

Lebanon green schools pave the way for eco-friendly generations

Samar Kadi

Beirut

“Green starts at school.” With this motto in mind, Lebanese NGOs and an eco-consultancy firm embarked on a mission to encourage Lebanese private and public schools to turn green.

“We believe in education to promote awareness about the environment and ecology,” said lawyer Hadla Traboulsi, founder of the Lebanese Organisation for Green Schools (LOGS). “School is the natural and ideal place to learn, raise environmental awareness, build habits and citizenship values because the ultimate objective is to change people’s practices and behaviour.”

LOGS has been approaching schools since 2015 with activities and ideas to help them become eco-friendly. These include training

teachers on green practices and introducing environmental issues in the subjects they teach, reorganising the schools’ utilities and premises to make them less harmful to the environment and assisting the schools in establishing environmental clubs.

“Students are in charge of running their school’s environmental club,” Traboulsi said. “By giving them such responsibilities we are actually engaging them. They decide on the activities they want to make and they are being very creative.”

Clubs’ activities include planting trees, clean-up campaigns, building vertical gardens in the school court and showing environment-related movies and documentaries.

The NGO has created a glossary of “environmental vocabulary” that teachers can introduce in language, mathematics and science classes, said LOGS educational adviser and board member Spiro Habash.

“Virtual water’ is one example of this vocab,” Habash said. “For instance, it takes 140 litres of virtual water to make a cup of coffee because you need to plant the coffee, irrigate the shrub, process the seeds, transport it, etc. This raises awareness about how precious a commodity water is. Messages are passed through lessons.”

Helping schools turn green is not an easy task due to financial and resource limitations, Traboulsi noted.

“Most schools are set in old buildings and it is not always simple to refurbish them. Financial means and capacities determine how fast the school can turn green. Some schools may have the will but not the means. Others have both and can in one year become eco-friendly by installing photovoltaic systems and solar panels to save on energy, etc.”

Green schools in Lebanon are audited by e-EcoSolutions. The environmental consultancy firm oversees implementation of the Green Schools Certification Programme,



Building habits. A Lebanese student speaks about saving paper to protect the environment.

(Green Schools)

“School is the natural and ideal place to learn, raise environmental awareness.”



Lawyer Hadla Traboulsi, founder of the Lebanese Organisation for Green Schools

under which schools are progressively rewarded for their achievements and commitment to protecting the environment.

“e-EcoSolutions is the appointed leader of the Lebanon Chapter of the Global Coalition for Green Schools. We have given Green School certificates to 38 schools across Lebanon so far,” said the firm’s CEO Gilbert Tegho.

He said each school will score Green Points (GPs) based on a checklist of sustainability solutions in the categories of recycling, green spaces, energy efficiency, water efficiency, health and safety and sustainability education.

“There is a minimum of 20 GPs that schools should score to qualify for certification. Depending on the points scored, the schools may get bronze, silver, gold or platinum certifications,” Tegho said.

Green Schools Certifications are valid for two years, after which a second audit is required to maintain

or upscale the certification level.

“We do the audits and the scoring because we have the benchmarks based on an international programme tailored to the country. We provide schools with a clear guideline of what they can do to become green. We actually give them free consultancy on the things that they can potentially achieve to score points,” Tegho said.

He noted that most schools in Lebanon, both private and public, are engaged in sorting and recycling paper. Many have replaced bulbs and lighting systems with light-emitting diode (LED) and energy-saving lights, others installed double-glazed windows to improve insulation and reduce energy consumption. Some are collecting rainwater or revamping water pipes and taps to make them more economical and prevent water leakage.

e-EcoSolutions has been working with partners and NGOs willing to help schools develop, including a

bank offering interest-free loans.

“The outcome that we want to achieve is to change the behaviour of students to become eco-citizens... They should know that there is a problem with climate change but that there are also solutions and that they can act towards it,” Tegho said.

Traboulsi lamented that people in Lebanon fail to react to environmental issues unless they reach a grave stage. “The garbage collection crisis that plagued Lebanon two years ago might have had one advantage in that it acted as a wake-up call and made people realise that it is a very serious problem affecting their life and their health,” she said.

“That is why engaging children and encouraging them to be part of the solution of environmental problems is crucial.”

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Jordan’s education system strained by Syrian refugees

Roufan Nahhas

Amman

Jordan is in dire need of reviewing and upgrading its weary education system, which has been further strained by taking Syrian refugee students into public schools.

A report by the World Bank stated that a new system in education was needed in Jordan to improve learning outcomes and raise the level of qualified teachers and institutions.

“This is a very realistic report that stresses the fact that one of the main challenges we are facing is low access to quality elementary education. There is a need to prepare students from an early age to higher education standards,” said Hiyam Jamil, a public school teacher.

“There are many other challenges affecting teachers and schools,” she said. “Better salaries, better training and a better environment are needed. If the teacher is well-equipped and satisfied, it will be beneficial to students and the whole system.”

The report said Jordanian teachers are unprepared because they receive insufficient pre-service training that leaves them ill-equipped to teach specific subjects.

In South Shouneh, in the Jor-

dan Valley, Al-Rawda Basic Mixed School has more than 500 students and receives almost 100 new students per year, most of whom are from Syria. That has forced the administration to resort to two shifts at the school.

The World Bank report said Jordan hosts 660,582 registered Syrian refugees, of which 232,868 are school-aged children requiring educational services. As of last June, approximately 10% of children in public schools were Syrian refugees. A government census said around 1.265 million Syrians lived in Jordan in 2016.

An estimated 80% of refugees live in host communities, representing 10% of Jordan’s population of 9.5 million in 2016. The rest live in refugee camps, such as Zaatarri in Mafraq.

Esra’ Abbas, 13, a Syrian student who attends a public school in Irbid in northern Jordan, said: “I am happy to join the school here as I want to continue my studies away from the war in my country. Soon, I will leave for Sweden as a refugee and continue my dream.”

Education has been the focus of Jordanian Queen Rania, who openly expressed dissatisfaction with the educational system and the country’s general secondary education examination (Tawjihi) at the National Strategy for Human

Resource Development conference in 2016.

She noted that of the 100,000 students who were registered in 12th grade in 2015, only 60,000 sat for the secondary certificate exam and only 40% of those passed. That means that less than 25% of 12th grade students will graduate.

Results from 2016 showed a similar pattern. Newspapers carried shocking headlines such as: “Not a single student from 300 schools has passed!” In one case, a blank Tawjihi exam paper was submitted with the only comment written on it by the examination hall supervisor: “The student is almost illiterate. He cannot read or write properly!”

“A student spent 12 years in our schools and did not learn how to read and write!” an outraged Queen Rania was quoted as saying.

The World Bank report said 20% of students in second grade could not read a single word from a passage and nearly half were unable to solve a single subtraction problem.

A total of 125,378 Jordanian students and 3,214 Syrian students sat for the Tawjihi summer session in 2017. Around 81% of schools in which no students passed the official exam were in rural areas, the Ministry of Education said.

Refugees are not the only challenge facing the country’s public education system. The influx of



Elusive dreams. Syrian refugee children between the ages of 6 and 12 line up in a classroom for a lesson in summer school in Amman, last July.

(AP)

Jordanian students from private to public schools is increasing at an alarming rate due to soaring private school fees.

“We cannot afford to pay for private schools anymore as one child costs around \$5,000 per year,” said a father of three who requested anonymity. “On top of the fees, you have books, uniforms, stationery, etc... We finally decided to shift them to public school to continue their studies... It was a very hard decision but we were forced to do so.”

Jordan has 1,100 private schools,

including 550 in Amman.

The World Bank report said that while most Syrian refugee children have access to education services in Jordan, they face the same challenges that disadvantaged Jordanian children do.

The accommodation of thousands of refugees in the education system has slowed efforts by the Ministry of Education to improve quality and manage the system more efficiently, the report added.

Roufan Nahhas is a journalist based in Jordan.