



*Rescue Radio*

# Summary

Life for foreign domestic workers in Lebanon has been deteriorating steadily for years. Ignored by the legal system, barely paid, poorly looked after and subjected to frequent abuse, their situation resembled slavery more than employment. Worse still, their reprehensible treatment had become publicly accepted practice, giving them little hope for the future.

We needed to find a way to reach them and let them know that wasn't necessarily the case, that there were people willing and able to help them. And we needed to do it in such a way that their employers would never know...until it was too late for them to do anything about it.

Through thoroughly understanding the complexities of their situations, we were able to create a campaign that effectively broke into the homes of unscrupulous Lebanese households and rescued the domestic workers trapped within, without arousing the suspicion of their captors.

*So far, we've rescued 17 maids, but given renewed hope to thousands more.*



# Rescue Radio

Having a domestic worker in the house in Lebanon is relatively commonplace. So commonplace in fact, that the International Labour Organization estimates that they comprise 5% of Lebanon's population. Before the start of Lebanon's civil war in 1975, these domestic workers came predominately from the poorer families from outside of the main urban center of Beirut, and occasionally from Egypt, Palestine and Syria.

Sometimes as young as 10, they'd work with the families until they got married themselves. Their parents would visit their daughters' employers to collect their salaries and check up on them, but they were generally treated with consideration. In fact, they were often considered part of the family and were looked after, financially and otherwise, long after their domestic employment ended.

But then the civil war started and this source of domestic help disappeared. They preferred to stay away from the warzone Beirut had become. Domestic help became hard to come by,



a disaster for a country so used to it and so, in 1978, the first domestic worker recruitment agency opened up in Beirut. They brought in women from outside the Arab world, from Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, women for whom the hardships of extreme poverty outweighed the risks involved in working amidst a civil war. Their new Lebanese employers, however, reacted very differently to them than they had with their domestic workers before. They weren't Arabs, they didn't speak their language and they didn't know their families. They had no connection with them. As such, they were looked down upon to the point that accepting a job as a domestic worker is now seen to be beneath the

Lebanese, even after the end of the civil war in 1990. Their treatment of domestic workers since has been an alarming reflection of that attitude.

RESCUE  
RADIO

# How times have changed

These days, domestic workers have their passports confiscated by their employers to ensure they're unable to leave the country. They're often not allowed to leave the apartment either, spending most of their time locked inside. Their Lebanese employers have good reason to fear their flight – they're treated like slaves. Worked seven days a week, sometimes without pay, many of them don't even have their own quarters and are forced to sleep in the kitchen or bathroom. They are subjected to physical abuse and even rape. Many of them commit suicide to escape their torment, or fall to their deaths as they desperately try to climb down the outside of apartment blocks. In 2008, Human Rights Watch reported that domestic workers in Lebanon were dying at the rate of one a week.



The situation and the local population's blasé attitude to it came to a head in February 2012 when a Lebanese man was filmed beating his maid outside the Ethiopian embassy, dragging her into his car as she kicked and screamed in terror. The video was posted online, sparking international outrage but little reaction in Lebanon. And while the world became increasingly vocal in its condemnation, the victim, Alem Dechasa, hanged herself with a bed sheet in the mental hospital she'd subsequently been committed to. An investigation into the entire affair was promised by Lebanon's Internal Security Forces, but there was little hope for a positive outcome when an ISF source was quoted as saying, "The video does not show what actually happened. The man could have been beating her, or rescuing her."

Or rescuing her. What more revealing indictment of the attitude that led to this situation could have been made? These were the words that drove Sawa Mnjah ("Together we succeed"), a Lebanese NGO dedicated to combatting domestic abuse, to approach us for help tackling the issue. The main question was how? Clearly the authorities wouldn't do anything of lasting significance. The public weren't particularly bothered either. The practice of physically abusing domestic workers was so embedded that people weren't even ashamed of doing it in public and having it filmed.

ORSHAN  
RADIO

# Time for another change

It was clear that trying to change attitudes was not going to deliver the immediate results we needed. We therefore decided to target those we ultimately wanted to help – the victims themselves. We needed to let them know that there were people who cared, wanted to help and were actually able to help. Sawa Mninjah shared everything they'd learnt about the domestic worker's situation with us, and that's where we uncovered our biggest problem – reaching our audience.



They had limited access to media. They weren't allowed newspapers or magazines, TV or internet access. The only media exposure they had was spillover from whatever their employers consumed in their presence. Relying on media spillover also meant we'd have to evade employer censorship, as they were swift to deny them access to anything they didn't want them to see. News from home, reports on domestic worker abuse in Lebanon and the region, and any ads from other charity organisations offering help and support, all were intentionally hidden from them. If a story about it appeared on CNN, the channel was changed. If an ad from an NGO appeared in the newspaper, the page was torn out. Most of them were unaware that their countries' labour ministries had banned the recruitment of domestic workers for employment in Lebanon. We needed to find a way to get our message across without their employers catching on.

*Our brief became, "Tell domestic workers that help is available, without anyone else knowing."*

RESCUE  
RADIO

# Bringing it to life

The briefing session dramatized this. We told a creative to deliver a message to another creative without anyone else knowing about it. We wanted it to be a mental exercise to get them started, but by the end it actually presented us with the solution. Messages were scribbled, turned into paper airplanes and thrown across the room, but obviously everyone saw them. They were folded up and hidden in different places, but without the recipient knowing that he had to look for something, they went unread. And as soon as they were prompted to look, so was everyone else. We had the same problem when they were written in code.



Dubai is 90% expatriate, so the creatives we had in the room consisted of a variety of nationalities. As each idea was proven ineffective, the proposed solutions became more and more outlandish, prompting a South African art director to say something to a South African copywriter in Afrikaans that everyone else thought was a joke, but turned out to be an insult. No one else in the room understood the meaning or the intent of what he'd just said...with the exception of the person he said it to. It was exactly the solution we were looking for.

We needed to create messages in the languages of the intended recipients – Tagalog, Nepalese, Amharic (Ethiopian), Swahili and Sinhalese. TV therefore became unaffordable. Print wasn't an option as it gave employers the possibility of having them translated. We considered radio, but with the maids not being allowed outside, we didn't think they'd spend enough time in the car for them to hear a radio ad.

However, during a discussion with our media agency, we discovered something we hadn't expected. 32% of Lebanese households listen to radio at home. It was the perfect solution. It was spillover media the domestic workers were exposed to, yet fleeting enough for their employers not to be able to get it translated on a whim. To further disguise them and make sure they didn't raise suspicions, they were recorded to sound like fast food ads and spa commercials, among others. We made sure each spot contained a number of familiar sounds from the maid's home countries to attract their attention and make sure they paid attention to them.

RESCUE  
RADIO

# Delivering hope through the radio

We named the campaign “Rescue Radio,” a campaign designed to break into homes and rescue those trapped within. Developing it was a heart-wrenching journey, exposing us to atrocities beyond anything we’d ever before encountered, but it was more than worth it.

Through the international coverage and recognition the campaign has achieved through being awarded at shows including the Clios, the One Show, the LIAs and Cannes, their plight has been brought to the attention of many the world over, including at home. The subject is now being discussed in Lebanon, with calls for laws to be introduced to protect their rights becoming ever more vociferous. We’ve started a conversation on a topic that no one in Beirut had ever thought worthy of discussion before. We’ve helped give hope to people who before had none – hope that the situation might improve either through legislation or by rescuing them from it altogether.

It’s a hope that we’ve helped turn into reality for 17 domestic workers so far. 17 people who no longer have to live in a never-ending nightmare of slavery and abuse. 17 people who have their lives back.

*And that’s just the beginning.*



RESCUE  
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