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Case study

Right To Play Lebanon

A flexible methodology to achieve
diverse objectives

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Right To Play in Lebanon has the broad goal to contribute to holistic community development. This includes supporting community development through the creation of safe spaces and social cohesion, as well as the personal development of the individuals who form the communities, especially children. To achieve this, RTP conducts projects with a wide range of objectives and works with a variety of partners. This requires a methodology that can be easily applied for different purposes. Their Reflect–Connect–Apply methodology does this by facilitating learning in an empirical way and giving them the flexibility to cover different themes such as health, life skills, employability skills and safety.

RTP runs different S4D projects based on a series of RTP resources that integrate coaching practices, physical education techniques and methodologies to help coaches implement sport as a tool for development. All RTP's S4D projects share some common aims, such as high levels of participation and the development of sports skills and development outcomes, including: the physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth of participants and, at community level, the creation of safe spaces, a peaceful climate, healthier lifestyles and empowered individuals. The priorities vary for each project to suit the local cultural and environmental context and the needs of the community, but partnerships, local coaches, regular activities and special events remain constant.

Overview

Right To Play (RTP) International was founded in 2000 by Norwegian speed skater Johann Olav Koss with the mission to “protect, educate and empower children to rise above adversity using the power of play”.¹ It now runs programmes in 15 countries across the world, reaching over two million children in 2019, supported by eight national offices in Europe and North America. RTP in Lebanon has been serving at-risk children and youth for 15 years. Beginning with support to Palestinian refugees in 2006, RTP has since enlarged the scope of its programme working all over the country to include displaced Syrians and Lebanese children and youth from vulnerable communities.

RTP follows a robust partnership model, working with institutional partners such as the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to promote positive educational outcomes, psychosocial well-being, physical health and critical life skills (see *Figure 1*). At the community level, RTP builds the capacity of civil society organizations and grassroots youth groups to use different forms of play to foster and sustain social change.

Figure 1: Right To Play focus areas



A learning space

Sessions are typically 45 minutes to one hour long and usually run twice a week. These sessions follow the Experiential Learning Cycle methodology that ensures children and youth learn both technical sport-specific skills and developmental life skills. The sessions are typically structured in seven parts:

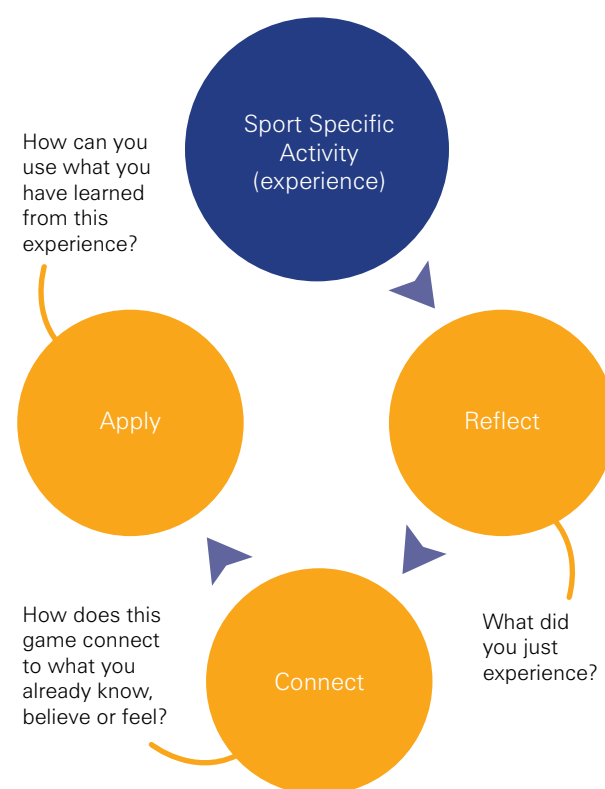
1. Opening discussion: Introducing the main objective of the training and the life skill targeted in the session
2. Warm-up
3. Modified game such as small drills
4. Skill development activity in which sports skills are combined with life skills
5. Modified game such as small drills
6. Cool down
7. Reflect–Connect–Apply: A teaching and learning strategy that leads children and youth through a three-step discussion about their experience (see *Figure 2*). First, the participants reflect on the game (what happened during the game) and talk about life skills. Second, they link it to their daily life, giving examples of where they use these specific life skills. Third, they explore where they can apply these life skills in the future.

Diverse objectives

Quality education

Mothers find that children are better able to concentrate on their schoolwork and that children enjoy the session so much that threatening to not let them go is an effective way to get them to do their homework. Coaches, who are often role models for the children, can also encourage children to do their homework and be active in school. For example, one coach stated in an interview that, “sometimes the parents call me that the children are not finishing their homework so I speak to the kids and tell them that they can only join when they finish. It is a great motivation for them to finish and to join.”

Figure 2: Reflect–Connect–Apply methodology



Health and well-being

One of the other focus areas of RTP Lebanon’s programming is health and well-being, covering both mental and physical health.

On mental health, when children can “play without worries, their wellbeing and their mental health is much, much improved”.² This is important in the context as a survey by the American University of Beirut and UNRWA found that 21 per cent of Palestinian refugees surveyed experienced depression, anxiety or distress in 2010.³ These concerns have continued since then, and since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the United Nations has made mental health interventions in the country a priority.⁴ An explosion in Beirut in August

2020, which resulted in at least 220 dead, 6,500 injured and 300,000 displaced persons (including 80,000 children) added even greater stress to children.^{5,6} RTP Lebanon responded to this with a multi-pronged response, including the use of play-based activities that they had developed from their experience to help children affected by the blast (Right to Play n.d.). This had important effects on their mental well-being (see Box 1).

Some effects on physical health were commented on by both parents and children. One mother noted how her children shifted “their concentration from mobile phones and spread their attention and concentration on sports”. Children also see the benefits to their physical health and feel stronger and more capable as a result of attending the sessions.

Gender equality

RTP also works towards gender equality, despite the many challenges that the context presents (see Box 2). Female coaches comprise 48 per cent of all trained sport coaches, and this not only provides girls with role models but also makes their parents feel that their girls are in good hands. For example, one 6-year-old girl stated that “coach sometimes tells us ... that one day

Box 1: Supporting children after traumatic events

After the Beirut explosion ... a mom shared that ... since the explosion it was the first time [after three sessions] that her children fell asleep without any anxieties.

Coach

This is the first time since the explosion that I have come home [after first mental health session] to see my son talkative and happy.

Father

Box 2: Mothers reveal the normative challenges to girls' participation

- “My husband’s parents were very surprised that I send my girl to such activity.”
- “It is not just the trust having an effect. In our time, we couldn’t accept the idea of letting a girl play football.”
- “We accepted that our girls go to the trainings since it is close to our residential areas. Our children are mature. We can see them from our home; the three of us live nearby.”
- “I took a lot of time to decide with my husband if we let our girl be part of this activity. I didn’t accept to take the decision alone, I insisted on letting my husband contribute approving her participation.”
- “We ask the coach about the training session. Most of the time they [the girls] are accompanied by their brothers or father. We are afraid to send our girls alone. It is easier to accept sending the boys alone.”

we will also become coaches. She encourages us a lot.” Girls who participate also encourage their friends to join and become leaders in their friend groups. One 12-year-old girl said:

sometimes, I use what I learn here [RTP programme] and I train my friends at school ... I didn’t use to have a lot of friends but because of the training sessions that I do I started having more friends, girls and boys, who became like my siblings. I trained them and they were very happy and even my teachers were happy about it.

This highlights the power of S4D programmes, helping to provide girls with role models and influencing gender norms in society. Role models play a key role not only

in engaging girls in sport and other activities.^{7,8} It also improves their sense of belonging.⁹

Child protection

Parents have close connections with coaches, who provide regular private updates on their children. This makes parents more comfortable sending their children, especially girls, to the programme and facilitates trust in the coaches and the programme at large. Further, coaches go out of their way to make children feel supported and safe, going to pick them up at their homes, and making them feel heard and comfortable during the sessions (see *Box 3*).

Box 3: Child protection and safety

There's a myth that coaches must be strict in order to manage the sessions. I have met other coaches and trainers using this tactic. They keep a distance. We work differently, on the sport itself and flexibly, without that distance. And when it is needed, we can be more serious.

Coach

I've been here for a long time. I used to train 13–17 years girls. I visit their home one by one to pick them up and go to the stadium. Parents wouldn't accept someone other than myself accompanying their kids.

Coach

We feel safe, because we have known the coach for a long time and she knows us well. We got used to her and we feel she is our friend.

12-year-old girl

Box 4: Peaceful Communities by changing attitudes and building connections

She [the coach] starts saying, to be better with each other, and that we are one team, that we need to cooperate like siblings.

12-year-old girl

We make more friends. We meet at football practice and get to know each other. It is better than having only two friends.

11-year-old girl

We don't bully each other. We don't have fights with each other. We don't have these attitudes.

6-year-old girl

Peaceful communities

RTP aims to build peaceful communities, and this is done through creating connections in the community and through the slow change in attitudes and ways of interacting. Mothers noted that their children are now growing positively and “have developed team spirits, because they are meeting friends and building new relationships” (see *Box 4*).

Beyond this, RTP Lebanon also creates opportunities for adolescents in a context where their options are limited. The youth unemployment rate in Lebanon was 18 per cent in 2020.¹⁰ This situation can lead “to lower levels of happiness and well-being and to feelings of not being accepted in society ... associated with drug and alcohol use as well as higher incidences of criminal and antisocial behaviours”.¹¹ These factors are not conducive

to a peaceful community. In one of its biggest initiatives with the Ministry of Social Affairs, RTP implemented programmes at the Ministry's social development centres to build the leadership and employment skills of children and youth. This programme aims to equip at-risk Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian youth with the practical skills to enter the job market (identified by analysing the alignment of skills with employment opportunities). The project included career counselling, and development of social and emotional skills to increase resilience and self-confidence.

¹ See: <<https://righttoplay.com/en/about-us/>>, accessed February 2021.

² Monitoring and evaluation officer.

³ Chaaban, J., H. Ghattas, R. Habib, S. Hanafi, N. Sahyoun, N. Salti, K. Seyfert and N. Naamani, 'Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', report published by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 2010.

⁴ UNICEF, 'Mental Health as a Priority for UN in Lebanon during COVID-19', press release, 19 June 2020a, <<https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/mental-health-priority-un-lebanon-during-covid-19>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

⁵ International Medical Corps, 'Beirut Explosion, Situation Report #9', 10 February 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IntIMedCorps-BeirutExplosion_SitRep09.pdf>, accessed 5 May 2021.

⁶ UNICEF, '80,000 children displaced due to Beirut explosions', press release, 6 August 2020b, <<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/80000-children-displaced-due-beirut-explosions-unicef>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

⁷ Adriaanse, J.A. and J.J. Crosswhite, 'David or Mia? The influence of gender on adolescent girls' choice of sport role models', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2008, pp. 383–389, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2008.08.008>>.

⁸ Morgan, Kelly, et al., 'Formative Research to Develop a School-based, Community-linked Physical Activity Role Model Programme for Girls: Choosing Active Role Models to INspire Girls (CHARMING)', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 19, 2019, p. 437, <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6741-1>>.

⁹ O'Brien, L.T., A. Hitti, E. Shaffer, A.R.V. Camp, D. Henry and P.N. Gilbert, 'Improving Girls' Sense of Fit in Science: Increasing the impact of role models', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, vol. 8, no. 13, 2017, pp. 301–309, <[doi:10.1177/1948550616671997](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616671997)>.

¹⁰ Similar to the low- and middle-income country averages. See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=LB&most_recent_value_desc=false>, accessed February 2021.

¹¹ Sleem, H.N., and J. Dixon, 'Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment in Lebanon', *Poverty & Public Policy*, vol. 10, 2018, pp. 338–353, <<https://doi.org/10.1002/pop4.223>>.

for every child, answers

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