



SOLAR LIGHTS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

Lighting, sanitation and the risk of gender-based violence

Case study 5: Lebanon, Bekaa Valley

What type of lighting was installed, when, where and why?

Since 2015, Oxfam teams have implemented four different lighting projects in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for some of the 500,000+ Syrian refugees living in the area. The Protection programme supports Syrian refugees to create Peer Groups that act as representatives for their community or settlement. These groups are made up of 6–12 men and women, and Oxfam's Protection Team works with them to build their capacity to run community meetings, speak in public, develop relationships with local authorities and NGOs, facilitate community meetings and implement community action plans. Many of the informal tented settlements in the Bekaa Valley are isolated and have no access to infrastructure such as the electricity grid. During winter the hours of reduced light and total darkness in the Bekaa Valley can stretch from 4pm to 7am the following day.

In April 2016, Peer Groups in 10 sites carried out a threat analysis to identify the greatest protection and safety concerns of the community, to understand how these came about and their impact, and to identify the coping strategies and capacity within the community. While this analysis was initially carried out by the Peer Groups themselves, they then organized a meeting with the wider community to share this analysis and have the findings verified.

The Peer Groups identified many threats relating to the lack of lighting, especially for women and children when accessing sanitation facilities and water tanks after dark. They found that elderly people with reduced vision were also struggling to use the facilities in low light. People were scared to go out after dark, and their fears were well-founded; there had been cases of harassment and assaults by intruders in three of the settlements. In three others, the main threat women identified was being harassed when using the sanitation facilities or water tanks after dark, or when throwing out rubbish. The field team believed that more GBV incidents had taken place than were reported, due to the fear of stigma and general reticence of talking about such issues.

The Peer Groups identified that solar lights for each family or tent would help reduce the risks, and asked Oxfam to help them choose suitable lights. Oxfam's team obtained a selection of bids from suppliers of different priced lights of varying specifications. The Peer Groups then carried out the bid analysis themselves against criteria they had developed – including whether the lights were waterproof, size and weight, whether they were easy to carry, and whether they had any additional features such as phone chargers. The groups narrowed it down to either a Solar LED light, Mandarin Ultra Solar Light or Waterproof Portable 12w light. The bid analysis chose the Waterproof Portable 12w light as it came with a USB charger, was 110-220v, and was bright with a luminous flux of 5400LM.

The Peer Group then organized the distribution, ensuring that they had accurate lists of family names and that each household received a light and knew how to use it.

Did the distribution/installation of lighting affect perceptions of safety, particularly in relation to GBV?

Oxfam's post-distribution monitoring found high levels of satisfaction with the lights, with feedback that users were far more comfortable going out after dark as a result. Some of the women interviewed during the monitoring were very emotional, and at times tearful, about the positive differences the lighting had brought to their lives and how it had made them feel safer.



Waterproof, portable light.

Photo: Cristina Carrandi

Any other observations related to WASH, GBV or lighting



A woman sips coffee in her tent's makeshift kitchen. Photo: Adrian Hartrick/Oxfam.

In 2017, two further sites identified the same need for lighting, with a strong focus on women and girls' safety in using communal sanitation facilities. The Peer Groups in these locations brainstormed all possible solutions and again went through a structured process of looking at the advantages and disadvantages of each, before finally settling on mid-range solar lights. They then organized an open meeting to present their proposed solution and check that the lights they had identified would meet the needs of community members.

Reflecting on what they would do differently in future, the Oxfam team

highlighted that the community had experienced some technical problems with mid-range lights they chose, and it would have been better to have provided higher quality lights that were more durable and would provide a more sustainable solution. However, 18 months after the distribution, it seemed that all the lights were still functioning.

The ideal solution would be for all the sites to have a connection to the electricity grid. While this would be bureaucratically and politically challenging, it offers the best sustainable solution for the settlements.

© Oxfam International and WEDC December 2018