

# Baseline, Monitoring and Mid-term Evaluation Strengthening Civil Society

Mid-Term Review - Lebanon

Client: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands Management Board Social Development

Rotterdam and Beirut, 29 August 2024





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# Abbreviations

AWDF	African Women Development Fund
AWRAD	Arab World for Research and Development
BHOS	Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
CBO	Community-based organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRTDA	Collective for Research and Training on Development –Action
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSW	Commission on the status of Women
CoA	Community of Action
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DQA	Data quality assessment
DSO	Department for Social Development
EGBV	Economic gender-based violence
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
INSM	Foundation for Digital Rights
KII	Key informant interview
L&A	Lobby and advocacy
LCPS	Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies
LFS	Leading from the South
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MP	Member of Parliament
MTR	Mid-term review
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCA	Organisational capacity assessment
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
POV	Power of voices
POW	Power of women
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
SCS	Strengthening Civil Society
SDG	Sustainable development goals
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SRH	Sexual Rights and Health
SRoL	Security and rule of law
SWOT	Strength Weaknesses Opportunity Threats analysis
ToC	Theory of change
TPM	Third-party monitoring
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VDO	Vital Data Observatory
WANA	West Asia and Nort Africa
WRGE	Women's rights and gender equality
WPS	Women, peace, and security
WRO	Women's rights organisation

# Executive Summary (English)

## Background

The consortium Ecorys and Beyond Group executed the Mid-term Review of the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) policy framework for Lebanon of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The purpose of the Mid-term Review presented in this report was:

- To assess progress made on the SCS indicators and on specific thematic indicators; on the crosscutting themes southern leadership, gender, and youth; and on the integration of conflict sensitivity and the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH).
- To assess coherence, efficiency, and sustainability of the policy implementation.
- To formulate lessons for the remainder of the policy implementation and future Strengthening Civil Society and thematic policymaking, implementation and funding mechanisms.

In total, 10 partnerships funded under the grant instruments (e.g. Power of Voices, Power of Women and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Partnership Fund) are active in Lebanon. Additionally, one organisation funded under the Leading from the South instrument has selected Lebanese organisations as grantees.

## Approach, methodology and limitations

The MTR has used contribution analysis as main methodological approach to assess effectiveness. It included an organisational capacity assessment of fifteen sampled programme partners and eighteen case studies and deep dives to ensure in-depth insights into the results of the programmes and to identify good practices and lessons learned. The main data collection tools included desk review; interviews with programme staff, staff of the MFA, external stakeholders and rightsholders; an online survey among civil society organisations; a workshop with the programmes to assess the validity of the policy Theory of Change (ToC); and a validation workshop.

A most notable challenge for the review was the deteriorating and volatile security situation in Lebanon following the conflict between Hamas and Israel and between Hezbollah and Israel since 7 October 2023. In this context, priorities have shifted for organisations, individual staff and target groups, which made it difficult to schedule interviews. SCS partners in some instances decided to focus on essential processes (which do not include external evaluations). Further challenges included the broad scope of the MTR, non- or slow responses of organisations in the programmes, the timing of the MTR with data collection during the Ramadan and several public holidays, and evaluation fatigue, with the MTR to some extent overlapping with data collection processes conducted by the SCS programmes. Methodological limitations include limited availability of partner organisations and rightsholders due to the sensitive nature of interventions and limited data availability to conduct the contribution analysis. It was also not easy to identify the precise contribution of lobby and advocacy activities because of the many external factors and intangible nature of some of them (e.g. change of attitudes).

## Country context Lebanon

Over the past two years, security and economic disruptions have further deepened the political and economic crisis in Lebanon and made the context for operations and policy change more challenging. The escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel has exacerbated tensions throughout Lebanon and increased uncertainty about its future, shifting priorities for the government, and adding more hardship, including significant displacement of inhabitants from

Southern border villages. Lebanon's civil society has been known for being highly active and dynamic but the civic space in which it can operate has narrowed, particularly on topics of gender, with the LGBTIQ+ community facing increasing threats and attacks from political and religious groups. It has sparked significant backlash on activities undertaken by the programmes and adversely affected advocacy and support efforts for the queer community. The shrinking civic space has also been reflected in cuts of significant aid funds. Against this volatile backdrop, ongoing factional disputes have created a governance vacuum, leaving the country without a fully functioning government and delayed presidential elections. In addition, the distrust between CSOs and powerholders is limiting the influence of civil society on the policy process. The fact that many activists ran for the 2022 parliamentary elections, with thirteen reform-minded MPs elected, contributed to the perception of CSOs as political actors.

### **Validation of the Ministry's ToCs in the context of Lebanon**

The MTR found that the focus of the ToCs on capacity strengthening and networking is considered relevant and largely validated in the Lebanese context, where capacities in terms of L&A and networking and collaboration are perceived to be weaker. However, most of the other assumptions underlying the ToCs can only be partially (or not at all) validated at this stage, including the effectiveness of Lobby and Advocacy, as policy and legislative changes are difficult to achieve in the current Lebanese context. Also, the assumption that external support from Northern donors and NGOs can strengthen national CSOs has only materialised to a limited extent, particularly in relation to the loss of credibility of Northern donors after the Gaza war and the perceived foreign agenda.

Regarding Women's Rights and Gender Equality (WRGE), the study has largely affirmed the critical role of Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and the importance of gaining support/collaborating with (a variety of) actors (e.g. government, knowledge institutes, private sector, etc.) to create an enabling environment for structural change. As for SRHR, the validity of the assumptions depends much on which aspects of SRHR are considered. It is not possible to lobby and advocate to the government on SRHR that includes issues of choice and freedom, as this would backfire considering the backlash from conservative religious and political groups.

In terms of relevance, a key weakness is that the ToC and SCS indicators do not capture key intermediate outcomes to show progress in the context of Lebanon. While the overarching programme ToCs are generally found to be a useful and a flexible starting point for in-country implementation, the processes are not always led by the Southern partners, with in-country partners not involved, or only to a limited extent, in the initial stages of ToC development. The extent to which programme ToCs are regularly reviewed and tested is limited, as the focus of reviews is often to discuss reporting and comparison with previously defined targets.

### **Effectiveness and progress made to date**

All programmes have experienced at least some delay in implementation. Delays mostly occurred at the start of the programmes due to the time that was needed for the programmes to get up and running (building networks and relationships) and align approaches of different partners. Other key factors obstructing progress were high staff turnover, change of partners (before and after the start), delayed payments within programmes, and the political and security situation in the country.

Only a number of intermediate outcomes as a step towards policy change have been achieved such as endorsement of articles of the Lebanese penal code addressing rape, acts of indecency, statutory rape, and kidnapping, with a plausible contribution of two SCS programmes. However, no

policy and legislative change as identified by the programmes has been achieved to date. More progress has been made in terms of creating space for demands and positions, including organising of forums and roundtables to influence debate. Furthermore, also the number of advocacy initiatives carried out, including coalition building with other CSOs and rightsholders, the private sector and other stakeholders, can be considered as an intermediate step. This is aligned with a general perceived increase in collaborate efforts. Nevertheless, programmes have faced challenges in building and participating in coalitions because of a level of competition among CSOs but also the backlash on gender and LGBTIQ+ rights, which makes programmes reluctant to engage with stakeholders.

Good progress has been made in capacity strengthening. The organisational capacity assessment of lobby & advocacy capabilities of sampled partners shows an improvement compared to the baseline, with most progress related to inspiring trust and building rapport among power holders representing constituency interest, and working collectively. Partners are also increasingly using a gender lens in their activities, although specific strategies are less common. There has been a high involvement of young people as well, both engaged in activities and strengthened as leaders, although the survey shows that it remains, at times, difficult to maintain broad-based youth engagement. At Mid-Term stage, in total 68 Lebanese organisations (Tier 1 and Tier 2<sup>1</sup>) have been included in the programmes thus far.

*Some positive change in public attitudes on WRGE is reported, but these are hard to validate. Nevertheless, surveys at community level show some positive findings.* Local successes are evidenced in creating mechanisms to foster awareness and promote women's' greater participation in decision-making. *With regards to SRHR, evidence of progress is found in making existing services accessible, either in terms of a safe space for all, including LGBTIQ+ people, refugees, migrants, etc, or in terms of commodities.* However, *there have been significant challenges in ensuring provision of particularly services related to choice and sexuality rights due to the restrictive environment. In addition, progress has been made in the participation of youth in policy and decision-making for the services currently provided by programmes, such as clinics or health centres and number of health workers trained in providing SRHR services.*

Progress in protecting human rights, has been more limited in awareness raising among communities in the current situation, as programmes have decided to adopt a low profile on any issue related to the LGBTIQ+, but also on other themes possibly prompting backlash.

#### *Meaningful participation of youth and target groups*

Youth participation in the programmes varied among the programmes. In the case of the programmes/partners with a youth focus, young people are mostly part of the programmes in an active leadership role, including for youth participation in local politics and SRHR. The contribution of the SCS policy framework to the empowerment of marginalised groups relates in particular to strengthening capacity for advocacy, raising awareness of the rights of migrants, refugees and people with disabilities, and building migrant movements. In some cases this is only linked to specific activities, whilst for others target groups are only informed and/ or consulted.

#### *Southern leadership*

About half of the programmes have demonstrated successful models of local leadership, with local partners actively involved in decision-making processes that shape activities, although less so in

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<sup>1</sup> Following the MFA's definition of consortia, the 1st tier are the consortium members, of which some are not active in Lebanon, and some are in-country leads, indicated in the table; 2nd Tier are implementing partners formally contracted by the 1st Tier partners; and 3rd Tier are local partners (with 3rd tier contracts), the constituency of 1st and 2nd Tier partners.

budget decisions. Programmes have faced challenges in fully engaging and involving local partners, particularly smaller CBO/ grass root organisations, which to some extent is due to short term nature of engagements and finance provided but also readiness of organisations. Other challenges have been related to the involvement of multiple consortium partners in the country programme or absence of an in-country lead partner, which have complicated the management of the programme and affected full involvement of in-country partners. The involvement of Lebanese CSOs in the programmes has been instrumental in increasing credibility and trust within their communities, thereby strengthening CSOs legitimacy both locally and internationally. To some extent this was also the case vis-a-vis authorities, but these processes have been affected by backlash and mistrust between civil society and government. The active involvement of Lebanese partners ensured that programmes were tailored to the local context and increased local engagement.

#### *Gender and intersectionality*

All programmes include a strong focus on women and girls and an intersectional perspective, but not many specific strategies have been developed in this regard. There is a need for more coordination on issues that require strong social change, such as LGBTIQ+ visibility, safety and choice, women's agency, participation and empowerment, and access to SRHR for all. All programmes have adopted a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), focusing mainly on the empowerment process. All programmes use an intersectional approach and ensure the inclusion of all social groups, with a focus on LGBTIQ+, refugees, migrants, people living with disabilities, and minority religious beliefs, with the aim of equal participation. Regarding people with disabilities, only one programme seems to have a strategy for their involvement. It is not clear how the programmes ensure that the poorest people are reached.

#### *Conflict sensitivity and safeguarding*

A full gender and conflict analysis was often not carried out at the time of programme design. After various forms of backlash, programmes improved their social conflict analysis and changed their activities accordingly. Most programmes have general safety and security policies, but these are not specific to the context of the conflict in Southern Lebanon. In general, the consortium partners ensure that safeguarding policies and codes of conduct are transferred to partners, specifically for the different target groups, including youth and young adults. Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) is a key focus for most programmes, including specific trainings for partners. None of the programmes have yet integrated these policies and principles into their MEL systems, except for privacy and confidentiality. Increasingly, programmes/partners are paying attention to the protection of staff, including mental health.

#### *Innovation*

Innovation within the programmes mostly refers to programming adaptations to the conservative, restrictive and volatile context, rather than the use of new methods. Adaptations in the face of backlash include changing the wording and the way concepts are conveyed, for example by making the message non-political or using specific individuals as entry points to deliver the message. In terms of outreach and organisation, some of the programmes show an innovative bottom-up approach, aiming to create networks at community level, involving rightsholders in an inclusive and innovative way. Some programmes provide good examples of the use of technology, including digital safety. However, many of the programmes and partners still seem to use social media, especially Facebook in a more traditional not very innovative way.

## Coherence

Internal coherence differs between the programmes, with some of the programmes still in the process of finding ways effectively cooperate. Coordination seems to work better in the case of programmes for which there is a clear in-country lead partner. Quite some in-country partners are involved in multiple programmes, raising the question whether the programmes have not overlooked other suitable (less obvious) civil society partners.

External coherence differs between programmes. External coherence with other SCS programmes is low, whilst coordination with other external stakeholders such as other local initiatives, donors, NGOs and government agencies is improving but still limited. Programmes are often not fully aware of other initiatives implemented in the country. Overall, a larger involvement of the embassy in supporting coordination and being part of the programmes was expected, but also programmes have not been active in coordination with the Embassy or other programmes. The relationship between the programmes and the embassy in Lebanon differs per programme, with more regular interaction with some programmes, mostly the alliances with Dutch lead partners. Other programmes indicate they have a weak or no relationship with the Embassy. Overall feedback is that the ministry/Embassy, to some extent, has contributed to the protection of civic space with its position on certain issues, including its support to freedom of expression, but that the embassy could play a more leading role to this respect.

## Efficiency

Considering the limited coordination and combined focus of the programmes on WRGE (and sub-themes), SRHR, but also on certain target groups such as LGBTIQ+ community and migrants, it can be expected that there will be a certain duplication of efforts. Key factors limiting efficiency are, in cases, the limited resources for the in-country partners which constraints the possibilities and scope of activities. Challenges in collaboration are also linked to the sometimes large and complicated organisational set ups of the programmes. Budgetary decisions are often made at the consortium level without much consultation with other partners, leaving limited flexibility with regard to the financial allocation at country level. In addition, high turnover of staff and also weaker internal systems, both at the level of the consortium partners and in-country partners, have affected efficiency, including support that could be provided to the partners. Programmes in general are positive about the flexibility provided by the ministry, which allowed implementing partners to adapt to changing contexts, also in terms of the security measures that some programmes had to take for the safety of rightsholders and personnel during periods of backlash concerning gender.

Nevertheless, it is felt that, considering the current fragility, there is a need for allowing additional budget lines such as service delivery and institutional costs in some instances. Specifically monitoring and evaluation requirements are considered strict and not always in line with the ambition for southern leadership, because in-country partners not always have the capacity to abide by these requirements.

## Sustainability

None of the programmes have yet developed an explicit exit strategy. Some of the in-country partners are critical about the limited attention for sustainability or lack of communication on possible continuation of support, including support in identifying new funding sources. It is also felt that more could be done to establish mechanisms for effective knowledge management and information sharing. Capacity strengthening support, movement building and networking, southern leadership, and legitimacy are conducive to support sustainability. The work with grassroots organisations/ CBOs or target groups in that sense is a key element, capacitating a 'next' generation to sustain and continue the work. Furthermore, risk mitigation strategies are expected to support continuation of effects, as the security and political situation is a key factor obstructing

sustainability. These include creating safe spaces, developing and adopting inclusive language, and effective strategies for community acceptance.

## Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions the following recommendations are formulated for the Ministry, embassy and programmes:

### *Recommendations for both the MFA and Programmes*

- Recognise and value any intermediate steps towards policy or legislative change (also in terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning) if the latter cannot be achieved within the programme timeframe.
- In the fragile context of Lebanon, where crisis, emergencies and backlash can occur suddenly, it may be necessary to include a contingency budget line for emergency interventions to allow for greater flexibility and agility in response. It is important for MFA to discuss this option with the programmes (also at a later stage) and for the programmes to consider a contingency budget in general and specifically for countries with a more fragile context.

### *Recommendations for the Ministry:*

- Ensure that an appraisal at country/ regional level is part of the tender process for better coherence among programmes implemented in a specific country/ region.
- The Ministry should encourage programmes to include in-country partners from the outset to support coherence and southern leadership.
- A significant number of the programmes, particularly those new established or new to the country, took a long time to set up and develop their internal coordination and management structures, partly because the programmes had to be set up in several (in some cases more than 10) countries at the same time. It is recommended to limit the number of (new) countries per programme in order to increase focus and effectiveness.
- It is recommended to include efficiency considerations in the appraisal, taking into account the actual expected impact and sustainability at country level.
- It should be taken into account that the Dutch position on human rights can provoke a pushback against programme activities, and can make it difficult for programmes and partners to still convey their messages.
- During the present evaluation assignment, we observed considerable evaluation fatigue among the programmes. The MFA should consider the complementarity between policy/ country level evaluation studies and the specific MEL requirements for the partners, taking into account wide variation in the quality of MTRs across programmes.
- The ministry could consider providing additional support for opportunities to meet and network, promote synergy and avoid duplication of efforts. These actions could focus on i) bringing together programmes for strategic exchange, ii) organise thematic meetings for programmes and iii) create a platform for exchange.

### *Recommendations for the programmes*

#### **To improve programme design:**

- Ensure that southern partners are involved from the design stage to promote contextualisation and leadership.
- Programmes are encouraged to diversify their selection of in-country organisations, to avoid contracting the 'usual suspects' and partners being part of many different programmes and to continue to support emerging or otherwise different partners.

- Establish a shared understanding of the programme and specific partner contributions at the design stage.
- Include a review of other initiatives as part of their in-country programme design), to be monitored in annual reports and MTR to support coherence and synergies.

#### **To improve programme implementation:**

- Design effective management structures that support coherence, complementarity, and synergy between partners.
- With regard to southern leadership, it is important to continue to reflect on the programme power dynamics, also in-country between different partners and Tiers, by involving lower-tier organisations in decision-making processes.
- It is important to increase the visibility of what is being done to the extent this is possible considering the backlash, including effective use of social media, to showcase what is happening to different people including policymakers.
- Establish mechanisms for effective knowledge management and information sharing. By establishing of mechanisms such as working groups and thematic exchanges, partners can create an environment that is more inclusive and participatory. The use of an online information exchange platform would allow partners to easily share documents and resources.
- Need for more coordination and synergy:
  - By promoting strategic exchanges and thematic meetings to improve coordination and avoid duplication. This could include capitalising on successful coordination structures such as the UNWOMEN coordination platform.
  - By improving networking and synergies with other stakeholders, for example between LGBTIQ+ organisations with feminist and or domestic workers organisations.
- Develop explicit sustainability strategies within programme designs.

#### **To improve MEL**

- The programmes should ensure that MEL is directly linked to the ToC, and used to reflect on the ToC, review its design and share experiences that can help to respond to the current context.
- To ensure that the principles and tools of feminist MEL are owned by all partners in order to avoid that these principles are used to avoid responsibility for implementing MEL.

#### **Thematic recommendations**

- There is a need to work more systematically and strategically with the opponents of inclusive and universally accessible SRHR to stimulate social change and hold the government to account. Changing the attitudes of the government and that of conservative forces in society who see SRHR only as maternal and child health and partly as family planning requires long-term perspective. This cannot be done by a single organisation or programme but should be taken up as a coordinated effort.
- Allocate sufficient time and resources to enable partners to play their role effectively in capacitating medical professionals and raising community awareness.
- Enhance coordination among stakeholders to address backlash on key themes (SRHR, WRGE) and promote sustained advocacy efforts.



# الموجز التنفيذي (Arabic) Executive Summary

## لمحة عامة

أجرى اتحاد شركة إيكوريس ومجموعة بيوند جروب مراجعة منتصف المدة لإطار سياسة برنامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني في لبنان، بتكليف من وزارة الشؤون الخارجية الهولندية. وكان الغرض من هذه المراجعة التي يتم استعراضها في هذا التقرير:

- تقييم التقدم المُحرز في مؤشرات برنامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني ومؤشرات مواضيعية محددة؛ وفي المحاور متعدّدة الجوانب التي تشمل القيادة في الجنوب والجنود والشباب؛ وفي عملية دمج مبدأ مراعاة ظروف النزاع ومنع الاستغلال والاعتداء والتحرش الجنسي.
- تقييم مستوى الاتساق والفعالية والاستدامة في تنفيذ السياسة.
- صياغة الدروس المستفادة لِمَا تَبَقِيَ من عملية تنفيذ السياسة وللسياسات والبيات التنفيذ والتمويل في برامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني المستقبلية.

في الإجمال، أُقيمت 10 شركات مُؤمّلة بموجب أدوات المنح (مثل صندوق شراكة Power of Women و Power of Voices والصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية) في لبنان. كما اختارت منظمة واحدة مُؤمّلة بموجب أداة القيادة من الجنوب منظمات لبنانية كجهات مُستفيدة من المنحة.

## المقاربة والمنهجية والقيود

اعتمدت مراجعة منتصف المدة على تحليل المساهمات كمقاربة منهجية رئيسية لتقييم فعالية البرنامج. وقد شملت تقييماً للقدرات التنظيمية التي يتمتع بها خمسة عشر شريكاً في البرنامج، إلى جانب ثماني عشرة دراسة حالة وتحليلات عميقة بهدف تقييم نتائج البرامج بشكل واضح وتحديد الممارسات الحسنة والدروس المستفادة منها. كما انطوت أدوات جمع البيانات الرئيسية على مراجعة البيانات المتوفرة؛ وإجراء مقابلات مع الموظفين في إطار البرنامج وموظفي وزارة الشؤون الخارجية الهولندية وأصحاب المصلحة الخارجيين وأصحاب الحقوق؛ وإطلاق استطلاع عبر الإنترنت لمنظمات المجتمع المدني؛ وتنظيم ورشة عمل خاصة بالبرامج لتقييم صحة نظرية التغيير الخاصة بالسياسة؛ وتنظيم ورشة عمل للتصديق على النتائج.

تمثل أحد أبرز التحديات التي اعترضت إجراء هذه المراجعة في تدهور الوضع الأمني في لبنان وتزعزعه بعد الصراع بين حماس وإسرائيل وبين حزب الله وإسرائيل منذ 7 أكتوبر 2023. ففي هذا السياق، تغيّرت أولويات المنظمات والموظفين والفئات المستهدفة، مما صعّب جدولة المقابلات، بحيث قرّر شركاء البرنامج في بعض الحالات التركيز على الإجراءات الأساسية (التي لا تشمل التقييمات الخارجية). كما انطوت التحديات الأخرى على نطاق مراجعة منتصف المدة الواسع، وعدم استجابة المنظمات المشاركة في البرامج أو تأخر استجابتها، فضلاً عن توقيت مراجعة منتصف المدة وعملية جمع البيانات الذي صادف خلال شهر رمضان الكريم والاعطال الرسمية وتقييم الإجهاد، بحيث تداخلت مراجعة منتصف المدة إلى حد ما مع عمليات جمع البيانات التي أجرتها برامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني. أما القيود المنهجية، فقد شملت محدودية توافر المنظمات الشريكة وأصحاب الحقوق بسبب طبيعة التدخلات الحساسة ومحدودية توافر البيانات لتحليل المساهمات. كما أنه لم يكن من السهل تحديد مساهمة أنشطة الضغط والمناصرة بدقة نتيجة مجموعة من العوامل الخارجية وطبيعة بعض هذه العوامل غير الملموسة (مثل تغيير المواقف).

## السياق في لبنان

تفاقمت الأزمة السياسية والاقتصادية في لبنان على مدى العامين الأخيرين نتيجة الاضطرابات الأمنية والاقتصادية التي عرقلت العمليات وتغيير السياسات. وقد أدى تصعيد الصراع بين حماس وإسرائيل إلى اشتداد التوتر في جميع أنحاء لبنان وزيادة الشكوك بشأن مستقبله، مما فرض على الحكومة تغيير أولوياتها وأسفر عن المزيد من الصعوبات، لاسيّما نزوح السكان بأعداد كبيرة من القرى الحدودية الجنوبية. وصحيح أنّ المجتمع المدني في لبنان يشتهر بنشاطه وديناميكيته، غير أنّ مجال عمله قد تقلص، لاسيّما في ما يتعلق بمسائل الجندر، حيث يواجه مجتمع الميم تهديدات واعتداءات متزايدة من الجماعات السياسية والدينية. وقد أثار ذلك ردود فعل سلبية على الأنشطة التي نفذتها البرامج وترك تأثيراً سلبياً على جهود المناصرة والدعم لمجتمع المتحرّرين جنسياً. كما تُرجم تقلص مجال المجتمع المدني إلى تخفيضات كبيرة في الأموال المخصصة للمساعدات. في ظل هذا الوضع المتقلّب، أدت الخلافات الطائفية المتواصلة إلى فراغ سياسي، مما ترك البلاد بدون حكومة فعّالة تعمل بكامل طاقتها وأخر الانتخابات الرئاسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يُقيّد انعدام الثقة بين منظمات المجتمع المدني وصانعي القرارات تأثير المجتمع المدني على عملية وضع السياسات. وقد ساهم ترشح ناشطين إصلاحيين من المجتمع المدني للانتخابات النيابية في العام 2022 وانتخاب ثلاثة عشر نائباً منهم، في ترسيخ مكانة منظمات المجتمع المدني بصفتها جهات سياسية فاعلة.

## التحقّق من نظريّات التغيير الخاصة بالوزارة في السياق اللبناني

وجدت مراجعة منتصف المدة أنّ التركيز على تعزيز القدرات والتواصل في نظريّات التغيير هو جانب مهمّ يمكن التحقق منه إلى حد كبير في السياق اللبناني، حيث إنّ القدرات في مجالات الضغط والمناصرة والتواصل والتعاون ضعيفة. ولكن، لا يمكن التحقق من معظم الافتراضات الأخرى الكامنة في نظريات التغيير إلا بشكل جزئي (أو لا يمكن التحقق منها على الإطلاق) في هذه المرحلة، بما يشمل فعالية جهود الضغط والمناصرة، حيث يصعب إجراء التغييرات السياسية والتشريعية في السياق اللبناني الراهن. كما أنّ الافتراض الذي يقضي بأن الدعم الخارجي

من الجهات المانحة والمنظمات غير الحكومية الشمالية قد يعزّز عمل منظمات المجتمع المدني الوطنية لم يتحقّق إلا بشكلٍ محدودٍ، لاسيّما في ما يتعلق بفقدان مصداقية الجهات المانحة الشمالية بعد نشوب حرب غزة وتبلور الأجندة الأجنبية.

بالحديث عن حقوق المرأة والمساواة بين الجندين، سَطّرت الدراسة إلى حدٍ كبير الدور الجوهري الذي تؤدّيه منظمات حقوق المرأة وأهمية الحصول على الدعم المناسب/ التعاون مع (مجموعة من) الجهات الفاعلة (مثل الحكومة، ومعاهد المعرفة، والقطاع الخاص، إلخ.) لتوفير بيئة داعمة للتغيير الهيكلي. أما بالنسبة إلى الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية، فتعتمد صحة الافتراضات على الجوانب التي يتم النظر فيها. فلا يمكن الضغط على الحكومة بشأن هذا الموضوع الذي يشمل حق الاختيار وحرية التعبير، إذ قد يؤدي ذلك إلى ردود فعل سلبية من الجماعات الدينية والسياسية المحافظة.

تشمل نقاط الضعف الرئيسية، عدم مراعاة النتائج الوسيطة الرئيسية في مؤشرات نظرية التغيير وبرنامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني لاستعراض التقدّم المُحرز في السياق اللبناني. وصحيح أنّ نظريات التغيير الشاملة تُعتبر عموماً نقطة انطلاق مفيدة ومرنة لتنفيذ البرنامج على الصعيد الوطني، إلا أنّ الإجراءات لا تخضع دائماً لإدارة الشركاء من الجنوب، حيث تُعتبر مشاركة الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني ضعيفة أو معدومة في المراحل الأولية من تطوير نظرية التغيير. تتم مراجعة نظريات التغيير الخاصة بالبرنامج واختبارها بشكلٍ محدودٍ، حيث غالباً ما ينصبّ التركيز في عمليات المراجعة على مناقشة آلية رفع التقارير والمقارنة مع الأهداف المحددة مسبقاً.

## فعالية البرامج والتقدّم المُحرز حتى اليوم

واجهت كافة البرامج بعض التأخيرات في عملية التنفيذ، وقد حصلت معظمها في بداية البرامج بسبب الوقت اللازم لوضعها وتشغيلها (تعزيز التواصل وبناء العلاقات) ومواءمة النهج بين مختلف الشركاء. وشملت أبرز العوامل الأخرى التي عرقلت التقدّم ارتفاع معدّل دوران الموظفين، وتغيير الشركاء (قبل بداية البرامج وبعدها)، إلى جانب التأخير في الدفع داخل البرامج، والوضع السياسي والأمني في البلاد.

تمّ تحقيق بعض النتائج الوسيطة كخطوة ملحوظة نحو تغيير السياسات، ونذكر منها إقرار مواد من قانون العقوبات اللبناني تُعنى بالاعتصاب، والأفعال الفاضحة، والاعتصاب الشرعي، والخطف، مع مساهمة معقولة من برنامجين. ومع ذلك، لم يتم تحقيق التغييرات في السياسات والتشريعات على النحو المحدّد في البرامج حتى الآن، إنّما تم إحراز المزيد من التقدّم من ناحية توفير البيئة اللازمة لتقديم المطالب واتخاذ المواقف، بما يشمل تنظيم المنتديات وطاولات الحوار للتأثير على النقاش. كما يمكن اعتبار مبادرات المناصرة التي تم تنفيذها، ومنها بناء التحالفات مع منظمات المجتمع المدني وأصحاب الحقوق والقطاع الخاص وأصحاب المصلحة الآخرين، خطوة وسيطة. ويُنسب ذلك إلى زيادة جهود التعاون بشكلٍ عام. ولكن، واجه القِيمون على البرامج تحديات في بناء التحالفات والمشاركة فيها بسبب مستوى المنافسة بين منظمات المجتمع المدني وردود الفعل السلبية على مسائل الجندر وحقوق مجتمع الميم، فتردّدوا في الانخراط مع أصحاب المصلحة.

تم إحراز تقدّم ملموس لناحية تعزيز القدرات. فقد بيّن تقييم القدرات التنظيمية في ما يتعلق بالضغط والمناصرة التي يتمّع بها شركاء مختارون تحسّناً ملحوظاً مقارنةً بخط الأساس، حيث تم إحراز التقدّم الأكبر في مجال تعزيز الثقة وبناء العلاقات بين أصحاب الصلاحيات الذين يمثّلون مصالح الفئة الناجية فضلاً عن دعم العمل الجماعي. كما يراعى الشركاء الجندر في أنشطتهم بشكلٍ متزايدٍ، على الرغم من غياب الاستراتيجيات الواضحة بهذا الشأن. ولاحظنا مشاركة كبيرة من جانب فئة الشباب التي انخرطت في الأنشطة وطوّرت قدراتها القيادية، مع أنّ الاستطلاع يُبيّن أنّه يصعب في بعض الأحيان الحفاظ على مشاركة فئة الشباب على نطاق واسع. وقد شُمل، في مرحلة منتصف المدة، ما مجموعه 68 منظمة لبنانية (من الطبقتين الأولى والثانية<sup>2</sup>) في البرامج حتى الآن.

صحيح أنّه تم رصد بعض التغييرات الإيجابية في المواقف العامة تجاه حقوق المرأة والمساواة بين الجندين، إلا أنّه يصعب التحقّق من صحتها. ومع ذلك، تُبيّن الاستطلاعات التي أُجريت على مستوى المجتمع بعض النتائج الإيجابية التي تشمل تصميم آليات لزيادة الوعي وتعزيز مشاركة المرأة في عملية صنع القرارات. أما في ما يتعلق بالصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية، فقد انعكس التقدّم في إتاحة الخدمات الحالية للجميع، إن لجهة توفير بيئة آمنة للجميع، بما يشمل مجتمع الميم واللاجئين والنازحين، أم لجهة السلع. ولكن، واجهت الجهات المعنية تحديات كبيرة في ضمان توفير خدمات معيّنة تتعلق بحق الاختيار والحقوق الجنسية نتيجة القيود المفروضة على البيئة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم إحراز تقدّم ملموس في تعزيز مشاركة فئة الشباب في عملية وضع السياسات واتخاذ القرارات في مجال الخدمات التي تقدّمها البرامج حالياً، مثل العيادات أو المراكز الصحية، وزيادة عدد العاملين الصحيين المُدرّبين على تقديم خدمات الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية.

اقتصرت التقدّم المُحرز في حماية حقوق الإنسان على زيادة الوعي في المجتمعات في ظلّ الوضع الراهن، حيث قرّر القِيمون على البرامج تخفيف الترويج للقضايا المتعلقة بمجتمع الميم وبالمواضيع الأخرى التي قد تثير ردود فعل سلبية.

### مشاركة ملحوظة من فئة الشباب والمجموعات المستهدفة

اختلفت مشاركة فئة الشباب في البرامج من برنامج إلى آخر. ففي البرامج/الشراكات التي تركز على فئة الشباب، غالباً ما يتولّون أدواراً قيادية ناشطة، بما يشمل مشاركة الشباب في السياسات المحلية والحقوق والصحة الجنسية والإنجابية. يساهم إطار سياسة برنامج تعزيز المجتمع المدني في تمكين الفئات المهمشة، ويرتبط ذلك بشكلٍ خاص بتعزيز قدرات المناصرة، وزيادة الوعي بحقوق النازحين واللاجئين وذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، وتعزيز حركة الزواج. وفي بعض الحالات، يرتبط ذلك بأنشطة محددة، فيما يتم إعلام أو استشارة الفئات المستهدفة فقط في حالات أخرى.

<sup>2</sup> بحسب تعريف الاتحاد الذي وضعته وزارة الشؤون الخارجية، تشمل الطبقة الأولى أعضاء الاتحاد، وبعضهم غير ناشط في لبنان في حين أنّ البعض الآخر هم شركاء رئيسيون على الصعيد الوطني، كما هو مُحدّد في الجدول. أما الطبقة الثانية، فتشمل الشركاء المنقذين الذين تعاقبوا رسمياً مع شركاء الطبقة الأولى. وتشمل الطبقة الثالثة الشركاء المحليين (مع عقود التعاقد من الباطن) والفئة الناجية للشركاء في الطبقتين الأولى والثانية.

## القيادة في الجنوب

بيّنت نصف البرامج تقريباً نماذج ناجحة للقيادة المحلية، حيث شارك الشركاء المحليون بنشاط في عمليات اتخاذ القرارات المرتبطة بالأنشطة، وإن كان ذلك بدرجة أقل في القرارات المرتبطة بالميزانية. واجه القِيمون على البرامج بعض التحديات في إشراك الشركاء المحليين بشكلٍ كاملٍ وفعّالٍ، لاسيّما منظمات المجتمع المدني/ المنظمات الشعبية الأصغر حجماً. ويُنسب ذلك إلى حدٍ ما إلى طبيعة المشاركات وعمليات التمويل قصيرة الأجل وإلى جهوزية تلك المنظمات. وقد شملت التحديات الأخرى مشاركة العديد من شركاء الاتحاد في البرنامج الوطني أو عدم وجود شريك رئيسي على الصعيد الوطني، مما صعّب إدارة البرنامج وأثر على مشاركة الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني. أدت مشاركة منظمات المجتمع المدني اللبنانية في البرامج دوراً جوهرياً في تعزيز المصداقية والثقة داخل مجتمعاتها، مما عزّز بدوره شرعية هذه المنظمات محلياً ودولياً. وقد انطبق ذلك أيضاً على السلطات إلى حدٍ ما، غير أنّ هذه العمليات قد تأثرت برود الفعل السلبية وانعدام الثقة بين المجتمع المدني والحكومة. كما ساهمت مشاركة الشركاء اللبنانيين النشطة في تكيف البرامج مع السياق المحلي وعزّزت المشاركة المحلية.

## الجنس والنهج متعدّد الجوانب

صحيح أنّ أحد المحاور الرئيسية في كافة البرامج يقضي بالتركيز على النساء والفتيات والنهج متعدّد الجوانب، إلا أنه لم يتم تطوير استراتيجيات واضحة في هذا الخصوص. فقد تبيّنت الحاجة إلى المزيد من التنسيق بشأن القضايا التي تتطلّب تغييراً اجتماعياً كبيراً، مثل الاهتمام العام بمجتمعات الميم وسلامتها وحفّها في الاختيار، وتمثيل المرأة ومشاركتها وتمكينها، وإتاحة الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية للجميع. وقد اعتمدت كافة البرامج نهجاً قائماً على حقوق الإنسان، مع التركيز بشكلٍ أساسي على عملية التمكين. كما تستخدم كافة البرامج نهجاً متعدّد الجوانب وتحرص على شمل جميع الفئات الاجتماعية، مع التركيز على مجتمعات الميم واللاجئين والنازحين وذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والأقليات الدينية، بهدف ضمان مشاركة متساوية. ويبدو أنّ برنامجاً واحداً فقط يعتمد استراتيجية محددة لإشراك ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة. وليس من الواضح كيف تضمن البرامج وصولها إلى الفئة الأشدّ فقراً.

## مراعاة ظروف الصراع وسياسة الحماية

في الكثير من الأحيان، لم يتم إجراء تحليلٍ كاملٍ لمسائل الجنس والنزاع عند تصميم البرنامج. فيعد ردود الفعل السلبية بأشكالها المختلفة، حسّنت البرامج تحليلها للنزاع الاجتماعي وغيّرت أنشطتها وفقاً لذلك. وصحيح أنّ معظم البرامج تعتمد سياسات عامّة للسلامة والأمن، بيد أنّها ليست مخصصة لسياق النزاع في جنوب لبنان. بشكلٍ عام، يضمن شركاء الاتحاد نقل سياسات الحماية وقواعد السلوك إلى الشركاء، بخاصة للفئات المستهدفة المختلفة، بما يشمل فئة الشباب والراشدين الشباب. يُعتبر الاستغلال والاعتداء والتحرش الجنسي من المحاور الرئيسية في معظم البرامج، بما في ذلك الدورات التدريبية المخصصة للشركاء. ولكن، لم يدمج أيّ من البرامج هذه السياسات والمبادئ في أنظمة الرصد والتقييم والتعلم حتى الآن، باستثناء الخصوصية والسرية. ويولي الشركاء/ القِيمون على البرامج اهتماماً متزايداً بتدابير حماية الموظفين، بما يشمل صحتهم النفسية.

## الابتكار

يُشير الابتكار في الغالب إلى التعديلات التي يتم إلحاقها بالبرامج لتناسب السياق المحافظ والمتقلّب والخاضع لقيود، بدلاً من استخدام طرق جديدة. وتشمل التعديلات التي تم إجراؤها لمواجهة ردود الفعل السلبية تغيير صياغة المفاهيم وطريقة نقلها، مثلاً من خلال فصل الرسالة عن السياسة أو اللجوء إلى أفراد محدّدين لنقل الرسالة. أما في ما يتعلق بالتوعية والتنظيم، فتعتمد بعض البرامج نهجاً تصاعدياً مبتكراً يهدف إلى بناء شبكات على مستوى المجتمع وإشراك أصحاب الحقوق بطريقة شاملة ومبتكرة. كما تقدّم بعض البرامج أمثلة قيّمة عن طريقة استخدام التكنولوجيا، بما في ذلك السلامة الرقمية. ومع ذلك، يبدو أنّ الكثير من الشركاء والقِيمون على البرامج يستخدمون وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، لاسيّما فيسبوك، بطريقة تقليدية وغير مبتكرة.

## الانساق

يختلف الانساق الداخلي من برنامج إلى آخر، حيث لا يزال القِيمون على بعض البرامج يبحثون عن سُبلٍ فعّالة للتعاون. ويبدو أنّ التنسيق في البرامج التي تضم شريكاً رئيسياً على الصعيد الوطني أفضل مما هو عليه في البرامج الأخرى. كما يشارك الكثير من الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني في برامج متعدّدة، مما يثير تساؤلات حول ما إذا كانت البرامج قد تجاهلت شركاء آخرين مناسبين (غير ملحوظين) من المجتمع المدني.

وبدوره، يختلف الانساق الخارجي من برنامج إلى آخر. ففي حين أنّ درجة الانساق مع برامج أخرى من هذا النوع منخفضة، يبدو أنّ جهود التنسيق مع أصحاب المصلحة الخارجيين، مثل المبادرات المحلية الأخرى والجهات المانحة والمنظمات غير الحكومية والوكالات الحكومية، تتحسن، على الرغم من أنّها لا تزال محدودة. وغالباً ما يجهل القِيمون على البرامج المبادرات الأخرى التي يتم تنفيذها في البلاد. بشكلٍ عام، كان من المتوقع أن تساهم السفارة بشكلٍ أكبر في دعم جهود التنسيق وأن تشارك أكثر في البرامج. ولكنّ القِيمين على البرامج لم يبذلوا بدورهم جهوداً حديثة للتنسيق مع السفارة أو مع البرامج الأخرى. تختلف العلاقة بين القِيمين على البرامج والسفارة في لبنان من برنامج إلى آخر، حيث تتفاعل السفارة بانتظامٍ أكثر مع القِيمين على بعض البرامج، لاسيّما مع الشركاء الرئيسيين الهولنديين، فيما تربطها علاقة ضعيفة أو معدومة مع القِيمين على برامج أخرى. تشير التعليقات بشكلٍ عام إلى أنّ الوزارة/السفارة قد ساهمت إلى حدٍ ما في حماية منظمات المجتمع المدني بمواقفها من قضايا معينة، بما يشمل دعمها لحرية التعبير، غير أنّها قد تؤدي دوراً أكبر في هذا الشأن.

## الفعالية

إنّ ازدواجية الجهود هي أمرٌ متوقَّع إلى حدِّ ما في ظلِّ التنسيق المحدود وتركيز البرامج المشترك على حقوق المرأة والمساواة بين الجندين (والمحاور الفرعية)، والصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية، فضلاً عن الفئات المستهدفة المحددة مثل مجتمع الميم والنازحين. وتشمل العوامل الرئيسية التي تحدُّ من فعالية البرامج، في بعض الحالات، الموارد المحدودة أمام الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني، مما يُقيّد إمكانيات الأنشطة ونطاقها. كما ترتبط صعوبات التعاون بالهياكل التنظيمية الكبيرة والمعقّدة في بعض البرامج. وغالباً ما يتم اتخاذ القرارات المتعلقة بالميزانية على مستوى الاتحاد بدون استشارة الشركاء الآخرين، مما يحدُّ من مرونة تخصيص الأموال على مستوى البلاد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أثر ارتفاع معدل دوران الموظفين وضعف الأنظمة الداخلية، سواء على مستوى شركاء الاتحاد أم الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني، على فعالية البرامج وعلى الدعم الذي يمكن تقديمه للشركاء. استفاد القِيمون على البرامج عموماً من هامش المرونة الذي قدّمته الوزارة، حيث تمكّن الشركاء المنفذون من التكيف مع السياقات المتغيّرة وتعديل التدابير الأمنية الواجب اتّخاذها لضمان سلامة أصحاب الحقوق والموظفين خلال فترات ردود الفعل السلبية على المسائل المتعلقة بالجنس. ومع ذلك، تظهر الحاجة إلى تخصيص ميزانية إضافية لتقديم الخدمات وتغطية التكاليف المؤسسية مثلاً، نظراً إلى هشاشة الوضع الراهن. كما تُعتبر متطلبات الرصد والتقييم صارمة ولا تتماشى دائماً مع طموح القيادة في الجنوب، لأنّ الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني لا يتّمعون دائماً بالقدرة على الوفاء بهذه المتطلبات.

## الاستدامة

لم يطرُق القِيمون على البرامج استراتيجيات انسحاب واضحة حتى الآن. يشدّد بعض الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني على الاهتمام المحدود بالاستدامة أو غياب التواصل بشأن استمرارية الدعم المحتملة، بما في ذلك الدعم لتحديد مصادر تمويل جديدة. كما يبدو أنّه يُمكن بذل المزيد من الجهود لتصميم آليات فعالة لإدارة المعارف وتبادل المعلومات. ومن شأن تعزيز القدرات وحركة النزوح والتواصل والقيادة في الجنوب والشرعية أن يساهم في دعم الاستدامة. من هذا المنطلق، يُعتبر التعاون مع منظمات المجتمع المدني أو الفئات المستهدفة عاملاً رئيسياً لتمكين "الجيل القادم" من أجل الحفاظ على ما تم إنجازه حتى الآن ومواصلة العمل عليه. علاوةً على ذلك، من المتوقع أن تدعم استراتيجيات تخفيف المخاطر استمرارية التأثيرات المُحدّثة، حيث أنّ الوضع الأمني والسياسي يعيق الاستدامة، من بين جملة عوامل أخرى. ويشمل ذلك توفير بيئة آمنة، واعتماد لغة مراعية لمبدأ الشمولية، وصياغة استراتيجيات فعالة لدعم تقبل المجتمع.

## التوصيات

بناءً على النتائج والاستنتاجات المذكورة أعلاه، تمّت صياغة التوصيات التالية للوزارة والسفارة والقِيمين على البرامج:

### توصيات لوزارة الشؤون الخارجية الهولندية والقِيمين على البرامج

- تحديد وتقدير الخطوات الوسيطة نحو إحداث تغيير في السياسات أو التشريعات (من حيث الرصد والتقييم والتعلّم أيضاً) إذا استحالت تحقيق هذا التغيير في إطار البرنامج الزمني.
- في ظلّ هشاشة الوضع الراهن في لبنان، حيث قد تنشأ الأزمات والحالات الطارئة وردود الفعل السلبية فجأة، لعلّه من الضروري تخصيص ميزانية احتياطية للتدخلات الطارئة بهدف ضمان استجابة أسرع وأكثر مرونة. ومن المهم أن تناقش الوزارة هذا الخيار مع القِيمين على البرامج (في مرحلة لاحقة) وأن ينظر هؤلاء في ميزانية احتياطية للبلدان بشكل عام وللبلدان الأكثر هشاشة بشكل خاص.

### توصيات للوزارة:

- يوصى بالتأكد من أنّ التقييم على مستوى البلد أو المنطقة ينضوي ضمن عملية المناقصة لتعزيز الاتساق بين البرامج التي يتم تنفيذها في دولة أو منطقة معيّنة.
- يوصى بتشجيع القِيمين على البرامج على إشراك الشركاء على الصعيد الوطني من البداية لدعم الاتساق والقيادة في الجنوب.
- استغرق إعداد هياكل التنسيق والإدارة الداخلية وتطويرها في عدد كبير من البرامج، لاسيّما الجديدة منها أو الجديدة في البلد، وقتاً طويلاً، ويُعزى ذلك جزئياً إلى وجود إعداد البرامج في عدّة بلدان (في بعض الحالات أكثر من 10 بلدان) في الوقت نفسه. لذلك، يوصى بخفض عدد البلدان (الجديدة) لكل برنامج بهدف تعزيز التركيز والفعالية.
- يوصى بإدراج اعتبارات الفعالية في التقييم، مع مراعاة التأثير المتوقع الفعلي ومبدأ الاستدامة على مستوى البلد.
- يجب مراعاة احتمال أن يثير موقف الوزارة الهولندية بشأن حقوق الإنسان ردود فعل سلبية ضد أنشطة البرنامج، مما قد يصعّب على القِيمين على البرامج والشركاء نقل رسائلهم.
- في إطار عملية التقييم الحالية، لاحظنا ضعفاً كبيراً في تقييم البرامج. لذلك، يوصى بالنظر في التكامل بين الدراسات التقييمية على مستوى السياسات أو البلد ومتطلبات الرصد والتقييم والتعلّم بالشركاء، مع مراعاة التباين الواسع في جودة مراجعات منتصف المدة من برنامج إلى آخر.
- يوصى بالنظر في احتمال توفير دعم إضافي لتعزيز التواصل والتأزر وتجنّب ازدواجية الجهود. وقد تركز هذه الإجراءات على (1) جمع القِيمين على البرامج لتبادل المعلومات بشكل استراتيجي، (2) تنظيم اجتماعات مواضيعية للقِيمين على البرامج، (3) إنشاء منصة للتبادل.

## توصيات للقيمين على البرامج

لتحسين عملية تصميم البرنامج:

- الحرص على إشراك الشركاء في الجنوب بدءاً من مرحلة التصميم لتعزيز التكيف مع السياق والقدرات القيادية.
- تنويع المنظمات الوطنية التي يختارها القيمين على البرامج، بهدف تجنّب التعاقد مع الشركاء "المعتادين" وإشراك الشركاء في برامج مختلفة ودعم شركاء ناشئين أو مختلفين.
- فهم متطلبات البرنامج ومساهمات الشركاء المحددة في مرحلة التصميم.
- مراجعة المبادرات الأخرى في إطار تصميم البرنامج على الصعيد الوطني، ليتم رصدها في التقارير السنوية ومراجعات منتصف المدة بهدف تعزيز الاتساق والتآزر.

لتحسين عملية تنفيذ البرنامج:

- تصميم هياكل إدارية فعّالة تعزّز الاتساق والتكامل والتآزر بين الشركاء.
- من ناحية القيادة في الجنوب، من المهم مواصلة التفكير في ديناميكيات القوة الخاصة بالبرنامج، وديناميكيات القوة على الصعيد الوطني بين الشركاء والطبقات، من خلال إشراك المنظمات الأدنى طبقةً في عمليات اتخاذ القرارات.
- من المهم زيادة الوعي بما يتم إنجازه إلى الحدّ المعقول في ظلّ ردود الفعل السلبية، بما في ذلك الاستخدام الفعّال لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لاستعراض ما يفعله أشخاص مختلفون، ومنهم واضعو السياسات.
- تصميم آليات فعّالة لإدارة المعارف وتبادل المعلومات. فمن خلال إنشاء مجموعات العمل وتسهيل التبادلات المواضيعية، يمكن للشركاء توفير بيئة أكثر شمولية وإشراكاً. كما أنّ استخدام منصة إلكترونية لتبادل المعلومات سيشجّع للشركاء مشاركة المستندات والموارد بسهولة.
- الحاجة إلى المزيد من التنسيق والتآزر:
  - من خلال دعم تبادل المعلومات الاستراتيجي والاجتماعات المواضيعية لتعزيز التنسيق وتجنّب ازدواجية الجهود. قد يشمل تلك الاستفادة من هياكل التنسيق الناجحة مثل منصة التنسيق التابعة لهيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة.
  - من خلال تعزيز التواصل والتآزر مع أصحاب المصلحة الآخرين، مثلاً بين المنظمات الداعمة لمجتمع الميم والمنظمات النسوية و/أو منظمات العاملين في المنازل.
- تطوير استراتيجيات استدامة صريحة ضمن عملية تصميم البرنامج.

لتحسين أنظمة الرصد والتقييم والتعلم

- يجدر بالقيمين على البرامج التأكد من أنّ أنظمة الرصد والتقييم والتعلم ترتبط مباشرةً بنظرية التغيير، وتُستخدم للتفكير فيها ومراجعة تصميمها ومشاركة الخبرات التي قد تساعد على الاستجابة للسياق الحالي.
- ضمان وصول جميع الشركاء لمبادئ وأدوات الرصد والتقييم والتعلم المتعلقة بالمرأة، من أجل تجنّب استخدامها للتهرب من مسؤولية تنفيذها.

## التوصيات المواضيعية

- تظهر الحاجة إلى العمل بشكلٍ منهجي واستراتيجي مع معارضي فكرة إتاحة الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية للجميع بهدف الدفع بعجلة التغيير الاجتماعي وتحميل الحكومة المسؤولية. إنّ تغيير مواقف الحكومة والقوى المحافظة في المجتمع التي تظنّ أنّ الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية تقتصر على صحة الأم والطفل وتنضوي جزئياً ضمن تخطيط الأسرة يتطلب نهجاً طويل الأمد. فلا يمكن لمنظمة واحدة أو برنامج واحد تحقيق ذلك، إذ يتطلب تنسيق الجهود.
- تخصيص الوقت والموارد الكافية لتمكين الشركاء من تأدية دورهم في تأهيل الخبراء الطبيين وزيادة الوعي المجتمعي.
- تعزيز التنسيق بين أصحاب المصلحة لمعالجة ردود الفعل السلبية بشأن المحاور الرئيسية (الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية، وحقوق المرأة والمساواة بين الجندين) ودعم جهود المناصرة.





# 1. Introduction



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and objectives of the mid-term review

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned a mid-term review (MTR) of the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) policy framework. The consortium Ecorys and Beyond Group has implemented the assignment for Lebanon (Lot 3 Middle East and North Africa (MENA))<sup>3</sup>.

Through the SCS policy framework, the MFA aims to contribute to civil society development in the protection of rights and interests of different groups in society, as key for an inclusive society and a good functioning democracy. The framework focusses on poverty reduction and representing and strengthening people's voices both in fragile and more stable contexts. It pays specific attention to the promotion of gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, and the role of youth in sustainable development. The MFA finances in total 42 programmes worldwide between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025, among which 11 programmes that are active in Lebanon.

This final report presents the findings of the MTR of the policy implementation in Lebanon. The specific objectives of the MTR as stated in the Descriptive Document are:

- To **assess progress** made on the SCS indicators, on specific thematic indicators, and on the crosscutting themes southern leadership, gender and youth and the integration of conflict sensitivity and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) (effectiveness);
- To **assess the coherence, efficiency, and sustainability** of the policy implementation (including previous implementation);
- To **formulate lessons** for the remainder of the policy implementation and future Strengthening Civil Society & thematic policymaking, funding mechanisms and policy implementation.

The MTR is part of a larger evaluation assignment that is composed of three parts: A baseline study, and third-party monitoring (TPM) and data quality assurance (DQA) that Ecorys and Beyond Group have previously conducted, and the present MTR. The objectives of this overall evaluation assignment are to provide transparency of and accountability for the allocation of official development assistance (ODA) funds; to evaluate the quality of policy implementation by the programmes and MFAs role in the programmes; and to generate lessons for future policy-making and implementation.

## 1.2 Approach and Methodology

The MTR covers all programmes including grant programmes under the SCS framework in Lebanon that have been implemented in the period January 2021 to May 2024 (11 in total). The assessment applies the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Additionally, the MFA requested to prioritise the question on the validity of the theory of change (ToC) and underlying assumptions in the Lebanese context. Annex 10 provides the evaluation matrix linking the research questions to indicators, data collection and analysis methods, and sources. Recommendations have been developed for the different evaluation objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Ecorys has also conducted the Baseline and DQA and TPM for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), as part of Lot 3. Given the circumstances after October 7, 2023 in OPT, the Mid-Term Evaluation was continued for Lebanon only.

### 1.2.1 Approach

The study followed a [theory-based mixed methods approach](#), applied through a [contribution analysis](#) to assess effectiveness. The MTR thereby built on the baseline study and the first ToC workshop conducted in 2022 for making comparisons and measuring progress. It further included elements of coherence, efficiency, and sustainability.

The MTR combined a [gender-mainstreaming](#) and [human rights-based approach \(HRBA\)](#). It assessed how gender equality is included into the design, implementation, and monitoring of the different programme interventions looking at the five key principles of the HRBA<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the evaluation used feminist principles of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) to evaluate programmes. This means that the assignment looked at how programmes have challenged different power structures; how they have been participatory and created inclusive learning spaces and feedback loops; and how they have been attentive to duty of care, trust-building (between stakeholders and rightsholders) and mutual accountability among partners<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the MTR design was informed by the combined approach too, in terms of:

- Ensuring that gender equality and diversity (LGBTIQ+, transformative change) and intersectional factors were reflected in all MTR tools and reports;
- Focusing the MTR on capturing transformative change for gender equality and advancing human rights for all;
- Protecting the safety and security of participants (anonymising participation and providing safe space, non-judgement, non-discrimination), and of the team members;
- Fostering team participation and internal power-sharing and decision-making (through regular meetings and consultation);
- Use of disaggregated data to the best possible extent while making sure to "do no harm".

Figure 1.1 Overview approach and methods











<sup>4</sup> The key principles are: Applying all human rights for all; Meaningful and inclusive participation and access to decision making; Non-discrimination and equality; Accountability and rule of law for all; Transparency and access to information supported by disaggregated data.

<sup>5</sup> Partos (2023). Feminist MEL. Available at: <https://www.partos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Rethinking-MEL-a-guide-for-a-Feminist-approach.pdf>.

### Organisational capacity assessment

To assess organisational capacity strengthening of civil society, an organisational capacity assessment (OCA) was used that was developed during the baseline study. The tool is based on a model by Elbers & Kamstra that is informed by empirical evidence regarding civil society organisations' (CSOs) engagement in advocacy and lobby actions for policy change and for influencing governance. It thereby disentangles the abstract notion of advocacy capacity into concrete components. The model focuses the analysis of the eight capabilities relevant for lobby and advocacy (L&A) effectiveness, as in the following figure.

**Figure 1.2 Advocacy capabilities for organisational capacity assessment (based on Elbers & Kamstra, 2020)**

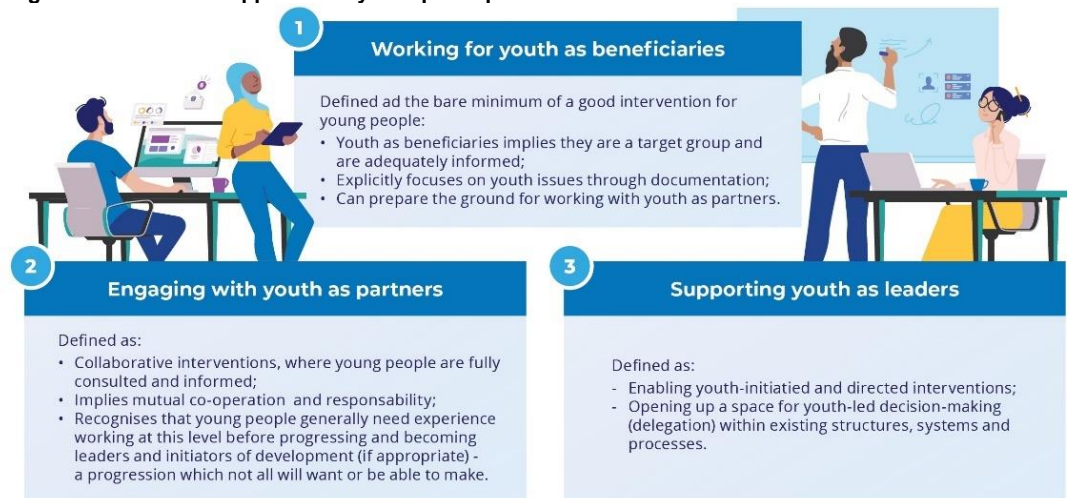
Advocacy capabilities		Organisational capacities for NGOs (a tailored version of the organisational capacities was developed for Community-based/grassroot organisations)
	<b>1. Produce evidence</b>	The capacity to analyse the local reality and identify problems, with a focus on gender equality, human rights and social justice. The organisation uses/produces evidence related to the implementation of human rights instruments.
	<b>2. Inspire trust among power holders</b>	The organisation is recognised as a bearer of CS voice (by duty-bearers).
	<b>3. Represent constituency interests</b>	The organisation has a strong base (among rightsholders) according to its focus, and the constituency is represented.
	<b>4. Analyse the political arena</b>	The capacity to identify relevant stakeholders including key duty-bearer and rightsholders and select relevant actions to address local (gender equality) interests/tactics/strategies.
	<b>5. Produce tailored messages</b>	Capacity to target groups in communication and advocacy. The organisation develops tailored gender-transformative messages. Messages are developed for both stakeholders and duty-bearers.
	<b>6. Work collectively</b>	The organisation has a clear vision of need to work together with other organisations, is able to build effective alliances (according to an intersectional approach taking into account the indivisibility of human rights) and has the capacity to mobilise external support
	<b>7. Build rapport with powerholders</b>	Capacity to engage in (local) governance processes and with power holders holding administrative, economic, social or operational positions, influencing public decisions.
	<b>8. Adapt to ongoing changes in the environment</b>	The organisation is able to react rapidly to threats and opportunities (for gender equality, for human rights including opportunities provided by human rights instruments the country is party to) and control and mitigate risk factors

These capabilities are linked to a range of factors affecting the effectiveness of CSO actions in influencing policies and decision-making processes, by targeting influential actors, and by representing constituency needs. The OCA includes relevant elements such as representativeness, inclusivity, safety and security, and cross-cutting issues related to gender-transformative objectives, adoption of the HRBA, and [meaningful \(youth\) representation](#), making a distinction between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). The assessment considered Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 partners.

To assess representation and involvement of different groups – youth, but also other programme target groups – the MTR, in line with the baseline study, used five levels of participation (from

informing as the lowest level of engagement, consulting, involving, and collaborating to empowering as the highest level of engagement) as distinguished in the Meaningful Youth Representation (MYR) toolkit of the MFA. See the figure below for elaboration of the three-lens approach<sup>6</sup>. The assessment for each is informed by desk and website review and interviews with staff members.

**Figure 1.3 Three-lens approach to youth participation**



Where possible, the sample of partners for the OCA was the same as for the baseline study to allow for comparison. Sampling was defined ensuring representation of at least two Lebanon-based organisations of each programme (if possible), of different types (NGO/grassroot organisations, culture, media, research institute) and from multiple regions.

- At baseline stage, fifteen OCAs were conducted. During phase I of the TPM & DQA assignment two additional organisations could be sampled for which an OCA was conducted in July 2023 for a total of **17 OCAs at baseline**;
- Due to changes in the alliances, programmes have stopped activities with five of the sampled partners. One of these became consequently part of another programme and remained included in the sample. Two organisations have been newly added, for which an OCA was made collecting also retrospective baseline data. In addition, two more OCAs have been conducted for which only baseline data could be collected (to support the assessment for the end-line review). In total, the analysis at MTR stage thus includes **15 OCAs** (of which fourteen Tier 2 organisations and one Tier 3 organisation<sup>7</sup>, involving ten NGOs and five community-based organisations (CBOs).

### *Theory of change workshop*

The ToC workshop aimed to provide answers related to the assumptions and pathways of the SCS ToC. It took place face-to-face in Beirut on Wednesday 20 March 2024, with eleven participants from eight in-country lead partners, and a representative of the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE). The first session focussed on the overarching SCS ToC and the connection to the programmes, through (thematic) group work and discussion on relevance, needed changes and new developments (focusing on what would be needed to achieve a just and equitable society). The second session was a deep dive in the current context in Lebanon, including group work and discussion on enabling and constraining factors and stakeholders (duty-bearers and rightsholders).

<sup>6</sup> MFA. (2022). Meaningful Youth Participation – Practical Toolkit. <https://www.youthatheart.nl/documents/publications/2022/03/14/my-p-toolkit-en>.

<sup>7</sup> Following the MFA's definition of consortia, the 1st tier are the consortium members, of which some are not active in Lebanon, and some are in-country leads, indicated in the table; 2nd Tier are implementing partners formally contracted by the 1st Tier partners; and 3rd Tier are local partners (with 3rd tier contracts), the constituency of 1st and 2nd Tier partners.

The final session included an interactive plenary discussion on the role and support of CSOs in Lebanon, including legitimacy, capacities, and different funding modalities.

### *Case studies and deep dives*

Case studies and deep dives were used to ensure in-depth insights into the results of the programmes and to identify good practices and lessons learned. They focus on different aspects of the programmes:

- **Case studies** (8) were conducted through contribution analysis of selected outcomes and provide insights in the (medium-term) [results/outcomes](#) of the programmes, including three case studies that focussed on capacity building. A selection of outcomes was made based on the reported results in the MTRs of the programmes. To be able to conduct a contribution analysis, it was first important to consider outcomes that were sufficiently important to warrant in-depth investigation, which refers to the relevance of a certain outcome based on an 'attribution problem', to determine what components of the programme might have contributed to or cause its outcomes. For instance, it was deemed important to consider the 'noticeable' shift towards a more open and normalised discourse on SRHR, because of the efforts certain partnerships have made in this regard. Second, outcomes were considered that provided a realistic opportunity to draw conclusions about the likely contribution of (multiple) programmes. The final sample was made through purposeful sampling of outcomes, to cover different programmes and thematic areas. For the three case studies focusing on capacity building, cases organisations were selected for which an OCA was conducted at baseline stage, representing different types of organisations, both CBOs and NGOs, and higher and lower OCA scores.
- **Deep dives** (10) in [organisational practices and processes](#) relating to the research questions were selected through purposeful sampling (the extent to which the programme related to the questions topics), representing different programmes and the different learning potential of certain programmes. The selection was linked to the case studies (where possible and relevant) to limit the burden for the programmes and their partners. Deep dives include the following five processes: Southern leadership; engagement of target groups; legitimacy; innovation; and the connection between the international and national component.

The final selection of case studies and deep dives was shared with the in-country leads to discuss any reservations (for example because of sensitivity or access challenges) and to take account of the progress made. It was also presented to the MFA. The findings of the case studies and deep dives were then developed through documentation review and in-depth interviews with the involved programme staff, rightsholders and external stakeholders.

### *1.2.2 Data collection and analysis methods*

Data collection methods used for the MTR were document review, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), workshops, and a survey.

For the [document and literature review](#), the evaluation team built on documentation that was already reviewed and summarised in programme fiches during the Baseline, and DQA and TPM studies. In addition, they were further developed reflecting the key MTR research questions and inserting data from the programmes' baseline studies/proposals, annual plans 2022, and MTRs. Regarding the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), programmes are free to choose on which indicators they report (at least three), and some programmes are exempted from publication because of sensitivity issues. Therefore, IATI data included in this report does not provide a complete overview, but rather insights into trends of progress. Finally, reviewed external data include national strategies and policies (e.g. National Strategy for Lebanese Women (2022-2030) and the related National Action Plan (2024-2026)), national statistical data and surveys, external

reports from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), World Bank data, and think-tank literature.

KII have been conducted with a total of 110 interviewees, both online and face-to-face, including interviews for the case studies. The full team undertook data collection in Lebanon in March 2024. The interviews informed the case studies, deep dives, and OCAs for which multiple interviews took place with partners staff. Annex 4 provides an anonymised overview of the interviewees:

- In total, 70 interviews were conducted with programme staff, including (in-country) leads and at least two to three partner organisations per programme, and 11 interviews with rightsholders/Tier 3 organisations;
- There have been 6 interviews with the Dutch MFA/embassy staff;
- 23 interviews with external stakeholders including UN Women, the EU, (international) CSOs, Belgian Embassy staff, and experts on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), youth programming and gender.

Two FGDs were used to develop the case studies, to collect in-depth information and reflections from multiple participants. Participants in FGDs were rightsholders of two programmes.

The [survey among CSOs](#) focussed on the core elements of the SCS policy framework, with the aim to capture the situation on civic space, civil society in different sectors, L&A, and responsiveness of duty bearers. The same survey questions used at baseline stage were repeated to compare the findings and to allow for analysis of a sufficient broad section of the CSO landscape in Lebanon. To the extent possible, the survey targeted the same set of SCS partners and CSOs that are not part of the programmes, to compare findings from CSOs within and outside the SCS framework. For SCS partners specifically, it included questions to capture self-reported changes related to the SCS programme. An online survey was combined with telephone interviews to increase the response rate (see challenges below).

In total, 94 respondents filled out the MTR survey (nine more compared to the baseline survey), 32 out of the 94 organisations that are partners (34%). Yet, there are only 41 respondents that filled out the survey at both stages, 17 of which are partners (41%). Chapter 3 provides a general analysis of the MTR survey, followed by a comparison between the baseline and MTR responses for only the 41 respondents, to allow for a statistically correct comparison.

[Contribution analysis](#) was undertaken to establish the contribution of the SCS policy framework to outcome-level results in Lebanon. For the case studies we assessed 1) how well triangulated a finding is and how much evidence there is to support it, and 2) the plausibility of contribution, or how likely it is that the activities and outputs will lead to the outcomes (including a rubric 1-4 from strong/highly plausible to poor/not clear). The analysis followed four steps integrating other methods to establish evidence of contribution (i.e. elements of [process tracing](#)<sup>8</sup>, which are used as to test (confirm or not confirm) hypotheses to assess plausibility of contribution).<sup>9</sup>

Given the sensitivity of many topics of the SCS framework in Lebanon, the evaluation team has ensured application of research ethics including the protection of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent to avoid that the research put the safety of those involved at risk ('[Do no harm principles](#)'). This was done through consideration of settings for data collection, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring that personal data are neither collected nor shared inappropriately. [Conflict sensitivity analysis](#) has been part of the context analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Intrac. (2017). Process-tracing. <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Process-tracing.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Steps of the contribution analysis are: Contextualisation of policy ToC at country level building on the existing policy ToC; Selection of policy level outcomes; Assembling and assessing the contribution story, including triangulation; and understanding and analysing the wider context and identifying other key factors that may have influenced the changes observed or provide a substitution.

### 1.2.3 Validation and triangulation

As the data collection process took longer than expected (see challenges below), data analysis started during data collection activities and continued after data collection was finalised. The data from different tools and methods was combined and compared, and for the case studies contribution analysis was applied. The information received was also cross-checked with external stakeholders and independent sources for validation and triangulation to the extent possible. As mentioned in the next section, due to the situation in Lebanon, the number of external stakeholders that could be consulted was less than planned, limiting the extent to which findings could be validated.

A validation and learning workshop was conducted on 13 June 2024 with a presence of 17 in-country partners from 10 programmes. Validation was based on the findings, and the learning part focussed on co-creation of recommendations. It consisted of two parts, first the presentation and discussion of key findings and recommendations. Second, three participatory break-out sessions enabled further discussion into three topics, namely southern leadership coordination and coherence, and opportunities for SRHR, gender equality and LGBTIQ+ efforts. In a reference group on 22 May, feedback on the draft report was discussed and the discussion results were taken into account in the finalisation of the report.

## 1.3 Challenges and limitations

### Challenges

The MTR process faced multiple and considerable challenges. Most notably, the security situation in Lebanon has deteriorated following the war in Gaza and the war between Lebanon and Israel since 7 October 2023. The security situation remains volatile and unpredictable with incidents particularly in the southern Lebanon and Beqaa (Chapter 2 provides an elaborate country context). In this context, priorities have shifted for organisations, individual staff and target groups. Stakeholders were often working remotely, with limited possibilities of meeting people in person outside of Beirut. Interviews often shifted to online, were difficult to schedule, or were postponed. As part of risk mitigation, the SCS partners in some instances decided to focus on essential processes of their programmes (thus not including external evaluations). In addition, international travel to Lebanon required additional security steps.

At mid-term stage, and because there have been delays in the implementation of the programmes, it is for some programmes too early to assess progress on long-term outcomes and impact, which is to some extent intrinsic to an MTR. To mitigate this challenge the MTR has instead focussed on intermediate outcomes and gaps.

A further significant challenge were the non- or slow responses of organisations in the programmes on requests for the MTR. While the data collection phase was announced three weeks in advance through the international lead organisation and additionally to the in-country leads, it took the team much time and many follow up e-mails and phone calls to schedule meetings or request to fill in the survey. Thereby, the number of partner organisations who filled the survey during the MTR is smaller than the number of those who filled it during the baseline; this could be due to general evaluation fatigue experienced as mentioned below. The limited response affected the efficiency of the MTR implementation, and the extent to which we could conduct a document review (with promised documentation and data not provided), and interview stakeholders. While some programme staff were helpful, in some cases, there has never been a reply at all, in particular to

requests to speak to Tier 3 organisations and rightsholders. There were no responses from Tier 2 partners for connections, significant hesitations, and repeating requests for explanation of the assignment, or no responses from Tier 3 partners themselves.

While we have streamlined the survey to make it more accessible, it required multiple requests to the Lebanese partners as well as through the international leads to fill out the survey. These limited responses to requests have been highlighted by the evaluation team to the MFA. This may be partly explained by the difficult situation in Lebanon. But there is also evaluation fatigue, as the MTR to some extent overlaps with internal processes for the 2023 Annual Report, and mirrors data collection conducted for the 2023 mid-term reviews by the programmes themselves as required by the MFA.

The timing of the MTR posed challenges as well. For the MTR to inform the next policy cycle it has to be finalised by mid-June 2024. While this is understandable from a policy perspective, it led to a very tight evaluation process impacting the information available. The submission deadline for IATI data and annual reports 2023 of the programmes was 1 May 2024, not matching the data collection phase of the MTR. Although this was known from the start, many of the programmes/partners referred to these documents limiting their responses/time made available for the interviews. Moreover, nine out of eleven annual reports 2023, and most of the IATI data were delayed and thus available very late to be used for this MTR. Furthermore, data collection could only take place during Ramadan and around Easter and Eid Holidays limiting availability of partners as well.

Finally, the broad scope of the MTR was a challenge per se. The evaluation questions cover a wide range of elements and research focus areas, and the methods include in-depth case study research and OCAs, all to be accomplished within the very limited time provided.

### Limitations

In addition to the challenges, there are also limitations of the methodologies selected for the MTR. A first one directly relates to the difficulty in accessing Tier 3 partners and rightsholders, or even Tier 2 partners and consortium members. External actors and especially governmental actors were difficult to access as well, as is the case for staff from the programmes themselves (who were therefore not always willing to share contact details). As a result, for one programme the evaluation team has not been able to talk to in-country partners, and for other programmes it was necessary to merge several activities (OCA, general interview and/or deep dive) into one meeting. In addition, the number of external sources, including the number of rightsholders was less than planned. This may to some extent have affected the representativeness of the sample and resulted in a degree of positive bias in the findings. This was mitigated to the extent possible by triangulating findings with different external stakeholders, different Tier 1 and 2 partners, and publicly available material.

Furthermore, the contribution analysis as methodology chosen has its specific limitations. While contribution analysis is suitable for providing credibility in complex environments, it only explains why and how the programmes have influenced change. Furthermore, it requires a substantial amount of data, which has not always been available. It similarly requires a robust ToC, which – for instance for SCS basket indicator 3 on creating space for CSO demands and positions – proved challenging. Finally, it is challenging to know at the outset which contribution claims could be tested and how. It has therefore been necessary to keep the selected contribution open for a long time, and to discuss the selection multiple times. Overall, this implies that a light-touch approach has been taken in this assignment, with a limited level of depth.

The SCS programmes work on issues that are highly sensitive – for instance LGBTIQ+, gender and SRHR issues – and in a politicised environment in which CSOs as well as external stakeholders

can provide inaccurate or socially desirable responses. To mitigate the risk of confirmation bias, the evaluation team endeavoured to avoid asking leading or anchoring questions and reassured participants of the confidentiality of their responses. To mitigate evaluator bias, interviews were as much as possible conducted by two evaluators – mostly consisting of an international and a national expert.

Sampling may also have resulted in a degree of selection bias as a limited number of interviews were arranged by suggestion of Tier 2 organisations, when the original partner selected was for different reasons not available for the research. This however happened in a limited number of cases, and most organisations were selected by the team.

Finally, capturing evidence of the effects of lobby & advocacy activities is challenging and it is not easy to isolate contribution to them because of the many external factors and the intangible nature of some of them (e.g. change of attitudes).





## **2. SCS policy framework, instruments and programmes**



## 2 Strengthening Civil Society policy framework and programme in Lebanon

In this chapter we will first provide a short description of the SCS policy framework and the partners active in Lebanon. This is followed by a description of the current context, and a discussion on the validity of the policy framework ToC (evaluation question 5) and the programmes' ToCs (evaluation question 6) in the Lebanese context.

### 2.1 SCS policy framework and programmes active in Lebanon

The SCS policy framework supports CSOs in the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The objective of the framework is to contribute to poverty reduction and representation and strengthening people's voices, through strengthening CSO's lobby and advocacy for human rights compliance. Within the broader SDG agenda, the MFA pays specific attention to SDG5, aiming at gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Also, the role of youth is considered a priority throughout the framework. The ToC underlying the SCS framework is presented below in section 2.3.

The SCS policy framework is divided into two grant instruments (power of voices and the SDG5 fund), and six sub-grant instruments. For Lebanon, the sub-grant instruments utilised are the following<sup>10</sup>:

1. **Power of voices (PoV)**: The PoV instrument aims to strengthen CSOs to lobby and advocate at local, national, and international levels to achieve SDGs and a more inclusive and sustainable society related to seven themes<sup>11</sup> and gender equality mainstreamed throughout;
2. **Power of women (PoW)**: The PoW grant instrument aims to strengthen CSOs so that they are capable of lobbying and advocacy;
3. **Sexual and reproductive health & rights (SRHR) programme fund**: The SRHR fund aims to strengthen sexual and reproductive health and rights including enhanced knowledge, greater availability of modern contraceptives, increased use of SRHR services, and reduced maternal and AIDS mortality;
4. **Leading from the south (LFS)**: The LFS grant instrument provides direct support to Southern feminist women's organisation, movements, and networks, through the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and three other regional women's funds.

The SCS policy framework finances in total 42 strategic programmes worldwide between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025. In Lebanon, 10 programmes and one of the LFS partners are active. Throughout the report, we will refer to '11 programmes' when presenting the findings.

The table below provides an overview of the programmes active in Lebanon with the thematic focus areas: seven on women's rights and gender equality (WRGE), two on SRHR, one on equal rights,

<sup>10</sup> Two other instruments are not active in Lebanon: 1) The civic space fund (CSF) & civic space flex fund is not opted for by the Embassy, 2) Women peace and security (WPS) has a focus on further implementing the UN resolution 1325 and Dutch action plan (Protection of women and girls in (post-)conflict environments) and SCF is specifically available for embassies.

<sup>11</sup> 1) Climate mitigation and adaptation; 2) Trade and making value chains more sustainable; 3) Food security, sustainable water management and/or WASH (including water, sanitation and hygiene); 4) Women's rights and gender equality (WRGE); 5) Freedom of speech or freedom of religion and belief; 6) Equal rights LGBTIQ+; 7) Security and rule of law (SRoL).

one on LGBTIQ+, and one on Security and Rule of Law. Annex 1 presents a programme overview including partners involved at Tier 1 level<sup>12</sup>, and the budget per programme.

**Table 2.1 Short overviews of SCS programmes**

Name and lead organisation Tier 1 partners active in Lebanon	Focus area
Free to be me <b>Hivos</b>	Thematic area: Equal rights LGBTIQ+ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened foundations of LGBTIQ+ movement</li> <li>Changed norms and increased public support for LGBTIQ+ people</li> <li>Legal and policy change for LGBTIQ+ people</li> <li>Socioeconomic development for LGBTIQ+ people</li> </ul>
Generation G <b>Rutgers</b> ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality (in-country lead)	Thematic area: Women's rights and gender equality (WRGE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth engagement, capacity strengthening of young people.</li> <li>Gender-based violence (GBV), women leadership</li> <li>Making policies more inclusive (mostly related to women empowerment).</li> </ul> Translation of laws into practical interventions and initiatives.
She Leads <b>Plan International</b> (in-country lead) Terre des Hommes Italy Defense for Children International (DCI) Dar Al Amal	Thematic area: WRGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SRHR for young people</li> <li>Civic space opening</li> <li>Community engagement and norm transformation</li> <li>GYW-led organisations and decision making (# of groups engaged, # of groups reporting that they are involved in decision making about implementation)</li> </ul>
Count me in! <b>Mama Cash</b> (remote) CREA (remote) Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF) (Remote)	Thematic area: WRGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LGBTIQ+ community and economic disparities, intersectionality:</li> <li>Funding and movement support (1)</li> <li>Inclusive networks and collaboration (2)</li> <li>Policy influencing and advocacy (3)</li> </ul>
Strengthening Civil Courage <b>Pax</b> (remote lead) ABAAD	Thematic area: Security and rule of law (SRoL) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), empowering survivors of sexual assault providing protected their civic space to freely express their concerns, create space to mobilise and bring together communities, and hold the Lebanese authorities to account</li> <li>L&amp;A for greater protection of Syrian refugees, and host communities and for a safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria</li> </ul>
Our Voices, Our future <b>CREA</b> (remote lead) Association for Progressive Communications (APC)	Thematic area: WRGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building the capacities of feminist organisations, women's rights, and sexual rights CSOs.</li> <li>Advocating for digital policy changes.</li> </ul>
Fem Pauer <b>Kvinna till Kvinna</b> Collective for Research and Training on	Thematic area: WRGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic focus on economic gender-based violence (EGBV), including issues faced by female workers such as lack of protection for women</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> Following the MFA's definition of consortia, Tier 1 are the consortium members, of which some are not active in Lebanon, and some are in-country leads, indicated in the table; Tier 2 partners are implementing partners formally contracted by the Tier 1 partners; and Tier 3 are local partners (with 3rd tier contracts), the constituency of Tier 1 and Tier 2 partners. Tier 2 and 3 partners are anonymised in the report. four.

Name and lead organisation Tier 1 partners active in Lebanon	Focus area
Development –Action (CRTDA)	working in certain sectors, workplace harassment, and lack of social protection, unpaid care work.
Power Up <b>Just Associates</b> (JASS)	Thematic area: WRGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building cooperative leadership judgement and business skills</li> <li>• Gender equality and women rights: challenging social norms, EGBV</li> <li>• Protecting LGBTIQ+ rights</li> </ul>
We Lead <b>Hivos</b> (in-country lead) Marsa, Restless Development	Thematic area: SRHR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger inclusive youth-led CSOs and movements</li> <li>• Public support for rightsholders' SRHR</li> <li>• Accessible SRHR</li> </ul>
Masarouna <b>Oxfam</b> SMEX	Thematic area: SRHR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SRHR</li> <li>• LGBTIQ+ rights</li> <li>• Digital civic space</li> <li>• Youth engagement and leadership</li> </ul>
Leading from the South Instrument <b>African Women's Development Fund</b> (AWDF)	Thematic area: Economic security and justice, and body and health rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced operational capacity of partner organisations, increased advocacy, and policy involvement by marginalized groups</li> <li>• Advocacy for women's rights (focus on Migrant Women domestic Workers)</li> </ul>

Seven programmes have developed an overall programme involving both international and in-country components, of which the latter is implemented by in-country partners. The other four programmes are providing short and long-term grants to individual partners and do not have a specific country programme.

## 2.2 Country context Lebanon

Over the past two years, Lebanon has navigated its way through significant disruptions to its security and economic environment, which have further deepened its political and economic crisis and made the context for operations and policy change more challenging. The escalation of the war in Gaza over the past eight months has exacerbated tensions throughout Lebanon and increased uncertainty about its future, distorting priorities and adding more hardship to an already broken context. While the villages on the southern borders have been most affected, recent months have seen assassinations and attacks in the Bekaa and the suburbs of Beirut<sup>13</sup>. As tensions spread, the security situation deteriorated and other challenges emerged, such as the escalation of tensions between Syrian refugees and local communities. This was evident in the "Undo the Damage" campaign launched by the NGO World House of Lebanon and other institutions, urging officials to take measures to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees<sup>14</sup>. This environment of heightened instability, coupled with an economic crisis since 2019, has fuelled widespread uncertainty and escalated concerns about the future.

<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera (2024) Israeli military strikes South Lebanon stoking fears of widening conflict, Al Jazeera. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/4/israeli-military-strikes-south-lebanon-stoking-fears-of-widening-conflict>.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, D., & Nasser, R. (2024, May 1). The hostility Syrian refugees contend with in Lebanon. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/4/26/the-hostility-syrian-refugees-content-with-in-lebanon>

Ongoing insecurity at the borders and the constant threat of further escalation have created a pervasive sense of fear among the Lebanese population, leading to significant displacement from border villages to safer locations such as Nabatieh and Tyre. The escalating risk has also led many, including Lebanese citizens and expatriates, to leave the country in search of safety, following warnings from several embassies about the increasing security risks.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the intensification of the Gaza conflict, Lebanon was already grappling with internal strife, including violent confrontations in places such as Ain el Helweh around August and September 2023, which led to further displacement and disrupted aid efforts in the southern city of Saida. In addition, civic space has narrowed, particularly around gender, with the LGBTIQ+ community facing increasing threats from political and religious groups, particularly from a group identified as "Jnoud Al Rab" or "Soldiers of God"<sup>16</sup>. These groups have carried out violent attacks against the community, including a notorious incident at a popular gay bar in Beirut. The political sphere has responded with initiatives aimed at criminalizing homosexuality, which have sparked significant backlash and adversely affected advocacy and support efforts for the queer community.<sup>17</sup> The shrinking space has also been reflected in the closure or budget cuts of some prominent aid programmes (for example, several USAID-funded programmes have been scaled back).

Against this volatile backdrop, Lebanon is politically paralysed. Ongoing factional disputes have created a governance vacuum, leaving the country without a fully functioning government and delaying crucial presidential elections. The paralysis has almost reached the level of local government, with municipal elections postponed for the third year in a row, extending the mandates of already exhausted and rarely functioning councils. Eleven independent deputies were elected in 2022, giving CSOs and the population a slight sense of hope. However, the deeply-rooted and persistent paralysis at the governmental and presidential levels has hindered any possible changes in the parliamentary space. This stalemate hampers Lebanon's ability to address both domestic challenges and wider regional and international tensions.<sup>18</sup>

Lebanon's civil society is known to be very active and dynamic, benefitting from a relatively open civic space. The relatively weak central government is complemented by a rather liberal legal environment, which historically allowed for the emergence of many CSOs. The Lebanese constitution affirms the freedom to establish associations, but it is the 1909 Ottoman Law on Associations which generally governs the civil society, and it has remained unchanged ever since. Although liberal in its content, the law is vague and leaves several legal grey areas. For example, activities that do not comply with Lebanese law, i.e. illegal activities, can lead to a ban on meetings, or prosecutions. This is used by the government to silence and prosecute those critical of the government. This instrumentalization of legal grey areas allows for a certain level of control over CSOs. Even those complying with Lebanese law can face difficulties in the arbitrary bureaucracy. For example, Helem, an LGBTIQ+ organisation, was founded in 2004 and applied for registration, but did not receive confirmation from the Ministry of Interior until 2022, allegedly because LGBTIQ+ remains a controversial issue in Lebanese society and politics. Despite this, the organisation works with the government in several areas such as HIV prevention<sup>19</sup>. One of the reasons for this is that,

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<sup>15</sup> Helou, A. (2024, June 10). In South Lebanon, empty villages, ruined crops and fears of what comes next. Breaking Defense. <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/06/in-south-lebanon-empty-villages-ruined-crops-and-fears-of-what-comes-next/>

<sup>16</sup> France 24 (2023) Hezbollah chief in new attack on same-sex relations, France 24. Available at:

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230729-hezbollah-chief-in-new-attack-on-same-sex-relations-1>

<sup>17</sup> Perry, S. (2023, September 28). *Why the anti-LGBTIQ+ crackdown in Lebanon is not a local issue, but a global one*. PinkNews. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/28/lebanon-lgbtq-rights-crackdown-helem/>

<sup>18</sup> Sherlock, R. (2023) Lebanon is stuck in political deadlock as presidency remains vacant, NPR. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/18/1188408323/lebanon-is-stuck-in-political-deadlock-as-presidency-remains-vacant>

<sup>19</sup> The October 2019 Protests in Lebanon: Between Contention and Reproduction, Abi Yaghi et al <https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/october-2019-protests-lebanon-between-contention-and-reproduction>.

although official registration has benefits such as obtaining a legal status and opening a bank account, the Council of State has issued a decision stating that it is not compulsory to obtain permission from the Ministry of the Interior before setting up an organisation.<sup>20</sup> As a result, many organisations choose to operate without this permit, as it also entails increased scrutiny by government oversight bodies. This modality has allowed the formation of CSOs representing most excluded groups (refugees, LGBTIQ+, domestic workers, etc.), but with varying degrees of efficiency and impact due to the restrictions and challenges they face. A striking example is the struggle to formalise the domestic workers' union in the country.<sup>21</sup>

Historically, the political and sectarian divide in the country has found its way into civil society, as politically-affiliated service delivery CSOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs) have been used as a front for many sectarian and political parties to distribute services and enforce clientelism.<sup>22</sup> In the aftermath of the civil war and then after 2005, issue-based CSOs began to cross borders and work across regions on cross-cutting issues. However, civil society in Lebanon faces structural challenges. In particular, the politically unstable environment makes working conditions highly insecure. Another important point is the sector's dependence on funding, which means that when donor funding stops, so do its activities. This is a major challenge as both service delivery and advocacy by CSOs require a long-term commitment.<sup>23</sup> In addition, donor dependency leads organisations to compete with each other, potentially causing them to deviate from their commitments in order to secure funding.<sup>24</sup> In addition to financial resources, human resources are also an issue, with CSOs noting weak mobilisation and fatigue due to the lack of short-term results, time constraints and opposition, especially given the limited commitment of the government to enable civil society.<sup>25</sup> This raises the question of whether CSOs in Lebanon are caught in a so-called "implementation trap", due to a combination of the need to raise funds and limited on development or policy implementation.<sup>26</sup>

CSOs have become critical in addressing the country's crises by filling gaps in service delivery, direct intervention and advocacy<sup>27</sup>. However, their efforts are often undermined by persistent security concerns and ineffective government institutions. In addition, trust in international donors has declined due to their perceived inadequate response to regional crises, and some donor funds have shifted from developmental to humanitarian aid. To combat this, CSOs are increasingly focused on strengthening their capacity to counter misinformation, which the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS) has identified as a crucial step in rebuilding public trust and effectively addressing Lebanon's complex social and political challenges. This initiative includes formulating policies and strategies to better understand public sentiment and mitigate the impact of misinformation on governance and social cohesion.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> HELEM, A Case Study For The First Legal Above Ground LGBT Organization In The Mena Region, [https://daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/Resources/helem\\_0.pdf](https://daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/Resources/helem_0.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Lebanon: Recognize Domestic Workers Union: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/10/lebanon-recognize-domestic-workers-union>.

<sup>22</sup> Faith Based Organizations in Lebanon: Objectives and Practices <https://rgu-repository.worktribe.com/output/248920/faith-based-organizations-in-lebanon-objectives-and-practices>.

<sup>23</sup> Mapping Civil Society organizations in Lebanon Beyond Reform and Development [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/lebanon/documents/news/20150416\\_2\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/lebanon/documents/news/20150416_2_en.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Assessing Civil Society Gender Politics and Youth Movements in Lebanon, Plan International 2020 [https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/23/2022/02/plan\\_international\\_lebanon\\_-\\_civil\\_society\\_gender\\_and\\_youth\\_-\\_summary.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/23/2022/02/plan_international_lebanon_-_civil_society_gender_and_youth_-_summary.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> The October 2019 Protests in Lebanon: Between Contention and Reproduction, Abi Yaghi et al. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/october-2019-protests-lebanon-between-contention-and-reproduction>.

<sup>27</sup> Barakat, C. (2023) CSOs in Lebanon: Overcoming challenges and Rebuilding Trust, LCPS. Available at: <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/articles/details/4823/csos-in-lebanon-overcoming-challenges-and-rebuilding-trust>.

<sup>28</sup> Nassar, F., & Barakat, C. (2024, January 11). Enhancing understanding and capacity of csos in Lebanon to counter misinformation. LCPS. <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/articles/details/4849/enhancing-understanding-and-capacity-of-csos-in-lebanon-to-counter-misinformation>.

CSOs have become crucial in addressing the country's crises by filling gaps in service delivery, direct intervention and advocacy. However, their efforts are often undermined by persistent security concerns and ineffective government institutions. In addition, trust in international donors has declined due to their perceived inadequate response to regional crises, and some donor funds have shifted from development to humanitarian aid. To combat this, CSOs are increasingly focused on strengthening their capacity to counter misinformation, which the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS) has identified as a crucial step in rebuilding public trust and effectively addressing Lebanon's complex social and political challenges. This initiative includes formulating policies and strategies to better understand public sentiment and mitigate the impact of misinformation on governance and social cohesion.

This deepening multi-level crisis has had a significant impact on gender equality and SRHR over the past two years. In particular, there has been an increase in GBV and early marriage. Child marriage remains a significant issue in Lebanon, exacerbated by the ongoing crises. Economic hardships and social pressures have driven an increase in child marriages, with girls often being forced into early unions to alleviate financial burdens on their families.(see Annex 2). SRHR have been largely neglected in Lebanon and continue to be largely understood as family planning and maternal and newborn health. In addition, Lebanon was considered relatively liberal towards the LGBTIQ+ community compared to other countries in the MENA region but has experienced security incidents over the past two years that have threatened the safety of LGBTIQ+ people. Annex 2 provides a detailed context analysis of WRGE, SRHR, LGBTIQ+ rights and security and the rule of law in Lebanon.

## 2.3 Validity of the Ministry's ToCs in the context of Lebanon

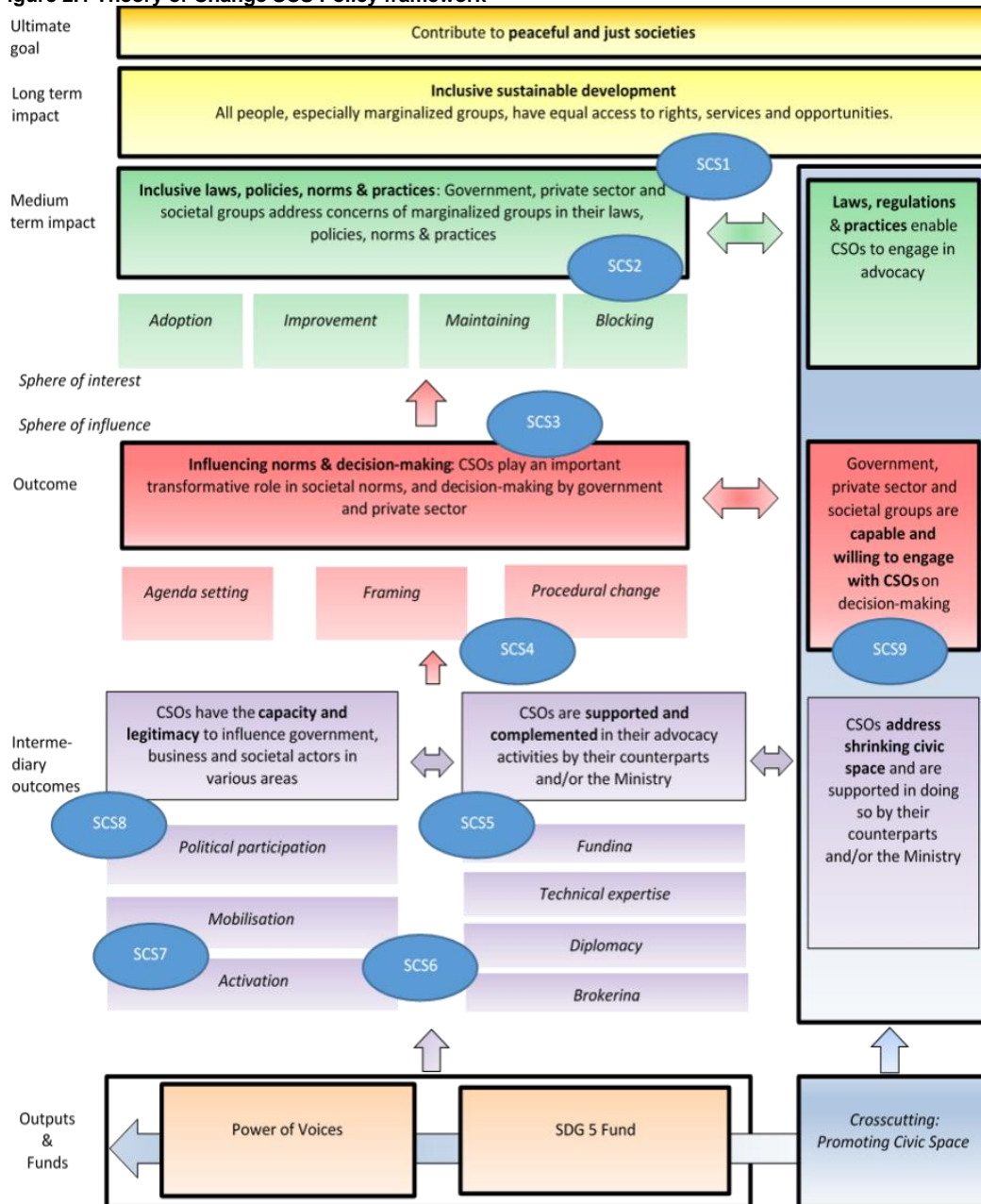
The figure below presents the ToC for the SCS framework as developed by the MFA. It summarises **intermediary outcomes** of the outputs from policy instruments (mobilisation, funding, diplomacy, technical expertise, etc.), as well as longer-term outcomes and impact, and visualises nine SCS indicators<sup>29</sup> that are described in the next chapter. Support for civil society is based on the principle that a diverse and pluralistic civil society is both an end in itself and a means to sustainable and inclusive development, good governance and responsible citizenship. It shows that in the long term, the SCS policy framework is expected to contribute to sustainable and inclusive development for all and to the fight against poverty and injustice by promoting the political role of civil society. This represents a shift in focus from aid aimed directly at poverty reduction through service delivery to aid aimed at tackling the root causes of poverty and (gender) inequality through lobbying and advocacy<sup>30</sup>. The MFA has also developed specific thematic ToCs; those for SRHR and WRGE are presented in Annex 3.

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<sup>29</sup> All partnerships commit to the minimum of three indicators which they are free to select. Most partnerships report on more than 3 or 4 indicators. The nine SCS indicators relate to similar thematic indicators from the MFA's thematic ToCs.

<sup>30</sup> Executive summary Strengthening Civil Society Theory of Change Supporting civil society's political role, December 1, 2019.

**Figure 2.1 Theory of Change SCS Policy framework**



The below sections answer research question 5 and 6.

*Question 5) To what extent are the Ministry's ToCs and respective underlying assumptions valid in Lebanon? To what extent have the Ministry's results frameworks proven to be effective in measuring progress? How useful is it to start design and programming at programme level with an overarching ToC developed for INGO's.*

*Question 6: To what extent are the programmes' ToCs and respective underlying assumptions valid in Lebanon? Were these ToCs and assumptions adjusted when necessary? How useful is to start with an overarching ToC developed by INGO's?*

The review is based on discussion during the ToC workshop, desk research and stakeholder interviews.

### Summary answer to research questions 5 and 6:

The SCS ToCs are seen as a useful basis for starting programming, as they are flexible and sufficiently broad. However, the fragile situation in some cases would require more flexibility to allow for service delivery and institution building interventions. The focus of the ToCs on capacity strengthening and networking is considered relevant and mostly validated. However, most of the other assumptions can only partially (or not at all) be validated at this stage, including the effectiveness of L&A. This is because policy and legislative changes are difficult to achieve in the current Lebanese context. Similarly, the assumption that external support from Northern donors and CSOs can strengthen national CSOs has materialised to a limited extent, particularly because of the loss of credibility of Northern donors since the conflict between Hamas and Israel and the perceived foreign agenda of national CSOs. The assumption that CSOs are able to protect or expand civic space is also limited, as civic space, especially for SRHR and LGBTIQ+ rights, is shrinking due to the climate in the country and region, where CSOs are mainly seen as political opposition.

Regarding WRGE, the critical role of WROs and the importance of gaining support/collaborating with a (variety of) actors (e.g. government, knowledge institutes, private sector, etc.) to create an enabling environment for structural change can be largely affirmed. As for SRHR, the validity of the assumptions depends very much on which aspects of SRHR are considered, as it is not possible to lobby and advocate to government on SRHR that includes issues of choice and freedom, as this would backfire, but also relates to the dysfunctional state.

In terms of measurement, a key weakness is that the ToC and SCS indicators do not capture relevant intermediate outcomes. The MFA basket indicators are found to be adaptable to the context, but there are challenges in applying the indicators. Nevertheless, some programmes indicate that it has also been a challenge to adapt the indicators to their programmes, also in terms of disaggregation.

Similarly, while INGOs' overarching programme ToCs are generally found to be a useful and flexible starting point for in-country implementation, the processes are not always led by the South, with in-country partners not involved, or only to a limited extent, in the initial stages of ToC development. The extent to which programme ToCs are regularly reviewed and tested is limited.

Overall, the various programmes indicate that the SCS ToC and thematic ToCs have provided a useful basis for starting programming and measuring progress. The Ministry's ToCs are found to be sufficiently broad to be translated into the overarching programme ToCs and the contextualised ToC for Lebanon. In the current Lebanese context, it is important that the ToC focuses on lobbying and advocacy audiences in a broad sense, recognising that L&A efforts should be directed not only at government, but also at international actors, religious leaders, the private sector and other influential social actors, in addition to the general public. In line with this, influencing is not limited to laws and policies, but also includes (social) norms and practices. The ToC gives space to advocacy activities targeting non-state actors, or at least actors at the local level, which is important in the Lebanese context where the traditional counterparts of lobbying and advocacy are considered to be rather weak and unresponsive (thus providing limited or no opportunities for advocacy). A key point raised by the programmes is that the ToC does not allow for intermediate outcomes that are relevant (and often the most important and only possible outcome) in the Lebanese context, such as the approval of laws by MPs and/or MPs willing to advocate for certain issues.

In particular, the focus of the ToCs on capacity strengthening and networking through the programme is seen as most relevant and critical to the success of the programmes in the Lebanese context, where capacities in terms of L&A and networking and collaboration are perceived to be weaker (see also assumption 2 below).

Overall, it is felt that the ToCs provide flexibility to respond to the different challenges in the current (fragile) context of Lebanon, allowing for support in terms of security, protection and safety, as well as core funding for CSOs to continue. However, the situation in certain cases would require more flexibility to allow for service delivery and institution building interventions.

This mid-term stage provides an opportunity to validate some of the assumptions of the ToCs. Below we discuss the causal mechanisms within the SCS ToC and the ToCs for SRHR and WRGE as prioritised by the Ministry.

### 2.3.1 Causal mechanism

In relation to the causal assumptions of the intervention logic prioritised by MFA for checking in this MTR, the findings from the ToC workshop and interviews with partners, rightsholders and external stakeholders are as follows:

#### Assumption SCS 1) – The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by civil society/CSOs

This assumption is only partially confirmed by the mid-term findings, as there appears to be some lack of frequent community consultation, suggesting that ongoing processes for engaging with marginalised groups may not be sufficient to effectively voice their needs. Some critical stakeholders point out that CSOs often do not base their agenda on what local women or their constituency say, but rather on their assessment of the situation. When asked how much they take the constituency into account in their plans, several CSOs mentioned that this is done indirectly through anecdotal feedback and comments they gather from interacting with rightsholders, or by referring to previous FGDs they have conducted to gather input, which they still consider valid. They also refer to their interaction with other stakeholders (policy makers, local leaders, other CSOs) as another source of information that helps them to assess the situation and what can be done. An important source of influence identified by several interviewees is interacting with donors and international agencies, understanding their agendas and plans, and trying to link their programmes to the priorities they are funding. As the country's political context became more difficult to influence, the risk increased that CSOs followed donor agendas more closely in order to maintain their funding and to find alternative ways of coping with day-to-day challenges, at the expense of giving voice to their constituencies. This applies more to the larger and more structured CSOs (Tier 1 and Tier 2) than to the smaller and more grassroots Tier 3 partners.

Specifically in relation to gender issues, the terminology used (in cases perceived as Northern, donor-driven and understanding of power dynamics, including hierarchy), can create structural challenges within CSOs that may affect their ability to represent marginalised groups effectively. . For example, certain wording relating to LGBTIQ+ and SRHR is more sensitive, such as 'partner' creates a push-back from local communities or leaders. Programmes recognise the need for more Southern leadership on the ground, but the capacity to implement this is not always available. In the current context, the provision of direct services, such as livelihood support to the community, could enhance the legitimacy of CSOs and enable awareness raising and consultation with marginalised groups. In the case of some programmes, the fact that their processes allowed space for all levels to be involved, including seeking the voice of the most marginalised, helped to maintain the influence of constituencies.

**Assumption SCS 2) When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.**

This assumption is confirmed only to a very limited extent. As noted in the context sections above, accountability is largely absent from Lebanese society, as the country operates without a functioning government. The sectarian and clientelist-based political system challenges this assumption, as issue-based politics is not the main driver of voting behaviour compared to sectarian identity and service delivery. Recent political events (since 2019) and the continued efforts of civil society groups have helped create a level of awareness that promotes a culture of accountability and issue-based politics, but it has not yet reached the majority of the population.<sup>31</sup> This assumption is thus challenged by default, but there is space to pursue it and it is an important element of the transition to a state where citizenship values are more prevalent. Government institutions, such as the Ministry of Health, are only responsive on a small scale and only to specific issues that they find useful. For instance, according to key informants' statements and interviews, regarding SRHR policies, the Ministry of Health does not provide awareness-raising on SRHR to young people or specific programmes for couples or the elderly or people with special needs; the Ministry's services are limited to family planning, maternal health, and natal and post-natal care.

Experience from specific programmes shows that institutions have been unreliable partners due to staff turnover and payment problems. Municipalities are influenced by the same political dynamics and are a platform for reinforcing patronage and sectarianism. In addition, there is mistrust between the government, political parties and CSOs, which are seen as separate from the community because they manage funds. Given the limited legitimacy of government actors as counterparts, CSOs seek to identify other societal actors who, despite these limitations, are able to promote the adoption of new norms and practices that address the concerns of marginalised groups. These include societal groups, including religious groups, alternative political groups and the newly elected reformist MPs who represent them, as well as international actors and donors. Many within society recognise the contributions of CSOs, but in the current context, the economic crisis and security situation are widening the gap between the community and civil society.

**Assumption SCS 3) External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in Lebanon**

This assumption can only be partially confirmed. External aid is recognised by the programmes and external stakeholders interviewed as an important means of funding Lebanese CSOs, providing them with financial stability and sustainability in the context of shrinking donor funding. However, it is felt that donors lost credibility since 7 October 2023 due to the war and human rights violations in Gaza, and donor positions that were perceived as relatively uncritical towards these violations, including the suspension of funding to Palestinian institutions. The donors' positions affected the legitimacy of CSOs affiliated with these donors. In addition, there has been resistance to CSOs that are perceived to have foreign agendas, especially on sensitive issues such as LGBTIQ+, and to CSOs that are able to pay staff in US dollars in the context of a financial crisis. There is also a perception that external aid provides limited support to more informal/grassroots organisations. Relatively small amounts are allocated to these organisations, which often cannot receive direct support due to their low capacity/informal status. On the positive side, based on the interviews conducted with various partners and external stakeholders, SCS programmes show to some extent that the support has indeed positioned them well, helped them to create space for their constituencies, and improved their communication and capacity to work with other actors.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621366/rr-lebanon-analyzing-voter-turnout-260422-en.pdf;jsessionid=C91FDE0E1EC1B4BB2C5342D22B227CCA?sequence=1>.

#### Assumption SCS 4) Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their L&A

This assumption is largely confirmed, as the capacities that need additional attention can be strengthened if L&A and engagement techniques are further developed through capacity development. These capacities were identified during the baseline and for instance include the capacity to interact with target groups and represent constituencies, and the capacity to influence policymaking and agenda-setting of target actors, such as political actors, UN agencies, the private sector and societal actors. Discussions during the ToC workshop and interviews with external stakeholders confirm the need for capacity strengthening at different levels, in general and considering the volatile context, which requires different L&A approaches and techniques. Findings from interviews with partners, and to some extent confirmed by external stakeholders, show the link between capacity strengthening activities and increased effectiveness of L&A activities, for example in terms of agenda setting through the organisation of round tables and more collaborative approaches, but also in terms of target group engagement. The challenge with this assumption is to determine the extent to which advocacy capacity has been strengthened in the current challenging context.

#### Assumption SCS 5) CSOs are in a position to protect or expand civic space.

There is only limited support for this assumption. On the one hand, many interviewees, including the external stakeholders interviewed, recognise the contributions of civil society in certain areas, such as service delivery and raising awareness of key issues, particularly in the field of human rights and gender. The active use of social media can also widen the civic space (in contrast to the past, when the media was very much controlled by politics). On the other hand, civic space, especially for SRHR and LGBTIQ+ rights, is currently shrinking due to the climate in the country and the region, which requires prioritising the safety of the population. Civil society is not able to increase government accountability, partly because it is mainly seen as political opposition. As issues become more critical and controversial, CSOs have lost their leverage to protect and expand civic space. What happens is that CSOs navigate the possibilities and try to protect some organisations or people from attacks. However, stakeholders indicate that not enough is being done to improve networking and synergies with other stakeholders, for example between LGBTIQ+ organisations and feminist and/or domestic workers' organisations. Strengthening networks and forging new alliances would allow LGBTIQ+ advocates to reach out more to rural areas of Lebanon, which are currently very poorly covered.

#### Assumption SCS 6) To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional and global women's and other movements are central.

It is too early to fully validate this assumption. Stakeholders, partners and external actors agree that CSOs can only be more effective if they are united and have a common goal. Alliances at local and national level are therefore crucial, as change takes time and often requires greater scale. As noted above, when looking at the capacity of Lebanese CSOs, collaboration and networking are seen as key areas for improvement. Some changes are reported when organisations come together through platforms developed in recent years, such as the LGBTIQ+ Task Force or the Feminist Platform. Links at regional level are seen as beneficial, as regional CSOs often work in a similar context, allowing for exchange and learning. Similarly, the opportunities for exchange and learning are seen as a clear value of linking with global partners. However, regarding global networks, both partners and external stakeholders mentioned that alliances with INGOs have not always been beneficial. As mentioned above in relation to assumption 3, several CSOs experienced significant backlash when working with international agencies due to the political situation in Lebanon, where foreign aid is often associated with accusations of foreign affiliations and agendas. The term 'funded by embassies' has taken on a negative connotation, often used by the media to cast doubt on organisation's intentions. Political attitudes to the war in Gaza fuelled further scepticism and resistance. In the early months of the war, the organisation of events under foreign branding

provoked strong reactions, complicating efforts to gain local trust and support. This wave has subsided over time, but the connotation of being "foreign-funded and promoting an agenda" remains an issue that can be used against CSOs at any time.

#### SRHR assumption 7) L&A by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people

This assumption can only be confirmed to a limited extent at this stage, as no changes at the policy level are expected in the current situation. Given the backlash on gender issues in the country, CSOs, and programmes working on SRHR, have decided to take a low profile in L&A on SRHR, particularly on safe, accessible and available SRHR for the LGBTIQ+ community and on abortion. Given the dysfunctional state, partners do not expect any concrete achievements during the programme period, as advancing SRHR beyond antenatal, postnatal and maternity care is not one of the government's current priorities. L&A took place within the programmes and towards rightsholders. Therefore, no action was taken towards the government. However, changing social norms is a key action that involved the young people in the programmes. Young people, many of whom are members of local associations, are themselves generators (multipliers) of social change, e.g. they can become leaders in their groups and use their increased skills to lead other young people to change social norms.

#### SRHR assumption 8) A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government vis-à-vis its citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems

This assumption can be confirmed to a limited extent in the Lebanese context. For the reasons outlined above, it is not possible to lobby and advocate with the government on SRHR issues that include issues of free choice and free sexuality, as this would be counterproductive. Experiences shared by partners and external stakeholders show that a strong voice of local CSOs at a smaller and lower level, in communities, has been effective. For example, CSO members of the CoA in one programme were able to contextualise the programme according to the specific needs of rightsholders and focus their activities on the provision of safe and affordable SRHR services. In other programmes, the constant exchange between CSO members and rightsholders has created a stronger sense of community, to the point where planning for future activities and funding is already taking place. SCS programmes have demonstrated the ability to work around the political lack of consistency, although this takes longer and may lead to partial results. In this sense, the programme with UN Women and participation in national networks, such as the one on HIV/AIDS, are elements that can facilitate lobbying the government on SRHR issues other than just maternal and child health. In addition, lobbying, advocacy and awareness-raising activities are carried out with midwives, who are themselves multipliers because they are in close contact with communities and families.

#### SRHR assumption 9) Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks

This assumption is true to some extent. The SCS programmes have been slow to get off the ground, but there are actions underway, including through regional networks, that show progress in addressing organised opposition to SRHR. For example, in one programme, a partner explored SRHR in the context of digital rights in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region. SRHR-related content moderation policies and practices on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube were analysed. Based on these findings, the organisation made recommendations. The partner joined forces with Human Rights Watch, the Foundation for Digital Rights (INSM) and other CSOs. The partner engaged in dialogue with Meta, the company that manages these social media, and contextually launched the #SecureOurSocials campaign in January 2024, which aims to protect LGBTIQ+ rights from digital targeting. This initiative also includes SRHR issues and aims to either put pressure on Meta and SRHR/LGBTIQ+ opponents or provide solutions to violations of LGBTIQ+ people's rights. The approach presented above is too

new to be able to conclude whether countering organised opposition by strengthening existing coalitions and networks works better than other approaches. Based on the interviews and our direct participation/observation of a digital rights event organised by a programme, it can be affirmed that networking and coalitions are very useful to frame SRHR problems and violations, share possible solutions, good practices and lessons learned, promote organised opposition to put pressure on companies/governments from many fronts to change the narrative on SRHR. Changing the narrative can trigger social change. Social media proposing a different narrative on SRHR increases the possibilities for real change, starting with young people as primary users of social media.

**WRGE assumption 10) Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality.**

This assumption is largely confirmed. In general, WRGE organisations have experienced less backlash than, for example, LGBTIQ+ organisations because gender is less of a taboo in society. Empowering women and girls to challenge social norms supports transformative change as it comes from the community itself. This is confirmed by the results of one of the programmes. External stakeholders have indicated that there is space for new women's rights organisations to support better and more inclusive representation of the constituency, providing more structure to channel women's voices.

**WRGE assumption 11) To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society and knowledge institutions.**

This assumption is true to some extent. All programmes seek to involve different actors. Certainly, the involvement of civil society is greater than that of other actors. This is mainly due to the backlash on gender equality launched by national government representatives, which also affected local governments and communities. The involvement of the private sector is not clear from the programmes. With regard to local governments, the municipal elections scheduled for May 2023 have discouraged programmes from engaging with local governments. Mainly to avoid being "seen as biased" when the power dynamics change, the elected candidates might not work with a project that supported the opponents. Some programmes involve knowledge centres, such as the American University of Beirut, but only in the production of evidence and not as lobbying and advocacy actors. External key informants are divided on whether to work with the government at this time. Many recommend continuing to work with institutions, especially at the local level, and with the NCLW at the national level, particularly to increase gender equality in entrepreneurship and to combat GBV. However, most tend to favour working with civil society and knowledge institutions. Again, this trend may be due to the backlash, which means that even external actors do not see increased work with government institutions on WRGE as effective for the time being.

***To what extent have the Ministry's results frameworks proven to be effective in measuring progress?***

The research carried out during the DQA and TPM assessment shows that programmes have generally selected indicators that are relevant (and in some cases the easiest to measure). The MFA basket indicators are also appreciated for being open and adaptable to the context of the different programmes (although this has not always been the case). Nevertheless, some programmes indicate that it has been challenging to apply the indicators, for example when activities focus on several aspects of WRGE at the same time, or when the selected SCS indicators do not really match what the partners are trying to achieve. However, a number of partnerships have revised the initial selection of indicators (or adapted internal reporting guidelines) in this respect to better suit their programmes over the past year. Secondly, disaggregation (of indicators,

such as by-laws, governmental policies, etc., or individuals/CSOs by youth-led/women-led, etc.) does not always follow the data collected within the programmes in terms of gender.

In addition, as shown in the next chapter on most of the SCS indicators no progress can be reported. In line with this, programmes suggest that the use of MFA indicators does not cover part of the progress made. This is partly related to the Lebanese context, where policy work is not really possible. But the feedback also relates to the unique number of organisations required for the capacity strengthening indicators (SCS 5), which makes the indicator not sensitive enough to the ongoing support provided. The focus on Tier 1 and Tier 2 organisations is also seen as limiting in this respect, as much of the important work is done with Tier 3 organisations.

#### *Usefulness and validity of the programme ToCs*

As mentioned above, all programmes have translated the SCS ToC into an overarching programme ToC. Seven of the programmes operating in Lebanon developed country-specific ToCs. Five programmes used participatory processes to contextualise the ToC, which was seen as a positive learning experience.

In the other programmes, the grantee proposal had to be aligned with the overall ToC (including the selected SCS indicators). In general, it is felt that the ToCs of the overarching programmes are a useful starting point, as the main processes, including the underlying assumptions, are generic, making them flexible and easy to contextualise. However, some in-country partners commented that the process of defining the ToC did not fully reflect a bottom-up, South-led approach, as in-country partners were not, or only to a limited extent, involved in the initial stages of constructing the ToC, including the identified outcomes. In some cases, the outcomes etc. are defined internationally before in-country partners are involved. Partners in one programme mentioned in this respect that the in-country ToC, although contextualised, lacked details of assumptions/causal mechanisms that could be refined to reflect the current context. Most partnerships have not detailed the assumptions (country level), which limits the possibility to assess their validity at country level.

It could be questioned whether the specific Lebanese context and volatility have been sufficiently taken into account (initially), as many of the programmes are in the process of adjusting their focus/activities in relation to policy work. Only three programmes indicate that they see the ToC as a living document that needs to be adapted to the changing context. In addition, several programmes have reviewed their ToC as part of the MTR process. Others are still thinking about how to integrate a ToC review process efficiently, which shows that the process is not yet really linked to the MEL process.



### **3. Effectiveness**

**Progress made so far**



## 3 Effectiveness - progress made so far

This chapter presents the findings related to effectiveness. It answers the research question: *To what extent is progress made by the policy implementation on the SCS indicators and specific thematic indicators and progress on the cross-cutting themes southern leadership, gender, and youth and the integration of conflict sensitivity and SEAH (effectiveness).*

### 3.1 Progress made in implementation



*Question 1) To what extent has progress been made; 1a) on activity implementation and realisation of outputs?*

#### **Summary answer on progress made in implementation:**

The programmes have shown progress on activity implementation, yet there has been at least some delay in implementation by all partnerships. Delays mostly occurred at the start of the programmes due to changes of partners and time that was needed for the programmes to get up and running (building networks and relationships and align approaches of different partners). Other key factors obstructing progress were high staff turnover, change of partners after the start, delayed payments within partnerships, and the political and security situation in the country.

The 2023 annual reports and MTRs of the programmes report outputs and activities. All programmes have experienced at least some delay in the implementation of activities and realisation of outputs, as reported in the MTRs and annual reports 2023, and elaborated upon in the interviews. Difficulties in contracting (consortium) partners and changes in programme partners have been key issues. Two programmes have had a delayed start as they had to change partners for administrative reasons, and this also required a revision of the proposal; one of these two programmes only started effective implementation in September 2023. Several programmes were new to Lebanon and faced high start-up costs in terms of time and resources, to build networks and relationships and align approaches and processes.

Besides change of partners at different levels, there were also delays due to high staff turnover, at times long vacant positions, and limited (MEL) human resources (Tier 3 mainly, but also in the case of smaller Tier 1 and 2 partners). It was also mentioned that delayed payment by MFA and the consortium members has affected implementation in several cases (see section 5.2 on efficiency).

The security situation in the south and east of Lebanon has hampered progress in some cases. Since the war in Gaza, several activities in southern Lebanon have been frozen or cancelled, particularly those requiring community mobilisation. One programme faced a strike by two of its (prospective) partners because of the situation around 7 October and the position of Western donors in Lebanon. Other partners faced opposition from conservative groups, for example in programme activities related to gender and SRHR, with one partner having to close its health centre in northern Lebanon. Annual reports, MTRs and interviews show that programmes have continuously adapted their activities. Activities have moved online and messages have been adapted (see section and deep dive on innovation/legitimacy in Annex 6).

### 3.2 Progress made: Mid-term measurement per SCS indicator, and specific thematic indicators



*1b) To what extent has progress been made on the SCS, specific thematic and relevant intermediate indicators compared to baseline? To what extent have the programmes and funds contributed towards this progress?*

#### **Summary answer on contribution SCS policy implementation towards progress made on the SCS indicators and thematic indicators.**

No progress has been made in terms of policy and legislative change (SCS1 and SCS2) as identified by the programmes. Only a number of intermediate outcomes as a step towards policy change have been achieved such as endorsement of articles 503-521 of the Lebanese penal code addressing rape, acts of indecency, statutory rape, and kidnapping. More progress has been made in terms of creating space for demands and positions (SCS3), including the organisation of forums and roundtables to influence debate. Similarly, there has been more progress on the number of advocacy initiatives (SCS 4), including coalition building with other CSOs, CBOs, rightsholders, the private sector and other stakeholders, which can be considered an intermediate step. This is aligned with a general perceived increase in collaborate efforts. Programmes have also faced challenges in building and participating in coalitions linked to a level of competition but also the backlash on gender and LGBTIQ+ rights, which makes programmes reluctant to engage with stakeholders.

Good progress has been made in capacity strengthening (SCS 5). The OCAs of L&A capabilities of sampled partners show an improvement compared to the baseline, with larger improvements for inspiring trust among power holders (and building rapport), representing constituency interest, and working collectively. Capacity strengthening has also resulted in partners increasingly using a gender lens in their activities, although specific strategies are less used (SCS 8 and WRGE indicators). There has been a high involvement of young people as well, both engaged in activities and strengths as leaders, although the survey shows that it remains at times difficult to maintain broad-based youth engagement. In total, 68 Lebanese organisations (Tier 1 and Tier 2) have been included in the programmes thus far. The survey data reflect improved perceived representation among CSOs (SCS 7) which can be linked to increased capacity as confirmed by the OCAs. Data provides a negative picture of civic space (SCS 9), with CSO facing increased challenges in basic operational areas but also security.

Survey data reflects a positive change in public attitudes (WRGE), but these are difficult to measure and take a long time to achieve. Nevertheless, surveys at community level show some positive findings. There have specifically been significant challenges in providing comprehensive, safe, inclusive and accessible SRHR services, particularly services related to choice and sexuality rights, due to the restrictive environment, despite efforts in services, information provision and awareness raising (SRHR thematic indicators). Progress has been made on the participation of youth in policy and decision-making at the level of services currently provided by partner organisations, such as clinics or health centres and number of health workers trained in providing SRHR services.

Below we will discuss overall progress for the SCS basket indicators, thematic indicators and relevant intermediate outcomes and the specific contribution of the SCS framework. The analysis is based on desk review, IATI reporting, interviews (both general and case studies), the survey, and workshops. The IATI data is retrieved on 14 June 2024<sup>32</sup>. The review also uses findings from the DQA and TPM phase. Finally, the full survey results are included in annex 8.

<sup>32</sup> Important to note is that IATI data does not provide a complete picture, as partners were free to choose indicators to report on (minimum 3) and exempted of publication in case of sensitive information. It nevertheless provides a trend on the level of progress.

### 3.3 Progress made: Mid-term measurement per SCS indicator and linked thematic indicators

#### SCS1 # of laws and policies for sustainable and inclusive development that are better implemented as a result of CSO engagement (practice).

So far, there have been no results in improved implementation of any laws related to sustainable and inclusive development,<sup>33</sup> specifically linked to laws and policies identified by the programmes at the start of implementation, including those on enforcing the Anti-Torture Law,<sup>34</sup> on gender equality in the Civil Code,<sup>35</sup> and on a follow up to the National Action Plan (NAP) related to women's full participation in society (see Annex 9 for the full list, to which the National Strategy for Lebanese Women (2023-2030) is added).

In general, in line with the contextual analysis in the previous chapter, interviewees emphasised the difficulty of achieving such changes in the current political situation. Working with duty-bearers, particularly at the national level, appeared to be very challenging due to the political stalemate and the sensitive issues that programmes were focusing on. One programme focusing on SRHR specifically refrained from reporting results for SCS indicators 1 to 3 because it was not considered possible to achieve results in this regard in the Lebanese context.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, programmes have shifted focus to other governmental actors including municipalities and semi-governmental bodies such as health care providers. Two programmes mention they shifted focus to the municipal elections or focus on embassies of the US and European countries (embassies of those traditionally supporting these issues).

Looking at the relevant survey data (see box below), CSOs' (positive) perception of their ability to influence government for better implementation of laws and policies is higher than at baseline. These data are self-reported and may therefore reflect a positivity bias, which explains the relatively positive perception compared to actual achievements at national level. It may also be explained by variation between different levels of government (as mentioned by respondents above). Furthermore, the survey of CSOs shows a difference in the perception of the ability of CSOs to occasionally influence government policy between SCS partners and non-SCS partners, with a greater decrease among SCS partners (from 94% at baseline to 58% at MTR) and a slight increase among non-SCS organisations (from 58% at baseline to 66% at MTR). This could be explained by the high level of positive perception at the start of the programmes and the experience gained during implementation. The box below also shows CSOs' perceived influence on government behaviour, beliefs and opinions, and the willingness of duty bearers to engage.

Survey: Influencing policy implementation (local and national government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 12% of SCS partners reported that they have capacity to influence national government at baseline, versus 16% of non-SCS organisations. This increased to respectively 29% for SCS partners and to 21% for non-SCS organisations at MTR stage.</li><li>• 30% of SCS partners reported that they have capacity to influence local government at baseline, versus 29% of non-SCS organisations. This increased to respectively 35% for SCS partners and to 29% for non-SCS organisations at MTR stage remaining the same.</li><li>• For both groups together, there's a marginal <b>decrease</b> in perceived effectiveness at influencing <b>national governments</b> (from 39% baseline to 34% MTR), while perceived <b>local government</b> influence</li></ul>

<sup>33</sup> Indicator SCS1 is disaggregated by: Laws (11); Governmental policies (12); Private sector company policies (13); By-laws (14); and international agreements (15).

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Lebanon: Enforce Anti-Torture Law*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/26/lebanon-enforce-anti-torture-law-0>.

<sup>35</sup> Arab Washinton Centre. (2023). *The Harrowing State of Women's Rights in Lebanon*. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-harrowing-state-of-womens-rights-in-lebanon/>

<sup>36</sup> In IATI no results are published on this indicator (on which two programmes report).

### Survey: Influencing policy implementation (local and national government)

**improved** (from 17% to 22%), potentially reflecting the ongoing political deadlock in Lebanon which constrains national policy change but may allow more localised initiatives.

#### *Perceived willingness to engage CSOs by duty bearers*

- Furthermore, the survey shows a perceived modest increased **willingness to engage CSOs**, from 68% reporting minimal engagement at baseline to 63% at MTR stage, possibly influenced by the election of 11 independent MPs considered close to CSOs.

### **SCS2 # of laws, policies blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development as a result of CSO engagement.**

None of the laws identified as targets for SCS2 were adopted, blocked or improved. However, an intermediate result was achieved as a step towards policy change, namely the endorsement of Articles 503-521 of the Lebanese Penal Code (see WRGE 1.1 below and more in the case study). One programme reported in its MTR the adaptation of two bylaws related to women's participation in local government and cyber harassment. However, the case study research (see box below) revealed that the programme had revised its indicator to include initiatives that could lead to bylaws in the future, thus referring to intermediate steps under SCS4.

**Case study** - The reported outcome in the MTR was the adoption of two by-laws in two southern communities which was the intention at the beginning of the programme. However, with the current political deadlock there had been a revision during the MTR phase of the indicator's definition to include initiatives that could in the future lead to any by-law changes. The implementation of these engagement initiatives were undertaken by young women who were trained by the partnership on soft and hard skills. In one of the communities, such initiatives helped to foster a community-wide open dialogue about the importance of inclusive political practices; namely the influencing of local leaders and gaining the public support and endorsement of the mayor who made a video encouraging local women to run for council. In terms of contribution, it must be considered that the mayor already had a positive attitude towards women's political participation.

The survey data also show a decrease in the percentage of both partner and non-SCS organisations who say that CSOs in their sector have sometimes succeeded in blocking, adopting or improving a government law, policy or strategy (60% compared to 70% at baseline). Interestingly, SCS partners generally have slightly more negative perceptions of their impact, possibly because of the perceived difficulty of achieving results in terms of policy change.

### **Women's rights and gender equality**

*WRGE indicator 1.1: # of laws, policies and strategies blocked, adopted or improved to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private life.*

As noted above, there has been one notable result, namely the amendment of Articles 503-521 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which deal with rape, indecent acts, statutory rape and kidnapping. The code now treats sexual assault as a crime, following advocacy by CSOs. The case study of this outcome (see Annex 5) concludes that this change is partly due to the efforts of the SCS programmes, in particular by giving a strong impetus to the efforts through continuous engagement with MPs, organising working sessions, and conducting legal research. However, it is also due to other factors: CSOs have been working on this issue for a long time, using different means and in the midst of the impetus provided by national statistical studies on sexual assault crimes.

*WRGE indicator 2.1. # of laws, policies and strategies blocked, adopted, or improved to promote women's voice, agency, leadership, and representative participation in decision-making processes in public, private and civic sphere.*

Based on interviews, documentation and external sources, there has been no progress on WRGE indicator 2.1<sup>37</sup>. At baseline, there was hope for the municipal elections that were postponed. The eight women in parliament were the same as in 2022.<sup>38</sup>

Progress on this indicator has been halted by the absence of a government. For example, the 2023 Annual Report and interviews with programme partners show the process of the National Strategy for Lebanese Women by the relevant National Commission. The programme's efforts - bilateral meetings with high-level stakeholders, coordination meetings and consultations - led to cooperation with the Commission and contributions to the strategy. Progress has been made and the strategy was published in March 2024 (after some delays) under the patronage of the Lebanese Prime Minister. However, the caretaker government is currently unable to endorse the National Strategy due to its position.<sup>39</sup>

*WRGE indicator 3.1. # of laws, policies, and strategies blocked, adopted, or improved to promote women's economic rights, empowerment, and entrepreneurship.*

There has been no progress in targeted policies on women's economic rights, such as the personal status laws<sup>40</sup> which still do not recognise the wife's economic contribution to the marriage, including the value of her unpaid domestic work nor the concept of matrimonial property, and the kafala system, which gives private companies or individuals total control over migrant workers.<sup>41</sup>

Programmes working on this sub-theme have specifically focused on influencing public discourse through research activities to support their messages and outreach and informal bilateral meetings with MPs (SCS3). Two programmes have adjusted the focus of their activities in relation to economic empowerment and the financial situation. One programme indicated that it has increased its focus on the implementation of labour laws, i.e. secular laws rather than religious laws. Another programme has allocated more funds for economic empowerment in 2024 and 2025.

**SCS3 # times CSOs succeed in creating space for demands and positions: agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or creating space to engage.**

Interviews and desk review show that there are few results on space created and agenda set.<sup>42</sup> However, there have been some contributions, as explained in the thematic indicators below.

The DQA found that SCS3 is open to multiple interpretations and difficult to measure. Programmes have interpreted SCS3 in different ways, and in some cases, the reported outcomes are not fully in line with IATI guidelines, as reporting focuses more on intentions than actual outcomes. For example, interviews show that creating space is often interpreted as safe spaces where rightsholders and activists can meet, support each other and strategize at the local level. Furthermore, creating space has been effective but not directly linked to the government level. Examples include the creation of advocacy groups to discuss youth and women's participation in decision making in contexts such as refugee camps or less privileged areas, and the linking of Tier

<sup>37</sup> The IATI data shows clear progress on WRGE indicator 2.1, with an actual number of 47 at mid-term, which is 64% of a target of 73. The relatively high number is explained by a different way of measuring programmes beyond only laws and policies. For example, strategies reported by organisations included blocking unfair trials and religious events to put pressure on decision-makers, which explains a relatively high number in IATI reporting.

<sup>38</sup> Alameddine, L. (2023, 7 March). Gender quotas in politics: Still a long road ahead for Lebanese women. L'Orient Today <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1330682/gender-quotas-in-politics-still-a-long-road-ahead-for-lebanese-women.html>

<sup>39</sup> Published as an actual in 2023 in IATI.

<sup>40</sup> Corresponding IATI data presents an actual of 0 on WRGE 3.1, of a target of 3.

<sup>41</sup> IOM. (2024). Crisis Response Plan. <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2024>.

<sup>42</sup> IATI data for SCS3 show a progress of 0, with an actual of 0 and target of 2.

3 partners to national campaigns and platforms where Tier 1 partners are usually based. In this respect, the space creation was effective, but it is difficult to measure the actual space created to influence policy in such a context.

There have been intermediate results that can be linked to SCS3. Movement and coalition building remains a key element in creating space. Programmes were involved in building collaboration between CSOs, CBOs, individual rightsholders, private sector organisations, and other stakeholders. Seven programmes explicitly mention network building - including formal and informal groups - as an important intermediate outcome. Youth platforms and contributions to the feminist platform are other examples of networks to which programmes contributed, and one programme mentions that an LGBTIQ+ movement/network was supported by the SCS policy.

**Case study – movement building:** The purpose of one specific SCS partner is to strengthen and support migrant worker communities and enabling women migrant domestic workers to be stronger agents of change working towards the complete abolishment of the Kafala system. The programme in addition aims to advocate for systemic change within government institutions and other relevant organisations to advance structural change against racism.

The project aimed to unite (freelance) domestic workers to support them in campaigning towards a minimum common wage and better working conditions. The partner supported the domestic workers through training, mentoring and capacity building efforts including negotiation skills, most notably through the negotiation school, a series of workshops organised by the advocacy team to train migrant workers. As a result, the specific group of activists have begun working collectively independently of the partner organisation and has been able to continue its processes of union and bargaining, and advocating without intervention or support, also in working with other collectives.

The partner organisation support funded through SCS was instrumental for this specific collective because of the day-to day support that could be provided, as the SCS support was seen as the backbone for the organisation. However, the partner received also funding from several other donors, which funded certain elements that supported the domestic workers including the community centres. Moreover, also the large media attention for domestic workers after the Beirut blast provided them with confidence and momentum for campaigning. See annex 5 for the full case study.

The survey data also show an increase in CSOs' involvement in collaborative efforts (coalition or movement building) for L&A activities within their sectors (from 45% at baseline to 61% at MTR). The perceived importance of coalition building remains more important at the national level than at the international level, with 60% of respondents at the national level considering it crucial, compared to only 21% at the international level.

The programmes faced challenges in building and participating in coalitions, which the interviews confirmed were common to CSOs in general. Key issues were competition between CSOs, with little sharing of advocacy strategies to create space, and uneven skills in agenda setting, which requires upstream work to understand windows of opportunity. In addition, CSOs have found it difficult to set agendas or build platforms, as parliament does not meet except for urgent matters and local councils meet less frequently. Another key challenge is the recent backlash on gender and LGBTIQ+ rights, which makes programmes reluctant to engage with stakeholders in order to

protect their staff and the individuals/organisations they work with (see section 5.1 on coherence and coordination).

### **Women's rights and gender equality**

*WRGE indicator 1.2. # of times that CSOs succeed in creating space for CSO demands and positions on violence against women and girls, through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or movement building.*

*WRGE indicator 2.2. # of times that CSOs succeed in creating space for CSO demands and positions on women's voice, agency, leadership, and representative participation in decision-making processes in public, private and civic sphere, through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or movement building.*

Interviews, documentation and external sources provide evidence of progress on these indicators, for example through a 16-day GBV campaign, and on gender more broadly through the publication of the National Strategy for Women (awaiting formal endorsement by the Executive). The specific contributions of CSOs are confirmed by external interviewees. An external expert on gender and LGBTIQ+ mentions in this context that the backlash against CSOs can be seen as a sign that CSOs are perceived as a threat, meaning that they may have some influence or impact in shaping debates.

One particular example illustrates the need to sustain efforts and seize the right political moment for change: In Lebanon, the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee discussed a draft law to raise the minimum age for marriage to 18, which was proposed with input from one of the SCS programmes.<sup>43</sup> The 'willingness' to take advantage of any window of opportunity can be partly attributed to the support of the programme, which helped to sustain and expand the campaigns.

Organising forums and roundtables has been an important way for programmes to influence debate. Examples include a national forum on women with disabilities and roundtables and videos with community and religious leaders on violence against women (in response to the backlash). Partners have also contributed by analysing legal gaps, drafting bills with recommendations and proposing them to MPs or parliamentary bodies (see SCS4 below). This is often done with contributions from other donors, in the midst of a dynamic such as an increase in GBV cases.<sup>44</sup>

*WRGE indicator 3.2. # of times that CSOs succeed in creating space for CSO demands and positions on women's economic rights, empowerment, and entrepreneurship, through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or movement building.*

Creating space in relation to the economic position of women has focused mainly on the position of migrant domestic workers. Three different partners continue to put this issue on the agenda, working with allies as well as mandated duty bearers and UN agencies such as the ILO. Programmes have supported women entrepreneurs and individuals to organise campaigns, including through networks, migrant-led protests on Labour Day, and submissions to community leaders. Interviews with partners and external stakeholders confirm that the situation of migrant workers continues to receive attention, although it is affected by the deteriorating economic situation. External stakeholders also believe that the efforts of various partners have had an impact, despite the lack of government action and backlash.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Equality Now. (2025). *Parliament To Consider Landmark Draft Law That Aims To Prevent Child Marriage In Lebanon.* [https://equalitynow.org/news\\_and\\_insights/parliament-to-consider-landmark-draft-law-that-aims-to-prevent-child-marriage-in-lebanon/](https://equalitynow.org/news_and_insights/parliament-to-consider-landmark-draft-law-that-aims-to-prevent-child-marriage-in-lebanon/).

<sup>44</sup> IATI data for WRGE 1.2 shows a progress of 0, with a target value of 4, and WRGE 2.2 shows an actual of 17 from a target of 101. It thereby shows a more limited trend of progress compared to interviews and external sources.

<sup>45</sup> IATI data shows a similar trend of progress, namely that CSOs have succeeded 8 times in creating space for CSO demands and positions, which is a progress of 57% against a target of 14.

#### **SCS4 #of advocacy initiatives for, by, or with their membership/constituency.**

There has been progress in the number of advocacy initiatives undertaken by the programmes, including on SRHR, GBV and in relation to refugee protection. The programmes have contributed to several advocacy campaigns since 2022, including on EGBV, the "no shame no blame" campaign mentioned above, support for grassroots advocacy initiatives, including facilitating and supporting advocacy initiatives by young activists, etc. In some cases, the CSOs involved understand advocacy initiatives as awareness-raising. This includes, for example, raising awareness among young people on SRHR or gender issues.<sup>46</sup> The case study research provided another example of an advocacy aimed at refugee protection, showing clear contributions in bringing evidence to the table both in Brussel as in Lebanon, but also need for a more pro-active (and tailored) approach (see Annex 5), towards allies/duty-bearers in Lebanon.

Networking, working with (social) media, community members and stakeholders was key to advocacy initiatives, including networking meetings with high-level policy makers and MPs. For example, advocacy efforts to influence the Penal Code (see above) involved a lot of informal and formal networking with legal, civil society and government stakeholders.

Given the difficult situation in Lebanon, programmes are increasingly focusing their advocacy initiatives at the local level, working with communities, municipalities, villages or (parastatal) institutions such as health clinics and schools. For example, one programme reports that it has been able to raise community awareness of gender justice by building a grassroots network of youth around gender justice and positive masculinity. A comparison of baseline and MTR survey data highlights the trend towards engagement with local government, with a significant increase from 29% at baseline to 41% at MTR. There is also a marked improvement in the perceived ability of CSOs to engage with diverse groups through communication and advocacy, with 68% agreeing at MTR compared to 58% at baseline.

#### **SCS5 # of CSOs with increased L&A Capacities**

Interviews with external stakeholders and discussions during the workshop suggest that the capacity of Lebanese CSOs has improved in terms of coordination and networking, and in terms of connecting with constituencies. However, there is a perception that in the current context, mistrust between those in power and CSOs has increased, while activities in terms of agenda setting and influencing the debate are also perceived as weaker. The survey data show that the perceived ability to work together to form coalitions has increased both nationally (from 44% at baseline to 61% at MTR) and internationally (from 40% to 51% at MTR), which underlines the above. There is also an increase in the perceived ability of CSOs to analyse local realities and identify problems (66% at baseline to 73% at MTR). Respondents rated the ability to identify and select actions relevant to local needs and political dynamics as low, with a slight decrease from 19% at baseline to 18% at MTR, indicating a continuing challenge for CSOs to align strategic actions with local contexts. Similarly, the ability to respond to changes in the environment decreased slightly (from 60% at baseline to 56% at MTR), as did the ability to address threats to the organisation and its members (from 49% to 39%) and the ability to mobilise political support (from 20% to 15%).

SCS5 is perceived as being most within the control of the programmes. All programmes have contributed to progress on SCS5 through grants provided, training, coaching and exchanges, although in some cases capacity support was limited to grants only. Based on the support provided, programmes report (small) examples of capacity improvements. For example, after having received a training to unions and groups of women workers, one such cooperative started to negotiate for certain equipment because they were more aware of their rights. Other examples show that several

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<sup>46</sup> A trend of progress is also reflected in the IATI data: five programmes report on SCS4, that 6 advocacy initiatives have been carried out by CSOs, which is a progress of 26% of a joint target of 23.

partners gained experience in sub-granting to organisations and strengthened their finance department, management, reporting systems and MEL, thereby gaining credibility with donors.

In general, rightsholders and most Tier 3 organisations confirmed that the training was relevant and contextualised. Training perceived as relevant includes gender mainstreaming, data security, L&A capacity and financial/organisational management. However, some Tier 3 organisations criticise the sometimes top-down approach, with many trainings related to organisational capacity building perceived as inappropriate, yet they were obliged to participate (see further involvement of target groups).

Overall, the OCAs of L&A capabilities of sampled programme partners as Tier 2 and Tier 3<sup>47</sup> show an improvement compared to the baseline, with larger improvements for inspiring trust among power holders (and building rapport), representing constituency interest, and working collectively. Chapter 4 further elaborates on the capacities of organisations and OCA scores.

**Table 3.1 Average score per advocacy capacity based on the OCAs (N=15)**

Advocacy capacity	Baseline	MTR	Difference
1. Produce evidence	3.3	3.6	0.3
2. Inspire trust among power holders	2.9	3.6	0.6
3. Represent constituency interest	3.3	3.7	0.4
4. Analyse the political arena	3.7	3.8	0.2
5. Produce tailored messages	3.7	3.9	0.2
6. Work collectively	3.2	3.5	0.4
7. Build rapport with power holders	3.0	3.4	0.4
8. Adapt to ongoing changes in the environment	3.4	3.7	0.3
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.4</b>

(Score 5=maximum capacity; 1=minimum capacity).

The case study research (Annex 5) provides deeper insights into the specific contribution of the SCS programmes to capacity strengthening, focused on three of the partners. The contribution analysis carried out showed a (highly) plausible contribution to the identified outcomes in terms of capacity strengthening. In all cases, capacity development focused on building partners' L&A capacity through financial support, training, coaching and mentoring. In terms of contribution, the demand-driven support provided over a longer period was mentioned, but also the funding provided for implementation (and learning). Alternative explanations for the increased capacity include: the capacity and motivation of the staff involved and the 'natural' growth process of the organisations; the funding and capacity strengthening support provided by other donors; and the momentum for advocacy on certain issues in the aftermath of the explosion in 2019. See the box below for one of the case studies.

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that a low score is not necessarily related to organisational weaknesses but could also reflect specific strategic choices of the sampled CSOs, such as in response to increased difficulty to move in the political arena.

**Case study – capacity strengthening:** The partner organisation focussed on youth in policy engagement. The OCA and interviews show that organisational capacity has increased for producing evidence, particularly with regard to gender analysis and ability to build trust and rapport with power holders. An example provided relates to discussion on the socially-taboo topic of sex before marriage within a session with youth from different genders, religions and sects, including a Muslim woman wearing the hijab; who stated to feel comfortable in the space created to contribute to this discussion – which is quite special in the context of Lebanon.

Furthermore, connections with political actors and government institutions have increased. As for the causal chain the organisation indicate that the partnership has provided continuous support “being present without suffocating us’ and supported them to grow outside of Beirut.

A clear alternative explanation for the outcome is the organisations has been supported by several other organisations in different ways, being a result of cumulative efforts over the years. In addition, the strong capacity of activists, who have a clear social cause and who are highly motivated to grow which has some extent supported a natural growth process. Also the momentum provided by the Beirut Blast may have motivated activism but also specific support from different funders. Overall, the work that the organisation has been doing over the years would not have been possible without the support of the different donors including the financial and capacity building support of the partnership. It is very plausible that the SCS support contributed to the strengthened L&A capacity of the organisation. The partnership established a close relationship with the organisation, being their source of information when needed, making it likely that they had influence on the outcome.

All programmes report on SCS 5 and related thematic indicators IATI reporting indicates 130 CSOs with increased capacities, which is 71% of a target of 182 (unique indicator). As indicated in the DQA and TPM report, SCS 5 raises issues of operationalisation and reporting as there is limited guidance on what increasing capacities requires. Some programmes provide single training sessions whilst others include longer engagement and follow-up combined with peer support and grants.

#### *WRGE 5.2.1 # of organisations with strengthened capacity to advance women’s rights and gender equality.*

The results for WRGE 5.2.1 – focussing on organisations working on women’s rights and gender equality specifically – are similar to SCS 5 in general. In IATI, 129 organisations reportedly have increased capacities (of a target of 179). In the OCA, the sampled organisations of the WRGE programmes have an overall increase of 0.2, which is 0.2 under the average of all SCS partnerships, but the sample is too small to draw any conclusions. See SCS 8 below for the further specific capacities related to gender.

#### **SCS6 # of CSOs included in Strategic Programmes**

The table in Annex 1 provides an overview of the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 organisations involved in the programme at the mid-term stage<sup>48</sup>. Four of the programmes include Lebanese organisations at

<sup>48</sup> IATI data at the MTR stage, which only includes Tier 1 and Tier 2 organisations, shows that 68 Lebanese organisations have been included in SCS programmes, which is 84% of the target of 81. Of these CSOs, 41 are women-led, 10 are youth-led, 12 are neither women- nor youth-led and 6 are both women- and youth-led. At the outset, 91 organisations were involved in the programmes, of which 38 are national Lebanese actors (and the others mostly Dutch) (see table in Annex 1).

consortium tier 1 level. Several of the programmes also include INGOs with offices in Lebanon. It is notable that several Lebanese organisations are involved in several programmes, with one organisation involved in four programmes. In addition, six organisations are part of two programmes, which limits the actual reach of the SCS.

### SCS7 # of CSOs that have enhanced representation of constituencies

The survey data reflect improved representation among CSOs. It shows a large increase in the perception of CSOs in their perceived ability to represent the constituency (almost doubling from 29% at baseline to 56% at MTR). There is also a large increase in the perceived ability to mobilise local constituencies (from 44% at baseline to 66% at MTR) and to act as the voice of their communities (from 49% at baseline to 68% at MTR). There is no significant difference between the perceptions of SCS rightsholders and non-SCS organisations.

In line with the MFA Indicator Guidelines for SCS7, constituency representation is closely linked to ownership and legitimacy (see section 3.2 for a more detailed discussion of the findings). In general, there has been progress in the representation of constituencies by programme partners, based on the OCAs carried out and confirmed by interviews. The average OCA score at the MTR stage is 3.7 (3.8 for NGOs and 3.6 for CBOs), an increase from the baseline score of 3.1. Constituency representation is one of the capacities that has mostly increased.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to the baseline, interviews with programme staff paint a positive picture of increased representation of constituencies through improved transparency and communication with their constituencies. In contrast, some of the rightsholders interviewed are more neutral on the issue. For example, one rightsholder stated: *I'm not too sure if our representation has increased because representation in general is influenced by trust and being consulted before information is shared or activities are carried out, and that doesn't always happen.* For LGBTIQ+ organisations, it helps to have directors from the community itself, which increases trust.

### SCS8 #of CSOs using a Gender and Social Inclusion lens

In general, compared to the baseline stage, there has been progress made on SCS8<sup>50</sup>. Interviewees from three programmes provide clear examples of increased use of gender tools and a gender lens in activities. As shown by the OCA (see Chapter 4 below), partners have benefited from specific thematic expertise, including tools that partner organisations have for gender mainstreaming and integrating youth participation throughout the programme. In addition, many of the partners are feminist organisations, while collaboration within the programme has increased the focus on youth (young women).

This is confirmed by the survey of partner and non-partner CSOs, which shows a significant increase in the perceived ability to develop and use gender analysis (from 21% at baseline to 46% at MTR). Strengthening the role of women within organisations has also increased (from 39% at baseline to 59% at MTR), and women's participation is robust among partners (from 75% at baseline to 70% at MTR), while non-partners also show progress (from 20% to 50%). However, the survey highlights a potential area of concern for gender balance (both men and women). The data also provides a nuanced insight into the evolving inclusiveness of CSOs.

#### Survey: Inclusiveness

##### Gender representation

<sup>49</sup> Published IATI data similarly refers to progress on SCS7, as at mid-term stage, 18 CSOs have enhanced representation of constituencies, which is 55% of a target of 33.

<sup>50</sup> Reported IATI data shows a trend of progress: Three CSOs have been using a gender and social inclusion lens, which is 23% of the target of 13. See further elaboration in section 3.11 on gender, inclusion, and intersectionality.

### Survey: Inclusiveness

- In **gender representation**, there has been a decrease in the perception of equal representation between men and women (from 49% at baseline to 41% at MTR). Representation of men notably decreased from 7% at baseline to 0% at MTR.

#### Youth engagement

- The percentage of respondents stating that young people are involved as activists in their organisations decreased (34% at baseline to 24% at MTR). Youth activism rose sharply for SCS-partners (11% to 35%), while it remained stable for non-SCS organisations (16%).
- Conversely, the percentage of organisations described as youth-led has seen a significant increase (from 20% at baseline to 29% at MTR). Youth leadership slightly declined for partners (24% to 18%), while it has seen an increased among non-partners (from 16% to 37%).

According to the survey data, there was no significant increase in outreach to different social groups and vulnerable populations (54% at baseline to 56% at MTR).

### SCS9 #of actions (...) that improve civil society space<sup>51</sup>.

According to the Civicus Civil space monitor 2024 (data end 2023)<sup>52</sup>, civic space in Lebanon is 'obstructed', similar to the 2022 Monitor (baseline). To illustrate, two articles in the 2023 Monitor specifically address harassment of journalists and activists by the authorities.<sup>53</sup> The authors discuss cases where journalists and activists in activities related to the Lebanon explosion as well as other issues (LGBTIQ+ and government/police corruption<sup>54</sup>) are summoned by the Security Forces in response to their messages.

Overall, the survey gives a negative picture of the situation, as shown in the box below. While some procedural aspects, such as registration and access to bank accounts, have improved slightly since the baseline, significant problems remain in more critical areas such as funding, government interference and security checks. Scores have declined and/or remained low in almost all areas. Furthermore, when comparing SCS partners with non-SCS organisations, partners perceive more challenges in almost all areas. For example, partners reported more challenges in basic operational areas such as opening a bank account and managing funds (i.e. 76% and 71% faced difficulties, respectively, compared to 63% and 71% for non-partners).

### Survey: Enabling Environment

#### Restrictions

- The ease of opening a bank account, though still low, showed a slight improvement from 10% at baseline to 20% at MTR.
- **Ease in obtaining CSO registration increased from 24% to 29%.**
- Freedom from government interference in receiving funding (34% of respondents at baseline to 24% at MTR).
- Freedom from security scrutiny (from 34% to 27%).

#### Expression of opinion

- Feeling able to freely express opinions and conduct campaigns (from 49% at baseline to 46% at MTR).
- The ability to gather and organize events remains relatively high at 61%, although it too has decreased slightly from 63% at baseline.

#### Funding

- The capacity to receive and manage funding (from 37% at baseline to 27% at MTR).
- **Concerns regarding funding (from 54% to 60%).**
- **Concerns regarding corruption (remaining significant at 61%).**
- **International donors' capacity to support CSOs (from 65% to 60%).**
- The capacity to raise funding from donors (from 41% at baseline to 29% at MTR).

<sup>51</sup> There are no programmes reporting on SCS 9 in Lebanon.

<sup>52</sup> Civicus Civil Space monitor. (2024). Lebanon. <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/lebanon/>.

<sup>53</sup> Civicus. (18 September 2023). *Authorities use the criminal justice system to harass journalists and activists.* <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/authorities-use-the-criminal-justice-system-to-harass-journalists-and-activists/>.

<sup>54</sup> Civicus. (10 October 2023). *Proposed Anti-LGBTIQ+ Law Imposes Harsher Penalties.* <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/proposed-anti-lgbtqi-law-imposes-harsher-penalties/>.

The interviews with the programmes point to a number of achievements of the policy framework in terms of enhanced and/or protected civic space. It takes into account the backlash specifically for the issues worked on, particularly for the LGBTIQ+ community and access to SRHR services, but also for providing safe space for migrant and refugee communities. Examples include increased civic space for youth and LGBTIQ+ people through the network/movement created by supporting communities of action (CoA). These networks create the space for CoA members to advocate or talk about sensitive issues on behalf of the CoA in order to provide protection and avoid backlash. In addition, several programmes have contributed to some extent to the protection of civic space by creating safe spaces and networks where target groups can share, network and plan advocacy. However, these are spaces that are limited to programme activities and cannot be expanded in communities for the time being.

Work to adapt language and policies to be more inclusive and discussions with religious leaders on gender can also be seen as contributing to protecting civic space in the face of cultural backlash.

### 3.3.1 Progress made – mid-term measurement for specific WRGE indicators

WRGE 1.3 # of individuals (disaggregated by type, age and gender) with improved attitudes and practices towards the elimination of all forms of violence, including harmful practices

WRGE 2.3. # of individuals (disaggregated by type, age and gender) with improved attitudes and practices towards women’s voice, agency, leadership and representative participation in decision-making processes

WRGE 3.3, # of individuals (disaggregated by type, age and gender) with improved attitudes and practices on women’s economic rights, empowerment and entrepreneurship<sup>55</sup>.

The survey reflects positive changes in attitudes. When civil society respondents were asked about their perceptions of changes in attitudes since 2022, 67% reported that attitudes towards GBV had improved; 60% reported that attitudes towards women’s leadership and representative participation in decision making had improved; and 63% reported that attitudes towards women’s economic rights and empowerment had improved. However, CSOs interviewed emphasised that attitudes and social norms take a long time to change and should be assessed on a regular basis.

Survey: Ability to influence social norms and practices
<p><i>Prioritisation of social norms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large majority of the respondents indicate that <b>to raise awareness and influence social norms is a priority for 52% of the CSOs in their sector</b>, whilst another 35% is involved but not as a priority.</li> <li>• At mid-term, 53% of SCS partners focused on social norms as a priority, which remained the same from baseline.</li> <li>• The proportion of non-SCS organisations prioritizing social norms slightly decreased from 62% to 58% by the mid-term review.</li> </ul> <p><i>Capacity to influence norms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of capacity, only 44% of the CSOs feel that CSOs are <b>able to influence the attitudes of the population and societal norms</b>.</li> <li>• However, both groups reported increased capacity to tackle social norms, with 46% of non-partners and 29% of partners acknowledging enhanced abilities.</li> <li>• Additionally, 42% of non-partners felt confident in their capacity to address these norms, substantially higher than the 18% of SCS partners who felt similarly equipped.</li> </ul>

<sup>55</sup> None of the programmes have selected these indicators for reporting, mostly because of the difficulty to collect rigorous data for measurement.

### Survey: Ability to influence social norms and practices

- Additionally, the perception of CSOs on their ability to influence societal norms and the attitudes of the population **through their advocacy specifically** has also seen an uptick, with 39% agreement at MTR compared to 31% at baseline.

In terms of social norms, three programmes indicate that they have seen a positive change in community attitudes. For example, one programme states that parents and other community members have become less resistant to young women's voice and participation in decision making. This is confirmed by interviews with young women and other stakeholders. Another programme states that SRHR has always been taboo in the community where they work, but that people have become more receptive for and interested in information (see box below). Similarly, many of the selected partners did not see SRHR as an issue to focus on, but now see the need for better advocacy. Finally, the three organisations working with migrant domestic workers also perceived some improvement in public attitudes, partly as a result of bringing the issues to the fore, although this could not really be confirmed by the perception survey conducted by one of the organisations.

**Case study – change in public attitude.** The MTR of the programme states that respondents in Lebanon were most positive about progress made in relation to increased public support. The opening up and progressive increase of conversations on SRHR took place at different levels and led to improvement of the language in relation to the different rightsholders groups and quality of information on SRHR. Progress on achieving public support consisted so far in setting rules for safe and inclusive communication with the rightsholders and allies along with developing inclusive communication and campaigning skills of rightsholders and the community of action.

Next to implementation of open sessions consisting in talks about SRHR needs of rightsholders and in strategizing for collaboration with other actors. Notwithstanding advancement in improving public attitudes at this stage of programme implementation there is not yet full evidence of effective increased general public support on inclusive SRHR, even at the level of target communities. External factors, such as the general reluctance of the public, and the government, to open up on issues related to certain SRHR and the general backlash limit the full achievement of the goal in no small measure. Next it has to be considered that opening communities and the country to full recognition of and support for these rights takes time.

#### *WRGE 5.2.2 of individuals with strengthened capacity (knowledge and skills) to advance women's rights and gender equality.*

Based on an inventory through partner interviews, more than 3250 people, including a large proportion of young people, have been involved in various trainings, peer-to-peer sessions and mentoring to support their advocacy activities across the eleven programmes. Again, this provides a wide range of support, from one training session to longer pathways involving multiple support activities. In addition, the programmes have conducted a large number of awareness-raising sessions, educating larger groups about their rights and/or specific issues.

#### *3.3.2 Progress made – Mid-term measurement for specific SRHR indicators.*

In Lebanon, two programmes under SRHR are implemented, overall focusing on SRHR indicators: A, B, C, F1.1, H, I, J.

Over the past two years, as mentioned above, the gender equality backlash has also affected SRHR, particularly services related to choice and sexuality rights, especially for LGBTIQ+ people.

Stakeholders interviewed confirmed the challenges of providing comprehensive, safe, inclusive and accessible SRHR services. However, programmes are making progress and efforts are being made to provide safe, inclusive and accessible services and/or to increase information and awareness on SRHR among young people. Programmes report high levels of youth participation and interest in activities. Less progress is being made at this stage in forming new alliances and programmes among civil society actors to reclaim space on SRHR. Both programmes are building synergies with other actors by being part of the national AIDS programme and by establishing a programme with UN Women to influence the government to support SRHR beyond antenatal and postnatal care and contraception. This programme is particularly concerned with engaging youth, conducting community consultations supported by comprehensive advocacy plans to engage with policymakers, supporting informal groups from diverse backgrounds such as refugees, rural people, migrants and youth-led groups, and working with schoolteachers and students' parents.

In 2016, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) launched the Vital Data Observatory (VDO), which monitors and evaluates health data specific to the maternal and child health population (of all nationalities) in Lebanon. Other data related to the broader SRHR sphere are not systematic or centralised. This has made it difficult to assess the baseline and current situation, as much of the available data, which is mostly the result of research by Lebanese institutions, UN agencies or civil society, is not regularly updated.

*SRHR indicator A # of youth who participate in policy and decision-making bodies who perceive their participation as meaningful.*

Progress has been made on the SRHR A indicator. However, it must be emphasised that participation in policy and decision making remains at the level of services currently provided by partner organisations, such as partner-run clinics or health centres, or lobbying and advocacy training and events. In this sense, there is satisfaction among young people who feel their presence is important. Work is underway to involve youth groups in community level consultations on SRHR and to discuss needs and findings to inform the development of policy papers and recommendations. Informal groups come from different backgrounds, e.g. refugees, migrants, and people from rural areas are involved.

*SRHR indicator B # of young people reached with comprehensive, correct information on sexuality, HIV/AIDS, STIs, pregnancy and contraception.*

Small progress has also been made on SRHR B. Youth-friendly SRHR and HIV/AIDS services are still very scarce in the country, according to interviewees, and there is no data available to quantify them. Yet, the programmes are providing information on SRHR to young people and beneficiaries and link them with other organisations to build a critical mass to strengthen community initiatives. Several young people have been selected to participate in capacity building on SRHR at the regional level, and partners will also work with hundreds of young people in schools and with parents. Many partners will also be brought on board to influence national and local institutions, including UN agencies working on SRHR. To this end, one of the programmes has established a programme with UN Women. Working with informal organisations is also seen as valuable in the Lebanese context. Some of them, although small, play a role in society. Partners build their capacity to know and advocate for SRHR.

*SRHR indicator C # of health facilities that adopt and implement youth-friendly SRH and HIV/AIDS services.*

There has been progress in making existing services accessible, either in terms of a safe space for all, including LGBTIQ+ people, refugees, migrants, etc, or in terms of commodities. One consortium partner established health centres in 2011 to provide SRHR services and commodities, including one in the north that was attacked by a conservative group in Tripoli. The availability of

commodities such as condoms and sanitary pads to vulnerable and discriminated people is very useful, especially at this time when the cost of these materials is skyrocketing in Lebanon due to high inflation.

#### *SRHR indicator F.1.1 # health workers trained in providing SRH services.*

This indicator was selected by one programme and progress has been made. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018, data shows that Lebanon's health system is performing well, ranking 34th out of 137 countries with a score of 6.8 out of a maximum of 7.<sup>56</sup> However, there are no comprehensive statistics on the number of health workers trained to provide SRHR services. Relevant data on health workers' knowledge and attitudes towards SRHR are summarised in the programme baseline, which refers to a 2019 study.<sup>57</sup> The programme provided specialised training and information on various SRHR issues, including for LGBTIQ+ people, to the staff of the clinic it manages. In addition, advocacy with health care providers is seen as safe and strategic, as medical personnel are highly regarded in Lebanon and are a good entry point to change public opinion on SRHR. Talking to midwives to reach the whole family is also proving to be a positive strategy. The programme targeted midwives with specific information on choice and informed SRHR.

#### *SRHR indicator I – Description of effective use of accountability mechanisms by citizens/communities and civil society organisations towards SRHR of all people.*

The term accountability describes "the processes by which government actors are responsible and accountable for the provision of quality and non-discriminatory goods and services (including the regulation of private providers), and for the enforcement of sanctions and remedies when these obligations are not met".<sup>58</sup> Key cross-cutting considerations for promoting accountability for SRHR include: macro-level policies and dominant ideologies, community voices, health system responsiveness, and the complexity of health systems. One programme reports on this indicator, but there is no tangible progress yet. This is explained by the difficulty of talking to the authorities about free, inclusive and safe SRHR for all. Regarding the ability of CSOs to increase government accountability on SRHR for all, one key informant said: *They cannot increase the accountability of the government. CSOs can't do that, it's too complex. CSOs can only counter anti-choice and opposition if they're united and have a common goal.* Regarding the possibility of holding the actual government accountable on SRHR for all, another stakeholder said: *The government is at a different level, they don't appreciate SRHR, they just understand it as post-natal care and contraception. If you put it on a different level, in terms of rights, they will turn against you.*

#### *SRHR indicator J) – # of communities, CSOs and advocacy networks with increased lobby & advocacy capacities.*

The OCAs carried out confirmed an increase in the number of L&A events, including for SRHR partners (see SCS5 above). In relation to SRHR specifically, partners appreciated training on digital security. Evidence of increased capacity of CSOs, communities and networks on SRHR can be

<sup>56</sup> World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-global-competitiveness-report-2017-2018/>.

<sup>57</sup> Naal, H.; Abboud, S.; Harfoush, O. & Mahmoud, H. (2019): Examining the Attitudes and Behaviors of Healthcare Providers Toward LGBT Patients in Lebanon. *Journal of Homosexuality* 67(13): 1902-1919. The study reports the following: 83% of health-care providers disagreed with the statement that homosexuality is a mental disorder; 78.6% disagreed with the statement that homosexuals can become heterosexuals through psychotherapy and/or medical interventions, and 96.5% disagreed with the statement that homosexual men deserve to be punished because of their sexual practices; 93.6% reported a willingness to attend to the medical needs of homosexual patients. A baseline should be established at project level on the basis of the areas that the programme will target. In its baseline report, the organisation proposes a bottom-up approaches that engages SRHR experts, including rightsholders activists from the four targeted group (women living with HIV, with disabilities, who identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex, and affected by displacement), and feminists' health care providers.

<sup>58</sup> Boydell V, Schaaf M, George A, et al. Building a transformative agenda for accountability in SRHR: lessons learned from SRHR and accountability literatures. *SexReprod. Health Matter.* 2019;27(2):64–75. DOI: 10.1080/26410397.2019.1622357.

already appreciated in the mid-term. For example, the Bread&Net regional digital event was co-organised in the framework of one partnership and included SRHR in times of war in the programme. Experts from various organisations and networks helped to raise awareness of both participating CSOs and advocacy networks, such as the Digital Arabia Network (DAN) or Sharika Wa Laken Platform, on SRHR. The event was coordinated by one of the partnership's organisations and discussed the SRHR of victims of conflicts in Arab countries, such as Sudan, Syria, and of refugee populations in the countries of the region as well as the OPT. Also, lack of information on SRHR in conflicts in the mainstream media was highlighted and how using digital platforms to inform and talk about these rights is part of protecting the digital rights of conflict-affected people. Another partnership carried out capacity building of grassroots organisations constituting the partnership's CoA at regional level on lobby and advocacy of LGBTIQ+ peoples' SRHR.

Furthermore, networking is mentioned by interviewees and in the OCAs as one of the increased capacities. However, for SRHR this is a little more nuanced given the sensitivity of the issue. As noted above, CSOs have responded to the backlash on gender and LGBTIQ+ rights by maintaining a low public profile while continuing to provide services and protect LGBTIQ+ people. This has meant refraining from organising highly visible public events such as LGBTIQ+ Pride or other events claiming political and social space for the LGBTIQ+ community, adopting more neutral language in all lobbying, advocacy and communication activities, and limiting networking and co-organising events and initiatives. As a result, the process of coalition building slowed down. Programmes continued their activities within existing networks on some SRHR issues, such as the national HIV/AIDS network. In addition, new programmes were established to strengthen the L&A capacities of existing networks, e.g. with UN Women to support L&A on SRHR and research on SRHR, and networking with Human Rights Watch, Foundation for Digital Rights (INSM), Helem and Damj associations in the #SecureOurSocials campaign to protect LGBTIQ+ rights, including SRHR, from digital targeting. These initiatives are still in their beginning stages, and although the security situation in the country and the region does not allow for initiatives in the short term, the MTR allowed for an appreciation of preparation initiatives for the L&A on SRHR that the partnerships are preparing by involving the existing networks.

### 3.4 Progress on the human rights situation



*Question 1c) towards improved or protected human rights situations (linked to SRHR, women & girls rights, gender equality, intersectionality, etc. – given the ambitions of the partners to improve rights situations.*

#### **Summary answer on progress on human rights:**

All programmes have been achieving results on protecting human rights, including of staff of partners and target groups but more limited in awareness raising of communities. Currently, programmes have decided to adopt a low profile on any issue related to the LGBTIQ+, but also on other themes considering the backlash are required. In terms of WRGE, local successes are evidenced in creating mechanisms to promote women's' greater participation in decision making and creating awareness.

As noted in Chapter 2, the human rights situation in Lebanon has deteriorated significantly, as highlighted in Amnesty International's latest report, which states that the ongoing economic crisis has had a significant impact on the rights to health, social security and housing, particularly for marginalised groups. The failure of the Lebanese government to address these issues has left many without access to basic needs. The report highlights widespread impunity for serious incidents, including the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and points to the increased use of criminal

defamation and insult laws to stifle freedom of expression. These laws have been particularly targeted at journalists, trade unionists and activists, further stifling public discourse and criticism. The report specifically mentions the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, which have been systematically violated, with the authorities encouraging hostility towards this community and the dire situation of refugees and migrants.<sup>59</sup>

All programmes are active and achieving results in the protection of human rights in Lebanon. This includes the training of staff of partner organisations or communities of action and target groups, while community awareness-raising is still limited. All programmes have decided to take a low profile in terms of advocacy on any issue related to LGBTIQ+, but also on other issues, given the backlash that needs to be addressed.

In terms of SRHR, progress has been made mainly on the right to access services, training of staff and rightsholders or the community, including capacity building and networking on advocacy for young people as an entry point to the community. However, there is no broader progress in terms of awareness raising and policies on SRHR of LGBTIQ+ people. This is always due to the introduction of security measures to protect these people from backlash.

Progress has been made on women's and girls' rights and the promotion of gender equality in all programmes. Some programmes, as evidenced by the TPM, have succeeded in creating mechanisms to strengthen women's self-esteem and promote their greater participation in decision making through economic empowerment projects. Other programmes have had local success in raising awareness of WRGE issues among young women in different communities (see also case study 2 in Annex 5).

There has been limited progress on the rights of migrants and refugees, mainly through localised exchanges. Advocacy at the policy level has had some success in influencing statements and providing monitoring data and evidence to stakeholders, but this has not (yet) resulted in policy changes.

### 3.5 Contribution of SCS policy implementation to empowerment of CSOs, youth and marginalised groups



*Question 1d) To what extent has the implementation of the policy framework SCS led to: Increased or protected civic space<sup>60</sup>; enhanced power of CSOs with locally embedded legitimacy; strengthened and/or creation of social movements (including women's movements); meaningful youth participation in different levels of politics and civil society; empowerment of marginalised groups and empowerment of women & girls; and equal women's participation as decision makers?*

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/lebanon/report-lebanon/>.

<sup>60</sup> The extent to which implementation of the policy framework SCS led to Increased or protected civic space was discussed under SCS 9 (section 3.2) above.

**Summary answer on contribution of SCS policy implementation to empowerment of CSOs, youth and marginalised groups:**

In general, programmes see the SCS policy framework as instrumental in strengthening the legitimacy of CSOs vis-à-vis local communities and authorities, but these processes have been affected by the backlash and mistrust between civil society and government. Similarly, the framework has been useful in creating safe spaces for movement building, but these are not being extended to communities in the current situation. This also limits the contribution to regional movement building. In the case of the programmes/partners with a youth focus, young people are part of the programmes in an active leadership role, including for youth participation in local politics. The political contribution of the SCS to the empowerment of marginalised groups relates in particular to strengthening capacity for advocacy, raising awareness of the rights of migrants, refugees and people living with disabilities, and building migrant movements.

*Enhanced power of CSOs with locally embedded legitimacy.*

The findings presented below in section 3.5 on leadership in the South show that this ambition has significantly empowered local CSOs. Programmes see the SCS policy framework as instrumental in strengthening the legitimacy of CSOs vis-à-vis local communities and authorities, and sometimes vis-à-vis government, especially at the local level. The framework effectively supports CSOs in capacity building on civil, political and social rights, which has enabled CSOs to play their role more effectively, thereby contributing to their credibility and legitimacy, as confirmed in interviews with rightsholders, OCAs and case studies. Such legitimacy is important because it builds trust between CSOs and the communities they serve, as well as with donors, government agencies and international bodies. When CSOs are perceived as capable and effective, especially in critical areas such as rights advocacy, their position as key actors in social change is consolidated and their power increased. However, these processes have been affected by the backlash and mistrust between civil society and government.

*Strengthened and/or creation of social movements (including women's movements).*

The increased capacity of CSOs, youth and women on civil, political and social rights has also contributed to movement building. The policy framework has been useful in creating protected spaces, for movement building and specifically on SRHR and LGBTIQ+, but given the current Lebanese context, these are not being scaled up in communities for the time being. Furthermore, the situation in the country and in the region limits the participation (presence) in regional networking initiatives, which limits the creation or strengthening of safe spaces and networking for social movements.

As noted above, the review also found that programmes support partners and rightsholders to participate in international conferences and events that help them to network and build alliances to gain consensus for their cause. In addition, some programmes aim to build a (feminist) global movement among their partners.

However, as mentioned above, the political and social situation does not allow for a greater presence of civil society in the public space on issues related to SRHR and LGBTIQ+. In terms of advocacy capacity and outreach, some techniques to protect rightsholders have been tested, such as not labelling campaigns as explicitly LGBTIQ+, but rather using more inclusive language. This is a positive outcome that will hopefully serve to advance equality in the longer term, depending on the institutional, political and social situation of the country.

### *Meaningful youth participation in different levels of politics and civil society*

A number of programmes/partners have a specific focus on youth, while youth are also involved in the empowerment activities of other programmes. Evidence was gathered of meaningful youth participation in these CSOs and in newly established groups working on SRHR, WRGE, LGBTIQ+.

In the case of the youth-focused programmes, young people are part of the programmes in an active leadership role, including through co-creation activities and youth-led campaigns, or supporting youth participation in local politics. In most of the other programmes, the involvement of target groups is linked to specific interventions, while for other activities there is a 'lower' level of involvement (mostly through the provision of information and consultation, but also through cooperation). However, this is not the case for all programmes/partners.

### *Empowerment of marginalised groups*

A number of programmes have a specific focus on the inclusion of people living with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, migrant and domestic workers, refugees and displaced communities, LGBTIQ+. Evidence of the progress made by these programmes in empowering these marginalised groups has been collected, particularly in terms of capacity building for advocacy, raising awareness of the rights of migrants, refugees and people living with disabilities, and building migrant movements (see further in section 3.9 on target group participation).

### *Empowerment of women & girls and equal women's participation as decision makers?*

All programmes have a focus on women and girls, and all tend to include them from an intersectional perspective, whether they are part of the LGBTIQ+ community or migrants, refugees, young people or people living with disabilities. The analysis shows that there is widespread awareness among programmes of the different levels of decision making. In general, this is limited to civil society, movements or communities. Three of the programmes focus on building women's capacity for public speaking and decision making. The evidence collected during the TPM and for the case studies and deep dives shows good results. For example, there are groups of women from rural communities working on small economic empowerment projects who have developed leadership skills, as a result of a followed training and the opportunity to speak in the communities. Evidence based on interviews with partners and corroborated by external stakeholders also shows good results with young women in terms of empowerment in SRHR and WRGE, resulting for example in young women actively engaging with community members through social media and direct discussions alongside CSOs. This engagement has not only strengthened rightsholders' decision-making roles, but also increased their visibility and influence in political and civic arenas in the community. Educating rightsholders on gender norms and legal rights has empowered them to drive changes in perceptions and advocate for improvements in human rights.

## 3.6 Southern leadership and legitimacy



*Question 1 e) To what extent has the implementation of the policy framework led to (or strengthened) southern leadership? To what extent do country actors /partners express increased local ownership of the programme's agenda setting, implementation and budget decisions?<sup>61</sup> Did southern leadership contribute to enhanced legitimacy of CSOs and embeddedness of the programme in the local context?*

<sup>61</sup> Different perspectives will need to be taken into account as southern leadership may be defined differently between Dutch INGOs and local southern NGOs.

### Summary answer on question 1e:

Approximately half of the programmes demonstrate successful models of local leadership, with local partners being actively involved in decision-making processes that shape activities, thus fostering a sense of ownership. This has however been less so in budget decisions. Programmes have faced challenges in fully engaging and involving local partners, particularly Tier 3 partners. Other challenges relate to the involvement of multiple in-country Tier 1 partners or international leads (not in-country), which complicates the management of the programme. The involvement of CSOs in the programmes has increased their credibility and trust within their communities, thereby strengthening their legitimacy both locally and internationally. The active involvement of Lebanese partners ensured that programmes were tailored to the local context and increased local engagement, as evidenced by roundtables, surveys and FGDs.

Southern leadership within programmes refers to a shift in power dynamics where local entities take on a more prominent role in decision making, agenda setting and implementation from more senior partners, whether they are international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) or lead partners in the country. It represents a move towards greater autonomy and ownership of initiatives in the local context. In terms of structure, although this does not necessarily indicate strong local ownership, three of the programmes are southern led in the sense that the lead partner is from the south. Three other programmes include Lebanese Tier 1 partners. In the case of the grant-based programmes, sole responsibility for design and implementation rests with the Lebanese grantees.

Interviews with partners at different levels, as well as with rightsholders, reveal a diverse landscape of programmatic partnerships. Five partnerships show successful models of local leadership, with local partners being actively involved in decision-making processes and empowered to shape activities and, to some extent, budgets after two years of implementation. Partners within the programmes clearly show a willingness to share resources, power and credit. However, not all partnerships have been equally successful in achieving strong southern leadership and have faced challenges in fully involving local partners in key decisions. To some extent this is related to the way the programmes were set up, with the involvement of several Tier 1 leaders in the country, which makes the management of the programme and/or the degree of synergy between partners' activities difficult. However, limitations in financial decision making and readiness also hinder the transition to full local leadership, as these programmes face challenges in engaging and sustaining the involvement of Tier 3 in particular, while efforts are made to empower local entities.

**Deep dive – Southern leadership:** The programme strengthened southern leadership first because it valued pre-existing leadership. The host organisation has full control on annual planning, implementation, engagement of rightsholders and duty bearers. However, it must be highlighted that the host organisation has no decision-making power on the assignment of the budget. The budget is assigned by the lead organisation according to established priorities. The budget assigned seems meagre compared to the efforts it is required to make, even though it can independently decide how to spend it. Since the DQA phase the programme has increased emphasis on women's voice, and good advancement was seen at the individual level through the direct involvement of women rightsholders in decision making about planning.

The level of southern leadership also varies between the different Tiers. For example, southern leadership is in most cases stronger between in-country leaders and their partners than between international leaders (not in-country) and partners, with limited local ownership in two programmes. In addition, programmes are in most cases still in the process of increasing the involvement/ownership of Tier 3 organisations, women's rights organisations (WROs) and other groups they work with, as mentioned above.

Interviews with partners, rightsholders and external stakeholders confirm that this active involvement fosters a sense of ownership and autonomy, contributing to the effectiveness and legitimacy of initiatives. For example, in one of the programmes running in southern Lebanon, the young women involved in the advocacy initiatives refused to stop or withdraw from their activities despite the war. Instead, the rightsholders changed the implementation modality to a safer approach and insisted on continuing their initiatives.

As noted above, capacity and readiness constraints pose significant challenges, as they make it difficult to engage Tier 3 organisations at different stages, which affects the ability of programmes to fully empower local partners. Efforts aimed at capacity building, collaboration and transparent communication are key to overcoming these challenges and promoting more equitable programmes.

CSOs involved in these programmes (and largely confirmed in interviews with rightsholders and external stakeholders) referred to increased credibility and trust within their communities, which strengthens their legitimacy both locally and internationally. For example, more than one programme mentioned using community leaders and other connections to introduce themselves to these communities. Similarly, most partners are well rooted in their communities and have prior knowledge of the local context and needs. This knowledge has enabled programmes to increase their local engagement and build trust and credibility within the community. This is evidenced by the roundtables, surveys and FGDs reported by various programmes, in addition to the active feedback mechanisms.

The active involvement of local partners ensures that programmes are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the communities they serve, deepening the embedding of initiatives in the local context as illustrated by the below insight.

**Deep dive – Involvement of local actors.** The programme's design and implementation leverage a participatory approach, to ensure that all partners, including Tier-1 and Tier 2 partners, were actively involved from the outset in design and ToC contextualisation. Embracing a bottom-up approach, the programme extends southern leadership by placing young women (tier 3) at the forefront of programme design and decision-making processes, and by ensuring that they are closely involved in the design and execution of advocacy strategies. This is further supported by adaptive budget allocations. However, the set-up of the partnership with multiple in-country tier 1 partners has complicated coordination of the overall in-country programme. Typically, planning involved joint sessions where one Tier-1 partner together with its partners cooperate on the agenda and budget for activities.

### 3.7 Unintended effects



*Question 2. Did the implementation of the policy framework cause unintended effects (positive and negative) and if so, what were the results? Were unintended effects different for different groups (disaggregated by gender (non-binary), age, disability)?*

**Summary answer to question 2:**

Overall programmes provide limited reporting on (and attention to) unintended effects. Key unintended effects relate to the (unwanted) increased risk exposure of the LGBTIQ+ community; strong ownership; and coordination by partner organisation involved in the programmes including connecting people with opposing views. In addition, positive effects of the exchange between partners both locally as internationally were mentioned. Specifically for young women positive effects included employment of youth involved and trained within the programmes, and young women wanting to become part of the feminist movement.

The Data Quality Assessment (DQA) carried out in 2023 showed that a number of programmes/partners had not (yet) developed clear procedures or methods to identify and/or discuss unintended effects. There is also limited attention to unintended effects in reporting to the MFA.

An important unintended (unwanted) effect is the increased vulnerability of the LGBTIQ+ community, given the context in Lebanon. On the other hand, as people from the LGBTIQ+ community became aware of the work of the programme, the partners involved were also able to provide life-saving support to individuals in the form of safe shelter. Linked to this is the backlash to WRGE issues, which in some cases has led to confrontation within communities, forcing partners to reframe their messages and use community-appropriate language in advocacy and training. Adopting inclusive language was driven by the need to protect against backlash, but also proved to be a good strategy for engaging more people.

Some of the unintended effects discussed in the interviews were to some extent foreseen but were going beyond what was expected. In particular, the strong ownership and cooperation of the partners (community of action), who behave more as a unit than expected, meeting and supporting each other, sharing and working independently. It also includes the extension of training to other partner NGOs as part of networking/movement building.

Another unintended effect that was often mentioned was that the joint activities between people from different (political) backgrounds opened up the space to connect and discuss issues with opposing opinions. Another effect mentioned in this context is that engagement with the programme has led to a change in views on the use of violence, with some activists now strongly believing in non-violent forms of engagement and protest.

More specifically for youth (young women), positive impacts included the employment of youth involved and trained in the programmes, and young women approaching the partner organisation to become part of the feminist movement.

A final category of unintended effects is the impact of (international) exchanges between partners within a programme. An example cited is the specific expertise of one partner assisting another partner in addressing GBV with their target group, as the exchange provided them with the tools and confidence to discuss the issue, while also providing a safe environment to do so.

As a positive effect, some programmes experienced an increased willingness of people and informal groups to cooperate better. As a result, some groups became more interested in working on human rights issues, such as lobbying and advocacy on SRHR, including in relation to securing safe space and resisting the shrinking of civic space.

### 3.8 Mutual reinforcement country and international components



Question 3) To what extent do the country and international components of the programme programmes reinforce each other?

#### Summary answer to question 3:

Reinforcement between country and international components occurs mainly through global L&A activities, including participation in international events and knowledge exchange between partners from different countries (global and/or regional). Participation in international events allows Lebanese partners to expand their network internationally. For two programmes, there appears to be a lack of reinforcement with limited international activities and/or a disconnect between the extensive international component and the limited in-country programming.

For most programmes, the international component includes particularly global L&A activities, including participation in international events such as the (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Feedback is that participation in this programme allows Lebanese experiences and lessons to be disseminated internationally and vice versa. Other examples include specific dialogues with bodies such as the World Bank to share lessons and strategies. At country level, this is said to support programming and content development. In several cases, in-country partners and also the target groups (young women) have participated in events such as the recent 68th CSW, advocating for gender issues relevant to Lebanon and enabling networking and exchange, including with programme partners in other countries. Feedback is that this has also increased understanding of similar projects and funding mechanisms.

Linked to this, some of the international partners have increased the international reach of the programme, including on specific issues related to Lebanon, through publications and knowledge sessions. Similarly, some programmes have conducted global research across countries, both to support local advocacy and to facilitate a global campaign, thereby linking national efforts to global initiatives. However, it is not yet clear how and whether this will strengthen in-country L&A activities.

Several of the programmes include regional and global components that focus on exchange within the programme or with partners (across projects) of the specific consortium partners. The latter is intended to support movement building. In some cases, country networks have evolved into regional networks and movements. This shift aims to address issues at a regional level, using a bottom-up and participatory approach. Specifically on gender, one partner mentioned: *The establishment of regional networks and learning exchanges has facilitated mutual learning and risk mitigation, allowing partners to learn from each other's experiences in using terminology and language that ensures safety and transparency while avoiding backlash.*

However, some partners are reluctant to involve national/grassroots partners in regional/global networks because of the potential political backlash against international actors. As mentioned in chapter 2, the political perception on international actors among local and grassroots organisations has changed significantly since the Gaza war. Previously, CSOs may have had a neutral or even positive view of international actors. However, the recent conflict has changed their attitude, leading to increased scepticism and criticism. Many local groups now question the intentions and effectiveness of international involvement, feeling that these actors have either failed to adequately address the humanitarian crisis or have adopted biased positions that do not reflect the needs and realities on the ground.

In one of the programmes the international and national components do not seem to really reinforce each other, with only limited international activities and exchanges. In another programme there seems to be a disconnect between international activities and a rather small in-country programme.

### 3.9 Progress towards formulated objectives



*Question 4) To what extent did the programmes achieve their formulated objectives (i.e. human rights, law and policy change, civic space, strengthened CSOs) or can they reasonably be expected to do so based on the achieved outputs and outcomes?*

The programme objectives are largely in line with the objectives of the SCS policy framework. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 provide an assessment of outputs and results achieved at mid-term stage, showing some delays in implementation and still limited achievement of results. The current context has required the programmes to change their strategies: i) to continue with a longer-term objective, focusing more on the process and 'capacity building' towards policy change rather than the policy change itself, iii) to redirect ambitions and interventions to lower levels (e.g. from national to municipal/community level), and iii) to focus on what is possible, such as advocacy.

In terms of ambitions for human rights and protection of civic space (see section 3.3 and section 3.2 SCS9), progress has been made, but on a small scale, which cannot reasonably be expected to advance human rights and/or increase civic space in Lebanon in the current context. In terms of strengthening civil society organisations, the programmes appear to be on track to achieve their stated objectives, as evidenced by the OCAs. In terms of building (social) movements, some clear progress can be seen, including in the creation of safe spaces, although this has to some extent been halted by the backlash.

Looking at the specific objectives of the programme, limited progress has been made in interventions targeting duty-bearers (e.g. accountability mechanisms, capacity building, etc.), especially at the national level. At the local/community level, duty-bearers are more willing to engage.

In terms of increased acceptance of norms, progress can be seen particularly in relation to gender norms, but often more at the community level, including family members and parents.

### 3.10 Gender, inclusion and intersectionality



*Question 7: To what extent is gender effectively mainstreamed in the implementation of the programmes? Do programmes use gender transformative, rights-based and intersectional approaches in their implementation and monitoring? What is the assessment of the OECD/DAC gender marker scores during MTR and does this differ from the scores given during proposal stage?*



*Question 8: How have women and men, girls and boys, adolescents, youth, people with disabilities, LGBTI people, religious & ethnic minorities and people in the lowest wealth quintiles been involved in the programmes? How was equal participation guaranteed?*

### Summary answer to questions 7 and 8:

All partnerships include a strong focus on women and girls and an intersectional perspective, but not many have specific strategies in this regard. There is a need for more coordination on issues that require strong social change, such as LGBTIQ+ visibility, safety and choice, women's agency, participation and empowerment, and access to SRHR for all. All programmes have adopted an HRBA, focusing mainly on the empowerment process rather than on developing the capacity of duty bearers. All programmes use an intersectional approach and ensure the inclusion of all social groups, with a focus on LGBTIQ+, refugees, migrants, people living with disabilities, and minority religious beliefs, with the aim of equal participation. Regarding people living with disabilities, there is no evidence that all but one programme has a precise strategy for their involvement. It is not clear how the programmes ensure that the poorest people are reached.

In general, we can say that all programmes integrate gender issues into their activities. However, our analysis suggests that what this means is not always clear, even to the partners themselves. At country level, we found limited awareness of the OECD-DAC gender marker<sup>62</sup>. All programmes, but certainly those focusing on WRGE, SRHR and LGBTIQ+, should in our view be marked with a G2 (see footnote) to be consistent with the SCS framework, but this is not the case. Nevertheless, partners (as confirmed by the OCA) have been strengthened their gender analysis, which is confirmed in the interviews, including with rightsholders. However, as mentioned by some partners, training and coaching is not always sufficient to mainstream gender effectively. To support progress in this respect, one programme has set up a Gender Innovation Fund to motivate the implementation of gender transformative approaches.

All programmes aim to be transformative, i.e. to address the root causes of gender inequalities in patriarchal societies based on gender power differentials and toxic masculinities. However, this cannot be achieved by one programme alone, except on a small scale, e.g. at community level or within specific segments of society, which is still useful. There is a need for greater coordination among programmes on issues that require strong social change, such as LGBTIQ+ visibility, safety and choice, women's agency, participation and empowerment, and access to SRHR for all. This is particularly important in light of recent backlashes in Lebanon, but it must also be said that it is precisely these challenges that prevent partnerships from more networking.

We found that all programmes use an intersectional approach in the sense that they make sure to include all social groups, with a focus on LGBTIQ+, refugees, migrants, people living with disabilities, minority religious beliefs, etc. However, not all programmes have specific strategies in this regard. In most cases, the approach seems to be one of openness to acceptance of all people without discrimination. One programme has included specific indicators on diversity and inclusion in its interventions, but diversity still refers to participation as a whole and not to specific groups. Overall, none of the programmes has clearly disseminated the principles and practices of the intersectional approach, either within the programme (with particular attention to Tier 3 partners), or to institutions and communities.

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<sup>62</sup> The Gender Equality Policy Marker of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a qualitative statistical tool to record development activities that target gender equality as a policy objective. The marker consists of three-point scoring system, such as: Principal (marked G2) means that gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective; Significant (marked 1) means that gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.; Not targeted (marked 0) means that the project/programme has been screened against the gender marker but has not been found to target gender equality. See more at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm>.

Similarly, all programmes have adopted an HRBA. This consists mainly of (i) consulting stakeholders and rightsholders, (ii) ensuring the participation of all, without discrimination, in all programme activities, (iii) ensuring that the processes put in place are owned by the partners, rightsholders and communities, (iv) triggering empowerment processes. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in strengthening accountability mechanisms towards duty bearers. Indeed, while the human rights situation in the country is challenging, it is necessary to identify entry points for supporting duty bearers and developing their capacities to fulfil their human rights obligations.

#### *Meaningful participation of target groups*

Apart from a few programmes and/or partners that are more specifically aimed at involving young people, all programmes seek to include all social segments with an intersectional approach and equal participation. With respect to persons with disabilities, one programme has included a partner that focuses specifically on this group. There is no evidence that any of the other programmes have a precise strategy in this regard, apart from specific activities, in particular training, for example using digital technologies to include visually impaired persons. Also, with respect to adolescents, there are no precise strategies to involve them. Their participation is limited to their request, especially about SRHR, or, as it was the case of a programme, of being involved in feminist activities. One programme mentioned in this respect that partners were in the process of tailoring procedures and methods to different age groups, as they were so far only directed to children. The same applies to poor people. Poverty and marginalisation are not the same thing, but a poor person is at higher risk of being marginalised. How the programmes ensure to reach the poorest people is not clear.

Most programmes consider themselves feminist and involve mainly women. Some others involve both men and women, working with migrants and refugees and host communities, youth activists etc. One programme mentioned that they recently had also established a men/boys group to push gender mainstreaming further. Looking at the meaning participation of different groups and particularly youth and targeted women, programmes/partners involve different levels of participation depending on the workstreams/interventions involved (see also section 3.4).

All but one of the programmes focus on empowerment of target groups and grassroots organisations, aiming at target-led advocacy. In terms of empowerment, most programmes have no full results yet due to delays in implementation. There is full engagement (empowerment) of rightsholders in CoAs (two programmes), LGBTIQ+ (four programmes), youth (three programmes), women and young women (three programmes), refugees and migrants (three programmes) and people living with disabilities (one programme). Based on our analysis, the capacity building activities, provision of safe and inclusive services, L&A and increased participation in movement building, international conferences and events, improved economic situation of women in remote areas are likely to result in a tangible increase in the empowerment of rightsholders.

**Deep-dive - Engagement of target groups:** The programme aims at improving the position of Women Migrant Domestic Workers. The NGO planned for the MWDW community to lead on the campaigns for policy reform. The project included capacity strengthening focussed on story/testimony telling, mental health and leadership. The NGO supported the MWDW to lead on actions and messages, playing mainly a facilitation role. The focus on mobilisation of community leaders supported the engagement. In interviews, rightsholders indicated that the campaign gave them visibility, room and freedom to talk about their stories. They felt that collaboration with the NGO was very good: “before they start any event, when they plan, they call all the community leaders (different nationalities), and they start talking, they ask their opinions and their suggestions. We have also learned how to prepare some events. They listen to all suggestions and they decide together on how to organize everything.” The experience also helped one community to secure small funding from other donors to support further establishment of their community and organisation of other events. Engagement with target group/rightsholders is however limited to the specific activity. There is no consultation and/or feedback mechanism for the other interventions involved, which could have benefitted from rightsholders participations.

### 3.11 Conflict sensitivity and integrity



*Question 9) What measures were taken to integrate conflict sensitivity in the design and implementation of the policy framework? Were these measures effective?*



*Question 10) To what extent do all SCS strategic programmes use integrity and safeguarding policies & principles in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation?*

#### **Summary answer to question 9 and 10:**

A full gender and conflict analysis was often not carried out at the time of programme design. After backlashes, partnerships improved their social conflict analysis and changed their activities accordingly. Conflict sensitivity can also relate to different political views and conflict resolution. Most programmes have general safety and security policies, but these are not specific to the context of the conflict in southern Lebanon. In general, Tier 1 programmes ensure that safeguarding policies and codes of conduct are transferred to partners, specifically for the different target groups, including youth and young adults. SEAH is a key focus for most programmes. None of the programmes have yet integrated these policies and principles into their MEL systems, except for privacy and confidentiality. Increasingly, programmes/partners are paying attention to the protection of staff, including mental health.

At the programme design stage, conflict sensitivity in all programmes was mostly understood as interpersonal conflict, conflict between CSOs and movements, conflict with government, conflict with society. In this sense, all programmes elaborated the programme methodology to address them. Following the backlash on gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights, most programmes also improved their social conflict analysis and changed their activities accordingly.

However, although Lebanon is a conflict-prone area, particularly due to the long and ongoing conflict with Israel on its southern border, not all programmes had carried out a full conflict and gender and conflict analysis at the time of designing their proposals. One programme included activities for women victims of conflict, such as Syrian refugees. However, it was not until the activities were contextualised and planned locally that conflict analysis was taken into account in

the contextualisation of the ToC and planning. Two programmes included a basic conflict analysis in their work plans, focusing on both armed conflict and cultural conflict (backlash).

Conflict sensitivity can also refer to different political views. One partner working with youth activists mentioned this: *We try to act as mediators between different groups that are in conflict in the same region as part of our trainings. This demand for such a role in the different communities has highlighted the importance of conflict resolution, and we are now thinking about how we can play a deeper and more effective role at this level.*

Most programmes have general safety and security policies, but these are not specific to the context of the conflict in South Lebanon.

#### *Integrity and safeguarding policies & principles in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation*

All programmes have safeguarding policies and principles. In general, Tier 1 programmes ensure that policies and codes of conduct are transferred to partners, especially for the different target groups, including young people and adolescents. This is usually done when the programme contracts are signed, to which the policies are attached. Some programmes have officers responsible for monitoring the application of policies and for dealing with cases, as in the case of SEAH. Many of the programmes included training on SEAH for partners, and in a number of cases this training is still being provided. Some programmes provided staff and partners with safety and security training tailored to the type and level of risk, e.g. alarm and safety systems in the event of bombings, explosions, disasters. One programme set up different security mechanisms for different areas of work and a committee for each mechanism. None of the programmes have yet integrated these policies and principles into their MEL systems, except for data protection and confidentiality. However, this work is in progress and following the intensification of the conflict with Israel in South Lebanon and the risk of escalation to the whole country, most programmes are working in this regard.

Increasingly, programmes/partners are paying attention to staff protection, including mental health.

### 3.12 Innovation



*Question 11) Which innovative ways of working are developed, or which existing methods are deployed in new contexts? What adaptations and/or improvements have been made based on new insights? How have innovative (digital) technologies contributed to innovative ways of working? To what extent are the innovations ready to be scaled up?*

#### **Summary answer to question 11:**

Innovation mostly refers to programming adaptations to the conservative and restrictive context, rather than the use of new methods. The volatile context in this sense often requires continuous innovation.

Adaptations in the face of backlash include changing the wording and the way concepts are conveyed, for example by making the message non-political or using specific individuals as entry points to deliver the message. Some programmes provide good examples of the use of technology, including digital safety. However, most programmes/partners still seem to use traditional methods, especially for awareness raising and L&A. Most use social media, especially Facebook, but both social media per se and the content is not very innovative. Several of the programmes have an innovative bottom-up approach, aiming to create networks at community level, involving rightsholders in an inclusive and innovative way.

Innovative ways of working were often related to programming adapted to the conservative and restrictive Lebanese context, rather than the use of new methods. This is illustrated by a programme working on GBV in a conservative mountainous area: to advocate and create a safe space, an innovative activity was to involve women of different ages in a participatory and creative way, using written stories with cardboard houses to reveal stories of GBV that would normally have been 'kept in the house'. Other examples include the use of sports, music and drama activities to raise awareness and promote cohesion within and between different groups, including refugees and host communities.

Two programmes have developed an 'innovation fund': one to enable partners to implement gender transformative initiatives and the other to enable initiatives to reduce GBV in communities. However, these initiatives do not yet show evidence of innovation or new ways of working.

Adaptations to the highly sensitive context and backlash include semantics and the way concepts are communicated. This includes, for example, changing wording (using 'bodies' instead of 'sex', husband/wife instead of 'partner'; avoiding terms such as LGBTIQ+, intersectionality and gender transformative approaches; and making messaging non-political), but also finding the best ways to target audiences on SRHR, for example when distributing condoms. In some cases, programmes build on previous (backlash) experiences in other areas of the country.

Programme partners indicate that they must constantly innovate due to the changing context, for example by trying to identify the right opinion leaders/allies to use as entry points to change public attitudes. Such adaptations in the delivery of messages may be small and perceived as inherent to working in a particular context but are critical to ensuring the safety of rightsholders. For example, two programmes recognise that doctors and midwives are open to providing SRHR care, given their moral oath and code (see also chapter on innovation). This provides a gateway to conservative communities and families, and a way to strengthen the health system.

Two programmes have a strong focus on digital and social media. Both programmes work closely with (feminist) media companies to support content producing partners: one programme develops specific design and messaging, integrating communications work into the programme work, using graphic novels and comics to raise awareness of issues including abuse of domestic workers and trans people. The other programme promotes digital safety and security, which is relatively new in Lebanon. An innovative action was a study that involved screening the most common social media owned by Meta or Microsoft to assess the suppression of SRHR content. The innovative action continued by contributing the results of the study to a social media campaign on gender and human rights, conducted in collaboration with international and regional organisations (see Deep Dives Annex 6).

While these are good examples of the use of technology, there is still room for improvement in the use of technology and digital media. Most programmes/partners still seem to use traditional methods, especially for awareness raising and L&A. Most of them use social media, especially Facebook, but the content is not very innovative and does not showcase their activities.

Several of the programmes included an innovative bottom-up approach aimed at creating networks at community level, involving right-holders in an inclusive and innovative way (see box below).

**Deep dive – Innovation:** The innovative aspect of the programme lies in the way civil society gained legitimacy to act for the programme's objectives and with respect to the communities. The programme worked on the establishment of a Community of Action (CoA), aiming at least 75% led by young people/rightsholders, a focus on public support for rightsholders, on accessible SRHR information and services, and on legal and policy framework protecting young women's SRHR. The deep dive demonstrated the increased legitimacy of the CoA with respect to the donor community, the Lebanese government, as well as the communities. The partners' activities have expanded, both in terms of projects and the communities it serves, and in terms capacity to participate in national networks.

The young people have been empowered both as part of a community fighting against discrimination and in terms of their knowledge of the legal, health and social aspects of inclusive and accessible SRHR. This was also evident in their choice to focus on advocacy at the community level and supporting communities in information and services for the time being and not engaging duty bearers given the backlash. This innovative mechanism of legitimacy through participation and representation is likely to lead to greater ownership of the programme initiative by the communities it supports. However, legitimacy is also gained with respect to the acceptance of the issues being advocated on by communities.

There is (as yet) no evidence of scaling up of innovative approaches or methods, either within the country or to other countries, although regional exchanges within programmes could be beneficial to support this in the future.





# 4. Assessment of the organisational capacity



## 4 Assessment of Organisational Capacity

### 4.1 Approach

The assessment of the capacities of the Lebanese CSOs involved in the programmes had the main goal to define the current situation that characterises these organisations, so as to make a comparison with the situation at baseline stage. In addition, the organisations were asked about the specific contribution of the programmes, whilst for three organisations a case study was made using a contribution analysis.

This analytic approach as explained in section 1.2.1 appears relevant in the Lebanese context, as it looks at the “internal factors” influencing the advocacy capacity of CSOs. However, some adaptations have been made looking at the specific indicators, to avoid imposing pre-cast models on capacities needed for advocacy and to include the requirement that an organisation has to pursue gender-transformative objectives and to adopt a HRBA.

The model has limitations that will be considered in the analysis. Namely:

- It considers “capabilities” without linking them to the organisations’ strategies and objectives. To properly work, CSOs attitudes, functioning modalities, and activities need to be coherent with strategies. A consequence of that is that an organisation can deliberately choose a certain organisational model (i.e. internal governance, communication and activity), even if this conflicts with commonly recognised models looking at CSOs’ capacities.
- The model tends to consider all CSOs as similar, while their differences may strongly influence engagement in advocacy and lobbying and the tendency to develop or not certain capacities. Thus, grassroots and self-help organisations – which mainly focus on protecting the interests of their own members and can have a clear constituency – are considered without any distinction from professional NGOs, or from CS platforms. CBOs can be very different in their linkage with constituencies. This can influence the way formal procedures can be introduced and/or are needed, as well as the way evidence is produced and represented.
- The model focuses on L&A, while in many cases a policy and governance role can be played by CSOs by delivering services and by engaging in other activities (including participation in movements which are not directly aiming at influencing policies, but rather at fostering social and cultural change).
- It only focuses on the “internal” capability side without considering the interaction among actors and context conditions. This can however influence the effectiveness of advocacy actions and the extent to which CSOs can engage in policy processes and governance - at local, national and international level - with public authorities and power/duty holders. This is particularly strong in conflict and fragile state contexts, where the positions of actors are strongly influencing their capacity to communicate and to be recognised. In these cases, the actors targeted by advocacy actions are not always visible and advocacy actions can or need to focus on long term impacts rather than on achieving results in the short term.
- While considering the social dynamics related to CSO functioning and the relationships with different actors, the model does not fully consider to the informal relations present in the Middle East. This involves rules, processes and dynamics that influence the legitimacy and the representativeness of an organisation and that are related to family/clan and informal relations, familiarity and “shared experiences” among actors. Such factors can strongly influence the functioning of public authorities and CSOs in Middle Eastern Countries.

Despite these limitations, the model and different capabilities appear useful and suitable for monitoring change in organisations (as was also confirmed in the ToC workshops both at baseline and mid-term stage and stakeholder interviews). They are also able to compare the situation at different points in time and with other organisations and entities that are involved in the programme. Nevertheless, as a mitigation, the team has been adopting different strategies:

- to refer to the model in a relatively flexible way, using the indicators identified for the operationalisation as proxies, rather than looking at them as rigid parameters. For instance, when considering powerholders, reference was made not only to public authorities but also to different groups of actors influencing decision making (political parties, religious institutions and groups, traditional leaders). Likewise, when looking at representation capacities, the way organisations are able to base their strategies and agendas on emerging issues at community level was considered together with formal mechanisms;
- To consider the model as a framework for measuring and comparing rather than as the only reference in the analysis and interpretation;
- To include in the analysis context- and strategy-related factors, allowing to better understand the way CSOs engage in their own political, social and legal environment.

It is to be considered in this framework that the capacities of CSOs are not the only elements influencing the effectiveness of advocacy and lobbying. Effectiveness of these actions strongly depends upon the context, including factors such as the actual possibilities to engage in change by decision-makers and stakeholders, the interests that such decision makers bear, the fact that spaces exist for interaction and for dialogue, etc. The importance of such external factors – which are not considered in the analysis – explain why the capabilities of actors not necessarily imply the effectiveness of advocacy and lobbying.

The assessment of the capacities of the sampled Tier 2 and Tier 3 partners was based on document review, review of website and other publicly available information, and interviews with the organisations guided by specific OCA questions. To the extent possible data was verified in interviews with rightsholders, other CSOs and other external stakeholders. This was specifically done for the three case studies focusing on capacity strengthening. The assessment of capacity strengthening at Tier 1 level is based on the interviews and document review.

Finally, it should be considered that the OCA is in cases related to the programme implementation. For instance, increased communication and collaboration with other CSOs may be discontinued if the funding situation is different.

## 4.2 Tier 1

Tier 1 partners refer to the consortium lead and consortium partners. These include also a number of INGOs with offices in Lebanon.

Overall, the Tier 1 organisations had already strong capabilities (in L&A) at baseline stage. Reported capacity strengthening of the Tier 1 partners are almost similar across the different programmes, referring to exchange of country experiences both globally and regionally and strategies and exchange of specialised thematic knowledge. Exchange of country experiences for instance relates to specific L&A approaches in the specific context of Lebanon and insights on safety protection of in-country right-holders and staff.

Tier 1 interviewees further indicate that they learned from specialised thematic knowledge that partner organisations have. This is for instance with regard to community mobilisation, gender

mainstreaming, integrating youth participation throughout the programme, and ways to engage CSOs and communities in SRHR issues. A number of the programmes underscored southern leadership and local ownership as an important learning aspect. This in particular implies learning how best to develop southern leadership and avoiding a too bureaucratic organisational set up. Further learnings are linked to the introduction of feminist MEL. The in-country Tier 1 partners specifically mentioned regranting as a learning experience.

### 4.3 Organisational capacity assessment Tier 2 and Tier 3

Second Tier entities refer to contractual partners of the consortium lead and partners, which are expected to participate (or lead on) programme activities, and in most cases to further involve and support more grassroots entities (Tier 3). Tier 2 entities have therefore in most cases a twofold position: on the one hand, they are expected to benefit from the programmes, on the other hand, they are expected to be the key intermediary organisation to support tier 3 entities.

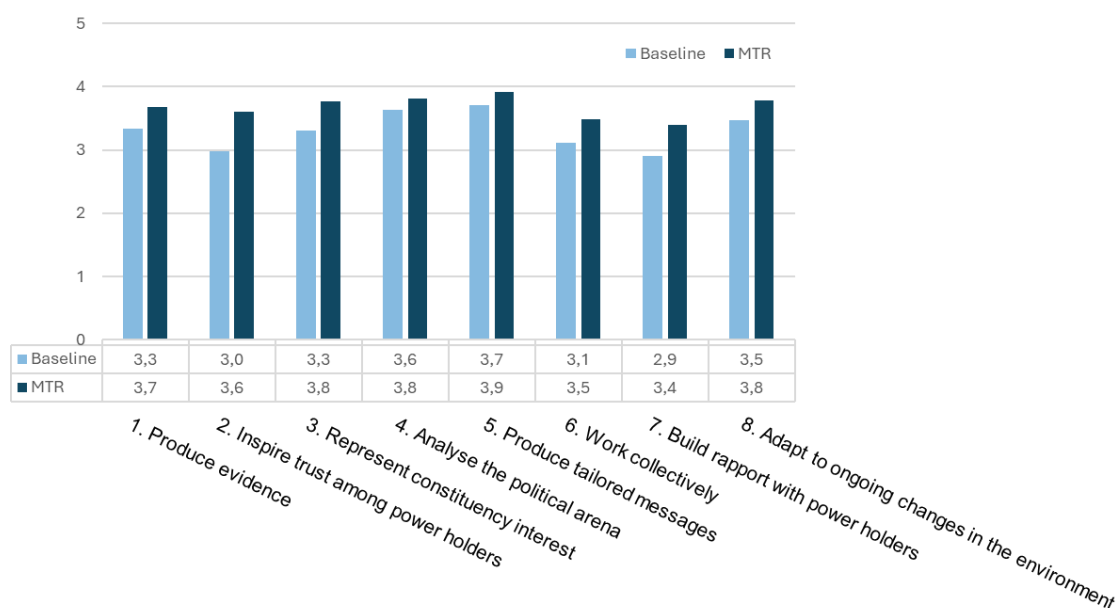
Capacity strengthening activities differed per programme and per sampled partner. The capacity assessment takes into consideration a sample of fifteen CSOs, from ten programmes. The Tier 2 and Tier 3 organisations were chosen to represent different programmes and grant provided under the LFS instrument, different types of organisations and the situations emerging in the different geographical areas of Lebanon. The sample of organisations includes ten NGOs and five CBOs/grassroots organisations. A different questionnaire and set of sub-indicators was used for NGO and CBO to represent their different set-up, within the same eight advocacy capacities. The present sample of organisations assessed contained eight women-led organisations, no youth-led organisations, three women- and youth-led organisations and four others (not women- and not youth-led).

The analysis below starts with the average scores for all organisations, followed by analysis of differences between the NGOs and CBOs as well as between women-led, women-and-youth-led and other organisations. We then present specific findings per advocacy capacity, including qualitative findings. Annex 7 provides a full overview scores per organisation in the assessment as well as the measurement of the different capabilities.

#### Overview of OCA scores

The figure and table below give a summary of the OCA scores for the baseline and MTR. They show that average scores have increased on all advocacy capacities between baseline and MTR, with a range of 0.2 to 0.6. The largest increase in capacities took place in the capacity to inspire trust among power holders (capacity 2) and the smallest increase was seen for the capacities to analyse the political arena (capacity 4) and to produce tailored messages (capacity 5). These latter already had relatively high baseline scores, which may have led to less opportunities for improvement. The averages of the capacities range between 3.4 and 3.9 at MTR. It should be noted that the minimum and maximum scores vary quite significantly, which indicates high variability between the capacities of the organisations.

**Figure 4.1 Summary of Baseline and MTR scores on OCAs**



**Table 4.1 Overview of OCA scores per capacity at baseline and Mid-term stage**

Advocacy capacity	All organisations (N=15)						Difference in averages <sup>63</sup>
	Baseline			MTR			
	Av.	Min.	Max	Av.	Min.	Max	
1. Produce evidence	3.3	2.0	5.0	3.7	2.5	5.0	0.4
2. Inspire trust among power holders	3.0	1.3	4.4	3.6	2.3	4.6	0.6
3. Represent constituency interest	3.3	2.0	4.8	3.8	2.8	5.0	0.5
4. Analyse the political arena	3.6	2.0	4.7	3.8	2.0	4.7	0.2
5. Produce tailored messages	3.7	1.7	5.0	3.9	1.7	5.0	0.2
6. Work collectively	3.1	2.2	4.3	3.5	2.6	4.7	0.4
7. Build rapport with power holders	2.9	1.0	4.7	3.4	1.7	5.0	0.5
8. Adapt to ongoing changes in the environment	3.5	1.9	5.0	3.8	1.6	5.0	0.3
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.3</b>			<b>3.7</b>			<b>0.4</b>

**Differences between NGOs and CBOs**

Average scores are on average slightly higher for NGOs than for CBOs, despite the adaptation of sub-indicators. During the MTR, the largest difference is seen on the capacity to produce evidence (capacity 1; score 4.0 for NGOs, 2.9 for CBOs) and on the capacity to build rapport with power holders (capacity 7; score 3.7 for NGOs, 2.6 for CBOs). Perhaps not surprisingly, these are advocacy capacities that larger organisations are typically better equipped to do.

Another main difference between NGOs and CBOs is that for CBOs there was hardly any improvement on the capacities to analyse the political arena (4), to work collectively (6), and to build rapport with power holders (7) (change in scores 0 to 0.2), whereas NGOs did improve significantly on those capacities (change in scores 0.3, 0.4 and 0.6, respectively).

<sup>63</sup> Note that the difference in averages is calculated before rounding off the numbers to one decimal. This explains why the difference can be larger or smaller than the difference between the rounded numbers given in this table.

In summary, baseline scores of NGOs were higher than those of CBOs and the average increase in scores was also larger for NGOs than for CBOs, resulting in an increased difference in scores during the MTR.

**Table 4.2 Overview of scores per capacity for NGOs and CBOs.**

Advocacy capacity	NGOs (N=11)			CBOs (N=4)		
	BL	MTR	Diff.	BL	MTR	Diff.
1. Produce evidence	3.6	4.0	0.3	2.6	2.9	0.4
2. Inspire trust among power holders	3.0	3.7	0.7	3.0	3.4	0.5
3. Represent constituency interest	3.3	3.8	0.5	3.3	3.6	0.3
4. Analyse the political arena	3.8	4.0	0.3	3.3	3.3	0.0
5. Produce tailored messages	3.9	4.1	0.2	3.3	3.5	0.3
6. Work collectively	3.2	3.6	0.4	2.9	3.1	0.2
7. Build rapport with power holders	3.1	3.7	0.6	2.5	2.6	0.1
8. Adapt to ongoing changes in the environment	3.7	3.9	0.2	2.9	3.4	0.5
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>0.3</b>

### Findings women and youth-led organisations

We can see that women-led organisations started with relatively moderate baseline scores (average 3.3) and have increased by 0.5 on average, the largest increase between the groups. The largest increases were seen in the capacity to inspire trust among power holders and to build rapport with powerholders.

Women- and youth-led organisations started with higher baseline scores (average 3.7) but increased a bit less (average 0.3). Finally, the other organisations had the lowest baseline scores (average 3.1) and also the lowest average increase in capacities, with 0.2.

Because of the small number of organisations in each group, it is difficult to establish whether these differences are a pattern or rather a finding of individual variation, since the differences in scores between organisations are large. Also in this case, a big difference can depend on the position within the programmes. Having a beneficiary position/role does not always help in building capacities over a certain level.

**Table 4.3 Scores per capacity for disaggregated CSOs**

Advocacy capacity	Women-Led (N=8)			Youth-led	Women- and youth-led (N=3)			Other (N=4)		
	BL	MTR	Diff.		BL	MTR	Diff.	BL	MTR	Diff.
1. Produce evidence	3.3	3.8	0.4	N/A	4.0	4.3	0.3	2.8	3.1	0.3
2. Inspire trust among power holders	3.1	3.8	0.8		3.0	3.7	0.7	2.8	3.1	0.3
3. Represent constituency interest	3.2	3.7	0.5		3.6	3.8	0.2	3.4	3.8	0.5
4. Analyse the political arena	3.6	3.9	0.3		4.2	4.3	0.1	3.2	3.2	0.0
5. Produce tailored messages	3.9	4.1	0.2		4.0	4.0	0.0	3.1	3.4	0.3

Advocacy capacity	Women-Led (N=8)			Youth-led	Women- and youth-led (N=3)			Other (N=4)		
6. Work collectively	3.0	3.3	0.4		3.4	3.9	0.5	3.2	3.5	0.3
7. Build rapport with power holders	2.8	3.7	0.9		3.4	3.7	0.2	2.8	2.6	-0.3
8. Adapt to ongoing changes in the environment	3.4	3.7	0.3		3.8	4.1	0.3	3.3	3.7	0.4
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>		<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>

## 1. Produce evidence

The score of the capacity to produce evidence has increased consistently with 0.3 to 0.4 in all type of organisations (NGO/CBO and women-led/Women and youth-led /other). The baseline and MTR scores between the different types of organisations do vary, with CBOs at a considerably lower baseline score (2.6) than NGOs (3.6) and similarly non-women and non-youth-led organisations starting off with a lower baseline score than women- and/or youth-led organisations. Especially the capacity to analyse needs with a human rights or social justice (including gender) angle scored lower for these groups, which might be a challenging skill for relatively small organisations.

The majority of organisations report that they now conduct some research with their target groups/constituencies to assess the needs and context. The largest improvements have been made in the capacity of using different research tools (across all types of organisations) and in analysing gender dynamics (for NGOs). Common tools used are all qualitative: surveys, interviews, documentary research and sometimes meetings with stakeholders or a focus group. A few frameworks such as risk analysis and Strength Weaknesses Opportunity Threats (SWOT) analysis are indicated to be used. One organisation described that it has made a large shift since the baseline and is now conducting deeper and more scientific research. A few organisations explain that working in the programme has familiarised them with new research tools. Two organisations have a distinct research and learning unit, others mostly conduct these activities as part of their MEL system or project management. The organisations are regularly part of research activities by the programme or in their network, only a few are leading and publishing research themselves. Human rights, gender, and social justice are regular topics of research/needs assessment, but not frequently used as an additional lens or disaggregation when the research concerns other topics.

## 2. Inspire trust among power holders

The average capacity to inspire trust among power holders has increased most of all capacities between the baseline and mid-term review. This capacity scored relatively low during the baseline (average of 3.0) and has improved to an average score of 3.6. NGOs and women-led organisations show a higher improvement than CBOs and other organisations. This capacity contains two components explained below.

*The capacity of an organisation to be recognised as a bearer of civil society voice, based on its involvement in consultations and programmes, by public authorities.* A number of organisations report growth on this capacity since the baseline, noticing that they are being consulted by national authorities more often. This took place for example by political parties or parliament, or by establishing stable relationships with ministries or in committees/working groups. There are also a number of organisations, mostly CBOs, that instead are more consulted by citizens and communities. Some of these are still trying to grow their relations with national stakeholders; for others their impact focuses more on a local/individual level.

*The capacity of an organisation to be recognised as a trustworthy entity by decision-makers and by donors, thanks to its transparency, and to its governance and representation mechanisms.* Here, multiple organisations report that they have grown their formal mechanisms of transparency, auditing, formalising policies and practices of the organisation. Many of the organisations are inclusive of women and youth in their staff and board, although mostly this is not formalised but a result of their culture and/or scope.

Being recognised as a bearer of civil society voice as well as a trustworthy entity, is seen to be a component that takes relatively long to establish. Younger organisations (often CBOs) are typically in the process of growing this capacity, whereas organisations that have existed for longer (mostly NGOs) describe that they have long-standing relationships and good visibility. In most cases the CBOs do not perceive the issue of representation as an important one, as they are directly stemming from a defined constituency group. Representation and being trustworthy become an issue for larger organisations, having looser relations with constituents and with reference communities/groups. Being recognised as a “bearer of civil society voice” takes long only for those that are not “per se” civil society voice. For larger organisations normally being recognised is very much related to the capacity to engage in relevant actions. Visibility is something different.

### **3. Represent constituency interest**

Similar scores are seen for NGOs and CBOs in their capacity to represent constituency interest. The ability to represent constituency interest involves strong communication and mechanisms for engagement with constituency groups, allowing them influence in the strategies and decision making of the organisation. All programmes describe that they assess needs of their constituents and in most cases, this also directly impacts decision making and strategy setting, for example through consultations in focus groups or surveys. This is often connected to activities to produce evidence or assessments under capacity 1 above. A few NGOs mostly do this indirectly, through the CBOs they work with, but others do have direct contact with their constituents. The capacity that has increased most is having mechanisms that allow constituency groups to influence the strategies and decision making of the organisation (periodic consultation, public hearings, surveys, working groups with relevant stakeholders). A few organisations describe that the programme has stimulated them to use participatory approaches for planning and strategy, beyond their initial approach of engaging with constituents only activity-based. Another organisation describes they have benefitted strongly from a training about facilitation, strengthening their capacities to engage with their constituents and collect meaningful inputs from them.

### **4. Analyse the political arena**

The capability to analyse the political arena was analysed by looking at a) the capacity to define and implement strategies based on the analysis of the context, and b) the capacity to define and implement strategies for responding to emerging challenges regarding Human Rights, social justice and gender equality in the organisations’ operation contexts. Some organisations report strong own analysis of the political arena, strategic planning, risk assessments, case studies and adaptive responses to emerging issues. For example, they have own strategic plans and concurrently map donor funding on these plans to realise activities. One organisation also explains that it has become part of their daily business to constantly keep an eye on developments with stakeholders and how to sustain their position and prevent backlash. Others do not have specific qualities or activities related to this capacity, but rather see it as an element of engagement with constituents and programme planning. In those cases, funding steers implementation strongly and actions are taken in a more reactive manner, such as when backlash from opposition occurs. Improvement in this capacity seems to have taken place predominantly with NGOs and women-led organisations (both 0.3 on average) and not with other categories of organisations, who show on average no change in this capacity. This may be just because the CBOs are not asked to have this kind of capacity.

## 5. Produce tailored messages

The capability to produce tailored messages and therefore to target specific groups through communication and advocacy shows a similar pattern to the capacity to analyse the political arena (4). It had a high baseline score of 3.7 and moderate improvement to 3.9 at MTR. This change is similar for NGOs and CBOs – although NGOs started on a higher baseline level (3.9) than CBOs (3.3) – and not considerably different depending on the leadership of the organisation.

Organisations that score highly on this capacity describe practices such as making communication plans for every project or having separate communications department/person. Many organisations explain they are very mindful of the language they use in their communication and tailor it to different audiences. They explain to always look for a balance between being considerate and sensitive to the people they want to reach (not wanting to oppose), and not making compromises on what they advocate for. One organisation uses particularly many different forms of communication, ranging from their website and social media to billboards and tv shows. They vary the use of this for distinguished stakeholders (communities/national/international).

The main limitation named under this capacity is a challenge of hiring staff for communications.

## 6. Work collectively

The ability to work collectively combines the capacity to mobilise resources and partners, to set up and participate in joint actions, and to support other actors and organisations. This capacity had a relatively weak baseline score (3.1), but improved by 0.4 on average, with a slightly higher increase with NGOs (0.4), women-led (0.4) and women- and youth-led organisations (0.5).

Only a few organisations, the larger ones typically, report that they have capacity to lead the mobilisation of resources. Others only participate to this in programmes, and among other factors see compliance requirements as a limitation. More generally, all organisations seem to have relationships with other organisations and working in programmes is part of their daily business. One limitation described is that organisations part of different programmes sometimes encounter challenges to collaborate because their programmes have different cycles and requirements.

Providing support to other (mostly smaller) organisations is done mostly in-kind, for example by helping out with translation services or access to their networks. One also explains they sometimes cover (financial/security) risks for smaller organisations. Two organisations also give financial support to smaller initiatives.

## 7. Build rapport with power holders

To build rapport with power holders is the capacity to influence local governance processes. This can be demonstrated by participation in consultation by public (local) authorities or launching of /participation in policy, advocacy and participatory governance actions and civic initiations at local level. This capacity has improved on average from 2.9 to 3.4. The improvement was especially large with NGOs (0.6) and women-led organisations (0.9) and not with CBOs (0.1), women- and youth-led organisations (0.2) and even negative with other organisations (-0.3). Three organisations that were assessed explained that while they might know mechanisms to engage with power holders, they are hesitant to do so because they expect backlash. The topics they are advocating for have become more sensitive over time as civic space is narrowing. These organisations focus on activism and channel their communication to non-governmental or semi-governmental actors instead of building rapport with power holders. Other organisations do recollect having improved their capacities since the baseline and are now increasingly participating in consultations with authorities on different levels. Some are leading actions such as policy drafting, others are taking

first steps in building relations by for example organising round table meetings. Staff of one organisation explain they feel more confident to negotiate with power holders after capacity building on this theme.

#### 8. Adapt to ongoing changes

The capacity to adapt to ongoing changes in the operating environment is a skill that the involved organisations strongly need in the context of narrowing civic space and economic hardship in Lebanon (also see context in section 2.2). This score was on average relatively well developed at baseline (3.5) and improved to 3.8 during MTR. Between NGOs and CBOs, NGOs had higher scores (3.9 vs 3.4 at MTR), but both groups showed a similar increase in capacity. All organisations are used to a general need to adapt to the changing environment and thus plan their projects flexibly. Yet, the difference in scores stems mostly from whether or not risk mitigation, security measures and measures to ensure the continuity of the organisation are part of policies and proactively assessed. In organisations with less experience in this capacity, they are seen to be dealt with reactively and based on experience rather than with the guidance of mechanisms in place. The most named areas in which organisations improved on this capacity are security measures for data security and physical security. Access to (financial) resources is still a large concern for many organisations, particularly given the high inflation rates.

### 4.4 Contribution of SCS programmes to capacity strengthening

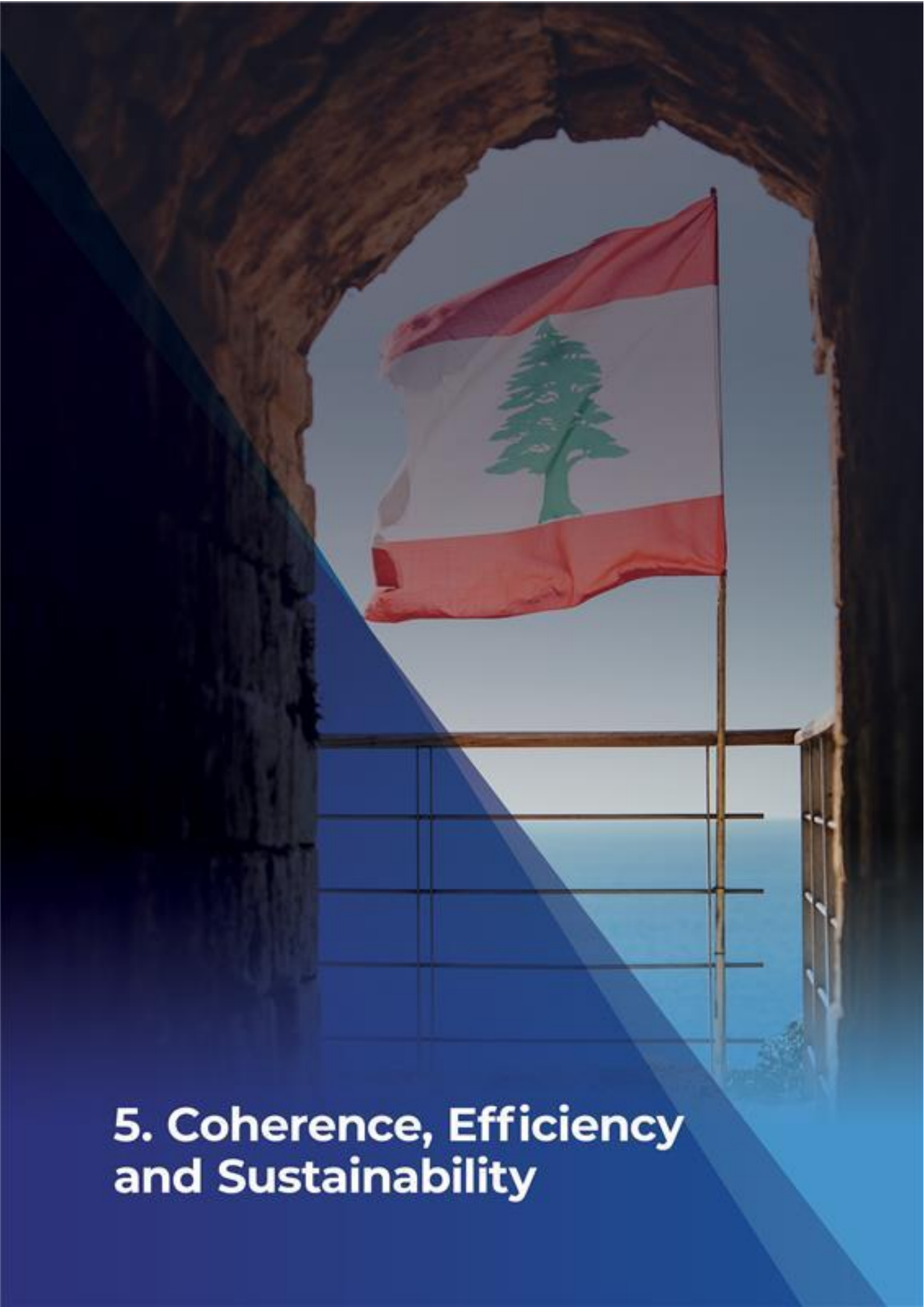
The OCA scores in all but two cases confirmed that on average capacity of the partners was strengthened. In some cases, negative scores were provided for specific capabilities, often related to staff turnover showing that capacities not always have been institutionalised, mostly in the case of smaller organisations.

Overall, SCS programmes have involved the partners over a longer period. They have provided grants and capacity strengthening support including trainings on a large variety of topics, mentoring and coaching, exchange and learning sessions, possibilities to travel abroad to participate in events, etc. The interviews showed that all sampled partners received support from other (one up to seven) projects/donors as well. With regard to SCS support the long-term perspective was often specifically valued. Key changes since the baseline to which SCS support has contributed are the adoption of a gender lens, strengthened programme design approaches, and MEAL. In addition, SCS support contributed specifically to expansion of networks (working with CSOs, communities, journalists, lawyers, religious leaders), improved/changed communication given sensitivities, expansion of advocacy activities to other thematic areas (LGBTIQ+) and a more strategic and structured approach for lobby and advocacy. Case studies using contribution analysis have been made for three of the partners involved in the OCA, to assess the specific contribution of the SCS programmes to capacity strengthening (see annex 5, case studies 6, 7 and 8). As mentioned in chapter 3, in all three cases the contribution analysis made for SCS 5 showed a (highly) plausible contribution to the identified outcomes in terms of capacity strengthening with one of the key contributing factors being the continuous support.

### **Reflection on effectiveness of capacity strengthening**

Overall, the OCA provides evidence of the progress made in capacity strengthening of CSOs of the programmes, showcasing increased lobby and advocacy capacity of the sampled partners. The OCA shows that the sampled partners have increased their capabilities to work collectively with more joined activities undertaken, represent their constituencies with increased involvement, are better able to influence target groups and CBOs/grassroot organisations, and inspire trust among power holders as compared to the baseline.

However, as mentioned above the assessment focuses on 'internal' capabilities only, without considering the interaction among actors and external context conditions. Yet, these external conditions influence the effectiveness of advocacy actions and the extent to which CSOs can engage in policy processes and governance with public authorities (duty bearers). Thus, despite the positive assessment of increased L&A capacity and effectiveness of capacity strengthening, only limited progress can be reported in terms of actual policy changes at this stage (which are difficult to achieve in the current context of Lebanon). Increased L&A capabilities may however support progress in the long run, as programmes and partners are continuing L&A activities at different levels. The progress made in terms of advocacy initiatives and creating space for demands can be linked to the increase of relevant L&A capabilities among partners supporting their collaborate efforts.



## **5. Coherence, Efficiency and Sustainability**



## 5 Coherence, Efficiency and Sustainability

### 5.1 Coherence of policy implementation

#### Summary answer on coherence of policy implementation (question 12, 13 and 14)

Quite some partners are involved in multiple programmes, raising the question whether the programmes have not overlooked other suitable (less obvious) civil society partners. Internal coherence differs between programmes. Coordination generally works better in the case of partnerships for which there is a clear (Tier 1) in-country lead partner. Coordination with other SCS partnership is low, and with other external stakeholders such as other local initiatives, donors, NGOs, and government agencies is improving but is still limited.

Overall, programmes expected a larger involvement of the RNE in supporting coordination and attending meetings or events. Yet similarly, also the programmes have not been active in this respect. The relationship between the programmes and the RNE in Lebanon differs per programme, with more regular interaction with some programmes, mostly the alliance with Dutch lead partners. Other programmes indicate they have a weak or no relationship with the RNE. Overall feedback is that the RNE/MFA to some extent contributes to the protection of civic space with its position on certain issues, including its support to freedom of expression, but that the RNE could play a more leading role.



*Question 12) How have partners coordinated the implementation of their programmes? What were the specific roles of the programmes and of the MFA in coordination and collaboration? Have shared ambitions between programmes been realised?*

Overall, the perception of external stakeholders is that programmes have included the 'right' partners, including niche partners to a large extent at all levels. As mentioned earlier there are however quite some (Tier 2) partners that are involved in multiple programmes, raising the question whether the programmes have not overlooked other suitable (less obvious) civil society partners.

Internal coordination differs between programmes. Overall, coordination of implementation seems to work better in the case of programmes for which there is a clear Tier 1 in-country lead partner. In the case of programmes where more than one (two to three) Tier 1 are active in Lebanon, internal coordination is weaker, with Tier 1 partners to some extent implementing own activities in silos. Partners in these cases indicated that there is a need to increase coordination within the consortium to avoid duplication of efforts. Programmes to some extent acknowledged this and have been working on improving the situation and to also increase coherence and synergy, by having more regular coordination meetings and exchanges. The grant-based programmes have made only limited or no efforts to coordinate between their grantees, even if some are active in the same fields or are working with the same target groups.

Within programmes internal coherence is also mixed. On the one hand, some show clear internal coherence where partners have been aligned and have contributed to different elements of the same implementation plan. In other cases, however, Tier 2 partners only implement their own activities, also due to the broad set up of the programme, and feel that collaboration with other partners has not provided much added value yet. As one partner mentioned: *"Up until now, we have been working very much in isolation. We are trying to support each other, but we are already overwhelmed, and the inter-collaboration gets delayed whilst we also need to find ways in which we can work together"*. Similar some programmes highlighted the lack of a unified/harmonised

approach by partners in the same programme towards SRHR, especially in terms of pursuing entry points on lobbying and advocacy.

In terms of external coherence, overall coordination with other SCS programmes is low. None of the programmes coordinates ambitions and activities with other programmes, not even when partners are involved in other programmes as well. On multiple occasions programmes have been in contact (including during the workshops as part of this assignment) but overall programmes seem not interested in collaboration. In three cases, it was indicated that in-country leads based outside of Lebanon are not really aware of the other programmes. Only in one case it was mentioned that there is some level of coordination on advocacy activities through an existing platform. It is also felt that coordination is more difficult due to the sensitive nature programmes, or in one case the unique focus of the programme interventions.

Programmes indicated that they had expected a larger involvement of the RNE and feel that the approach in Lebanon differs from other countries, particularly those with whom the Netherlands has a development cooperation relationship. Also based on the partnership agreement it was expected that there would be regular communication with the embassy, and that the policy officer would have attended essential meetings and events and would have supported linkages and synergies among the programmes. However, since the start of the programme only bilateral meetings between programmes and the embassy have taken place with limited possibilities for networking. Recently, in view of future policy making, a first partner day was organised by the embassy involving most of the programmes and partners from different Tiers which according to partner feedback highlighted shared values and objectives, leading to several bilateral meetings. Nevertheless, partners as well as the RNE feel that more coordination would be needed to get to know the different programmes and find synergies. Nevertheless, the programmes are also not active in this respect, The Power of Learning programme funded on the SCS policy framework which includes Lebanon as one of the priority countries, sees only limited participation for their learning sessions, mainly from three programmes, with one programme indicating they were not aware of this initiative. The limited coordination is a missed opportunity considering the shared ambitions on WRGE themes, SRHR and LGBTIQ+.



*Question 13: To what extent were activities coordinated with other actors (e.g. (sub-)national government, local initiatives, other donors, (I)NGOs, other programmes funded through embassies, other programmes of other donors, private sector) and what was the role of the partners and of the MFA in this process? Which innovative interfaces and collaborations have been developed/established?*

Coordination with other actors seems to be improving but is still limited. Partners collaborate with government agencies, sub-national government bodies, local initiatives, other donors, and CSOs. Nonetheless, it is felt the coordination with the latter is not always easy as there is a general sense of competition among CSOs for funding. Furthermore, coordination takes to some extent place through the networks that partners are part of.

One programme mentioned that one aspect to increase collaboration includes SCS basket indicator 7, which involves increasing constituencies, requiring WROs to map out CSOs they would like to connect with for their initiatives, to enhance the integration and impact of the programme. In general programmes do not report on other efforts in the country and how these relate to their interventions (also not in their ToC reviews and in their proposals/baseline studies).

As mentioned above the RNE did not play a significant role in linking programmes to other ongoing initiatives. Stakeholders interviewed mention that donor coordination in Lebanon is limited, with limited exchanges at programme level, although it has improved over the last period. Other

stakeholders, including bilateral donors and multilaterals, active in the field of WRGE and human rights were not aware of RNE's activities, including the SCS programme.

The role of the MFA with regards to coordination was mostly limited to coordination at lead partners/global level as in-country coordination is seen as a responsibility of the embassy. Specific for SRHR the ShareNet platform is available for partners to exchange information, results, strategies, however this does not include Lebanon as focus country.

No innovative interfaces and collaborations to foster cooperation could be identified.

*Questions 14) To what extent has the MFA fulfilled its role as described in the programme agreements? Has MFA, incl. embassy level succeeded in contributing diplomatically to the objectives of the programmes i.e. through enhancing/protecting democracy and civic space (including digital space), and thereby contribute to achieving the objectives of the implementation of the policy framework?*

The programme agreement refers to the alliance between the MFA and the programmes. It is further detailed in the policy documents for the different grant instruments, referring to diplomatic support through its missions, providing access to (inter-)national networks, access to knowledge, expertise, and (governmental) information (including Multi-Annual Country Strategies), facilitating of MEL and facilitating annual strategic policy dialogues.

The relationship between the programmes and the RNE in Lebanon differs per programme. Some programmes (four) have more regular interaction to discuss progress and contextual challenges, including support at diplomacy level. These are mostly the alliances where the lead partners are Dutch, with which the RNE already had ongoing contacts. As one of the programmes states: *RNE is very keen on sharing with the MFA the challenges and it's bridging between CSOs and the MFA. A lot of significant change happened thanks to RNE support.*

Other programmes indicate they have a weak or no relationship with the RNE. It was mentioned that initially they had expected more active involvement from the embassy since they are part of the programmes. However, this expectation was tempered after clear communication about the resource limitations at the embassy. This was acknowledged by the RNE, who at the start of implementation indicated that it would only have the lowest level of capacity available to support the programme in Lebanon, with no additional capacity/support provided by the MFA to increase capacity.

Overall feedback from the programmes as well as external stakeholders is that they believe that the RNE/MFA to some extent contributes to the protection of civic space with its position on certain issues, including its support to freedom of expression. It is mentioned the RNE is audacious to work on human rights issues, but that the embassy lacks influence on the governmental practices in the country. It is felt that the RNE should increase their diplomatic efforts with the government. Programmes indicated that they would like to be more aware of the efforts of the RNE. Their perception is that the exchanges to some extent have been a bit extractive as they had expected to receive more insights from the side of the RNE/MFA as well.

## 5.2 Efficiency of policy implementation

### **Summary answer on efficiency of policy implementation (questions 15, 16 and 17):**

Considering the combined focus of the partnerships on WRGE (and sub-themes), SRHR, but also on certain targets groups such as LGBTIQ+ community and Migrant Women Domestic Workers it can be expected that there will be a certain duplication of efforts. Key factors limiting efficiency are in cases the limited resources per partner constraining the scope and scale of initiatives and challenges of collaboration, including need to coordinate between partners, logistical constraints and potential backlash. There is limited flexibility with regard to the financial allocation at country level. Budgetary decisions are often made at the level of Tier 1 partners without much consultation with other partners. High turnover of staff and also weaker internal systems has affected efficiency, including support provided to the partners. Programmes in general are positive about the flexibility provided by the MFA, which allowed implementing partners adaptability in responding to changing contexts, although it is felt that considering the current fragility there is a need for allowing additional budget lines such as service delivery and institutional costs in some instances. Specifically MEL requirements are considered strict.



*Question 15) To what extent does synergy exist between the different initiatives or did the different programme programmes and funds lead to fragmentation and duplication of efforts at country level? What were the effects of the collaboration and/or fragmentation between programmes and with other actors on achieving results?*

As indicated in the above section, limited to no coordination and/or cooperation exists between the different programmes, whilst also collaboration with other actors is limited. It can be expected that there will be a certain duplication of efforts considering the combined focus of the programmes on WRGE (and sub-themes), SRHR, and on certain targets groups such as LGBTIQ+ community and Migrant Women Domestic Workers. This also would include work done to deal with backlashes.

However, thematic coordination seems to increase exemplified by the increased engagement in networks and with other actors, leveraging expertise and resources. For instance, one of the partners collaborates with the Bar association whilst another partner conducts network-building efforts among political activists. Nevertheless, concerns about confidentiality (and security) and values, to some extent also hamper collaboration. For instance, an organisation working on SRHR reported participating in a regional event organised under the programme to which an organisation perceived as homophobic was invited. Transparency and alignment of values emerge as crucial factors for fostering collaboration and avoiding fragmentation.

In addition to the above dynamics observed within and across programmes, several other factors affected efficiency in this respect, including limited resources (per partner) constraining the scope and scale of initiatives. The complex and uncertain socio-political situation in Lebanon further compounds these challenges. Collaboration among partners is crucial, yet it is often hindered by logistical constraints, such as coordinating regular meetings and activities, exacerbated by the need to navigate diverse stakeholder interests and potential backlash. The role of donors and international actors adds another layer of complexity, shaping the priorities and timelines of initiatives.



*Question 16) How are the expense flows and financial decision making organised between organisations and how does this effect efficiency? To what extent is there a difference between 'Southern' led and 'Northern' Led programme in efficiency?*

Based on the desk review and interviews, several key themes emerge regarding the organisation and flow of expenses in programmes. Firstly, budgetary decisions are often made at the level of Tier 1 partners without much consultation with implementing partners. The overall financial

frameworks are developed and while there is transparency regarding budgets, partners typically have limited space for input. In some cases only one-year contracts were offered to partners, to be renewed annually, affecting efficiency in planning of resources and activities by the specific partners.

Secondly, the efficiency of financial decision making and expense flows varies depending on the size and capacity of the Tier 2 and Tier 3 partners. Smaller organisations often face challenges in dealing with financial procedures and have less influence on decision making compared to larger counterparts. However, efforts to build capacity, such as providing support when needed and flexible budgeting, have improved efficiency and reinforce ownership among partners, as exemplified by one of the programmes, contributing to more efficient project management for in-country organisations. A voiced criticism often by Tier 2 and Tier 3 organisations is that the large set up of the programme in terms of (consortium) partners involved is affecting efficiency overall. This is because quite some resources are spent on coordination and management, particularly for programmes that have multiple Tier 1 partners in-country (see section above). This was also related to the limited resources available for Tier 3 partners. In the case of one of the programmes it can be questioned whether the small country budget as compared to the overall budget is an efficient use of resources in terms of results and sustainability, although implementation seems to be successful.

Furthermore, financial efficiency was affected by delayed fund disbursement by the MFA and by consortium partners. Late disbursements disrupted project activities (in cases over a longer period), especially for grassroots organisations as they are heavily reliant on timely funding. However, some programmes stated that adopting adaptive programming strategies, including combining activities and shifting operations online, have mitigated the challenges to some extent, albeit with additional complexities in conflict areas and amid economic uncertainties such as inflation.

It is difficult to generalise findings on efficiency of 'Southern' led and 'Northern' Led programmes. Of course, Northern (mostly Dutch-led) Led programmes have generally long-term experience in managing MFA grants and have in-house capacity. The ambitions for increasing southern leadership are still a learning experience for the programmes and have at times affected efficiency in terms of resources and time. It is generally felt that Tier 1 partners from the South have been flexible about change, understanding the issues at stake such as hyper-inflation, although specific contexts still needs to be explained as there is no uniform Southern context. Specifically in the case of one programme it was mentioned that high staff turnover and weaker internal systems have affected efficiency, together with limited quality of support provided to the partners.



*Question 17) To what extent did the MFA allow flexibility to the partners to adjust their programmes (to changing contexts)? Were there differences in flexibility between the different policy instruments? And to what extent were the programmes able to use this flexibility to adapt their programmes to changing circumstances (e.g. changing national or international policies or the covid-19 pandemic)?*

The MFA has harmonised budget models and guidance across the different SCS instruments. The partnerships are flexible to adjust their programmes between and within countries but need to provide an explanation when changes are above 10-15%. Strict limitations are linked to overhead costs. Budget for service delivery is available for the programmes funded by the POW and SRHR instruments. Under the other instruments such costs are not allowed, also not in a humanitarian crises as this would need to be part of humanitarian assistance. In addition, a contingency budget can be included, however only a limited number of partnerships make use of this option.

Programmes in general indicate that the MFA is very much aware and sensitive to the situation in Lebanon and willing to support. Programmes noted instances of flexibility but also highlighted challenges in accessing this flexibility due to strict interpretations of guidelines by the financial department, but no specification related to Lebanon was provided. In addition, it is felt that flexibility does not apply to framework requirements, particularly for MEL, which were adapted during the implementation of the programmes and are considered strict and not always in line with the ambition for southern leadership. In general, feedback is that southern partners including regional consultancies hired by partners have difficulty applying the MEL requirements, which is to an extent also linked to cultural differences.

The partners appreciate MFA's flexibility as it allows room for change of focus in terms of objectives (while not changing the overall design of the programme) and willingness to accommodate changes to programme budgets and activities within the budget lines. Overall, it is felt that the flexible budget allows for experimentation and piloting and changing priorities if required. The flexibility to provide capacity building support, fund staff costs and infrastructure (within limits) is also seen as important in the volatile Lebanese context. Nevertheless, considering the fragile status of Lebanon, programmes indicate that more flexibility in allowing service delivery (PoV, LFS) and funding of institutional costs would be needed (see also chapter 2).

The responsive approach, coupled with occasional relaxation of budget lines restrictions has allowed implementing partners adaptability in responding to changing contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial sector collapse. This flexibility was also appreciated in the framework of the security measures that some programmes had to take to assure the safety of rightsholders and personnel during gender backlashes. This involved some programmes changing, postponing or cancelling some activities, and the temporary closure of a partner's centre.

However, there are also challenges highlighted regarding the clarity and consistency of guidelines provided by MFA. Some partners expressed ambiguity in understanding when and how to communicate changes to their programmes, leading to uncertainty about the extent of permissible flexibility. These challenges were to some extent also linked to the seniority of the MFA staff involved, with a few programmes indicating that in cases their counterpart at the Ministry was junior staff which they felt complicated the discussion due to limited experience with MFA regulations and project coordination.

### 5.3 Sustainability



*Question 18) Which measures (e.g. exit-strategies, risk mitigation strategies) have been taken and put in place to ensure the sustainability of the programme programmes' effects after they will end? Question 19) Which factors may contribute to sustainability of the effects and which factors present the greatest risk?*

**Summary answer on sustainability (research questions 18 and 19):**

None of the programmes have yet developed an explicit exit strategy. In line with this there are partners that are critical about the limited attention for sustainability or lack of communication on possible continuation of support, including support in identifying new funding sources. The design of the programmes in terms of provided capacity strengthening support, and focus on movement building and networking, southern leadership and legitimacy are conducive to support continuation of activities. The work with grassroots/CBOs or target groups in that sense is capacitating a 'next' generation which is considered so they can sustain and continue the work. Similar risk mitigation strategies, including developing safe spaces, developing and adopting inclusive language and effective strategies for community acceptance are implemented and expected to support continuation of effects. The security and political situation is a key factor obstructing sustainability expectations.

In general, programmes have not developed a written exit strategy for their in-country programmes. One programme indicated that they are in the process of bringing in a consultant to develop an exit strategy to ensure a transition out without any harm. Others mentioned that an exit strategy will only be discussed at a later stage as they plan to have an ongoing relationship with the Lebanese partners. Some of the programmes (INGOs) are trying to integrate the programme in their own programme and to fund activities with other resources to enable continuation. A number of the lead partners (in-country INGO offices) also plan to remain supporting their partners or at least stay in contact. In the case of one programme partners will receive core support for about 10 years, depending on organisation and context, with an additional budget as preparation for the exit. SCS funding is used to support these partners for a number of years. In other another case only short-term grants are provided as one-off transactions.

A number of partners are critical about the limited attention for sustainability or lack of communication on possible continuation of support by the programme lead, including support in identifying new funding sources. Particularly considering the fragile situation in Lebanon which makes it more difficult for them to access donor funding, but also the possible changes in Dutch develop cooperation are mentioned in this respect. Similarly, in cases it is felt that a central place to share information, tools and exchange would have supported continuation in the long run.

By providing capacity strengthening support, and focusing on movement building, networking, southern leadership, legitimacy and enhancing civic space, programme programmes are designed in a way to support sustainability. Nine of the programmes have been working over a longer period with grassroots/community-based organisations and/or target groups (youth, women LGBTIQ+ community, refugees, etc.) directly capacitating a 'next' generation so they can sustain and continue the work. This is also important in light of the many civil society actors that have left Lebanon in recent times. The work includes supporting the legitimacy of the Tier 3 partners (for example support CBOs to formalise or at least sustain themselves and building their capacity on different levels including advocacy), which will help them also to apply for funds and implement their own activities. Activities planned for the last two years of the programme are often targeted at sustainability for instance by building platforms and producing material that can go beyond the programme timeframe.

Risk mitigation strategies are implemented and expected to support continuation of effects. This includes developing safe spaces, inclusive language and effective strategies (community acceptance), for instance by involving women and young girls from the communities or midwives in SRHR activities, as well as attention for safeguarding, mental health and how to adapt in difficult circumstances.

*Key factors that may hinder or contribute to sustainability*

In general, the political and security situation are seen as a key limiting factor next to the decrease in donor funding, including specific political conditionalities. If the situation gets worse for the LGBTIQ+ community, , important members of the community might leave Lebanon. Similarly, the backlash on gender might provide a threat, but the past years showed that partners can still work in difficult circumstances.



## 6. Conclusions and recommendations



## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

**The Theories of Change of the SCS policy framework are flexible and sufficiently broad for programming, but underlying assumptions can only be partially validated in the fragile context of Lebanon. At country level a clear link between learning and the ToCs is missing.**

The broad and general set up of the Ministry's Theory of Change for the SCS framework and thematic ToCs allow for programming of the diverse partnerships. However, in the present fragile and volatile context of Lebanon the ToCs are only relevant to some extent, as the selected key underlying assumptions can only be partially validated. The assumption that capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy is mostly validated. Particularly the assumption that CSO pressure can lead to policy change is difficult to achieve, considering the 'paralyzed' government and non-transparent decision-making processes. Also, the position of international donors including the Netherlands with regard to the Gaza conflict made it challenging for programmes/partners to still convey their messages. Translated from the SCS ToC, the programme ToCs are similarly broad and allow for contextualisation, although this is not always done. Most partnerships do not use ToCs effectively to articulate their in-country programme, analysis and reflection. The partnerships learn and adapt but an opportunity is missed if they do not always link this process to their theories of change and reflection on assumptions.

**At mid-term stage, good progress is made in terms of capacity strengthening and space creation at different levels. In terms of policy work, progress has been problematic, particularly at the national level.**

Progress has been made in terms of strengthening the capacities of partners and rightsholders, including the establishment of networks/movements, but given the current Lebanese context, these achievements have not yet scaled up in communities. To date, progress has been limited in terms of policy and legislative outcomes, which to some extent can be expected given that advocacy processes are a long-term investment and given the difficult Lebanese context including the backlash on WRGE and SRHR. Considering that influencing may need more time, lack of outcomes at this stage do not automatically need to be seen as ineffectiveness. In the current context, simply keeping an issue on the radar and a network functioning and/or expanding can be a significant achievement. Overall, partnerships/partners have needed time to rethink where the strengths and opportunities for their programmes lie and to decide on strategies to deal with the situation. This is also because programmes are very much focused on reporting, which limits the flexibility that is now needed in a context like Lebanon. Although reviews are used for reflection, the tone and design are often meant to discuss reporting, to compare with previously defined targets, to see what needs to be changed in reporting, and rarely to actually re-design and revisit the design and share experiences that can help in responding to the current context. It is important to note that the pace of change in Lebanon has been rapid, requiring almost constant adaptation.

**Southern leadership is apparent for most programmes but less so in the design phase, for budgetary decisions and involvement of tiers 3.**

Programmes show successful models of local leadership, with Lebanese partners actively involved in decision-making processes, empowered to shape activities and, to some extent, budgets. In other cases, often more grant-based relationships, southern leadership relates only to the implementation of specific projects. Lebanese partners have often not been involved in the design phase, because of the set-up of the SCS framework by which organisations/programmes define the countries to work in as before they can contract partners. Partnerships are in most cases still in the

process of increasing the involvement and ownership by Tier 3 organisations and WROs and other groups they work with, but limited efforts are 'underway' to do something about the power of partners in terms of budgetary decisions.

**Coordination and coherence within and between programmes (and within the sector) are limited; this affects efficiency (and influence on policy).**

The need for a donor-based country approach is a recurrent issue; In principle, CSOs should work together on specific themes, not based on donor relationships. Coordination and coherence between the different SCS programmes are low, with limited availability of the RNE to support, while coordination within the wider civil society is also low but improving. This is a missed opportunity, and certainly the backlash in relation to SRHR, WRGE and the LGBTIQ+ community requires for coordination as these cannot be the efforts of a single organisation or programme. Diversity within and between programmes has in some cases been fruitful, with different actors bringing different strengths and voices, leading to synergies and complementarities. However, a number of programmes have quite a large set-up in terms of (consortium) partners involved at different levels in Lebanon, bringing different expertise and experiences, but also affecting internal coherence and efficiency. This has an impact on the actual amounts left for in-country (Tier 3) partners, who are in some cases constrained by conditionalities (e.g. only yearly contracts, limited amounts for Tier 3 partners).

**Innovation and flexibility as a need in a more fragile context (including new tools and approaches).**

The challenging (political) context requires the adoption of new tools and approaches to influence policy makers despite the overwhelming political and social priorities. Similarly, the backlash on key SCS themes (SRHR, WRGE, LGBTIQ+) requires continued innovation (and collaboration). Implementation shows that effective adaptations in the face of backlash include changing the wording and the way concepts are communicated and paying attention to digital security. Successful advocacy in this regard also depends on partners' ability to engage religious leaders as most resistance comes from this part of society. Programmes are generally positive about the flexibility as provided by MFA to make the necessary adjustments in terms of focus and activities, although it is felt that more flexibility would be needed in the fragile context of Lebanon. In this respect, only a limited number of programmes have made use of the possibility to include a contingency budget.

**Sustainability mostly implicit in design of the partnerships (and indirect)**

None of the programmes included an explicit exit-strategy at design phase and also at this MTR stage no explicit strategies have been developed. Certainly, many of the programme components such as capacity strengthening and network building contribute to continuation of activities and results. Yet, given the fragile situation in Lebanon that makes it more difficult to access donor funding (and expected changes in the donor landscape) there is a need for more attention for sustainability.

## 6.2 Recommendations

In the following section, based on our findings and conclusions, we provide recommendations for the MFA and programmes, as well as a number of recommendations for specific themes.

*Recommendations for both the MFA and Programmes*

- It is recommended to recognise and value any intermediate steps towards policy or legislative change (also in terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning) if the latter cannot be achieved within the programme timeframe.

- In the more fragile context of Lebanon, where crisis, emergencies and backlash can occur suddenly, it may be necessary to include a contingency budget line for emergency interventions to allow for greater flexibility and agility in response, depending on the focus of activities. It is important for MFA to discuss this option with the partnerships (also at a later stage) and for the partnership to consider a contingency budget in general and specifically for countries with a more fragile context.

#### *Recommendations for the MFA*

- The current design of the tendering process does not allow for programme appraisal at country/regional level which works against coherence between programmes and with other programmes. It is recommended to ensure that an appraisal at this level is part of the tender process for better coherence.
- In addition, in the current design of the tender process, lead organisations/programmes apply for the grant indicating which countries they wish to work in, only after which the partners can be contracted. This is not conducive for southern or in-country leadership. The Ministry should encourage in-country partners to be involved from the outset to support coherence and southern leadership.
- A significant number of the programmes, particularly those new established or new to the country, took a long time to set up and develop their internal coordination and management structures, partly because the programmes had to be set up in several (in some cases more than 10) countries at the same time. It is recommended to limit the number of (new) countries per programme in order to increase focus and effectiveness.
- Some of the programmes are active in a large number of countries and/or have limited country budgets. It is recommended to include efficiency considerations in the appraisal, taking into account the actual expected impact and sustainability at country level.
- It should be taken into account that the Dutch position on human rights (such as in the case of the Gaza conflict) can provoke a pushback against programme activities and can make it difficult for programmes/partners to still convey their messages.
- During the present evaluation assignment, we observed considerable evaluation fatigue among the programmes. The MFA should consider the complementarity between policy/country level evaluation studies and the specific MEL requirements for the partners, taking into account wide variation in the quality of MTRs across programmes.
- MFA could consider providing additional support for opportunities to meet and network, promote synergy and avoid duplication of effort. These actions could focus on:
  - *Bringing together programmes for strategic exchange*: Programmes have much in common, particularly in terms of approaches, the stakeholders and even the policies. It is recommended to document and disseminate successful approaches used across them. Examples include capacity building between local and international partners, and the division of labour within programmes.
  - *Organise thematic meetings for programmes*: Thematic meetings can be the best platform for networking and sharing experiences. Create moments of exchange between programmes and, in particular, of technical exchange for those working, for example, on the same themes and indicators, be it WRGE or SRHR.
  - *Create a platform for exchange* between partnerships working on similar scope/themes, similar to the platform created for SRHR.

#### *Recommendations for the programmes and improved programme design:*

- Ensure that southern partners are involved from the design stage to promote contextualisation and leadership.
- Programmes are encouraged to diversify their selection of Tier 2 organisations in particular, to avoid contracting the 'usual suspects' and continue to support emerging or otherwise different partners, including through the use of existing structures such as networks.

- Establish a shared understanding of the programme and specific partner contributions at the design stage. Partners' involvement/contributions need to be defined based on their expertise, experience, and networks to identify their strengths, complementarities and opportunities for synergies. It is important to allow for sufficient time for a solid start to include different voices.
- Include a review of other initiatives as part of their in-country programme design (contextualisation ToC), to be monitored in annual reports and MTR to support coherence and synergies.

#### *Recommendations for improved programme implementation:*

- Design effective management structures that support coherence, complementarity, and synergy between partners. Programmes that take a more grant-based approach, or have not developed a full country programme, should at least encourage some synergy/coordination between their grantees/partners in the country, in order to strengthen the impact of the activities of each funded organisation/project as well as southern leadership.
- With regard to southern leadership, it is important to continue to reflect on the programme dynamics, also in-country between different Tiers, by involving tier 2 and 3 organisations in decision-making processes. Ensure that capacity strengthening support is demand-driven (and that grassroots organisations do not feel pressured to become NGOs).
- Innovative approaches: Use innovative tools and approaches to influence policy makers and increase visibility. It is important to increase the visibility of what is being done to the extent possible considering the backlash and need to protect staff and target groups (), including effective use of social media, to showcase what is happening to different people including policymakers.
- Knowledge management: Establish mechanisms for effective knowledge management and information sharing. By establishing of mechanisms such as working groups and thematic exchanges, partners can create an environment that is more inclusive and participatory. The use of an online information exchange platform would allow partners to easily share documents and resources.

#### *Recommendations for coordination and synergy:*

- Programmes are recommended to promote strategic exchanges and thematic meetings to improve coordination and avoid duplication. This could include capitalising on successful coordination structures: for example, UNWOMEN facilitates a coordination platform that has been praised by many stakeholders in the sector as efficient and successful. It may be useful to link programmes to the platform and use it as a space to share sector-specific programme campaigns and activities and learn from the model.
- To improve networking and synergies with other stakeholders can be improved, for example between LGBTIQ+ organisations with feminist and or domestic workers organisations. Strengthening networks and forging new alliances would also allow LGBTIQ+ advocates to reach out more to the rural areas of Lebanon, which are currently very poorly covered.
- *Sustainability*: Develop explicit sustainability strategies within partnership designs.

#### *Recommendations for improved MEL*

- The partnership should ensure that MEL is directly linked to the ToC, and used to reflect on the ToC, review its design and share experiences that can help to respond to the current context.
- Although feminist MEL is aimed at easing monitoring and reporting requirements as much as possible, accountability and transparency remain central to the feminist MEL. It is therefore recommended to ensure that the principles and tools of feminist MEL are owned by all partners in order to avoid that these principles are used to avoid responsibility for implementing MEL.

### *Thematic recommendations*

- There is a need to work more systematically and strategically with the opponents of inclusive and universally accessible SRHR to stimulate social change and hold the government to account. Changing the attitudes of the government and that of conservative forces in society who see SRHR only as maternal and child health and partly as family planning requires long-term perspective. This cannot be done by a single organisation or programme. Planned and coordinated action is needed to stimulate social change. This is necessary in terms of accepting free choice and bodily autonomy. This includes the existence of non-heteronormative gendered people who have the right to make decisions about their own bodies, receive sexual and reproductive care, and live their sexuality freely. It also applies in terms of holding government accountable for ensuring the availability of inclusive and safe SRHR services for all as a matter of human rights.
- Resource Allocation: Allocate sufficient time and resources to enable partners to play their role effectively in capacitating medical professionals and raising community awareness.
- Enhance coordination among stakeholders to address backlash on key themes (SRHR, WRGE) and promote sustained advocacy efforts.



# Annex

See separate document.

# About Ecorys

Ecorys is a leading international research and consultancy company, addressing society's key challenges. With world-class research-based consultancy, we help public and private clients make and implement informed decisions leading to positive impact on society. We support our clients with sound analysis and inspiring ideas, practical solutions and delivery of projects for complex market, policy and management issues.

In 1929, businessmen from what is now Erasmus University Rotterdam founded the Netherlands Economic Institute (NEI). Its goal was to bridge the opposing worlds of economic research and business – in 2000, this much respected Institute became Ecorys.

Throughout the years, Ecorys expanded across the globe, with offices in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Our staff originates from many different cultural backgrounds and areas of expertise because we believe in the power that different perspectives bring to our organisation and our clients.

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