A framework for youth engagement in urban contexts
The framework for youth engagement in urban contexts offers a structured and pragmatic approach for engaging youth residents of cities and urban areas in development initiatives. This focus has emerged as a result of learning from a peace building project, implemented by World Vision Lebanon in Beirut (2009-2013). The framework was developed, refined and supported by external literature to strengthen the evidence behind it and identifies five key elements that are critical for any project aiming to engage youth in urban contexts. Those elements are: physical space, mobilisation, exposure, activism and staff competencies as well as organisational adaptations. Each of these elements needs to be taken into consideration and carefully planned for in order to have improved urban youth engagement. A specific step-by-step process is hence also presented as part of the proposed framework.

At this stage, the proposed framework is not yet validated. This document presents the plan for testing and validating the framework in the next phase of the Beirut programme (2014-2016). It is worth noting, however, that as is the framework presents a strong argument as to the significance of the different elements and the interactions between them. It has been reviewed and validated by multiple stakeholders (including members of the peace building project in Beirut) and is also supported by academic and non-academic literature on the topic. The document at hand represents a compilation of evidence to date with regards to urban youth engagement. It can be considered an interim report. The final product will be developed after testing and validating the framework. Meanwhile, it enables practitioners to have a general understanding of what urban youth engagement entails and what evidence exists to support the proposed approach.

The framework is proposed at a critical moment as World Vision International (WVI) has acknowledged the importance of addressing urban vulnerabilities globally as well as advancing the urban programming agenda. These efforts are being led by the Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming. Furthermore, from a regional perspective, World Vision’s Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office (MEERO) is shifting its focus to evidence-based, scalable practices in order to ensure efficient and effective contributions to the well-being of children and youth in MEER. The Urban Learning Hub (ULH), part of World Vision MEERO, recognised the importance of putting together this framework for urban youth engagement given both the importance and magnitude of the issue as well as its alignment with the national, regional and global strategies of the organisation. The ULH is a platform for generating, transforming and transferring learning from existing practices, aiming to contribute to the scale up of effective urban programming approaches as well as position MEERO as a leader in innovative urban programming, both internally as well as among external agencies. This product is therefore one of the first attempts of the ULH to document and share promising practices for engaging with youth in urban contexts.
This document is the result of the fruitful collaboration by several parties, who contributed through different means and at different stages. We would like to thank the youth participants in the peace building project in Beirut for their continuous involvement in reflection meetings and learning events which contributed to the development of this framework. The uninterrupted enthusiasm of each one of them about the project was pivotal. The World Vision Lebanon (WVL) Beirut team also contributed to a great extent to the proposed framework, with current and former staff members among those we would like to mention by name, including: Elias Ayoub, former Beirut area manager; Olivia Pennikian, WVL advocacy manager, provided insightful review of the product and Nisreen Abou Mrad, WVL design monitoring and evaluation coordinator, helped in the process of conceptualizing the next phase for testing the framework. Yara Shamlati, research assistant at the Faculty of Health Sciences in the American University of Beirut supported in the literature review process, which was a critical task for the completion of this document. From World Vision MEERO, Giorgos Filippou, evidence building advisor was part of the conceptualization of this product and provided much valuable input on how to support the framework with existing evidence from various sources; and Clare Seddon, field support director also provided insightful guidance throughout the development of this product. Also from MEERO, a thank you goes to colleagues from the Youth Empowerment Learning Hub for their review of the first phases of this framework development and their contribution to the final product as well as for Heidi Isaza, resource production coordinator, for the editing of this document. The design of this product was done by external consultant, Patrick Thatch. Finally, the Global Centre of Expertise (CoE) for Urban Programming in WVI was the chief stakeholder, pushing forward the development of this framework by supporting the peace building project in Beirut as an urban pilot and providing the financial support needed to conduct research and generate learnings from the promising practices since 2009. This product could not have been completed without the valuable contribution of everyone mentioned.

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I. URBAN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:  
A SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

“Youth engagement” has gained momentum within many organisations and institutions after the Convention of the Rights of the Child\(^1\) recognised youth as active agents of change within society and emphasised their right to have their voices heard. Although each organisation has its own definition for youth engagement, the central factor is that “youth engagement” is all about young people actively participating and tackling issues that affect them personally (Preira, 2007, Ginwright & James, 2002). Youth engagement refers to the process of meaningful voluntary participation of young people in decision-making and governance of organisations or programmes resulting in: the valuing of youths’ opinions and contributions towards change; an increase in youths’ understanding of factors that impact their lives and a shared power between youth and adults (Preira, 2007).

In the urban context, youth engagement is extremely important given that urban youth (both women and men), especially the marginalised among them, are generally viewed as threats to civil society as opposed to assets of their communities. Youth living in disadvantaged urban areas and slums are subject to: unsafe living conditions, discrimination, violence and exploitation by gangsters, criminal organisations or even military groups (Ginwright & James, 2002). The high rate of school dropouts and unemployment in urban areas, places youth in even more vulnerable positions (Laithy et al., 2008). Such conditions can trigger drug addiction, depression and suicidal tendencies, among other things (Ginwright & James, 2002). These problems are exacerbated by the fact that traditional youth development programmes rarely address the ways in which young people deal with these problems (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Therefore, investing in appropriate programming for poor, marginalised youth in cities is both a crime prevention and conflict mitigation strategy, resulting in the reduction of urban crime levels and a significantly enhanced security (Ginwright & James, 2002). When youth become active, they can catalyse positive change in the settings in which they live, learn, work and play (Delgado & Staples, 2008). The benefits of youth engagement are numerous; especially on the personal level (International Youth Foundation, 2002). Being involved leads to a greater sense of control, empowerment and connectedness; thus leading to “positive youth development” and enhanced well-being (International Youth Foundation, 2002). “Positive youth development” is a wider concept that links young people’s engagement in interventions with developmental outcomes. “While all positive youth development opportunities enable youth to acquire and advance a range of life skills, youth engagement programs

\(^1\) The CRC considers “children” to be of age zero to 18 whereas other agencies consider the youth to start at the age of 14 and to continue till 25. As such, the CRC does include a segment of youth aged 14-18 in its considerations. In this document, we consider youth to be young men and women aged 14 to 25, recognised by UNESCO and other global agencies.
deliver the added value of active citizenship and social responsibility” (International Youth Foundation, 2002).

Research has shown that civic engagement increases resiliency and protects young people from engaging in risky behaviour (Shen, 2006). The benefits of such civic engagement are not limited to youth, but also extend to the organisation and staff implementing this approach. First, they will better understand the youths’ concerns and needs and they will be able to use this knowledge to develop more responsive programs. Second, the connection with the community is strengthened and the relationships between adults and youths are enhanced. Third, new innovative ideas might come from the interaction with youth (Norman, 2001). Finally, youth engagement promotes the ownership and sustainability of programmes enabling them to reach a wide spectrum of youth and children in the community; allowing for a trickle-down effect of those programmes which could, in turn, affect the well-being of a wider segment of young people in the community (Brennan et al., 2007).

In the countries where World Vision operates in the MEER³; urban youth face a range of diverse issues, starting with high rates of unemployment as well as wider poor socio-economic conditions that can lead to delinquency and criminal behaviour. World Vision MEERO recognises the challenges affecting young people and the regional strategy for 2014-2018 prioritises addressing those. The strategy recognises that by working on mobilising youth and building their technical as well as life skills, they will be empowered to better contribute to the development of sustainable, resilient and productive cities that will ensure a more conducive environment for improved well-being of children.

In order to operationalise this strategic direction, the Youth Empowerment Learning Hub in MEERO put together a Youth Empowerment Theory of Change (ToC) which serves as a framework for a systematised and structural approach by which the youth can be empowered to further contribute to the transformation of their communities. The ToC represents key changes at individual, household and societal levels that need to occur if the foreseeable transformation is to take

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³ WV MEER encompasses: Lebanon and JWG, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Albania, Kosovo, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Bosnia & Herzegovina.
Youth engagement in urban contexts and the related findings presented here will be another building block for youth to be granted important roles in their communities and given the opportunity to contribute to social changes. After being tested and validated, the framework for urban youth engagement will then be adopted as one of the approaches aligned with the ToC to implement youth projects in urban areas.

There have already been several youth engagement initiatives implemented in MEER offices, the approaches, however, were different for each initiative. Even though the principles of youth engagement might be similar across multiple frameworks and approaches in theory, when implemented in urban contexts, those same principles must also take into account each community’s characteristics, such as: the density of the urban population, the diversity of the urban residents as well as the dynamics in terms of power relationships and politics (World Vision International, 2012).

In this document, the a framework for urban youth engagement is proposed as an approach for increasing youth participation and eventually improving youth empowerment in cities and urban towns. The proposed approach was developed based on a literature review, an examination of models developed by other NGOs and extensively on a project implemented by World Vision in Beirut, Lebanon; detailed in the following section.

Figure 1 – Framework for Youth Engagement in Urban Contexts [2013]
A. BACKGROUND
Between 2009 and 2013, World Vision Lebanon (WVL) implemented a project to address political and religious intolerance as well as scars left by conflicts (past and present). The participants were youth between the ages of 16 and 30 in Beirut. The project area covered two communities spatially divided based on sectarian and political affiliations. The area is known for the former demarcation line that divided the Christians and Muslims during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and was also directly affected by the July war in 2006. The project emerged after the July war in response to the demand of local youth who pleaded for interventions to reconcile the segregated urban communities they call home.

B. EXPECTED OUTCOMES
The peace building project was designed with an overarching goal of, cultivating “communities that proactively engage in building positive relationships and a healthy and resilient community for peace”.
In order to contribute to this goal, the project was designed with the following outcomes in mind:

1. To empower youth in selected urban communities to become agents of change who in turn promote peace in the larger project areas.

2. To build a network of organisations from divided communities to address obstacles to peace and build resilience in the area.

This document will focus on the first outcome that addressed youth; from which the proposed engagement framework emerged.

Under the first outcome, the project activities aimed to address youth both as beneficiaries as well as volunteers. (1) As beneficiaries, the project sought to build the capacities of youth in order to equip them to be involved in community social work; planning and executing peace building activities that addressed children and other youth in their communities. This aim grew from an important community need that was identified: the project communities lacked extracurricular activities for young people and many youth spent their free time on the streets, where they were exposed to: drugs, gangs or political parties, as the area needs assessment report (2005) showed. The few existing clubs and activities in the communities were mostly affiliated with religious groups and afforded little chance for interfaith collaboration. The assumption was that by keeping youth busy with constructive extracurricular activities, they were less likely to be exposed to risks on the street and more likely to have improved well-being. Furthermore, in such segregated communities, if opportunities are not intentionally created, youth were unlikely to meet
their peers from other backgrounds. (2) The original design of the project included the development of a children’s and youth club that engaged the same youth as volunteers for the implementation of World Vision’s child-focused events. The aim was to provide youth with the training necessary to organise and implement World Vision’s project activities, which ranged from interfaith religious celebrations and the yearly Peace Marathon to peace focused summer camps, organised by World Vision for children and youth in the area.

C. MEASURED OUTCOMES

**Background on evaluation:** Between July and September 2013, WVL completed an evaluation of this project led by an external consultant. The consultant, who is based in the United States, visited Lebanon for two weeks of field work. The remainder of the evaluation was conducted virtually.

**Evaluation methodology:** The evaluation methodology was decided jointly by the external consultant and WVL staff working on this project. It consisted of primary and secondary data collection. For secondary data, the evaluator reviewed all project documents, including the project design, monitoring reports and learning documents. For the primary data, the evaluation had a qualitative focus, whereby Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with 13 (nine males and four females) youth members of the project, nine current and former WVL staff influencing the design and implementation of the project as well as four local government stakeholders who were the main partners in this project. The selection of the youth to participate in the evaluation was done...
through stratified sampling to include: youth who were believed to add value and background to the results of the project; youth who had different durations of participation in the project and to make sure both the opinions of both girls and boys as well as Christian and Muslim participants were heard. The results of the KII with the youth were then discussed in a validation meeting comprised of eight youth (six males and two females) including participants and non-participants in the KII process. This meeting aimed at validating the evaluation results as well as the urban youth engagement framework, which was designed as a result of continuous reflections by staff members on the process of youth engagement throughout the project’s implementation.

D. MAIN EVALUATION RESULTS
In general, the evaluation results showed that the project, at its peak, was able to bring together 40-50 youth (both male and female) between the ages of 15 and 35, from divided urban communities and impact their personal lives by:

- Improving their interpersonal skills: such as communication and attitudes towards the ‘other’; who is from a different background (religion, culture, political affiliation, etc.).
- Improving their technical skills (such as those required to plan, implement and evaluate activities and community interventions), as well as their abilities to engage with children; specifically around the topic of peace building.
- Impacting their type of interaction with their communities making their engagement a positive experience that yields to positive changes and developments.

E. LIMITATIONS
A couple of limitations were noted throughout the planning and execution of the evaluation process.

1. Quantitative tools used to establish the baseline of the project were no longer relevant during end evaluation due to the change in the profile and the course of the project’s implementation to reflect the changing urban context – i.e. an increase in youth organisations and civil society in the area as well as the shift of focus from religious to political divides. As no quantitative data collection was done around these topics during the evaluation, there are no tangible, numeric results that can be derived from this exercise.

2. Throughout the implementation of the project, internal change management within WVL translated into high turnover of staff managing this project, which has resulted in turnover among the youth participating it (due in part to the changes in the approaches adopted by different managers). The children and youth club has thus progressed into different structures depending on the management approach of the project coordinator and the level of participation among youth.

F. DISCUSSION
The peace building project in Beirut was designed to build positive relationships among the children and youth of the area and provide them with the needed life and technical skills to organise community interventions targeted at other children and youth. Overall, it was not possible
to measure to what extent the project has contributed to the goal of fostering a resilient community for peace (see the limitations section). The project did, however, significantly impact the lives of a number of members of the youth group who would have, potentially, resorted to the less positive and unhealthy alternatives available in their communities. One could confidently claim that the project targeted individuals rather than the mass. While it did not reach a great number of youth compared to the overall number of youth and young adults living in the area, it did reach out to those who are in need of such programming: those already involved in gangs and delinquent activities and those at most risk of joining them.

Interviews with the youth revealed a significant change on the intra and interpersonal relationships among many of them. One example of this is a young man who turned away from the armed political party he was affiliated with and embraced a new worldview founded on peaceful engagement and participation which, in turn, resulted in community development. Many other youth were pulled away from a life on the streets and encouraged to put their time to better use through participating in various initiatives aimed at improving their communities – for example, the child friendly space that the youth established with the support of one of the local municipalities that hosted regular activities for children and youth in the area. The child friendly space also served as a place for youth coming from different backgrounds, religions and political affiliation to meet, share ideas and plan together for community interventions. By working towards a common end goal, the youth were able to put their differences aside and join their skills and expertise together; which, at its core, in, is a good example of peace building.

One of the significant positive outcomes of the project was a group of youth participants who formed their own Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) to serve children and youth in the community – inspired by World Vision’s approach – which is now working with World Vision Lebanon as one of its partners in Beirut. Such examples tell a lot about the potential for success of such projects. The lessons learned from this project allowed the World Vision Lebanon team in Beirut to think of ways to overcome challenges and expand on good practices during the next phase of the project (these are detailed in the last section of this paper, discussing the future of programming in Beirut and explaining why a solid approach for urban youth engagement is needed in order to ensure successful programming that contributes to the well-being of children and youth in urban areas).
III. A FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the implementation of the peace building project, World Vision Lebanon documented the learning of the process of urban youth engagement. This section explores the evidence from the urban youth engagement framework that was developed in a phased approach based on lessons learned from different approaches used during the implementation of the project. The initial framework was developed in 2009/2010, based on the theory of change that was behind the project’s logical framework. This framework was an attempt to identify the critical elements for youth engagement as part of projects implemented in urban areas. Later, action research was applied to intentionally monitor and document the change in the developed framework as a result of internal organisational changes as well as the changing urban environment. The action research process resulted in the creation of a revised framework as well as the steps in the process of engaging urban youth in peace building in 2013. The framework and steps were then revisited based on other data sources (validation of the framework with youth who participated in the project, findings from evaluation of the project as well as existing external literature on the subject) and resulted in the development of this product.

In the following section, we will take each element of the framework individually and discuss, in detail, why it is a critical factor when developing projects designed to engage youth in urban contexts.

A. ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

1) PHYSICAL SPACE

Research shows that informal, youth-friendly spaces are key elements for engagement and necessary complements to formal education (Lombardo, n.d.). In a study targeting youth workers’ perceptions regarding the perceived needs of youth programmes, youth workers identified youth-friendly spaces as one of the essential assets of development programmes. They claim that the lack of youth-friendly spaces would lead to a higher probability of youth being exposed to harassment and involvement in unsafe conditions (Travis, 2010). These youth spaces (or facilities) must be multi-functional; offering youth a range of uses and connecting them with: youth advocates, adult mentors, counsellors and service providers; depending on their needs (White, 2002). Therefore, the physical space that is provided for youth engagement activities can be any facility that youth in the neighbourhood or community use. It need not be one that is exclusively built for one activity or programme. The literature supports the use of any available community assets that facilitate the youth’s engagement, such as municipalities, community centres and existing clubs (Tolman et al., 2001).

The evaluation of the peace building project confirmed the assumptions about the importance of physical space. It was acknowledged in the discussion with the youth that while today’s urban is often...
described as ‘connected’ and access to communication technologies and mobility is available to nearly everyone, the presence of the physical space is still perceived as a critical element by the youth. It gives them a sense of belonging which, often times, they lacked originally. It could also serve the wider purpose of a community centre in densely populated areas with few public meeting spaces. A physical building is important, one youth member explained, “it allows many people, not just youth, to meet”. This issue was of particular importance to the fragmented urban communities of the project site where residents are gathered in homogenous neighbourhoods with little interreligious and intercultural connection.

In line with the research conducted by White (2002), the evaluation of the peace building project also showed that one of the most critical determinants of the success or failure of youth spaces/centres is its management and the social environment within the space. Based on the management, youth either feel a sense of belonging or a sense of frustration and detachment. A guide about public spaces for young people (White, 2002) sheds light on this issue and suggests a set of recommendations, based on case studies and the literature. These recommendations include: communicating directly with the youth in a friendly manner, including them in decision making as well as involving them in the development of protocols and code of conduct. Finally, it is important to make sure the staff members are well trained to deal with youth’s problems and refer cases when needed.

The evaluation results also shed light on the importance of relationship building with
the youth and their involvement in decision making, as well as on the competences of staff working with youth. Those will be explored in further sections of this document.

New thinking on youth engagement programming takes this concept of ‘physical space’ further; beyond the centre-based approach to the urban neighbourhood streets which are better known for drug use and gangs. New thinking on youth engagement aims to reconstruct the meaning of urban streets by pushing forward urban interventions, such as street theatre. “This type of urban interventions […] tries to bring young people’s enthusiasm onto the streets [and encourages them to] interact with the wider population,” (Alban & Geudens, 2008) in direct contrast with the idea of confining youth activities to physical centres. The peace building project in Beirut also attempted to follow an ‘urban street initiative’ by organising a yearly “Peace Marathon,” where children and youth from the different religious and political affiliations in the area ran together and benefited from the occasion to meet people of other faiths, learn about other religions, and be entertained. Such events were considered by many of the youth volunteers to be community-building events. One of the recurrent opinions observed by the youth regarding the Peace Marathon, however, was the fact that what the community needed was not one-time events, but an ongoing flow of activities to ensure continuous engagement with the wider population, including the youth and children themselves.

2) Mobilisation

“In our opinion,” declared one youth volunteer, “we believed that anything is possible, everything is achievable one way or another, and this idea I still believe until today.” (From peace building project evaluation)

One of the successful approaches in youth mobilisation cited in the literature is the “sports-based youth development” approach (Perkins & Noam, 2007; Kahn et al., 2007). Such activities foster friendships and provide youth with a positive group experience. As a result, youth connect with each other and develop communication and social skills. The developed skills enable them to act as a team, come up with initiatives and contribute to the development of their communities (Perkins & Noam, 2007). Examples of sports-based youth development programmes include
a programme in Harlem (in the United States) that combines baseball, academic and enrichment activities (Berlin et al., 2007). Another youth development and leadership programme is in New York and is called Hoops & Leaders Basketball Camp (Berlin et al., 2007). The programme offers summer camp experiences to improve the lives of at-risk urban youth through which basketball is utilised as a means to provide youth with caring mentors, develop leadership skills and offer exposure to different educational and career paths.

The peace building project in Beirut adopted multiple methods for youth mobilisation. In the early years of implementation, youth were mobilised as ‘volunteers’ coming from fragmented and segregated communities based on religious and political affiliations to implement project activities that were planned by the organisation. As volunteers, their mobilisation also meant equipping them with the needed technical capacities, building their sense of connectedness as a group as well as focusing on the building of relationships and group dynamics. This was of particular importance given that the youth were not able to identify their areas of similarities with those who came from a different culture/religion/upbringing initially. One youth observed, during the project evaluation, that running activities helped to build his communication skills, which can be applied in other venues. Another said it made him more “sociable”. He said: “we used to gather before meeting time and play together. We were a big family, and we were always together”. Others noted the cultivation of interpersonal skills and the benefits of teambuilding.

Throughout the course of the project, mobilisation started to take on a more organic nature, more in line with those presented in the examples from the literature. Instead of mobilising youth for implementing an intervention already identified by the organisation within the boundaries of one community, the new proposed approach aims to mobilise youth from various urban communities within one city - through existing organisations - by having them identify their issues of concern and identifying strategies to address them. This builds on the first two components of the Watson-Thompson’s mobilisation framework (Watson-Thompson et al., 2008) (see box). Methods of mobilisation in the proposed approach included: sports events (basketball tournaments), child-friendly street initiatives (where youth and children are mobilised to paint the walls of an urban neighbourhood street while also cleaning it and make it more child friendly), in addition to the Peace Marathon that was done on a yearly basis as part of this project (explored in the previous section).

Two important themes emerged from the peace building project evaluation with regards to mobilisation:

1. Urban youth recruitment
2. Youth group structure

These two elements are further unpacked with the support of evaluation findings as well as results from the literature review.

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Watson-Thompson framework included five components: (1) assessment and collaborative planning, (2) targeted action and intervention, (3) community change, (4) widespread behaviour change, and (5) improvement in population level outcomes.
Urban youth recruitment
Youth engagement happens when a group of young people who are recruited by a development organisation work in the community to address a certain topic, based on needs and interests. One key element of this statement is the youth recruitment. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS, 2010) emphasises the importance of recruiting youth from diverse backgrounds and experiences; including those who might not be involved in volunteer activities or community initiatives. The proposed framework of urban youth engagement also emphasises urban youth recruitment as one of its critical elements. The results of the evaluation of the peace building project validated the importance of youth recruitment from different neighbourhoods across the city. Youth acknowledged the advantages of recruiting youth from various areas across Beirut to work together, as compared to the initially adopted method of gathering youth from one or two specific communities. Working with a largely diverse group increases the exposure of the youth to different urban realities, communities, organisations and issues as well as other youth groups they could join their efforts with. The citywide approach also facilitates more inter-community events.

Upon involvement of youth in activities and engagement programmes, they develop changes at personal and social levels. These changes are referred to as “growth experiences”. A study by Dworkin et al (2002) explored these experiences by conducting 10 focus group discussions with high school students engaged in extracurricular activities, members of community-based organisation and others.

An example of recruitment of youth is: The Engaging Neighborhoods Initiative, organised by University of British Columbia Learning Exchange, which focused on youth engagement and community capacity building. The project was to facilitate the youth-led planning of a community dinner (Gillet, 2010). For this purpose, youth were distributed into groups and handed several tasks. The recruitment strategy involved choosing some youth based on their past involvement and experience in leadership activities while others were chosen because of where they lived (within the community), since the project encouraged engaging youth who are not typically involved in these kinds of activities. The outcome was real diversity in the skills and experience among the members of the group. “The choice of what kind of youth to engage in a project is one that programmers need to consider during program design”. In this project, it was important to include youth champions with the skills and experience necessary to take a lead on further youth-led projects while also reaching out and engaging youth who are not typically involved. Programme developers, however, must pay attention and provide support and capacity building for inexperienced youth or else they may feel frustrated and leave the program.

Results showed personal development, the development of initiative skills (such as learning to set goals and manage time) and learning strategies for emotional regulation. Development at the interpersonal level was revealed by building new relationships with peers as well as adults and developing group social skills (i.e. the ability to work in a team). Adolescents described themselves as, “the agents of their own development and change”. Under the title of building relationships with peers, youth noted the significance of getting to know peers outside their existing networks or circles.
of friends. They were able to understand their point of view and connect with them emotionally, thus creating a bond between youth of different backgrounds (Dworkin et al., 2002). This example supports the learning stemming out to the peace building project in Beirut, which aimed to contribute to improved social cohesion among youth coming from segregated communities.

One of the reasons why recruitment of youth from multiple urban communities is important is the opportunity provided for them to experience the “shocking” and transformative experience of witnessing the difficulties faced by other communities. Beirut youth explained that this experience made them view their own communities and their own problems with a new perspective. This is in line with research that shows that sometimes youth experience shock upon witnessing certain circumstances, such as violence, extreme poverty and more. In the Cognitive Development Theory or Theory of Engagement, the shock stage is important because it provides a sharp emotional and psychological jolt to the individual’s perceptions of reality (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

**Youth group structure**

One of the most significant challenges when engaging youth is meeting their expectations and working on a project that combines the concerns and passions of youth so that they may become committed and involved in the program or activity where they care about the issue and want to make a difference (Hoffman & Staniforth, 2007). One way to do this is, “by creating a project and then finding youth who share the project’s concerns and passions”. Another is, “by bringing youth together, supporting them in identifying their shared interests and creating a project,” (Hoffman & Staniforth, 2007). Whichever method is used, one should ensure the project also engages youth in roles of real commitment and responsibility.

Based on the experience from the peace building project in Beirut, creating a project and then finding youth who share its concerns and passions could be effective. But, it could leave the youth with a feeling of disengagement after a while as they would...
perceive themselves as implementers of somebody else’s ideas.

The proposed framework for urban youth engagement suggests the opposite. It recommends the youth are mobilised (around an initial issue of interest), then exposed to a large array of needs and opportunities and later engaged in the development of the vision for the change they like to see in their city as well as the respective interventions they want to implement to contribute to this vision. This direction was adopted based on several approaches that were tried by the peace building project staff to structure the youth group. When the project started, the approach was more top-down; with the project staff deciding the structure of the group, dividing it into subgroups (with each responsible for one task; for example: fundraising team, animation team, etc.) and lead by one appointed leader who was identified based on a number of criteria. While this approach served the purpose of the youth volunteers of implementing the activities set by the organisation, one supervisor recalled that some youth, “felt excluded, because decisions were taken by an active core.” This perception was confirmed in the evaluation with some youth saying that non-leaders often felt marginalised.

The lessons learned from this were: if not managed well, leadership of youth by other youth from a different background could be perceived as discriminatory (if the process was not done in a transparent and engaging manner). This situation could lead to increased tension among the youth, defeating the purpose of the project. It could also lead to repressing the potential of non-leaders. Urban youth come from diverse backgrounds and have multiple opportunities in sight. Careful thinking should be done around how to ensure meaningful participation of everyone, including those who are educated and those who are not as well as those who are employed and those who are not.

Excerpts from the evaluation of the peace building project regarding diversity of urban youth in relation to opportunities:

“I am studying architecture, so I am always overwhelmed with studies and other academic duties that I have to submit … and deadlines! I don’t always have time … especially the last period I am not having time to be committed”.

“We were committed, really, at the beginning. But since I have started to work (I was unemployed before) the commitment has declined”.

Opportunities should be given equally to every member of the youth group to play different roles, depending on their individual interests. As such, an imposed structure by the organisation could not work for the youth. Instead, they should be given the opportunity and the space to come up with the most appropriate way to structure themselves in order to address the issues they have identified, based on their availability and level of engagement.

3) Exposure
Exposure represents the channels through which engaged youth work with the community. There are three main areas of youth participation: first, youth services and programmes (schools, youth and leisure
centres); second, collaboration and action projects (activities, special projects and initiatives); third, structures and places of influence (advisory committees, decision structures and meetings). Each of the categories offers various opportunities for young people to work in partnership with adults in their communities and to have a greater impact on their lives and their communities (Latendresse, 2010). Involving youth in such programmes and community work builds awareness of issues and root causes and deepens young people’s commitment and sense of responsibility (Tolman et al., 2001). Being exposed to problems and cases outside their familiar environment and acquaintances creates opportunities for youth to identify interests and use their skills to develop initiatives and become part of real change (Tolman et al., 2001).

Another advantage of exposure is carrying out activities that join young people from diverse backgrounds. This improves the relationship between different groups of young people and breaks down social stereotypes and barriers (White, 2002). Furthermore, youth will feel connected and valued by larger social networks or organisations they come in contact with and thus they will become more socially integrated (Hamilton et al., 2004). The proposed urban youth engagement framework emphasises exposure (after mobilisation) as the second most important element for engaging urban youth. Linking to what the research shows, the exposure component in the framework aims to link the youth to existing local, national and international organisations. Through exposure to initiatives organised by others, youth can become more aware of the issues that affect their city as a whole as opposed to just one or two issues their neighbourhoods face. This is the first step in creating a strategic lens through which they can identify the issues they want to mobilise themselves and others to address.

Excerpts from the peace building project evaluation regarding exposure:

“[…] we went to Nabaa, and saw how many issues existed there; for example there is domestic violence against women – [this made me want] to join an NGO that works on this issue and I asked about what organisations we could be involved in” (24-year-old woman who lives outside Beirut)

“[…] our views changed. I don’t know how much we were able to impact the people we helped… But, we as volunteers, our views [were] changed. Our beliefs [were] changed” (23-year-old man, from Chiyah)

“I know my home. I know my community [and] my people. They are all in good status. I hear that there are poor people, I know that, but I did not know to what extent. You hear stories that people cannot afford to eat, they steal to [afford food]. I did not know these things until I joined the group and participated in projects,” (24-year-old, man who lives outside Beirut)

This is in line with the findings of the evaluation of the peace building project, where youth acknowledged how being exposed to other underprivileged urban communities within their city helped them broaden their understanding of the issues affecting Beirut at large and identify different groups of vulnerable people. Additionally, because youth were exposed to other agencies and their initiatives, such as the “Safe and Friendly Cities for All” project, some youth members were able to acquire short term jobs which built their skills in this field,
while also allowing them to increase their exposure to issues affecting their city.

4) Volunteering vs. Activism

The literature indicates that volunteering can be any freely beneficial activity from a person to another person, group or cause (Wilson, 2000). In the case of the peace building project, the identified cause was the building of peace in segregated communities in Beirut. Volunteering involves more commitment than spontaneous support but is narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends (Wilson, 2000). On the other hand, activism actually means taking an active role and promoting change at several levels, including but not limited to social and political. Youth are given the opportunity to participate in shared decision making, listening to different opinions and weigh options and consequences to help build civil society (International Youth Foundation, 2002).

The proposed urban youth engagement framework is driven to promote activism rather than just volunteering and to implement activities among youth similar to the example provided at right.

The results of the evaluation of the peace building project show that throughout the implementation of the project, there has been a clear, though slow, shift from volunteerism to activism. As previously mentioned, youth were initially

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* A joint Project between UN Habitat, UN Women and UNICEF; WVL was implementing partner of this project in Beirut and was mainly involved in conducting a profile of two urban communities with relation to women, youth and children’s perception to safety, security and access to basic urban services.

An example of youth activism can be found in Brussels, Belgium where a youth initiative project wanted to create a space for youth to express themselves in the popular neighbourhoods in Brussels. The project aimed at giving young people responsibility for their neighbourhoods, building on the rationale that youth have the potential to intervene in their own urban areas if they get the chance to discuss burning issues and train themselves to make a difference. Youth working in the project received training, in the form of practical information (about rights, public services, violence, and more) as well as helping them develop their skills to organise different events (festivals, workshops, etc.). The project demonstrates that youth are no longer satisfied with youth centres that only conduct activities to keep youth off the street. Instead, the new paradigm is that youth become activists and take responsibility for their own neighbourhoods and lives. As a matter of fact, urban youth are more likely to be motivated to engage in civic participation because of their own experiences of growing up in neighbourhoods and attending schools with insufficient resources. As part of their daily lives, urban youth witness income stratification, job loss and inequalities. Many of them are looking for a way out. Greater involvement in their communities increases their motivation. That said, it is important to acknowledge that these young people face many barriers, including: access, opportunity, quality, and awareness.


mobilised as “World Vision volunteers” who were gathered and trained to plan and implement child-focused activities designed by the organisation. Over the course of the project’s implementation
and through continuous reflections with the youth; the youth started to demand more flexibility in addressing the issues they see of interest to them and of critical need in their communities, rather than just what the organisation was interested in. It was important to differentiate between gathering volunteers and building activists. This concept builds on the importance of the previously discussed “exposure” as a building block in developing an increased sense of activism.

5) Staff competencies and organisational adaptation

Staff competencies and organisational adaptation are considered two of the the most critical elements when it comes to projects aiming at engaging with urban youth. Literature suggests that staff members of organisations implementing youth engagement approaches are the key to the success of these programmes (Shen, 2006). They are in direct contact with youth, coordinating activities and following up with them every step of the way. Furthermore, staff members are the advocates for the youth in the organisation, bringing back the ideas and realities of youth from the communities to the organisation (Shen, 2006). That is why it is of utmost importance that staff members are well trained and possess the capacities to work with youth through a partnership approach, to be able to maintain a good relationship with them and attract more youth to the programme. It is not enough to simply train staff members, the organisation must also be aware of the circumstances in which staff members work and the challenges they face. These include (Shen, 2006):

- Youth programming is sometimes the responsibility of one staff person, whose work is done in isolation; separated from other programmes in the organisation.
- Long working hours, low wages, instability of the position (short term contracts) and overwhelming workloads frustrate staff members, especially youth workers who are youth themselves.
- Exposure to a wide diversity of programmes and opportunities to work with youth – specifically in the urban context – where there are many opportunities and there could be greater incentives with another organisation.

Neglecting the challenges that staff members who work with youth are faced with may result in high rates of staff turnover, which in turn weakens the effectiveness of youth engagement programmes.

It is recommended by Bartko (2005), in a paper about the ABCs of engagement in out-of-school programmes, to include the following factors for youth engagement:

- A setting that is safe and free of dangers
- The enforcement of clear and consistent rules.
- A warm and supportive environment with opportunities to connect to others
- Where opportunities for inclusion and belonging are presented.
- Where the social norms concerning behavior are clear.
- Are governed by practices that support both autonomy and responsibility
- Provide opportunities to learn valued skills

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The literature presents guidelines and identifies ways to improve the staff’s capacities to be able to truly engage youth in programmes and initiatives at the city level. The first criteria is that staff be well aware and “attuned to the affective, behavioural and cognitive demands” of the activity they are handling within the context of “the developmental needs of and resources available to participants,” (Bartko, 2005).

A successful approach for training youth workers and building their capacity has been demonstrated in Massachusetts, in the United States, organised by The Healthy Options for Prevention and Education (HOPE) Coalition, a youth–adult partnership working to reduce youth violence and substance use, while also promoting positive adolescent mental health and youth voices in the city (Ross et al., 2011). The Coalition assessed the needs of frontline youth workers and identified gaps in their readiness and skills. Then, a 13-week Youth Worker Training was conducted. The training approach used multiple learning strategies that promoted reflection, peer learning and networking. Formative training addressed topics like youth protection and risk factors (i.e. abuse, sexual behaviour, and substance abuse) as well as programme development and management. The trainers were youth development professionals; some were even from the same community where the participants worked. The trainers used interactive methods and created a space for the youth workers to contribute their own knowledge and expertise to the sessions. Other parts of the training included self-
discovery and empowerment exercises through writing reflections throughout the training (i.e. reflection on the dynamics of power and money in the community and how these factors influence them personally; reflection on their motivations and sense of cultural humility). A formative evaluation of the sessions indicates their success and efficacy. Participants reported feeling more skilful, connected to other youth workers, confident, professional as well as reflective. They also stated that they felt they were prepared to be more powerful change agents.

Findings from the evaluation of the peace building project in Beirut are in line with evidence from the literature. When interviewed, the youth highlighted competencies that cannot be neglected when it comes to selecting staff members to lead and manage youth programs. Among those competencies are:

- Transparency in dealing with youth
- Ability to utilise the most appropriate approach for communication (especially when dealing with urban youth who are school dropouts)
- Ability to leverage the relationship between the staff and the youth on

Excerpts from the peace building project evaluation regarding staff competencies:

“The most important thing is that this person specifically has to be with the youth and the person has to lead this group to a certain point where this group can be alone in the community. S/he has to be the bridge the youth cross in order to help the community. This person has to give them power, and to empower them and give them skills. I am not saying that the person who will come will be perfect. But, this person has help the youth to reach goals and objectives.”

“The most important thing is to mingle with the youth and to be integrated within them …to participate with them in different activities, any activity.”

“Good communication skills with youth. They [staff] have to understand the youth. They cannot impose things on youth or they cannot be bossy with them”

“Many volunteers with World Vision were developing an attachment to someone – a specific person; for instance a manager or someone that is responsible for the youth group and other staff – as a basis for their volunteering in the project. What is happening is when this person leaves the organisation, the volunteer is also leaving with this staff member. This is the problem really. It was obvious. And, the most important thing is that the person who will be working with the youth group is aware of this issue.”

“We want the staff who will work with us and with the volunteers to know at least what peace building means and to have knowledge about peace building.”

“[…] If you go now to AER [Ain el Remaneh Area Development Programme] or to Chiyah, you will find several youth standing on the corners of the streets doing nothing, smoking or drinking alcohol…[…] Let’s ask ourselves, did any organisation working there try to see what these guys want, what their needs are? If the staff were not on the streets to see [these things] the project won’t work. The person has to be close to the field… We cannot say ‘we want to do this and that as an organisation and you, as youth, you have to implement.’”
both personal and institutional levels. Individual and personal relationships are good, but if a system is not in place to manage those relationships and move them to the professional level, there is a risk in losing interest among the youth in case of staff turnover.

- Knowledge of the local community and the specific issues in it
- A sense of humility and realism
- Commitment to being present in local communities
- Staff knowledge and expressed capabilities in the specific area of focus of the project should be clear to all project participants, in order to build credibility and be trusted by the youth

B. STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF URBAN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

With the continuous refinement of the framework for urban youth engagement throughout the implementation of the peace building project in Beirut (2009-13), significant focus was invested in the steps required for the process of engaging urban youth. In addition to identifying the elements of the framework (elaborated on in the previous section), learning was documented to allow for understanding the “how” of urban youth engagement—how to engage urban youth; what comes first, what follows and why. For example, should the structure of the youth group be set at the start of the project or would it develop in an organic fashion by the youth themselves at a later stage? Should the vision of the project be defined before recruiting the youth or is it better to recruit, mobilise, expose the youth to opportunities and needs and have them develop the vision accordingly? Those questions and others were looked at during the implementation and evaluation of the peace building project. As a result, the step-by-step process below was developed based on input from youth participants.
and staff members who have worked on or influenced the project.

In this section, each of the steps identified in the above figure is explained separately to allow for understanding the rationale behind the suggested flow of steps for urban youth engagement. Given that the previous section looked at the external literature to support the argument for each of the elements of the framework, this section use information provided by project staff and youth reflections from the results of the peace building project evaluation.

1) **Urban youth recruitment**
The process of youth engagement in urban areas starts with the recruitment of the youth. There are several formal and informal structures in the urban setting from which youth can be accessed. Examples of formal structures include: schools, health, fitness and community centres, youth groups, NGOs, community- and faith-based organisations as well as internet cafes, among others. Informal structures that could be considered include the streets and parts of the neighbourhoods where youth hang out, which often change overtime. Depending on the mandate of the organisation and what it is recruiting the youth for, it could utilise formal, informal or a mix of both structures. Based on experience from the peace building project in Beirut, a couple of lessons were learned:

- The most vulnerable youth might not always be accessed through formal structures. Often times they are the school dropouts, members of gangs and/or street youth, etc. Whereas it is of utmost importance to be working with youth who are available through formal channels, the others should also not be neglected. It is important
to note that different approaches should be used for recruiting youth using both formal and informal structures.

• For increased sustainability of the youth project, it is important to ensure that youth from existing formal structures are participating. Knowledge and practices acquired by the project are then transferred to those structures and thus remain within the communities, even after the project has ended.

• In the urban context, accessibility to different neighbourhoods and communities is easy and should not be an issue when deciding to work at a city rather than an individual community level. Based on the experience from the project, in a fragmented city such as Beirut (and many other contemporary cities) it is recommended to recruit youth from various communities rather than from one or two small neighbourhoods in order to increase social cohesion.

2) MOBILISATION AND EXPOSURE
Mobilisation and exposure of the youth go hand-in-hand, as the second and third steps, respectively, of the process of urban youth engagement. Both terms were defined in the previous section. This section will explore why they come as the second and third steps after recruitment.

During the first two years of the implementation of the peace building project in Beirut, the process adopted was to: (1) recruit the youth, (2) structure them in a group, (3) build their capacities through formal training so that they could, (4) youth plan and implement ‘events’ all while (5) working on the exposure of the youth.

What was learned throughout the years of implementation is that mobilisation around issues of interest and building capacities and skills through various means (coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer, etc.) as compared to formal training is more effective with youth. This is not to undermine the importance of formal training, but instead to highlight that whereas some topics could be explored in formal training sessions;
many others are more easily understood through informal means that are not necessarily bound to the walls of a training hall. One such example is that the visiting other youth groups and NGOs and learning from their experiences was received as a positive and effective learning process by the youth of the project.

Furthermore, working on the exposure of the youth from the beginning and ensuring they are aware of the multiplicity and complexity of issues in their city at large (not just those in their small neighbourhoods they belong to) as well as the opportunities that are available and what others are doing, is essential for them to widen their scope of thinking. Being exposed to what youth groups are doing in other contexts not only helps the youth learn, it also increases their motivation and their belief in the importance of the work that they are doing. Youth exposure should not be limited to other youth groups, but should also include civil society and local governmental organisations (such as the local municipality) as well, as those can play a major role at later stages in the sustainability of the efforts of the group, such as by having local organisations and municipalities contributing to sustaining the physical space for the youth and providing the resources the youth need to continue their community initiatives.

The exposure of the youth to local organisations and to the communities they serve, if received positively and met with collaboration from the local partners, can result in more support from the partners to the youth, thus contributing to the sustainability of their work. Being exposed to other communities, youth groups and organisations also allows the youth to better understand what knowledge and skills they need in order to be activists in their city, rather than just receiving training as set by the organisation and ‘volunteering’ to plan and implement activities already decided upon by the organisation.

3) **Building the citywide vision**

Mobilisation and exposure go hand-in-hand in initiating a sense of activism among the youth; what follows is that the youth are able to develop their own vision of engagement at city level and to design the
“interventions” they deem to be appropriate mechanisms to achieve their set visions. This has come up repeatedly in the evaluation of the project (as can be noted in some of the direct quotes of the youth, found in the previous section). One of the complaints voiced by the youth regarding the former approach of treating them as volunteers, who received training to plan and implement events in their neighbourhoods, was related to the fact that those events were set by the organisation without involving them in the decision-making process. The youth did prioritise the issue of peace building in their area as one that needed to be addressed, when they were first consulted. But, the details of the intervention were decided by World Vision and other stakeholders. The youth thought that the proposed activities were stand-alone initiatives that they couldn’t link together to contribute to an overarching end goal that would make a change in their city. One of the incentives for youth engagement and for building their spirit of activism was for them to participate in a process of visioning the future of their city and deciding on approaches to make the changes happen together. When the peace building project started in Beirut, all activities implemented were focused on this specific topic. Throughout the implementation, the youth realised that they can actually organise any activity, related to whatever issue, and simply by ensuring that the youth from the different fragmented communities are equally participating and joining efforts to address this one subject, they would be indirectly contributing to building social cohesion and peace among them.

4) STRUCTURE OF THE URBAN YOUTH GROUP
Structuring the youth group comes as the last step in the suggested flow, based on learning from the implementation of the peace building project that the structure cannot be set in an imposed fashion by project staff at the start of the project. Instead, it should be something that is formed in an organic fashion by the youth themselves, after they set their strategic vision for issues they would like to address at the city level. The structure should be the mechanism that allows the youth to implement the interventions they plan in the urban areas they have identified. The structure should not be fixed. Instead, it should be flexible and able to change as the project progresses, depending on the youth’s fluctuating availability and capacity to participate. A detailed description on the youth structure was given in the previous section. It is best to be as flexible as possible in this matter and to leave it to the youth to decide how they would like to structure themselves around priority issues. The intervention of the staff members in the case of any emerging conflict and/or grievances between group members should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, bearing in mind the competencies that staff members are required to master when working with youth.
IV. PLAN FOR TESTING THE FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework for urban youth engagement, although based on learning stemming from actual practice of the implementation of the peace building project, still needs to be tested for validation. The purpose of the validation is then to refine the developed framework and to provide a synthesis of evidence proving: effectiveness of impact, contribution to change, sustainability and efficiency. This product will thus take its final shape after the completion of the validation phase. The purpose of this section is to explore how and where the validation of the framework will take place.

The Beirut peace building project ended in September, 2013. It was part of multiple projects ongoing in a number of communities across Beirut. It is critical to give an overview of Beirut programming, as the validation site, to set the stage for discussion regarding testing of the framework.

A. BACKGROUND OF BEIRUT AREA PROGRAMMING

In the Greater Beirut area five, World Vision Lebanon has been operating through four Area Development Programmes (ADPs six) spread across seven municipalities in the peripheries of Beirut. Each ADP had separate projects, focusing on multiple sectors (education, health, peace building, etc.). The peace building project was one of those. During the past two years, a decision was made to shift the operation and programmatic framework in the area and to have one citywide program instead of four scattered ADPs with multiple foci. The overall strategy stemmed from the need to: (1) focus the programming on one or two city-level issues; (2) increase impact on children and youth by ensuring their active engagement in all the programme cycles; (3) ensure more efficient operations; (4) work on macro (city) and micro

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5 Greater Beirut Area refers to the city of Beirut and the peripheral municipalities. Beirut has expanded outside its administrative boundaries as a result of urban sprawl and unchecked urban expansion throughout the years, forming a region encompassing 55 municipalities, considered to be “Greater Beirut”.

6 Area Development Programmes (ADPs) are integrated development programme that help communities by assisting the children, families and the community as a whole to achieve the basic standards of the four ‘well-beings’, physical, intellectual, socio-economic and moral well-being. World Vision’s community workers facilitate this by living in the communities, learning their problems and helping them find their own solutions. Rather than treat the effects of poverty, World Vision’s Area Development Programmes (ADPs) help communities find ways to confront the root causes of poverty and help people in the ADP improve their livelihood. World Vision’s partnership with children, families and communities as well as local governments, other NGOs, corporates and citizens around the country makes this possible. Each ADP has a lifetime of 15 years; divided into three cycles of five years. In each cycle, the program goes through assessment, design, implementation & monitoring, evaluation and transition (either back to another cycle, or out of the community; depending on the achieved outcomes in children’s’ ‘well-being). Each ADP is bound by specific geographic boundaries that the programme cannot operate outside. Each programme contains 2-3 sector specific projects in addition to the child-sponsorship project that is similar across all WV ADPs.
(community) levels through a more holistic approach, integrating local-level advocacy in development and (5) increase the visibility of the organisation and position it to be the partner of choice for the city-level issues that were prioritised.

For this to take place, synchronisation needed to happen among existing ADPs since each one of them was at a different stage in the project cycle (two programmes were in evaluation, one was in monitoring and one was in assessment and design). Negotiations happened with funding offices (called Support Offices) and different processes were completed in each ADP simultaneously. The (re)design process started late 2013 across all four areas. The new thinking in Beirut also encompassed having children and youth lead the design process (as opposed to our traditional approach of the organisation leading the process with stakeholders and ensuring the participation of children). In this process, a number of youth were selected and trained to conduct discussions with other youth and children in the four areas (ADPs), identify their needs and prioritise one or two city-level issues to address.

The process is now in its final stages. The issues prioritised by the children and youth were: (1) safety and security and (2) positive youth development. Combined, those two issues will result in one programme focusing on, “A positive development of Beirut area children and youth in a safe environment”. The next steps are to have the have those children and youth design the actual interventions, take them to city-wide stakeholders for validation, finalise the plans and then take them to the municipalities and advocate for the inclusion of those issues in the municipal plans.

B. OPPORTUNITY FOR TESTING THE FRAMEWORK

Given the vision for new programming in Beirut to be city-wide and engage several urban communities across the city; and, given the children and youth-led nature of
the design process, working with youth and children in the next steps requires a solid approach for their engagement, seeing that they are coming from various geographical areas. The Beirut programme presents an opportunity to test the framework in its next phase. The methodology for testing is yet to be set. Once the design process is completed and the respective logical framework in place, a plan for monitoring and evaluation will also be implemented.

C. RISKS TO MANAGE

One of the common challenges in youth programming is the turnover of youth. In the urban context specifically, youth are exposed to multiple opportunities, be it for income generation or for leisure. As such, youth programmes are continuously faced with the challenge of keeping youth interested. If not handled well, there is a risk of losing youth to other opportunities. This is not an issue when the opportunities that are sought lead to positive engagement (professional development opportunities, formal/informal education, service learning activities, etc.). But, it is definitely an issue when youth resort to harmful practices readily available in urban settings (drug use, armed groups, etc.). The challenge of youth turnover in Beirut has direct implications on testing the framework as it is preferred to have the same youth available and participating at baseline and evaluation of the programme to be able to accurately measure the change.

Another important issue to be considered when planning for the testing of the framework is that of attributing the outcomes of urban youth engagement to the interventions developed. This is a common challenge of such programmes as the number of confounding factors that could intervene and influence the project results is significant, especially in dynamic and complex cities such as Beirut and other contemporary cities in our region.

Last, but not least, we should consider the challenge of ensuring internal and external validity of the proposed framework that needs to be well thought of while planning for the testing, especially in case of unavailability of other similar youth programmes and/or unavailability of a group of youth to take as a “control group” to compare to.

Finally, if the listed risks are well managed throughout the planning and actual implementation of the next phase of the programme, the Beirut area should provide an appropriate site for validating the proposed framework given its progress and the changing role that children and youth are playing in this next phase.
REFERENCES


