



Final Evaluation: Executive Summary

Diwan Project “Everyone Gains”

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Introduction

- **Lebanon's population:** 6.9 Million
- 1.5 million Syrian refugees
- **Syrian Refugees:** 1.5 Million
- 76% of Syrian refugees live **below poverty line** (USD 3.84 per day) (2017)
- 1.5 million **vulnerable Lebanese** in need.
- **Unemployment** in Wadi Khaled: 58% (estimated 2017) (LCRP)

Since 2011, 1.5 million Syrians have fled the conflict in Syria to seek refuge in Lebanon (997,905 million registered with UNHCR), including 34,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) and 35,000 Lebanese returnees, in addition to a pre-existing population of more than 277,985 Palestinians refugees residing in Lebanon (PRL).

The country's infrastructure, public services, labour market and healthcare have been drastically impacted as a result of hosting the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. This has further exacerbated the pre-existing development constraints in the

country, with an estimated cost by the end of 2015 of USD 18.15 B. These negative impacts have to a large degree been concentrated in poverty pockets and isolated areas such as Wadi Khaled in northern Lebanon.

Pre-existing challenges in Wadi Khaled included its distance from the capital, its weakened economic profile and high rates of unemployment, special demographics and religious diversity and the evident state of exclusion for women, youth and marginalized groups from the decision-making processes. The Community has had to shoulder the additional burden of hosting a considerable number of Syrian refugees, which now account for half of the community's population and have further strained the limited resources and increased the potential conflicts and disputes. These challenges have contributed to a vicious circle of distrust and tension between the local authorities and the inhabitants of Wadi Khaled (including Syrians).



Those were the entry points and rationales for *Search for Common Ground* (Search) to implement The DIWAN project in Wadi Khaled between 2017 and 2019 with generous funding from the *Global Affairs Canada* (GAC) with the objectives of strengthening equitable and inclusive decision-making processes and ensuring more participatory and representative governance in the community. The project has therefore engaged with representatives from local authorities, youth, women and other marginalized groups to promote the principles of good governance through a series of activities: *Capacity Development, Trust-Building, Subgrants initiatives, establishing Advisory Board, etc.*

Evaluation Findings

The final evaluation was commissioned by Search and conducted in October 2019 with the overall objective to assess the previous phase of the DIWAN project and to identify elements of future interventions, examine the project’s achievements of its intended outcomes and impact(s), and to further investigate key areas of sustainability, effectiveness, and relevance using a mixed method approach as outlined in the Final Evaluation report.

The perspective, realities and needs of inhabitants of Wadi Khaled have been used as a basis for the analysis (of the evaluation report) and information collected and therefore findings developed were to a high degree relevant to improve Search’s implementation.

1. Relevance

The evaluation report concludes that the **overall objectives of the project were highly relevant in meeting the respective needs of the inhabitants of Wadi Khaled and in promoting the principles of good governance**. The political and administrative environment that were often characterized by a “clannish” structure of governance has resulted in non-inclusive and inequitable representation of women, youth, and other marginalized groups in the decision-making processes of outcomes that shape their daily lives. Those needs and priorities were explicitly embedded and reflected in the project design, objectives, indicators and activities implemented (**Capacity development; Roundtable discussions; Trust-building activities; Restitution meetings; Advocacy campaign; Subgrant Initiatives and the establishment of the Advisory Board**) which guided the implementation of these activities and ensured high alignment with priorities of de-escalating tensions, supporting social cohesion and facilitating dialogue with decision-makers. However, the project design did not explicitly discuss or link planned objectives to national policies/agenda. This means the relationship between the intervention and alignment with the national policy objectives (e.g., Lebanon Crisis Response Plan) can only be of a general nature.

2. Effectiveness

The project was found to be largely effective in achieving the planned objectives on outcome level in terms of reducing social tension, promoting inclusivity and representation in local governance and improving the overall collaboration and trust between the citizens and the local authorities of Wadi Khaled through the newly created communication channels and trust-building activities that fostered the principles of good governance.

These positive results are predominantly based on the evaluation’s participants’ perceptions (FGDs and KIIs). This reflects poor design of the evaluation structure which did not allow for a reliable quantitative assessment of the benefits delivered as explained in the evaluation methodology. As such, it has foregone capturing the quantifiable value of the aforementioned results that can facilitate for reliable judgments for the overall main objective of the intervention. However, the report managed to update the indicator table with these results:

- 80% of community members who confirm that they are able to access the decision-makers in their communities (Baseline 60%)
- 61% of community members and representatives who report that they possess skills to effectively play their roles and carry out responsibilities in local governance
- 95% of community members who agree that collaboration between local leaders and their constituents is necessary to facilitate change and to improve access to services (Baseline 75%)
- 74% of women, youth and other marginalised/vulnerable groups who confirm their ability to participate in local decision-making processes (Baseline 31%)
- 24% of women, youth and other marginalised groups who confirm participating in the design and initiation of social actions in their communities in the past 12 months (Baseline 3%)

Furthermore, gender issues were prominently taken into account in the design of the intervention, which had a clear gender focus with clear gender specific measures in indicators and activities delivered despite the contextual challenges pertaining to women’s participation in the public sphere of Wadi Khaled. However, the project lacked a clear vision of how to include persons with disabilities (PWD), who were only addressed to a lesser degree in project design that makes several references to marginalized groups which look inter alia at PWD.

3. Sustainability

The effects of the project’s activities are by nature long-term and so are highly likely to be sustained over time. The intervention successfully brought social changes onto the community in regards to good governance, trust and relationship dynamics and social-cohesion with high level of local ownership through various channels like the Advisory board¹, youth centers, capacity development and roundtable discussions with decision-makers and community members. These results are most likely to sustain given the nature of changes brought as a result of the project’s activities (e.g., change in attitude and knowledge and capacity developed) unless impacted by other factors. However, evaluation findings suggest that continuation of the project is highly recommended to maximize the sustainability of benefits delivered with special emphasis on youth, gender, and on - implicitly stated - livelihoods and having local staff from the community employed by the project.

4. Efficiency

The evaluation determined that the project was to some degree efficient. However, poor selection of implementing partners impacted the timeframe of implementation, adding major delays of two to three months which resulted in amendment of the plan of activities. Furthermore, the evaluation report overlooked the efficiency of subgrants implemented in terms of cost-effectiveness and impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

¹ The Advisory Board: Of selected members of the community ensured accountability and representation of all groups of the community and become a platform to facilitate inclusive governance through open communication channels with the decision-makers

The evaluation outlines specific recommendations as they were evidenced and observed throughout the evaluation process of the project. These are highly important to deepen and maintain the impactful results achieved on social dynamics, participation and trust between local decision-makers and the citizens of Wadi Khaled. These can be summarized in key five areas:

- Add a specific gender component to the project design and activities that are tailored to women needs to maintain and further increase their participation (*From Gender Sensitive to Gender Responsive*).
- Continuation of the Diwan project given that ensuring inclusive-governance requires longer term commitment and support.
- Rethink the partnership’s modality of the project and focus on direct collaboration with local members of the community in the delivery of the project’s outputs. This would enable creating livelihoods opportunities and increase acceptance at the community level.
- Contribute towards the overall developmental aid effectiveness in Wadi Khaled and seek synergy and collaboration with other programmes.
- Shift the project approach of grants towards having contractual agreement with municipalities that includes M&E and reporting to ensure proper management of projects financed by Search in the community. By doing so, Search might split each grant onto installments to be delivered based on performance and good management.