

# Success Story

## Combating Gender Stereotypes with School Children through Books and Plays

Through a sub-grant from USAID Takamol, a USAID funded program implemented by IREX, in November 2015, the Haya Cultural Center developed six children's books and two plays that tackle gender stereotyping.

Children are incredibly susceptible to gender stereotypes and are constantly exposed to gender-biased concepts. In a USAID Takamol study of gender in textbooks, for example, male figures were frequently presented as powerful leaders while most females were restricted to domestic roles. Such messages have a profound impact on the emotional development of children, shaping their social growth and ambition from a young age. “Unfortunately, there is a lack of locally created content tackling gender stereotypes, especially for children,” reflects Mahmoud Hind, a professional storyteller. Since media and books are main influencers instilling gender stereotypes in children, tackling this complex issue requires an approach that uses these same creative tools.

“My mother changes the light bulb without a ladder and my father folds clothes and puts them in the bottom shelves” reads Mahmoud to a group of enthralled school children in the southern Jordanian city of Al-Karak. My Tall Mother is one of a series of six children's books that were developed by the Haya Cultural Center through a grant from USAID Takamol under an initiative called “Children's Books and Plays” which aims at deconstructing gender roles with school children.

In order to broaden the perspectives of children and communities, the Haya Cultural Center developed the children's books in collaboration with local writers and artists based on current research in children's literature and gender stereotyping. Each book tackled one main theme, including occupation, personality, domestic orientation, and physical and emotional attributes. Following the publication of 500 copies of each book, Mahmoud toured several governorates including Karak, Zarqa and Ajloun reading the stories to school children. “The stories were incredibly well written, the illustrations were beautiful, and the overall quality of the books themselves was superb,” recalls Mahmoud.

The books proved to be a creative tool for subtly prompting conversation about gender stereotypes among children. “The feedback and reactions from the children were great. After almost every reading session, the children almost instantly started talking about the stories to each other and sharing stories about their families,” remarks Mahmoud. Mahmoud also notes that he was approached by several school principals asking where they can buy the stories.

The initiative also developed two plays focusing mainly on combating gender stereotypes. “A Cub Unlike Any Other” and “Sun and Moon” were shown to almost 1,660 students coming from different governorates around Jordan, including Ajloun, Karak, and Zarqa. Discussion sessions and focus groups were also held to create dialogue among 604 students aged between 10 and 17 from across Jordan who traveled to Amman to visit the Haya Cultural Center through their schools.

After meeting great success and positive feedback from schools and children across the kingdom, USAID Takamol plans to build upon the Haya Cultural Center's work by involving members of its National Youth Leaders' Network. Following training on storytelling, members of the network will receive copies of the books to hold storytelling sessions in their communities increasing the reach to 4,000 or more children. Taking these steps towards raising gender-sensitive individuals in Jordan are necessary in order to have an aware and educated generation, void of discrimination.



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