

Evaluation Summary

Appel à projets crise et sortie de crise « Réfugiés syriens et communautés hôtes »

ACTED'S Project: Improving Access to Basic Social Services Through Local Capacity Building in Lebanon and Iraq (Kurdistan)

Country: **Lebanon and Irak (Kurdistan)**

Sector: **Health – Social Security System**

Evaluator: **Optimum Analysis**
Date of the evaluation: **April 2021**

Key data on AFD's support

Projet numbers: CZZ2144

Amount: 2 000 000 € (Liban and Irak)

Disbursement rate: 94,1%

Signature of financing agreement: 11/12/2017

Completion date: 31/12/2020

Total duration: 36,5 months

Context

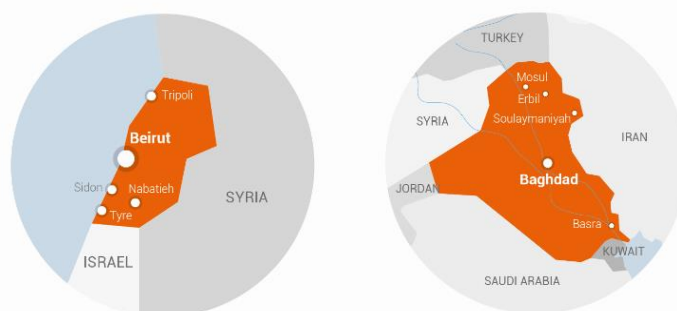
The war in Syria has caused a mass displacement of people across the Middle East: "the worst refugee crisis since World War II" according to the European Union. The number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries has reached 4.7 million, with the UNHCR calling its assistance operation "the largest in its history". A generation of children and their families have been forced into exile, without access to the basic services they need (health, education, psycho-social care, access to the labour market, decent accommodation, etc.).

A delegation of European Union funds amounting to €22.2M was granted on 22 March 2016 by the MADAD Fund's Executive Board in order to support a joint programme presented by AFD (€10.5M) and the Italian Cooperation (€11.7M). AFD was to finance the regional projects of four international NGOs. By responding to immediate social needs and building the resilience and capacities of local actors, AFD is seeking to address the strangulation of public services caused by the crisis and to prevent tensions between refugees and host communities that threaten social cohesion. It also aims to improve the coordination of humanitarian and development operations.

Actors and operating method

Four projects were pre-selected to benefit from funds mobilized via a delegation of complementary funds from the European Union to AFD for an amount of €10.5M. The beneficiaries are (i) the French NGO ACTED, (ii) the French NGO ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM, (iii) the FRENCH RED CROSS and (iv) the Swiss NGO TERRE DES HOMMES LAUSANNE.

In Lebanon, ACTED established a strategic partnership through which NMHP was able to train the beneficiaries. In Iraq, DOLSA was a beneficiary of the project, as was the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon.



Objectives

ACTED's project - Supporting the improvement of basic health and social service delivery through local capacity building in Lebanon and Iraqi Kurdistan - was evaluated ex-post.

The main objective of the project is to reduce the impact of the Syrian crisis by improving access to quality basic services for vulnerable and marginalised populations and promoting social cohesion in the most affected communities (community-based initiatives, capacity building of local institutions and civil society organisations to provide efficient services, and development of networks and advocacy campaigns).

Expected outputs

The project proposed by ACTED includes 3 components

- Capacity building of local institutions and civil society organizations providing services in the fields of health, protection and psychosocial assistance.
- Supporting trained organisations to implement local initiatives to improve the delivery of and access to basic health, protection and psychosocial services in their communities.
- Increasing dialogue and exchange between actors within the sectors (health, protection and psychosocial support), and between target communities, service providers and local and national authorities in the target areas.

Performance assessment

Relevance

To ensure the project activities aligned with the needs of the direct beneficiaries, ACTED made use of data obtained through the Grassroots Organization Capacity Assessment (GOCA) tool to tailor training and mentoring activities for direct beneficiaries (Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Social Development Centres (SDCs), and the Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs (DoLSA)). Indeed, information obtained from CSOs (and SDCs in Lebanon and DoLSA in Iraq) suggests that the project was successful at addressing their most pressing needs with regards to capacity building, whether technical or organizational. Lastly, the direct beneficiaries agreed that the activities they implemented through the project addressed some of the most pressing needs among the indirect beneficiaries.

Effectiveness

Under work package 1, ACTED supported organizations (DoLSA and two CSOs in Iraq and seven CSOs and three SDCs in Lebanon) through training and mentoring. All beneficiaries received technical training. Generally, they were highly satisfied with the training received but mentoring was considered even more important as it gave participants a chance to use their knowledge. The impact of the training appears to have mostly taken place at an individual level, with different respondents reporting remarkable data showed that the training and mentoring activities improved the organizational capabilities of the direct beneficiaries.

Under work package 2, in Iraq, ACTED only worked with one of the two CSOs supported during work package 1. ACTED had to provide a lot of training and supervision to ensure that the CSOs were able to complete the needed financial and administrative tasks. In Lebanon, all CSOs and SDCs who received support under work package 1 were invited to implement their initiative. Almost all indirect beneficiaries were satisfied with the services they received from the direct beneficiaries. Moreover, those who participated in awareness-raising, training or mental health or psychosocial support activities reported that they had improved their knowledge and skills. They highlighted that they had improved their ability to express themselves and deal with stressful situations, increased their self-confidence, became better able to build relationships with others, and improved the communication with their children.

Under work package 3, different networking, awareness and advocacy activities were implemented. ACTED Iraq, amongst others, implemented a door-to-door awareness campaign focused on breast cancer self-examination, family planning, and the risks of caesarean section deliveries. A comparison of baseline and endline data suggests that the campaign resulted in improved knowledge on breast cancer prevention as well as awareness of the availability and accessibility of reproductive health services.

In Lebanon, the supported CSOs and SDCs were invited to attend different Communities of Practices (CoPs). Aside from encouraging dialogue, the CoPs encouraged interaction between CSOs and SDCs, many of which thereby created opportunities for future collaboration.

Efficiency

During project implementation, ACTED was faced with different delays which caused ACTED to request a one-month no-cost extension for both countries. In Lebanon, causes for delays included, amongst others, the 2019-2021 uprising, the Beirut explosion, the financial crisis, and the lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, only needing a one-month no-cost extension to complete the project is relatively remarkable and this can, in part, be attributed to the CSOs which were able to quickly adjust their activities when changes in the context took place.

Overall, ACTED was able to use the available budget efficiently. In particular, working through CSOs allows for the implementation of more activities with fewer resources. Moreover, since CSOs usually know much more about the local context and are closer to communities, CSOs may be able to deliver higher quality services against lower cost. The mentoring approach was also assessed to have resulted in good value for money with remarkable results being reported among the receivers of such services.

Sustainability

In Iraq, almost no organizational change appears to have taken place during project implementation and most of the positive impact of the training and mentoring is visible only at the individual level. As such, turnover has major implications for the sustainability of the activities. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the sought after organisational change did take place on top of individual change.

Even if organizations have improved their organizational capabilities, their ability to secure funding is critical to their sustainability. In both Lebanon and Iraq, some of the direct beneficiaries reported having secured additional funding for initiatives. In this regard, it should be noted that one CSO in Lebanon is currently implementing a project in collaboration with ACTED. In this consortium project, the CSO is the lead agency and ACTED is a member of the consortium. Other CSOs reported that they improved their ability to secure funding through the training on proposal writing and support given to improve their procedures related to transparency.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

ACTED's intervention in Iraq addressed some of the most pressing needs among relevant government entities, CSOs and, indirectly, the general population in targeted communities. The project is, furthermore, in line with the priorities of both Lebanon's and Iraq's government, as well as with AFD's general and region-specific strategies.

Considering the available timeframe for project implementation (two years in Iraq and three years in Lebanon), the objectives of the project were found to be ambitious. However, ACTED managed to deliver most activities on time in both locations. This is impressive in Iraq due to the short timeframe but might be even more impressive in Lebanon where significant changes in the local context posed serious obstacles for implementation.

Training and, even more so, mentoring activities were found effective at increasing skills and knowledge at the individual level. In Lebanon, moreover, these activities appear to have been effective at increasing the organizational capacities of the direct beneficiaries. This might be because there was a clear connection in Lebanon between the capacity building under work package 1 and the implementation of initiatives under work package 2. This link provided beneficiaries with opportunities to showcase the knowledge acquired through training and mentoring. Unfortunately, this link was largely missing in Iraq.

Even though the project was designed with a strong focus on sustainability, certain obstacles threaten to undermine the long-term results of the activities implemented. The effects of the activities highly depend on the readiness of Lebanon's and Iraq's governments to continue supporting capacity-building initiatives in terms of protection and mental health. The training provided to social workers could be strengthened if the Ministry of Public Health had the capacity to maintain a mechanism to continue to monitor the work of these individuals in providing mental health services at the community level. Secondly, the degree to which ACTED was able to achieve organizational instead of individual change will impact the ability of the direct beneficiaries to continue functioning at a higher level. Lastly, the sustainability of the project highly depends on the ability of direct beneficiaries to secure funding for future initiatives focused on mental health and protection.