

سارة محمود

أحاول كسر المفاهيم التي تميز بين الجنسين والتي يرسخها المجتمع من خلال الرياضة

"I try to challenge gender-discriminatory concepts established by society through sports"



قصة إنسان مؤثر

HUMAN IMPACT STORY

Σ ΚΑΦΑ
ENOUGH VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION
كفيت العنف و الاستغلال

السويد
Sverige

UN
WOMEN

الناس

The nineteen-year-old girl, Sarah Mahmoud, is a martial arts trainer, specialized in taekwondo, in Al-Jalil Organization for Development, which provides support to young men and women through various activities aimed at promoting gender equality. The organization is active in Rashidieh camp for Palestinian refugees in Tyre, southern Lebanon, where Sarah also resides. The young woman considers sports as a tool through which patriarchal concepts can be challenged and gender equality achieved, as it is one of the areas where there is massive gender-based discrimination.

SARAH SAID:

“ I try to challenge gender discriminatory concepts established by society through sports”



SARAH MAHMOUD

Prior to her participation last June in the “Men and Women for Gender Equality” programme implemented by KAFA, Sarah’s work was limited to training children. “The programme taught me how to use my skills with my peers to convey my ideas, and it was my first opportunity to coach people my age,” Sarah says. Before this project, the young trainer herself was caught in the trap of discrimination she inherited from her community as she used to practice sex segregation, but today she brings both genders together to training “so that children do not inherit their parents’ ideas”. “Through sports, I try to break this cycle and abolish concepts that society has instilled in children from a young age,” she says. Today, Sarah trains women to defend themselves against any kind of harassment.

2021

This young resident of Rashidieh camp talks about discrimination practiced inside the camp, where martial arts are considered as a male gendered sport, not designed for girls. She adds, “my goal from my work with the Al-Jalil Organization is now to change my surrounding’s views and ideas through sports. I succeeded in changing the views and concepts of one category, but I seek to change the views of the category that I have not yet been able to influence. I have been able to change the attitude of the parents of the girls who trained with me, who disapproved their daughters’ participation in this sport.”



IMPROVEMENT

The young woman recounts how “certain parents were initially against their daughters’ participation in this sport because they believed it was for boys only. With time, we were able to convince them to allow their daughters to participate. The girls started bringing their friends to train together, and the parents’ consent grew more and more sure and they were more and more convinced that this sport gives their daughters courage and enhances their self-confidence. I remember that one of the girls could not initially join us due to her family’s opposition; then they sent her older sister with her to watch her during training, and the sister wanted to participate as well. We felt so proud that day that we were able to convince the older sister too.”

In addition to her work as trainer, the young woman pursues a degree in biomedical sciences. She didn’t face discrimination within the family since her father was her biggest fan and supported her in taekwondo practice, as she states. However, she faced discrimination within the community, and like any girl, she was judged and criticized, “people in my community used to call me a tomboy (a term that refers to girls seen by the patriarchal society as not abiding by the roles imposed on them and who exhibit characteristics or behaviors typical of boys). I was able to convince them that I was growing and succeeding. I started walking down the streets in the camp unaffected by the words I heard. The programme gave me an incentive to stand up for myself,” says the young woman. She adds, “the programme boosted my self-confidence. I received encouragement from the trainers, and the topics that were tackled reinforced my rejection of gender-based discrimination.”

Sarah recounts how she was an introvert before participating in the project, “the programme made me open to communication and discussion. My personal relationships were also positively affected.”



SARAH'S BEHAVIORS

As a girl who has to face society's views and judgment, Sarah used to wear modest clothes, other than those designated for sports, while on her way to training; then changes when she arrives in order to avoid harassment. Today, she chooses appropriate and comfortable workout apparel and no longer has to change.

ADMIRABLE LEADER

Despite the pressure that the young woman had to face, just like the girls she trained, she managed to overcome many obstacles. The programme built her capacities to rise to the challenge and enhanced her resilience and experience despite her young age: "It made me realize the importance of collective projects aimed at achieving equality. Such projects not only offer knowledge and techniques, but also moral support."

GENDER EQUALITY

Women's safety

This interview was conducted as part of the “Men and Women for Gender Equality” programme (2019-2021), which aims to challenge social norms regarding discriminatory mentalities on the subject of gender equality, as well as on positive fatherhood and gender-based violence.



MEN AND WOMEN FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). As part of this project, KAFA, in cooperation with UN Women in Lebanon, supported CBOs in designing and implementing community-based solutions, tailored to suit local contexts, in order to challenge social norms and promote gender equality.

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