



SUCCESS STORY

Community Theater Harnesses Youth Talents



OTI/Lebanon

Douma residents enjoy the first theater production performed and produced by their newly formed village theater company.

“This project has been so positive for the village. In place of going to politics or doing nothing, we are being creative—writing, acting, performing.”

**— Joseph Maalouf,
Douma stage director**

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August 2008 – A bit of Broadway came to Lebanon recently, as young people staged their own contemporary theater productions through a project designed to encourage youth participation in creative activities instead of divisive politics.

Led by Lebanese nongovernmental organization Zico House with support from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, villages in four different regions of the country have set up amateur production companies. Participants joined together for workshops on acting and other backstage roles like lighting, costuming, sound production, and prop design.

The project has introduced youth to possible careers in the arts and fostered positive relationships between participants who come from the Beqaa, the north, the south, and Chouf and who represent a mix of religious and political backgrounds.

First-time actor Olivia Samia, 16, from the Douma theater group enjoyed learning new skills with young people from other villages. “During the workshops, the theater companies from other villages came. We shared our experiences. They were just like us, just from different places,” she said.

After training from a professional crew and a series of rehearsals, the theater troupes toured other villages to perform their plays before staging a festival in Beirut. The plays addressed socially relevant issues, providing the youths with creative platforms for expressing their views and concerns.

The Baissour theater group’s play about the environment was staged at Douma, and playwright Malaeb Houssam discovered that the villages have similar concerns. “Baissour is like Douma and every other village in Lebanon,” he said. “We all have the same issues that we have to draw attention to. These problems touch everyone.”

The theater companies promise to have a lasting effect on the communities in the four villages. Douma stage director Joseph Maalouf says work has already started on the next play. “We have everything now to continue on for ourselves—the skills, the resources. We will continue and have a play ready for the next summer festival,” he said.