Policy Brief

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Empowering adolescents through an integrated programming approach: exploring the effects of UNICEF's Makani programme on Dom adolescents' well-being in Jordan

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Overview

The Dom community in Jordan, comprising many sub-groups, is highly marginalised and faces multiple challenges. In this policy brief, we focus on two main sub-groups: the Bani Murra and the Turkmen.

Historically, both these groups have been nomadic. However, increasingly, the Dom community (and particularly the Bani Murra) has become settled, with some families living in urban areas and others in tented settlements (UNICEF, 2016). The Dom community faces significant discrimination, which can impact access to education, health services and employment opportunities (Minority Rights, n.d). Although there is a significant lack of data on the Dom community in Jordan, reports suggest high rates of child labour and child marriage, low school enrolment rates, and limited employment options (Williams, 2005; UNICEF, 2016).

UNICEF's Makani (My Space) programme aims to tackle some of the challenges facing the Dom community (see Box 1 for more information about Makani). This policy brief presents findings from an assessment of the contributions of UNICEF's Makani programme on the multidimensional capabilities of Dom adolescents in Jordan. It draws on findings from qualitative interviews conducted in September and October 2020, and March 2021, with 64 adolescent boys and girls (aged 10–19 years), including programme participants and non-participants, their caregivers, and key informants. We present key findings regarding the contributions of UNICEF's Makani programme in the six core capability domains covered by the Gender and

Box 1. UNICEF Makani's approach to working with the Dom community

The UNICEF Makani programme, launched in 2015, provides an integrated package of services including learning support, skills building, child protection and psychosocial support for vulnerable children, adolescents and youth in Jordan. In some Makani centres, it also provides social innovation labs for older adolescents (aged 14–18), which teach hard and soft skills and encourage adolescents to apply their learning to problems they want to tackle in the community. As well as working with children and youth, Makani also provides community outreach, early childhood development (ECD) and parenting sessions. In 2020, the Makani programme in Jordan reached 150,000 people through 141 centres.

In 2016, the Makani programme shifted its response to focus on the most marginalised groups. At this point, due to the significant social exclusion and stigma they face in Jordan, Dom adolescents became a key group of interest. Currently, three Makani partners target Dom children, adolescents and their parents within their existing programmes.

Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research programme: (1) education and learning; (2) bodily integrity and freedom from violence; (3) health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health; (4) psychosocial well-being; (5) voice and agency; and (6) economic empowerment. The brief concludes with a discussion on the implications of our findings for policy and programming.

This brief is part of a series of publications on Dom adolescents in Jordan. Findings on the lives of adolescent girls and boys from the Dom community in relation to GAGE's six capability domains can be found in the accompanying [report](#).

Key findings

Education and learning

One of the main components of UNICEF's Makani programme is providing learning support for younger adolescents in core subjects – Arabic, maths and English – and, in some centres, science. We found that most of the Dom Makani participants highly valued the education they received at Makani centres. This was especially true for Turkmen adolescents; they predominantly speak Turkish and face significant language barriers in many aspects of their lives, and Makani gives them the opportunity to learn Arabic. This language barrier was considered an obstacle for some Turkmen adolescents in terms of their ability to participate in other aspects of the programme, and so Makani facilitators focused on Arabic skills and also used alternative methods, such as drawing, to communicate with the Turkmen adolescent participants.

Makani participants emphasised that they valued the pedagogical approaches used by the programme. They reported feeling supported and encouraged, and felt that the Makani facilitators took the time to make sure they understood the lessons (see Box 2). A 14-year-old Bani Murra girl explained:

In Makani, they give you enough time to understand and answer comfortably. They ask about the problem, they then explain it. If I do not understand something in Arabic or English, he explains and clarifies it. The teacher at school wants to finish quickly because there is not enough time.

Adolescents also valued how Makani facilitators treat them and facilitators are trained to use alternative discipline techniques. This supportive environment appears to be having positive impacts on learning outcomes for many Dom adolescent participants. Many of the adolescents in our sample described increased learning outcomes after attending Makani. A 17-year-old Bani Murra girl noted, *'I didn't know how to spell, but I got better in reading when I came here,'* while a 17-year-old Bani Murra boy commented, *'I was not able to calculate but they taught me how to do this.'*

The exception to this was some older Turkmen boys, who were more likely to report that they prefer formal school to Makani. Some adolescents suggest this is due to a lack of classroom control and disruption by some students in formal schools, as a 12-year-old Turkmen boy explained: *'At school, there is no disturbance, however in the centre [Makani] Turkmen boys make a lot of disturbance.'*

While Makani focuses on learning support for younger adolescents, older adolescents in our sample highlighted that they would also like to receive learning support, especially to support them through higher levels of education and the Tawjihi.[1]

Many Dom adolescents are out of school, having dropped out at an early age due to discrimination from their peers, lack of support from teachers, or due to child marriage or work (Devonald et al., 2021). Makani has strong referral systems in place to support adolescents to re-enrol in formal education. As a Makani facilitator described: *'We've transmitted some students to regular schools… we've referred around 144 students to regular learning and public schools'.* However, in some cases, there were challenges in referring adolescents back to formal school. Some adolescents, particularly Turkmen, reported that they did not want to return to formal schooling because they face high rates of discrimination and violence in the school environment. On the other hand,

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1 The Tawjihi is the exam students take at the end of secondary school, and which they must pass to gain university admission.

a few participants also highlighted challenges in accessing Makani (see Box 3).

Protection from age- and gender-based violence

Child protection is a key component of UNICEF's Makani programme, and through this, Makani is having positive impacts on adolescents' bodily integrity and freedom from violence. As the head of a Makani centre explained, during child protection sessions, adolescents are taught *'where it is not ok for anybody to touch us'*. Adolescents are also taught about the different forms of violence and encouraged not to engage in violence with their peers. A 14-year-old Turkmen boy noted:

> We spoke about violence, sexual violence, physical violence and verbal violence. It's not good to beat someone and it is not good to say bad words.

Makani has referral processes and supports adolescents to report any experiences or knowledge of violence and abuse. However, a lack of trust in the authorities can be a challenge in the referral process. As adolescents from the Dom community are frequently in trouble with the police – due to high levels of begging or street vending – key informants highlighted reluctance to report instances of abuse as *'they are really afraid of the police'* (head of a Makani centre).

In response to high levels of sexual harassment in Jordan (IRC, 2015; Jones et al., 2019), Dom adolescents also strongly valued the Makani life skills lessons, where they were taught to defend themselves and were taught how to report instances of harassment. A 16-year-old female Makani participant explained how the lessons had given her confidence to challenge abusive behaviour:

> Let me tell you, when I walk in the street, a lot of guys harass me, and I used to stay silent. But after a while, when we started taking the life skills lesson, I stopped allowing any guy to harass me.

Child marriage

Child marriage is common among the Dom community due to social norms that see adolescents marry during mid-adolescence.[2] Awareness about the risks of child marriage is a key component of the Makani programme, and adolescents learn about its negative consequences. A 17-year-old female Makani participant described one awareness session she attended:

> The early marriage initiative was really fantastic. It was about how young girls get married while they're not ready

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2 Bani Murra girls tend to marry at around 15 years old, while Turkmen girls tend to marry younger, around 12 or 13 years old.

for the responsibility. She goes to her husband's house and watches Tom and Jerry [children's TV show]. She turned 17 years old and she's pregnant. She got married when she was 15 and her husband was beating her like crazy.

The impacts of these awareness-raising sessions varied. While some adolescents stated that they would still marry at a young age, others described wanting to delay marriage due to what they have learnt at Makani. As a 14-year-old Turkmen girl commented:

The Makani teacher told us not to get married young, when we grow up we can get married. I got engaged now, but I will marry after 5 or 10 years.

While adolescents from the Bani Murra sub-group were able to provide details of the negative consequences of child marriage, due to the language barrier, Turkmen adolescents were aware that child marriage should not happen, but were often unable to articulate why.

The Makani programme also includes awareness-raising sessions with parents and caregivers. However, some key informants were doubtful of the impact of the programme on child marriage as it is so *'deeply entrenched in their traditions'* (Turkmen Makani centre head). Adolescents agreed that further parental engagement is needed, especially for fathers, who are often the decision-makers and therefore will have significant influence over marital decisions. As a 16-year-old girl explained:

They should do it for fathers, not mothers. Because mothers will ignore it. For example, if a mother wants to defend her daughter, he'll silence her. A lot of fathers don't listen to the mothers regarding their daughters' future! If he wants to get her married, he will!

However, key informants found it challenging to engage with fathers, who often have little interest in attending awareness-raising sessions.

Health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health

UNICEF's Makani programme also appears to be making an important contribution to shaping adolescents' health-related behaviours, especially in terms of hygiene. Personal hygiene within the Dom community is poor, and this can have additional impacts on their social cohesion and

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(A 14-year-old Turkmen girl)

interactions with members of the community (UNICEF, 2016). Facilitators at Makani aim to combat this through hygiene initiatives to teach Dom adolescents about the importance of maintaining good personal hygiene. As the head of a Makani centre explained:

We also did hygiene initiatives each class. Every day when a student comes with clean hands and showered, we give them the hygiene crown and they distributes pens to the students. The next day we would see every student come clean and showered because they want to be the hygiene king. I feel that it made a difference for them.

Makani also supports Dom parents to talk to their children about personal hygiene, and provides hygiene kits. These messages seem to be resonating, and many adolescents reported improvements in their hygiene practices after attending Makani sessions. A 14-year-old Bani Murra boy explained:

Makani has taught us about sickness and they have discussed hygiene, and that we should bathe 3–4 times a week. I bathed twice a week before I went to the centre, but now I bathe daily.'

In light of the covid-19 pandemic (see Box 4 for more information on Makani's response to the covid-19 pandemic), Makani's hygiene messaging is even more important, teaching adolescents the importance of handwashing and social distancing to prevent the spread of covid-19. An 11-year-old Turkmen boy described the Makani messaging as follows:

They taught us how to wash… So that the corona[virus] will go away by washing hands… We learnt that we need to wash and repeat washing hands with soap and wipe hands with a tissue paper.

As well as hygiene messaging, Makani centres also provided adolescents with information on how to maintain a healthy diet. Adolescents reported increased knowledge about what constitutes a healthy diet. A 10-year-old Bani Murra girl explained:

We learnt to eat healthy food like fruit, orange and lemon that contain vitamin C, and to drink milk in the morning to stay energised and not to eat a lot or have an unhealthy dinner because it will hurt our health. I learnt to not have dinner late at night, and to take care of my health.

Many of the adolescents in our sample also highlighted that they learnt about the negative consequences of smoking, which is particularly important considering the high rates of smoking among the Dom community. Adolescents reported learning that smoking causes cancer and *'makes*

your lung black' (14-year-old Bani Murra boy). They also participated in role-plays where *'someone is advised to smoke to forget their problems, and the others are telling him not to smoke and how bad it is, and then the person doesn't smoke.'* These sessions had a strong impact on adolescents. Many explained that they would not smoke because of what they have learnt at Makani, and were passing this information on to their family members and friends. A 13-year-old Bani Murra girl commented, *'I made my father stop smoking after we did the activity I didn't know about smoking I learnt from my Makani teacher'* (14-year-old Bani Murra boy). A 14-year-old Turkmen girl added: *'We have learnt about smoking [and] it is not good for us. I told my friend who smokes how bad smoking is.'*

Among Dom girls, the Makani programme's monthly provision of menstrual hygiene products was seen as a key benefit, especially given the economic challenges facing their families, which limits their access to such products. However, puberty education sessions at Makani are rare and a key gap in Makani's health programming.

Psychosocial well-being

Adolescents from the Dom community reported high levels of psychosocial problems, due to the discrimination and exclusion they face in society (Devonald et al., 2021). The Makani programme has been supporting adolescents' psychosocial well-being in many ways. The centres provide a safe space and an opportunity for adolescents to make friends, play and socialise. This is particularly important for girls due to the dearth of girl-friendly recreational spaces in the community.

Makani centres also provide a supportive environment in which adolescents can discuss their problems and learn how to deal with them. A 17-year-old Bani Murra girl, for example, described how learning these skills had positive impacts on her mental health:

She [the Makani facilitator] taught us how to be stronger. One time in the past I couldn't cope with the problems, but since I started addressing and facing them, my life has changed, and my mental health has been better.

The psychological support offered at Makani is seen by adolescents as an important component, especially for those dealing with discrimination and bullying. A 14-year-old Bani Murra girl explained:

The psychological support [is important at Makani] because I am in a stage where I need the confidence to confront the community. This helps me have it! I need to not listen to bad words being said to me and I should be confident.

Key informants also highlighted how the Makani centres are supporting social cohesion through bringing together Bani Murra, Turkmen, Jordanian and Syrian students. In one case, facilitators were using an 'Arabic-Turkish initiative', which encourages interaction between students through sharing language skills and exchanging knowledge. In cases where students of different nationalities and ethnic groups were interacting together in the same classroom, social cohesion appeared to be improving, with friendships forming across groups. A key informant explained:

There was a big change that happened after integrating and engaging communities together. Now we have them in the same classroom… they communicate very well with each other.

However, Makani facilitators also described some challenges when integrating students from different backgrounds, with some adolescents refusing to interact with their Dom counterparts. A UNICEF programme officer explained: *'I met a bunch of children and they said "Miss, are these people [Dom] coming to the centre?" Because*

if they do, we are dropping out.' This attitude was more common among older adolescents, as the head of a Makani centre explained:

> I told you that we were able to mix the little kids together but we were not able to mix the adolescents together, they are very hard and critical... They tell us that they are afraid of catching diseases from them or having lice transmitted.

Behavioural issues- such as being disruptive in class, throwing things and fighting with other children- in some adolescents from the Dom community further affected this and can cause challenges in integration. However, Makani facilitators highlighted that overtime behaviour of Dom adolescents is improving due to a focus on classroom etiquette.

Dom adolescents also highlighted that they had limited interactions with Jordanians or other ethnic groups, as Bani Murra students usually have classes with other Bani Murra only, and Turkmen students have classes with Turkmen only however quite a few Dom adolescents indicated that they would like more interactions with other groups. A 13-year-old Bani Murra girl explained: *'We do not study with Jordanians not from Bani Murra, I do not know them, but I have participated with them in one session and I loved them.'* Improving social cohesion is particularly important for Turkmen adolescents, who are generally more isolated and have limited interactions with people outside their immediate communities, as the head of a Makani centre noted: *'This is the first time in our centre that they have friendship with people other than Turkmen.'* However, Turkmen adolescents seem resistant to interacting with other groups and – although they highlighted that there were fewer fights occurring between different groups at Makani – they had limited interactions with Jordanian and Bani Murra students.

Voice and agency

Adolescents from the Dom community have limited access to voice and agency in many aspects of their life. Girls in particular face strict mobility restrictions and have limited input into key decisions about their life. The Makani programme is supporting adolescents' voice and agency in multiple ways through its life skills component, which aims to foster the skills needed for adolescents to actively participate in their communities. During these sessions, adolescents learn about their rights, how to think critically, as well as leadership and problem-solving. Adolescents highly valued learning these skills and described how it has developed their personalities and built their self-confidence (see Box 5). Adolescents also took part in exercises to improve decision-making where they had to map out and think of solutions for their problems. A 14-year-old Bani Murra boy explained:

> We took the problem-solving skills, like the resemblance of the tree – the branches are the causes and the trunk that's the name of the problem, and the papers are suggested solutions.

Adolescents at Makani were also involved in various volunteering activities such as working with people with disabilities, recycling projects, and cleaning their communities. Adolescents greatly valued the opportunity to participate in their local community, and this could have impacts on integration and social cohesion. However, mobility restrictions appear to influence some girls' participation in volunteer activities, a 17-year-old Bani Murra girl noted that for some volunteering activities in the community they were not allowed to participate due to safety concerns:

> We didn't volunteer a lot, but the guys volunteered in the camp. For example, the initiative where they cleaned the garbage. All the guys participated, and they cleaned the camp. At the time there were not enough cleaners. We were going to do it, but they [Makani facilitators] refused because we're girls.

Box 5. Impact of the Makani programme on voice and agency

Walid* is a 17-year-old Bani Murra boy who has previously attended a Makani centre. He highly valued some of the life skills he learnt at Makani, which increased his confidence and fostered his creative talents. *'I discovered that I can sing. They gave me confidence and self-esteem. They taught me how to trust myself. I started singing at parties. They encouraged me so much. They did not teach us how to be confident at school. I discovered my talent here [Makani].'* This new ability to *'speak freely and have confidence'* allowed Walid to help resolve conflicts between his peers: *'They taught us how to respect people. Some kids used to fight in front of the centre and we used to stop them.'* Makani also helped encourage Walid's aspirations to work in security: *'They encouraged me here and told me if you want to be a doctor, a pilot, or in the general security, you can.'*

*pseudonym

Economic empowerment

Rates of child labour among the Dom community are high and it is common for adolescents to work on the streets, often at traffic lights, engaged in petty trading or begging. Key informants highlighted that Makani centres have been trying to tackle this by providing awareness-raising sessions for parents and adolescents. A Makani facilitator explained:

We're in partnership with an organisation that is combating begging. We talked to them about begging and showed them its dangers and punishment. We've had good results. It influenced them a lot, they started saying that we won't send our kids anymore.

Adolescents who participated in the Makani programme also highlighted that they have learnt about the negative consequences of child labour. They were able to distinguish between harmful forms of work that are not suitable for children and less harmful forms of work, as a 14-year-old Bani Murra boy commented:

We talked about child labour. If there is a dangerous job, it should be [someone] over 18 years old [doing it]. Intermediate work from age 16 to 18.

Makani also provides a space in which adolescents are encouraged to plan for their future. The programme ensures that adolescents learn the importance of saving and do not waste money. *'We learnt that we should save money and plan what we want to buy',* explained a 14-year-old Bani Murra girl. Dom adolescents face limited employment options and a lack of role models in their community, which is reflected in limited career aspirations among some adolescents. Makani aims to help foster aspirations among Dom adolescents and help them understand the opportunities available to them. A 14-year-old Bani Murra boy explained:

I want to be a dentist. My [Makani] teacher said we should plan our future and start with it. We have to take an idea of what we want to become by looking at it more online.

Interestingly, many Dom adolescents want to become police officers, and during Makani they received talks from local police officers who discussed what the role involves. This type of engagement can provide adolescents with more information about the steps they need to take to enter their desired profession, and provide them with local role models.

UNICEF's Makani programme also offers (and is planning to expand) sessions to support entrepreneurship skills among Dom adolescents. This is focused on creative

◗◗ **We talked about child labour. If there is a dangerous job, it should be [someone] over 18 years old [doing it].**

(A 14-year-old Bani Murra boy)

skills such as making bracelets and jewellery, as Dom adolescents are considered to have a special aptitude for and interest in these types of skills. As a Makani facilitator explained:

One of the life skills is called entrepreneurship. At the end of three months, we should have a project. I went to the market and bought the beads and threads and everything I might need for making accessories. We created a Facebook page and we started to work on it with the youth.

Adolescents enjoyed taking part in these activities, although the focus (particularly for Turkmen adolescents, due to the language barrier) was more on learning practical skills such as making bracelets, with less attention to teaching them wider entrepreneurship skills. Gender norms can also affect girls' participation in these activities. As a 14-year-old Turkmen girl described, although she participated in such activities it is not something she would continue because *'Turkmen females don't work'.* Adolescents also highlighted the lack of information, communication and technology (ICT) skills offered by Makani, and would greatly value sessions to improve their computer skills.[3]

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

Our findings underscore that Dom adolescents' participation in UNICEF's Makani programme is contributing to improvements in their well-being across a range of capability domains, and is therefore addressing a significant gap in programming targeting Dom adolescents. Although there are many challenges in working with this community, our findings indicate that the Makani programme – through its continual efforts to integrate Dom adolescents, its focus on developing a wide range of soft and hard skills, and building strong relationships with the community – has the potential to make a difference to the outcomes of marginalised Dom adolescents. Through involving local partners, the Makani programme aims to continue to support Dom adolescents and encourage a new generation that has greater access

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3 As of April 2021, the Makani programme will be introducing financial literacy and digital skills into the skills-building package (previously referred to as life skills).

to their human rights. To further leverage these positive programme effects, and in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its commitment to leave no one behind, our findings suggest the following priority actions for UNICEF's Makani programme should be considered:

Education and learning

- Partner with local schools to help teachers in formal schools adopt child-friendly pedagogies to improve learning and discipline.
- Provide additional training for Makani facilitators on classroom control and positive discipline techniques.
- Introduce learning support for older adolescents to support them through higher levels of education and the Tawjihi.

Protection from age- and gender-based violence and child marriage

- Scale up community outreach sessions to raise awareness among the Dom community of the negative consequences of child marriage and child labour, particularly targeting fathers.
- Strengthen reporting and referral processes by working closely and building trusting relationships with Dom parents and community leaders (mukhtars).

Health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health

- Expand the curriculum for Makani health education classes to ensure that they include age-appropriate information about puberty and sexual and reproductive health.
- Continue with and scale up lessons on the harmful effects of substance abuse to build on lessons already learnt about the consequences of smoking, and include additional awareness-raising on drugs and alcohol.

Psychosocial well-being

- Introduce more mixed-nationality sessions for adolescents at Makani centres, including sessions that encourage those from different nationalities or sub-groups to interact together and share their knowledge and experiences.

Voice and agency

- Expand volunteering opportunities for Dom adolescents and encourage girls to get involved, and partner this with parental awareness-raising sessions to challenge gender norms that may prevent girls participating in such activities.
- Scale up affordable and safe transportation to enable Dom adolescents to attend Makani centres.

Economic empowerment

- Increase Dom adolescents' opportunities to learn ICT skills – for example, through International Computer Driving License (ICDL) labs and social innovation labs that target Dom adolescents, and include guidance on how to stay safe online.
- Invite successful Dom community members from a range of professions to do talks and provide mentorship for Dom adolescents at Makani centres.

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