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Lebanon: Democracy Promotion in a Handbook

July 12th, 2010 by Jennifer

Using funding from USAID, Mercy Corps and the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) published a handbook of training procedures on democracy and governance both in print and online today. The book “sets out specific guidelines on how to conduct workshops and training seminars on topics including accountability, leadership, corruption and municipal law.” Municipal authorities and local NGOs are being encouraged to apply the guidelines to their own projects, with the hope that the standardized model outlined in the handbook will be adopted throughout Lebanon and eventually spread throughout the region. Focusing specifically on the involvement of youth ages 15-22m the report grew out of a 2009 project entitled “Youth Government through Youth Municipalities,” in which young people from across Lebanon received training in conducting free, transparent elections. The publication seeks to address problems of underfunding and a lack of coordination among municipalities in Lebanon on elections, as well as a lack of education on democratic processes and participation among the youth.

Source: **Daily Star**

Link: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=1&article_id=116967#axzz0tXvZ3Q00

NGO's good-governance booklet aims to strengthen country's democracy

Toolkit sets guidelines on how to conduct workshops, seminars

By Simona Sikimic

Daily Star staff

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BEIRUT: Democracy promotion among the next generation of Lebanese voters was given a boost on Monday with the national release of a handbook detailing training procedures on good governance.

The toolkit designed by international non-governmental organization Mercy Corps and the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), sets out specific guidelines on how to conduct workshops and training seminars on topics including accountability, leadership, corruption and municipal laws.

Local municipal authorities and NGOs are now being encouraged to adopt these outlines and carry them out in their own projects with youth aged 15 to 22. The free publication of the handbook in print and online has been funded by USAID and it is hoped the guidelines will soon be extended to other countries across the region and eventually to Europe and America.

"From now on it doesn't matter what organization implements this project, it just matters that it is implemented," Mercy Corp country director Steven Haley told delegates gathered for the launch. "We can now start straight away and hand the running of the program over to local government and NGOs."

Training outlines are taken from "Youth Government through Youth Municipalities," a Mercy Corps and LTA program adopted in October 2009. It saw groups of 50 to 112 young people in Bourj al-Barajneh, Baalbek, Baal Mohsen, Tyre and Nabatieh being prepped to hold mock municipal polls.

The groups were trained and then asked to form political lists which electioneered based on manifestoes promising to implement chosen developmental social activities, such as providing local fishermen with nets or cleaning up local parks.

Candidates were elected based on their promises and coalitions formed according to election results.

"This is in no way an attack on the ability of the municipalities," he said. "Often they are restrained by a lack of resources [and] often if they had the resources they would do it."

Coordination across the country's 116 municipalities is limited, meaning that operating procedures are often ad hoc, leading to disorganization and a lack of popular understanding.

Crucially, municipalities are vastly underfunded which impedes the ability of local government to respond to the needs of its citizens, delegates heard.

Basic democratic principles – such as what constitutes a free, fair and transparent election – are also not taught in many schools, or, by municipalities.

"The main aim of the project is that voting should be based on platforms and not personalization," Mercy Corps program officer Ghassan Wehbe said in a specially aired documentary about the project. "[And] to take the thoughts of these youths and translate them into contributions serving the local community."

Program participants are now being used as a support base for future community leadership initiatives and will be used to train peers about better governance and electoral practices.

"I'm excited about this release and ... hope we can implement some of its programs by the summer," said Omar Sleiman, director of Lebanese NGO Horizon which works with children in underprivileged areas.

"Young people have much to learn, the level of understanding about the democratic process tends to be relatively low.

"[But] I saw the program in implementation in Baalbek, and I know that it can work."

For the time, Mercy Corps will not be providing funding for endeavors conducted by other organizations.