Management Response

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women's Empowerment in Lebanon, Impact Evaluation of the project 'Women's access to Justice' in Lebanon*

Effectiveness Review Series 2017/18)

Prepared by:	*Hadeel Qazzaz- Regional Gender Justice Coordinator*		
Contributors:	*Farah Kobaissy- MENA gender advocacy advisor*		
Signed off by:	*Marta Lorenzo- MENA Regional Director*		
Date:	*28.8.2019*	**Country/Region/Campaign:**	*MENA Region*

What is the purpose of an evaluation management response (MR)?

A management response enables us to document the key learning generated from the project evaluations whilst also ensuring that the report is given careful consideration by relevant stakeholders.

The management response should:

1) Include a summary of the reflections of your team and program/project stakeholders in relation to the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations;

2) Detail actions that will be taken to respond to the evaluation findings;

3) Offer an opportunity for all relevant project stakeholder to comment on the utility of the evaluation process and final report.

A: Context, background and findings

1. The context and background of the review, i.e. the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

> Oxfam GB's Global Performance Framework is part of the organization's effort to better understand and communicate its effectiveness, as well as enhance learning across the organization. Under this Framework, a small number of completed or mature projects are selected each year for an evaluation of their impact, known as an Effectiveness Review. The project 'Women's Access to Justice Programme: Phase 2' was one of those selected for an Effectiveness Review in the 2017/18 financial year. The project was selected under the global outcome indicator of Women's Empowerment, which is defined as change in empowerment of supported women – measured by a composite index assessing indicators of empowerment that are relevant to the socio-economic context of the project under analysis.
>
> **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**
> The project 'Women's Access to Justice Programme: Phase 2' (WAJ2) is a multi-country programme, operating in Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Phase 1 started in May 2011 and finished in July 2014. Phase 2 started in December 2014 and concluded in December 2017. Given the complexity and diversity of the interventions, the evaluation team – in coordination with the programme management – decided to focus the attention of the Effectiveness Review on one specific country, Lebanon. As such, the results coming from this Effectiveness Review are not meant to be indicative of the overall impact of WAJ2 but are a focused impact assessment for the activities implemented by the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW).
>
> The overall objective of the project was to contribute to equitable access to formal and informal justice for poor and vulnerable women in targeted countries, and it aimed to achieve four main results. First, to increase voice and confidence to claim access to legal systems for poor and vulnerable women. Second, to increase support from communities to equal access to justice for poor and vulnerable women. Third, for policy makers and legal

OXFAM

stakeholders to increasingly take action towards a more equitable and accessible justice system. Fourth, for women's rights civil society organizations in the Middle East to foster engagement of communities, legal stakeholders and policy makers around women's access to justice. The project's Theory of Change identified three areas of intervention: personal, community and systemic. The expectation was that at the personal level, if women are empowered to stand up for their rights they will be more likely to use judicial institutions and claim their rights when they are violated. At the community level, if communities are supportive of women's rights and subscribe to the principles of equal access to justice, then women will be more likely to claim their rights through the judicial system. Finally, at the systemic level, if law and policies ensure equal access to justice for all, women are more likely to claim their rights using the formal judicial institutions.

In Lebanon, the project worked with two partner organizations. This evaluation is focused on the activities implemented by LECORVAW, which started its activities in 2014 and worked with Sunni Muslim women, mainly in the region of Tripoli in the north of the country.
LECORVAW implemented a variety of activities at personal, community and systemic level. Activities conducted at personal level included training paralegals, who then conducted awareness-raising sessions with over 2,000 women on the Personal Status Law (PSL). It established peer-to-peer support groups for nearly 140 women and provided over 840 legal consultations to over 600 women, 160 of which consisted of litigation cases. At community level, LECORVAW conducted awareness-raising sessions for community members and established community support networks. Finally, at systemic level, LECORVAW organized meetings and public events and presentations with duty bearers, including religious leaders, judges, bar associations and other NGOs from Tripoli.

EVALUATION DESIGN
The Effectiveness Reviews are impact evaluations that focus on impact questions. This evaluation aimed to answer three main questions:
- What has been the impact of the project on women's empowerment?
- What has been the impact of the project in changing trust in, willingness to use and accessibility of the legal system?
- What are the factors and characteristics that cause a woman to start a legal case and leave an intimate-partner relationship?

Given the complexity of the project, the evaluation adopted the framework suggested in Bamberger et al. (2016) to unpack and evaluate complex interventions. It then identified and used evaluation methods that aligned evaluation questions with available resources and attributes of the intervention (Stern et al., 2012).

The evaluation employed a quasi-experimental impact evaluation design to assess the impact of awareness-raising sessions conducted at individual and community level. It investigated whether awareness-raising sessions are effective in leading women to increase their knowledge, awareness, trust and accessibility with regard to the legal system. The evaluation used a composite index for measuring women's empowerment combining indicators associated with changes taking place at three levels: personal, relational and environmental, to measure and estimate the impact on women's empowerment.

Life-history interviews were used to provide deep contextual knowledge and understanding of the lives of women who sought legal consultation and chose to litigate. Life-history interviews were then codified and analysed with a configurational analysis tool (EvalC3), which combines methods drawn from Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Predictive Analytics (PA). This was used to identify which attributes help to explain why women start a litigation for divorce and/or leave an intimate-partner relationship.

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness

OXFAM

2. **Summary main findings and recommendations**

RESULTS

What has been the impact of the project in promoting women's empowerment?
Despite very low levels of recall of attendance at the awareness-raising sessions – less than one third – women involved in the awareness-raising sessions, on average, scored positively in 54 percent of the women's empowerment indicators, compared with matched women who scored positively in only 48 percent of the indicators. This difference is positive and statistically significantly different from zero.
There is evidence of positive and significant effects on some indicators of empowerment, including participants' knowledge of women's rights, their willingness to react to violence, level of social capital, and access to appropriate services. However, there was no evidence of positive impact on several other indicators that were linked to the project's Theory of Change. At personal level, these include self-confidence, personal autonomy, financial independence and recognition, and non-acceptability of violence. At relational level, there is no evidence of change in household decision making.
It appears that the awareness-raising sessions had a good impact on group membership. This is an interesting and/or surprising finding, given the short duration of the awareness-raising sessions. It may be interesting for future research to further explore the link between group membership and women's access to justice.

What is the impact on women's access to justice?
In terms of the impact of the intervention on access to justice pathways, we found evidence that through awareness-raising sessions, the project had a positive and significant effect in increasing trust in reporting problems to the police and organizations supporting women, and towards seeking legal advice. However, despite increased trust in some organizations, awareness-raising sessions did not increase trust in the key focus institution – the courts. There was similarly no evidence of impact on overall perception of the quality of the legal process (in terms of cost, timelines and level of stress). There was also no evidence of the awareness sessions impacting on perceptions of the level of support from the community towards women who take legal action, nor their own supportiveness towards family members or friends in their community who take legal action – although support levels were very high in both groups, which may be due other community-focused interventions in the project.

Despite the mixed picture above, we found that women involved in awareness-raising sessions *are*, on average, more likely to report having had a legal consultation (8 percentage points) and undertake legal action (5 percentage points) compared with women who didn't.
For these women who did take legal action, we found no difference in satisfaction with the result of the legal outcome/verdict, or on women's perception of fairness of the courts. However, the intervention had a significant positive effect on women's *experience of the legal process* (31 percentage points higher than comparison women), this finding was also supported by the life-history interviews, where women describe LECORVAW's support during what is often a challenging and traumatic process.

What are the factors and characteristics that cause a woman to start a legal case and leave an intimate-partner relationship?
Analysis conducted on the life-history data identified the three most important factors in predicting whether a woman decides to initiate a divorce were *attending awareness raising sessions*, *confidence in LECORVAW* and *self-confidence*. As not all litigants proceed to a divorce, the evaluation also considered the attributes that predicted whether women were no longer in an intimate-partner relationship (where the majority were experiencing violence). '*Starting a litigation*' was identified as a Necessary and highly accurate attribute (79 percent), meaning that all women in the sample who are no longer in a relationship with their husbands also started litigation. Another important attribute for predicting a woman not being in an intimate-partner relationship was '*not being concerned about negative stereotypes of divorced women*', which is also Necessary and highly accurate (84 percent). When combined, these two attributes form a model that is Necessary, with 95 percent

---

OXFAM

accuracy, with only one False Positive. This evaluation did not assess the impact of the project on the systemic component, as it was deemed too early at the time of the evaluation to be able to expect measurable changes. However, during the design of the evaluation, the evaluation team had the chance to witness public meetings held with local religious authorities, as well as appearances on national TV shows promoting LECORVAW work and activities.

Lessons learned
From discussions and critical reflections with Programme Staff based on these results, the following learning points emerged:

Review model of awareness-raising sessions (ARS)

The evaluation found evidence that suggests women who attend awareness-raising sessions have higher levels of participation in legal consultation and litigations than similar women not attending. This may provide evidence to support the assumption that women's knowledge, understanding and perception of their legal rights is a critical factor for access to justice. However, given the low recall of the session (with only one third of participants remembering participation) and lack of impact on several key empowerment indicators, future projects should more clearly articulate how the one-hour, one-off sessions expect to achieve change.
For example, although the programme had a statistically significant impact on women's knowledge of legal service providers, overall knowledge remained low, with 70 percent of women who participated in an ARS still not aware of legal service providers.
The ARS may be working as a simple, yet effective, gateway/introduction to LECORVAW/a LECORVAW paralegal, but if the session *itself* is intended to lead to wider changes in women's empowerment, then critical questions need to be asked about whether the duration and intensity of these activities is enough to prompt and sustain change. Other practices may be considered, such as using videos and other mass media, to reach a wider population for a more prolonged time.

Continue to focus on social norm change, particularly on stereotypes of divorced women

There is good evidence from this evaluation that not holding negative stereotypes towards divorced women is an important factor in predicting if a woman will leave an intimate-partner relationship (i.e. divorce or separation) in which she experiences violence. This provides good support to the programme Theory of Change that social norm change is critical. The programme is therefore encouraged to maintain its focus on social norm change, in particular considering how to influence harmful and negative stereotypes towards divorced women in the society. These stereotypes are a form of gender inequality that stops women from seeking justice.

Articulate a more explicit Theory of Change to address violence against women and girls

The life histories showed that intimate-partner violence was a major theme in women's descriptions of their lives and a pathway to legal justice. Divorce or legally recognized separation is often an important form of justice (although not complete in itself). Although implicit in the rationale for access to justice work in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, this is an area that was not conceptualized clearly enough in the programme documentation or Theory of Change. Theories of Change on Women's Access to Justice should be more explicit in articulating the causal pathways or chain between access to justice and ending violence against women and Girls. This includes both the intersection between personal status laws and criminal law in access to justice for violence against women. It is also important to better understand the barriers and enabling factors with regard to leaving an abusive relationship as a critical part of women's decision to litigate or not.

Ensure that programmes' working on access to justice include activities and budgets for addressing intimate-partner violence for project participants

Although not a focus of the evaluation, the extent to which the project had articulated the mechanisms that need to be in place (across partners and countries) to detect, prevent and mitigate against episodes of violence for

project participants, was not clear. Especially in projects working on access to justice, where violence is a recurring threat for project participants, there should be more explicit procedures – and ideally infrastructure – to protect and provide immediate support and shelter to women who decide to seek legal support.

Develop a long-term strategy for addressing women's lack of trust in the Sunni Family Courts

Literature on how change happens in the context of access to justice shows that trust in judicial institutions is a critical component. Although women in the intervention group were more likely to advise a friend to seek support from police, lawyers and women's organizations – a positive finding – there was no statistically significant impact on increased trust in the courts (i.e. 'going to court can help solve problems related to personal status law') (Table 6.2). This suggests that the project had an impact on trust in some institutions, but not the key target of the programme, the Sunni Family Court. This was an important part of the programme Theory of Change, and therefore future programme interventions may wish to consider further how to build this trust.

Importance of self-confidence as a predictor of litigation – reiterates/supports the TOC

Although no evidence was found that the ARS led to increased self-confidence, the qualitative analysis showed that having self-confidence was an accurate predicter of filing for divorce. This supports the Theory of Change for the programme and is an area that future programmes should continue to focus on in their work, developing clear strategies and techniques for building confidence with women they work with at all stages of the programme.

Litigation not necessarily leading to a perception of more power and freedom – the empowerment pathway needs greater planning and design

Future programmes should consider more explicitly which individual and societal level changes are required for divorced women to experience increased power and freedom. This should include, among other things, psychosocial support and peer-to-peer support, as well as addressing more explicitly the links between access to justice and women's empowerment.

Monitoring data

Whilst the programme had a detailed Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy and framework, some monitoring data that was collected was of poor quality, which made sampling for the evaluation a challenge. Greater focus on building an evaluative culture, in which all partners are interested in the power of data and the insights it can bring into learning about justice and empowerment pathways, may lead to better quality data. Similarly, greater investments in ICT for data collection may enable smaller feedback loops for more frequent adaptations to the programme.

B: Oxfam's response to the validity and relevance of the review findings, conclusions and recommendations.

3. **Overall, do the findings of the review meet with you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness? Was anything identified which was surprising?**

The effectiveness review went in depth into the question of how the project supported women's empowerment in Lebanon and it is helpful to inform the overall gender justice strategy on MENA, of which the women's access to justice and violence against women are two important components.

The findings generally met the management expectations. Experience with women on the ground showed there were some significant changes in their lives and experiences of violence. Local partners also indicated that the project was helpful for them to fine tune their approaches. The close follow up and regular engagement of the

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness

OXFAM

project team with partners and beneficiaries led to a mutual learning experience which the findings of the effectiveness review confirmed.

The review clearly pointed at areas of improvement which we are taking seriously, especially the focus on a more transformative approach in our work which moves from the individual empowerment to a more systemic change. It is not enough to increase women's awareness without improving the justice system and the way it looks at women and violence against women. It is also important to influence social norms in the overall environment in which women live (and are often stigmatized for walking out of a violent relationship) and where the justice system operates. The review helped us confirm these findings with multi-stakeholders of the project.

The other important point which the review made us see clearly is the MEL. A very well-designed MEL that is not fully understood by all those involved in the project is not helpful. The MEL needs to be simple enough to use but comprehensive enough to produce evidence. This recommendation makes us consider the importance of a feminist MEAL approach that is more participatory and informed by the beneficiaries and partners themselves.

4. Any conclusions/recommendations which the country team does not agree with or will not act upon and why

This was a regional program that was implemented in 3 different countries. The review was implemented only in Lebanon. If the review looked at other evidence from other countries that still work on women access to justice as on Jordan and OPT, the results may have been different. Lebanon as a country programme did not implement a women's access to justice programs but the regional gender justice program at that time was hosted in Lebanon which lead to direct implementation rather than supervising a multi-country programme. Lebanon still does not have a gender justice pillar of work which means that despite the successful implementation of the project, it does not have implications on the country program and learning. However, in the other two countries, the program of women access to justice still inspires and contribute to much of the learning and future activities.

Generally, we agree with all the recommendations and will use them to inform future regional and multi-cultural programs. There only finding that concerns us is "increased trust in the courts (i.e. 'going to court can help solve problems related to personal status law')". Women do not trust the religious courts for a reason. Mostly for their bias against women, in practice and in their regulations. In the past years there has been a growing protest movement from women against religious courts claiming for fundamental reforms in laws and regulations (I am not talking here about the civil-secular movement which is calling for a civil/secular family and marriage law, but a movement calling for reforms inside of the established religious/sectarian laws and courts) the point is, to increase trust of women in the court system, this cannot happen without tackling the patriarchal nature of the religious courts, their blatant discrimination against women and their total disregard of women's rights.

5. Main follow-up actions

- The MENA gender justice team is taking forward the recommendations of the project, conference research findings and effectiveness review outcomes into the next gender strategy of 2020-2025.
- The Effectiveness review will be shared across the confederation and with the gender justice leads in MENA. Findings will be part of the background readings and discussions during the face to face meeting in October 2020.
- The effectiveness review team has been invited to present the evaluation in an international evaluation conference in October 2019. This will also be an opportunity to showcase the project based on the evaluation findings.

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness

OXFAM

- Special discussions around transformative approaches to gender justice are held with gender justice leads throughout 2019-2020 to reflect on some recommendations including feminist MEAL, systemic change, the potential to focus on social norms and intimate partner violence in a regional campaign.

6. How do you plan to use the evidence which is generated from this review? Please be as specific as possible.

- The effectiveness review document will be used as a background document for the update of the regional gender justice strategy with reference to specific data around VAW and referencing social norms.

- A concept note for a next phase of the project is developed. Findings from the review especially about perception of quality, fairness and satisfaction with the legal process will be used to inform that concept note.

- The learning is shared with different country offices and gender justice leads, especially regarding engendering the theory of change and implementing a feminist MEAL approach.

- There will be a focus on systems level change which gained momentum among civil society pushing for legal reforms

- Addressing change makers at the systematic level including members of the judiciary and lawyers who continue to discriminate women in the court system.

- Supporting civil society to push for reforms in the legal system and legislation in MENA on PSL and GBV in particular.

7. How do you plan to apply the learning from this review to relevant or new projects in the future? Please be as specific as possible and provide context where relevant, naming projects in full where learning from the review will be applied.

- The learning will be discussed with all gender justice leads and presented, quoted in any future proposals.

- In October 2019, a feminist convening will be held to discuss social norms and violence against women with a group of young and active feminists from the region. The effectiveness review will be referenced, and the learnings will be discussed.

- In the program design of a new program of Oxfam "Women on the Move", learnings around social norms and feminist MEAL were discussed and will be reflected in future proposals.

8. Is there any support your team would require in order to maximise the use of the evidence generated from this review?

- The Regional gender justice team lost most of its members due to budget cuts and change of management. The current structure is not enough to implement regional projects. More funds need to be allocated to ensure the continuity of this work and other project.

- Gender justice leads in MENA asked for specific support in transformative gender mainstreaming and in feminist MEAL which requires additional technical and financial support.

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness

OXFAM

- There is a need to support a regional advocacy campaign on social norms and VAW both technically and financially.

9. **Additional reflections** that have emerged from the review process but were not the subject of the evaluation.

Women's access to justice is very important in MENA, especially when most women's rights related issues are dealt with outside the formal justice system. However, a more comprehensive referral system for women victims of violence is much needed. This includes a comprehensive set of services from awareness to identification to referral to the right service (social, economic, medical, psychological, legal and any other needed services). This project showed that when addressing women's access to justice, many issues emerge. Working closely with women rights organizations is a strategic approach because they are the ones who guarantee sustainability and impact. Evaluating the capacities and needs of women rights organizations, assessing the gaps in the referral system and defining strategic priorities were not within the scope of this review but is a must if we were to continue working on this topic.

Signed off by:	*Mara Lorenzo Rodriguez, MENA Regional Director*		
Date:	*09/09/19*	**Country/Region/Campaign:**	*Lebanon*

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness

OXFAM