

ASU grad builds bridges between research and action amid ongoing crises

By Laura Randall, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

From economic collapse to the COVID-19 pandemic to intensified military action, Lebanon has faced overlapping crises with insufficient humanitarian aid.

Bruno Atieh, a Lebanese student, has witnessed the consequences of conflict, instability and declining aid on children and young people. His experience working with [World Vision](#) as their senior advisor in humanitarian policy, advocacy and partnerships and as a former U.N. representative for humanitarian affairs inspired him to pursue research that bridges the gap between academia and action.

Atieh is now graduating with a PhD in innovation in global development from the [Rob Walton College of Global Futures](#) at Arizona State University. He has been named the Spring 2026 Outstanding Graduate for the [School for the Future of Innovation in Society](#) and received the SFIS PhD Charter Award.

His dissertation, “Surviving Hunger: How Adolescents Cope with Hunger Amid Conflict and Aid Decline in Lebanon,” emerged from the intersection of his experiences to bear witness to the devastating consequences of armed conflict and insufficient humanitarian aid.

“I wanted my research to document what these compounded crises mean for adolescents, especially at a time when humanitarian funding was shrinking globally,” Atieh said. “More importantly, I wanted it to generate evidence that could inform policy and programming to better support children and adolescents in crisis settings.”

Through the evolution of an ongoing war, amid intense airstrikes on major cities across Lebanon, Atieh pursued his research to amplify the voices of those who have endured the most severe impacts.

“What kept me going was my connection to the people and communities affected by these crises,” Atieh said. “This research was never abstract to me. It was deeply human and deeply personal. I felt a responsibility to ensure that adolescents’ experiences in Lebanon were heard and reflected in a way that could inform action.”

ASU News sat down with Atieh to learn more about his journey.

Question: How did you decide to pursue a PhD in innovation in global development?

Answer: After completing my master’s degree and spending years working in development and humanitarian action, I felt a strong need to continue learning and deepen my understanding of the issues I had been working on. I wanted to build a bridge between practice and academia: to draw from field experience, strengthen it through research and contribute knowledge that could be useful to others. When I learned more about ASU’s innovation in global development program, I was struck by how closely it aligned with both my professional path and my aspirations. It felt like the right place to expand my knowledge while connecting it directly to real-world challenges.

Q: How has your perspective shifted after completing your dissertation?

A: Completing my dissertation strengthened my belief that academia and practice should not be separated. It showed me how rigorous research and critical thinking can uncover root causes, challenge assumptions and generate evidence that directly informs policy and programming. My perspective shifted from seeing research mainly as analysis to seeing it as a tool for practical change.

I now feel even more committed to using evidence-based research to help shape better responses to complex humanitarian and development challenges. The experience also reinforced for me that knowledge becomes most meaningful when it is connected to people’s lived realities and used to improve their lives.

Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?

A: Make the most of the experience. School is not only about completing requirements. It is a rare opportunity to grow, question, reflect and build the kind of thinking that stays with you for life. Use your time to learn deeply, stay curious, build meaningful relationships and take advantage of the opportunities your university offers. Most importantly, allow the experience to shape how you think. The ability to think critically, analytically and with empathy is one of the most valuable things you can carry forward.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: After graduation, I plan to continue my work with World Vision’s global team, focusing on humanitarian policy and advocacy. I want to keep contributing to efforts that defend the rights and dignity of people in need, especially children, at a time when the world is facing growing conflict, shrinking aid and deepening inequalities. I hope to continue building on the bridge between research and practice by using evidence to inform advocacy, policy and decision-making, and to keep working toward a more just and humane world.

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Main image



Bruno Atieh (far right) takes a selfie with his colleagues and peers by Lynx Lake, near Prescott, Arizona, during the 2022 CGF Grad Camp. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



Bruno Atieh, courtesy photo