



ROOTSLAB PILOT PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

March 2017 – April 2019

*"The feminist movement in Lebanon has a lot to gain from a project like RootsLab. RL has successfully started the process of decentralising feminist resources, knowledge, skills, and decision-making power, geographically, generationally, sectorally, and, importantly, to non-Lebanese communities. Starting from the belief that each community is best placed to fight for its own causes, we see the proliferation of new initiatives as a desirable and healthy expansion of the fight for gender justice."
RootsLab Final Evaluation*



1. Progress made

As the RootsLab (RL) Lebanon pilot completes its second, and final, year of funded support, we are proud to see formal confirmation of what we, as a project team, sensed, saw and heard in our day-to-day collaborations with RootsLab partners and supporters...that the project has had a significant impact on the activism of over 40 young women and trans*¹ folks and over 5,500 members of their respective communities, as well as on the wider community of over 60 feminist partners, mentors, trainers, facilitators, and allies who have engaged with the project. It has planted the seeds for better intergenerational relationships amongst activists and for more and better support to new social change initiatives. RootsLab has also sparked conversations around resources, building bridges across communities, issues and geographical areas, and has contributed to current debates about strengthening and revitalizing the feminist movement in Lebanon. Most importantly, it has opened a space for support, collaboration and solidarity that those who have been involved in RootsLab now seek to sustain.

The final evaluation clearly shows the added value of RootsLab in reaching out to young activists outside of Beirut, to migrant and refugee communities, and to less experienced or established activists. RootsLab has had a significant positive impact on the diversity of voices, perspectives and dynamics of the feminist movement here in Lebanon, and has emphasized on fostering solidarity and collaboration, rather than competition, between all of those involved in the journey. The programme management team and global partners recognize how privileged they are to have been part of this process.

Our collective work in this second year has focused on solidifying and deepening early relationships, and on growing these into more formal networks and collaborations in support of the ten initiatives. During this period, emphasis was placed on tailored and close support and accompaniment to the ten teams as they tested out their initiatives, and in identifying future opportunities to sustain, grow or scale up their work. In terms of the project's intended outcomes, RootsLab's achievements in just 2 years have been remarkable:

Participating young women and trans* activists have increased agency and ability to implement innovative ideas:

The first four months of this second year of the pilot saw the finalization and formal approval of ten proposals by the global Steering Group – a significant milestone for the groups involved and for us all in RootsLab. Each team was matched with a peer mentor, to complement their own expertise and guide them through the proposal-writing and testing of their initiative, filling needs they have identified with the support of the RootsLab project team. Activist teams have also been matched with six established feminist organizations and one social innovation (SI) organization that have hosted their initiatives. The overall process of developing a final proposal and budget, as well as responding to questions and elaborating on their ideas, has reportedly been challenging, but consisted of a key form of capacity building, which allowed activist teams to think deeper, build stronger theories of change, and provide meaningful and valuable answers to the challenges that they themselves had identified as most critical.

Over the past year, activist teams have built on the learnings, knowledge and skills that they developed during the incubation and proposal writing phases to test new ideas, adapt their work, and engage with their communities on different levels. Nevertheless, barriers and challenges, almost always structural and contextual in nature, persist. Team members have had to leave the country for resettlement, or in pursuit of better opportunities. Activists working across communities with a history of conflict, such as *Qudwa* and *Noon Al Tadamon*, have sometimes struggled in reaching out to members of those different communities. Almost all of those who participated in the journey have experienced first-hand the draining nature of activism and organizing work, as well as varying constraints in accessing certain spaces, opportunities and decision-making. Yet, in the face of such challenges, activists were able to exercise significant leadership and were ready to respond to emerging challenges and engage with relevant stakeholders, proactively, creatively, and most often, effectively. Where further support was needed in dealing with such issues, RootsLab's project team – as well as mentors and host organizations in some cases - provided guidance and support.

Throughout the process, the activists involved were able to maintain ownership over their own initiatives, which led to increased agency and ability to implement them. As the final evaluation demonstrates, they themselves credit RootsLab with this clear increase in their sense of agency, self-efficacy and ability to develop and implement their ideas. In addition to the project team's close accompaniment, they attribute this to the support provided by mentors and trainers, but also to their own success in implementing their projects – despite challenges faced and the long way ahead. This is particularly true for those young women and trans* folk from communities that are not usually involved in – or even invited to be part of – more formal development spaces and discussions. For example, those working in rural, refugee or migrant communities; for the three groups of young Syrian and Ethiopian activists for whom opportunities like this are so much harder to access; for groups like *Noon Al Tadamon*, working in villages outside of the center of activity; or for groups like *Equity*; three young law students at a public university who had no prior engagement in activism or organizing activities, and for whom the strengthening of their knowledge and ability to develop new initiatives, through RootsLab, has been strongly recognized. This is indeed an indication of RootsLab's proactive and continuous efforts to reach those activists and their communities, to remove barriers they face in accessing resources and feminist spaces, and to facilitate linkages with other activists and feminist and women's rights groups.

It is also important to mention that, at least 6 of the groups that were supported by RootsLab have submitted applications to other funding opportunities – which have arisen through and beyond RootsLab - including the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS), FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, Global Fund for Women (GFW), Open Society Foundations (OSF), Mama Cash, Hivos and Kvinna til Kvinna – and 1 proposal partnership with Oxfam in Lebanon on a new European Union (EU) programme fund. At least four of these proposals have already been successful, and will allow teams to continue and grow their current work, sustain their space or implement new projects.

Finally, our collective work in this second year has very much focused on solidifying and deepening early relationships and on growing these into more formal networks and collaborations in support of the ten initiatives. All of those involved in the journey,

from activists, to partners, mentors, trainers and allies, have expressed interest in sustaining the space of support and solidarity that RootsLab has strived to build.

“Sometimes I would give an intervention and then think “I did not know I was capable of that thought!” I was really impressed with myself. [RootsLab] really valued us and our opinions and this makes all the difference. [It made us] feel capable, knowledgeable, revolutionary.” – RootsLab Participant

New and innovative solutions aimed at improving young women and trans* people’s lives and rights are developed, tested and adapted by young women and trans* leaders:

As the ten teams evolved, adapted and matured their ideas and innovations we have witnessed the launch and growth of new online and offline conversations, spaces and communities, and the sharing of creative work and new knowledge with diverse audiences. Activist teams built on their learnings from the incubation phase, as well as on guidance from the project team and their mentors, to adapt and refine their work during the prototyping phase. Through this experience, they have gained insights into what it means to build a feminist initiative, and more broadly, to be part of a wider feminist movement. The teams are continuously learning and using such insights to solidify their relationships with their communities. As they are addressing issues that impact them directly, they have proved to be the most effective, and the best placed, to work on such initiatives.

“Our idea has developed since the beginning of the incubation, in terms of how to implement it on the ground and thinking of details we hadn’t thought of before.” – RootsLab Participant

Below are some highlights of the many achievements of those initiatives:

- *EngnaLegna*, a group of young Ethiopian women have established a women-led community group, already promoting and protecting the rights - and lives - of thousands of Ethiopian domestic workers working invisibly in homes and other workplaces across Lebanon. Over 1000 people have viewed *EngnaLegna*'s online informational video, produced in partnership with the Migrant Community Center, and addressing key issues that have come out of their workshops. Nearly 400 women took part in the online discussion that followed.
- *Research by Comics* and *Qomics* work respectively on disseminating feminist knowledge through art, and on queer representation. They have used innovative tools to make academic knowledge and the wider discourse on feminism, gender and sexuality more accessible. *Research by Comics* have held two workshops², bringing together researchers and visual artists to develop an online comics dictionary, which will serve as a basis and a glossary for a graphic novel that they intend to work on in the near future. *Qomics*, on the other hand, has launched a comics series³, counting over 600 followers on Instagram, following the lives of a group of queer feminists in a city like Beirut, and challenging the victimizing discourse through which queer people are often represented.

- A team of young Syrian women living in Lebanon's Bekaa valley have created the *Nadina - Women's Gym*, providing a safe space for women in their area, particularly refugees, to come together, discuss issues related to their bodies, health and well-being, and support each other in taking control of their own lives. Sports is also used as an entry point for discussions around socio-political issues and civic rights.

“Our project challenges social norms. But we don't want women to only come play sports and leave. We want to link them to other groups and build this network. It has also contributed to social integration between Lebanese and Syrian women.” – Nadina

- Similarly, other teams like *Geek and Queer*⁴, *Know Your Place | KYP Community*⁵, and *Gharssah* have created new online and offline spaces in which they are introducing new perspectives, ideas and language, and enabling diverse communities to better understand the personal and political priorities of young women and trans* folk. *Gharssah* has worked with around 100 women from the Syrian refugee community in the Bekaa, among which were groups of 15 to 25-year-old young adults. *Geek and Queer*'s events on digital rights, feminist and digital research and the feminist internet have targeted young women and trans* people interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) in Lebanon and Tunisia, with their online work spreading across the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. Finally, through their monthly [Un]Spoken and [Un]taught events *KYP* has worked with young women who are at a turning point in their lives, and are making critical decisions about their future.
- Other groups are working with women across sectarian and political divides to build collective power and become involved in decision-making spaces. Whether through the women's group in Tripoli, or the feminist lobby in Aley that have been established, *Qudwa* and *Noon Al Tadamon* hope to see women collectively organizing to represent the needs and priorities of women in their respective areas.
- *Equity*, our youngest team of activists, has conducted a survey with around 179 students and lawyers to assess their perception and knowledge on discrimination in the Lebanese legislature, opening space for new debates around gender justice, amongst the legal community on their university campus in the south of Lebanon.

The 10 teams have just completed the nine months prototyping and testing phase of the RootsLab journey. Throughout this last phase, RootsLab continued to provide tailored support to the different teams. Needs and gaps were identified together with the teams through regular meetings, phone calls and discussions and were validated through a survey. Based on that, a series of workshops, trainings and discussions were held, some involving only one to five teams to ensuring that their specific priorities are addressed:

At the beginning of the prototyping phase, five teams were brought together to discuss the challenges they faced in launching their initiatives, and were introduced to tools they could use in managing and planning their work as a team. The training

also covered budgeting and financial management. The opportunity to share such experiences allowed the activists to understand that they were not alone in the challenges they faced, and was a source of comfort, revitalizing their energy and gaining valuable insight from the trainer. Another workshop was facilitated by an Oxfam colleague with *Gharssah* around tools to assess and deal with threats and risks, building on Oxfam's protection expertise and knowledge. Also, between February and March 2019, RootsLab partnered with *Dammeh*, a feminist cooperative based in Beirut, to facilitate sessions with three teams on alternative models of organizing and feminist spaces, and distribute their yearly calendar of people's movements. Activists from the cooperative visited *Qudwa* in Tripoli, *Noon AlTadamon* in Aley, and *Gharssah* in the Bekaa, to introduce their model and support the teams in strategizing for their future activities.

In the hopes of sustaining the linkages built during incubation, and in line with the spirit of the project and its movement-building aims, RootsLab sought to continue bringing all teams together in different ways throughout this phase. In December 2018, a field trip was organized for all teams, to visit *Gharssah*'s newly opened center in the Bekaa. There, participants engaged in discussions, facilitated by the Project Manager, around various issues related to feminist organizing and critical debates around such issues, approaches and tactics. In March 2019, RootsLab partnered with *Ahel*, a Amman-based organization, who was introduced to us through OSF's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional office, and that specializes in coaching new initiatives on community organizing. All teams were invited to a final two-day workshop, facilitated by *Ahel*, and were introduced to different practices of community organizing and leadership.

"We have never met with people in such settings outside of RootsLab. In RootsLab, we felt like the space was for everyone." - RootsLab Participant

Finally, acknowledging the difficult and exhausting nature of activism and organizing, the wrap up event was conceptualized as a much-needed well-being day. All teams were invited to a woman-owned space offering an outdoor space in nature and allowing for a relaxing atmosphere outside of the city, and where we all had the opportunity to reflect on, but also practice, personal and collective self-care. This practice is among many that RootsLab succeeded in introducing to our large community of organizations and activists, some of whom are now seeking to replicate in their own programs, and have asked for advice and guidance in doing so.

Increased participation of young women and trans* activists in addressing complex social issues, through peer to peer and intergenerational learning:

The RootsLab process helped participants to hone their understanding of feminist concepts and collective action strategies - and continued the important work of embedding their role within, and contribution to, the wider movement.

The matching of RootsLab teams with more established feminist or a social innovation 'hosts' was another important feature of the pilot. Hosts disbursed grants, but in some cases also provided workspace, technical support, or linkages with other local activists and organizations. Hosting arrangements were established jointly by Global Fund for Women (GFW) and the RootsLab project team, through a tailored process to accommodate RootsLab's, and the teams', specificities. The formal relationships were

agreed in MoUs and grants were awarded in July and August 2018. Bi-monthly review meetings were held by the project team between activist teams and their hosts to review progress and discuss arising concerns. The RootsLab project team were required to support several situations where relationships between host and teams were slow to establish or where tensions arose. However, where these hosting relationships worked, they represented the best of what we had intended in terms of intergenerational learning between new and more established groups - and a more collaborative, generous practice amongst groups that had never previously worked together.

"We think being a host is a crucial thing to do, to support groups that need the registered structures to access funds." – Host Organization

Activist teams were also able to benefit from peer to peer and intergenerational learning through the mentorship process, where each team was matched with a peer mentor – activists with more experience, or experts in areas that teams themselves identified as a gap. Mentors provided expertise and guidance in testing and refining the initiatives. Some have also considered this relationship as a mutually beneficial one.

We have seen numerous examples of the ten teams, but also the wider community of RootsLab supporters and allies – including mentors and hosts – supporting each other's learning, events, strategizing and efforts to ensure sustainability. New relationships, linkages and networks were built as a result. For example:

- One of our mentors and trainer who was introduced to the work of *Geek and Queer* through RootsLab, later joined the team as an active member of their group;
- Some teams have supported each other in writing and polishing funding applications;
- *Geek and Queer* has facilitated one of *Know Your Place's* [Un]taught events, specifically focused on online violence;
- Four of our seven host organizations reported that they will continue to support the teams they have hosted after the project ends, in different ways. This includes the Anti-Racism Movement's continued support to *EngnaLegna* through their Migrant Community Center space, and SHiFT continuing to provide a workspace to Koudwa, and offering more for their envisioned community space.
- As an art manager, the peer mentor assigned to *Research by Comics* who supported the team in project management, in turn expressed having largely benefited from the relationship, by improving her knowledge of feminism, gender and sexuality.
- Other activities and collaborations continue to emerge between trainers, mentors or feminist organizations and the teams who took part in the journey, whether through coaching or co-organizing workshops to the communities they work with.

"I remember we had put down as a barrier that we didn't have a network in the feminist movement, and now we do have it. We know you, we know other groups and we're getting to know more. This barrier has changed." - RootsLab Participant

RootsLab stakeholders more strongly support innovation led by young women:

Much of the focus of this past year has been put on efforts to expand the networks and social capital of the ten teams, and to introduce them to relevant new allies, supporters and potential donors. As part of our efforts to support the initiatives' sustainability and growth, the project team in Lebanon has worked with the teams to identify, and in some cases, secure opportunities for future funding. This ranges from networking and facilitating relationships with other funders – such as Hivos, Kvinna Till Kvinna and Mama Cash – to acting as references in the teams' different submissions, or even to providing support in drafting proposals or filling application forms.

Additionally, a high-energy, semi-public, awards event brought together all participants on September 19th, 2018, to mark the start of the prototyping phase and connect them to possible future donors, and was a powerful celebration of their work. The participation of OSF's regional women's rights advisor, Kvinna till Kvinna, Hivos and two EU Embassy representatives – among others – was an important and exciting outreach to the local and regional donor community, and these contacts remain part of RootsLab's immediate community of allies and supporters. The event, which has received a strong response, showcased and shared the early ripple effects of the 10 initiatives. Invitees had a chance to talk in more detail with the teams on the specifics of their work, without the pressure of a formal public presentation.

“RootsLab opened the door to women no one had considered” – Host Organisation

Finally, as part of those efforts to garner support, and interwoven with donor engagement and the awards event, comes our considerable communications work, which served to amplify the work and visibility – where relevant and safe – of the initiatives, through RootsLab Lebanon's website and social media platforms. It has also allowed us to make visible the different issues that they're each addressing, from gender injustice, heterosexism, racism, misogyny in various spaces, as well as sectarian and political divisions and conflicts. Notably, a collection of 10 stories were written about each of the initiatives to shed light on their work, and are being published throughout the month of May 2019, and pushed on Oxfam and GFW's platforms. Additionally, over the past two years, four blogs were written by the project team, which allowed us to contribute to the discourse around feminist movement building in Lebanon, as well as to share our own learnings and reflections. Global partners also contributed their own learnings through three other blogs. Links to our communications can be found at the end of the report.

There is also evidence that the most closely involved RootsLab stakeholders – key partners like the Knowledge Workshop and our other six hosts – are recognizing the value of their support to new innovations led by young women and understanding how this support differs from more traditional approaches.

The excitement around and interest in the RootsLab model itself has continued to grow - with interviews undertaken for the Final Evaluation and Research clearly showing the value that key partners and allies in Lebanon see in the RootsLab model and its investment in supporting feminist movement building. In particular, respondents value RootsLab's commitment to providing support and resources to young women and trans* activists from across Lebanon who are *not* part of

established organizations – especially those located outside of Beirut and those led by young women who are non-citizens.

“RootsLab came at a time when there was a great desire and need to invest in collective work, and brought together many individuals, groups and organizations from the feminist scene. This is because it has become clear and certain, after 10 years, that building bridges is key and central to any feminist movement that we are hoping to grow and nurture... we need to work on widening the movement, and spreading it as an idea, a condition, or a basis of belonging, to those who aren't working at its center. This is exactly what RootsLab has done when it reached out to the regions outside Beirut, and challenged a prerequisite that feminism can only be practiced in the main city.” – Sara Abou Ghazal, Knowledge Workshop

However, this enthusiasm did not have the space and time to evolve into a clear model of support that would enable RootsLab to transition to a locally owned, independent entity in the year that follows, as hoped. Rather, at the time of writing, we close the Lebanon pilot with continuing conversations between the current RootsLab project team and Oxfam gender team allies as to how best to maintain and mobilize existing support and goodwill *independently* of the founding global partners after May 2019.

The work we've supported in Lebanon thus far however is solid and exciting – with strong recognition of the value of the RootsLab model and its contribution to local feminist organizing, knowledge and networks coming clearly from our Final Evaluation and Research. We know therefore that this is *not* the end of RootsLab' story...but as we have come to learn with *most* things about the RootsLab model, we accept that uncertainty, flexibility and responsiveness are a reality for new and 'unfamiliar' models of working. As already mentioned, all of those who have joined the challenging and immensely heartening RootsLab journey now seek to sustain the space it started to build.

2. Lessons Learned

The reflection and findings from our midline exercise, as well as final evaluation and research have been invaluable in helping us broaden our understanding and analysis of our collective RootsLab experience – and in answering our learning questions with deeper insight.

RootsLab Learning Questions:

1. What tools, resources and support systems do young women and trans* people need to enable their activism and innovation?
2. What are key lessons about generating and bolstering networks of young women and trans* activists to address social challenges?
3. What linkages and connections were made? What was the impact of those new linkages? (expected and unexpected)
4. What are the key lessons about advocacy, influencing and communications?

The full details of this analysis and recommendations can be found in the Final Evaluation report and the independent research carried out in parallel to the evaluation, with additional funding from the Oxfam confederation, both submitted alongside this Project Completion Report.

The midline exercise included in-depth interviews led by Oxfam Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team, with all participants. The evaluation adopted an insider methodology, whereby evaluators come from the feminist movement themselves, and have an intrinsic and tacit knowledge about feminist activism and movement in Lebanon. The evaluator gathered the perspectives of most project stakeholders: 11 participating teams (one of which did not complete the RL process in its entirety), five out of seven mentors, six out of seven host organizations, three out of four global partners, and the project management team.

Key lessons from their analysis have been integrated with the project teams' own, ongoing learning processes from the last two years and are summarized below – in answer to our original RootsLab Learning Questions.

Widening the circles: The tools and processes adopted throughout RootsLab, from outreach to the final implementation and learning stages, contributed towards breaking the centralization of feminist activity in Beirut, and amongst longer-established individual activists and organizations. This is critical to our contribution to what we have identified as one of the most powerful barriers to the effectiveness of the feminist movement – that of its divisions and lack of inclusiveness. It has, however, required deliberate and proactive interventions and tools. Piloting the RootsLab model, with all the required flexibility and adaptability, proved the success of many of these tools, whether the face-to-face outreach sessions and meetings, the accessible application process, the structured training and close accompaniment by the project team, mentors and others, or the flexible grantmaking arrangements.

Our MEAL work has revealed a unifying theme of change amongst stakeholders. All of those who had been involved in the RootsLab journey, reported a sense of widening perspectives on feminist activity and on their role and that of others within the greater movement. Interviews from the final evaluation have also revealed how that practice has been replicated by the participating teams themselves, who reported using their own initiatives to give opportunities to women who lack experience but show potential to be agents of change.

Structured support, accompaniment and mentoring: RootsLab's innovation approach is characterized by a structured process of situating ideas within a framework and breaking these down into manageable components that could be understood, tested, refined, and implemented more effectively. Throughout that journey, support was provided at different levels from the different project stakeholders: trainers, mentors, hosts and the project team. Training started in the incubation phase and continued through tailored sessions during prototyping. A mentorship program was launched after incubation to provide close accompaniment during the initial phases of launching and implementing the initiatives. Host organizations were also contracted after incubation to disburse the grants and provide additional support such as physical space, networking opportunities and technical expertise.

This journey has been a key feature of our approach to introducing social innovation techniques in how young feminist activists in Lebanon approach the complex problems they see in their communities. More importantly, we have adapted those SI techniques to feminist principles, moving them from an individualistic entrepreneurial framework to that of collective action. This structured process has proved to be essential in helping participants turn early ambitious ideas into more mature initiatives.

“RL never tried to teach us how to be the best at anything. On the contrary, they showed us how valuable it was to make space for the highest number of people possible. This was amazing. We were developing ourselves as individuals but we were benefiting everyone around us at the same time.” – RootsLab Participant

Teams also spoke to the value of having a diverse range of support available to them – from host organisations, to mentors and to the constant check-ins and advice provided by the Project Team themselves. For most groups, the mentorship represented a valuable aspect of the pilot's direct support model. Activists mentioned too, that mentors were brought in at the right moment. Their support was found to have been highly effective in most cases, and ranges between guidance on proposal writing, linking up teams with relevant stakeholders, providing an external perspective, thinking about sustainability, providing budgeting and project management advice, coaching, as well as technical, initiative-specific support.

Access to resources: 10 grants (representing a total of \$104,000) were made to the 10 teams through Global Fund for Women's grantmaking channels. These were adapted slightly in order to make exceptional provisions for one Social Innovation (rather than women-led organization) and further supported by relatively flexible grant-making and reporting processes for RootsLab participants – recognizing that for many of them, this is the first time they have been in formal receipt of funding. At the same time, however, the model of managing RootsLab grants from *outside* of the project team also created some difficulties and inefficiencies.

The local project team has reflected that separating the grantmaking from the RootsLab training, support and accompaniment would actually represent a more efficient future model of working – with the complementary functions working independently of each other with greater clarity about the aim, boundaries and role of each input.

Seven of the 10 groups have already applied for additional funds using their acquired skills and their participation in the RootsLab pilot as proof of existing trust in their innovative ideas. Overall, the positive experience for RootsLab teams of successfully applying for and managing grants represents a *significant* value of the model – and speaks to the likelihood that groups will be able to build on this first experience to grow and sustain their activism in future.

“We are still fundraising. [...] What helps is that we got the trust of one partnership. This changes the tone for fundraising. There is some kind of trust now... It helps our case and opens up conversations, people want to talk to us.” – RootsLab participant

Increased agency: the RootsLab experience in its entirety proved to have contributed to an increased sense of agency for participating activists. In addition to the training, accompaniment and encouragement received, feeling capable of transforming

their ideas into actual, feasible initiatives has been an important indicator of change. The key highlight here lies in that RootsLab has enabled these young activists to develop something tangible, turning ambition into action and leadership. Although the experience itself is empowering regardless of the success of individual initiatives, being able to see the actual fruits and results of their work has built confidence. This aspect is important when contrasted with the usual type of capacity building available for women in Lebanon that do not give them the opportunity to practice what is learnt. Reflecting on their own leadership program, one of the host organisation's staff said: "RootsLab gave us inspiration to work the same way in the future. We got two grants to do that." In fact, the evaluator presents this aspect on improved agency as one of the "Most Significant Change" areas achieved.

How we work matters as much as what we do: As much as the concrete tools, resources and support were valued, much of the positive feedback about the RootsLab model relates to the way in which these were provided – considered by local partners to be almost as important as the resource inputs themselves. The strong feminist principles and agile, responsive approach that the project team and local partners integrated into the way they worked with RootsLab teams has been greatly valued by all those involved. However, this has taken significant amounts of extra time, labour, creativity, and patience on the part of our Lebanon project team to deliver.

Practicing our feminist values has translated into inclusive and collective work, which the evaluator has described as "an accomplishment... in the Lebanese context of women's rights and feminist organizing". It also meant eliminating barriers to entry and participation, adopting easy and accessible processes of application and implementation, adapting the project to the needs and realities of all partners, being available for accompaniment and support, providing child care for mothers, and seeking to eliminate unpaid labour, and most importantly, bringing in participants as equal partners and agents of change rather than beneficiaries. This has constituted a huge endeavor in terms of involving everybody in participatory decision-making processes, but is a necessary one for a project that upholds feminist principles.

All of the RootsLab participants have demonstrated significant leadership since the early selection process where they had to showcase and defend their ideas. Throughout incubation, they took charge of their initiatives, conducting meetings with local stakeholders, negotiating with potential host organizations, and engaging with the project team around support needs and ways-of-working. For some of these, this was a first experience; for others, the specific focus of their initiative took them into new, more political spaces and debates than they had been part of before.

The critical reflections that young activists have shared with us about how RootsLab differs from existing donor funding reflects the principles and practices they want to see in the world, in their funders and partners, and in their communities. Challenging the politics and quality of the financial support offered to young activists represents an important part of the longer-term shift required in the feminist movement (and development sector more broadly) in relation to what's expected – demanded even - from good partnership and good donorship.

Fostering solidarity through collective work: The diversity of RootsLab participants has been one of its strongest features; representing a core principle in our understanding of the kind of intersectional collaborations required for a strong feminist movement.

The benefits have shown us immediately that the time and efforts we made to work in this way have been worth the investment. From its onset, RootsLab has worked to be a space for activists to work together towards a common goal: to improve the lives and rights of women and trans* people in Lebanon. From outreach, to incubation, to the final prototyping phase of the project, deliberate efforts were made to bring a diverse group of participants together in a collective journey. Activist teams emphasized the enriching opportunity to meet people whose struggles were previously unknown to them, recognizing that ultimately, the diverse issues they face are all rooted in the same patriarchal system.

"... the decision to involve all the teams, in all their diversities, in one common process, referred to by the project team as the "collective journey", constitutes in itself a practice of intersectionality and an invaluable opportunity for challenging stereotypes and misconceptions of the "other." The collective aspect enabled linkages among groups and signs of inter-community solidarity are starting to show..." - RootsLab Final Evaluation

However, bringing a diverse group of activists together from vastly different parts of the country has not come without its challenges, from the logistical (location and time of meetings and workshops, language, etc.), the political, to the more technical and content-related. For example, we sometimes lacked the time in some of our sessions to do justice to the discussions required about the differences in perspectives and politics. Sitting with such difference of perspective has not always made for comfortable experiences - for participants or for our programme and facilitation teams. However, so much valuable learning has come out of this collective experience that we feel justified in having held the spaces in the way we've done. Overall the experience has helped all involved better understand both the nuances that may drive divisions, and the strategies that may allow for greater mutual support, learning and collaboration. Building in more time (also meaning increased resources) for these sessions would be vital for subsequent pilots. From a content/technical perspective, it has meant that sometimes our early workshops were not able to cover ideas and more challenging issues at the right pace for participants coming from vastly different technical experience. This has been resolved during the prototyping phase trainings that were delivered in clusters of smaller groups to provide more targeted inputs, as discussed in the progress section above. This tailored approach during prototyping worked well and allowed for much deeper discussion of the issues and specific challenges being faced by participating teams.

Despite these challenges, we have witnessed firsthand how participants moved from feelings of unease, to acceptance, and later to showing the first signs of solidarity. We witnessed the impact of some of the most eye-opening interactions around experiences of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, and the harsh realities faced by non-Lebanese communities. The presence of Ethiopian women within the groups also shifted perspectives towards them as fellow activists in the struggle for gender justice.

"In the beginning [...] I felt overprotective over my idea. However, [RL] showed us that the more you talk about your idea, the better; the more you collaborate with whoever wants to help, [the more] the initiative will grow." - RootsLab Participant

This has also translated into practice, with new relationships emerging and old ones being strengthened, between the teams, between the teams and their host organizations, and between the participating activists and other feminist collectives and individuals. These collaborations included space sharing, knowledge sharing, organizing common events, and coaching.

Working collectively – starts with individuals: The principle of collective working is a central tenet of RootsLab's feminist approach – but also to our understanding of how change happens. Much of this thinking aligns with emerging theory on transformative feminist leadership – but in practice, it is only as we close and reflect on our RootsLab pilot phase that we've really seen how much our collective journey has depended on extent to which each of the *individuals* that make up the RootsLab community have been able to practice feminist politics and principles in word and deed.

For example, we have been reminded many times in RootsLab that individual contributions matter so much to the shaping of group dynamics and the scope of our collective organizing, and to our ability to hold a shared space and to navigate difficult discussions and moments. This feels obvious, but we have learned that a focus on collective working without understanding the importance of - or making time for the immense, 'unpaid care work' of - building individual relationships of trust and respect can only get us so far. Similarly, we reflect too that the deep trust, kindness, humor and care for each other that developed and nurtured throughout the RootsLab journey has not only been the bedrock for the success of RootsLab's approach – but has enabled core staff and volunteers to weather difficult and demanding times. This is true of the local and global project management team; of the interactions amongst global partners; and critically, of the deeply trusting relationships between the project team and 10 groups of activists. This has also made difficult conversations – about funds, strategy and ownership - so much easier because they have been able to take place on the solid ground of longstanding, trusting relationships.

Where Feminism meets Social Innovation: Finding people and organisations in Lebanon with the right set of skills to support RootsLab participants through the ideation, incubation and prototyping phases has been one of the hardest aspects of bringing the envisaged feminist innovation model to life. The challenge of finding innovation experts who genuinely understood, supported and could adapt their technical approaches to a political model that prioritized social change and feminist collective activism over individual approaches and business practices, proved almost impossible.

Our original plan to partner with a local social innovation organization to act as project advisor and trainer did not work out. An advisor from our global partners, the Young Foundation, eventually provided much of the innovation advice on the broader direction and phases of the RootsLab journey. In the project's first months, the project manager met with more than 10 different innovation and social entrepreneurship contacts and experts to identify the right allies and expertise. A couple of these joined us to co-facilitate the early Ideation workshop, had the right skill-set to act as supportive mentors to RootsLab teams, or became one of our host organizations. But, none had the combination of skills and politics that RootsLab so needed in a training partner. The same is true for the challenges faced in identifying and selecting mentors and trainers. We suspect that this is, in fact, likely to be true of

most, if not all, contexts in which future RootsLab pilots would be established – reflecting as it does a wider problematic in relation to the gender-blind, often a-political innovation spaces currently mushrooming in the global development sector.

3. Organizational and RootsLab partnership capacity

Operationally, the limited funds for this project (both at country and global level) have significantly complicated the ability of global partners to contribute to local level implementation in meaningful ways. Staff changes and significant organizational re-strategising in both GFW and FRIDA have meant additional pressure on partner representatives on the Steering Group. In all four organisations, Steering Group representatives changed or took on additional responsibilities within their organisations and private lives. Sustaining continuity of our collaboration between four global organisations, all in different locations, with limited funds for over three years has been difficult – despite the best will of *all* those involved.

Despite all this, as the project draws to an end and the Final Evaluation shows the power of our collective endeavor, all of us involved in this first RootsLab pilot in Lebanon, recognize how privileged we are to have been part of this process. GFW, FRIDA, Young Foundation and Oxfam (both in the UK and in Lebanon) have all contributed significant human and financial resources to the design, ideation and implementation of the pilot. This impressive work has been delivered with around 0.5 million USD – around 25 thousand USD for each of our 10 innovation pilots.

But above all, the project's achievements would not have been possible without the commitment of – and personal and professional sacrifices demanded of – the RootsLab Lebanon project manager and project officer. Their dedication to RootsLab's feminist vision and purpose, and their professionalism, resourcefulness and stamina have been extraordinary. FRIDA, Global Fund for Women, Oxfam and the Young Foundation owe them our *immense* gratitude, love and respect.

During the last six months of the project's formal funding, the Lebanon project team, global coordinator and partners have taken stock and imagined future scenarios for the work the four organisations began together. An initial Concept Note for a one-year transition to a locally-owned, independent RootsLab entity in Lebanon was developed in February 2019 to support our collective thinking about the shape of Phase II – and to get clarity on the four, global partners' individual and collective appetite and capacity to continue to support and accompany RootsLab in Lebanon.

In a series of discussions in April 2019, global partners reflected that we have done all we can do together to do justice to our original RootsLab ambition – and that the obvious avenues for funding for the *current* global partnership model had all been exhausted; although our conversations continue about how best to sustain learning from the pilot and the still-powerful ripple effects in Lebanon. We recognize too, that a locally-owned, independent RootsLab would have *far* greater relevance for the next stage of movement building support and accompaniment to the local feminist movement than a global partnership ever could. A local RootsLab would also be more likely to secure support from existing and newly interested donors to fund the continuation of this work.

Indeed, GFW has indicated that they would be keen and able to directly fund an independent RootsLab in Lebanon, and, with FRIDA, continue to support the activism of future innovations and activism that the Lab supports – through their normal grant-making channels. Oxfam in Lebanon is also exploring potential partnerships with the RootsLab teams supported in the pilot. This represents a positive shift in how we are starting to envisage the future model of RootsLab in Lebanon; one that represents a simpler, more sustainable way of supporting new initiatives to access funding directly.

Looking Forward

More work is now needed to define and plan the transition to an independent RootsLab entity or process – with greater clarity about its purpose, local governance structure, model of accompaniment, and grantmaking. Those of us involved also need to work out, in this next stage, the way in which the current project coordination expertise and organizational memory are sustained, transitioned or handed over to other members of the local feminist movement.

RootsLab partners have always grappled with the disconnect between the excitement RootsLab generates and actual funding support to the initiative. In practice, this now requires the urgent work of formally celebrating and closing the current RootsLab global partnership as it relates to RootsLab in Lebanon. Through this process, we honour what we've grown together whilst, importantly, making sure that the optics of our past collaboration don't confuse the relationships and politics of the future independent work and its place in the feminist movement in Lebanon.

This will include agreeing on key issues that would give a future RootsLab in Lebanon the greatest possible independence, and ability to embed strong local ownership e.g. ownership of the RootsLab website and logo; how we protect/share the intellectual property and learning materials developed through this pilot and how the four global partners want their original role in the design and incubating of the first RootsLab pilot to be recognized. These will be informed based on recommendations from the local and global coordinators.

Although the final evaluation clearly shows real appetite and demand for the continuation of the kinds of contributions that RootsLab has made, the evaluators and their 40+ interviewees were unable to identify an obvious immediate alternative host or home for an independent future RootsLab. There is therefore much here that still needs working through, and above all, unpressured time required to give that organic process of context-specific thinking, working and planning, real justice.

The project team agree that we need to prioritize time and resources for a proper transition period – so that we don't reach out too fast for funding in ways that might later compromise a more complete vision/articulation of what the independent RootsLab needs to look like. We are keen to keep open our positive conversations to date with OSF regarding future possible support for RootsLab scale up, though a revised Concept Note will not be articulated and shared before this transition period and thinking has been carried out.

At the time of writing, the model for supporting this transition period are still being worked out – with likely interim funding from Oxfam in the UK and US. For now though, the first Phase of the RootsLab pilot in Lebanon closes with its head held high, and with

solid foundations on which to build its future model when the time and context are right.

Blogs and social media links:

- Social media channels:
 - **Website:** <http://rootslabglobal.org/lebanon> and <http://rootslabglobal.org/#/home>
 - **Facebook:** [rootslab.lebanon](https://www.facebook.com/rootslab.lebanon)
 - **Twitter:** [@Rootslab_lb](https://twitter.com/Rootslab_lb)

- Lebanon blogs
 - RootsLab Stories (Intro Blog + 10 stories being published in May): <http://rootslabglobal.org/lebanon/blogDetails/index.php?id=18&lang=en>
 - Incubating Feminist Initiatives: Reflections and Learnings May 09, 2018 <http://rootslabglobal.org/lebanon/blogDetails/index.php?id=15&lang=en>
 - RootsLab's Ideation Workshop: The Power of Collective Journeys <http://rootslabglobal.org/lebanon/blogDetails/index.php?id=13&lang=en>
 - What's Innovation got to do with it? <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/whats-innovation-got-to-do-with-it/>

- Global blogs:
 - Rethinking Partnership at the Roots, Alliance Magazine 29 June 2018 <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/rethinking-partnerships-at-the-root/>
 - What Does Feminist Social Innovation Looks Like? <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-does-feminist-social-innovation-look-like/>
 - Co-creating feminist innovation: Lessons learned from the Roots Lab design process: <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/gender/2017/03/co-creating-feminist-innovation-lessons-learned-from-the-roots-lab-design-process/>

Notes

¹ Trans*: an umbrella term referring to all non-conforming and non-cisgender identities, which include, but are not limited to, traender, transsexual, genderqueer, non-binary, agender, transmen, transwomen and genderfluid identities.

² <https://researchbycomics.wordpress.com/intensive-practical-workshop-research-popularisation-through-comics/>

³ To protect the safety of the activists, we can share a link to the comics separately.

⁴ <https://twitter.com/geekandqueer>

⁵ <http://kypcommunity.com/>