

Insan NPO: Working as a Nonprofit With Syrian Migrants in Egypt

Case

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PREVIEW

Abstract

Insan, a nonprofit organization working to help Syrian migrants and refugees settle in Egypt, has implemented programs to provide financial, educational, and overall human care services, from informal schooling for Syrian dropouts to an educational center that offers certified vocational training. However, with governmental restrictions on fundraising, bureaucratic policies, and fluctuating support for the Syrian cause, operating Insan has political, economic, and social challenges. To maintain and enhance its effectiveness, Insan must consider how it can diversify fundraising, create niche markets, and carefully manage government and donor relations.

Case Learning Outcomes

After reading this case, students should be able to:

- Identify operational issues nonprofit organizations must confront in the face of difficult migration policies.
- Investigate how NPOs develop programs for public good within the limits of local and national laws and regulations.
- Explore situations where no clear answer is available, such as situations where an organization must skirt local laws or risk running out of funds.
- Apply strategic management tools to the case, such as developing a SWOT analysis, stakeholders' analysis, and developing strategies and action plans.

Note

This case is based on actual events, but the name of the founder and organization have been disguised.

Introduction

Some extended families sent the grandparents with all the grandchildren to Egypt and the parents stayed back in Syria to settle their affairs ... on the assumption that they will be able to join them later. Up until now, there are cases of elderly grandparents responsible for a large number of grandchildren and missing the parents ... This is a big problem. (M. Akram, personal communication, June 2018)

Insan, a nonprofit organization operating in Cairo, Egypt, helps Syrian migrants settle in the country. The program was founded by Mona Akram (pseudonym), an Egyptian woman of Syrian descent and mother of six. Akram wanted to help alleviate the hardships Syrian migrants faced in Egypt. By literally knocking on the doors of migrants, she began assessing their needs and collecting data. Later, she registered the nonprofit organization Insan—meaning human in Arabic—with a vision statement of “investing in individuals to fulfill their potential and have a positive impact in their community.”

Syrian Migrants in Egypt

The number of Syrian migrants and refugees is estimated to exceed 13 million (Pew Research Center, 2018) and according to government officials, Egypt has received an estimated 5 million refugees and immigrants (Karasapan, 2016), although these numbers are contested.

Data 1. UN Estimated Refugees From Syria

[Click here](#) to view the online version of this case for optimal experience of interactive data embeds.

Data 2. UN Estimated Asylum Seekers From Syria

[Click here](#) to view the online version of this case for optimal experience of interactive data embeds.

Data 3. UN Estimated Internally Displaced People in Syria

[Click here](#) to view the online version of this case for optimal experience of interactive data embeds.

The media has reported that Syrians are less welcome in Egypt under the current regime of President Sisi than during the time of the ousted President Morsi, with stricter visa and security clearance (Hauslohner, 2013). Since June 2013, Syrians entering Egypt must buy a visa for USD 3,000, which is a hurdle for many and often results in the separation of family members. Registered Syrian refugees decreased from 138,000 to 117,000 in 2015; many either chose to go to Turkey or attempted to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe (Karasapan, 2016).

Egyptian media circulated stories that the Syrian immigrants were affiliated with the Moslem Brothers group, to which the ousted President Morsi belonged. The group that started as a conservative religious cult was later identified by the Egyptian government as a terrorist group. Additionally some media channels cautioned the public that Syrians would take job opportunities from Egyptians (Grisgraber & Crisp, 2014).

People were influenced by the media. They believed there is a relation between the Syrians and the Moslem Brothers. We got people asking us directly why are you helping out the Syrians? Why not focus on the Egyptians? ... Things temporarily changed in 2015 with the picture of Ilan [a three-year-old Syrian boy found drowned on the shores of Turkey]. In one day we got more than 150 Facebook comments. People were suddenly asking how can we help. (M. Akram, personal communication, June 2018)

As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Egypt is meant to advocate for refugee rights and should not refuse them entry. However, the Egyptian state has imposed entry regulations on refugees, which are sometimes inhibitive. Syrians living in Egypt are required to renew residence permits every six months and the process is lengthy and tedious.

Syrian refugees have access to educational and health services in Egypt, but because services are already perceived as lacking, even by Egyptians, often migrants have to pay for private educational and health services and find them costly (Grisgraber & Crisp, 2014). Many cannot afford private education. Female refugees in Egypt may be subjected to harassment and sexual advances on the streets. As refugees, the idea may be that Syrian women may be less expensive to marry than Egyptians. As a result, many Syrian women remain confined to their homes and may miss out on schooling (Grisgraber & Crisp, 2014).

The Roots of Insan NPO

Insan NPO started as an informal school, catering to Syrian dropouts, then expanded to implement an economic empowerment program and a human care program.

At first our support to Syrians was focused on provision of relief services ... cash assistance, rent payment. We continued for a while doing this. Then we decided to shift. (M. Akram, personal communication, June 2018)

The Schooling Program

Insan NPO operates an informal school, the Insan Educational Center, which is not allowed to give out certificates to the children attending. Insan's school caters mainly to Syrian children who have dropped out of education, a need identified during discussions at a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ad hoc working group that Mona Akram attended; the group deliberates on the condition of Syrian

migrants and refugees in Egypt.

The schooling initiative started after Insan conducted a phone survey in September 2014, interviewing 1,507 Syrian migrants in October city, a suburb of the capital city Cairo, where a concentration of Syrian refugees live. Among its findings, the survey revealed that at least 282 Syrian children, 19% of the sample, had dropped out of school and were not registered in any formal schooling activity.

Syrian refugee children had dropped out for economic reasons in 56% of cases, where families were unable to pay public-school fees or when children had to work to support the family. Another major hurdle to children continuing formal schooling in 21% of the cases was lack of safe commuting options, especially for girls. In 10% of the cases, students had dropped out for administrative reasons, where either there was no space for the Syrian student in nearby schools or the student lacked the necessary documentation. The survey also identified psychological issues due to traumatic events, difficulty in understanding the Egyptian dialect, and harassment from Egyptian students.

Syrian children frequently get accepted in Egyptian public schools based on age, without any pre-assessment of their abilities or knowledge. Many children may have missed one or two years of schooling during the turbulent years of their families migrating and trying to settle in Egypt. Accordingly, they may not do well in regular schools and may drop out.

Insan NPO's school helps students catch up with regular school. Syrian students then attend the public school only one day a week, usually on a Thursday, which is the minimum requirement, so Insan NPO's school gives the children Thursday and Friday off.

Through individual donations and support from Save the Children, a school was started in a small rented villa in October city.

During the first year we had a big problem, at least a quarter of the students were illiterate. We first started by giving the children psychological support through a volunteering Syrian team specialized in providing psychological support "Li-Anak Insan" (Because you are a Human). We offered them an after-school program to enable them to catch up. (M. Akram, personal communication, June 2018)

At first, the school accepted girls only, but then opened to boys. Currently, there are 885 children in Insan NPO's school, from grade 1–9. They are taught mostly by Syrian teachers, thereby enabling the students to overcome the dialect hurdle and at the same time providing job opportunities for many migrants; currently there are around 96 Syrian staff between teachers, administrators, and bus matrons. Through Insan Educational Center, the students receive intensive support that helps them pass the formal Egyptian school exams and obtain the necessary certification, as well as engage in multiple extra-curricular activities.

Economic Empowerment Program

The economic empowerment program started with a limited group of Syrian women who were transferred from the Masaken Othman district in Cairo to a safer one. With funding from the French Embassy in Cairo, Insan NPO established a vocational training center for the women, which provided training in areas including cooking, crochet, leather work, accessory making, and the traditional embroidery work of Khayameya. Trial and error revealed that the cooking and crochet classes had the greatest potential for success in terms of the women building a sustainable business.

To develop a crochet product line that would reach beyond selling items at charity bazaars, Insan NPO produced sophisticated products for export, making use of a designer and specializing in two lines: baby clothes and toys. The women participated in the International Handicrafts Show (IHS) in Egypt. They studied Imigromi, the art of toy making, and developed a company and brand name called Knittiez.

A series of crocheted animal figures called the Animal Cultural Toy Collection was created, each with a background story to educate children about diverse cultures. Each character has a small label that reads "made by the beautiful hands of Syrian refugees and Egyptian women."

Following the success of the vocational training center, Insan NPO began to focus on male Syrian refugees. In the vocational hub project (VHUB), refugees worked with the Japanese Embassy on different aspects of home renovation, including electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, painting, tiling, and plastering. The NPO also augmented literacy and soft skills, if needed. The aim is to provide skills certification for graduating workers. Funding approved from the Japanese Embassy is still in the pipeline (at time of writing) due to security issues.

Human Care

Under the Human Care program, Insan distributes food bags and hot meals especially for the elderly, organizes group Iftars (meals) in Ramadan, the fasting month, in collaboration with the American University in Cairo student club “Mashrou Kheir” (Benevolence Project), distributes used clothes, organizes clothes exhibitions, and undertakes general outreach.

Funding an NPO in Egypt

The Egyptian government imposes restrictions on the collection of donations locally and requires complicated security clearances for international donor funding, which can create significant hurdles for Insan. The new Egyptian Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) Law 149 of 2019 theoretically allows NGOs to accept foreign grants and donations so long as they inform administrative authorities. In practice, informing the authorities means that the funds deposited in the NGO's bank account need to be managed according to regulations decided upon by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the entity mandated with approving all foreign funding. The Ministry has 60 days to approve or disapprove the funding, during which the NGO cannot spend the money. The law considers the NGO funds as public monies and therefore if any citizen requests an investigation into grants or donations, NGO funds will be frozen during the investigation period. If the state denies funding approval, the law does not require it to give a justification. The law imposes very high fines, up to 1m Egyptian pounds (equivalent to approximately USD 60,000), for a range of violations that are loosely worded in the law, such as activities that may threaten national security and/or public morals (POMED, 2019; CIHRS, 2019; Nader, 2019).

Additionally, the government is focused on enrolling Syrian migrant children in public schools, which can impede Insan's efforts with schooling. The government seeks to project a favorable picture about its care of migrants, and enrolls migrants in public schools to show evidence of registered numbers and justify its own requests for international donor funding (M. Akram, personal communication, June 2018).

Although Insan NPO is permitted to work with migrants, inspectors from the government's Urban Planning Authority have asked the organization to move. The school has been shut down several times because it is not located in an identified administrative zone, which would be more expensive. For a time, it had to close down completely, move nearly 600 students, and operate in the evenings in the administrative zone within the premises of another school. Next, a donor offered space in a service area within a registered orphanage and elderly care home. The school operated for a year and a half, and then was shut down again. Insan is currently (at time of writing) waiting for another donor to build it a new school in an administrative zone. For the past five years Insan NPO has been trying to get permission to collect donations.

Gaining the required national security clearance for approved international donor funding has been a challenge. For example, support promised from the Japanese Embassy in Cairo for the vocational training hub has been delayed due to ambiguity around security clearance. After Insan obtained clearance for the Japanese funds, there were further delays from the Ministry of Social Solidarity that prevented the project from starting.

A number of local NPOs serving migrants from different nationalities compete for donor funding and Insan NPO must determine whether to partner with other NPOs, or to compete against them. Some NPOs are religious-based, such as the StARS organization, founded by St. Andrew's Church in Cairo, a group that provides legal aid and professional development courses mainly through volunteers, and Caritas-Egypt, which serves eight governorates in Egypt with a cash assistance program, a livelihood program, and a counseling program to refer migrants to other service providers. The Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights (EFRR) serves refugees who need legal representation. NPOs like Naath support only Sudanese migrants,

providing them with accommodation and help registering with the UNHCR office in Egypt.

Discussion Questions

- 1.
How can a country such as Egypt balance economic considerations with humanitarian values when accepting migrants and refugees? Can there be a win-win situation? How can the government work more effectively with nonprofit organizations like Insan?
- 2.
To open the school for the Syrian refugees, Insan NPO ignored governmental regulations and operated in a designated residential district. The NPO manager also allows children to skip formal schooling. What kind of ethical deliberation approach can be used to justify or argue against these decisions?
- 3.
Prepare a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges) analysis for Insan NPO.
- 4.
Suggest potential strategies to pursue over the coming five years. What strategic and tactical improvements can enhance the nonprofit's effectiveness?

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