WATANEYA SOCIETY
QUALITY OF LIFE FOR EVERY ORPHAN

Building The Capacity of Marginalized Youth Without Parental Care in Egypt to Advocate for their Cause

Azza Osman, Research & Knowledge Management Senior specialist, Wataneya Society
azza.othman@wataneya.org
+2 01007568327

When people lack the options and opportunity to take part in and profit from development advancement, they fall behind. Thus, anyone who has disadvantages or deprivations that restrict their options and chances in comparison to others in society can also be referred to as being "left behind". 193 United Nations Member States vowed to make sure "no one would be left behind" and to "endeavor to reach the furthest behind first" with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In actuality, this entails taking overt action to combat discrimination, end extreme poverty, reduce inequality, and expedite advancement for those who are most disadvantaged.

Therefore, to effectively address the root causes of people being left behind, countries need to gather more detailed and individualized data, and rely on information gathered from the people themselves. Each country's progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals should be tracked and reported. Furthermore, in order for the SDGs to be achieved, the people who are falling behind must play a full and equitable role in sustainable development. To enable and empower them, immediate action is required, including ensuring their meaningful involvement in decision-making and building secure and welcoming frameworks for their civic engagement. In addition, policies aimed at reducing inequality and sustaining minimal standards of wellbeing will need to be developed, implemented, and improved by both decision makers and people of the cause (UNDP, 2018, 2-11). In this paper we will focus on the challenges faced by youth without parental care as a group threatened to be left behind due to many reasons such as their limited resources and the social stigma towards them. In addition to introducing some of the possible solutions.

In Egypt, there are 12 thousand children in residential care[1]. Yet due to the large number of unregistered care-homes this figure is underestimated. Children placed in residential care in Egypt like in many countries are receiving poor quality care (Behilak et al., 2015; Kelly, 2016 as described by Nada.M, 2022, 7-8). In addition, according to the law they are abruptly required to leave care and be independent once they reach 18 years old, or once they finish school, and for girls they stay at the care home until they get married. This happens with no regard to how they will manage their new lives and whether they are prepared and equipped for this new stage in their lives.

Furthermore, youth without parental care are faced with the burden of a strong societal stigma, affecting them psychologically, and hindering their personal, social and professional well-being (Cantwell et al., 2017; Ethnasios, 2012; Stein, 2012, as cited by Nada.M, 2022, 31). A number of development concerns addressed in the SDGs, disproportionately affect children without parental care. Extreme poverty, poor physical and mental health, and a lack of access to education and essential services are just a few examples (SOS Children's villages, 2017, 2-5).

---

[1] Children in Egypt 2016 a statistical digest
https://www.unicef.org/egypt/sites/unicef.org.egypt/files/2018-05/eg_Children_In_Egypt_2016_en%283%29.pdf

In 2021, Wataneya Society (A leading Egyptian NGO a leading NGO in reforming the alternative care sector) launched a leadership program called Mobader (which means being proactive in Arabic), with the aim of building the capacity of care-leavers[2] to design and lead their own initiatives, tackling the most pressing challenges faced by children and youth without parental care.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[3] recognize that strategic investments in children are critical to advancing peace, reducing global poverty, and guaranteeing that all people can reach their full potential (SOS Children's villages, 2017, 2-11). The Mobader program will contribute to the achievement of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development adopted by Egypt, more specifically the 10th sustainable development goal (of reducing inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind and that vulnerable youth are empowered and capable). By giving marginalized youth voices and platforms to advocate for their rights and demand equal opportunities.

The Journey of Empowering Youth and Children Without Parental Care in Egypt
Since its foundation in 2008, Wataneya Society aimd to create a better future of equal opportunities for children without parental care. The organization started its work with the care homes where most children without parental care in Egypt are found. Through research and practical experience Wataneya began the journey of developing the national quality standards (NQS) to standardize the quality delivered to children and youth in alternative care. In order to draft the NQS collectively, Wataneya Society organized a number of participatory workshops that were attended by youth in care, caregivers and social workers working in care homes, managers and founders of care homes, representatives from international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs), experts in alternative care, child rights advocates, and psychologists[4]. The development of the national quality standards was based on Wataneya's field experience with seven care facilities for four years starting in 2009, in addition to the United Nations (UN) guidelines for the alternative care of children (2009), contribution of experts in the field of alternative care, and best practices in the alternative care sector (Hassanin & Kotb, 2021, 2-9)). Furthermore, the participation of youth without parental care played a big role in the development of the NQS, as it was very important to include their actual needs and aspirations in these standards.
These standards were adopted by the Ministry of Social Solidarity[5] through a ministerial decree in 2014, and became a primary tool by which care homes are monitored and assessed. Before that, Egypt had a set of outdated guidelines that dated back to 1977.

Wataneya's work and the clear vision of advancing the alternative care sector and the lives of children and youth without parental care led to the development of projects and programs that engage children and youth in capacity building and advocacy. In this paper we will introduce one of Wataneya Society's programs with care leavers called Mobader which translates to "being proactive" in Arabic. This program is part of a five year project called Care Leavers

---

[2] Youth without parental care, who resided for sometime or since childhood in alternative care and leave it when they reach the legal age or when they complete their studies in order to move to independence.
[3] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
[4] Hassanin, N and Y Kotb. "The Journey of Developing, Mandating and Applying the National Quality Standards for Care Homes in Egypt." Institutionalized Children Explorations and Beyond (2021): 2-9
[5] The Ministry of Social Solidarity is the ministry regulating and monitoring care homes in Egypt

Independence. The project is focused on the after-care of youth without parental care to prepare them for independence. It was launched in 2019 based on the experience of Wataneya from its continued work with the youth and care homes, and the realization of the need for care leavers to be well prepared for adulthood and independence. The after care project is done in partnership with the ministry of social solidarity and Drosos foundation[6]

Organizational Approach
Wataneya follows a holistic approach, to ensure that the best interest of the child is achieved. Working with different stakeholders at each level of the ecological system[7] (figure 1) towards advancing alternative care. It offers specialized programs to provide services for all stakeholders concerned with the alternative care system. The strategic goals of the organization include specific objectives to advance the alternative care ecosystem.
The goals are achieved through; partnership with the ministry of social solidarity, enabling institutional homes, capacity building of caregivers, youth skills development, and raising public awareness.
Furthermore, as part of its strategy Wataneya recognizes the importance of joining national and international networks in the field of alternative care such as The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA), and International Foster Care Organization (IFCO). These engagements help the organization stay updated on the recent developments in the field, in addition to contributing to the cause with resources and practical knowledge.

---
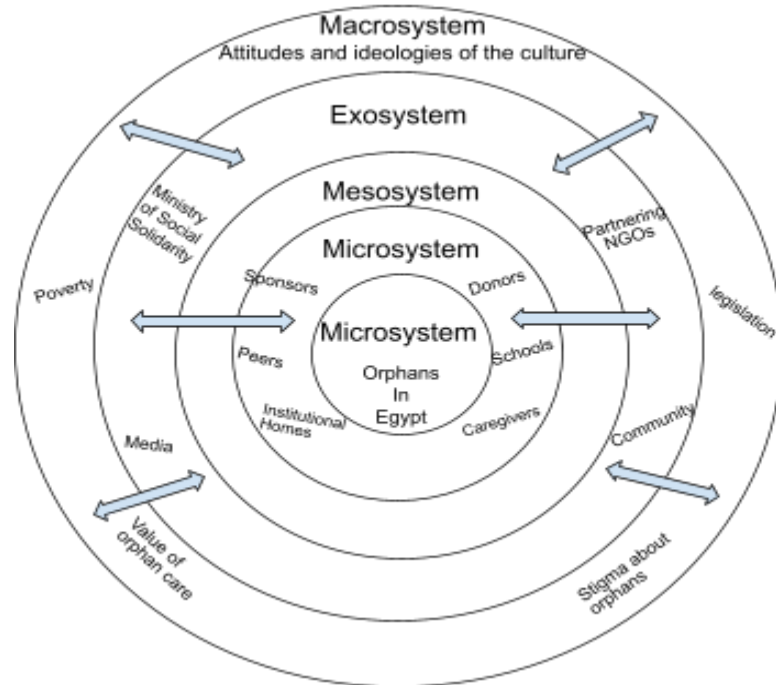
[6] Drosos Foundation is an international development organization that was established in Switzerland in 2003 and is currently working in the Middle East and North Africa as well as Europe. Their Website: https://drosos.org/en/about/#foundation
[7] Bronfenbrenner's system theory (1977) explains the influence of social environments on the development of individuals

Ecological Systems Theory Among Egyptian Children and Youth Without Parental Care
(Kelly, 2015) Figure (1)

Wataneya also takes part in national, and regional conferences to expand its network and gain exposure to help deliver its message. In addition, The organization continuously works towards engaging children and youth without parental care in national and international dialogue.

Egypt's 2030 Vision[8], The SDGs, and The Strategic Objectives of Wataneya Society
Egypt announced the vision of 2030 which is derived from the SDGs. The 2030 vision is divided across three main pillars;
- The economic dimension (economic development energy, knowledge, innovation, and scientific research, transparency and efficiency of governmental institutions).
- The social dimension (social justice, health, education and training, culture).
- The environmental dimension (environment, urban development).

Wataneya's vision aligns with the SDGs and Egypt's 2030 vision. The organization believes that through working on these four main strategic objectives (Figure 2) it will contribute to the achievement of the following Egyptian and international sustainable development goals.
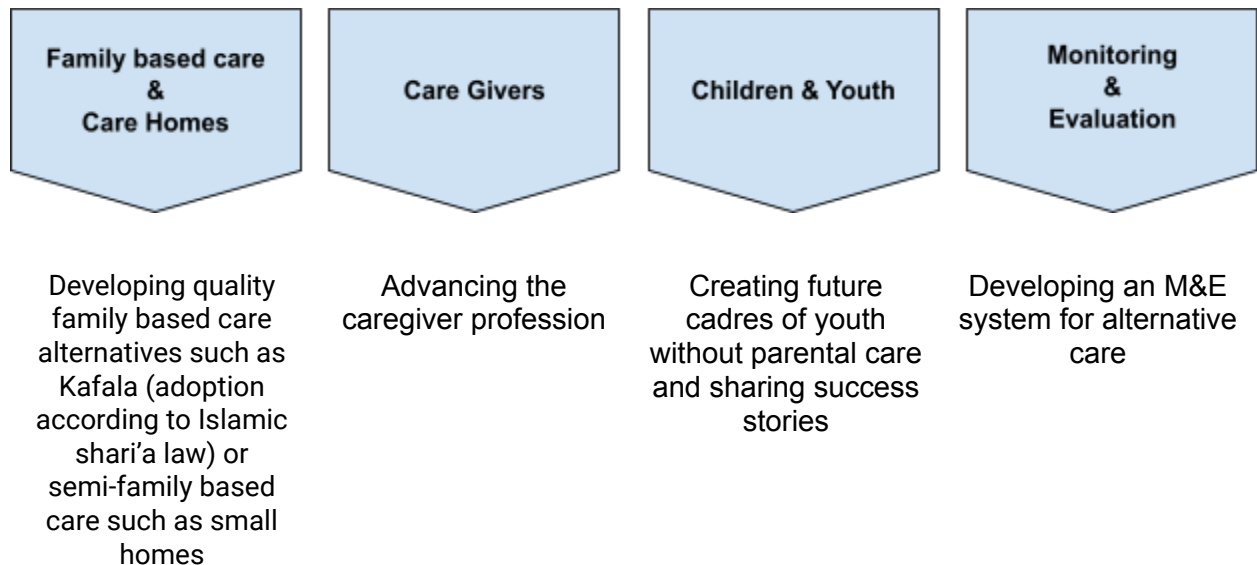- Goal 8: Decent work
- Goal 3: Good health and well-being
- Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve goals
- Goal 4: Good education
- Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions
- Goal 10: Reducing inequalities

Moreover, in April 2021, The Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the Alternative Care Strategy 2030 which is driven from Egypt Vision 2030. Wataneya's strategic objectives contribute to six out of seven objectives under the Alternative Care Objectives. One of the governance mechanisms mentioned in the Alternative Care Strategy is a youth council formed by care leavers to monitor the strategy implementation and progress.

---

[8] Egypt 2030 vision is an ambitious national agenda launched in February 2016 by the Egyptian Government and unveiled by the Egyptian president Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi, which consists of eight main national goals to be met by 2030 that are in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Sustainable Development Strategy for Africa 2063

Family based care & Care Homes	Care Givers	Children & Youth	Monitoring & Evaluation
Developing quality family based care alternatives such as Kafala (adoption according to Islamic shari'a law) or semi-family based care such as small homes	Advancing the caregiver profession	Creating future cadres of youth without parental care and sharing success stories	Developing an M&E system for alternative care

Strategic Objectives of Wataneya Society Figure (2)

Interventions to Build the Capacity of Children and Youth Without Parental Care

There is a sense of community for many of the youth engaged in different activities at Wataneya. A good number of care leavers work with the organization and others volunteer in different capacities. This is the result of the long term relationship and trust that was built throughout many projects and engagements. One of the main interventions in which many of the care leavers are involved is the youth forum.

The "Youth Forum" was established by Wataneya Society in 2017 to empower young people as they transition to independence. The forum, which targets youth aged 18 and older, aims to provide a safe space for the youth to exchange their thoughts and experiences, allow the youth to discuss the challenges they face and come up with potential solutions. This is achieved through working with experts from various fields to increase the youth's awareness, empower them to communicate their voice to the concerned authorities, and equip them with the necessary skills to do so. In turn, the forum led to the development of more ideas for projects and programs to support children and youth without parental care, with special focus on the after care system.

Another program that is implemented for youth without parental care is Mobader (meaning 'being proactive' in Arabic). This leadership program is designed to provide youth without parental care with the opportunity to practice community leadership skills, and give them the power and tools to bring about the change they desire to see in their communities.

In addition, in 2022 Wataneya created a youtube channel called Gaylak Men Henak[9] (meaning Coming to you from there/residential care). The channel targets children and youth without parental care, and features the experiences of care leavers during their years in the alternative care system. It is planned to be managed by the care-leavers in the near future.

---

[9] Gaylak Men Henak YouTube Channel link: https://www.youtube.com/videos

Mobader Program

Children and youth without parental care in Egypt have many challenges across their childhood and adulthood. The social stigma, and their limited resources makes it difficult to enjoy the same opportunities as their peers. The advocacy gap is addressed by many of Wataneya Society's programs which are implemented in collaboration with the government and civil society.

The main objective of the Mobader program is to create leadership capacity, to equip youth without parental care with the skills needed to advocate for their cause and assume their roles as changemakers and community leaders. During the program, youth are trained on leadership skills that include an advanced level of conflict resolution, planning and organizing, to prepare youth without parental care to advocate for their cause[10]. All participants from the program then use these skills to design their initiatives, to serve the cause of children and youth without parental care in Egypt. They are funded by Wataneya, and technical support is provided to them through the organization's network of experts to ensure their success. Furthermore, Wataneya holds monthly meetings and events, through which they maintain communication and follow-up with the youth from the program.

Program Design and Participants

The program addresses the community leadership methodology developed by Professor Marshall Ganz of Harvard University, which defines leadership as: "empowering others to achieve a common purpose under uncertain circumstances."

The community leadership approach is built on decades of experience in community involvement and experiences around the world, reinforced by theories and principles drawn from the social sciences, and tested through on-the-ground campaigns. Participants criteria provides equal opportunities for both males and females to join the program. It further includes care leavers, and youth transitioning from care, who have strong commitment to their communities and awareness of its issues and values. The approach has five key leadership practices;

- **Public narrative:** In order to be a leader, a community member must be given the freedom to publicly share their story about who they are, where they have come from, where they are going, and what they must do to get there. Narrative is a powerful tool that leaders use to help people better understand their beliefs, communicate them with others, and draw strength from them to take action.
- **Strategy:** Allowing the community to plan how to use its resources to gain the power it needs to achieve its goals, demands leadership. Based on a theory of change, strategy offers a path from where they are now to making the change they want in a constantly shifting environment.
- **Building relationships:** Relationships are the foundation of leadership in organizing. Leaders foster relationships among stakeholders to foster a commitment aimed at achieving a common goal. Shared values may be the foundation of relationships. Sharing personal narratives about oneself is one way people might find common values. Creating the resources they require to take action on them is another. Relationships can also be viewed in the context of exchanges. Although everybody has particular interests and resources, the majority are unable to achieve their objectives by relying solely on these resources. To have fruitful interactions, people require other individuals to create

---

[10] The cause here refers to orphanhood, and the people of the cause are meant for children and youth in care homes and alternative care, and care leavers.

productive exchanges. Through relationships, common values and interests are better understood.
- **Structuring**: Any campaign, project, or organization that is successful needs to have strong leadership. However, leadership is a group effort; it is not the domain of a single individual. The youth further learn about the concept of extended structure (snowballing). And work to mobilize other leaders from their communities in their campaigns.
- **Action:** Getting the community involved brings it all together. Based on the agreements they have obtained with others, leaders organize and deploy resources to take action. Resources can be deployed differently depending on how they mobilize them, and vice versa. Whatever the limitations, though, acting necessitates persuading others to invest time, money, effort, and frequently, courage. In order to accomplish their strategic objectives, action is frequently taken in the form of tactics. Additionally, the teams develop distinctive strategies required to carry out their plan and launch their work into other areas of the community to increase participation in campaigns.

Methodology

To achieve the above mentioned practices, Mobader program uses the following methodology. Participants work in teams on a campaign[11] of their choice, applying what they learned in the program sessions. During the first month of training, participants are divided into groups of their choice to work on a campaign of their own design. The "campaign" requires building a leadership team that mobilizes the people of the cause to achieve a tangible result in pursuit of a common goal by the end of the program (i.e. within 10 months).

Each team has three to four participants who work together on a joint campaign across the duration of the program. Across each of the five key leadership practices there is a set of learning outcomes that should be achieved by participants through training and hands-on experiences.

Example of Youth Campaigns and their Objectives

One of the youth campaigns is called ambassadors of change. It is focused on building the capacity of the youth's siblings in the care home between the age of 8 years to 25 years old, in order to help them advance in their studies, by creating momentum through different study groups, camps and other strategies. The goal is to implement this campaign across two years 2021 / 2022, by encouraging the children and youth to use their resources, motivate each other, and set their goals and study plan for the next two years. In the first semester of implementation, there were some promising initial results for the people who joined the campaign. The results showed that many of the children and youth at the care homes had low grades and some even had summer school, but by the end of the second semester many of them had great results and some of them excelled. The leader for this campaign shared the following statement *"I was the type who did everything myself and was very nervous because I have this need to make everything perfect. But I learned that I need to give others space, empower them to do things themselves, and allow everyone to have a role".*

---

[11] A campaign is a time-limited community project in which the focus is on solving a specific challenge by implementing a set of tactics.

Impact of Mobader Program

Mobader seemed to have impacted the youth on multiple levels, such as: in the desire to help others, their self confidence, planning, skill development, empowerment to self and others, and leadership. The following are some of the youth testimonials from the programs:

One of the youth shared the following *"I don't just live for myself, but I live to help others. Before the program, I wanted to do this and I knew how, but the program gave me a chance to actually do it."*

While others shared the skills they gained and believe they will continue to use in the future. One of the youth said *"I became more self confident, I am not scared of public speaking, I've come to use planning in my personal life, and I became more keen on working and developing myself".*

Many of the youth in the program shared professional and personal skills they were able to develop through their participation in Mobader. One said *"I learned how to work as part of a team, coordinate meetings and create an agenda, furthermore I learned how to empower others, mobilize people for a cause, and storytelling"* while another shared *"I learned the concept of empowerment, and how to let others gain the tools with which they are able to help themselves".*

One of the youth said *"I learned the skill of storytelling to share my story with others, and I learned the meaning of shared responsibility"*

Finally two of the youth shared their insights after a while in the program saying *"After joining Mobader I gained a sense of responsibility towards the cause. I learned how to build and sustain strong relationships, how to plan, implement and evaluate interventions, and finally, I learned how to dream and believe in my dreams"* The other shared *"The program changed me in many ways. I learned how to be a leader"*

Finally, in the context of Egypt and more specifically youth without parental care, there has been a steady progress taking place across different levels of the ecological system.

The work of the Ministry of Social solidarity, Wataneya Society, youth without parental care, and other stakeholders in the alternative care field, is creating a snowballing effect on the cause.

It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) has addressed Wataneya Society to nominate care leavers to participate in reviewing the draft of the alternative care law before submitting it to the parliament. Accordingly, a group of Mobader program participants have participated in reviewing the proposed law in coordination with MoSS.

This is one of many small successes, which contributes to the achievement of the international agenda of the SDGs, and the 10th sustainable development goal of reducing inequalities and leaving no one behind. By providing opportunities such as "Mobader" for capacity building, empowerment, leadership and advocacy, youth without parental care will have the necessary tools and skills to make their voices heard, contribute to their cause, demand equal opportunities, and catch up to their peers.

Resources

Behilak, S G., E M. Gemeay and S Hedgecoe. "Psychoeducational intervention for caregivers of
institutionalized school age children." Journal of Nursing and Health Science (2015):
33-45.

Cantwell, N, C Gale, K McGhee and K Skinner. "Prepare for Leaving Care: Practice Guidance."

(2017):

Hassanin, N and Y Kotb. "The Journey of Developing, Mandating and Applying the National
Quality Standards for Care Homes in Egypt." Institutionalized Children Explorations and
Beyond (2021): 2-9

"How To Support Children Without Parental Care Through The Sustainable Development
Goals."(2017): 5-20

Children in Egypt "A statistical digest". Retrieved from,
https://www.unicef.org/egypt/press-releases/release-joint-publication-children-egypt-20
16-presenting-national-data-child-well (2016):

"The extent of violent practices for child discipline in Egypt". Retrieved from UNICEF
https://www.unicef.org/eg- 2021:

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (SDS): EGYPT VISION 2030
https://arabdevelopmentportal.com/sites/default/files/publication/sds_egypt_vision_203
pdf 2016:

UNDP. " WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND? A UNDP discussion paper and
framework for implementation" (2018): 3-11

Nada, M."Promoting Secure Attachment in Children without Parental Care in Egypt" [Master's
Thesis, the American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain.
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1893 (2022) 7-8