



A Case Study in Inclusiveness

Focusing on 7 external variables in El Rehla: gender, geography, age, industries, startups› stages, languages, and players and stakeholders

December 2021

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This case study is a byproduct of a larger consultancy, YPE-DAPP, implemented by Oxfam to demonstrate the partner organizations' abilities in incorporating the inclusiveness value and other organizational and developmental values on their organizational and/or programmatic levels using the case study approach. The consultancy team applied primary data sources, including interviews, focus groups, and a workshop with the partner organizations' employees and community members, in addition to secondary data sources, which included project reports, relevant documents, and literature.

Since 2014, ElRehla has worked on accelerating and building collaborative communities by hosting retreat experiences away from busy cities, bringing together **corporate leaders and their teams, industry stakeholders and decision makers, and founders and incubators** for a connective, reflective, and habit-changing experience through a unique program that engages the participants mentally, physically, and emotionally. El Rehla's main tool is **networking**, with the goal of **building collaborative communities** in the entrepreneurial and industrial ecosystems of Egypt.

El Rehla applies a **holistic approach** working on the individual as a whole—body, mind, and soul—to achieve an impactful experience by the end of the retreat; therefore, selecting a venue by the sea builds a stronger connection among participants. El Rehla believes that this approach improves productivity, builds connections with peers in their industries, and influences ecosystem empowerment.

Each retreat has its own separate target audience, with the common goal of networking for building collaborative communities through sharing practices, challenges, and experiences. For this reason, El Rehla requires that everyone attending the retreats be a decision-maker, whether at the small or large organizational levels.

The team identified seven inclusiveness variables starting from the fourth or fifth retreat based on the frequent feedback from participants after recognizing that diversity enriches the overall experience and personal growth of individuals.

Male and **female** participants attending the camps are of different **ages** from different **governorates** in Egypt, representing different **industries** and **organizational levels**. El Rehla's strength point is the community, the team has built a huge network of **players and stakeholders** in the ecosystem through creating partnerships with donors, sponsors, supply logistics, speakers, outreach partners, and facilitators. All retreats are conducted in Arabic, and the reading resources are published in **both languages**, Arabic and English.

At first, El Rehla provided a public retreat only for entrepreneurs in different start-up stages, but with the support of Oxfam, it developed the sectoral retreats. Currently, El Rehla's main retreats are **(a) public camp**: this camp is advertised publicly, unlike other camps. It is mainly targeting founders in the early start-up stages; however, founders in the growth stages attend as experts; **(b) industry camp**: focuses on employers from a particular sector, e.g., education. Participants attending this retreat come from the same industry but from different departments and organizations; **(c) thematic camp**: focuses on a specific topic within organizations, e.g., organizational culture. Participants attending this retreat represent different departments from different organizations and industries; **(d) corporate camp**: tailored to companies to build their employees' capacities and team bonds. Participants are selected by the company.

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For example, when two applicants are from the same organization, we first consider their ability to make decisions within the business before attempting to achieve a gender balance, Ahmed Seddik, El Rehla's Operation Controller and Co-founder.

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Retreats are organized to fit the **Egyptian culture**, including participants from different governorates, separately accommodating males and females, and facilitating workshops in Arabic. In addition, **Customer experience** is a priority for El Rehla in all its programs; they continuously consider small details in logistics and content.

For El Rehla, being inclusive is **accepting** each participant for who they are, regardless of their circumstances or backgrounds, e.g., providing mothers and persons with disabilities facilities to support their stay and participation.

Participants are considered to be leaders or influencers in their organizations, humble, generous to share their best practices, willing to learn, and willing to build partnerships and collaborations with others. **Outreaching** the right people for each experience is challenging; consequently, the team is continuously working on mapping the ecosystem and connecting with strategic partners to enhance the outreach process. El Rehla reaches public camps' participants through its network and social media, and for other camps, invitations are sent directly to organizations with the name of the selected leader to attend, asking them for recommendations for other leaders in the industry. Also, reaching experts is challenging because of their availability.

For the public camps, the team sets a plan for the 7 variables; they identify the percentage of participants' gender, geography, age, industries, startups' stages, language, and players and stakeholders; however, in practice, it is challenging because applicants sometimes cancel their reservations at the last minute, so this changes the planned percentage, and the team tries to manage it by getting someone with similar criteria attending, but it is not always accurate.

For the industry camps, it is a bit more difficult; for instance, in some industries, the number of males exceeds the number of females, and vice versa.

Another challenge is the retreat's cost, which slows down the decision for many participants to pay all these fees for just 3 or 4 days. El Rehla's business model is mainly donor- and corporate-based in order to subsidize the whole cost for participants. Only the public camp is paid for by individuals, and it is subsidized by almost 70%. If partnerships and sponsors stopped, that would affect the cost, and many people would be excluded.

Donors and sponsors are involved in the selection and organizing process through identifying the outreach list and validating the agenda, as they are considered to be subject matter experts. But sometimes they interfere too much, which affects the process's standardization.

In addition, **confirmations and procedures of donors take time**, which slows down the operations, affecting the decisions regarding price setting, confirmation with partners, and retreats' timings.

Logistics also require extensive effort because traveling preparations demand advanced logistics management skills in order to provide a service of high quality. However, after COVID-19, some retreats were moved online, but they lacked the physical interaction that is a main pillar in El Rehla's learning journey.

The team is constantly considering different types of services in order to expand, rather than relying just on organizing retreats outside of Cairo, e.g., figuring out how one-day workshops can build collaborative communities through consistent online or offline events where people meet

for networking, support, and collaboration. But at the current time there is no team capacity to focus on building this consistent community.

In their periodic gatherings and meetings, El Rehla team considers the **retreats' impact on the community**, which is then reflected in designing the content, selecting participants and speakers, and creating assessment tools. **El Rehla has developed interactive activities and feedback tools** to achieve networking that develops participants on both professional and personal levels.

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Because of networking, many participants learned from each other, and they kept in touch. When we also see participants attending more than once, we understand that the camp was useful to him or her, Sherif Ashraf, Co-founder and Project Manager at El Rehla.

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