

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women's empowerment in Lebanon: Impact evaluation of the project 'Women's access to justice in the Middle East and North Africa region'* (Effectiveness Review Series 2014/15)

Prepared by:	<i>Sarah Barakat, Middle East Gender Justice manager</i>		
Contributors:			
Signed off by:	<i>Fran Beytrison, Country Representative, Oxfam GB Lebanon</i>		
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1. The context and background of the review

As part of Oxfam Great Britain's (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of mature projects are randomly selected each year and their effectiveness rigorously assessed. The 'Women's Access to Justice in the MENA region' project was selected for review in this way under the women's empowerment thematic area.

The project was founded by SIDA with a budget of 1.3 Million USD, and was implemented in three countries: Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. It started in May 2011 and finished in July 2014.

The focus of this Effectiveness Review is on the Lebanon project component only. The project worked at four levels of intervention: individual, community, institutional, and policy. The key activities conducted at each level can be summarised as follows:

At the individual level: a) the organisation of awareness raising sessions (ARS) through the training of 50 women from 6 different NGOs, 13 of which became para-legal experts and started offering ARSs. b) provision of free consultation to women who decided to bring their case to court. This service has been promoted during the awareness rising session and through the media (TV).

At the community level: a) the provision of awareness raising sessions to community leaders who were viewed as potential changing actors. These community leaders included: political parties, religion leaders, municipal employers. b) establishment of a men's forum with 10 men who were trained and engaged in raising awareness.

At the institutional level: The project worked with the lawyer bar, in order to raise awareness around women's right among lawyers and judges. This intervention aimed to create a better environment that women could more easily have access to.

The activities for this project started in May 2011, but work with community leaders and court officials was intensified from January 2013 onwards. They originally started in El Metn and then spread to all Mount Lebanon region. The work underlying this effectiveness review specifically looked at the effect of project activities conducted at the individual and community level.

This Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the activities among the people who directly participated in the project activities. Oxfam recognises women's empowerment to be a complex, multi-dimensional concept. While not arguing for a standard set of women's empowerment characteristics that are applicable to all contexts, Oxfam has developed a multi-dimensional index to support measurement of this hard to measure area that sets out dimensions of women's empowerment that the organisation considers to be important in all contexts. Recognising the importance of context, however, each effectiveness review begins by identifying a set of characteristics under these 5 dimensions that are considered to be important to the particular context of the project that has been selected. The review was carried out in El Metn (where a sample of project beneficiaries was selected) and in the three regions of Deir El Ahmar, Zahle and Marjeyoun where the comparison group individuals were selected. The sample of project participants included 225 women, whereas the sample from the comparison communities includes 450 women. The statistical method of propensity-score matching was used to control for baseline differences between the households in the project and comparison communities, to



increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Summary of results:

Outcome	Linked to the Evidence of project logic positive impact		Comments
Overall Women's Empowerment	Yes	Yes	Survey results provided compelling evidence that the project had been successful in improving overall women's empowerment.
Personal - Power from within	Yes	Yes	The project had a positive impact on attitudes and beliefs concerning gender rights, acceptability of gender based violence, and recognition of care. There was no evidence suggesting improved self-esteem and self-confidence as a result of the project likely because it was not originally part of the project intervention. Impact on knowledge remained unclear.
Personal - Power to	Yes	Yes	There was some evidence of improved personal autonomy. Willingness to take legal action has been extremely high among both intervention and comparison groups.
Relational - Power with	Yes	No	The project was successful in improving woman's social capital. The evaluation investigated attitudes toward community leaders and men. While community leaders' attitudes were not different between intervention and comparison group, estimates suggested that men in the comparison group were more supportive of women than men in the intervention group. This could be interpreted as a failure of the project. Alternatively, it could be due to differences in perception amongst interviewees of what it means for a man to be supportive.
Relational - Power over	No	No	The project did not intend to impact directly any of the indicators measured under Power-over; it therefore came to no surprise to find no evidence of change attributable in any of these areas.
Environmental	Yes	Yes	The project increased accessibility to legal services and decreased the emotional costs involved in filing a case.

Recommendations:

The programme team in particular have been encouraged to consider the following:

- **Link more explicitly women's access to justice with gender rights**

This evaluation raised questions on how projects focused on women's access to justice (and legal rights) could also have included broader women's rights components. Despite not being directly linked with the original theory of change of the project, the evaluation identified positive and significant impacts on indicators measuring attitude and beliefs to women's rights. Future programmes on women's access to justice should consider how they could promote other aspects of women's rights within their interventions, making it explicit in the theory of change.

- **Identifying the right balance between intervention at community level, advocacy and citizen's movement**

Results from this evaluation identified that women's perception of whether men are supporting women was statistically different between project participants and the control group. In order to be more effective in achieving sustainable change there is the recognition from the programme team of the necessity of working not only directly with individual women and key stakeholders (like judges), but also supporting wider citizen's movements demanding improved institutions and equal access to justice. The evaluation therefore suggested considering to find the right balance between interventions with individuals at personal community level, advocacy, and creating of broader citizen's movements for change.

- **Investigate further the high levels of understanding around women's access to justice**

The evaluation identified high levels of juridical knowledge, as well as high levels of willingness to file a lawsuit if needed, both in the intervention and comparison group showing no statistically significant difference between the two groups. These findings do not necessarily mean a failure of the project as number of internal and external factors to the project has been identified as possible factors which may have affected this indicator (for example, advocacy with the national Maronite court, TV advertisements). Unfortunately, despite the monitoring system in place – which included a baseline and endline- the quality of data did not provide sufficient information to track or understand adequately this change. Given the high levels of knowledge in both group, the programme team is encouraged exploring if lack of knowledge still represents an impediment for accessing justice, and to consider greater investment in the other factors impeding women's access to justice.

- **Invest in improvements to the monitoring and evaluation system**

Despite having an monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in place, the programme team has been encouraged to promote a more robust monitoring system, particularly at outcome level, which allows collecting indicators for improving: targeting, project implementation, and influencing. Collecting and analysing socio economic characteristics of women accessing to legal services could provide useful information for improving future targeting. For example, monitoring data on geographical and socio-economic characteristics could be used to target women for future interventions. Similarly, collecting and analysing information on legal cases can support project implementation by providing useful learning on the determinants of success and failure of legal cases in court. Both source of information could also be used to raise awareness with campaigns and influencing activities on the problems in the legal system. This monitoring system should be designed and implemented recognising the sensitivity of the data involved, particularly considering the risk involved in exposing women in a vulnerable situation.

3. Overall do the findings of the review concur with you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness?

Yes; project endline and final evaluation reached same findings; noting however that our data had reflected a significant improvement of levels of knowledge of family laws and that women's perception of this improvement was also confirmed by community leaders.

4. Did the review identify areas that were particularly strong in the project?

Yes; the project was particularly successful in changing empowerment at environment level and personal level, especially for the dimensions of '*power from within*' which look at personal self-confidence as psychological strength, and '*power to*' which measures women's ability to exercise agency and take action.

5. Did the review identify areas that were particularly weak in the project?

No areas that were particularly weak, but suggest intensification of work on policy level; which we had known to be an area for improvement. The Gender hub has since recruited more Advocacy and campaigning capacity, and this is also something the Lebanon country team has been investing in, in line with greater national influencing aims/capacity at country level.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

We consider the review to have been quite good. Coming up with the assessment framework and indicators/questions was a bit challenging but the person leading the evaluation used a very participatory approach and incorporated our concerns. At the beginning it was a very intense process but once the framework and the questions were agreed, things were much smoother. It would have been good to receive initial findings/data earlier as we were given a short timeframe for start-up, and then had to wait for 5 months or so for results and findings.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

- Support partner teams in building better M&E systems and beneficiaries database (already started doing this using Gender hub monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) capacity – as this moves under Lebanon country team support to partners will come from national Gender Justice Coordinator, Head of Programmes, and either national or MECIS MEAL support functions)
- Partnership reviews with implementing partners have been carried out with support of Lebanon partnership advisor to review ways of working, partnership principles, roles & responsibilities and identify specific action points for both partners to take forward to strengthen the partnership and therefore programme impact
- Better planning, resourcing, and support for influencing and policy work including media & campaigning support to partners. This has already been included the design of phase 2 of the programme; increased policy/influencing capacity is a commitment from both the Gender hub and Lebanon country team, with both structures recruiting additional posts. One post of the Gender hub is already in place, a Gender Justice & Media advisor within the Lebanon country team will be recruited in early 2016.
- Work with partners on awareness-raising "package" to ensure it address gender equality framework from a larger lens and link it to women's realities using various techniques

8. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon

No

9. What learning from the review will you apply to relevant or new projects in the future? How can the regional centre/Oxford support these plans?

Most of the above can be applied to wider Gender Justice and non-Gender Justice projects in terms of applying a women's rights lens to all of our work. Specifically, as Lebanon country team takes on oversight of Gender Justice work in Lebanon and brings in dedicated Gender Justice Coordinator & staffing, the learning from this review feeds into Oxfam Country Strategy (OCS) workstream development and wider programme development. For example (SIDA 5 year submission MENA) for Gender Justice and 'humanitarian' work – such as sexual gender-based violence/legal aid for women amongst Syrian and Palestinian populations who cannot always access Lebanon structures and services. The intention within the Lebanon programme is to build complementarity between such work, seeking integration where possible and facilitating learning/referrals between the 3 target populations.

Support from regional centre and/or headquarters would be primarily around policy work as this is not our forte, both in terms of training and technical advice and support and in developing strong M&E systems. Having programme quality capacity sit as regional expertise generally is insufficient if it is not matched with dedicated expertise in-country. Much of this links to our WIN (worldwide influencing network) strategy, and embedding national influencing approaches (including monitoring) into our work. It is important that the Oxfam team in Lebanon has dedicated technical capacity to support partners in designing campaigns, media work (including social and digital media) and wider educational/influencing strategy development. To date partners have done this with limited support from the Oxfam team, whilst Oxfam focus has been directed to undertaking international policy/campaigning. Going forward the team in Lebanon need to see this as an integral part of partnership and programme, and making resources available in-country/more easily available from above-country.

10. Additional reflections

As per above, given the ongoing transfer of responsibility of programme oversight from the Gender Hub to the Lebanon country team, the recommendations and findings in particular have been useful in informing both the Oxfam Country Strategy discussions around the Gender Justice workstream content for Lebanon, as well as resourcing in terms of technical (gender, policy, influencing) expertise.