not that superficial... that we're all concerned by what's happening around us and are the only ones who can make a change.

(Female, age 17, South)



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Figure 4.2 Attitudes and beliefs (vision)  
\* denotes a statistically significant difference.  
1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

[Offre Joie]... is the other and true face of Lebanon where every person looks at his brother as a human.  
(Female, age 19, North)

Children’s camp participants expressed that their Offre Joie experience had affected how they think about the future: 7 of the 16 said they wanted to make something of their life, 6 wanted to continue involvement with Offre Joie, 5 wanted to help others and/or make a difference, 3 expressed a different perspective on the Other, and 2 said they wanted to help their country. When asked to describe Offre Joie’s vision and explain what it meant, children who had attended Offre Joie camps expressed deep inspiration:

[The Offre Joie vision is] to help people in need and stand beside people who want help. They gather us from different villages to

become one, and one Lebanon... We accept each other because we are all Lebanese.

(Female, age 12, Mount Lebanon)

The main objective is to give joy for all children and bring them joy despite the war and all the violence... It is about changing the faces of people to faces of joy and love.

(Male, age 16, North)

Offre Joie made me realize the importance of the unity of Lebanon and has made me want to change how the country and everyone is going. The country is not for our benefit, but for us to protect.

(Male, age 13, South)

These narrative responses suggest there is a causal relationship between participation and embracing the Offre Joie vision with hope for positive change.

#### *Discussion*

Chronic sectarian conflict breeds despair with its disruptive cycle of reprisals. A compelling vision paints a different picture of a desired future, giving birth to a living hope. A profit motive alone is inadequate to inspire and sustain sacrifice for the common good. Social entrepreneurs in MENA must raise their sights beyond good ideas to visions as audacious as the Offre Joie vision. Such inspired visions fulfil these three tests proposed by the authors and exemplified in other cases in MENA and beyond: (1) visions are celebrated as good news by those in greatest need, (2) visions invite all to participate and require all to change, and (3) visions inspire and require tangible sacrifice (Haskell et al., 2009: 540–543). The Offre Joie vision has generated growing momentum against MENA sectarian currents. This should embolden other MENA actors to pursue their inspired visions as well.

#### **Values practice: Respect, Forgiveness, and Love**

##### *Findings*

Figure 4.3 reports a statistically significant difference between Offre Joie and control respondents in their attitudes and beliefs concerning Respect, but not concerning Forgiveness and Love.

The more significant assimilation of Respect is borne out in children's explanations of the values and how they are applying them:

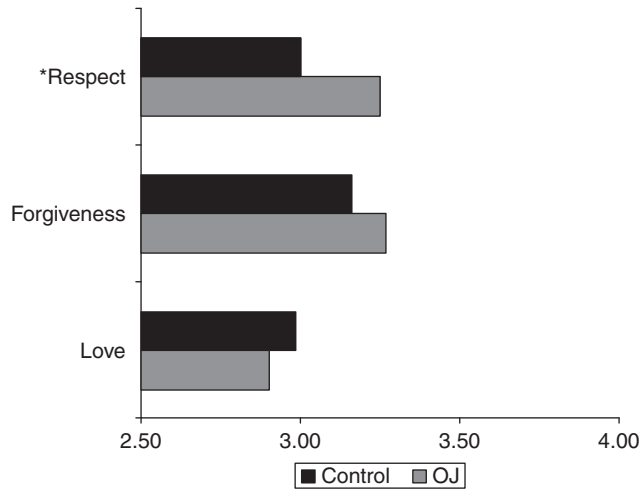


Figure 4.3 Attitudes and beliefs (values)  
 \* denotes a statistically significant difference.  
 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

We are all like siblings...[we] respect them and respect their opinion... I wish we could all play together.  
 (Male, age 13, North)

[I mostly apply] forgiveness and respect. You cannot love everyone but you can respect everyone.  
 (Female, age 12, North)

Co-founder Melhem Khalaf acknowledged the challenge of moving beyond Respect to Forgiveness and Love.<sup>7</sup> Still, narrative responses from Offre Joie volunteers and children referenced all three values of Respect, Forgiveness, and Love as lessons learned from Offre Joie participation. Moreover, when asked what they had learned from Offre Joie, both the child campers and youth volunteers offered profound reflections on the values of Love and Forgiveness in their lives:

I'm trying to remember my duty of love for others despite the extreme stressful times that we're going through.  
 (Female, age 42, Mount Lebanon)

Love everyone to be loved, even the ones that [hate] you. Respect everyone when you don't get respected [because] respect is what represents you. Forgiveness, [the] most important factor in life is to be loved, forgiven and respected, you have to forgive and carry on. I've also learned to respect all religions and never differentiate any person [because] of his thoughts [or] beliefs.

(Male, age 27, North)

### *Discussion*

The founders of Offre Joie intuitively grasped that the consistent practice of values was critical for their vision. They chose and modelled values relevant in their sectarian context. However, scaled growth brings the new challenge of sustaining the practice of values in MENA beyond immediate relational circles. Harnessing the power of values for social entrepreneurship impact in MENA will require clear values definitions and assimilation processes. Defining values in measurable terms translates good intentions into practices, such as the way in which B Corps has designed auditable certifications for value standards.<sup>8</sup> Values also need to be integrated into social enterprise operations. For example, an Egyptian social enterprise demonstrated that implementing an indigenous values assimilation process delivered statistically significant performance improvements (Haskell et al., 2012).

### **Volunteer service**

#### *Findings*

Survey results showed that Offre Joie respondents had higher scores on "Service" statements than control respondents, representing a statistically significant difference. Respondents who volunteered were asked to approximate the number of hours they volunteered per month. The median number of hours Offre Joie respondents contributed per month exceeded that of controls by five times: a statistically significant difference of 25 hours versus 5 hours, respectively.

Even more telling was the difference between Offre Joie and control respondents in their use of free time. Respondents were provided with 11 possible choices<sup>9</sup> and asked to select three things they would choose to do with three days off. Offre Joie respondents were more

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than three times as likely than controls to choose to “Volunteer to help others in need”. Only Offre Joie respondents selected “Advocate for a cause”, while controls were almost twice as likely to choose to “Hang out with friends”.

The children and youths’ reflections on what they learned from Offre Joie further indicate that an experience with Offre Joie profoundly affects a participant’s attitude towards volunteering:

Offre Joie taught a lot of things . . . the volunteerism is very successful because this volunteerism was positive, serious, and involved children and old people . . . children can be influenced a lot.

(Male, age 16, North)

There are so many people around us suffering and . . . waiting for someone to help them. Social service is . . . the only way to unite regardless the differences we have which have [led] to all the problems.

(Female, age 19, Beirut)

Being involved with Offre Joie was something unique since I learned to be an active citizen in my society, to help others no matter what, and to apply equality between all of us because we are all human and we all deserve a respectful living.

(Male, age 18, South)

The respondents’ expressions of joy and happiness in service are especially striking:

[Offre Joie] just changed my way of perceiving things. Giving money is a way of helping but you won’t have this feeling that you actually did something . . . .

(Female, age 22, North)

Offre Joie simply taught me a way of life, to be happy by giving, not by taking.

(Male, age 28, Mount Lebanon)

Helping is a huge source of joy. It makes me feel responsible and believe that I can make a change.

(Male, age 21, Mount Lebanon)

*Discussion*

Offre Joie volunteerism has proven transformative in the face of MENA sectarianism, developing the trust-based social capital conducive for economic development.<sup>10</sup> The Offre Joie volunteerism formula is characterized by integration across confession, class, gender, district, and disability; the public dignity of manual labour; freedom of religious conscience; expression of civic duty; *esprit de corps* group dynamics; solidarity with the disenfranchised; crisis emergency response; and incorruptible political neutrality. MENA social entrepreneurs should consider building such principles into their enterprise models. The resulting volunteer service would aspire to Gibran's ethic of work with love:

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And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God. And what is it to work with love? . . . It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

(Gibran, 1923)

**Intergroup engagement***Findings*

Figure 4.4 reports a statistically significant difference between Offre Joie and control respondents on statements that elicit attitudes on serving "With the Other" and "For the Other".

Also of note is that 11 of the 16 children interviewed said they had maintained friendships that lasted after the camp. The narrative reflections of the child and youth participants further support the transformative effect of Offre Joie's service "with and for the Other":

We are different but we are one.

(Female, age 12, Beirut)

For me, the sense of humanity. There is no difference with anyone. Offre Joie created this in me, and everyone in society is the same.

(Male, age 16, North)

[I learned that] religion, politics don't matter. In the end we are all the same and search for the same things such as peace in Lebanon, forgiveness and love.

(Female, age 17, Mount Lebanon)



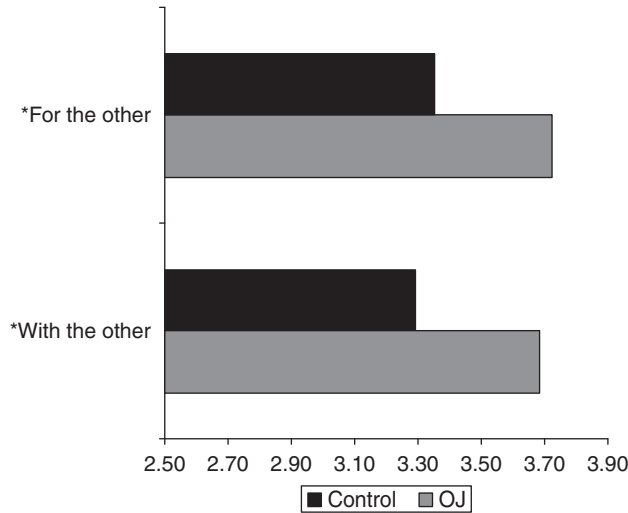


Figure 4.4 Attitudes and beliefs (intergroup engagement)

\* denotes a statistically significant difference.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

I have learned that no matter where you are from, there is no difference... Most importantly, I have learned the meaning of one big happy family as well as the effect of strong bonds of friendship.

(Male, age 22, Beirut)

A number of participants directly attributed exposure to the "Other", and their willingness to engage with the "Other", to their experience with Offre Joie:

I learned love and respect for other people. Offre Joie helped me to see what life looks like outside of my background. I saw how hate and violence can destroy people's lives... but on the other side I also saw how love can save us.

(Female, age 18, Beirut)

If someone knows the other is [from a different confession], he would say he is not [from my confession] and he would not talk to him. I don't do this. I learned this from Offre Joie and my parents, relatives. I applied it the most when I was with Offre Joie.

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I remember we went during Ramadan and there were veiled girls and Christians and I was friends with everyone.

(Female, age 12, Mount Lebanon)

I am more open to everyone and I can easily like other people without boundaries.

(Female, age 13, Beirut)

Perhaps most profound were the reflections of children who attended a camp together, combined from neighbourhoods referred to below as "Area A" and "Area B" due to chronic and active sectarian violence. Their responses indicated not only changed attitudes, but also a growing awareness that their own "side" was part of the problem:

[Offre Joie's vision is to reconcile] between us [Areas A and B] and make us talk to each other. Offre Joie is the only one that can let [Area A] and [Area B] talk to each other. This means a lot to me. You know [my friend] who died? All our guys are dying like this.

(Male, age 13, [Area B])

Offre Joie had a big impact. I now accept the others because of Offre Joie. If I stayed in the bubble we have I wouldn't even say hello to anyone from [Area B].

(Female, age 12, [Area A])

I don't think others from [Area A] are different than me. We are all the same.

(Female, age 16, [Area B])

When I look at the situation now, I ask myself if all this war is because of [Area A] or because of us... I always wonder why we are in this situation.

(Female, age 16, [Area B])

## *Discussion*

The example of Offre Joie demonstrates the possibility of transforming the Other into Neighbour, and Neighbour into Family, achieving the hospitable generosity of spirit embodied in the Arabic proverb, "The neighbour before the house".<sup>11</sup> Social entrepreneurs in

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MENA who wish to achieve impact beyond sectarian strictures need to lead by example by redefining the Other as fellow stakeholder, dramatically enlarging the market in shared community. No longer merely anonymous customer or constituent, the Other becomes a partner, vested in a relationship of shared values and a vision of the common good. No longer a liability or cost to be externalized, the Other can take centre stage in helping rediscover the shared values that redefine and enrich all as part of the human community. When insiders and outsiders, the strong and the weak, become mutual partners, all may learn and welcome the truth of Gibran's paradox:

You have been told that, even like a chain, you are as weak as your weakest link. This is but half the truth. You are also as strong as your strongest link.

(Gibran, 1923)

## **Conclusion**

Offre Joie has developed a laboratory of praxis for the children and youth of Lebanon, achieving significant transformative impact despite daunting sectarian challenges and limited resources. The quantitative and narrative data presented in this case study demonstrates the organization's efficacy, both in terms of the scale of its participation and in terms of the depth of its influence on participant attitudes and behaviour. The interplay of its four theory of change elements – shared vision, aligned values, volunteerism, and intergroup engagement – warrants consideration as a replicable approach to transcend the sectarian divisions that undermine civil society and stymie the flourishing of enterprise, social and otherwise, across MENA.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Toha of Harvard University. This research would not have been possible without their input, but the responsibility for any errors remains ours alone.

### Notes

1. Per 2013 mid-year projections, 30 per cent of the MENA population is between 15 and 29 years of age (US Census Bureau, 2013). MENA youth unemployment exceeds twice the global average (International Labour Organization, 2014).
2. The movement name was registered as “Offre Joie” in France, “*fara2 al 9taa*” in Lebanon and Iraq, and “Joy of Giving” in the USA.
3. Lebanon’s confessional democracy, established by the 1989 Ta’if Accords ending the civil war, divides Parliament equally between Christians and Muslims and requires that the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of Parliament to be, respectively, a Maronite Christian, a Sunni Muslim, and a Shi’a Muslim.
4. Offre Joie recently initiated activity in Iraq; however, this case focuses on its three decades in Lebanon.
5. Classic control groups were not feasible due to lack of longitudinal data. To obtain a control group demographically similar to the Offre Joie group, Offre Joie volunteers were asked to send the survey to a friend who had not participated in Offre Joie. Demographic data was collected from both Offre Joie and control groups. Variables regarding gender, marital status, socio-economic status, confession, and employment showed no statistically significant differences.
6. More detail on the case research methodology and analysis is retrieved from [www.dreamsindeed.org](http://www.dreamsindeed.org).
7. Interview with Melhem Khalaf, 29 May 2014.
8. See <http://www.bcorporation.net/> and <http://bimpactassessment.net/>.
9. “Hang out with friends”, “Volunteer to help others in need”, “Enjoy the out of doors”, “Go home to your village/visit family”, “Travel”, “Read a book”, “Advocate for a cause”, “Study/work”, “Shop”, “Go on a religious pilgrimage”, and “Other”.
10. See Fukuyama (1995) for the links between trust, social capital, and prosperity creation.
11. *Al jaar qabal al daar*.

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## Chapter 4

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