



COMMUNITY-BASED LIGHTING FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

Lighting, sanitation and the risk of gender-based violence

Case study 6: Lebanon, Bekaa Valley

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

Oxfam has been working in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley since 2012 providing safe, clean drinking water as well as working on lighting projects in over 120 informal settlements which house some of the half a million Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Protection programme supports Syrian refugees to create Peer Groups, made up of 6–12 men and women, that act as representatives for their community or settlement.

In one informal tented settlement (name withheld to protect the residents), the Peer Group identified lack of lighting as a problem, particularly for the safety of women and girls using the sanitation facilities at dusk and after dark. The landowner of the site did not want any permanent infrastructure to be built on his land, which meant the sanitation facilities had to be located along the road on the edge of the site. The site itself was very remote and the area around it was mostly fields, and therefore extremely dark after sunset. There had been several occasions when strangers or intruders had been found wandering around the edge of the site, particularly around the sanitation facilities, without good reason, and some residents had been robbed of mobile phones or intimidated by these intruders. In an attempt to combat this, the Peer Group organized a distribution of solar lights to the households.



An informal settlement for Syrian refugees near the town of Baalbek in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, January 2016. Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam.

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

Despite the distribution of lights, there were still significant fears about using the sanitation facilities after dark. This was especially the case among women and children, who were particularly vulnerable to harassment or attacks by intruders and expressed high levels of fear about using the facilities. While each household had a light for their tent, it wasn't always possible or easy for an individual to take this

light with them when using the latrine; if they did, then the rest of the family was left in darkness until they came back. This drew attention to those using the latrines and could create difficulties and embarrassment – for example, for teenage girls during menstruation. In general, the light provided by solar lights was limited when moving around the camp, and could actually draw attention to those using them in an otherwise extremely dark environment.

In discussion with the residents of the settlement, the Peer Group came up with a proposal. They had been allocated a budget of approximately \$600 for community projects and wanted to use this to install better lighting. To do so they planned to install a generator to power fixed lights around the sanitation facilities, and had identified a trained electrician living in the camp who would install the generator, three large lights, and the necessary wiring and cables. They had also identified individuals who committed to maintain the system and ensure repairs were undertaken as needed. The community agreed to pay for fuel for the generator, with household contributions linked to income. The funding available was very limited and did not enable the group to buy enough lights, so the community decided to raise the money themselves and collectively bought two more large lights.

During the post-distribution monitoring, community members gave very positive feedback about the impact of the lighting. It not only made people feel safer and less fearful about using facilities after dark, but also gave everyone – especially women and girls – greater freedom of movement around the camp. As a result, women had begun socializing in each other's tents in a way they hadn't been able to do previously. This made a great difference to the sense of community, and to the support women were able to give each other. The community also expressed strong appreciation for the approach taken – including the role they had played in making decisions, and the psychological benefits of 'not feeling like beggars'. This point was repeatedly made by members of the community during field visits, and seemed particularly important for a community in a protracted displacement, who had limited opportunities to use their own skills and capacity to improve their situation.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email rachel.hastie@oxfam.org

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