



Human Stories of MENA

British Council MENA:
Celebrating our community
Working together to shape a better world

Second Edition

www.britishcouncil.org



Special Women's Day edition!



Promoting women in science

Professor Nahla Mansour tells us how the Newton-Mosharafa Fund has supported her career as an academic and researcher.

Nahla is on a mission to control foodborne diseases. Her research explores ways to reduce the risk of bacterial enteritis, a type of infection that can be passed to humans by eating poultry and other meat.

The project is a collaboration between the Egyptian National Research Centre and the UK's University of Nottingham. It is supported by the £50 million Newton-Mosharafa Fund, a seven-year partnership between Egypt and the UK.

The fund brings together research institutions in both countries to create new opportunities for scientific collaboration. Its main goal is to support the Egyptian science sector to address social and economic challenges through high-quality research and innovation.

For Nahla, the fund has played an important role in her career in science, an industry that is still dominated by men. With the support of the fund and her team at the National Research Centre,

she published a paper in a prestigious peer-reviewed journal, helping to raise her academic and research profile internationally.

'The selection of my project by the fund made me proud as a scientist and gave me a huge boost for more challenges,' says Nahla.

The fund also gave her the chance to present her research at a workshop for academics and industry professionals, opening up potential networking opportunities to support her career in the future.

'The Newton-Mosharafa Fund has been a life jacket for me to reach a precious goal at an important time in my research career.'

Professor Nahla Mansour, National Research Centre, Egypt



Empowering women's voices

In a city where every corner tells a story, Syrian psychologist and content creator Sanaa Kordi is passionate about giving more women the space to tell their own. Our Beirut Creators video competition was an opportunity to do just that.

Our Beirut Creators project supports young media creators and influencers in Lebanon to contribute to trust building, cohesion and stability in their societies. Run in collaboration with SHiFT and Shadda Media Lab, it's an opportunity for young people to represent their communities locally and nationally, and to make their voices heard on issues that affect them.

Sanaa built her content creation skills during the project, and later seized the chance to take part in a video competition run by our partners. Open to project participants and the public, the competition challenged entrants to produce an Instagram Reels video showcasing Beirut 'in metamorphosis'.

Sanaa's work is deeply rooted in her Syrian heritage and inspired by the rich cultural diversity that surrounds her. She saw the competition as an opportunity to develop her skills and to put a spotlight on local women who are defying societal norms and breaking barriers.

'It was more than just a competition; it was a platform to amplify the voices of women and challenge ingrained stereotypes,' Sanaa explains.

Her video features Latifa, a grocery seller. She tells Sanaa that people are often surprised to see her pushing a heavy vegetable cart through the streets of Beirut, a type of work that men 'can't even do'. Latifa has experienced many challenges, and the video celebrates her ability to 'start her life anew' – advice she gives to other women who may be struggling.

Sanaa won the video competition, and Latifa's story resonated deeply with audiences around the world. It has been viewed more than one million times and attracted the attention of many news agencies, who have reached out to Latifa to interview her themselves.

'This project contributes to changing the general perception about the role of women and enhances cultural and social communication,' Sanaa says.

Taking part in the competition has strengthened her belief in the transformative power of art. She is more committed than ever to creating content that amplifies women's voices and paves the way to a more inclusive and equitable society.



'Art and creative expression have the ability to positively impact society.'

Sanaa Kordi, psychologist and content creator, Lebanon

Bridging cultures through art

Participating in a collaborative mural project with the British Council reaffirmed artist Muna Al Bader's commitment to promoting cultural exchange through art.

Muna is a celebrated Qatari artist whose murals have become a mainstay in the capital city Doha. She first collaborated with the British Council in 2022, lending her artistic talents to a mural celebrating the Qatar UK Festival. Last year we asked her to contribute to another mural, this time representing the 2023 festival theme: sustainability and communities.

'Being invited to paint the mural for a second time was truly an honour, and it allowed me to further explore the intersection of nature and culture between Qatar and the UK,' Muna says.

The project's focus on the vibrant flora of both countries sparked Muna's curiosity and passion for environmental conservation. By researching the diverse flowers in the UK and Qatar, she gained a deeper appreciation for the natural beauty of both countries.

'This project enabled me to merge my love for art with a meaningful cause, raising awareness about

the importance of preserving our environment,' Muna shares, emphasising the significance of using art as a vehicle for environmental advocacy.

Another highlight was the opportunity to collaborate with diverse communities and both local and UK artists on the mural. This sharing of ideas and techniques provided Muna with new perspectives and different artistic approaches to explore.

Looking to the future, Muna remains committed to using art as a medium for cultural exchange, expression and understanding. She hopes to continue collaborating with the British Council to showcase Qatari culture in the UK.

'I believe art has the power to transcend boundaries and foster connections between people from diverse backgrounds,' Muna says.

Her own experience at the Qatar UK Festivals is certainly proof of that.



'Connecting with artists from the UK allowed me to broaden my artistic horizons and build meaningful connections across borders.'

Muna Al Bader, artist, Qatar

A transformational education journey

From immersive training sessions to online courses, the British Council has supported teacher Ilham Haddadi along every step of her journey from learner to leader.

Ilham's story begins in 2016, when her supervisor invited her to a Connecting Classrooms training event. Connecting Classrooms was our global education programme for schools, aimed at supporting millions of young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values they need for life and work in a global world.

The training supported Ilham to connect and learn with other teachers, and to embed core and 21st-century skills into her curriculum. It marked a new chapter in her career, setting the stage for an ongoing pursuit of learning.

In 2017, Ilham seized the opportunity to apply for our International School Award. The award celebrates schools who are encouraging international awareness and understanding in their classrooms. Ilham led seven education projects at her school and worked tirelessly with her peers to demonstrate their commitment to fostering an international ethos. This hard work paid off: in July 2018 they clinched the award, catapulting Ilham's school to prominence within the local community.

She continued learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, engaging in webinars and courses from the British Council and platforms like FutureLearn. Topics included the

development of mental health and well-being frameworks for schools.

In 2022, we invited Ilham to join the online course From Teacher to Trainer, delivered by the Norwich Institute of Language Education. Recognising it as a good opportunity to work towards her goal of becoming an education inspector, Ilham approached the rigorous curriculum with her usual determination.

Over four months of intensive study, Ilham honed her skills in designing effective training sessions, guided by principles of adaptability and impact assessment. Her final assignment – a dynamic workshop incorporating cutting-edge methodologies – perfectly encapsulated her journey from learner to leader.

Armed with her newfound expertise, Ilham later approached the Inspector's National Exam with confidence, drawing upon her training to craft a compelling plan for teacher development.

But Ilham's journey with the British Council didn't stop there. In 2023, our partnership with the Center for the Training of Education Inspectors in Rabat provided a platform for further growth. The five-day intensive training programme offered a wealth of knowledge and inspiration, reinforcing Ilham's commitment to excellence.



'Taking the British Council's Connecting Classrooms course was a turning point in my career.'

Ilham Haddadi, teacher, Morocco

From online courses to international conferences

Hayah Ihmoumah's professional development journey took her all the way from Facebook to the NileTESOL stage, with support from the British Council.

Armed with a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of Zawia, Libya, Hayah was eager to bridge the gap between theory and practice in her teaching career.

She turned to the British Council's Facebook page, discovering a treasure trove of online courses and events that ignited her curiosity.

In 2022 Hayah enrolled in a Classroom Activities, Interaction and Motivation course, sponsored by the British Council and delivered by the esteemed Norwich Institute of Language Education.

The immersive eight-week course supported Hayah and her peers to create dynamic learning experiences. Zoom meetings became vibrant hubs of collaboration, where ideas flowed freely and innovative teaching techniques took shape.

Inspired by this newfound knowledge, Hayah left the course excited to apply what she had learned. 'I had a collection of classroom activities to use and adapt for various teaching situations to make the teaching-learning experience more interactive and motivating,' she says.

Hayah reconnected with the British Council through our Teaching for Success: Empowering Libyan English Language Teachers course. Armed with practical strategies to tackle challenges head on, Hayah embraced the art of interactive teaching and effective feedback, laying the groundwork for change in her own classroom.

The highlight of Hayah's professional development journey was the 28th NileTESOL Conference in 2024, held at The American University in Cairo, Egypt. In front of an audience of peers and teaching experts from around the world, Hayah took to the stage to present her systematic review on the role of self-assessment in enhancing students' writing skills. It marked an important contribution to the conference and the landscape of English language education.

As Hayah made her way between the conference workshops and presentations, her transformation from novice to seasoned practitioner became clear. With each new insight gained and connection forged, she grew more convinced than ever that learning knows no bounds.



'Learning never stops, nor does development.'

Hayah Ihmoumah, teacher, Libya

Empowering educators, enriching education

May Moanis tells us how taking part in the Teach. Engage. Aspire. programme boosted her confidence and skills as a teacher educator.

After becoming a British Council certified teacher educator in 2018 for our National Teacher Training Programme in Egypt, May was chosen to co-ordinate Teach. Engage. Aspire. (TEA) in North Sinai.

TEA is a partnership with the Ministry of Education and Al-Azhar. It aims to develop the English language and teaching skills of teachers and teacher educators like May, and stands out for its comprehensive approach to professional development, focusing on both cognitive knowledge and soft skills.

‘Today, a competent teacher is knowledgeable, skillful, and sustainably improved, says May, emphasising the comprehensive nature of the programme.

Being part of TEA introduced May to a vibrant community of practice – particularly in the remote governorate of North Sinai. ‘Being a teacher educator in North Sinai is a huge challenge,’ May explains. ‘The TEA programme granted knowledge to about 300 teachers in North Sinai with no cost of effort.’

During the programme, teachers discussed ‘topics of great importance,’ says May, including ‘the differences between a leader and a manager, personality types, and the use of effective teaching strategies.’

May credits the TEA programme with enriching both her professional and personal life. As well as being ‘more confident and competent in delivering knowledge,’ she now says her ‘teaching techniques are more and varied and up to date’ because of the experience. She is grateful too for the support provided by the programme management team, which was instrumental in her journey.

May’s story is just one example of the transformative power of education programmes in empowering educators and enhancing classroom practices.

Through dedication and commitment, May and her colleagues continue to inspire and uplift the educational landscape of North Sinai and beyond.



‘TEA is a programme I recommend for teachers around the world. It opens the door to unlimited professional development opportunities.’

May Moanis, teacher educator, Egypt

Promoting gender equality through community engagement

Artist and activist Teresa Albor's Cut from the Same Cloth installation invited local people in Doha, Qatar, to come together to challenge gender norms and promote a more sustainable future.

Cut from the Same Cloth brought together a diverse group of residents in Doha to explore themes of reinvention and recycling. Held at M7, a prominent design hub in the city, the week-long live event and art installation aimed to encourage environmentally friendly practices and challenge traditional gender roles by including men and women in activities such as folding and repairing clothes.

The project was a collaboration between artist Teresa Albor and the British Council in Qatar. They invited attendees to donate unwanted clothes, take part in sewing marathons and share stories of reinvention. School children also got involved, learning to repurpose old T-shirts into shoulder bags.

Through activities like these as well as workshops and demonstrations, Cut from the Same Cloth raised awareness about the importance of textile recycling and encouraged sustainable practices.

This is a topic close to Teresa's heart. As designer and co-ordinator at Re/DRESS, a responsible fashion brand, she was inspired to join Cut from the Same Cloth after

relocating to Bangladesh. The country is home to 4,000 textile and garment factories, and is the world's second largest exporter of readymade clothing. Teresa was keen to effect change, and collaborated with local factories in Bangladesh to ensure clothing donated to Cut from the Same Cloth could be recycled there.

As well as encouraging sustainability, the project also provided a unique platform for residents of Doha to come together, exchange ideas, and build meaningful connections, laying the groundwork for future collaboration and social change.

The project had a profound impact on both participants and the wider community. By involving men in traditionally women-dominated activities like sewing and textile recycling, it challenged gender stereotypes and helped to promote women's empowerment.

Teresa views Cut from the Same Cloth as just the beginning of a larger movement towards inclusivity and gender equality. She plans to continue her work in Qatar, building on the lessons learned from this project to inform future initiatives and help create a more equitable and sustainable society for all.



'We should strive to transcend thinking about gender in a binary way.'

Teresa Albor, artist, Qatar



Share your stories with us

British Council MENA:
Celebrating our community
Working together to shape a better world

www.britishcouncil.org

