



Capacity strengthening

Material support

Self-protection outside community protection structures

Social cohesion

 Lebanon

Case study of a community lighting project by Oxfam in Lebanon

2016–17

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Oxfam is committed to adopting a community-based approach in its humanitarian programmes. Oxfam in Lebanon started supporting the establishment of community structures in the Bekaa and Tripoli areas in 2013. These included 'peer groups' in urban areas and informal settlements (IS) for refugees from Syria. This case study highlights only a very small aspect of the work done with those groups: the implementation of two peer group initiatives in 2016–17 in North Bekaa. This is intended to illustrate how community-based protection can provide platforms for community members to collectively implement action plans to respond to the needs and protection risks of their communities.

Oxfam's protection team has facilitated the formation and supported the work of peer groups in Bekaa since 2015. This follows a thorough process including regular structured discussions and consultations with community members and capacity-strengthening sessions. Training topics have included humanitarian protection; community participation methods; facilitation and mediation skills; the responsibilities of local stakeholders; and local-level advocacy. These sessions enhance peer groups' technical knowledge on protection and enable them to identify, prioritize and plan to mitigate protection threats.

Peer group members in Talia, Saidi and Bouday in North Bekaa identified some priority threats that the wider community was facing at the time and determined an action plan to mitigate them. In Talia the peer group included both women and men; in the other areas the groups were women only. The threats prioritized by the peer groups were mainly related to harassment and safety when going to the latrines at night due to the lack of lighting. Communities also reported that the lack of lighting was preventing families from going outside, while strangers were entering sites at night to steal items including livestock, and motorcycles used by refugees. Community members had tried to buy candles to address this issue at the beginning, but this was not always an affordable option. Furthermore, candles had resulted in fires that had damaged several tents.

After consulting the wider community – especially women – the peer groups in Talia agreed an action plan for a lighting project. Group members and the community reported a preference for having an electrical generator at the site, and agreed to share the expenses needed for filling the fuel tank and conducting maintenance. Peer group members at the site identified skilled volunteer workers in the community who could undertake the necessary external electrical connections from the generator to the site's road. Accordingly, Oxfam provided the community with an electric generator from the budget allocated to community projects. The peer group members agreed and signed terms of reference to commit to the maintenance of the generator and to continue collecting money from all households in the community for refueling.

The feedback from the community was extremely positive at the beginning. However, after a while, several households were no longer able to afford the costs of refueling and frequent maintenance, which required an external worker to be hired. In addition, communities in neighbouring sites got in touch with the Oxfam team to complain about not receiving the same type of assistance.

Peer group members in Saidi, who had identified the same threat, decided that the distribution of solar-powered lamps to each household would be the best solution, because electricity is not always available, and they considered generator maintenance to likely be too costly. The lamps are also able to be recharged from electric sockets, which is useful at night or on days with little sunlight. Oxfam distributed these solar-powered lamps to the entire community in order to avoid causing tensions. (For instance, they were not only provided to women heads of households, as that could have made women living alone more easily identifiable.) Community members and peer group members were all satisfied and mentioned that the lamps allowed women and children to feel safer when accessing the latrines at night and/or going out for other necessities. The community in this site has also mentioned that this project was sustainable and free.

Lessons learned

Following this community project, the Oxfam team highlighted the importance of conducting risk assessments in any intervention, especially community projects, to ensure that any intervention is safe, effective, long-lasting and does not add any barriers for individuals in the community. Furthermore, the geographical proximity of nearby sites must be always considered in order to avoid creating any inter-communal tensions of different assistance received. Looking for sustainable, cost-effective solutions in general (such as solar-powered lamps in this case) can often alleviate the financial burdens faced by communities and provide long-lasting solutions that organizations can invest in and support communities with.