

Civil society strengthening in North Africa and Middle East

CRS' PARTNERSHIP AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING UNIT USED FOUR LEARNING QUESTIONS TO FRAME THE RESEARCH AND TO SYNTHESIZE THE FINDINGS OF THAT RESEARCH. THESE QUESTIONS ARE BOTH EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT IN THIS DOCUMENT, AND, WHEN ANSWERED, WILL HELP CRS AND PARTNERS WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY WHEN DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING AND SCALING UP CAPACITY STRENGTHENING EFFORTS.

1. HOW EFFECTIVE (PROMOTES CHANGE) AND EFFICIENT (ADVANTAGEOUS COST AND RETURNS RATIO) IS THE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING MODEL IMPLEMENTED IN MENTOR?

2. ARE MENTOR'S CAPACITY STRENGTHENING INVESTMENTS SUSTAINABLE AND/OR SCALABLE, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF CASCADING CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS FROM CRS TO LTPS TO CSOS?

3. WHAT KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES (KSAS) ARE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY FACILITATE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING WORK?

4. WHAT (IF ANYTHING) IS UNIQUE IN A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A CATHOLIC ACADEMIC INSTITUTION AND A CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION?

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East-North Africa CSO Training and Organizational Development Response (MENTOR) project works with local lead training partner (LTP) organizations in Lebanon and Tunisia to provide sustainable training support and organizational development resources that, in turn, help strengthen the capacity of nascent civil society organizations (CSOs) in their communities. These capacity strengthening efforts are also helping establish and promote networks and linkages among organizations working across similar issue areas in order to maximize their impact.

Participatory organizational assessments of both LTPs and participating CSOs are a critical part of MENTOR's conceptual approach and its monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) plan. Assessment findings—which include stated organizational priorities—shape MENTOR's tailored capacity strengthening interventions and measure net change in organizational, financial, and managerial capacities as well as expertise in advocacy (for CSOs). Reaching the project's midpoint, CRS' Middle East regional office determined that a deeper, more elaborate assessment should be done to further learning on capacity strengthening and to leverage that knowledge for programming growth and expansion.¹

In response to this request, CRS' Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit provided technical and financial support to a structured assessment and learning exercise around the project's approaches and impact on communities (see CRS' Theory of Change on page 3). This paper seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge base on capacity strengthening, inspire additional discussion and research on capacity strengthening's value and impact, and document MENTOR's approaches for future application. The discussions that follow reflect data and analysis available as of April/May 2015.

WHY STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY?

CIVIL SOCIETY IS PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Individuals have come together in pursuit of common interests for arguably all of human history. Even in the presence of a strong state that genuinely seeks to act in the interests of its citizens, alliances logically and organically form among civil society actors. The exact roles and functions of CSOs in different development efforts are widely debated, but there is no question that CSOs have a role to play in initiatives ranging from peacebuilding and governance to health and agriculture.²

1 The inquiry also served as a baseline measure of MENTOR's impact on communities via participating CSOs (which are, by definition, an expression of those communities). A follow-up midpoint assessment is slated for December 2015. Those data were not available as of the time of writing.

2 For example: Thania Paffenholz (May 2013): International peacebuilding goes local: Analyzing Lederach's conflict transformation theory and its ambivalent encounter with 20 years of practice. *Peacebuilding*. DOI:10.1080/21647259.2013.783257. Thania Paffenholz (January 2014): Civil society and peace negotiations: Beyond the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy. *Negotiation Journal*. President and Fellows of Harvard College. Aaron Chassy. "Civil Society and Development Effectiveness in Africa," in Ndulo, Muna, and Nicolas van de Walle (eds.). 2014. *Problems, Promises, and Paradoxes of Aid: Africa's Experience*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing/Institute for African Development.

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AMONG OTHER CHARACTERISTICS, A STRONG ORGANIZATION CAN FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY, WITHSTAND INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CHANGE, AND FULFILL ITS ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION.

Civil society has profoundly influenced modern events. Ordinary citizens have forced peaceful regime changes from Lech Walesa's Poland to Tunisia's role in the Arab Spring. Grassroots organizations in the US demanded a response to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s that helped make HIV treatment available first in wealthy countries and then globally—with advocacy and pressure from civil society in the poor countries most affected by the epidemic. Citizen protests against austerity in Greece and Spain, demonstrations for free and fair elections in Russia, and the Occupy Movement have brought about mainstream conversations on inequality.

Advocating on behalf of individuals and communities can be an important CSO function, but CSOs are also program implementers. For example, community-based organizations (to include faith-based organizations) have been key actors in the roll-out and expansion of HIV treatment and prevention across sub-Saharan Africa, and local school committees might concurrently lobby for district education reform and provide lunch or books for disadvantaged students.

While priorities and activities can vary widely, CRS' historical observations and decades of first-hand experience have reinforced the Agency's position that unjust systems and structures are transformed by communities and their institutions.



Members from Lebanon Eco Movement demonstrate to raise awareness of environmental issues. Photo by Lebanon Eco Movement.

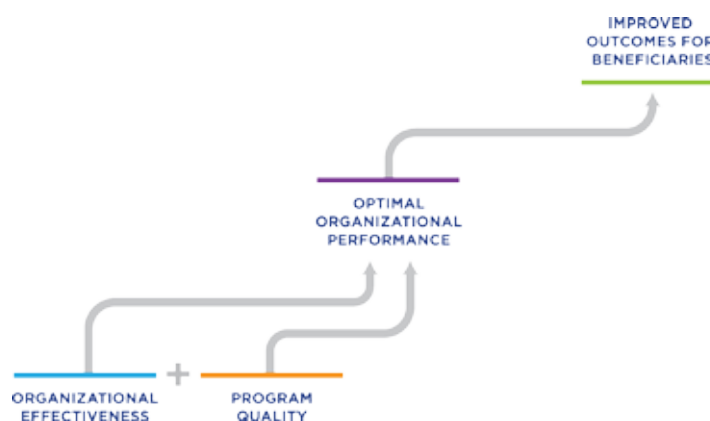
STRONGER, HEALTHIER ORGANIZATIONS CAN BETTER FULFILL THEIR MISSION

Many CSOs operate in contexts that challenge even the strongest organization; their difficulties compounded by shortages of human, material, and institutional resources. CRS has learned and demonstrated that strong institutions with capable staff can design, implement, evaluate, and sustain effective and efficient interventions—thus better fulfilling their organizational missions. Healthy local institutions can also better withstand inevitable fluctuations in project funding, staffing, and material or technical support.

CRS' THEORY OF CHANGE

While more functional institutions help to ensure that funding recipients are accountable to donors, comply with the laws and regulations of countries and donors, and create a better work environment for employees, a well-run organization is not an end in itself. Because civil society institutions are by definition an expression of local communities and constituencies, CRS believes that institutional changes should have a cascading effect. Ultimately, that effect produces an authentic, meaningful shift in the lives of those served by local partners.

This causal sequence has been a defining trait of CRS' operating model since its establishment in 1943. Local institutions are best placed to address situations of structural poverty and injustice, and, as such, strengthening the capacity of these institutions will have a direct benefit in the wellbeing of the communities they serve. Such stances and approaches continue to be of prophetic relevance as endorsed in the various aid effectiveness declarations since the early 2000s (i.e., Rome 2003, Paris 2005, Accra 2008, and Busan 2011³).



CRS' PROVEN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING APPROACH

CRS' capacity strengthening approach has proven effective in numerous countries prior to its application through MENTOR in Tunisia and Lebanon. The approach is rooted in [CRS' Integral Human Development framework](#) that regards human development and wellbeing as holistic and thus heavily dependent on and capable of leveraging the context. Over time, CRS has honed its model of local capacity strengthening, comprised of three primary components:

- **Capacity building** is focused on individuals or teams, enhances or develops new KSAs so people or teams function more effectively.

³ The High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness: A History. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/thehighlevelforaonaideffectivenessahistory.htm>. Additional resources on the validity of theory of change have been sponsored and developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development and are available at the following sites: <http://usaidlearninglab.org/library/webinar-measurement-capacity-development>, by David Jacobstein; and <http://www.developmentiscapacity.org/> led by Thomas Ditcher.

- **Institutional strengthening** is focused on an organization, enhances or develops the systems and structures needed to function, work towards sustainability, and achieve goals. Efforts assist in developing or improving sound business processes.
- **Accompaniment** combines consistent coaching and individualized mentoring to individuals and teams after interventions such as workshops, organization design, or on-the-job training.



CRS' Beirut-based team facilitated capacity strengthening with LTPs in Lebanon and Tunisia. Photo by CRS/Lebanon staff.

MENTOR: STRENGTHENING CSO CAPACITY IN LEBANON AND TUNISIA

BACKGROUND ON TUNISIA

The Tunisian uprising of 2011 began as a spontaneous social protest against unemployment and social injustice. Against all predictions, the movement swept away an autocratic regime that had been in place for twenty-three years, and led to the country's first free elections. Presidential and parliamentary elections, and the ratification of Tunisia's constitution followed in 2014.

Thirty-nine percent of Tunisia's population is younger than twenty-five years old.⁴ Facing limited economic opportunities, longing for revolution's promises to rapidly take hold, and exposed to a flood of ideas previously stifled by the government, these young people are vulnerable to exploitation and the radicalization that is undermining the region. At least 2,400 Tunisians are estimated to have fought for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.⁵

Robust CSOs can help Tunisia operationalize the aspirations of its people in the face of economic and demographic challenges. CSOs targeting youth, for instance, can advocate for youth interests, and

⁴ CIA World Fact Book, Tunisia. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>. Accessed 01 May 2015.

⁵ "Tunisia becomes breeding ground for Islamic State fighters." *The Guardian*. 13 October 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/13/tunisia-breeding-ground-islamic-state-fighters>. Accessed 01 May 2015. "New Freedoms in Tunisia Drive Support for ISIS." *The New York Times*. 21 October 2014. http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/10/22/world/africa/new-freedoms-in-tunisia-drive-support-for-isis.html?referrer=&_r=0. Accessed 01 May 2015.

employ (paid or volunteer) young people in project activities so that they are positively engaged in social change.

A new legal framework guaranteeing freedom of association has given new life to Tunisian civil society, yet a history of repression means that many of these estimated 23,000 organizations struggle and are not well coordinated. Furthermore, limited internal resources exist to strengthen capacity and reinforce networks among complementary organizations.

BACKGROUND ON LEBANON

Lebanon's modern history includes a protracted civil war, countless skirmishes and battles with its neighbors, and decades of regional conflict. This instability has fueled a wide Lebanese diaspora, battered Lebanon's economy, and created a staggering population of at least 1.3 million refugees—the vast majority from Syria,⁶ which occupied areas of Lebanon in recent memory.

Lebanon's civil society is one of the most dynamic and well established in the region; however, many CSOs grew out of external aid interventions rather than a core organizational mission, and are governed by an outdated 1909 Ottoman law on associations. Lebanon's more than 6,000 registered NGOs are largely uncategorized, uncoordinated, and unspecialized. Their activities are overwhelmingly donor driven and focused on the refugee crisis, sometimes diverting resources from local development.

Lebanese civil society provides essential services, likely helping stabilize the country⁷ by mitigating the refugee crisis and providing employment for many Lebanese. However, CSOs could provide even more desperately needed services by functioning more efficiently and better coordinating efforts. CSOs are urgently needed as full development partners.

THE MENTOR PROJECT

MENTOR's goal is to contribute to the formation and strengthening of participatory societies where citizens have the systematic opportunity to play an active role in making decisions that affect their lives and in holding their governments accountable. The project does so by:

- Strengthening the financial, management, advocacy, and institutional capacity of participating CSOs so that they can advocate effectively for their causes.
- Reinforcing the technical and institutional capacity of LTPs so that the LTP can serve as a sustainable, local resource for such support to CSOs.

MENTOR works in Lebanon and Tunisia.⁸

In support of MENTOR's goal, CRS provides sustainable capacity strengthening support and organizational development resources to

6 UNHCR. Lebanon Global Appeal 2015 Update. <http://www.unhcr.org/5461e607b.html> Accessed 01 May 2015.

7 Aaron Chassy. "Civil Society and Development Effectiveness in Africa," in Ndulo, Muna, and Nicolas van de Walle (eds.). 2014. *Problems, Promises, and Paradoxes of Aid: Africa's Experience*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing/Institute for African Development.

8 Initially, a third LTP was identified in Algeria, but Algeria's socio-political situation has made it progressively unfeasible to continue with implementation as of this writing. Subsequently, the initial target of 120 CSOs was reduced to 90.

local LTPs that, in turn, strengthen the capacity of two cohorts of nascent CSOs. LTP support to CSOs has a dual purpose: to *reinforce LTP capacity* to mentor CSOs, and to *strengthen CSO institutional capacity*.

MENTOR at a Glance

- Duration: November 2012 to July 2015, no-cost extension from August 2015 to March 2016
- Donor: [Middle East Partnership Initiative \(MEPI\), U.S. Department of State](#)
- Total funding: \$2.62 million (\$2.5 million from the U.S. Government; \$120,000 from CRS private funds)
- Direct beneficiaries (capacity strengthening): 90 CSOs, 600 individuals
- Indirect beneficiaries (various CSO services): 6,000

MENTOR also promotes and supports the establishment of networks and linkages among CSOs working in similar program areas, thus maximizing their impact and contribution to fostering a vibrant civil society. Small grants (5,000 USD each) support advocacy and networking, and ensure CSOs have an opportunity to apply their new capacity.

Figure 1: The MENTOR Process



In partnership with one LTP in each country, MENTOR is strengthening the institutional, managerial, and financial capacities of more than 90 CSOs in Lebanon and Tunisia. As participating CSOs improve their ability to function, they can better fulfill their respective missions and ability to serve the communities and individuals they represent.

Figure 2: The MENTOR Timeline

JULY 2012	JAN. 2013	JULY 2013	JAN. 2014	JULY 2014	JAN. 2015	JULY 2015	MARCH 2016
CRS assesses, designs, and implements individualized capacity strengthening plans for two LTPs.							
	LTPs mentor and train first cohort of nascent CSOs (to Dec. 2014).						
	First cohort of CSOs network with each other and other stakeholders (to Dec. 2014).						
						LTPs mentor and train second cohort of nascent CSOs.	
						Second cohort of CSOs network with each other and other stakeholders	
							Establish CSO network in Tunisia and Lebanon.
							Country exchange visits

LEAD TRAINING PARTNERS

In developing the MENTOR project, CRS sought LTPs with a commitment to building the capacity of civil society in their country, experience in compliance with foreign public donor regulations, and the ability to work in English, Arabic and French when required.

UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, BEIRUT, LEBANON

A private Catholic university founded by the Jesuits in 1875, University of Saint Joseph (USJ) is well-known and widely respected both regionally and internationally. The university community includes more than 1,800 professors of various rank, 11,000 students, and prestigious alumni. USJ established a dedicated MENTOR unit for the purposes of implementing the MENTOR project and to develop a vibrant civil society in Lebanon that effectively contributes to sustainable development and promotes participatory democracy. The unit includes five dedicated staff and is co-managed by the schools of social work and business.

TUNISIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL STABILITY, TUNIS, TUNISIA

The Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS) is a nonprofit NGO registered in Tunisia since 1995. Founded to promote professional business relations between Tunisia and the US, TAMSS shifted to a new social mission in 2006 to promote sustainable development for poor communities by contributing to the social and economic integration of vulnerable populations. TAMSS works in 13 of Tunisia's 24 administrative districts, and is proud to focus on supporting women and promoting entrepreneurship.

NASCENT CSO PARTNERS

After CRS conducted the foundational capacity strengthening work with USJ and TAMSS, the country LTPs selected and engaged with a group of nascent CSOs to design and implement individually tailored capacity strengthening plans. CRS accompanied and mentored the two LTPs as they designed and implemented the project with the first round of CSOs. Please see Annex 4 for a complete list of participating CSOs and information about their size, history, and program areas.

MENTOR strengthens the KSAs of staff, board members, and volunteers (depending on the topic area) to develop and implement organizational systems. These systems help ensure an organization's long-term sustainability and the institutionalization of know-how and expertise to support present and future staff performance.



A pottery painting activity led by Phenix Group Homes, a Lebanese CSO supporting people with disabilities.

SELECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

As measured by an organizational assessment tool derived from CRS' [Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument \(HOCAl\)](#), each LTP increased its financial and management capacity. The improvements ranged from about 15 to 85 percent. Anecdotally, LTP representatives interviewed also confirmed feeling more confident in their abilities. These results are consistent with what CRS has observed in other settings; the change between baseline and endline tends to be smaller when baselines are relatively high.⁹

At the time of writing (about three-quarters through the project), each of the forty-six CSOs in the first cohort substantially improved key institutional functions. For example, one CSO increased its score ten-fold between baseline and endline capacity assessments, and even CSOs with comparatively smaller changes improved their scores by 30 to 50 percent.

⁹ CRS' 2010-2014 Jerusalem West Bank and Gaza Civic Participation Project (CPP).

Organizational Assessments: Sample Inquiries and Responses

Every organization has different strengths and weaknesses, but also different concerns. For example, two organizations might have limited capacity to advocate at the national level. For a grassroots service delivery organization, that gap might not be a problem, but advocacy could be the primary function for an umbrella organization representing dozens of CSOs to a country's decision-makers.

Like the HOCAI from which they were derived, MENTOR assessments strive to capture an organization's context and a mutual understanding of where that organization stands in terms of its capacity and its priorities. These assessments inform project capacity strengthening activities and document changes in capacity. They do not label organizations with an absolute capacity "level" or "rank." Samples of assessment inquiries and responses follow.

Yes/Always: Organization is fully compliant with the requirement or always enforces the stated control.

Mostly/Usually: Organization complies with most of the requirement or frequently enforces the stated control.

Partially/Sometimes: Organization complies with the requirement in part or enforces the stated control less than one-half of the time.

No/Never: Organization does not comply with the requirement at any time or never enforces the stated control.

N/A: Requirement or stated control does not apply.

Planning (seven statements): Availability of and mechanisms for setting program objectives, needs assessment, organizational plans, M&E plans

Managing activities (seven statements): Information of project compliances, obstacles, mechanisms, time frames, key activities, documentation, communication structure, learning curves

Human resources (ten statements): Role of human resources in the project implementation on the basis of unique job descriptions, successful implementation of tasks, and having the right persons in the key positions

METHODOLOGY

In response to a request from CRS' Middle East regional office, the Agency's Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit provided technical and financial support to a structured learning exercise. A desk review of standard project documents (e.g., technical reports, assessment tools) and relevant literature (peer-reviewed and gray;

see bibliography in Annex 3) was conducted. Through a dialogue with stakeholders from CRS country programs in Lebanon and Tunisia and from CRS' Middle East regional office, learning questions were identified (see below) and a participatory research (see box) was planned for and conducted in December 2014 and January 2015. CRS deliberately engaged a range of stakeholders and actors from the capacity strengthening process to identify, collect, and interpret heterogeneous data through a series of individual conversations and group discussions.

Participatory research eliminates the dichotomy of a researcher and its object(s) of inquiry. There is no knowledge to be "extracted" from key informants; research facilitators and participants together embark on a short journey of inquiry in pursuit of evidence-based understanding and actionable learning.

Previously agreed-upon learning questions (also called a "learning agenda") guided and structured the entire process for data collection and interpretation:

1. How effective (promotes change) and efficient (advantageous cost and returns ratio) is the capacity strengthening model implemented in MENTOR?
2. Are MENTOR's capacity strengthening investments sustainable and/or scalable, particularly in terms of cascading capacity improvements from CRS to LTPs to CSOs?
3. What KSAs are needed to effectively facilitate capacity strengthening work?
4. What (if anything) is unique in a partnership between a Catholic academic institution and a Catholic international development NGO?

HETEROGENEOUS DATA

By design, the data include quantitative, descriptive, qualitative, ethnographic, and interpretive information such as:

- Notes and recordings from in-depth interviews with actors from CRS, the two LTPs, and CSO partners from the first cohort (duration: one to two hours; small group and individual discussions)
- Statistics on institutional growth affected by capacity strengthening efforts (e.g., program value, service diversity, and reach; staff retention)
- Financial resources invested into capacity strengthening during project implementation

The stakeholder interviews, in particular, were designed to provide insights on the most significant changes that took place at individual and institutional levels, the KSAs that made the most difference in this capacity strengthening process, and both a vision for and the necessary components of future capacity strengthening efforts among these actors.

The combination of both qualitative and quantitative elements is intended to leverage the strengths of both views.

Table 1: Interviewees and Their Affiliations

INTERVIEWEE AFFILIATION	# OF ORGS PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH FOR LEARNING PAPER	# OF STAFF INTERVIEWED	TOTAL # OF STAFF (APPROX.)
LTP 1: Mentor Unit USJ, Lebanon	1	7	15
LTP 2: TAMSS, Tunisia	1	5	20
CSOs: Cohort 1, Lebanon	5	24	50
CSOs: Cohort 1, Tunisia	4	25	40
CRS	1	3	18
Total:	12	64	143

BASELINE IMPACT DATA

According to CRS' Theory of Change (page 3), one cannot assume that capacity strengthening is truly effective without evidence that the improvements to organizational capacity cascade, subsequently improving the well-being of CSO beneficiaries. For this reason, and to supplement the participatory assessments (see page 1) built into MENTOR's project design, CRS' Middle East regional office determined that a more elaborate, secondary assessment was appropriate to document and understand MENTOR's capacity strengthening efforts. This secondary assessment includes an initial (baseline) impact assessment using focus group discussions with beneficiaries from the second cohort of CSOs (conducted in Tunisia in December 2014 and in Lebanon in January 2015). These findings provide interesting preliminary insights that are among the topics discussed in this paper.

At the time of this writing, MENTOR plans to interview CSO beneficiaries again in both countries after support to the second cohort of CSOs concludes (December 2015); these endline data will help capture any net change in perceived effectiveness.

Additional methodology detail can be found in Annex 1.

DISCUSSION

MENTOR supports robust and responsive civil societies in Lebanon and Tunisia by strengthening capacity of participating CSOs so that they can better fulfill their missions, and by reinforcing the capacity of LTPs to serve as capacity strengthening resources for civil society after the end of project funding. MENTOR launched in November 2012 with capacity strengthening efforts targeting both LTPs and the first cohort of CSOs (in each country); the project engaged with a second cohort of CSOs in mid-2015 and work will continue through March 2016. This discussion focuses on data and analyses available as of May 2015.

The phases of project implementation that follow are solely to organize this discussion; they are not meant to prescribe any technical or implementation approach.

LTP CRITERIA INCLUDED A COMMITMENT TO BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY IN THEIR COUNTRY, EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH FOREIGN PUBLIC DONORS/DONOR REGULATIONS, AND A CAPACITY TO WORK IN BOTH ENGLISH AND ARABIC.

PHASE 1: PROJECT DESIGN AND START-UP

ACTIVITIES

SELECTING PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Key activities in MENTOR design and start-up included the **selection of LTPs** to participate in the project and sustain CSO support after the end of the project. CRS selected LTPs during proposal development based on donor input and CRS' experience in the region. LTP criteria included a commitment to building civil society capacity in their country, experience working with foreign public donors/donor regulations, and a capacity to work in both English and Arabic.



Small group work in a capacity strengthening session. Photo by CRS/Lebanon staff.

The **selection of nascent CSOs** to participate in the training was also a critical MENTOR activity. The MENTOR project (to include USJ and TAMSS as LTPs) worked with MEPI and the U.S. embassies in Lebanon and Tunisia to develop criteria for CSO participation. CSOs had to apply to the program demonstrating their interest in the support and that they met the minimum criteria. These criteria included a desire to work on issues around youth, women's empowerment, and advocacy; a commitment to a particular vision or mission (even if it was not yet well defined); committed and available staff or board members; and the organization's potential impact in a community and its geographical reach/distribution. MENTOR also stated a strong preference for newly registered (nascent) NGOs.

DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

In order to leverage existing material and capacity assets, MENTOR (to include LTPs) mapped resources ranging from learning material that could be adapted or adopted, specialized consultants with relevant expertise, and national and international NGO networks whose membership could benefit nascent CSOs and/or extend their reach.

Continuing to work together, CRS and LTPs then created a curriculum framework to be adapted for each CSO's tailored capacity strengthening plan (see Table 2). While each organization is unique, several functions are fundamental. MENTOR used these functions to identify areas of support relevant to most (if not all) of the participating CSOs, and the areas of support comprised the curriculum framework.

Creating an easily customized framework allows MENTOR to work efficiently while also attending to individual capacity needs. For example, core modules on financial management are available to all CSOs, but the number of modules and amount of accompaniment varies based on each CSO's needs.

Table 2: Standard Curriculum Elements

MODULE	TOPIC	RATIONALE
Governance and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategic Planning • Board Development • Leadership and Partnership • Fundraising/Fees for Services 	<i>Most young organizations lack formally agreed-upon plans and procedures, often are not democratically run, and rarely understand how to create and manage long-term fundraising strategies with fees for services.</i>
Management Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources/ Staffing • Compliance with Local Law • Financial Management • USG Compliance 	<i>Most organizations need help recruiting, hiring, and maintaining qualified staff and volunteers; creating transparent, accountable systems to track resources; and complying with local law and donor regulations.</i>
Program Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal and Budget Writing • Effective Planning and Project Cycle • Monitoring and Evaluation • Emergency Management and Conflict-Sensitive Approaches 	<i>Most organizations require support not only in designing proposals and implementing projects, but also in creating monitoring and evaluation, and reporting systems that build an organizational learning culture to constantly improve program quality, develop new ideas, and tie those in to changes in fluid, potentially volatile, political situations.</i>
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation Skills and Public Speaking • Marketing, Media, and Social Media • Networking and Coalition Building • Advocacy • Training of Trainers 	<i>Many organizations rely on one charismatic leader, not investing in communication and advocacy skills for the entire staff and board, as well as the efficient IT tools (including professional email addresses) to facilitate such. Most CSOs benefit from coaching on how to share information and responsibility. Most CSO projects have heavy training elements but few quality training standards.</i>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) • Coalition Building among NGOs • How to Become Effective Trainers 	<i>These topics were included in the six-month no-cost extension to ensure that the CSOs work effectively and efficiently together, building upon each other's strengths. CSR training will allow the CSOs to benefit from a wider range of potential funding opportunities.</i>

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Activities undertaken during MENTOR design and start-up have been critical to the project's overall effectiveness and efficiency.

USJ and TAMSS participation in MENTOR began at early stages of project and budget design, making the sub-agreement process a natural and straightforward extension of proposal development instead of a separate negotiation process that consumed time and other resources. This early involvement was valuable to cultivating relationships between CRS and LTPs, and to enhancing USJ and TAMSS ownership in capacity strengthening efforts—an invaluable precursor to long-term LTP involvement and initiative.¹⁰



Small group work during a capacity strengthening session with Save Energy Plant Trees (SEPT), an environmental CSO in Lebanon. Photo by SEPT staff.

Adapting capacity strengthening resources identified through the mapping exercise and developing a foundational curriculum framework helped the project quickly start capacity strengthening efforts and to work more efficiently throughout the project without forcing participants into a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

The CSO application process helped ensure at least a measure of organizational commitment from each capacity strengthening participant—widely regarded by organizational development experts as a prerequisite to successful knowledge transfer and change management. Furthermore, the number of CSO applicants for the second cohort of MENTOR training suggests both great need and great interest. One hundred CSOs applied for a total of 45 spots in the two countries; this was about twice the number of applicants as for the first cohort. Lastly, the minimum requirements for CSO participants helped ensure that MENTOR capacity strengthening contributed to MEPI's overall goals of helping young people and women, and promoting vibrant civil society in the region.

PHASE 2: PREPARATION OR INVENTORY,

¹⁰ CRS, *The AIDSRelief Zambia Partnership: Transitioning to the Churches Health Association of Zambia*. 2012. <http://www.ics.crs.org/resource/aidsrelief-zambia-partnership-transitioning-churches-health-association-zambia>

ASSESSMENT, AND PLANNING

ACTIVITIES

PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENTS: LTPs AND CSOs

Working on behalf of MENTOR, CRS facilitators joined relevant employees from USJ and from TAMSS (individually) to complete a predetermined set of checklists derived from the HOCAI early in project implementation. The LTP representatives participating in the assessment were selected for their in-depth knowledge of the functional area being evaluated (e.g., finance staff for financial assessment). Once completed, CRS supported LTPs to prioritize areas in need of improvement and to develop an action plan (that includes tailoring of the curriculum framework) to address those needs. Each CSO from the first cohort participated in a nearly identical needs assessment, co-facilitated by individuals from the relevant LTP and from CRS.

MENTOR conducted participatory assessments again with both LTPs at mid-point, and will do so again at the end of the project. This serves to track progress (adapting activities as necessary) and to monitor results. Most first-cohort CSOs participated in follow-up assessments at mid-point and at the end of support. Each LTP facilitated (with CRS shadowing) participatory assessments of second-cohort CSOs at baseline, and will do so again at mid-point and endline.

When these results, recorded at different times, are compared, they reveal a net change in capacity. Given the capacity strengthening nature of MENTOR and the absence of similar efforts conducted with participating LTPs and CSOs, the net change in capacity is heavily dependent (if not attributable) to the project's capacity strengthening initiatives.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The capacity assessments measure changes over time in financial, managerial, advocacy, and other organizational capacities. The project's ability to influence such changes in levels of capacity over time is the very core of project effectiveness. Furthermore, the Theory of Change (see page 3) entails a cascading effect that originates from CRS in strengthening the capacity of LTPs, and of LTPs in replicating and sustaining the same approach with nascent CSOs. CRS anticipates that this will continue after MENTOR closes.

The baseline and midline assessments also informed MENTOR's adaptation of the curriculum framework (including ongoing adjustments to capacity strengthening activities) for each organization (LTP and CSO). By doing so, the project is able to efficiently direct capacity strengthening resources to actual needs.

The assessment process helps participating organizations to collect and analyze data on their own organizational functions, determine the relative importance of the issues, and develop an action plan (all suggesting ownership of the capacity strengthening process). Concurrently, these assessments provide LTPs with hands-on capacity assessment and facilitation experience that will be essential as they continue to support CSO capacity strengthening after MENTOR.

PHASE 3: PARTNER CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

As previously noted, the CRS model of local capacity strengthening employed by MENTOR has three primary components (capacity building, institutional strengthening, and accompaniment) and took place concurrently with two major categories of partners (LTPs and CSOs). Individual activities frequently touched on more than one component and served both LTPs and CSOs. For example, when USJ or TAMSS conducted CSO trainings jointly with CRS, the exercises served to build CSO capacity in a particular skill and to provide accompaniment to the LTP (thus reinforcing skills they previously acquired).



Strengthening record-keeping and financial management systems is critical to organizational health. Photo by CRS/Lebanon staff.

ACTIVITIES

CRS' initial contact with and selection of LTPs lasted seven months, from July 2012 to January 2013. Beginning in February 2013, CRS began working closely with TAMSS and the USJ Mentor Unit. This work continued until December 2014 (twenty-two months in total). Both LTPs began partnering with local nascent CSOs in May 2013: TAMSS with twenty-eight, and USJ with sixteen. Traditional capacity strengthening activities continued until June 2014 (thirteen months in total).

LTPs were selected, in part, because their existing KSAs and systems were good, but the participatory assessments (see pages 15-16) revealed areas for improvement, for example, financial management changes required to receive USG funding. CRS provided tailored trainings and worked with USJ and TAMSS to narrow gaps identified through the assessments. Through ongoing mentoring and the midpoint assessment, CRS and each LTP also identified ways to improve the capacity strengthening plan by developing or adapting trainings (material or sessions) based on emerging themes, or spending more/less time on certain topics.

Capacity strengthening support to the first cohort of CSOs followed a similar model, with activities jointly facilitated by USJ or TAMSS (depending on the country). During the first round, CRS was more involved in supporting the respective LTPs during coaching sessions and trainings of CSOs, often leading initial coaching sessions and co-facilitating trainings. However, in both countries, LTPs are taking the lead with the second cohort of CSO capacity strengthening underway at the time of writing. CRS remains involved, but in an increasingly limited technical support role, so as to reinforce the previous LTP learning and mentoring experiences.

SMALL GRANTS TO SUPPORT CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Through MENTOR, CRS supported LTPs to award and monitor small project grants to CSOs. These small grants were open to all MENTOR-supported first-cohort CSOs and served to further develop CSO capacities by applying new skills and knowledge (from proposal writing through project implementation and evaluation), and by establishing or nurturing partnerships/networks with other actors. Grants of 5,000 USD (per CSO) were awarded to small networks of CSOs (seven CSOs in Lebanon and twelve in Tunisia).

Unsuccessful applicants received a thorough debrief with suggestions for their next application. MENTOR supports successful applicants through the full year of the grant life cycle in areas that include organizational and financial management, advocacy, and networking. CRS and the LTP also provided project- and sector-specific capacity strengthening (respectively) when necessary (e.g., advocacy training or training of trainers).

Small grants are typically designed to provide a “laboratory” to employ newly acquired or honed capacity. In local capacity strengthening efforts, small grants are fairly common, have a programmatic logic, and are popular with many donors (as gauged by the increasing presence of small grants in capacity strengthening requests for applications/proposals). However, some critics counter that organizations might participate in small grant activities to access the funds rather than because of a commitment to strengthen their capacity.¹¹ (Commitment to the process is widely perceived as a prerequisite to successful capacity strengthening.)

¹¹ From lessons learned in reports from the Integrated Development for Empowering Approach (IDEA) project funded and implemented by Caritas India (at the national Episcopal conference level).

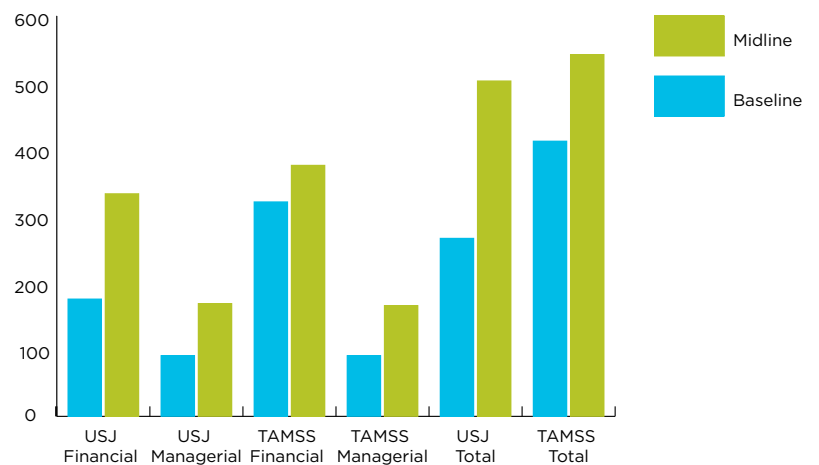
MENTOR’S grants program was necessarily small, even by nascent-CSO standards, and two focus group participants reported being limited by the size and timing of the funding. As a condition of the grants, however, CSOs were required to network with each other. This collaboration provided an opportunity to combine grant funding (yielding a larger pool of resources directed toward common purposes), was positively regarded, and might turn out to be equally important to (or more important than) the additional funding. While there is little to no evidence of small grants’ influence on capacity strengthening (in MENTOR or elsewhere), it is intrinsically difficult to measure or isolate individual inputs to improved capacity. Even small-scale investigations in this area would be valuable to the field.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

IMPROVEMENTS IN FINANCIAL AND MANAGERIAL CAPACITY

From baseline to midline, the USJ Mentor Unit nearly doubled its overall capacity assessment scores, and TAMSS’ total score grew by more than 30 percent (Figure 3). This indicates significant growth in the strength of its organizational systems and staff competencies. While the change in TAMSS’ scores was notable, it was not as dramatic as USJ’s. This is consistent with a tested hypothesis from CRS’ 2010–2014 Jerusalem West Bank and Gaza Civic Participation Project (CPP): the higher a partner’s original capacity score, the less drastic their growth tends to be during the project.

Figure 3: LTP Capacity Assessment Score



Each CSO also saw improvement from its baseline assessment; several doubled their scores and some increased scores by a factor of ten or even twenty-five (see figures 4 and 5). Some—but not all—organizations with a high baseline scores saw more modest improvement than those with lower baseline scores. As noted, this is consistent with other CRS experiences.

Figure 4: Lebanese CSO Capacity Assessment Scores, Cohort One

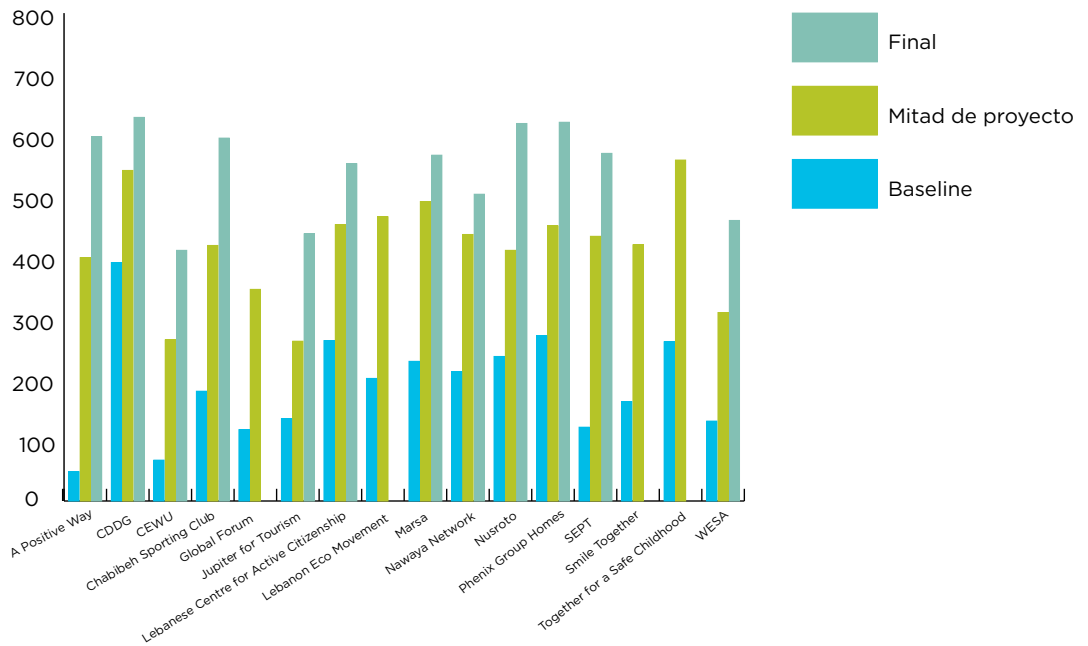
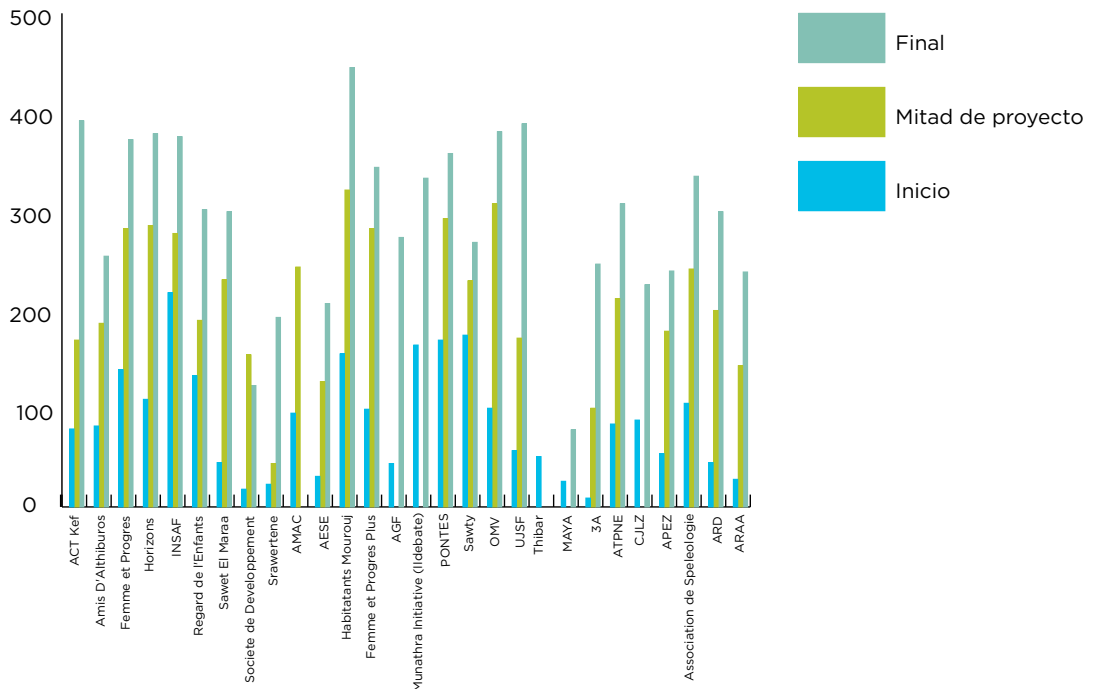


Figure 5: Tunisian CSO Capacity Assessment Scores, Cohort One



EXPANDED REACH AND COVERAGE

In addition to the standard capacity assessment data, MENTOR documented that several CSOs submitted more proposals after participating in MENTOR capacity strengthening (see Table 3). From a sample of seventeen CSOs (nine from Tunisia, eight from Lebanon), eleven submitted more proposals for USG funding¹² and twelve submitted more proposals to other donors. While the absolute numbers are small, the trend is promising.

Of the sample of seventeen, two CSOs in Tunisia and three in Lebanon also expanded their geographic coverage. It is important to note that expansion is not always good for an organization. Without the appropriate staffing and systems, growth can undermine an organization's success. Holistic capacity strengthening like that offered through MENTOR works with organizations to simultaneously develop the systems to absorb growth and the maturity to recognize what growth serves the organizational vision and mission.

Table 3: CSOs Increasing Proposal Submission after MENTOR Intervention

INCREASED # OF PROPOSALS SUBMITTED	# OF CSOs		
	TUNISIA (N=9)	LEBANON (N=8)	TOTAL
To USG	6	5	11
To other donors	6	6	12
To both USG and other donors	5	3	8

IMPROVED SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Staff from LTPs and CSOs credit MENTOR with substantial improvements they observed in the technical aspects of CSOs' work. Several CSO representatives noted that they document activities more thoroughly now and that their information and data are more organized and accessible. By developing and using manuals, CSO staff have learned how to regulate internal relations in a way that transcends the actual individuals. "Record keeping and institutionalization of the new procedures and methods will help sustain the NGO for the next 10 years," said a focus group member from SEPT, a participating Lebanese CSO.

Staff now have clear job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities—making division of labor and decision-making smoother. In some cases, this clarity in job roles has allowed CSOs to engage their beneficiaries in new ways. For example, one Lebanese CSO noted that youth are now directly involved in some functions of the organization, benefitting both the organization and the individuals.

Consistent with improved CSO capacity assessment scores, staff from CSOs commented that they greatly improved their management and financial practices. Staff highlighted improved policies, procedures, accounting, and use of software in particular. "A policy manual is essential. It shows us how to deal with situations and run internal affairs," said one focus group member from the Chabibeh Sporting Club, a participating CSO in Lebanon.

¹² Because of its stringent requirements, USG funding is widely used as a proxy measure of robust organizational systems (especially financial systems).



Policies and procedures help ensure that organizational changes remain even if staff and leadership change over time. Photo by CRS/Lebanon staff.

TAMSS Project Officer Fathi Neji also credited the MENTOR project with helping the organization create and maintain a progressive institutional system that “does not depend solely on the charisma of an individual.” TAMSS has learned how to operate an organization as a community of individuals, rather than individualistically. As part of this learning experience they continue to question themselves about where and how they can improve. Multiple TAMSS interviewees also pointed out that the capacity strengthening has spilled over to the entire organization, other projects, and even their personal lives. TAMSS Project Manager Darine Hadj Hassine commented that her experience in MENTOR improved her self-esteem and helped her prove to herself, her community, and to her country that a woman could do a good professional job. “The challenges changed me,” she said.

Interviewees also described a diversification in their organizations’ work. Because of MENTOR, they network with other NGOs in their country. Staff mentioned that they have been introduced to advocacy and now lobby local government officials and within their communities. CSO staff interviewed say that they feel more confident in themselves, have a higher profile, and have received positive comments on their growth from community members. MENTOR has also enabled them to become more adept at using social media such as Facebook and crowd-sourcing platforms to promote their mission and work.

At a personal level, many staff credited MENTOR with helping them become more organized. Staff say they have gained valuable professional experience, while also challenging themselves to grow as individuals and community members.

THE VALUE OF SHADOWING

Staff of the USJ Mentor Unit were quick to mention that MENTOR was the university's first partnership with an international American NGO. Prior to this project, they said, USJ was unfamiliar with the practical dynamics of the NGO community or civil society in general. Thanks to training, coaching, and job shadowing on various capacity strengthening subjects—including previously unfamiliar approaches to grant making and management, and project management—several interviewees said that they are more comfortable operating in this environment now.

Multiple TAMSS staff observed that one of the most important parts of the MENTOR project was on-the-job shadowing—both when TAMSS staff shadowed counterparts from CRS, and when staff from one nascent CSO shadowed TAMSS financial staff. LTP interviewees described shadowing as highly effective and beneficial, saying that much of their learning and change took place because of the example that CRS set.

Based on their experience with CRS, TAMSS reflected that it can be more important to find solutions together as partners than to know every technical answer. From the project, said TAMSS staff, they realized the importance of customized solutions. TAMSS now adopts the same style of partnership that they experienced with CRS with their own partners. “We are not here to give lessons. We don't know better than [our partners] do. We need each other, we are learning together. Share expertise without giving lessons. It is coaching,” said TAMSS Director of Programs Lylia Haddad.

In a focus group discussion, a CSO interviewee verified this (without prompting), noting that his organization does not have a “donor relationship” with TAMSS; instead it is a “real relationship.” Several representatives of different CSOs noted they felt comfortable asking TAMSS questions without fear. “[TAMSS is] here to help, even at the last minute,” noted a focus group member from the International Institute of Debate, a participating CSO in Tunisia.

CONTRASTS BETWEEN CSO ASSESSMENTS AND BENEFICIARY PERCEPTIONS

While the currently available data are limited, the impact assessment focus groups among beneficiaries of Tunisia's second-round CSOs (see page 37) revealed an interesting complement to the cohort's baseline capacity assessments. According to assessment criteria, second-round CSOs generally lack a systematic approach to needs assessments, yet beneficiaries reported that CSOs relied heavily on their input to plan activities. This suggests that CSOs have an informal or nascent approach to assessing beneficiary needs.

Similarly, advocacy was specified as a weakness among the majority of the second round CSOs; however, the focus group discussions showed that beneficiaries perceive the CSOs as their advocates. The majority

**“IT IS NOT IMPORTANT TO KNOW EVERY TECHNICAL ANSWER. IT IS IMPORTANT TO LISTEN AND FIND A SOLUTION TOGETHER.”
—FATHI NEJI, PROJECT OFFICER, TAMSS**

of respondents had benefitted from or participated in one or more advocacy/awareness campaigns or activities by their respective CSO. This suggests that CSOs have a burgeoning—if not yet systematic or institutionalized approach to advocacy.

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS AND RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CRS AND LTPS

USJ and TAMSS representatives interviewed stressed that CRS’ modesty and humility stood out to them throughout the capacity strengthening (CS) process. Staff described CRS as filled with respect for them as partners, and stressed that CRS made sure that there were “no stupid questions” and that the daily work and progress of partners was acknowledged. Partners described the importance of CRS respecting and “accepting us the way we are” with regard to capacity. Perhaps more importantly, partners said they felt that CRS also actively believed in them, bolstering the confidence of partner staff.

CRS affected partners by being open, available, and flexible. USJ faculty member and MENTOR Project Manager Dr. Hilda Bayramia emphasized that CRS staff were “always helpful and present,” and TAMSS staff noted several small, simple changes CRS was willing to make to meet their needs, like adjusting meeting times to fit the partner’s schedule. Just as there were “no stupid questions” that the partners could ask, CRS staff were comfortable being honest when they did not know something.

In the partners’ words, it was more important to listen and find solutions together, rather than to know every technical answer. CRS staff were open to feedback and willing to learn from the LTPs as well, keeping the partnership mutual and collaborative.

While recognizing that CRS was responsible for managing the MENTOR grant and liaising with the donor, LTP staff made the distinction that their relationship with CRS was not a “typical” prime-sub or donor-grantee relationship; the relationship was not about the money or just providing funds. Instead, LTP staff said, it really felt like they were on the same team as CRS. Partners wanted to emulate traits they saw in CRS staff, like the authentic love for their jobs and their desire to help others.

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS AND RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LTPS AND CSOS

The CSO partners in Lebanon and Tunisia appreciated many of the same characteristics in their relationships with their LTPs (USJ or TAMSS) as the LTPs did in their relationships with CRS. Staff of the nascent NGOs highlighted the tailoring of training content and customization of the MENTOR program to their individual needs. The LTPs were easily reachable and supportive, “even in the last minute,” said CSO staff. Like CRS, they fostered an open environment that encouraged trust and asking questions.

Partner staff explained that the LTPs not only connected them to new funding sources, but helped them build networks with other

organizations. This networking, the partners said, improved the relationship of CSOs across each country. It also helped their own organizations grow in valuable competencies like conflict resolution and communication. Various NGO staff also commented on the authentic dynamic of partnership with the LTPs, going beyond the money or project outputs that seem to symbolize a more typical donor relationship.

CRS AND USJ: UNIQUE PARTNERS

Established in 1943, CRS is an extension of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and includes 5,000 staff in nearly 100 countries. The Jesuits established USJ in Lebanon in 1875 and the university boasts more than 1,800 faculty and 11,000 students. Both organizations are part of the global Catholic Church structure and are highly respected in their areas of expertise. While CRS and USJ share a profound Catholic identity, their spheres—the academic and NGO/development worlds—can differ dramatically.

USJ's excellent reputation in the region is hard to overstate; the USJ brand alone attracts attention and brings gravitas to any project with which it is associated. USJ's depth of expertise and pedagogical capacity further enhanced the actual and perceived value of the capacity strengthening MENTOR provided to CSOs.

CRS' depth of experience working with civil society was highly complementary to USJ's pedagogical excellence, bringing operational understanding to academic study. These differences—between CRS' implementation expertise and USJ's scholarship—were sometimes trying for both parties, but led to a high-quality end product, and appear to be influencing CSOs through a cascading effect.



Children get involved with planting during an event sponsored by Save Energy Plant Trees (SEPT), an environmental CSO in Lebanon. Photo by SEPT staff.

TWO MATURE, PRESTIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

CRS' partnership principles are foundational to the right relationships the Agency strives to develop with any organization it works with, whether that organization is a learner in a capacity strengthening context or a major consortium partner. USJ was an unusual partner for CRS in terms of the university's exceptionally long history and deep influence in the region (CRS partners with organizations of all sizes and ages, but historically most tend to be smaller and less well-established than USJ.) This variance required CRS to adjust its tactics at times. For example, rather than encouraging a small, young partner to develop its financial systems to absorb additional funding or reinforce accountability, CRS had to convince a large, established partner to adapt its existing financial systems (which satisfied its existing needs) so that those systems could meet audit requirements of a USG donor (requirements that struck some at USJ as overly demanding and too picky). Concurrently, USJ had to decide that it was worthwhile to accommodate USG grant regulations through changes to existing systems, policies, and procedures.

CRS Partnership Principles

- Share a vision for addressing people's immediate needs and the underlying causes of suffering and injustice.
- Make decisions at a level as close as possible to the people who will be affected by them.
- Strive for mutuality, recognizing that each partner brings skills, resources, knowledge, and capacities in a spirit of autonomy.
- Foster equitable partnerships by mutually defining rights and responsibilities.
- Respect differences and commit to listen and learn from each other.
- Encourage transparency.
- Engage with civil society, to help transform unjust structures and systems.
- Commit to a long-term process of local organizational development.
- Identify, understand, and strengthen community capacities, which are the primary source of solutions to local problems.
- Promote sustainability by reinforcing partners' capacity to identify their vulnerabilities and build on their strengths.

Interviewees at USJ reflected positively on the novelty of partnership, particularly among organizations or sectors with different worldviews: “Learning went both ways,” said Nora Dacchade, vice-project manager in USJ’s Mentor Unit. These perspectives did not always naturally align, allowing for a sort of fusion between CRS’ pragmatic, performance-driven approach, and USJ’s deep and nuanced understanding of Lebanese society and well-established base of technical expertise. Interviewees also saw that the Mentor Unit—an entity currently housed within two schools of the prestigious academic institution—could move toward a more-nimble business model while still leveraging its academic perspective and rigor to more effectively interface with and empower Lebanese civil society institutions.

CONCLUSION

THE MENTOR PROJECT

Implemented by partners CRS, USJ’s Mentor Unit (Lebanon), and TAMSS (Tunisia), the MENTOR project supports robust and responsive civil societies in Lebanon and Tunisia by strengthening capacity of participating CSOs so that they can better fulfill their missions, and reinforcing the capacity of LTPs to serve as capacity strengthening resources for civil society after the end of project funding. These capacity strengthening efforts also help to establish and promote networks and linkages among organizations working across similar issue areas in order to maximize their impact.

MENTOR launched in November 2012 with capacity strengthening efforts targeting both LTPs and the first cohort of CSOs (in each country); the project engaged with a second cohort of CSOs in Tunisia in June 2014, and with a second cohort with USJ in September 2014. With a no-cost extension, work will continue through March 2016.

CRS’ THEORY OF CHANGE

Seeking a deeper, more elaborate assessment than those integrated into MENTOR project design, the CRS Middle East regional office requested technical and financial support from CRS’ Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit to conduct a structured learning exercise around MENTOR’s approaches. This resulting document seeks to further the learning on capacity strengthening and to leverage that knowledge for programming growth and expansion. The inquiry also served as a baseline measure of MENTOR’s impact on communities via participating CSOs. Data and analysis available as of May 2015 shape the discussion and preliminary conclusions of this paper.

EXPANDING ASSESSMENTS OF MENTOR’S IMPACT

Seeking a deeper, more elaborate assessment than those integrated into MENTOR project design, the CRS Middle East regional office requested technical and financial support from CRS’ Partnership and

Capacity Strengthening unit to conduct a structured learning exercise around MENTOR's approaches. This resulting document seeks to further the learning on capacity strengthening and to leverage that knowledge for programming growth and expansion. The inquiry also served as a baseline measure of MENTOR's impact on communities via participating CSOs. Data and analysis available as of May 2015¹³ shape the discussion and preliminary conclusions of this paper.

LEARNING QUESTION 1

How effective (promotes change) and efficient (advantageous cost and returns ratio) is the capacity strengthening model implemented in MENTOR?

MENTOR's ability to influence changes in capacity over time is the very core of project effectiveness. Data analyses available as of May 2015 indicate widespread improvements in capacity among both LTPs and CSOs (as measured by participatory organizational assessments):

- LTP improvements in financial and management capacity ranged from about 15 to 85 percent.
- The USJ Mentor Unit nearly doubled their overall capacity assessment scores, and TAMSS' total score grew by more than 30 percent.
- Each of the forty-six CSOs in the first cohort substantially improved key institutional functions, and even CSOs with comparatively smaller changes improved their scores by 30 to 50 percent.¹⁴

Anecdotally, staff from LTPs and CSOs credit MENTOR with substantial improvements observed in the technical aspects of CSOs' work. In particular, the project's cascading approach in which LTPs institutionalized capacity strengthening and shared this knowledge and experience with the nascent CSOs they support.

Several CSOs noted that they document activities more thoroughly now and that their information and data is more organized and accessible. By developing and using manuals, CSO staff have learned how to regulate internal relations in a way that transcends the actual individuals.

Consistent with improved CSO capacity assessment scores, staff from CSOs commented that they greatly improved their management and financial practices. Staff highlighted improved policies, procedures, accounting, and use of software in particular.

Key MENTOR activities seem to be critical to the project's overall effectiveness and efficiency:

- Adapting and tailoring capacity strengthening resources identified through the mapping exercise and developing a foundational curriculum framework helped the project quickly

¹³ A follow-up midpoint assessment is slated for December 2015. Those data were not final as of the time of writing.

¹⁴ These results are consistent with observations from CRS' 2010-2014 Jerusalem West Bank and Gaza Civic Participation Project (CPP); namely that the change between baseline and endline capacity assessments tend to be smaller when baselines are relatively high.

start capacity strengthening efforts and to work more efficiently throughout the project without forcing participants into a one-size-fits-all approach.

- Because many participating organizations lacked robust financial systems or skills, MENTOR's provision of financial software and training are important interventions among nascent CSOs.

LEARNING QUESTION 2

Are MENTOR's capacity strengthening investments sustainable and/or scalable, particularly in terms of cascading capacity improvements from CRS to LTPs to CSOs?

By definition, the ultimate sustainability of capacity strengthening improvements gained under MENTOR will not be measurable for some time; however preliminary data gathered suggest that MENTOR participants have or are developing some qualities that correlate with longer-term effect.

- The strong relationships with and early involvement of LTPs in MENTOR have helped to cultivate USJ and TAMSS ownership in the project's capacity strengthening efforts.
- Similarly, organizational commitment from participating CSOs helped ensure that each capacity strengthening participant was fully engaged in the process.
- The reported (by both LTPs and CSOs) institutionalization of new skills and systems will help ensure that improved capacity withstands staff turnover or other common organizational changes.



Facilitating a session with the Lebanon Eco Movement, an environmental CSO. Photo by Lebanon Eco Movement.

Certain approaches appeared to be particularly important in ensuring ownership, commitment, and institutionalization of capacity strengthening conducted under MENTOR:

- Early engagement and heavy involvement of LTPs in most aspects of MENTOR implementation;
- Application process required of CSOs seeking to participate in MENTOR; and
- Extensive shadowing/accompaniment between LTP staff and CRS counterparts, and between LTP staff and members of participating CSOs.

Interviewees from CRS, LTPs, and CSOs suggested some longer-term factors that might affect sustainability as well:

- Full-time staff and opportunities for future funding (to include more robust, proactive business development practices) would help make both LTPs more sustainable.
- USJ's Mentor Unit—currently overseen by two schools within the university—could benefit from more streamlined management.
- Further capacity strengthening in non-administrative topics (e.g., social work, communication) could further benefit participating CSOs.
- As nascent CSOs mature, they could provide peer support to other organizations and/or form networks of complementary CSOs.¹⁵

LEARNING QUESTION 3

What KSAs are needed to effectively facilitate capacity strengthening work?

LTP and CSO interviewees noted their appreciation for technical knowledge and resources (e.g., high-quality training materials or adaptable policy manuals). However, the relationships among and attitudes of CRS, USJ and TAMSS, and participating CSOs were overwhelmingly referenced as prerequisites to successful capacity strengthening.

While recognizing that CRS was responsible for managing the MENTOR grant and liaising with the donor, USJ and TAMSS representatives interviewed stressed CRS' modesty and humility. Interviewees described a culture that ensured there were "no stupid questions" and that the daily work and progress of the partners was acknowledged. CRS staff were open to feedback and willing to learn from the LTPs, keeping the partnership mutual and collaborative.

CSOs provided similar reflections of LTP attitudes. In the partners' words, it was more important to listen and find solutions together, rather than to know every technical answer. The LTPs were easily reachable and supportive, "even in the last minute," said CSO staff. Like CRS, they fostered an open environment that encouraged trust and asking questions.

¹⁵ These are possible directions for a CSO, not a prescribed organizational evolution.

LEARNING QUESTION 4

What (if anything) is unique in a partnership between a Catholic academic institution and a Catholic international development NGO?

Established in 1943, CRS is an extension of the US Catholic Bishops Conference and includes 5,000 staff in nearly 100 countries. The Jesuits established USJ in Lebanon in 1875 and the university boasts more than 1,800 faculty and 11,000 students. Both organizations are part of the global Catholic Church structure and are highly respected in their areas of expertise. While CRS and USJ share a profound Catholic identity, their spheres—the academic and NGO/development worlds—can differ dramatically.

While partnering with an established university presented unique challenges, it was an overall beneficial experience for both parties. For example, CRS frequently will encourage a young partner organization to develop its financial systems to absorb additional funding or reinforce accountability, but this approach is not appropriate for an institution as complex and well-established as USJ. Instead, CRS and USJ acknowledged that while the existing financial systems satisfied the university's existing needs, they did not comply with the stringent USG requirements of the MENTOR grant and certain modifications had to be made. However, CRS' depth of experience working with civil society was highly complementary to USJ's pedagogical excellence, bringing operational understanding to academic study, and the CRS and USJ team worked closely to ensure a financial system that satisfied all parties in order not to compromise the positive working relationship.

Interviewees at CRS and USJ also reflected positively on the novelty of the partnership and noted that while perspectives did not always naturally align, differences allowed for a sort of fusion between CRS' pragmatic, performance-driven approach, and USJ's deep and nuanced understanding of Lebanese society and well-established base of technical expertise:

- Interviewees saw that the Mentor Unit could move toward a business model while still leveraging its academic perspective and rigor to more effectively interface with and empower Lebanese civil society institutions.
- CRS' perspective as an NGO and working with NGOs, helped USJ better understand the realities faced on the ground by the nascent CSOs they support.
- USJ's emphasis on theory and pedagogy provided checks and balances to a donor-driven NGO approach.

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY DETAIL

The following methodology details are drawn from the assessors' scope of work from December 2014/January 2015.

LEARNING QUESTION 1

How *effective* (promotes change) and *efficient* (advantageous cost and returns ratio) is the capacity strengthening model implemented in MENTOR?

PROPOSED/ PROXY INDICATORS	SOURCE DOCUMENT(S)	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	POSSIBLE OUTPUT(S)
Milestones of the project	Project design Quarterly reports In-depth conversation with CRS staff (i.e., Ramzi Hage, Yousra Taleb and Ziad Mounayer)	What are the major milestones of this project? Were there unplanned events that were positively significant for the implementation of this project? What were the unexpected setbacks? How did you overcome them?	Annotated chronology of events (infographic) Video/audio recorded interview
Principal capacity strengthening activities/ initiatives defining the approach	Project design Quarterly reports In-depth conversation with CRS staff (i.e., Ramzi Hage, Yousra Taleb and Ziad Mounayer)		Detailed description of main CS initiatives Video recorded interview(s) Highlights of the differences between how the two institutions have approached the CS initiative
Costs incurred/ investments in capacity strengthening	Financial data on project implementation		A comprehensive account of the expenses incurred on each individual CS initiative implemented.
Indicators of institutional growth of the two principal partners and the first round of partner nascent CSOs	Granted that a final list of indicators need to be defined with relevant stakeholders. Existing data will be utilized on the illustrative following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased diversified funding; • increased diversified programs; • stronger financial systems; • higher levels of retention and increased staff diversity <p>If data is not existing, it will be generated through conversations with the two partners.</p>		A list of indicators of institutional change, supported by evidence will be gathered to provide evidence on the effect of the CS initiatives implemented.
Cost savings/ efficiencies gained by having an office in one location with two outreach countries	Indicators to capture these efficiencies need to be identified with involved stakeholders.		

LEARNING QUESTION 2

Are MENTOR’s capacity strengthening investments sustainable and/or scalable, particularly in terms of cascading capacity improvements from CRS to LTPs to CSOs?

PROPOSED INDICATORS	SOURCE DOCUMENT(S)	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	POSSIBLE OUTPUT(S)
Capacity spillover effect from the lead partners to the nascent CSOs working with them	<p>Some of these indicators may already be identified in the project design. If so, data on those can be used.</p> <p>If there are no existing indicators on this domain of change, new ones will be generated in conversation with country program and partners.</p> <p>In-depth conversation with relevant stakeholders.</p>		Video recorded interview(s)
Preliminary data on changes in the lives of beneficiaries (i.e., CRS two major partners their own partners beneficiaries)	Baseline data on changes in lives of beneficiaries		

LEARNING QUESTION 3

What KSAs are needed to effectively facilitate capacity strengthening work?

PROPOSED INDICATORS	SOURCE DOCUMENT(S)	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	POSSIBLE OUTPUT(S)
KSAs relevant to CS	In-depth conversations with CRS and partners staff on what KSA (as outlined in the Institute for Capacity Strengthening's learning framework) has proved to make a positive difference in the implementation of this project.	<p>What are the knowledge, skills and attitudes of CRS staff, that made the most difference in your institutional growth? [guiding question for Leading Training Partners (LTPs)]</p> <p>What are the knowledge, skills and attitudes that served you best in your capacity strengthening work with nascent CSOs? [guiding question for LTPs]</p> <p>What are the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the staff of LTPs that made the most difference in your institutional growth? [guiding question for CSOs]</p>	Video recorded interview(s) with representatives of CRS, LTPs, and selected CSOs
	Record qualitative accounts (in-depth interviews) on some of the failures and breakdowns of this project (CRS with principal partners; and principal partners with their CSOs), and if/how they were resolved.	<p>Can you identify a moment of difficulty/breakdown in the capacity strengthening relationship with CRS/ LTP?</p> <p>What do you think caused that breakdown?</p> <p>Was it overcome? If yes, how? What was learned from it?</p>	

LEARNING QUESTION 4

What (if anything) is unique in an institutional partnership between a Catholic academic institution and a Catholic international development NGO?

PROPOSED INDICATORS	SOURCE DOCUMENT(S)	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	POSSIBLE OUTPUT(S)
Two different types of local institutions (i.e., university; consortium; national NGO):	In-depth conversation with CRS staff (i.e., Ramzi Hage, Yousra Taleb and Ziad Mounayer)	<p>How have different institutional characteristics featured differently in the program?</p> <p>How might different institutions have different CS needs?</p> <p>Does the type of institution influence the effectiveness of the model and if so, how?</p> <p>Is it better to partner with a university or other types of partners in terms of effectiveness?</p>	<p>Video recorded interview(s)</p> <p>Note that this area of inquiry will address some of the interest the GHR foundation has on understanding the collaboration/partnership between a Catholic university and a Catholic NGO</p>
	Record qualitative accounts (in-depth interviews) on some of the failures and breakdowns of this project (CRS with principal partners; and principal partners with their CSOs), and if/how they were resolved.	<p>Can you identify a moment of difficulty/breakdown in the capacity strengthening relationship with CRS/LTP?</p> <p>What do you think caused that breakdown?</p> <p>Was it overcome? If yes, how? What was learned from it?</p>	

ANNEX 2: INTERVIEWEES

CRS

- Ramzi Hage, Program Manager
- Yousra Taleb, Program Officer
- Ziad Mounayer, Finance Officer

USJ Mentor Unit (LTP)

- Dr. Hilda Bayramian, Faculty Member and Project Manager
- Dr. Tony Gibeily, Dean of the Business School
- Maryse Tannous Jomaa, Dean of School of Social work
- Nora Dacchade, Vice- Project manager
- Imad Achkar, Financial Officer USJ, Mentor Unit
- Syla Abadjian, Program Officer USJ, Mentor Unit
- Mr. Zaher Roustom, Administrative Officer USJ, Mentor Unit

Nascent CSOs, Lebanon

- CDDG-Dbayeh (partner grantee)
- Pierre El Haddad, President of the board, SEPT
- Chabiebeh Sporting Club (group discussion)
- Phenix Group Homes (group discussion)
- International Institute of Debate (group discussion)
- Global Forum for Religious and Humanity (group discussion)

TAMSS (LTP)

- Wassila Jedidi, Financial and accounting officer
- Fathi Neji, project officer
- Darine Hadj Hassine, MENTOR Project Manager
- Chema Gargouri, Founder and President
- Lylia Haddad, Program Director

Nascent CSOs, Tunisia

- AHK, El Kef (group discussion)
- Femmes et Progres, El Kef (group discussion)
- Association Speleologie et d escalade Zaghouane (group discussion)
- Association des Diabetiques de Zaghouan (group discussion)

ANNEX 3: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ANNEX 4: PARTICIPATING CSO DETAIL (COHORTS 1 AND 2)

TUNISIA

NAME	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	FIELD OF ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF STAFF/ VOLUNTEERS
1000 volontaires	2012	Social development	250
ARAA	2012	Citizenship/human rights	20
Association 3 A	2012	Children	2
Association ACG	2011	Community care	10
Association Acte Théâtral	2012	Art advocacy	12
Association AFAK De Développement Et De Bienfaisance		Development - Handcraft	5
Association caritative farha	2011	Social, health, educational and cultural areas	14
Association de développement SraWerten	2011	Community development	40
Association de promotion de l'églantier à Zaghouan	2012	Culture	
Association de sensibilisation des femmes rurales	2013	Rural women	300
Association d'encadrement et de soutien des entrepreneurs AESE	2011	Entrepreneurship/Women	5
Association des Amis d'Althiburos	2011	History/archeology	9
Association des arts pour le cinema et le theatre du kef	2011	Culture	25
Association des Femmes pour la Protection de la Famille de Jebéniana.	2011	To protect the family from the dangers that threaten it by raising awareness of crime and domestic violence. To raise awareness among women of their rights in the society and their role in the family, and encourage them to be more active. Teach culture to the kids Lobby other members of the civil society for constitutionalizing women's and men's rights.	26
Association des habitants d'el Mourouj 2	1989, stop & resume in 2011	Active citizenship /habitat/ human development	25
Ass devloppement durable			20
Association el ATAA	2012	Women/youth	20
Association El Hamama Jelma	2012	Intervention in all areas Sidi Bouzid	100
Association femme el fateh pour culture et développement maknessy	2013	Civilization, culture, development	11
Association Femmes et progrès	2011	Women/youth	6
Association Femme & Progrès +	2011	Women/citizenship	10

Association femmes rurales : choix et décision pour promouvoir le développement	2014	Rights and freedom advocacy	57
Association Horizons El Kef pour le développement intégral	2011	Social/ citizenship	20
Association insaf elkef	2011	Community development	15
Association le regard de l'enfant	2011	Children/education	15
Association locale des diplômés du supérieurs en chômage d'elhencha	2011	Jobs creation, entrepreneurship	7
Association Méditerranéenne D'Arts & Culture	2012	Culture	28
Association Mondiale de Volontariat Tunis	2011	Community care	50
Association pontes Tunisie	2011	Community development	6
Association Tunisienne de protection de la nature et de l'environnement Zaghouan	2012	Environment	10
Association Tunisienne pour le développement et la coopération internationale ATDCI	2011	Advocacy	37
Association Victoire pour Femme Rurale	2011	Human rights and citizenship development Training, equipment, health	12
Ass Paradis vie (fardaws elhayet)		Charity and development	50
Centre les aventuriers pour le développement de la société civile	2012	Strengthening women's capacities Leadership development for youth in difficult circumstances Development of managerial capacities of civil society leaders To implement eco-citizenship	32
Chabeb Gafsa		Social development	30
Citoyenneté gafsa		Citizenship / human rights	6
Conseil jeune leaders	2013	Youth empowerment/citizenship	6
Diabetique	2011	HSealth	6
Droits et libertés	2014	Rights and freedom advocacy	10

El Nada		Social development	53
Ettajdid théâtre	2012	Human rights; development; culture; human development and social work	42
Generations Futures	2012	Human rights /advocacy	14
Inma Gafsa	2012	Human rights, development, culture, human development and social work.	48
Machhad Culturel		Art advocacy	25
Organisation des jeune leaders Sidi Bouzid		Citizenship, capacity building	15
Organisation mondiale pour l'environnement, le développement et les droits de l'homme		Environment, development, human rights	45
Sawt el maraa kalaat sinan	2012	Women/child	6
Sawty	2011	Advocacy/citizenship	130
Sawty gafsa	2011	Political awakening, leadership and citizenship	95
Sawty Jbenyana	2012	Political awakening, leadership and citizenship	30
Sfax El Mezyena	2011	Environment Eco-citizenship Youth involvement in the beautification and cleanliness of Sfax	60
Taysir		Environment	10
Terre et Progrès	2014	To protect the environment in Metlaoui and to maintain the cleanliness of places To raise public awareness and public interest in environmental issues. To revive the spirit of solidarity in the community. To provide social protection, education and health services to beneficiaries	51
The Munathara Initiative	2012	Advocacy/ citizenship	9
Tunisia Debates Association	2013	Presentation, debating and argumentation techniques workshops Youth and cultural exchange. Debating competitions at the international, regional and national levels	55
Union de jeunes sans Frontières Tunis	2011		50
Voix d'ève			12
WeYouth Tunisie	2012	Leadership Youth Coaching Projects Awareness and citizenship	16
Wafa blé Houdoud		Environment	8

LEBANON

NGO NAME	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	FIELD OF ACTIVITY	BOARD MEMBERS	MEMBERS	FULL-TIME STAFF UNTIL END OF 2014	PART-TIME STAFF UNTIL END OF 2014	VOLUNTEERS UNTIL END OF 2014
نيكمت مدعدي عجمج يفكلا يف ءارملا	2010	Women: Social justice and equality	0	28	0	0	62
رتي بوج ءي عجمج يحي ايسلا ءامنا لال	2003	Tourism,environment, culture,education	9	35	0	0	64
دلح ءالا ءي عجمج ءالماعلل يئاسنلا لامشلا يف	2009	Women and youth	4	31	0	1	50
A Positive Way	2013	Social work, awareness, trainings, charity work	6	0	0	0	15
Al Ershad El Kanouni wal Ijtima3i	2015	Advocacy and legal counseling, volunteering, citizenship education, human rights	12	25	0	1	25
Al Hannan Association for the disabled	2003	Disability: education	7	25	17	5	0
Al Irtika2 bil Ata2	2013	Human development, education, assistance to needy	5	6	0	0	11
Ard el Toufoula, Shajar Wa bachar committee	2000	Human development, environment awareness, citizenship, peacebuilding, etc.	7	25	3	5	100
Association Nabad for Development	2013	Citizenship education, human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance, vocational training	7	25	5	3	50
Beltezim	2011	Civic education and awareness	5	0	0	0	15
Centre for Development, Democracy and Governance	2010	Rural community development including agriculture	5	14	2	4	8
Chabibeh Sporting Club	2002	Sport and education for youth	9	46	0	8	25
Global forum for religions and humanity	2005	Capacity building, women's empowerment, inter-religious dialogue, national reconciliation, promotion of values of peace and diversity, human rights	5	0	0	5	100
Kalimat: Al Jam3iya al loubnania li tanmyat al koudourat	2011	Scientific education, educational difficulties, robotics	7	22	1	8	5
Kouloub min Nour	2008	Disability: education	5	28	6	4	15

Lamsat Wared	2015	Psychosocial support, human development	4	0	0	0	100
Lebanese Active Youth	2013	Child protection, psychosocial support, women's empowerment, education, vocational training, awareness	5	4	4	17	50
Lebanese Center For Active Citizenship	2006	Civic engagement	5	12	3	2	32
Lebanese Developers	2008	Livelihoods, vocational training, safety over the internet (advocacy, research and awareness)	6	20	1	1	25
Lebanon Eco Movement	2012	Environment	13	60	1	0	5
Lebanon Love Association	2008	Conflict resolution and peace building, especially with youth from Jabal Mohsen and Tabani, and vocational training	6	10	3	4	75
Marsa Sexual Health Center	2010	Medical sexual health services	4	0	2	11	2
Min... Ila	2013	Citizenship	8	8	0	0	8
Nusroto association	2005	Drug rehabilitation	2	20			
Phenix Group Homes	2011	People with special needs : mental disabilities/Inclusion	6	20	8	3	3
SEPT Save Energy Plant Trees	2010	Environmental awareness-culture and dialogue	5	50	0	0	50
SMILE Save Many Innocent Lives Everyday Together	2010	Youth volunteerism and social awareness	7	50	1	1	1545
Success and Happiness	2008	Awareness raising on child abuse, women's empowerment, child protection, youth education, sustainable development	5	13	2	18	31
The Nawaya Network	2012	Youth empowerment	6	7	3	1	20
Together for a safe childhood	2009	Child protection (from abuse, harassment), psychosocial support in case of emergency	7	5	0	2	15
Volunteers Without Borders	2009	Promote volunteering, citizenship education, advocacy, human sustainable development, reconciliation	12	50	0	1	100

