

NEWSLETTER PLATFORM

Newsletter #2 – Second quarter 2020

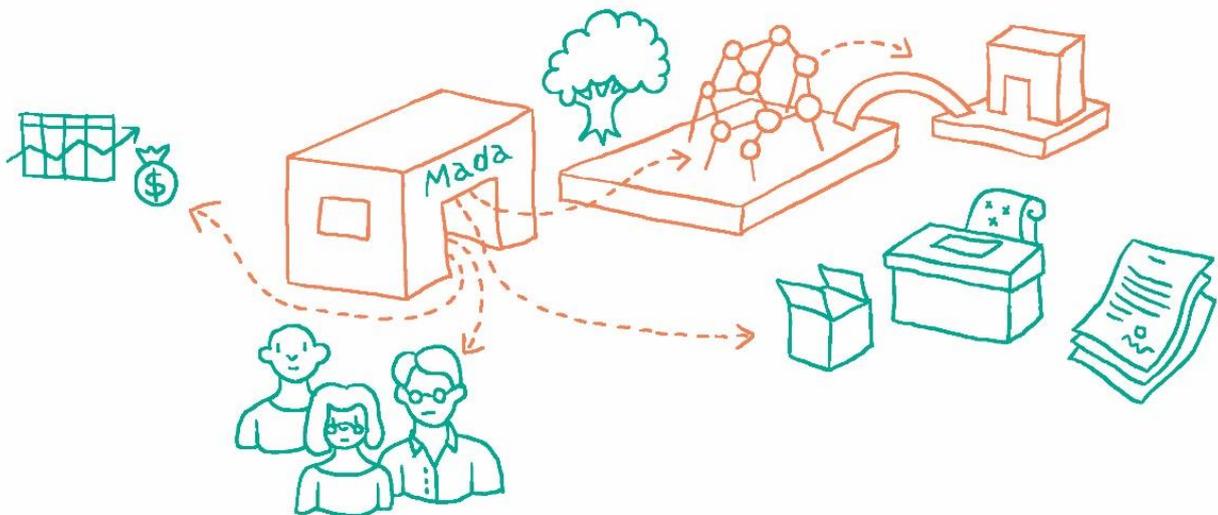
The Platform is a space that offers flexible support for civil initiatives to help them grow and reach their full potential. Active since 2005, it has supported more than 10 organizations or groups, such as artistic communities, municipalities, environmental associations, early-stage social businesses... Since the end of 2019, the Platform has grown in capacity which has enabled it to open up to new members and offer closer support.

During Spring 2020, activities were slowed down due to the global Covid-19 crisis. Mada's staff worked remotely between mid-March and mid-May 2020 but most of the members of the Platform had to pause their activities, which jeopardized their financial stability. The economic crisis is exacerbating tensions and hindering the ability to plan ahead. Despite the difficulties encountered, the Platform was able to ensure support through online meetings and to offer mitigation measures in some cases. Over the past months, the Platform members have shown resilience and have proven their capacity to adapt and innovate. With the gradual reopening of the country since mid-May, activities are slowly taking off again.

The purpose of this newsletter is to inform Mada's internal network on:

- How are the Platform's members affected by the Covid-19 and the economic crisis, and how are they facing the challenges?
- How did we support the Platform's members in the second quarter 2020?
- What are our future prospects?

If you have any further question or suggestion, please contact us directly (platform@mada.org.lb), we will be pleased to hear from you.



How are the Platform members facing challenges and how did we support them in the second quarter 2020?

Hikayatouna is an early-stage enterprise of handmade Levantine handicrafts, led by 3 Syrian women who are former beneficiaries of the association Ninurta (which closed in September 2019). Hikayatouna is still in the process of finding an effective business model and clientele. The economic and Covid-19 crises severely impacted the sales given that decorative items aren't a primary necessity. Moreover, the inflation impacts the pricing and the capacity to renew stocks of fabrics. However, thanks to their solid network, sales started taking off again in June.

During Q2 2020, the Platform supported the renewal of Hikayatouna's visual identity and helped finalize [a catalogue](#) of their new collection. One-to-one sessions were conducted with one of the members to develop her communication skills on social media and to launch a new [Facebook page](#). The biggest upcoming challenges are developing on-line marketing and identifying physical selling points to widen the client base.



Bird feeder made by one of the children during an online craft session.

Horshna is an outdoor learning program that provides children with a direct experience with nature in the public pine forest of Horsh Beirut. It was conceived by an education specialist and a small group of parents who were looking for an alternative to regular indoor nurseries. With the Covid crisis, the Horshna family wasn't able to meet physically for 2 months but the project leader adapted by organizing on-line sessions and designing podcast stories and tutorial videos for craft activities. As the Horsh Beirut is still closed to the public, the group temporarily moved to a forest in Baabda. New families are expected to join starting this Summer, which will bring a new dynamic.

During Q2 2020, the Platform advised the project leader on how to adapt fees and salaries given the exceptional context (price inflation and distance learning). Discussions were initiated concerning the different options for legal registration and switching the business model entirely to Lebanese Lira.

Najda Now is a civil society organization supporting marginalized youth in the camp of Shatila through the art of puppet-making. Since 2017, they created the [One Hand Puppet](#) theater group which provides a safe space for expression and creativity. Over the past months, the pursuit of activities became increasingly difficult due to the socioeconomic turmoil and to the Covid-crisis. From mid-March until beginning of June, Najda Now's center was closed and the children were isolated, not all of them having access to electronic devices and internet. Moreover, their living conditions worsened drastically.

During Q2 2020, the Platform purchased 10 electronic tablets to enable the young beneficiaries to keep contact with the educators through online meetings in Corona times. The tablets will also enable them to build their artistic and technical skills, such as acting, video making and photo montage.



Puppets designed by the One Hand Puppet group, participating to a virtual meeting with the tablets.



Training in catering

Empower is a Lebanese association aiming at promoting social cohesion through education and civic activities. They first partnered with Mada in 2017 on a joint project funded by UNICEF and requested support for project management.

During Q2 2020, Empower signed up for a new phase of the joint project funded by UNICEF. Between June and August 2020, they will be providing trainings to 75 youth living in the regions of Dannieh, Tripoli and Zgharta. In this respect, the Platform provides general accounting and administrative support to the project officer.

Samandal is a Lebanese association dedicated to the advancement of the art of comics in the Arab world and has been a member of the Platform since 2017. Due to the Covid crisis, all the events planned were cancelled, including several international comics' festivals, which had a direct impact on Samandal's sales (festivals are the main opportunity to sell books). With the economic crisis, many publications are on hold as the printing has become too expensive, and the banking restrictions have blocked payments to contributors and suppliers. On the bright side, these challenges have encouraged Samandal to innovate: discussions were initiated to develop online publications, to build more collaborations with other artistic collectives and to engage more in the sociopolitical dialogue by using the art of comics as a tool to convey ideas.

To tackle these issues, funding is key. Therefore, during Q2 2020, the Platform helped Samandal identify funding opportunities and develop two project proposal with the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and with the Austrian embassy.



Despite the difficulties, Samandal launched a call for comics for the 17th edition of the Magazine, which is a yearly compilation of cartoon strips from different Arab artists.

Collaborations with **Sénévé**, a center for disabled children based in Homs, were delayed until further notice. Indeed, the series of workshops planned during Q2 2020 couldn't take place as the border between Lebanon and Syria is closed. With **Mejwiz**, a newly founded association aiming to empower the independent musical scene in Lebanon, the Platform monitored the funding opportunities to scale up activities although the period is not conducive to funding in the cultural sector.

What are our future prospects?

- More transversally speaking, the Platform is working on a beta version of an **expert database**. The idea is to structure and make available Mada's network, in order to facilitate access to expertise. Moreover, substantive work is underway to build Mada's **safeguarding policies** and to improve **administrative procedures** which will be shared with the Platform members, when applicable.
- With the renewal of Mada's board in February 2020, a sub-committee was formed for the Platform. A first meeting is planned in July, which should enhance new ideas and directions.
- During Q2 2020, the Platform met new groups or individuals with educational and civic projects. Some could join the Platform in a more sustainable way.



Contact the Platform:

Mada association – El-Areed Street, 20, Bldg Attalah, Ain el Remmaneh, Beirut, Lebanon.
platform@mada.org.lb / (+961) 3 063 177