



Growing and Sustaining IB Communities: How schools in Egypt beat pandemic odds to bring together a rapidly expanding IB population.

The recent pandemic compelled us all to embark on a quest to discover new meanings and solutions. United in reflective inquiry, we sought to achieve greater balance in our ecosystems and to add more substance to our values. Our reflections prompted us to review, and in many cases, to eradicate, some of our ‘traditional’ practices. Resulting from this global crisis, came our strong desire to connect with others not only to counsel and console, but to rethink and to innovate. By coincidence, regional IB associations were contemplating their effectiveness at this time, and the IBO had shared its vision for the development of strong country networks. Amidst a global crisis with very real challenges for us to navigate, the need for collaboration magnified, and opportunity to network with colleagues in schools in shared contexts become even more relevant.

IB advocates across the region have time and time again demonstrated great courage and stoic resilience in times of hardship, working together to navigate challenges, with our students’ needs always the top priority. Encouraged by conversations held with our then small network of IB Heads and Coordinators, we decided that we would not allow obstacles to stand in our way. We wanted action, refusing to simply accept the lockdown disconnect that had been life-changing for so many. Risk-taking is a key attribute of the IB Learner Profile. I was determined for us to continue good work for the IBO in Egypt, spurred on by a principled commitment and drive that was widely welcomed and encouraged. Knowing that open-mindedness brings about great results, we took a leap of faith and responded swiftly to the call of IB personnel throughout the nation.

By aligning Egypt’s needs with the global call for Country Associations to be formed, a new vision for IB in the country was ignited. In true IB spirit, in the summer of 2020, the power of community grit in the face of challenging circumstances shone

through, and Egypt became one of the first countries to form an official IB Country Association.

The network grew, we started to meet regularly and were soon nominating members for the Executive Committee. There was a high level of excitement and participation and, after votes were counted, the members of the inaugural IBSEA Committee were announced, with the new Committee members representing seven IB World Schools.

The Committee got very busy, very quickly! Our first virtual meeting as a group took place in December 2020. We discussed the IBSEA name, title and acronym, and developed a shared vision for the IBSEA website. Specific duties for each member of the Committee (Secretary, Treasurer, DP/CP Advisor, MYP Advisor and PYP Advisor) were agreed upon. The committee has since met regularly, with an agenda that has included creating a constitution, facilitating staff training, creating networking opportunities, working with the Ministry of Education on recognition, and strategising for sustained growth. Knowing that communication is key to success, we worked closely with the IBO throughout the process. On behalf of the committee, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for the support of Ms Mary Tadros (previously Development and Recognition Manager, IBO) and Dr Kawther Saa'd AlDin, (IBO Development & Recognition Associate Manager). With their help, IB Schools in Egypt Association (IBSEA) has grown into a bold, thriving force; led by a representative, elected committee that is working effectively to support schools, educators and students across Egypt. IBSEA is working hard to continue delivering a positive impact for students in member schools and we are all very proud of the way in which the Association is keeping its promises while overcoming many odds.

Adapting to a new landscape – IBSEA's first major event – *IB Connected*

Having hosted an annual IB networking event at our school for five years prior to the pandemic I worked with the IB team at my school and with the IBSEA Committee to invite every single IB teacher in Egypt, from all programmes in the continuum, to a virtual networking event, aptly named, ***IB CONNECTED***. Under the umbrella of the newly formed IBSEA, the event brought together hundreds of IB educators from diverse schools, creating networking opportunities for teachers, coordinators, and heads of school. Wide representation was essential in the creation of an environment of unity and progress for all. Educators from all schools were invited to submit proposals to lead workshops and forums and we were

staggered by the expertise, enthusiasm and initiative of colleagues from schools across Egypt. The programme for the event was soon finalised and the autumn of 2021 suddenly felt like spring! There was a real buzz and a build up to the event. So many people had newly connected and were planning aspects of the event together. Under the expertise and supportive leadership of IBSEA we were able to ensure that the event was immaculately organised. The programme was structured around the four themes of: Implementation, Growth, Evaluation and Collaboration. IBSEA would again like to thank Dr Kawther SaadAl Din (IBO Development & Recognition Associate Manager) for her Keynote presentation at this event. She shared critical news with us about each Programme in the Continuum and highlighted the aspirational, contextualised and developmental features of the 2020 PSP. Most importantly she reminded participants why they are all passionate IB educators - evidenced by a very high level of attendance and engagement. Participants were then treated to a suite of workshops delivered by exceptional IB teachers and leaders. They engaged in discussion forums and shared many brilliant ideas. Some of them very new to the IB, teachers relished the opportunity to support the IB Mission and to nurture their own lifelong learning pathway, by meeting together and sharing rich knowledge.

As the world returns to normalcy, we are excited that IBSEA can now run face-to-face events for teachers, students, and the wider community, as described in its Constitution. We look forward to hosting a face-to-face *IB Connected* event this November.

IBSEA has relied upon the continued support and active involvement of caring colleagues from 32 IB World Schools in Egypt, along with the support of the Development team at the IBO and administrative staff at MES Cairo. Now that the Association is well established, we see how the hard work and collaboration has truly paid off. We strongly encourage all IB schools to get connected, and stay connected, by joining their Country Association and actively participating in meetings and events. If there is no Association in your country, we hope you will be inspired by our story to start one, so that we continue to grow and sustain our IB Communities, everywhere.

Ghada Dajani – IBSEA President