

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND



FINAL EVALUATION

Everyone Gains: Making Governance More Inclusive and Participatory in Northern Lebanon “Diwan Project” Phase II

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CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATION

Search for Common Ground (Search) is the largest dedicated peacebuilding organization operating globally. Since 1982, they have worked to end violent conflict and build healthy, safe, and just societies all over the world. Currently, Search works in 31 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Search’s MISSION is to transform the way the world deals with conflict away from adversarial approaches, and toward cooperative solutions. Search BELIEVES that conflict is inevitable but violence is not; conflict, rather, is a natural result of human diversity. Search commissioned and funded the development of the Final Evaluation for the *Diwan Project’s second phase to a team of external consultants*. Additional report editing and formatting were provided by Search.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CFP	Community Feedback Planning
CGA	Common Ground Approach
ER	Expected Results
ET	Evaluation Team
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IG	Inclusive Governance
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSC	Most Significant Change
PM	Project Management
RTD	Round Table Discussion
Search	Search for Common Ground
SO	Specific Objectives
TH	Town Hall
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
VfM	Value for Money
WAB	Women Advisory Board
YAB	Youth Advisory Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Located on Lebanon’s border with Syria, Wadi Khaled is one of the most impoverished and marginalized areas in the country. Poor governance, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, and illicit trade with Syria over the last decade have all contributed to a rise of extremist ideologies and arms trafficking. Concurrently, Lebanese people's trust in the overall political and government institutions at central and sub-regional levels has dwindled. This erosion reached unprecedented levels in October 2019, when millions of people protested across Lebanon, demanding total change of the political landscape.

To help address these localized and country-wide challenges, Search launched the Diwan Project in March 2017. The project’s second phase began in July 2019 and lasted until September 2021. During this period, the Diwan Project pursued its intended ultimate outcome of: **ensuring governance in Wadi Khaled is inclusive**. The project was founded on a theory of change (ToC) that states: *“If local governance is more inclusive and participatory and local communities collaborate across social divides, then local development will be more sustainable, equitable, and accountable because the full diversity of interests and needs in Wadi Khaled will be represented and taken into account in local development planning and implementation.”* The project aspired to promote trust and collaboration among municipal leaders and citizens and build governance capacities in accountability, inclusivity, and transparency through two specific objectives (SO), each paired to three expected results (ER):

Objective 1:

Improve collaboration between local leaders and their constituents in addressing local needs;

- **ER 1.1:** Local leaders and community members have increased knowledge of the benefits of inclusive governance;
- **ER 1.2:** Local leaders and community members gain skills in participatory governance; and
- **ER 1.3:** Local leaders and community members recognize the value of improved collaboration.

Objective Two:

Increase participation and representation of marginalized groups in particular (e.g. youth and women) in addressing local needs;

- **ER 2.1:** Women, youth and marginalized groups gain skills and knowledge of how to participate in local governance;
- **ER 2.2:** Women, youth and marginalized groups gain skills in community mobilization; and
- **ER 2.3:** Women, youth and marginalized groups are confident in playing an active role in community initiatives.

At the close of the project’s second phase, Search commissioned an independent consultancy team to evaluate the extent to which these objectives were realized and generate insight, learning, and recommendations for the organization and others interested in initiating social change throughout the region. This report details the methodology, findings, and recommendations produced by the team.

Methodology

The final project evaluation was implemented over a timeline of eight weeks. Through its analysis, the evaluation team (ET) sought to inform future program design and assess the overall success and effectiveness of the Diwan Project's second phase. During the evaluation's inception, the ET met with Search and developed its initial understanding of the project. Equipped with this information, the ET assessed potential methodologies for their suitability. The ET collaboratively worked with the Search team and determined a conventional, multimethod approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection would operate most efficiently, given the study's time constraints. To maximize the caliber and validity of findings and data collected, the ET facilitated validation meetings with Search staff before the reporting phase.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study relied on a knowledge, attitude, and behavior model (KAB) which states behavior change is directly affected by an individuals' personal knowledge and attitudes. This approach was used to interpret, qualify, and quantify the project's ToC and identify assumptions and challenges within the theoretical foundation of the Diwan Project. This methodology enabled the ET to showcase the profiles of key project participants through consideration of instances where project interventions deeply affected individuals and significant changes in perception and the practice of inclusive governance occurred.

Data collection took place over two weeks and information was gathered to answer the evaluation's core questions. A combination of: (1) qualitative data collection approaches, including secondary review, context analysis, KIIs, focused interviews, and case studies, (2) a quantitative survey that targeted the project's beneficiaries, and (3) triangulating quantitative project data collected by Search's MEAL team over the life of Phase II were used to collect sufficient data for the ET's assessment purposes.

Data analysis was guided by an evaluation matrix designed based on the OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria. The tool balanced five core criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability, and sustainability. Data collected during the study made use of multiple evaluation tools in order to: (1) overcome the potential influence of biases, (2) ensure the ET's findings were evidence-based, and (3) maintain consistent findings across both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Challenges

The Diwan Project faced serious challenges resulting from country-wide political paralysis, economic and financial meltdown, the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating consequences felt after the Beirut Blast in August 2020, a skyrocketing inflation rate, and continued impact from the unfolding Syrian crisis. These factors created tangible and specific difficulties such as: fuel and gas shortages which affected the project team's mobility and access to Wadi Khaled, security concerns for staff members' personal safety, the need to transition in-person programming to digital platforms, and frequent cuts in electricity interrupting such digital communication. Search was not the only organization to face these challenges, and almost all humanitarian development efforts during 2020 and 2021 were profoundly affected.

Key Findings

Evaluation of the Diwan Project's second phase confirmed it was relevant to Wadi Khaled's regional context, which was characterized by a strong clan structure that cherished patriarchal norms and tribal customs. This socio-political and cultural context was resistant to the development of inclusive governance and equal representation of all community members' voices. Prior to the project's implementation, the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of most local women, youth, and other underprivileged community members were not consistently acknowledged by clan and municipal leaders from Wadi Khaled. **Phase II of the Diwan Project was seen to address the right issues at the right time, given its relevance to country-wide dynamics and momentum created by political uprising. However, the project team was strongly impacted by unpredictable external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant lockdowns, despite its adaptability and mitigation attempts of which proved relevant and effective in many instances.**

On the level of project activities, the evaluation firmly established that **the project's soft component (capacity building) effectively provided opportunities for marginalized groups.** Women, primarily, engaged with these opportunities, as did youth to a lesser extent. Both groups were able to freely express their opinions and participate in meetings related to municipal decision-making. In fact, many project beneficiaries asserted **Phase II broke several social barriers and allowed youth and women who lacked opportunities to gather for discussion a chance to come together and share their opinions.** In these gatherings, participants explored community-related issues and sought collaborative solutions with one another. Participants stated they felt more skilled and were more confident and capable in speaking about their concerns publicly. The evaluation's survey results showed that **91 percent of project beneficiaries considered Phase II of the Diwan Project effective in contributing to increased representation of marginalized groups in addressing local needs.**

The project experienced continuous delays and inefficiencies during its implementation. These delays arose from multifaceted and multi-layered decision-making delays, contextual challenges, significant staff turnover, and lengthy and inefficient procurement processes. Prolonged decision-making and the delayed responsiveness of the project team—resulting from changes in management—contributed to significant delays in project activities, and Phase II's community initiatives in particular.

The project's overall cost per direct beneficiary was calculated off of 313 direct participants. This amount came to 5,560 USD in actual spending and 7,556 USD based on the total budget available. Based on the evaluation's survey results, a majority of surveyed participants stated the project had contributed to long-lasting change (impact) beyond the project's closure, and 83 percent of respondents said governance dynamics between decision-makers and the wider Wadi Khaled community had become more inclusive. Additionally, 81 percent of respondents believed the project's outcomes would likely sustain within the community in the future. Fewer respondents (70 percent) believed Wadi Khaled's decision-making processes had become more inclusive and responsive.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the evaluation concluded outcome advancements are possible alongside the key successes and achievements the project realized. On an overarching level, the ET recommends the adoption of new project management practices, including: early adoption and frequent revision of risk and context analysis assessments, strong transparency and oversight protocols, well-defined processes for the preservation and sharing of institutional knowledge and the transfer of leadership roles, and a heightened focus on the importance of exit strategies and sustainability. To these ends, the following recommendations are made:

Relevance

- Adopt participatory approaches that include project beneficiaries during developmental phases.
- Ensure projects have programmatic components that cater to the specific needs of youth.
- Include more awareness building and knowledge-exchange activities.

Effectiveness and Impact

- Utilize a persistent field office and staff to reduce response-cycle turnaround.
- Scale projects' soft components to include the maximum number of participants.
- Refine the selection criteria for activities with a limited number of beneficiaries.
- Ensure components with complex procurement needs have ample time for implementation.

Efficiency

- Improve internal project management practices and adopt more rigorous hiring procedures.
- Partner with local NGOs that have expertise in specialized fields.

Sustainability

- Embrace and acknowledge project shortcomings openly as a means of facilitating better exit strategies.
- Ensure governance projects have steering committees that include local stakeholders.
- Develop sustainability plans for each activity within a project and introduce project beneficiaries to these documents.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Area Context

Located on Lebanon’s border with Syria, Wadi Khaled is one of the most impoverished and marginalized areas in the country. This border has shaped the area’s relationship with Syria socially, economically, and politically, since its creation in 1943 alongside Lebanon’s independence. Poor governance, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, and illicit trade with Syria over the last decade have all contributed to a rise of extremist ideologies and arms trafficking. Only recently, in March of 2016, was the Wadi Khaled Union of Municipalities created. The new governance entity includes the municipalities of Amayer, Awadeh, Bani Sakher, Farod, Hisheh, Khat El Petrol, Moukaibleh, Rama, and Wadi Khaled Village.

At the point of creation, these newly structured areas lacked the financial, organizational, and human capacities needed to: (1) provide support and services to their communities, and (2) address local tensions and conflicts emerging from the considerable influx of Syrian refugees. In Wadi Khaled, competing clans have maintained their prominent and historical role by placing their members into the newly created governance roles. Through a *quid pro quo* process, these tribal leaders use formal governance structures to extend the influence of their informal clans’ power. This status quo has excluded large segments of the population from decision-making processes, especially women and young people. Because large segments of the population, including youth, are disengaged from their own governance and lack avenues for addressing grievances, heightened potential exists for increased conflict and social repercussions. Many members of the community lacked the ability to voice their concerns or receive equal representation in governance, and Syrian refugees (nearly half the total population), women, youth, persons with disabilities, and stateless residents were chief among these people.

For more than a decade, Lebanese people's trust in the overall political and government institutions at central and sub-regional levels has dwindled. This erosion reached unprecedented levels in October 2019, when millions of people protested in the streets and city centers of the country, demanding total change of the political landscape. Since that time, the economic and financial pressures have escalated, and the Lebanese Lira has devalued to more than 90 percent of its value.¹ Between May 2020 and May 2021, the country experienced a year-on-year inflation of 120 percent. The multifaceted economic and political crisis has dramatically impacted the lives of the Lebanese people, ensnaring them in cyclical poverty, socio-economic stresses, and political exclusion.²

To help address these localized challenges contextualized by country-wide decline, Search launched the Diwan Project in March 2017. Over the course of five years and two phases (2017–2019 and 2019–2021), the Diwan Project strengthened inclusive and participatory forms of local governance in Wadi Khaled. Through its efforts, Search fostered more sustainable, equitable, and accountable governance processes in the region.

¹ The Daily Star Lebanon: Lebanon's inflation in May rises 119 percent year on year; The Daily Star Lebanon (June 23, 2021)

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-emergency-response-plan-2021-2022-august-2021>

Project Overview

Search implemented Phase II of the Diwan Project between July 2019 and September 2021, in pursuit of its intended ultimate outcome: **ensuring governance in Wadi Khaled is inclusive**. The project was founded on a theory of change (ToC) that states: *“If local governance is more inclusive and participatory and local communities collaborate across social divides, then local development will be more sustainable, equitable, and accountable because the full diversity of interests and needs in Wadi Khaled will be represented and taken into account in local development planning and implementation.”* Project activities were designed both to: (1) resolve the challenges associated with citizens’ and municipal leaders’ limited knowledge and (2) facilitate the practice of inclusive governance and accountability procedures lacking in Wadi Khaled. Furthermore, the project aspired to promote trust and collaboration among municipal leaders and citizens and build governance capacities in accountability, inclusivity, and transparency.

The Diwan Project pursued this work through two specific objectives (SO), each paired to three expected results (ER):

Objective 1:

Improve collaboration between local leaders and their constituents in addressing local needs;

- **ER 1.1:** Local leaders and community members have increased knowledge of the benefits of inclusive governance;
- **ER 1.2:** Local leaders and community members gain skills in participatory governance; and
- **ER 1.3:** Local leaders and community members recognize the value of improved collaboration.

Objective Two:

Increase participation and representation of marginalized groups in particular (e.g. youth and women) in addressing local needs;

- **ER 2.1:** Women, youth and marginalized groups gain skills and knowledge of how to participate in local governance;
- **ER 2.2:** Women, youth and marginalized groups gain skills in community mobilization; and
- **ER 2.3:** Women, youth and marginalized groups are confident in playing an active role in community initiatives.

At the close of the project’s second phase, Search commissioned an independent consultancy team to evaluate the extent to which these objectives were realized and generate insight, learning, and recommendations for the organization and others interested in initiating social change throughout the region. This report details the methodology, findings, and recommendations produced by the team.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The final project evaluation was implemented over a timeline of eight weeks. Through analysis, the team sought to inform future program design and assess the overall success and effectiveness of the Diwan Project’s second phase. As detailed in the Terms of Reference (Annex 1), the final evaluation planned to:

- Assess the intended and the unintended outcomes—whether positive or negative—of the project and determine Search’s contribution to identified changes;
- Identify the project’s achievements based on its logframe and report against its indicators;
- Assess the project’s overall adaptability, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability effects as envisioned through its ToC; and
- Capture good practices, compile lessons learned throughout the lifespan of the project, and draw forward-looking recommendations to inform future program design in a similar context.

The study’s foundational terms also placed emphasis on the project’s gender lens and necessitated gender dynamics be addressed when considering women and youths’ access to rights, services, and decision-making processes alongside municipal and local leaders. In order to satisfy these conditions, the ET developed a five step process:

Figure 1: Evaluation Approach and Process



During the evaluation’s inception phase, the ET met with Search and developed its initial understanding of the project. Equipped with this information, the ET assessed potential methodologies for their suitability. While the ToR requested an Outcome Harvesting approach, the ET collaboratively worked with the Search team and determined a conventional, multimethod approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection would operate most efficiently, given the study’s time constraints. To maximize the caliber and validity of findings and data collected, the ET facilitated validation meetings with Search staff before the reporting phase.

The study’s narrow data collection window was the result of a ten week contracting and procurement process preceding the study’s inception phase, and initial delays related to the development of the study’s database. In addition, the theoretical underpinnings of the study relied on a KAB which states behavior change is directly affected by an individuals’ personal knowledge and attitudes. This approach was used to interpret, qualify, and quantify the project’s ToC and identify assumptions and challenges within the theoretical foundation of the Diwan Project.

Data Collection

The ET’s evaluation utilized a multimethod approach backed by rigorous theoretical models. Data collection took place over two weeks and information was gathered to answer the evaluation’s core questions. A combination of: (1) qualitative data collection approaches, context analysis, KIIs, focused interviews, and case studies, (2) a quantitative survey that targeted the project’s beneficiaries, and (3) triangulating quantitative project data collected by Search’s MEAL team over the life of Phase II and Phase I’s final evaluation were used to collect sufficient data for the ET’s assessment purposes.

KIIs and Focused Interviews

The primary qualitative data utilized by the ET was gathered over a period of two weeks through KIIs, and focused interviews with the project's core participants and project staff. Originally, the ET planned to host a series of FGDs to bolster data collection, however, conflicting schedules, time constraints, and the preference of project participants led to the substitution of focused interviews in their place. Representatives from the project’s three chief beneficiary groups—namely the Woman’s Advisory Board (WAB), the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), and municipal leaders—participated in these data collection activities:

Table 1: Consulted Project Participants

Participant	KIIs	Focused Interviews	Notes
Municipal Leaders	7		
Women	10		In place of the originally planned FGDs, a combination of KIIs and case studies were conducted with members of the WAB and other women from the community
Youth		8	In place of the originally planned FGDs, focused interviews were conducted with members of the YAB and other youth from the community

Five members of the WAB, four members of YAB, and seven municipal leaders were consulted. The ET accounted for geographic distribution and ensured participants were drawn from all eight municipalities that participated in the project’s second phase. Other women and youth who were consulted by the ET were selected based on their engagement in project activities. The nationality of participants was not considered a key factor for assessment and was not accounted for. Consultation protocols utilized by the ET are annexed within this report (Annex 2). Unexpected challenges related to the ET’s transportation (roadblocks, prohibitive fuel prices, etc.) resulted in the team using a combination of face-to-face, phone, and app-based (i.e. WhatsApp) communication to conduct data collection activities.

The Search staff members who took part in data collection activities included:

Table 2: Search Project Staff Consulted

Name	Role
Khaled Yamout	Former Program Director
Reem Hmayssi	Project Coordinator
Malake Masri	Field Reporting Officer
Mohamad Haj Ali	Project Coordinator-Support
Roukaya al Jassem	Field Assistant
Sultan Ghaddar	Logistics and Procurement Manager
Maxwell Saungweme	Country Director
Chantal Tayyar	MEAL Manager
Sara Rida	MEAL Coordinator

Quantitative Survey

A quantitative survey that served as a complimentary data source was developed in consultation with Search’s MEAL team. Information gathered through the survey helped triangulate instances of significant change identified elsewhere in the evaluation and support development of the final report. Similarly, the survey itself benefited from triangulation, as the ET’s tool collected individuals’ direct perceptions which may have been influenced by forms of bias (e.g. social desirability, conformity, or acquiescing bias). The survey questionnaire utilized by the ET is annexed within this report (Annex 3). Implementation of the survey was managed via phone calls with the support of four enumerators, and data was collected via KoBo Toolkit.

Data Analysis and Sampling

Data analysis was guided by an evaluation matrix (Annex 4) based on criteria created by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee. The tool balanced five core criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability, and sustainability. Data collected during the study made use of multiple evaluation tools in order to: (1) overcome the potential influence of biases, (2) ensure the ET’s findings were evidence-based, and (3) maintain consistent findings across both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Preliminary findings analyzed through this lens were shared and validated with members of Search’s management and MEAL team during a validation workshop held on 4 November 2021. Overall, information shared during the workshop was well received, and additional feedback provided by Search was integrated into the final report.

Survey Sampling

Within the evaluation’s narrow data collection window, the ET initially targeted a representative and realistic sample size of 150 unique project participants and beneficiaries, accounting for a 6 percent

margin of error with a 95 percent confidence interval. The study’s sample was drawn from the full database of beneficiaries provided by Search, which mapped project participants through: the activities they participated in, their gender, and the social grouping they belonged to (i.e. municipal leaders, women, youth, community members, clan leaders, and members of the WAB and YAB). Stratified sampling of these groups led the ET to evenly survey almost half of the total beneficiaries listed in Search’s database, as detailed in the table below:

Table 3: Total Number and Sample Size of Project Beneficiaries

Group	Sample Size	Total Number of Project Beneficiaries	Percentage of all Beneficiaries
Municipal Leaders	25	52	17%
Women	59	122	39%
Youth	52	108	35%
Community and Clan Members	14	31	10%
Total	150	313	100%

Overall, the survey had a response rate of 69, with 104 questionnaires successfully collected.

Table 4: Survey Respondents by Beneficiary Group

Stakeholders/ partners	Sample Size	Total	Percent
Community	14	11	11%
Municipality leaders	25	13	13%
Women	59	30	29%
Youth	52	50	48%
Total	150	104	69%

Ethics and Quality Control

The following ethical considerations were taken into account throughout all phases of the evaluation:

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Data collection took place based on voluntary participation and the informed consent of the participants. The ET ensured all respondents agreed to participate after they were informed of the following:

- The purpose of the interview and research;
- The right to withdraw consent at any time during, or after, the interview or survey;
- The right to not answer any questions for any reason;
- All works resulting from their participation would not contain any identifying information;
- The right to ask any questions before, during, and after interviews; and
- The right to information in clear, easy to understand language.

Data Security

Data collected was anonymized for the analysis and no information that could be used to identify respondents was used after the study’s initial coding. All files and data transferred from the field were encrypted and password protected when shared electronically.

Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm

The ET ensured participant anonymity and did not attribute any quotes or personal data to a specific individual. Additionally, data collection processes adopted a “Do No Harm” process and strove to minimize any inadvertent harm that could potentially arise through the data collection and evaluation processes. All questions and communication with participants were checked for cultural appropriateness, especially when translated from English to Arabic.

Data Quality Assurance and Management

Quality assurance was a critical component of the evaluation and was overseen by the ET’s senior consultant. Data sources were ensured to be valid and the team’s analysis included fact-checking, triangulation, and substantiation of all findings reported or identified.

Risks and Mitigation Measures

Over the course of both project phases, Lebanon’s political, economic, and social situation worsened. The Diwan Project operated within a complex context of socio-economic difficulties, political instability, and the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. These same challenges were present during the evaluation process and affected its course of action. A detailed list of core risks experienced by the ET and the steps taken to mitigate their impact on the evaluation are presented below:

Table 5: Evaluation Risks and Mitigation Measures

Risks	Mitigations
Reduced access to Wadi Khaled resulting from: fuel shortages, roadblocks along the road to Al-Wadi, and sporadic instances of social unrest and armed tensions	Utilization of both virtual and in-person data collection. In instances where FGDs could not be conducted, focused interviews were substituted
Difficulty convening participants for FGDs and other MSC-related activities resulting from: normalized and frequent electricity blackouts preventing online communication, unstable internet and mobile connections, and a general frustration of participants regarding the state of the country	MSC-related activities utilize in-depth case studies as a realistic, efficient, and suitable means of data collection. This approach draws increased value from conversations that weren’t interrupted or took place in-person
Validating budget data’s accuracy and reliability, as project budgets and continuing costs from Phase I and II weren’t fully separated	Involve the project team immediately to discuss and validate data collaboratively.

	Triangulate budget information with secondary data and project reports
Potential influences that could skew participants' feedback on the survey, including: forms of social desirability, conformity, and acquiescence bias	Triangulate data with other data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, in order to overcome the influence of potential biases
Difficulty determining evaluability of the project outcomes resulting from significant delays in project implementation	Measure respective indicators along with their related questions and people's perceptions regarding expected change Triangulate the evaluation's findings with data from additional sources
Project staff unavailable for consultation resulting from their commitment to new projects following the close of the Diwan Project at the end of September	Coordinate with Search's MEAL Staff to conduct initial communication with the core project team and project beneficiaries
Similar difficulty reaching out to FGD participants and other project beneficiaries following the close of the project	If accessibility remains an issue, conduct focused phone interviews and retrieve beneficiary data immediately

FINDINGS

Adaptability of the Project Interventions

The Diwan Project faced serious challenges resulting from country-wide political paralysis, economic and financial meltdown, the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating consequences felt after the Beirut Blast in August 2020, a skyrocketing inflation rate, and continued impact from the unfolding Syrian crisis. These factors created tangible and specific difficulties such as: fuel and gas shortages which affected the project team's mobility and access to Wadi Khaled, security concerns for staff members' personal safety, the need to transition in-person programming to digital platforms, and frequent cuts in electricity interrupting such digital communication. Search was not the only organization to face these challenges, and almost all humanitarian development efforts during 2020 and 2021 were profoundly affected.

All key evaluation informants recognized COVID-19's negative impact on the implementation of Phase II. While the project was able to adapt its programming and made use of various digital and online technologies, participants stated that advancements in participatory decision-making processes were limited by a lack of face-to-face interaction. Participants' skepticism of virtual activities and their initially insufficient capacities highlighted the necessity of on-the-ground activities for future efforts. Notably, some municipal members chose not to participate in online RTDs. In underdeveloped regions such as Wadi Khaled, direct communication and relationship building is still the primary social model for interpersonal development.

Search did implement technology training alongside its online adaptations and built the computer skills of participants. This change of plans had a positive effect on women’s inclusion in project activities, and improved accommodations for those unable to leave their homes due to specific needs (e.g. social norms, the provision of childcare, etc.). Overall, the disruption of Phase II caused by the pandemic shed light on the project’s fragility. While some activities were able to adapt to alternative forms of implementation, Search’s planned—and admittedly relevant—goals of increased interpersonal engagement between local leaders and minority groups suffered.

Relevance of the Project Interventions

Evaluation of the Diwan Project’s second phase confirmed it was relevant to Wadi Khaled’s regional context, which was characterized by a strong clan structure that cherished patriarchal norms and tribal customs. This socio-political and cultural context was resistant to the development of inclusive governance and equal representation of all community members’ voices. Prior to the project’s implementation, the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of most local women, youth, and other underprivileged community members were not consistently acknowledged by clan and municipal leaders from Wadi Khaled. Thus, leaders did not value or leverage participatory or inclusive approaches to governance, nor did they consult their local communities when making decisions.

Phase II of the Diwan Project built upon advancements made during Phase I, which was implemented between 2017 and 2019. This phase was designed to improve community participation in local governance, with particular attention given to improving the active role of marginalized groups in decision-making processes and fostering collaborative relationships between local leaders and their constituents. During October 2019, which coincided with the beginning of the project’s second phase, Lebanon experienced a political uprising that served as an impetus for communities across the country to strongly express their opinions and voice their demands for inclusion in governance mechanisms. Hence, **Phase II of the Diwan Project was seen to address the right issues at the right time, given its relevance to country-wide dynamics and momentum created by political uprising. However, the project’s interventions were found to be minimalist and the project team was not prepared for unpredictable external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant lockdowns.** The project’s implementation was severely disrupted and hampered by contextual challenges.

The evaluation noted skepticism and mistrust between community members and decision-makers in Wadi Khaled was amplified by the October 2019 uprising. Community members considered decision-makers—municipal and clan leaders—to be corrupt, inefficient, and focused on self-interest over the needs of the community. This may partially be explained by municipal leaders’ authority being contingent on larger financial and institutional structures that are inattentive to the voices of marginalized groups. Historically, these groups have not been able to gain active roles in local governance because they lack skills and experience in advocacy, leadership, and community mobilization, and are sidelined by the aforementioned patriarchal norms.

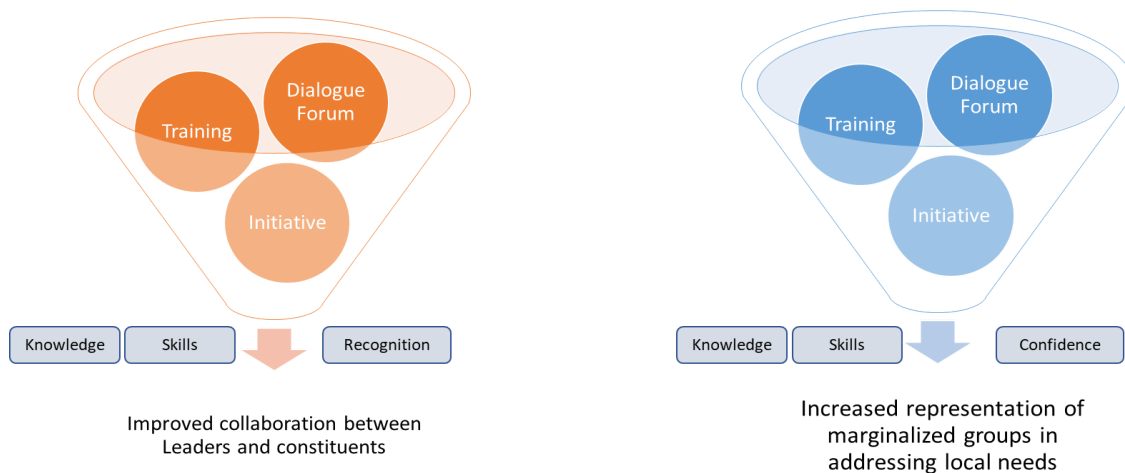
Project Design

Evaluation of the project established that its scope of influence was built on the premise of a linear ToC, one which believed that local development would be sustainable and equitable if local governance became more participatory and local communities collaborated across social divides. This theory assumed that: (1) Wadi Khaled’s traditional clan-structured system dominated inter-communal relations, and (2) local leaders’ basic understanding of governance prevented municipalities from both effectively addressing tensions and promoting social change in the region. **Such premises are believed to be too narrow, given the myriad of challenges faced by local communities** in Lebanon generally, and Wadi Khaled in particular. Lack of inclusive governance is multi-faceted and multi-layered, and is often associated with many levels of political and administrative processes and structures. Citizens’ lack of trust in representation; the insufficient capacity of political structures; limited resources of local municipalities; weak political, administrative and social accountability mechanisms; and corruption at all levels of governance intertwine and create imbalanced power dynamics between leaders and representatives, especially within tribal and clan-influenced structures. While the Diwan Project did address some of these challenges, its focus on individual capacity building did not fully address root causes of structural concern. Nevertheless, given necessary constraints and a limited implementation window, the project did conduct effective activities that addressed some of the complex contextual factors that influence inclusive governance within Wadi Khaled.

As elaborated in Phase II’s SOs and ERs, the project was designed to:

- Build knowledge (and recognize value);
- Enhance the skills and capacity of targeted municipal leaders and marginalized groups; and
- Provide participants with opportunities to put these new skills and knowledge into practice through small grant initiatives that aimed to improve community relationships, enhance collaboration, and increase the representation of marginalized groups.

Figure 2: Illustration of Phase II’s Project Propositions



Project Aims and Activities

The evaluation found Phase II was relevant in fulfilling project aims to: improve collaboration between local leaders and their constituents, and increase the representation of marginalized groups in addressing local needs. Conversely, **the evaluation challenged the project model’s relevance** on three main levels:

- a) **Relevance to context:** A legacy of challenges resulting from mismanagement and skewed perceptions that arose during Phase I of the project carried over and influenced implementation of Phase II. Many project beneficiaries, particularly women and youth, highlighted how insufficient follow-up and sustainability measures negatively affected Phase I’s project activities in Khat Petrol, Al-Fard, and Al-rama. Additionally, community members retained their mistrust of municipal officials over alleged misuses of public funds during the project’s first phase;
- b) **Relevance to beneficiaries:** Many local and municipal leaders were not fully committed to the project’s capacity building activities, which influenced their participation; and
- c) **Relevance over time:** The project’s anticipated outcomes in increased collaboration and representation likely required a longer frame of implementation to materialize. Members of the WAB stated advancements made in participants’ knowledge of local governance structures and opportunities for their voicing concerns were not sufficient enough to fully influence municipal decision-making processes. While progress was made, some community members felt they did not always have the ability to affect local decisions, and stated more time and progress would need to pass to manifest such change.

On the level of project activities, the evaluation firmly established that **the project’s soft component (capacity building) effectively provided opportunities for marginalized groups**. Women, primarily, engaged with these opportunities, as did youth to a lesser extent. Both groups were able to freely express their opinions and participate in meetings related to municipal decision-making. In fact, many project beneficiaries asserted **Phase II broke several social barriers and allowed youth and women who lacked opportunities to gather for discussion a chance to come together and share their opinions**. In these gatherings, participants explored community-related issues and sought collaborative solutions with one another. Participants stated they felt more skilled and were more confident and capable in speaking about their concerns publicly.

The hard component of the project, which took the form of 15 community initiatives, was perceived by participants as both crucial and responsive to the needs of their respective communities. However, due to delays, implementation of these initiatives was rushed, some were not implemented (the project originally planned for 28 initiatives), and initiatives’ potential for effectively addressing inter-communal challenges and promoting inter-municipal collaboration—a cornerstone in the project—was diminished.

Project Beneficiaries and Representative Inclusion

In terms of beneficiaries, the project reached out to 313 individuals, with even representation from women and men. Youth and women made up more than two-thirds of the project’s participants. Municipal leaders (17 percent) and clan representatives (three percent) were also represented, albeit to

a lesser extent. The vast majority of beneficiaries were Lebanese (96 percent), despite a high influx of Syrian refugees to Wadi Khaled over recent years. Information regarding individuals with disabilities participation was limited, and only one individual was clearly identified as a project beneficiary.

The project’s core beneficiaries—those who were the primary targets of a majority of project interventions—included: the nine member WAB, the six member YAB, and a group of nine municipal leaders that represented nine municipalities from across Wadi Khalid. Overall, the evaluation found **the project’s inclusion of a diverse set of stakeholders and beneficiaries was necessary, relevant, and sufficient** for achieving its SOs and improving community relationships, enhancing collaboration, and increasing the representation of marginalized groups. While the project successfully engaged the traditionally marginalized groups of youth and women, it did not mobilize or provide particular attention for emerging minorities, such as Syrian refugees, or other historically underrepresented groups, such as those with physical or mental disabilities.

Table 6: Demographic Profiling of Phase II’s Project Beneficiaries

Profile	Demographic	Number of Beneficiaries	Percentage Representation
Gender	Male	158	50%
	Female	155	50%
Nationality	Syrian	13	4%
	Lebanese	300	96%
Groups	Municipal leaders	52	17%
	Women	122	39%
	Youth	108	35%
	Community members	21	7%
	Clan leaders	10	3%

Generally, **the evaluation could not establish if Phase II was relevant in addressing community power dynamics and imbalances between clan leaders and minority groups, as originally planned.** The project lacked representation from tribal and clan leadership throughout its interventions, which limited minority groups’ engagement with these bodies. Additionally, there was no indication of whether or not leaders from these power-vested groups participated in any of the project’s capacity building activities. Direct engagement with clan leadership only took place when: (1) 10 leaders were consulted in focused interviews held early on in Phase II’s development, and (2) two leaders participated in community feedback planning sessions (CFP). While the participation of municipal leaders with tribal connections was present within the project, the overall relevance of Phase II’s activities was because of the limited participation of extra-governmental leaders.

Relatedly, little evidence exists regarding the project’s ability to build bridges between municipal authorities and their constituents. Members of the WAB identified the binding clan system of Wadi Khaled as a key concern the project could neither fully address nor unpack. Some women interviewed believed the project could have devised different, more relevant approaches to promote the engagement of clans leaders, support collective decision making and avoid communal disputes.

Effectiveness of the Project Interventions

The evaluation confirms that the project was relatively effective in delivering its outputs, a necessary step in achieving Phase II's outcomes of, "improving the collaboration between local leaders and their constituents in addressing local needs," and "increasing the representation of marginalized groups in addressing local needs." While the evaluation confirms the project's usefulness and effectiveness in executing its planned soft components, it could not confirm whether or not the project's outcomes have or will manifest. Only a short time has passed since the project delivery closed and the Diwan Project's outcomes are innately long-term goals. What is known and what the evaluation established was that the project continued to cultivate a basis for advancing dialogue and challenging current governance structure to make them more inclusive. Women and youth were eager to engage in decision-making processes and were more receptive to the pursuit of inclusive governance concepts than current local leaders.

Specifically, the project's soft components were effective in raising municipal recognition of the value of improved collaboration and inclusive governance, and piloting these approaches within community initiatives. There were clear signs pointing towards the project's effectiveness in building the confidence of often marginalized youth and women, growing individuals' understanding and capacity to engage in community mobilization, and an increase in individuals' pursuit of more active community roles. However, the ET could not establish whether the knowledge and skills participants gained would affect or influence the ways municipal and clan leaders manage community needs.

This section of the report details the project's activities, its aforementioned outcomes, and two ERs in turn, to take stock of what Search did and did not achieve. A summary of this assessment is represented by the project's logframe (Annex 6).

Project Activities

The evaluation summarizes the project's soft components into two categories: capacity supportive trainings, and dialogue and discussion forums. Assessment of the project's training component revealed that Phase II simultaneously implemented both sets of its capacity-development interventions in order to support municipal leaders, women, and youths' growth in concert. Modules and training packages were tailored for each of these core groups and their sessions covered a number of topics (Table 7). Alongside these trainings, Search facilitated joint consultation and reflection sessions on Phase I that drew out lessons learned within the community and collectively discussed development plans for Phase II's community initiatives (Table 8).

The capacity building and training component of Phase II was selective and focused its efforts on the core project beneficiaries, namely: municipal leaders, women, and youth. Sessions were delivered both online and in-person in response to wider contextual needs of the community (i.e. the pandemic), sometimes with significant interruptions. The following training sessions were held in-person: two three-day Common Ground Approach (CGA) sessions, a four-day Communication Outreach session, a two-day Leadership Training session, and a two-day training on Inclusive Governance (IG) and Project

Management (PM). The three training sessions conducted online included: a three-day training on Women’s Empowerment, a three-day Gender Sensitivity training, and the three-day MenEngage Training.

Table 7: Distribution of Phase II’s Training Activities

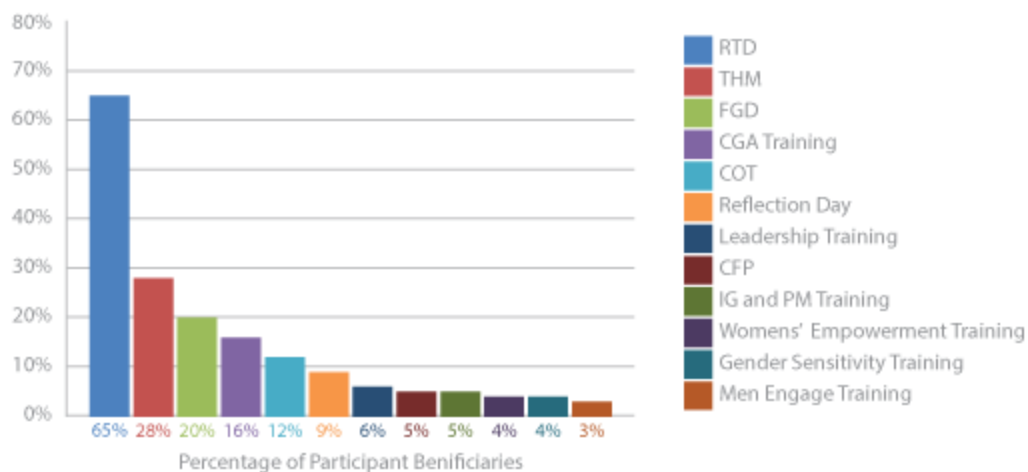
Training Topic	Number of Beneficiaries	Percent of Total Beneficiaries	Intervention Description	Participant Groups
CGA	47	16%	(January 2020 and May 2021) Three sessions held over three days each	Separate groups
Men Engage	9	3%	(March 2021) Convened online	Municipal leaders
IG and PM	16	5%	(May 2021) A one-day training package	Municipal leaders
Communication Outreach	37	12%	(May 2021) One four-day training package	Youth and women
Leadership	20	6%	(July 2020) One three-day training package held in in Beirut	Youth and women
Gender Sensitivity	11	4%	(April 2021) One three-day training package conducted online	Youth and women
Women Empowerment	13	4%	(April 2021) One three-day training package held online	Women

In total, 45 Roundtable Discussions (RTDs), 36 Town Hall Meetings (THMs), and a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Community Feedback Planning Sessions (CFPs) and two Reflection Sessions were held. These consultation and dialogue sessions attracted the bulk of the project’s participants.

Table 8: Distribution of Phase II’s Dialogue Sessions

Intervention	Number of Beneficiaries	Percent of Total Beneficiaries	Intervention Description	Participant Groups
FGD	64	20%	(October 2020) Five FGDs held for each of the project’s constituent groups	Mixed (i.e. municipal leaders, youth and women)
CFP	18	5%	(December 2019) One session held to plan for the Canadian Ambassador’s visit	Mixed
Reflection Sessions	27	9%	(January 2021) Three sessions held that convened participants from nine villages	Mixed
RTDs	204	65%	(Jan–July 2020) 36 sessions held online (Apr 2020–Feb 2021) 36 sessions held online	Separate groups
THMs	85	28%	(Oct–Dec 2020) 13 sessions were convened (Jan–Feb 2021) 8 sessions were convened (Aug–Sept 2021) 15 sessions were convened	Mixed

Figure 3: Distribution of Phase II’s Participant Beneficiaries by Activity



Improving Local Leaders’ and Constituents’ Collaboration in Addressing Local Needs

“This project shed light on the importance of inclusive governance and broke barriers when it comes to us meeting together.”

— Women Beneficiary

After the close of the project, a majority of women and youth surveyed during the final evaluation (79 percent) confirmed they were not consulted about community needs by local leaders over the past two years. This time frame overlaps Phase II itself, meaning the data may be more indicative of historical trends than the impact of the Diwan Project itself. Encouragingly, 57 percent of the project’s beneficiaries observed some form of change in local leaders’ approach to governance, either through more inclusive action or more direct fulfillment of their duties. In total, a third of the project’s participants expressed satisfaction when seeking services from their local municipality, while 55 percent voiced dissatisfaction (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Participants’ Satisfaction with the Provision of Municipal Services



When asked of these varied levels of satisfaction with—and perceived change of—municipal leaders, leaders themselves viewed people as having unrealistic expectations about what municipalities could provide or perform, given the limits of their resources and capacity along with devastating country-wide economic conditions. Nevertheless, levels of collaboration between municipal leaders and their constituents have improved, as stated by women, youth, and municipal leaders alike. Some individuals asserted real, meaningful collaboration had not yet been achieved:

“The project did not change the extent of collaboration at all. They are still the same. They don’t like to take orders from anyone, not an NGO, not the community.”

— WAB member

In addition to a change in local leaders’ behavior, improved collaboration required the advancement of women’s place within Wadi Khaled’s society. Many women participants praised the project in this regard and stated the Diwan Project enabled them to express their opinions and participate in several meetings related to municipal affairs when Search was present, an opportunity never afforded to them in the past. The evaluation could not confirm, however, if similar, multi-stakeholder meetings had been convened organically by municipal leaders outside of the Diwan Project. This lack of continued interaction raises concern about the effectiveness of the project in achieving its intended outcomes.

In order to further develop municipal leaders’ understanding of collaboration, Search also facilitated an exchange visit to Minyara, a municipality in Akkar. The town faces similar challenges to those found in Wadi Khaled and has found ways to run a successful municipal government.

“Search’s pioneered an approach that created collaboration between active community members and the municipality.”

— Municipal Member

The visit took place during the last month of the project’s implementation, during August 2021. While the visit provided municipal leaders with insight into another town’s effective use of inclusive governance practices and helped develop their personal understanding of inclusivity’s importance, the activity did not have any follow up. Inability to host the project’s four initially planned exchange visits likely stands as a lost opportunity to leverage the event and provide further impact for project beneficiaries.

Overall, in terms of improving collaboration between local leaders and their constituents in addressing local needs, **more than half of the project’s beneficiaries (54 percent) believed that community members in Wadi Khaled were able to influence the decisions of local municipal leaders.**

Increasing Representation of Marginalized Groups in Addressing Local Needs

The evaluation’s survey results showed that **91 percent of project beneficiaries considered Phase II of the Diwan Project effective in contributing to increased representation of marginalized groups in addressing local needs.** This data was further confirmed by a series of consultations in which women beneficiaries stated the WAB provided high levels of women’s representation in addressing local needs. Women from Wadi Khaled believed the WAB gave them a level of status and recognition they needed and allowed them to have a unified public voice that could participate in consultations and speak openly. Participants of the WAB said their collective voice led to better recognition from municipal leaders and the community at large.

“The Board made us feel represented, it gave us a voice.”
— WAB member

Establishment of the WAB was a critical achievement of the project that empowered an often-marginalized group of the community. Only four WAB meetings were convened over Phase II due to implementation delays caused by contextual challenges. Regardless, the meetings held were perceived as useful and beneficial by participants, and members discussed the board’s role, its mandate, and plans for internal organization. Women in the group were keen to self-organize and assume an oversight role for Phase II’s activities. Although recognition of the board was limited with municipal leaders, the board did report engagement in consultation meetings convened by Search.

Table 9: Distribution of Phase II’s Advisory Board Meetings

Group	Number of Beneficiaries	Percent of Total Beneficiaries	Intervention Description	Participant Groups
WAB	9	3%	(July and Nov 2020, and June and July 2021) Four meetings convened	Women
YAB	6	2%	(July 2020) One meeting was convened	Youth

The positive experiences of women in the WAB contrast those experienced by the project’s youth board. The YAB was not planned in the project’s original design and was developed to mitigate emergent contextual challenges. Specifically, the board was created to resolve mismatched expectations and quell the hostility of youth who participated in Phase I and expected Phase II to implement a similar structure of service remuneration or payments for service they had previously experienced. This *ad hoc* form of development likely explains why the board only held a single meeting in July 2020. Despite these challenges, youth who sat on the board stated they benefited from the training they received and engaged intermittently in with other project activities.

“Despite the challenges we faced with this project, we cannot deny all the skills and knowledge we acquired during the roundtable sessions and our discussions with the WAB.”
— YAB member

While the advisory boards provided clear benefit for their constituent members, their effect on the wider base of community beneficiaries is uncertain. In total, 46 percent of survey respondents stated they did not know of either an advisory board or a committee that oversaw operations and activities within their communities during Phase II. While 27 percent of respondents did know of the advisory boards, only half of these individuals (13 percent) stated the boards had facilitated communication between community members and the municipalities.

A Story of Change from a Member of the WAB

***“Diwan was a window of opportunity to explore the other side of me
the side of a potential community leader...”***

One member of the WAB spoke at length about how Phase II of the Diwan Project built bridges between municipal leaders and community members:

“This is evident to me as I observed increased participation in Diwan among women and other community groups, despite the challenges... Each group of people brings different perspectives and had a different role to play—this has become clearer... I feel our representation as marginalized groups and our awareness about inclusive governance has enhanced... I feel the training and meetings conducted in this project have connected us all together like a web.

“I realized I am now more confident and comfortable sharing my opinions with peers and family members thanks to the knowledge and skills I acquired about inclusive governance during project activities... I am, like many of my peers, able to pinpoint issues and look for alternative solutions.

“I am from Wadi Khalid and I totally understand the cultural barriers and social fabrics in the areas. I will not approach the notion of inclusive governance with a rebellious spirit, but rather through a spirit focused on reform, respect and inclusiveness... I respect the tribal system. It is our way of organizing ourselves and leading our lives. It is the system all the community members respect and do not aim to ignore... It is important that we work around this system in a constructive manner, in other words, see how this already established system can be enhanced and become conducive to inclusive governance.

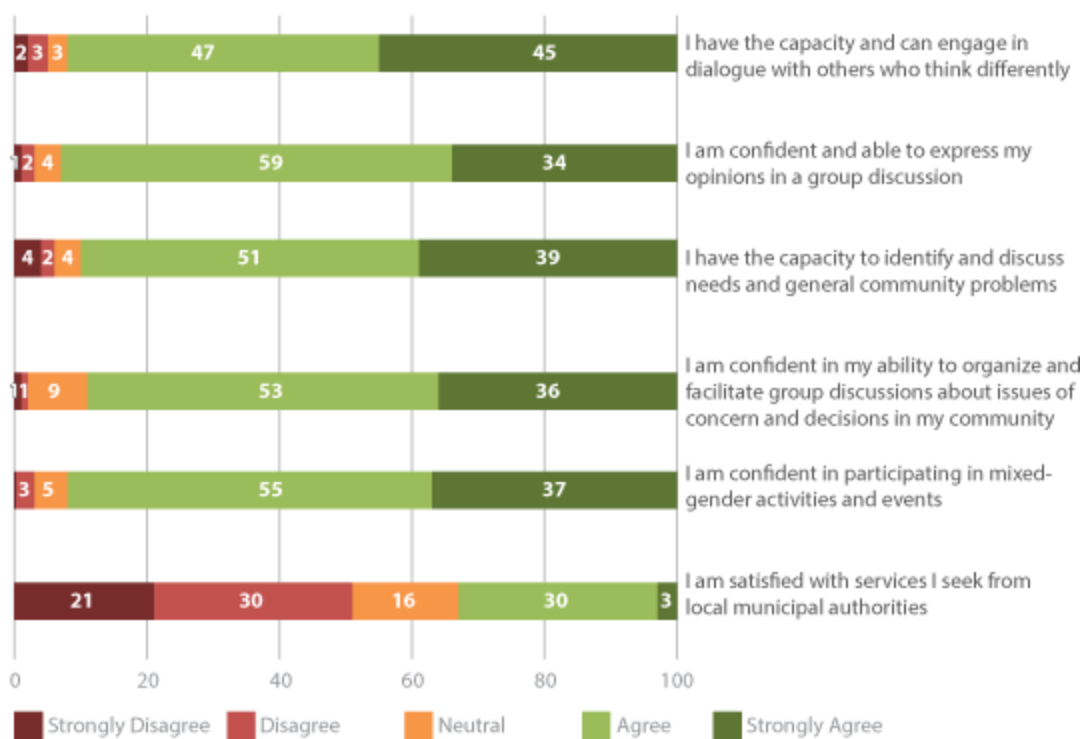
“I personally have the energy and willingness to keep this going, but we need to make sure everyone involved feels the same... It is very important to have the board [WAB] because we need influential people to carry our causes and voices and have an impact on the community... members are very motivated to continue supporting similar projects but are still in need of support. More training sessions are needed for the board members and the trainers will need to carefully assess who the most suitable members are based on their participation and commitment.

Gaining Skills and Knowledge of Participation in Local Governance

The project proved to be effective in building the knowledge, skills, and capacities of women and youth, and empowered them through the implementation of community initiatives. A majority of these project beneficiaries believed that Phase II of the Diwan Project enhanced their skills in participatory governance. Furthermore, participants gained the knowledge necessary to implement community projects and suggest initiatives to local leaders, and became more aware of the resources and personnel needed for such efforts.

These findings confirm the value of the Diwan Project’s soft components were well recognized by women and youth, and were seen as effective in building their understanding, skills, and capacity to engage with and mobilize their communities. These facts were further reflected in the evaluation’s survey, and a majority of these participants stated they had built confidence in expressing themselves, and had gained the capacity needed to discuss local needs and engage in dialogue with other stakeholders on local priorities. In total, 92 percent of the project’s women and youth had the capacity needed to engage in dialogue with others who think differently from themselves and hold the requisite confidence for participating in mixed-gender activities. Similarly: 93 percent of participants were able to express their opinions in group discussions, 90 percent could identify needs and discuss general community problems, and 89 percent had gained confidence in their ability to organize and facilitate group discussion about community issues (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Survey Results on the Confidence and Capacity of Project Beneficiaries



These positive developments occurred despite the fact that the project’s capacity building components had a narrow implementation window near the end of the project and targeted relatively few numbers of women and youth. The project’s successful capacity-development activities may well have lost their full potential for impact because they failed to maximize their participant audience. Only a few members of the WAB and YAB were able to attend the trainings offered during Phase II. Impact of the project’s soft components would also have benefited from a longer and more flexible implementation timeline. Had participants been able to exercise their newly acquired skills and engage in feedback processes, complementary activities and further training could have bolstered their impact.

Alongside the advancements and challenges experienced by women and youth in the development of their capacities, the project team also worked with municipal leaders to improve their understanding of participatory governance and project management. Leaders were provided with two sets of capacity building sessions, including: (1) a MenEngage training conducted online for nine municipal representatives in March 2021, and (2) IG and PM training held over a two-day training period for 16 municipal representatives in May 2021. Participants who attended the sessions confirmed their usefulness and attested to their building of new knowledge. Additionally, municipal leaders stated their facilitators were engaging and effective. Nevertheless, the overall impact of these training sessions were limited by the same key factors that affected women and youth: late-term implementation and limited participation. Despite contextual challenges, had the project team been able to allocate more time and resources to the acquisition of new knowledge, municipal leaders would have been able to better process, contextualize, apply, and reinforce their learning. Practical knowledge of IG and PM would both have benefited greatly from such an approach.

In addition to all these capacity-development activities, Phase II convened a series of 45 RTDs and 36 THMs. Five FGDs were also held in November 2019 for each of the project’s beneficiary groups—women, youth, municipal leaders, tribal representatives, and community members—to reflect on the successes, significant changes, and failures of Phase I. During the RTDs and THMs, citizens and other stakeholders received updates on the status of their respective municipality’s projects, and reviewed technical project components (i.e. bills of quantity and supply lists) as an added measure of projects’ community accountability. However, given the meetings’ low rate of engagement—an average of four attendees per meeting—the extent to which these objectives were achieved is uncertain. Improved planning, communication, and coordination of the THMs and RTDs may have produced higher levels of engagement and facilitated opportunities for the project’s beneficiaries to practice and leverage their newly acquired capacities in participatory governance and program development.

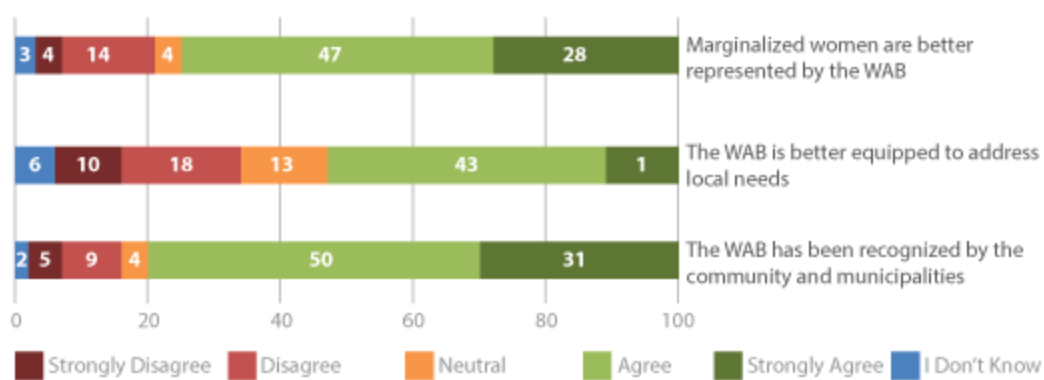
The fifteen THMs held between August and September 2021 served as close-out events for Phase II’s small grant initiatives. During these events, Search reported they formally handed over responsibility of the initiatives to municipal leaders and other community attendees in order to ensure the initiatives’ long-term success. The evaluation was not able to measure the effectiveness of these activities, as very little time had passed since their completion and their handover to the communities. Had Phase II’s initiatives been implemented earlier, communities’ capacity to independently and effectively manage their projects could have been tested and measured.

In conclusion, the evaluation’s survey showed that 90 percent of project’s participants believed the Diwan Project had built the knowledge and skills of municipal leaders and community members in participatory and inclusive governance. This development is attributable to workshops and capacity-building activities the project’s beneficiaries participated in.

Women, Youth, and Marginalized Groups Gaining Skills in Community Mobilization

The ET found that 81 percent of the project’s beneficiaries believed the WAB and YAB had played active roles in their communities and been recognized by their communities and municipal leaders. These same beneficiaries, albeit to a lesser extent, thought the WAB represented marginalized women effectively (75 percent), and was equipped to address local needs (54 percent). This feedback resonates with that provided by members of the WAB, who repeatedly stated that the Diwan Project had significantly enhanced their skills in participatory governance. Members became more aware of both the stages of project implementation and initiative development, and the resources and personnel requirements needed to pursue such efforts.

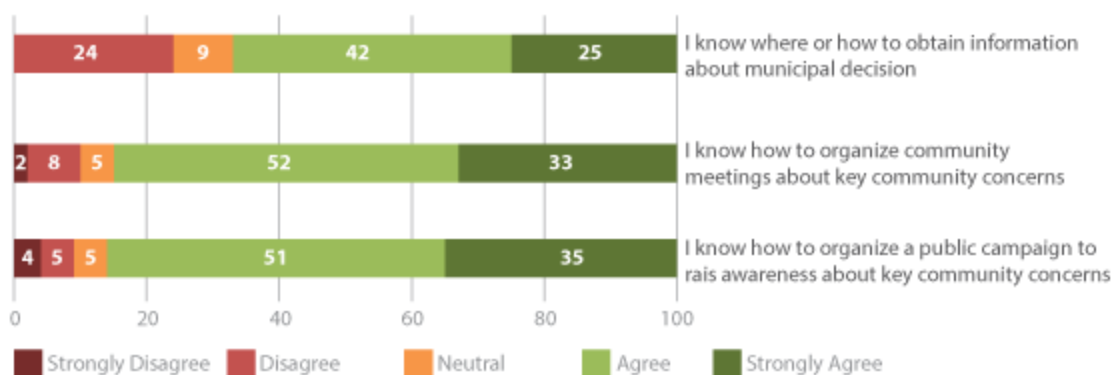
Figure 6: Survey Results Regarding the WAB



Instances of personal excellence and achievement highly motivated project participants. The ET was informed that one woman from Wadi Khaled had decided to run for office in the region’s upcoming municipal elections. Nearly all participants stated this action inspired them and many vocalized their support for her aspiration. This anecdote indicates both a shift in the framework of what community members believe is possible—and the spaces such change can occur in—and the usefulness of Phase II’s activities which mobilized women and youths’ interest, supported their participation in political life, and built their confidence and willingness to voice concerns.

Over the course of the project, there was notable improvement in women and youths’ ability to mobilize their communities through events, meetings, and public campaigns around issues of concern. The evaluation’s survey found that 86 percent of project beneficiaries had the knowledge needed to mobilize their communities (Figure 6). This finding may indicate a spill-over effect from the project’s capacity-development activities, as only a small percentage of these beneficiaries directly participated in training sessions. Nevertheless, 67 percent of respondents stated there are still accessibility barriers when attempting to influence decision-making processes at the municipal level.

Figure 7: Survey Results Regarding Community Mobilization



Community engagement and mobilization were best manifested through the fifteen initiatives executed under Phase II, which included: five initiatives led by municipal leaders, five by the WAB, and five by youth. The ET found that a wide base of stakeholders were engaged by these activities and participated in community needs assessments in 2020 through CFPs and RTDs, and targeted consultation meetings for women and youth in March and April 2021. While the development process of the initiatives effectively mobilized citizens, their actual implementation was hindered by a combination of contextual factors, project delays, and internal difficulties.

All fifteen of the planned initiatives were implemented during the last quarter of the project. Four further joint initiatives planned through collaboration between municipalities were scheduled for implementation, but never materialized. As with other components of Phase II, implementation delays impeded the overall impact the project’s activities could have achieved. Beyond difficulties driven by Lebanon’s economic crisis and COVID-19’s impact on supply chains, Search’s internal procurement policies and procedures—which required regional office approval for considerable expenses—caused significant delays. These internal difficulties negatively affected project participants:

"When we finally got people to agree on a project to be implemented, and after I left my family to go attend training sessions and meetings to benefit my community, the project suddenly stopped, and no one came to clarify what happened. This affected us in a very negative way as we lost all trust in such initiatives."
 — WAB Member

All of the implemented initiatives responded to real needs within their respective communities, and the identification processes which created these efforts were driven by a motivated and mobilized citizenry. While the initiatives were effective in this regard, Phase II was unable to adequately address project-long concerns in its closing days, and the final implementation of these activities was diminished as a result.

Table 10: Phase II's Community Initiatives

Types	Initiative Title	Location	Procurement Date	Completion Date	MoU Signature
Additional grants	Maintenance of the Safa Spring from Phase I	Safa	15-Aug-21	10-Sep-21	30-Sep-21
Municipality led initiatives	High school renovation and stream cleaning	Al-Rama	21-Jun-21	22-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Culvert restoration	Amayer	31-May-21	20-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Town hall improvements	Awadeh	31-May-21	06-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Town hall improvements	Fared	17-May-21	18-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Football field development	Wadi khaled	22-May-21	23-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Wadi Khaled Arch	Wadi Khaled	01-May-21		
WAB led initiatives	Public garden development	Al-Rama	22-May-21	23-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Public gym development	Amayer	09-Jul-21	10-Sep-21	30-Sep-21
	Streetlight installation	Awadeh	21-Jun-21	23-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Sewing centre development	Fared	01-Jul-21	10-Sep-21	30-Sep-21
	Public library development	Wadi khaled	09-Jul-21	10-Sep-21	30-Sep-21
Youth led initiatives	Football field development	Al-Rama	22-May-21	22-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Streetlight installation	Amayer	21-Jun-21	22-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Mosque restoration	Awadeh	31-May-21	18-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Streetlight installation	Fared	24-Jun-21	12-Aug-21	30-Sep-21
	Community hall renovation	Wadi Khaled	01-Jun-21	10-Sep-21	30-Sep-21
Joint initiatives	Sidewalk development	Bani Sakher	19-May-21	Not delivered	
	Football field development	Hisheh	22-Jun-21	Not delivered	
	Sidewalk development	Khat el petrol	19-May-21	Not delivered	
	Protective wall construction	Moukaibleh	19-May-21	Not delivered	

Efficiency of the Project Interventions

Within the context of the evaluation, efficiency was defined by how well resources were allocated and managed to achieve the project's outcomes. The efficiency of results considered timeliness and economic sensibility. During the evaluation of Phase II, the ET determined whether the intervention's resources were used effectively by measuring results. Concretely, the evaluation explored two dimensions of efficiency, namely: (1) value-for-money (VfM) and cost efficiency, and (2) project management efficiency and its effect on the project's implementation and achieved outcomes. Overall, the project was not deemed efficient in its usage and utilization of allocated resources. Analysis of the project's budget expenditure, feedback from staff, and consideration of how project results were achieved indicate a low value-for-money ratio.

Project Management

The evaluation considered how well Phase II's results were achieved in terms of process timeliness, recruitment, and communication with beneficiaries. These themes emerged from the ET's analysis of the

amassed data and were triangulated with participants’ feedback and dialogue sessions with Search staff. The project experienced continuous delays and inefficiencies during its implementation, as detailed in this report’s section on effectiveness. These delays arose from multifaceted and multi-layered decision-making delays, contextual challenges, significant staff turnover, and lengthy and inefficient procurement processes. The ET team identified Search’s internal procurement and vetting processes as detracting factors to the project’s implementation. Prolonged decision-making and the delayed responsiveness of the project team—resulting from changes in management—contributed to significant delays in project activities, and the community initiatives in particular.

Regarding the meetings and training sessions conducted in July and August 2021, project participants expressed the need for Search’s field team to quicken its processes and improve their response turn-around for initiative proposals and questions. The evaluation verified that some of the 15 community initiatives implemented were not being utilized, and several initiatives had not been completed five weeks after the close of Phase II.



Left: Wadi Khaled’s Community Hall, five weeks after Phase II’s closing date

Right: Al-Farad’s Sewing Center after the close of Phase II

Alongside delays related to procurement, gaps in project management were found to have a direct impact on the project’s efficiency. The project was severely affected by staff turnover, and recruitment processes to fill vacancies were not time effective, especially for the Project Manager position. Search’s team internally identified project management pitfalls associated with staff turnover, limited communication with project participants, and Phase II’s planning and outreach. While this internal reflection was not able to fully mitigate the project’s challenges, it did correctly identify its structural problems and has begun to generate learnings and responses to improve the organization.

“When we did the initial assessment for the project, it was 36,000 [USD]. When we received quotes from bidders, the least [expensive] one was 40,000. By the time procurement agreed with the bidder on 36,000, the fence for the playground could not be procured in time!”
 — Search Staff Member

In order to expedite project implementation in the wake of these challenges, and provide the project with needed clarity and focus, management duties were divided amongst Search’s project team in

March 2021, and the project’s hard and soft components were spearheaded by different groups. Internal feedback regarding this change was mixed. Many staff stated this split led to confusion and the project’s inefficient closure. Additional duties also stretched existing staff members’ capacities. It was reported that Search’s procurement focal point assumed additional field visiting responsibilities toward the end of the project to meet with local participants and contractors, oversee the finalization of the small grant initiatives, and sign off on the completion and fulfillment of contractors’ deliverables. The evaluation could not determine whether these changes in workload were temporary solutions to challenging contextual difficulties, or whether they represent normative mitigation strategies.

“I would have improved the planning on the program side. The initiatives took too long to launch. The project design was really good, especially how the links were made, but the planning and implementation was not good. In a project where the community works on trust, the turnover of staff, change of PMs, and division of soft and hard parts did not help implementation. People internally and externally were disoriented.”
— Search Staff Member

There were also reports that Search’s new hires were not fully onboarded to the project after filling vacant positions. These staffing and recruitment challenges had repercussions on ownership of the project ownership and accountability for its deliverables. These challenges affected the team’s communication with the project’s beneficiaries and the management of beneficiaries’ expectations.

The issues highlighted above indicate the project was challenged from its onset, and concerns present within the project’s first phase affected the efficiency of its second. For instance, some Phase I initiatives suffered from corruption attempts from local stakeholders (mainly related to key municipal elected officials), which triggered community discontent and complaints against Search and its staff. While such incidents were investigated by Search staff from outside the country office, and the project was cleared of any mismanagement despite proven mismanagement by local officials³, community recollection of these challenges indicate a need for strengthened organizational transparency and improved project control measures moving forward.

³ This has notably led to the women advisory board being put in charge of the oversight and long-term management of the grants in Diwan’s second phase.

Perspectives of a Mayor from Wadi Khaled

One mayor who had occupied his office for several years felt Phase II of the Diwan Project was highly relevant and stated his community needed support to address the many problems and challenges they faced daily. The mayor noted Wadi Khaled's context changes rapidly as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees and Lebanon's economic collapse.

“Collaboration did not improve because the municipality is being asked for things we cannot perform. People ask for jobs when they cannot find work. There is trash in the streets because of the fuel shortage. Yes, residents built some skills and gained some knowledge, but people need jobs. They went to trainings for a year and were hoping to get a job or some type of assistance.”

The mayor recollected how he and other municipal members had increased their knowledge of inclusive governance and also how several community members had gained an appreciation for the challenge of running a municipality. From his perspective, the municipalities strive to provide their constituents with the best services they can, but are constantly held back by tight budgets.

“There were groups of women and youth who mobilized to help gather funds. However, the municipality does not collaborate or gather funds. We only advise or bless these initiatives.”

Residents tend to not pay their taxes. While Phase I of the Diwan Project made some progress in this regard, it is not sufficient to meet all local needs and demands. Mayors, the respondents stated, consistently look for alternative paths for funding and service delivery.

“We buy cooking gas from the government and resell it to our residents so they benefit from the subsidized price... When a Syrian wants to renew their papers, we charge them for the taxes in return for their documents. This way some of the Lebanese household taxes are paid... It is a win-win for everyone.”

The mayor lauded the project's ability to create dialogue opportunities with women and youth, and help establish common ground in these conversations. However, he was uncertain if the WAB and YAB would be sustainable without the support of Search and also questioned the way the Diwan Project closed.

“They [WAB and YAB] are sustainable if they have a project to work on together. Overall, they need support to continue working together. If they don't get something in return they will not work.”

“The project's end was negative for us. People are asking daily, ‘Where is the playground?’ We will be accused of cancelling it or taking the money. We did not hear the project was over from Search—we heard from people.”

Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon's responsive measures, and Search's necessary transition to remote management weakened the organization's information sharing processes with project beneficiaries. This, in turn, generated a sense of disconnect between the project team and its

participants. Overall, there did not appear to be a sound, overarching communication strategy between these groups. A majority of municipal leaders engaged with the project reported that they received minimal information regarding its implementation, including not knowing who project managers were, and not understanding the project’s duration, activity timelines, or mechanisms for filing complaints. Leaders stated they only knew and interacted with one junior field officer and one senior staff member, though they could not regularly contact this person. Near the end of the project, this challenge became even more apparent, and a significant number of women, youth, and municipal leaders were not aware the project had ended. At the time of evaluation, some of these individuals still hoped Search would be able to find additional funding and conclude the project’s initiatives.

“Different staff members were in the first project and there was more communication with the project team. The Project Manager was available and present. For Phase two, we do not even know where their offices are.”

— Municipal Member

Stronger communication regarding project objectives and activities could have improved the project’s efficiency, helped avoid misunderstandings and resentment, and quelled tensions. Some beneficiaries expressed their disappointment when—after being consulted on their needs—none of the needs seemed to be addressed during Phase II. While some of these unaddressed issues may be the result of unattainable expectations for the project, this was not communicated back to participants. Local interests in infrastructure developments (specifically the creation of a hospital), improvements to local service provision, and increased employment were outside of the project’s mandate and specific objectives. Improved communication at the onset of the project regarding its intended aims and objectives could have potentially resolved such confusion and resultant disappointment. The project could also have benefited from the inclusion of community stakeholders, perhaps through the creation of a steering committee, during the drafting of Phase II’s initial plans and proposals.

“No context or stakeholder analysis was done. The analysis of clan power dynamics was not done and the risk matrix was never updated.”

— Search Staff Member

In consultation meetings with the Search team, a lack of proper planning and implementation for many of the project’s activities were highlighted, alongside insufficient levels of stakeholder and context analysis. These difficulties were especially evident in the selection of project participants, particularly when the team engaged clan and tribal leaders. Particular tension arose around the inclusion of participants with a history of smuggling. While honest and open engagement with a variety of stakeholders was advantageous for the project’s goals, the inclusion of fringe stakeholders brought with it levels of risk the project was not fully able to mitigate. Had the project team experienced lesser rates of staff turnover or possessed stronger mechanisms for retaining institutional knowledge it may have been better positioned to navigate these challenges within the intricate context of Wadi Khaled.

While Search experienced many challenges and shortcomings over the course of Phase II, their management team made strong attempts to rectify its challenges and improve implementation of the

project. One such measure was the initiation of disciplinary policies for project staff, which led to the aforementioned reshuffling of the project responsibilities during the project’s closing months. Search also sought to extend the project twice to improve the implementation of project activities—particularly the small grant initiatives—and conclude Phase II. The first extension of six months was granted by the donor, however, the second was not. As noted in this evaluation, the project did not experience a smooth conclusion and additional time may well have been advantageous in improving its outputs and outcomes. Nevertheless, the need for additional project time does signify a lack of efficiency over the whole of Phase II.

Cost Efficiency and Value-for-Money

Table 11: Budget Breakdown for the Diwan Project

CATEGORY		% Of Total	% Of Total
Activities	Trainers & Consultants	4.70%	29.80%
	Transportation	3.80%	
	Venue Cost & Accommodation	7.10%	
	Initiatives	14.10%	
Operating Costs	Staffing	47.30%	70.20%
	M&E (Baseline & Endline)	2.30%	
	Office Expense (Rent, supplies, legal, etc.)	6.60%	
	Communication	2.90%	
	Overhead	11.10%	

In broad terms, VfM describes the principles of good financial planning, cost efficiency, governance, and the allocation of funds. The measure serves to generally assess projects’ efficiency and how worthwhile interventions are. Evaluation of Phase II’s VfM examined budget expenditures through three primary indicators: (1) direct support costs as a proportion of project activities, (2) cost per unit of outputs and outcomes, and (3) cost per direct beneficiary. Because many internal charges at Search ran continuously between Phases I and II, details on cost allocations were not fully determinable.

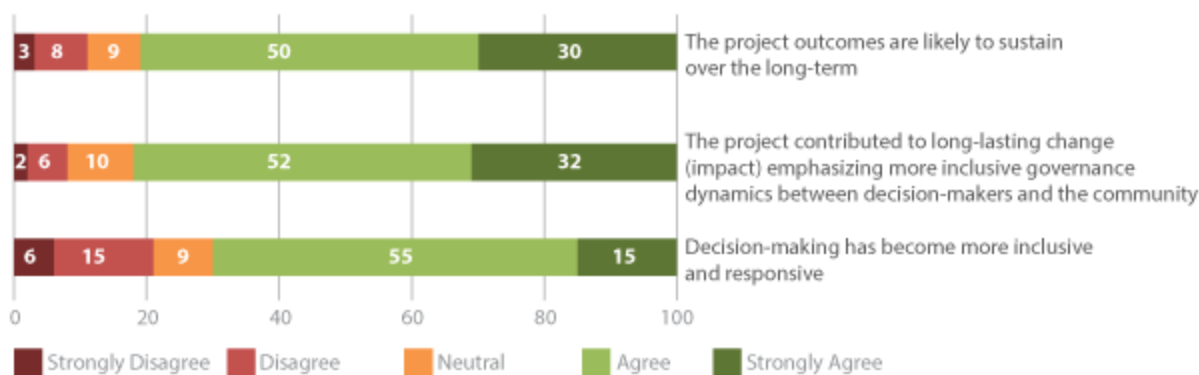
Overall, the ET found the project budget for Phase II was 2,365,158.75 USD, with an actual spending of 1,740,422.40 USD. In total, the project’s underspend was 624,736.35 USD, or 26 percent of the total allocated budget. The majority of the project’s underspending came through budget lines related to training and the small grant initiatives. High staffing costs accounted for nearly half (47.3 percent) of the project’s spending. The overall cost per direct beneficiary of Phase II was calculated off of 313 direct participants. This amount came to 5,560 USD in actual spending and 7,556 USD based on the total budget available.

Sustainability of the Project Interventions

Within the context of the evaluation, sustainability was defined as, “Positive effects generated by the Diwan Project that continually provide demonstrable value for key stakeholders—including intended beneficiaries—after the project’s conclusion.” The evaluation examined sustainability as it related to communal resilience and adaptation within the dynamic and complex environment of Wadi Khaled, and considered whether the project’s benefits would last. Analysis also addressed: (1) the sustainability of project inputs and their impacts, if any, on the broader context of the intervention, (2) how opportunities for supporting the continuation of positive effects were anticipated, identified, and planned for, and (3) any barriers that might have hindered the continuation of positive effects.

Based on the evaluation’s survey results, a majority of surveyed participants stated the project had contributed to long-lasting change (impact) beyond the project’s closure, and 83 percent of respondents said governance dynamics between decision-makers and the wider Wadi Khaled community had become more inclusive. Additionally, 81 percent of respondents believed the project’s outcomes would likely sustain within the community in the future. Fewer respondents (70 percent) believed Wadi Khaled’s decision-making processes had become more inclusive and responsive.

Figure 8: Survey Responses Regarding Project Sustainability



This general optimism regarding sustainability did not match the data collected during interviews with both community members and project staff. In these conversations, respondents clearly stated that sustainable change and lasting impact required more time for project implementation, and that further support and additional activities were needed to address contextual and internal challenges. As stated above, the evaluation examined preemptive conditions for sustainability as they occurred during the project’s design and planning stages. In general, the ET did not find intentional elements of sustainable design within Phase II’s startup, excepting the inclusion of capacity building activities and the enhancement of participants’ knowledge and skills. Through internal reflection, the ET established that the project team believed sustainable design was practiced through the creation of the WAB—and to some extent the YAB. There was hope the existence of these institutions could be strengthened in future project cycles, and further development of women and youths’ capacities could be built both within these boards and by these boards. While staff mentioned municipalities appreciated the advisory boards and wished for them to continue, there was insufficient planning as to how these bodies would operate

without institutional support. Although gains of recognition were made over the course of the project, not all municipal leaders acknowledged the value of the boards, as they did not fully serve their intended purpose of auditing and reporting upon the small grant initiatives within the lifetime of the project.

“We are not ready to talk about sustainability at this point because the organization did not finish what it came to do. We still need support. We need to choose the right people to lead, since this is a clan system.”

— WAB Member

Search staff confirmed there could have been better engagement with the WAB to improve the board’s effectiveness after the close of the project. As stated in other sections of this report, the advisory boards were considered an important mechanism for holding decision-makers accountable, representing the community at large within decision-making spaces, and addressing local needs through locally crafted projects. The fact that WAB members were not engaged in activities except when called upon and activated by the Search team demonstrates an enabling environment was not created, and that the WAB did not fully understand how they should move forward or make use of their institution. Nevertheless, a number of vocal women have taken up the reins of leadership and begun to move the advisory board forward. It is too early to see what the results and sustainability of this organic leadership will be.

“We are ready to continue doing our work, but we are nothing without the municipality’s recognition and cooperation. Without the organization present, we can no longer exist.”

— WAB Member

While the WAB was provided with managerial support from Search, albeit with complications, and nascent indicators of sustainability are now present, the YAB fared worse. In general, the YAB does not appear to be sustainable, primarily because the group lacked rigorous selection criteria and a clearly articulated purpose at its creation. A majority of the board’s members were cynical regarding the project and felt the board was not productive. In contrast to this perspective, municipal leaders held a variety of opinions on the YAB’s sustainability—some anticipate its continuation and others its closure.

“The outreach should have been done better. A lot of people come for the phone reimbursement. I saw a lot of siblings and relatives; more diversity was needed. It’s a good idea, but I do not think it will continue.”

— Municipal Member

In the project’s closing days, minimal efforts were made with a focus on sustainability past the lifetime of the project. The ET examined opportunities the project team had to support the continuation of positive effects through its activities, and actions taken to mitigate barriers to such progress. Because the project experienced an overall disparity between what was planned and what was achieved, the conclusion of the intervention suffered from the compound effects of its previous shortcomings. This led to a loss in the potential impact and sustainability the project could have achieved.

“When we finally got people to agree on a project to be implemented, and after I left my family to go attend training sessions and meetings to benefit my community, the project suddenly stopped, and no one came to clarify what happened. This affected us in a very negative way as we lost all trust in such initiatives.”

— WAB member

The eight ceremonial activities planned with youth participants for the end of the project are a prime example of lost potential. Because some small grant initiatives were not implemented, project staff had growing fears of harm from participants whose initiatives were not conducted. In order to mitigate the potential for harm and also fulfill the project’s tight closing schedule, the Project Manager proposed a single, joint ceremony in place of the eight originally planned. This change sparked anger from most of the activity’s participants, and they voiced frustration because their activity proposals had been submitted two months earlier. In response to this feedback, the Project Manager reverted implementation to the original plan. However, as result of increased tension and further delays, a majority of the closing events never took place. In this regard, Search explained that due to its inability to close the project sensitively, the closing events were cancelled in order to protect local staff, who felt unsafe and might have suffered from retribution in their communities. From the perspective of the project participants, Phase II ended abruptly. Some did not know it had ended at all. Although Search raised those concerns to the donors in the final weeks of implementation, requesting an additional three months to ensure proper closing, this request was refused by GAC. Despite this, reparation work and exit conversations are still ongoing in Wadi Khaled at the time of writing this evaluation.

“There was no exit strategy—no debriefing about the implementation’s failure and success.”

— Search Staff Member

The ongoing challenges encountered throughout the project's timeline culminated during this closing phase, leading to increased tensions and a lack of sensitive exit strategy. Although Search raised those concerns to the donors in the final weeks of implementation, requesting an additional month to ensure proper closing, this request was refused by GAC. Despite this, reparation work and exit conversations are still ongoing in Wadi Khaled at the time of writing this evaluation.

Overall, sufficient effort was not dedicated to the project’s exit strategy. While several in-person discussions were held regarding exit procedures during a field visit to Wadi Khaled, field staff failed to appropriately follow through with their commitments. Over half of the municipal leaders and mayors consulted by the ET stated residents and project beneficiaries continued to ask about the state of the project at the time of the evaluation’s data collection. In municipalities where joint initiatives were cancelled, beneficiaries continued to ask when their projects would be implemented. Some municipal leaders, unaware themselves of whether or not the project had closed, hoped the project would receive future funding or a project extension which could facilitate the continuation or completion of planned activities. Many participants suspected the municipalities themselves were the cause of cancelled activities, and questioned whether or not they had siphoned off project funds.

LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings detailed above, the ET concluded outcome advancements are possible alongside the key successes and achievements the project realized. While the following recommendations are made for Search and Phase II of the Diwan Project specifically, they may well apply to other organizations, institutions, and donors intending to facilitate more sustainable, equitable, and accountable development projects within Wadi Khaled and similar regions. On an overarching level, the ET recommends the adoption of new project management practices, including: early adoption and frequent revision of risk and context analysis assessments, strong transparency and oversight protocols, well-defined processes for the preservation and sharing of institutional knowledge and the transfer of leadership roles, and a heightened focus on the importance of exit strategies and sustainability.

To these ends, the following recommendations are made:

Relevance

- **Adopt participatory approaches that include project beneficiaries during developmental phases.** By including individuals with immense knowledge of local challenges and conditions in the drafting of a project's ToC, activities, objectives, and outcomes, there is greater likelihood that interventions will be relevant to targeted communities. Participatory monitoring and evaluation over the course of a project can help maintain relevance and enable meaningful response to emergent conditions;
- **Ensure projects have programmatic components that cater to the specific needs of youth.** Activities such as debate clubs, exchange visits, and fellowship programs can grow alongside youth as they mature and usher them through periods of personal change. A strengthened focus on the place of youth can help seed long-term, adaptive outcome delivery that outlasts any individual project's lifespan;
- **Include more awareness building and knowledge-exchange activities.** While technical capacity development activities are critical in underserved regions such as Wadi Khaled, these efforts should be paired with deeply interpersonal activities, such as storytelling sessions and guest lectures. Connection-building activities can help translate successes from similar—or vastly different—cultures and help communities grow the worldview through which they perceive inclusive governance.

Effectiveness & Impact

- **Utilize a persistent field office and staff to reduce response-cycle turnaround.** When working with culturally and geographically remote locations, it is imperative that project beneficiaries have reliable and accessible points-of-contact. Projects are more adaptive and nimble, and have a greater potential for impact when they can quickly respond to feedback from local conditions.
- **Scale projects' soft components to include the maximum number of participants.** The Diwan Project's capacity-development activities were one of its strongest successes, and provided the most VfM. Individual growth has been shown to have a positive spill-over effect and can transfer a project's effectiveness beyond its targeted beneficiaries.

- **Refine the selection criteria for activities with a limited number of beneficiaries.** In instances where leadership capabilities or other unique characteristics are necessary for the success of an activity, improved targeting and selection criteria can improve programs' effectiveness. Within the context of the Diwan Project, this primarily includes the WAB and YAB.
- **Ensure components with complex procurement needs have ample time for implementation.** Beyond the direct execution of such activities, adequate time should be budgeted for corresponding monitoring, oversight, problem mitigation, and follow-up activities. These supportive components can help derive increased impact from singular events.

Efficiency

- **Improve internal project management practices and adopt more rigorous hiring procedures.** Staffing organizations with effective leadership and retaining talent is universally challenging; nevertheless, reducing staff turnover can greatly improve projects' VfM, prevent the loss of institutional knowledge, and sustain rapport with project partners and beneficiaries. When effective staff are retained, focus should be given to accountable, transparent, and frequently reviewed work plans, risk assessments, MEAL tools, and budget expenditures.
- **Partner with local NGOs that have expertise in specialized fields.** Complexity in interventions like the Diwan Project are unavoidable, and rarely, if ever, can a single organization efficiently retain all the skill sets necessary for their implementation. Long-term partnerships with professional organizations can reduce costs related to one-off contractors and can free existing staff from operational minutia to improve their focus on technical support and overarching needs.

Sustainability

- **Embrace and acknowledge project shortcomings openly as a means of facilitating better exit strategies.** While no organization, donor, or individual is fond of failure, challenges must be addressed head on when they occur. Personal or institutional shame and the obfuscation of problems are counterproductive to transparency—a core component of healthy and inclusive governance. While addressing missteps is trying and often painful, the harm that comes from unresolved issues is far greater, and can negatively impact a project's sustainability.
- **Ensure governance projects have steering committees that include local stakeholders.** *Ad hoc* governance bodies created within governance projects can provide safe spaces that model and facilitate inclusivity. While such structures will not be fully free of the cultural and historical trappings of legacy systems, they may provide community members with significant and encouraging instances of success that seed a desire for progress beyond projects' lifespans.
- **Develop sustainability plans for each activity within a project and introduce project beneficiaries to these documents.** By providing participants with insight into a project's temporality and the ever-present reality of life after an intervention, communities can envision their current and future needs for success and sustainability.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Terms of Reference: Final Evaluation

Annex 2: Consultation Protocol

Annex 3: Community Survey

Annex 4: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 5: List of Selected Participants

Annex 6: Project Logframe