



RootsLab Lebanon Pilot Evaluation



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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many people who contributed to the evaluation process by taking time out of their busy schedules to share their views on the RootsLab pilot project. We would particularly like to acknowledge the extensive support we received from the project team who spent a considerable amount of time to share their valuable knowledge and insight with us.

Consultants' current and past affiliations

Zeina Ammar was a co-founder and member of Dammeh from December 2014 until August 2018. She was a paid staff member at The A Project from September 2016 until September 2017 and continues to conduct paid freelance work for The A Project, such as transcription, translation, and organising and facilitating reading retreats on The Politics of Mental Health.

Myriam Claire Baker has been a Dammeh member since December 2017. She volunteered with The A Project as a hotline counsellor from January 2017 until March 2017.

Dammeh is a feminist cooperative that conducted three discussion sessions with RootsLab participants in Tripoli, Aley and the Bekaa around alternative models of organising, feminist political activism and community building, and the integration of feminist values in their work. The consultants did not participate in those sessions.

The A Project is a feminist non-governmental organization (NGO) that was involved in the inception phase of RootsLab, and expressed interest in being a potential host organisation in case relevant initiatives received seed grants. However, this was not the case, and the organization was not contracted by RootsLab.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRIDA	FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund
GFW	Global Fund for Women
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
RL	RootsLab
SG	Steering Group
SI	Social Innovation
YF	The Young Foundation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
WRO	Women's rights organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
KW	Knowledge Workshop

Terminology

Participants: activists who took part in the RootsLab pilot project.

Project stakeholders: all participants, trainers, mentors, and host organisations who took part in the RootsLab pilot project.

Unusual Suspects: women and trans* persons who may lack access to spaces and resources, or the ability to participate in collective organising work.

Usual Suspects: people who have had relatively extensive involvement in feminist activism in Lebanon and who are often based in Beirut.

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

Executive summary

RootsLab (RL) is a collaborative pilot project by FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, Global Fund for Women (GFW), Oxfam and Young Foundation (YF). It seeks to test how best to incubate social change driven by young women and trans* activists. Over the past year and a half, 10 activist teams, have successfully undergone a four-months incubation phase, a mentorship program, a proposal submission process, and a prototyping phase to test out their ideas for change. Throughout the journey, RootsLab has provided tailored support, accompaniment and resources to the teams as they designed and implemented their initiatives, and sought to support them in sustaining their work.

Main Evaluation Findings:

Relevance: RL responded to some of the challenges faced by the feminist movement by proactively reaching out to women and trans* folk outside of Beirut, to migrant and refugee communities, and to the less experienced activists. RL has explicitly adopted feminist politics and sought to integrate feminist values through actively eliminating barriers to entry and participation for all participants, involving unusual suspects, and fostering solidarity and cooperation instead of competition between the teams. The global partnership brought in a complementary set of experiences in women's rights and feminist organising, and social innovation (SI). The partnership gave weight and credibility to RL globally and was able to secure some funding for the pilot. However, locally, project stakeholders raised some questions regarding the legitimacy of the global partnership and the implementation role played by Oxfam.

Governance: RL's project team in Lebanon faced difficulties during implementation for two reasons: two of the four global partners could only partly fulfil their intended implementation roles due to a slimmed budget, and the project itself proved to be too labour-intensive for two people to carry alone; noting that the original budget only included one coordinator - with Oxfam Lebanon finding funds from their organizational budget to add an additional post during the second year of project implementation. The global partnership proved insufficient for securing the budget required and the pilot operated on a slimmed budget.

The RL Model: The SI support process and the fail-fast principle assume full-time dedication to the project by participants, which proved incompatible with the participants' realities. The training programme successfully adapted the SI support process to feminist principles of collective organising, and provided essential support which helped participants turn ambitious ideas into reality. The mentorship model achieved its intended objective where matching between team and mentor was appropriate and the team was open to the mentor's support. While partnering with established organisations to host the teams was necessary for grant disbursement, the hosting model absorbed too many human and financial resources and provided little yield.

Key Learnings from the Ten Teams: The diversity of the initiatives means that there are no common criteria based on which one can measure the success of the projects, nor is it the objective of this evaluation to assess the work of the teams against set criteria. However, a few factors proved relevant in determining the success of the teams in achieving their own objectives: 1- the closer the team was to their target audience, (in terms of location, nationality, educational background, and class), the easier it was for them to do their outreach, ensure participation and commitment, and be perceived as legitimate actors in their causes. 2- Participants who had a prior experience of the collective, either through community organising or a strong sense of belonging to a supportive network, exhibited more autonomy and confidence in their work and were better equipped to cope with the challenges faced during implementation. 3- The teams that managed to create a truly collaborative spirit were the ones where participants shared a similar level of experience and expertise, as well as a shared sense of ownership over their idea.

Most Significant Change: Participants credited RL with several changes they experienced: an improved sense of self-efficacy and agency, an increased openness towards others and a nascent sense of solidarity, an improved understanding of the benefits of collaboration and an increased willingness to collaborate with others.

Introduction

1. Context

Feminism in Lebanon, as everywhere, takes on many forms, adopts different tactics, and practices a wide variety of politics. Despite their differences and apparent fragmentation, feminist activists tend to agree that they are part of a greater whole, a movement, which binds them together in their fight for gender justice. However, several systemic and circumstantial challenges have hindered the growth of the feminist movement and resulted in the concentration of feminist organising in Beirut, in a small number of organisations and groups, and predominantly among Lebanese women. This trend has entrenched the exclusion of non-traditional actors from social and political organising and the marginalisation of their causes in the mainstream feminist discourse¹.

RootsLab (RL) was conceived in response to these challenges and reflects a shared belief among its founders that supporting feminist movement building is the most effective and sustainable way to bring about gender justice.

2. About RootsLab

RootsLab is a collaborative pilot project by FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, Global Fund for Women (GFW), Oxfam and Young Foundation (YF). It seeks to test how best to incubate social change driven by young women and trans* activists. The first pilot took place in Lebanon, and was hosted by Oxfam's country office. The project piloted an innovative approach to advancing young women and trans* people's rights, leadership and collective action, by directly providing them with resources and support to help them imagine and develop impactful social change initiatives in their communities. This includes professional skills, connections and networking opportunities, financial resources, access to mentoring and coaching support, and, most importantly, a collective structured process to develop and test their ideas.

Over the past year and a half, 10 activist teams, selected from over 45 applications, have successfully undergone a thorough selection process, a four-months incubation phase, a mentorship program, a proposal submission process, and a prototyping phase to test out their ideas for change. Throughout the journey, RootsLab has provided tailored support, accompaniment and resources to the teams as they designed and implemented their initiatives, and sought to support them in sustaining their work.

The project has provided valuable findings about the tools, resources and support systems required to nurture young feminist activism, innovation and leadership. The midterm review had highlighted a demonstrable positive impact on the scope for, and quality of, collaboration and intergenerational cooperation within Lebanon's feminist movement. As the pilot came to an end in 2019, a review and planning process was undertaken to evaluate and build on learnings from the project.

The evaluation mission

1. Objectives of the evaluation

The objectives of the overall evaluation mission are:

- To assess the pilot's achievements against original objectives looking at implementation of activities, use of resources, coordination between stakeholders, and ownership of stakeholders;
- To capture and document learnings in answer to the pilot's learning objectives (see Annex 1);
- To present an analytical tool that provides guidance for a more efficient implementation and a more sustainable approach;
- To assess the replicability of the project in Lebanon and other countries.

2. Methodology

The evaluation adopts an insider research methodology, whereby evaluators come from the feminist movement themselves. Rather than applying a scholarly "observer" lens to the piece, evaluators have an intrinsic and tacit knowledge about feminist activism and the movement in Lebanon.

The evaluation also followed a qualitative and participant-centred approach guided by some of the learning questions detailed by the project team in the Monitoring, Evaluation, accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework. In parallel, the evaluator used elements of the Most Significant Change approach which assess the pilot's performance by looking at domains of change defined by the stakeholders themselves. The objective of this approach is to allow for free input from the participants which provides insight into what they deem to be the most significant contributions made by the project. This method is very much in line with the participatory ethos of the project.

The evaluation report is written in narrative form to allow for nuances to emerge, given the importance attached to experiences and processes in feminist research.

The evaluation mission was accompanied by a research assignment which looks at the challenges faced by feminists in Lebanon, as individuals and as groups, in order to come up with recommendations on strategic interventions to strengthen the feminist movement. As intended, the research paper and the evaluation report informed each other to a great extent.

Scope

The evaluation assessed the relevance of the RL project in relation to women's rights organising in Lebanon, the effectiveness of the governance structure of RL, the effectiveness of the RL model in supporting feminist activists, and the impact of the project articulated as the "Most Significant Change" cited by the participants themselves.

Sample

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 organisations, three out of four global partners, and the project management team. The project team was also greatly relied on for debriefing, corroboration, and feedback on findings.

Data collection tools

Information gathered through the below listed methods was triangulated in order to provide analytical answers to the evaluation questions raised in the evaluation matrix.

1. Desk review

The evaluator reviewed and analysed the following documents:

- Project proposal
- Project concept note
- Budget
- MEAL framework + strategy
- Partnership agreements
- Training material
- Tangible outputs from each team (proposals, budgets, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), work plans, etc.)
- Mentor reports
- Regular review meetings' minutes with host organisations and teams
- Midline report

2. Focus group discussion (FGD)

The evaluator also held one focus group for the mentors of the project. Two of the mentors who could not attend the FGD were later interviewed one-on-one.

3. Semi-structured interviews

The evaluation relied mainly on in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participating teams, the host organisations, the mentors, and the global partners. A total of 18 interviews was conducted with 33 interviewees (teams were interviewed together).

The interviewers followed the guiding questions detailed in Annex 2 while allowing for narratives and personal stories of change to emerge.

With the consent of the interviewees, interviews were recorded and transcribed by the two consultants. Recordings were deleted immediately after transcription. The transcribed interviews were anonymised prior to their submission as raw data to the project team.

4. Field observations

In addition to the data collected directly from stakeholders, the consultants noted each group's internal dynamics, their ease of explaining the project, the language and terminology they used, as well as their levels of engagement at a workshop organised by RL.

Limitations

As an activist in the feminist movement, the evaluator will inevitably have a certain degree of bias, while recognising, as per feminist MEAL principles, that indeed no knowledge is ever completely objective. The evaluator will make a conscious effort to state their assumptions explicitly where relevant, and will let the stories of the interviewees speak for themselves. The decision to submit the raw data to the project team also allows for a re-read where needed.

This is valuable in the context of a pilot project where learning is an essential component of the process. However, it should be acknowledged that submitting the raw data compromises the anonymity of the interviewees as the characteristics of the initiatives are quite unique and can reveal the identity of the teams. This limitation of anonymity was made clear to the participants and no objections were recorded.

A few project stakeholders, including seven core participants, two mentors and one host organisation focal point were not in Lebanon at the time of the evaluation. In the case of the participants, this was not an issue as the in-country team members were able to answer all of the questions. While one of the mentors who is abroad had completed thorough reports that compensated for her absence, the other mentor had submitted very short reports from which little could be gauged regarding her work as a mentor.

Evaluation findings

1. Relevance of objectives

Responding to local challenges

Feminist and women's rights organising is notoriously underfunded globally and Lebanon is no exception. Given this reality, it is essential that the resources that do exist are invested strategically in strengthening and expanding the feminist movement. As community organisers ourselves, we believe that the growth of the movement can only be achieved through activating each person's potential for organising, enhancing their ability to fight for their own causes, and enabling collaborations among existing and emerging groups. As such, we believe that the feminist movement in Lebanon requires deliberate interventions which enable the decentralisation of resources, knowledge, skills, and decision-making power, geographically, generationally, sectorally, and, importantly, to non-Lebanese communities.

In parallel to this evaluation, RootsLab commissioned a research paper to arrive at recommendations for feminist movement building. The paper details some of the systemic and circumstantial reasons behind the centralisation of the movement. Interestingly, when prompted to think of solutions to the challenges they listed, some interviewees suggested creating support processes similar to the ones implemented by RoostLab.

The table below illustrates how the RootsLab model responds to some key challenges reported by feminist organisers.

Challenges faced by feminist organisers in Lebanon	How RL responds to these challenges
Centralisation of the feminist initiatives in and around Beirut, exclusion of remote areas	Deliberate and proactive effort to reach areas outside of Beirut and providing required resources and support for the inclusion of such initiatives
Unequal access to knowledge, trainings, and networks which translate into feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence in ability to manage and implement projects among the less experienced feminists	Offering a training program to all participants in addition to follow-up sessions and mentoring tailored to each team's needs
Limited access to financial resources by nascent initiatives with no prior experience getting funding and/or initiatives that are too "experimental" in nature to attract donors	Prioritising the "unusual suspects" and their inclusion in the RL process, close accompaniment and flexible process
Competition over funds and status among groups working on gender justice	Eliminating competition within RL and fostering a sense of solidarity among participants, and encouraging linkages and alliances between teams through a collective journey
Available seed funding is seen as insufficient to effectively prototype an idea, and the larger grants are only available for established and registered organisations	Mid-level funding offered to nascent unregistered groups

Feminism in practice

RootsLab sought to integrate feminist practices into its project design and implementation and has succeeded in doing so on several levels. The decision to define the project as feminist was made possible thanks to each individual global partner focal point, and was reflected in the ways of working and governance documents developed and adopted by the four organisations. More importantly, the ability to establish feminist practices in implementation is attributed in great part to the efforts of the local project

manager. The project manager's positionality within the feminist movement in Lebanon has proven to be a key element in the success of the pilot in a difficult political context.

The local project team succeeded in practicing inclusivity and bringing together participants, mentors, and host organisations from usually mutually exclusive circles of organisers. In the Lebanese context of women's rights and feminist organising, this act in itself constitutes an accomplishment and one which could have been sidestepped by another project team.

The project team sought to eliminate barriers to entry and participation through adopting an easy and accessible process of application and implementation.

"We saw the call and weren't sure if we wanted to apply but we read that they accepted video pitches so we made the video because it was so easy!" – RootsLab Participant

The project team and global partners showed a lot of flexibility and adapted the project to the needs of participants and the realities of the context. Throughout the journey, efforts were made to work around the schedules of participants to ensure the attendance of all teams in collective meetings. The participants unanimously reported that the project team was always available to answer questions and accompany them through the implementation of their projects. Paid child care was also provided when needed, to ensure that mothers could attend all training sessions.

GFW amended its internal grant making processes. They also made an exception to their internal regulations by agreeing to fund a host organisation that was not women-led as it responded to the needs of one of the initiatives and provided RL with an opportunity to encourage linkages with other social innovation (SI) actors.

The project team also sought to eliminate unpaid labour by choosing to compensate any and all contributions made within this project, including stipends for participants and compensation for mentors and host organisations.

All participants were brought in as equal partners and agents of change rather than beneficiaries. This was reflected in the project team's attitudes and behaviour towards participants.

"We protect the people we work with from external visits, and only accept those that are completely necessary. We don't tokenize, we don't give these stories, we compromise on our visibility but we determine its terms and decide on our own language." – Project Team

The project team endeavoured to involve the participants in all decision making related to the project processes, which proved to be time-consuming but is a crucial undertaking for a project which upholds feminist principles.

Involving unusual suspects

RootsLab has deliberately and proactively sought to break the centralisation of feminist activity in Beirut and amongst longer-established individual activists and organisations. They did so by including women who are usually left out of women's rights and feminist organising or included as beneficiaries of women's rights organisations (WROs) rather than activists in their own right. They referred to these women and trans* people as the "unusual suspects," which they defined as "persons who may lack access to spaces and resources, or the ability to participate in collective organising work."

"RootsLab opened the door to women no one had considered" – Host organisation member

Instead of relying exclusively on online outreach which usually attracts usual suspects, the project team held meetings, information and ideation sessions in Tripoli, the Bekaa, Nabatiyeh, and Beirut. Some of these sessions were held with migrant and refugee women. This resulted in applications being submitted by five groups of migrant women (of which one was selected), and five groups of refugee women (of which two were selected).

"That was the value of RootsLab [...], people who come here don't have papers, or the ability to form a union, they can't have official groups and apply for funding under a registered name." – RootsLab Participant

Selection criteria were adapted to facilitate the access of less experienced groups. The selection committee chose not to apply the same standards to all applicants, acknowledging the fact that language and exposure allowed some applicants to formulate their ideas better than others, thereby giving them an unfair advantage. To truly allow first-time activists to participate, the in-country advisory committee formed as part of the selection process met a lot of the applicants face to face to listen to their pitches. This reportedly made a significant difference.

"Of all the feminist and women's rights organising, this was one of the few spaces where at least two groups were non-citizens, which I think was very powerful [...] It forces us to acknowledge that our country has a quarter of the population that are non-citizens [...] And I think they made a lot of efforts to bring these people on board. They were not there by chance. They didn't just happen to see the call and apply." – RootsLab Participant

Fostering solidarity

Breaking with the tradition of investing in individuals and focusing on women's personal leadership skills, RootsLab favoured collective work and community strengthening by investing in teams. The focus on a collective project rather than personal development breaks the existing trend of individualism.

Additionally, 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, as shown in the Most Significant Change section.

The decision to eliminate competition from the process and to emphasise the collective aspect of the journey was fundamental in fostering these amicable relations.

“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

2. Relevance of partnerships

The four global partners bring in a complementary set of experiences in women’s rights and feminist organising and social innovation.

Oxfam, GFW, and FRIDA have been investing in women’s rights and feminist organising in Lebanon for years and are familiar to many local activists. FRIDA offers seed funding to young feminist groups who are often unregistered. GFW and Oxfam offers grants to more established WROs and feminist organisations. GFW also seeds some unregistered initiatives globally and in the region. Importantly, the grantees of FRIDA, GFW and Oxfam, have little overlap between them. As such, there is a complementary set of experiences with women’s rights and feminist organising in Lebanon among the partners. This potentially opens the door for RootsLab to engage with a wide variety of local organisations and groups. As for the Young Foundation, their contribution to RootsLab rests in their significant technical expertise in social innovation and their ability to advise on the design of the project and the training materials.

The global partnership facilitated the introduction of new values and practices into large organisations whose internal procedures, having been accrued over decades, are deeply rooted and difficult to change. Having acquired a distinct identity, and the weight and credibility of four global partners, RootsLab focal points were able to ask fundamental questions regarding the practice of feminism from the global level all the way through to the local one. The partners reported spending a lot of time conceptualising these aspects of the project, which resulted in committing to ambitious feminist principles.

Perceived legitimacy

Although project stakeholders confirmed the need for a project like RootsLab, several questions arose regarding the value of the global partnership as well as the implementation role played by Oxfam.

On the ground, RootsLab is sometimes misconceived as an Oxfam-only project. In the opinion of some of the interviewees, RootsLab tried to play too many roles at once, namely the roles of the grant-maker and the implementer, while the project team also rightly maintained their role as activists. This reportedly affected the relationship of the

project team, the trainers and the mentors with the participants. A participant and a mentor, on different occasions, suggested separating the grant disburser from the implementer, claiming that the combination of the two roles creates a power differential which alters the spirit of the partnership between stakeholders. These reflections were not explicitly articulated by others, although the evaluator could well observe that dynamic in two isolated cases.

“I’d recommend in the future that the resources offered are completely separated from the funder. So, for Oxfam to be a donor but for the support that they wanted to give to come from outside Oxfam very clearly. Someone whom they [the participants] would see as their ally and not their monitor.” – RL Mentor

One mentor raised a question concerning the added value of RootsLab compared to FRIDA’s existing involvement in Lebanon, given the perceived similarities in the level of funding and other support provided to the grantees. However, although FRIDA does offer organisational support, capacity development, and networking opportunities to its grantees, it does not provide the close accompaniment and training to develop and incubate new initiatives.

The same mentor raised concerns regarding the adoption of the label of “feminist” by a project hailing from what she labelled as “non-feminist” organisations like Oxfam and GFW.² Though they support feminist groups and may at times adopt feminist politics, the perception here is that these organisations were not founded on feminist principles and were not originally designed to serve a feminist agenda. This critique reflects a shared unease among some radical feminists in Lebanon towards mainstreaming feminism to the extent where the concept becomes devoid of politics and detached from the practice. The view is that large structures that are not *built on* feminist principles cannot simply become feminist through a few changes in their organisational policies. From that perspective, the ownership of RL by non-feminist organisations could compromise the legitimacy of its feminism in the feminist community. This view risks to overshadow the tangible efforts exercised by the Steering Group (SG) and project team to build RL on feminist principles.

Another strong critique emerged with regards to housing a project like RootsLab in an international rather than local organisation. This relates to two issues mentioned in a focus group conducted with three mentors. The first is the concern over the loss of financial resources to the intermediary or “middlemen” organisations. The perception here is that the four global partners and the Lebanon management team receive resources that would be better placed with local feminist activists themselves. The second issue relates to the sense of ownership that local organisers want to feel over such a formative project with potentially great reach and impact. The need for the sense of ownership is also closely related to the possibility of holding RL accountable. It is worth mentioning here that ideas for locally-owned projects similar to RootsLab were previously discussed within different circles of organisers, though none have materialised.

The suggestion to house RootsLab at a local organisation presents several practical and political considerations, however. On a practical level, no local organisation currently seems to have the capacity to integrate such a heavy project without losing its organisational identity and vision in the process. This consideration does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle. It could be overcome if an organisation expresses interest in increasing its capacity. The organisation may choose to adapt itself in order to be able to accommodate the project or RootsLab may be adapted to be able to fit the organisation. The real obstacle in the face of housing RL at a local organisation lies in the politics between organisations. There is no existing local entity that is relatively neutral in terms of its relationship to other women's rights and feminist groups. Any existing organisation has deeply-rooted personal, political or professional affinities with some groups and personal, political or professional tensions with others. As such, no one local organisation can truly position itself at an equal distance from all women's rights and feminist organisers. Losing the distinctively inclusive character of RootsLab would compromise one of its most significant achievements.

3. Governance

Global partner roles

RL is governed by a Steering Group which includes one focal point from each of the global partners as well as the project manager of the Lebanon team. The Steering Group provided essential strategic guidance for the project in the design phase and during inception. However, the SG could not assist with most of the issues that arose on the national level during implementation.

Gaps in implementation were due to several factors:

- A shortfall in funding and a slimmed budget resulted in the partners' inability to hire in-country project leads to fulfil their intended implementation roles.
- Given the slim budget, the global partners could not designate a separate implementation body or focal points to carry out the implementation roles which they had intended for each partner prior to facing the resource constraints. The SG itself included senior staff from the organisations: FRIDA's co-Director, GFW's Head of Programmes and YF's Director of Programmes. Though they invested a lot of time in designing and coordinating and advising on RL, their involvement could naturally not extend to the implementation on the ground.
- The roles of each partner were not formally re-evaluated in light of the funding shortfall.
- Having only one focal point assigned to RootsLab from each agency has meant that enthusiasm for and commitment to the project did not trickle down to other staff members within each organisation.

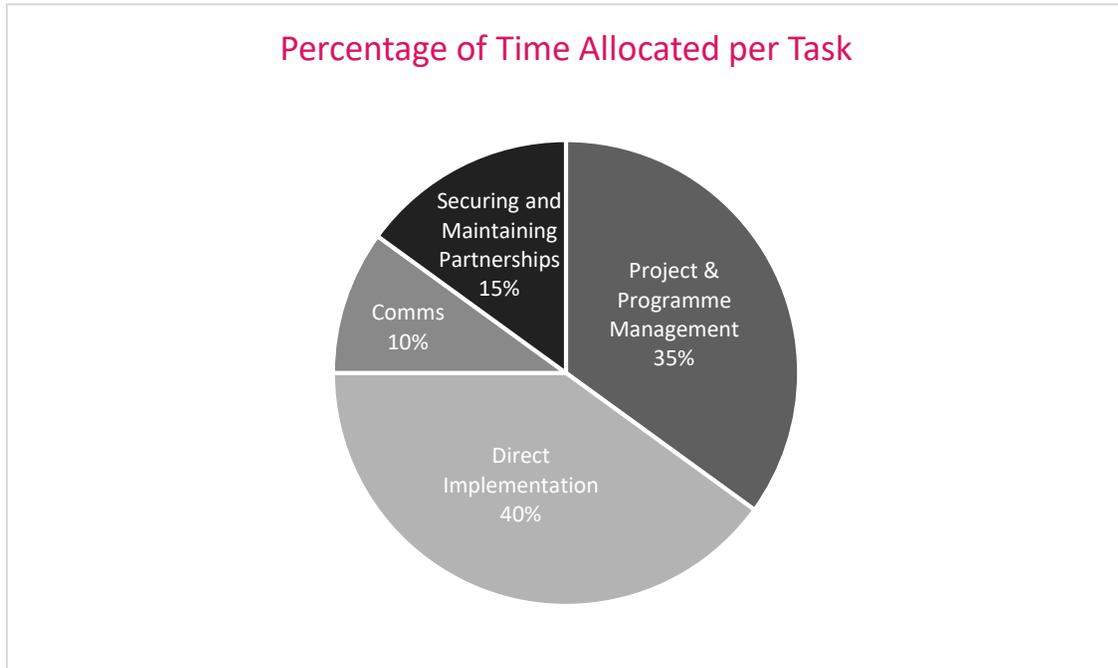
The Lebanon project team carried the full weight of these gaps.

Project team

The project team reported carrying an immense workload, a claim that was repeatedly corroborated in interviews with all stakeholders. A lot of the work that the project team carried can be described as invisible labour due to its human and intangible nature. Their tasks included:

- Project design and set-up (branding, website development, MEAL framework, Comms Strategy...) and Core **Project and Program Management** Tasks in line with Oxfam WoW and procedures (Budgets, logistics, MEAL, planning, reporting, fundraising)
- **Direct Implementation** Tasks
 1. Close accompaniment and mentorship to the teams, on a weekly basis, from ideation phase to implementation
 2. Coaching and guidance to participants on personal challenges, internal team dynamics, and interpersonal matters
 3. Regular visits outside the office to teams in Beirut, Saida, Bekaa, and Tripoli for support, regular review meetings and ad-hoc matters throughout the journey
 4. Facilitating relationships between teams and hosts, and addressing arising concerns, both interpersonal and operational
 5. Efforts to adapt ways-of-working to fit the needs of the RootsLab model, as well as the participants:
 - a. Timing (generally after working hours, and on weekends) and tailoring of activities, products, training, and communication to each of the ten initiatives
 - b. Internal processes
 - c. Working closely with external trainers and consultants to support the development and tailoring of the work
 - d. Providing interpretation when needed, and translated training and communication material
 6. Maintaining open and constant communication between all stakeholders and partners, including regular updates on the project, consultations, and feedback that would shape the direction of the project and its implementation, and sustain engagement and investment
- **Communications Tasks** for project and sharing learning purposes (blogs, social media – for RL and to amplify the work of the teams, booklets, designs, photography)
- **Securing and maintaining partnerships** – local and global
 1. Coordinating with global SG, mostly in the first year of the program, and working closely with advisors of these organisations on specific components.

2. Securing support from hosts and other resource partners (trainers, mentors, allies, other...)



Participants unanimously and invariably credited the project team for the success of RootsLab. They all referred to the readiness and availability of the project team to support them throughout the process as an invaluable asset and condition for their ability to carry out their projects.

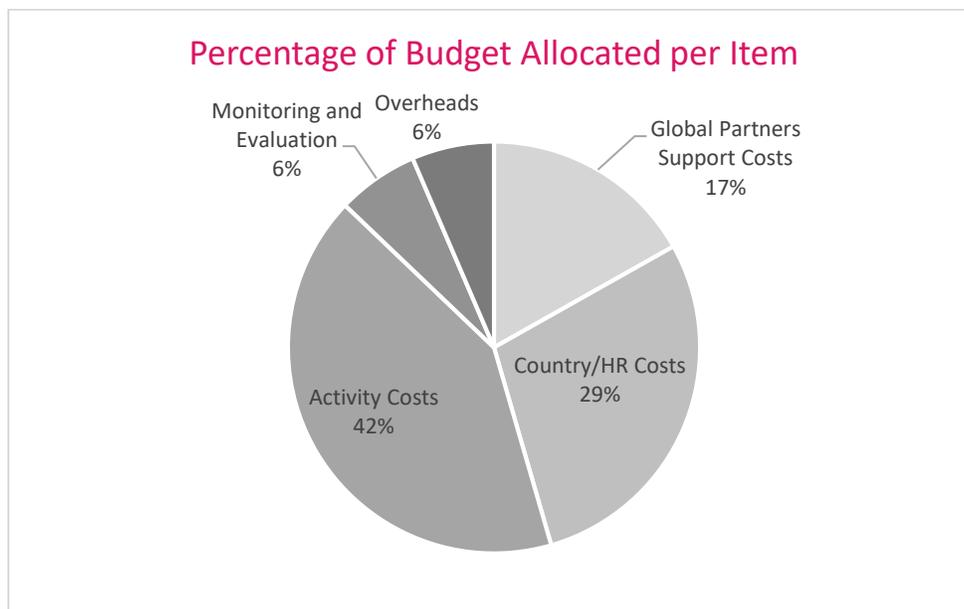
Resource mobilisation

The pilot project suffered from a funding shortfall and operated on a slimmed budget. There are several factors contributing to this:

- Pilot projects are generally harder to raise funds for due to the donors' requests for proof of results and impact.
- Donors are reluctant to pass through international organisations in order to reach grassroots groups as they fear that the bulk of the funds do not go directly to the feminist activists.
- Rather than aiding with the fundraising, the coming together of the four partners seems to have diffused the responsibility for fundraising within each organisation. As a result, home fundraisers did not prioritise RootsLab.
- Tensions exist within the Steering Group around how to allocate the funding, which may have contributed to their reluctance to fundraise for RL. The main contentious point revolves around the perceived high cost of RL staff as compared to the funds received directly by grassroots organisers. However, it is worth noting that the project in its current design is inherently labour-intensive, as discussed below.

Budget allocation

The total budget of the pilot amounts to 520,015 USD. Of this amount, 216,437 USD (42%) was allocated to project activities; 87,538 USD (17%) was allocated to the four global partners; 149,154 (29%) was dedicated to in-country HR costs.



The high amount dedicated to the global partners reflects the initial roles that they were intended to play during implementation. The amount allocated to HR costs reflects the fact that the project team is not only managing the project but indeed implementing it. RL is a labour-intensive project by design as it emphasises relationship-building and requires significant adaptability to the needs of the diverse group of nascent initiatives.

While some partners expect that the HR cost would decrease if RL were to be replicated, this is not advisable, given the workload carried by the project team. In fact, if RL is replicated with the same model as the pilot, the project team could benefit from a third person to assist with implementation.

Importantly, most RL participants reported that the grants they received through RL were largely sufficient for them to prototype their initiative in the given timeframe. Indeed, some teams reported that they did not need to spend the full amount of their grants. Participants also received stipends to compensate their work on their initiatives. Similarly, mentors and hosts were satisfied with the amounts they received in relation to the work they contributed.

Recommendation: maintaining or increasing HR budget for local project team to reflect the reality of the workload.

4. The RootsLab model

The project phases

The pilot project included five main phases, as illustrated in the infographic below:



As consistent with the midline report, some participants stated that the time dedicated to incubation was insufficient. Participants unanimously expressed that the time dedicated to meeting their peers and familiarising themselves with other initiatives was largely insufficient. Referring to the incubation phase, one participant stated that “There wasn’t enough time to build relationships with other teams. We barely managed to explain our idea to them and our time was up.” Another concern seems to be related to the need for more training sessions stemming primarily from a feeling of inadequacy among the less experienced activists. However, as one participant states, “there’s always something new to learn [...] Learning has no end when it comes to this.” Looking at the outputs produced by each team in terms of proposals, budgets, work plans, and implemented activities, it is not clear how a short incubation period affected the teams’ work.

The time concern was more evident and more widely reported by participants and mentors in relation to the prototyping phase which had a direct impact on the teams' work. Indeed, it resulted in some teams reducing the scope of their initiative in order to fit the timeframe, while others overworked themselves and expressed a high level of exhaustion and burn-out.

"The RL initiative is running on our free time so mostly on weekends. I was supposed to be putting 50% of my [free] time on another initiative but the RL initiative demanded too much time so I couldn't do that. If we had one person working full time, that would've been amazing, but we were exhausted." – RootsLab Participant

The limited time allowed for each phase reflects several considerations. Firstly, the financial resources available for the pilot project imposed certain constraints on the implementation, especially given the care taken to compensate project stakeholders fairly. For example, the mentors agreed that they would have liked to be involved at an earlier stage in the process in order to familiarise themselves with the project, the participants, and better understand what is expected from them. However, given the budget dedicated to mentorship, engaging the mentors for a longer period of time was not a possibility.

Secondly, there was a concern regarding the possible loss of momentum should the project phases be extended. However, provided that the disbursement of funds happens on schedule, the loss of momentum is unlikely, given the amount of work required by each team in the incubation and the prototyping phases as well as the routine follow-ups by the project team, mentors, and hosts.

The third and most important reason for the limited time allowed for each phase was the adoption of a Social Innovation process which imposes short and condensed phases as it rests on the fail-fast principle. The SI process assumes a full-time dedication to the initiative during a crunch period. This stands in sharp contrast with the realities of the activists involved in RL who have multiple commitments besides their RL initiative.

"The project on paper looks easy but when you start implementing you learn that it requires a lot of effort and availability. And we have families and children so we need to work and have an income but this project requires much more availability if it is to succeed and be sustainable." – RootsLab Participant

Furthermore, the SI model does not truly take into account the lack of exposure and experience of the RL participants which necessitates closer and more time-consuming accompaniment than would perhaps be required in the context of social entrepreneurship.

Recommendation: The SI model can be further adapted to the objectives of RL by:

- Adding an informal yet structured "meet and greet" activity prior to the incubation phase, which would facilitate the exchanges between participants and enable relationship-building across teams;

- Extending the prototyping phase to avoid saturating the activists' capacities.

Support received

Participants had access to several levels of structured support from the different project stakeholders: trainers, mentors, hosts, and the project team. Training started in the incubation phase and continued into the prototyping phase as tailored sessions given upon the teams' request. Mentors were brought in after incubation to provide close accompaniment during implementation. Host organisations were contracted right after the incubation phase but the proposal submission process by teams and then hosts, the approval of proposals, and later setting up the hosting arrangements and disbursing the grants, which marks the beginning of the prototyping phase, took around three months.

These different layers and types of support were essential and ensured that participants could find the expertise that they lacked in the many project stakeholders put at their disposal. Participants unanimously reported getting answers to all of their questions from one source or another. However, despite signing agreements with mentors and hosts which detailed the responsibilities of each party towards the team, several teams reported confusing the roles and responsibilities of these different stakeholders and not knowing which person to contact for which question.

RL also provided other types of support that are important to highlight. For example, throughout the journey, RL prompted the teams to think about and try to secure funding for their initiatives after RL. In addition, ninety people attended an Awards Event which facilitated the introduction of the activists and their projects to a large community of practitioners, activists and donors/funders, some of whom expressed interest in supporting certain initiatives. Alternative ways of generating revenue were also explored with Dammeh, a local feminist cooperative, which provided sessions to three teams on fundraising tools that are not donor-dependent.

Training

The training programme successfully adapted the SI support process to feminist principles of collective organising, and provided essential support which helped participants turn ambitious ideas into reality.

For the incubation phase, RootsLab partnered with the Knowledge Workshop (KW), a local feminist non-profit company which produces and documents feminist knowledges. The training provided as part of the incubation phase of the project was given through four full-day sessions over a period of three months where teams were brought together to lay the groundwork for their initiative. In the first two workshops, after having been introduced to each other, they defined their teams and the different tasks and responsibilities, agreed on their values, revisited their assumptions, and finally, learned about and discussed the history of the feminist movement and feminist theory. Later, they worked on conceptualizing a project through developing a theory of change, and drafting a workplan, a budget and a MEAL plan. Finally, they learnt about communication strategies with their stakeholders and wider audience, and applied it to

their work. According to the Young Foundation, KW and the project team succeeded in adapting the social innovation support process to feminist principles. They shifted the SI process's focus on the entrepreneurial individualistic framework to a framework of collective action.

The need for the SI process, and its successful implementation, were reflected in participants' feedback. Participants expressed an appreciation for the accompaniment they received from the trainers in sharpening their ideas and turning them into projects. The sessions which were remembered most vividly were the Theory of Change, dealing with threats and risks, and budgeting. Though they struggled to recall the details of most sessions, many participants credited the trainings they received with their ability to pitch their projects in "NGO language" and their ability to write project documents. As one participant expressed it, "I can say that I can now write a proposal because I wrote it around 17,000 times." Most teams found this language to be essential in helping them write project proposals and budgets, skills which greatly increased their confidence in applying for and receiving funding for their projects in the future.

One noticeable tension that has emerged from the interviews is the difference in experience among participants in the room in relation to building and managing projects. This diversity in experience was noticed by the trainers, one of whom suggested having two separate tracks that would cover different materials or advance at different paces: "To have a diversity of experiences, identities, positions, and geographical locations, but maybe different paths. If, for example, someone already has experience with growing initiatives, experience with proposals while others don't, they can either teach other, or to have different paths for each group.". However, given the value of the collective journey, this was not explored by the project team.

This diversity and the decision to maintain one track for all resulted in almost opposing feedback from participants regarding the same training sessions. Teams with prior exposure to training opportunities requested that the trainings be less content-driven and more focused on the participants. The main value that this group reported to have derived from the incubation phase was exposure to the diverse experiences and perspectives of other teams. Some participants suggested that all trainings be sourced from the participants themselves in a form of knowledge and skill-sharing forum where the trainees take turns training their peers on their areas of expertise. In contrast, those with less prior exposure to training opportunities tended to be thirstier for "traditional" and structured knowledge and requested more sessions from professional trainers.

One possible disadvantage to the collective journey is that the discrepancy in levels of experience becomes evident to the participants themselves and may at times create a sense of inadequacy among the less experienced. One of the trainers voiced this concern: "we want this cross pollination by keeping people who have some experience, but we also don't want some people to feel like they don't know this stuff while others do and are comfortable with it." Indeed, there was a sense among the teams from outside Beirut that they were at a disadvantage and needed to catch up with their peers. This explains, in part, why some participants expressed that they still lacked confidence in

their ability to continue their work independently from RootsLab. When asked what they perceived as lacking, some were unable to answer while others had very specific requests for more training on time management, public speaking, facilitation, pitching ideas to donors, fundraising, risk management, and a practical session on how to apply for funding (what grants are available and how to apply for them). The training sessions were reportedly not accessible to everyone due to the background discrepancies. However, great care was taken by the project stakeholders to reduce this gap. Several follow-up sessions with trainers and host organisation members were held to clarify some of the concepts to some of the participants. Tailored training sessions were also held during the prototyping phase, some of which were requested by the participants themselves and responded to their specific projects' and teams' arising needs.

Mentorship

The mentorship model achieved its intended objective where matching between team and mentor was appropriate and the team was open to the mentor's support.

Expertise

The project team reported difficulty in finding the expertise required for mentorship among feminist women and trans* folk. Expertise and the confidence to assume a mentorship position are concentrated in a few people. As a result, two mentors were responsible for two and three teams each. The practice of sharing and passing knowledge is also far from common within the feminist movement and needs to be cultivated. Even among the mentors that were recruited, six out of seven lacked experience and skills in accompaniment: when and how to intervene. The mentor who did have that expertise recommended that a training be given to the mentors themselves to enable them to better support the teams assigned to them. As the project manager put it, "It's like trying to cook a meal without the ingredients, so you go to buy the ingredients but you don't find them, then you have to plant them yourself, and this is a longer process."

Matching

Involving the teams in the selection of mentors helped them articulate the type of support that they require and provided them with a sense of ownership and responsibility over the process.

Each team chose a mentor at the end of the incubation phase to support them in the implementation process. Four of the teams had some form of relationship with their mentor which pre-existed RootsLab: a long-term friendship in two cases, an acquaintance in one case, and a nascent professional collaboration in one case. The remaining teams received suggestions for mentors from the project team. The pre-existing relationships were not a determinant for the success or failure of the mentor-mentee relationship as mixed feedback was presented by the teams.

All teams conducted interviews to select their mentors and inception meetings to agree on ways of working. The matching between teams and mentors was done based on different criteria for different teams, as evident in the table below:

	Pre-existing Relationship	Matching Criteria	Support Needed as Perceived by Team
Engna Legna	No	Relevant professional experience	Significant
Equity	No	Relevant professional experience	Significant
Geek and Queer	Friendship	Thematic + skill-based (management, structuring and planning)	Occasional
Gharsah	Acquaintance	Relevant professional experience	Occasional
Know Your Place	No	Work Philosophy + Skill-based (management and planning)	Occasional
Koudwa	No	Skill-based (community organising)	None
Nadina	No	Skill-based (community organising)	Occasional
Noun al Tadamon	No	Thematic (feminist concepts) + Skill-based (community organising)	None
Research by Comics	Friendship	Skill-based (cultural project management)	Occasional
Qomics	Professional Collaboration	Relevant professional experience	Occasional

While there was common appreciation for the idea of mentorship, four teams reported not benefiting from that relationship in a concrete way. In three out of those four cases, the mentor corroborated that statement. This was likely due to inappropriate matching in the case of Koudwa, Nadina and Noun al Tadamon, all three of which had the same mentor, but could have benefited more from someone inside their own community or at least within their geographic area.

“I feel like the distance was the main problem. It would be much better if the mentor was based in the same region as the team. It was very difficult because we didn't know how much we could ask her to be present.” – RootsLab Participant

In the case of Koudwa and Noun al Tadamon, the team itself requested that the mentor does not interfere due to their status as outsider to the community.

“We're three people and we're working with people we know very well. So there was no need for them to step in and help us. On the contrary, if they had called and said they wanted to be present, I would've asked them not to come. At this stage, we can't involve outsiders.” – RootsLab Participant

Support received

The type of support provided by mentors varied from team to team and included the following: providing an external perspective on the team's work; outreach; networking and communication with third parties; structuring the work and approaching it more systematically; drafting proposals and budgets; technical issue-based knowledge.

The most beneficial relationships occurred with mentors who had a specific expertise that the team lacked. This complementarity between team and mentor helped advance the work significantly in some cases. In contrast, other mentors acted as an extension of the team, someone who offers an outsider perspective but not the particular kind of expertise that the team was lacking. This was generally less valuable to the teams, though still appreciated in most cases.

Some of the less experienced teams expressed that their choice of mentor should have been based on their mentor's project management skills and that mentors should have been familiar with the RL training material in order to better assist the teams: "Maybe mentors should be experts in the things we are expected to deliver." Although this was not the intended purpose of the mentorship program, this may be a need that is worth catering to, especially given the lack of experience among some participants. It is worth noting, however, that all teams did deliver what was expected of them and that, in some cases, this perception of inadequacy could be stemming from a lack of confidence rather than a lack in actual ability to carry out the expected tasks.

Resource pool

As a response to some of the teams' need for specific expertise which their mentor lacked, some participants suggested having a pool of experts, each specialised in a different technical area, available to all the teams. Each team would then address their questions to the relevant mentor from that pool. This proposal was challenged by most mentors who thought that the value of mentorship also lies in the close relationship established with the team. Another setback to that model would be the inability of some teams to identify the kind of expertise that they are lacking, or even that they are lacking anything.

"The pool of mentorship is a good idea, but there's a disadvantage to it, [...] don't ruin the personal relationship that's being built and the team spirit, or else it becomes more like a consultancy rather than support." – RootsLab mentor

Hosting

While partnering with established organisations to host the teams was necessary for grant disbursement, the hosting model absorbed too many human and financial resources and provided little yield.

The involvement of local Women's Rights and feminist Organisations as hosts to the teams was meant to serve two purposes: first, to encourage peer-to-peer support and the nurturing of a mutually beneficial intergenerational relationship; and second, to act as

fiscal sponsors for the teams, given the fact that nine out of ten teams do not have a registered legal entity through which funding could be received.

Matching

The project team reported a difficulty in finding and selecting host organisations according to the following criteria:

- Capacity to manage and disburse a grant
- Credible/key part of the women's movement in Lebanon
- Optimal if they have a relationship with one of the consortium partners (this also provides more accountability)
- Willingness to work with young feminist activists
- Willingness to embrace social innovation
- Willingness to take on this project (which may fall outside their remit and theory of change)
- Have time to engage in the project along the timeline
- Can fulfil the tasks we have in mind, and can allocate a point person
- Level of networks with CBOs in marginalized communities all over Lebanon and ability to reach most marginalized areas with broad reach to regions

A total of seven registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit companies were contracted by RootsLab to serve as hosts: the Knowledge Workshop (three teams), Women Now (two teams), Anti-Racism Movement (one team), Qorras (one team), Fe-Male (one team), Kafa (one team) and Shift (one team). Each host organisation signed an MoU with its corresponding team(s) and received a payment of 15% of the team's budget. The matching between the hosts and teams followed different criteria for each case: thematic similarity, location, pre-existing relationship between members of the team and members of the organisation.

The type of support offered by hosts to the teams varied greatly and included: fiscal management; providing a work space; outreach and access to networks; assistance with implementation of specific tasks; general coaching and accompaniment.

Grant disbursement

GFW significantly expedited their grant making process to accommodate the RL model. However, participants experienced the waiting period between their proposal submission (May 1st) and the receipt of their grant (end of July) as a delay which dampened their momentum. Further delays were experienced in some cases due to internal procedures of the hosts themselves.

The teams held a session with their host to clarify the organisation's financial processes: how the money would be disbursed (cash or cheque), what documents and receipts are required from the participants, quotation regulations. Still, one common challenge for several teams was understanding the financial processes and regulations of their hosts and complying with them. Some hosts had quotation requirements and receipt

requirements which were difficult to comply with. For instance, transportation receipts could not be obtained when the participants were taking public transportation or using their own cars. Hosts showed some flexibility and accommodated the teams to the extent possible.

Some participants reported that their reliance on the host prevented them from gaining the necessary fiscal management skills to manage their initiative's finances on their own. To them, this created a sense of dependence on their host.

Relationship building

The hosting model helped provide exposure for the teams and their work and gave them the opportunity to widen their network. Several teams expressed their desire to continue to collaborate with their hosts in the future. While one valuable collaboration materialised between team and host, the other ideas for collaboration were yet to be tangibly formulated and formalised.

"I think there was a romanticization of fiscal sponsors in the sense that we're supposed to support each other but money does not allow for support. Money is the worst poison you can give a relationship." – RootsLab Participant

The hosting model was criticised by some participants for entrenching unequal power between the money holder and the money recipient. To illustrate this, one participant gave the example of a situation where she felt obligated to humour a member of the host organisation in conversation even though she disagreed with them.

The fear of an imbalance of power was echoed in different ways by other teams. One team reported that their host organisation imitated one of their activity ideas, expressing a fear of their initiative being co-opted by their host. However, this perception seems to stem from miscommunication rather than a real intention on the part of the host to co-opt that initiative, although in fairness, this cannot be objectively verified. Another team expressed a fear of being too dependent on the host organisation for their financial management, having not had the opportunity to learn how to manage their finances on their own.

The risk of power imbalance in the hosting relationship was explicitly included in the risk matrix developed by RootsLab. Several measures were taken to mitigate that risk including, holding regular review meetings with both hosts and teams, that address funds disbursement, spending, progress, relationship and challenges faced by both, as well as regular follow-up on any arising issues. In fact, the hosts were only asked to report on the disbursement of funds, the relationship between them and their hosted team, and the support they provided, rather than on the teams' work and activities. All of these measures were meant to avoid any withholding of funds or abuse of power and co-optation of the initiatives by the hosts, and foster the beneficial aspect of such a relationship.

5. Key learnings from the ten teams

The teams were given complete freedom in the definition of their goals, objectives and activities. Although they received extensive feedback from trainers and mentors to sharpen the initial ideas and turn them into actionable projects, all final decisions were left to the participants' discretion. This helped protect their ownership over their projects.

The diversity of the initiatives means that there are no common criteria based on which one can measure the success of the projects, nor is it the objective of this evaluation to assess the work of the teams against set criteria. What is significant is that all ten teams reported achieving their initial objectives, though some work plans have changed along the way as a response to certain implementation challenges. Importantly, the level of experience of the participants was not a significant determinant for their ability to achieve their objectives. This is perhaps the greatest indicator of the success of RL.

Below is an analysis of the internal factors that enabled and those that hindered the teams' success.

Community insiders

All teams belonged to the communities that they targeted in their projects. As one participant phrased it, "We are not outsiders who have been parachuted into this town. We are part of the social fabric." Being community insiders resulted in the participants having a clear command of their context and first-hand understanding of the issues faced by their communities. The better defined their target audience was, and the more refined their proximity to the community (in terms of location, nationality, educational background, and class), the easier it was for them to do their outreach, ensure participation and commitment, and be perceived as legitimate actors in their causes.

Recommendation: in the ideation and incubation phases, helping the teams define a more specific audience that they relate to, and indeed belong to, on **more than one level.**

Being anchored in a collective

Participants who had a prior experience of the collective, either through community organising or a strong sense of belonging to a supportive network, exhibited more autonomy and confidence in their work and were better equipped to cope with the challenges faced during implementation. Importantly, teams anchored in a collective were not necessarily the ones with prior experience in activism. Teams in the Bekaa in particular share strong ties with their community.

Recommendation: reinforcing the collective aspect of RootsLab through activities and exchanges that build a sense of community across teams.

Team spirit

The teams that managed to create a truly collaborative spirit were the ones where participants shared a similar level of experience and expertise, as well as a shared sense of ownership over their idea. Where discrepancies existed among team members, the coordinator emerged as the team leader and perceived owner of the project. This

leadership was seen as legitimate by some teams but the said leaders often expressed frustration with the unequal division of responsibility. In one case the internal tensions resulted in the team being reduced from six members to three. Initiatives where teams are more than two people and with better divided responsibilities have been more successful in implementing and sustaining their energy.

The RL team was attentive to this aspect throughout the process. In the selection criteria, RL favoured collective over individual ways of working. This has encouraged people to form teams before applying to the project. In one case, the team was formed for the sole purpose of applying to RL rather than out of need and desire to work collectively. In another case, one person who applied as an individual was repeatedly encouraged to find team mates, and is now part of a growing team of four people. Two other teams who lost members due to travel were able to welcome new additions and integrate them effectively into their work. The readiness of these three teams to involve new members was instrumental to their ability to manage the workload and the subsequent success of their project.

Time & scope constraints

One challenge that was common to all teams was the difficulty in making time for their projects, given that none of the participants could afford to forego their other responsibilities and dedicate themselves fully to their project. In some cases, the workload turned out to be too heavy given the limited amount of time dedicated to the prototyping phase. Attempts to reduce the scope of the projects happened with several teams, with the help of the trainers, the project team, or the mentors. In one case, a participant reported that they “were thinking of publishing more and more often. That didn’t work out and our mentor saw this from the beginning and we were convinced to reduce the scope.” Even with the reduced scope, however, that team still reported high levels of exhaustion as a direct result of the RL workload. This was also evident with the team who dropped out after the incubation phase. Indeed, with the help of the project team, they reduced their scope of work significantly and still could not handle the workload due to their other commitments. Yet reducing the scope of the project even further in order to fit the timeline would have altered the nature of the project itself.

Recommendation: prolonging the prototyping phase and working with the teams to set an adequate project scope.

6. Most significant change

Improved sense of agency

“I feel like we only truly realised that we have rights and we have to fight for them through RL.” – RootsLab Participant

Most participants reported an improvement in their confidence and self-efficacy. This was attributed by some participants to the encouragement received by the project team, as well as some trainers and mentors.

“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. They really valued us and our opinions and this makes all the difference. They make you feel capable, knowledgeable, revolutionary.” – RootsLab Participant

Other participants related their improved sense of agency to the fact that they succeeded in implementing their projects. One mentor remarked that “confidence is attained when you see results. Had they not seen a product of their work, they wouldn't have built confidence.” This aspect of RL is important as it stands in contrast with the usual type of capacity building available for women in Lebanon where participants receive training but often have no opportunity to practice what they learn. Reflecting on their own leadership program, one of the host organisation members said: “RootsLab gave us inspiration to work the same way in the future. We got two grants to do that.”

Several teams reported having applied for funding and at least three of them received grants after RL. These participants credited the RootsLab process with having both encouraged and enabled them to make such a move, as they now have the knowledge, skillset, and connections needed to find funding sources and design viable initiatives.

In addition, several participants reported being transformed on a personal level as a direct result of RootsLab. They gained confidence in themselves and their ideas and their transformation spilled over into their homes.

“What I find most surprising is that my personality has changed. My behaviour with my parents has changed. My parents [...] didn't let me come home after 5PM at all. Now I come back at 11 PM and I tell them “don't you want your kids to be successful? You can't tell me to be successful and ask me to stay at home at the same time.” – RootsLab Participant

From unease to acceptance to solidarity

“Now there's a lot of respect for the other [...] I wasn't like that because I live in a village and was influenced by what my parents said. [...] Now all we want is to help others like RL helped us, through raising political, social and human awareness.”

All project stakeholders mentioned the diversity of the group as an immensely valuable and enriching experience. The most eye-opening interactions revolved around experiences of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, and the harsh realities faced by non-Lebanese communities. Although the conversations around sexual orientation were reportedly unsettling to some participants, there seems to be consensus around the fact that the exposure they got through RL made them question their beliefs and change their opinions.

One participant reported being surprised with her own transformation and stated: “Our community makes us feel like there are certain people who come from outer space so we put up these walls and we have a strange conception of the other but then you go and meet these people and you realise that we're all the same.”

The presence of Ethiopian women also greatly shifted the perspectives of the other participants towards migrant women from weak and incapable to equal and active agents of change. Breaking down these barriers between the different communities during the entire RL process provided a live example of the possibility and the benefits of inclusivity to the participants.

"I really started to believe that yes "Solidarity is the solution" to many, many issues that we are all facing and living every day." – Host Organisation member

Emerging relationships

"In the beginning [...] I felt overprotective of the 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

RL's insistence on a collective journey translated into the emergence of new relationships and the strengthening of pre-existing ones. At least, three pairs of collaboration emerged between the teams and at least five other pairs between the team and their host organisation, although two of those existed prior to RL but were strengthened through the project. In addition, RL facilitated exchanges between a local feminist cooperative and three of the teams. Collaborations took many forms, including space sharing, knowledge sharing, organising common events, and coaching.

Others have expressed the desire to reach out to other teams and organisations, either to work on a specific project together, or to open channels of communication between them.

"I would like to work with organisations in Beirut, bring them to Tripoli and take our women to Beirut. We're thinking about how to organise exchanges with the other RL initiatives so they come visit us and we go visit them." – RootsLab Participant

Decentralising feminism

Most participants identified as feminists by the end of the RL journey. Given the diversity of the group in terms of age, nationality, place of residence, and socioeconomic background, and the usual negative connotations associated with the term, this is a significant achievement. Where participants critiqued feminism, they did so in relation to the practices of WROs and their inability to reach people and collaborate with each other. Others made a distinction between feminists and women's rights activists: "RL gave us all a chance to really understand and discuss the deep meaning of feminism and how that's different from being a women's rights activist."

More importantly, feminism seems to have seeped into some of the teams' daily practices. Efforts to be inclusive are evident among some teams. Emulating RL's efforts to reach unusual suspects, two teams reported deliberately using their initiative to give opportunities to women who lack experience but show potential to be agents of change.

“We made an effort to reach the women who have never participated in anything like this and who stay at home most of the time [...] I feel like when someone initiates a project, they shouldn't only target people with experience. They should make an effort to give a chance to people who have not had opportunities in life.” – RootsLab Participant

Some participants also reported noticing a change in discourse among their teammates. One striking change manifested in a participant stating “I can't trust people who say they are part of a feminist movement while they accept the *Kafala*³ system and contribute to the exclusion of refugees.”

These changes are all the more significant as they are manifesting among the unusual suspects. **The decentralisation of feminism by RL is not only evident through their ability to reach unusual suspects but also through the ability of the unusual suspects to reach their own audiences with the same practices and discourse.**

7. Replicability

The success of the RL model as it stands today seems to be highly contingent upon the recruitment of the right project team with regards to the following:

- Their positionality within the movement: the project manager's experience as a feminist activist in Lebanon was crucial for her understanding and navigation of the dynamics within the feminist movement. Being at equal distance from the different groups and individuals helped the legitimacy of RL and allowed for inclusivity.
- Their politics: the project team was committed to the feminist principles upheld by RL and raised the team's standards even higher by always prioritising the participants' interests over those of partners or donors.

“The project only achieved so much just because of the project manager. If you put someone else in her place, the process would be very different, the attitude would be very different. She's someone who likes to be just [...] I don't know how much these processes she put in would be respected if she left.” – RootsLab Participant

The main threat to the replicability of RL can be summarised in the tension which emerged between the need for greater human resources to carry the workload and the reluctance of donors to increase HR costs.

Conclusion and macro recommendations

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.

The contributions of the four global partners in designing the pilot and setting its feminist values and framework are indispensable as a first step in piloting the project in any country. The global partners provide the exposure and credibility that could attract funding, as well as the accumulated experience of starting an initiative like RL. They would also ensure the common identity, shared feminist ethos, and advisory support for the RL projects around the world.

However, after the pilot and its evaluation in a given country, it is worth assessing the possibility of granting the RL country team independence from the global SG, and indeed from the partners themselves, with regards to implementation and accountability. RL would then be established as an independent local entity acting as incubator for new feminist initiatives. Where a local feminist entity at an equal distance from other feminist activists in the country already exists, and expresses interest in adopting RL, that local entity would be supported to increase capacity to accommodate the RL project. The global SG would pursue its work in taking the RL model to other countries to be piloted, assessed, and eventually released to local feminist ownership.

This model would allow for other changes as well. The hosting could be ensured through the RL entity itself, thereby cutting the cost of overhead disbursed to host organisations. The new entity could also start a parallel training programme for potential mentors, building local expertise in accompaniment and coaching on social innovation support processes.

Notes

¹ To read more about this, please refer to the research commissioned in parallel to this evaluation titled "Feminist Movement Building in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities", Moughalian C and Ammar Z (April 2019).

² Her exclusion of Young Foundation from this statement stems from her unfamiliarity with the organisation.

³ *Kafala* refers, in this quote, to the sponsorship system that applies to migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.

Annex 1

Learning Question 1

What tools, resources and support systems do young women need to enable their activism and innovation?

- What support was provided (how effectively) to young activists? What aspects of the context helped/hindered provision of support?
- To what extent were projects able to adapt, learn and improve as a result of pilot model?

Learning Question 2

What types of spaces, linkages and connections enable collaborations amongst young women and their groups to advance women's rights? (Limited to those applied in the project)

- What space/links were made (how effectively) and what was the result? What worked to connect young women and what were blockages?

Learning Question 3

What types of spaces, linkages and connections enable collaborations across sectors to advance women's rights? (Limited to those applied in the project: project criteria, bilateral meetings, demonstration events etc.)

- What space/links were made (how effectively) and what was the result? What worked to connect sectors and what were blockages?

Annex 2

Guiding Questions for Participant Interviews	Interviewer Prompts
Can you tell us a bit about your project?	Note the ease of explaining their initiative
How did you benefit from RL? What is the most significant change you've experienced as a result of RL?	Give time for narrative, note the domains of change of importance to them
How have you used the trainings and mentorship you received to implement your project? What have you learned from the prototyping phase? How do you plan to adapt your project to reflect these lessons learnt? Have you tried to apply for other sources of funding or mobilize other kinds of support? If so, were you successful?	Prompt for concrete answers and examples
Have you benefited from your mentor? What type of engagement did you get from your mentor for the future? Were you able to ensure a long-term commitment from your mentor? Have you benefited from your host organisation? What type of engagement did you get from your host organisation for the future? Were you able to ensure a long-term commitment from your host organisation?	Gauge the level of commitment of mentors and hosts and the quality of the partnerships Note any difficulties or exceptional collaboration
Have you been able to build new relationships with any social innovation funders or influencers?	Understand their perception of SI component of the project
Have you been able to build new relationships with feminist or women's rights groups other than your host organisation? Do you feel like you have access to a network of women's rights activists or feminists? - If yes, can you elaborate? - If not, what are the barriers you are experiencing? Do you have plans to engage other groups or activists in the future? If so, which groups and how? To what extent do you feel capable of shaping decisions in the feminist movement or women's rights movement? - As an individual - As a group	Prompt for concrete examples of past or planned collaborations that resulted from RL Allow interviewee to define "access" herself and note her own definition Gauge the importance of relationship building to them

	Gauge their perception of their power within the broader movement
Were the resources (financial and other) received sufficient for the development of your project? What are the skills you still need to acquire to achieve your project objectives and full potential? What are the external barriers that you still expect to face when implementing your project?	Understand project limitations Gauge their perception of their agency and ability to turn their ambition into action
To what extent did you feel like you had a say in what happens at RL? Were there any sources of discomfort throughout your involvement with the project team? Are you interested in participating in future RL activities?	Understand perceptions of process
Do you have any recommendations for the project team to improve RL?	
Is there anything else you would like to tell us that we didn't ask you about?	

Host Organisations

- Describe your relationship with the RL team(s) you worked with
- How have you been able to support them?
- How have you benefited from involving them in your organisation?
- To what extent do you feel like you are able to involve young women and trans* people in your work on gender justice?
- Do you have any recommendations for the improvement of the RL model?

****Followed by interview for research paper (see research paper methodology document**