IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS IN PALESTINIAN GATHERINGS HOST COMMUNITIES

Evaluation Report

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Prepared and Submitted by Cosette Maiky

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I hope that this evaluation does justice to all that has been accomplished and provides guidance for the work that is yet to be done.

**Cosette Maiky**

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDP, the KFW, the Government of Japan or the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

# List of Acronyms

**BUS** Basic Urban Services

**GWG** Gatherings Working Group

**MOM** Minutes of Meeting

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organization

**PARD** Popular Aid for Relief and Development

**PC** Popular Committee

**PT** Project Team

**PRL** Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

**PRS** Palestinian Refugees from Syria

**TOR** Terms of Reference

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**UNRWA** United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

**WASH** Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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# Executive Summary

UNDP project “Improving Living Conditions in Palestinian Gatherings Host Communities: Towards More Comprehensive and Sustainable Solutions”, funded by KFW, the Government of Japan and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) in 2015, aims at providing more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to improve living conditions in the Palestinian Gatherings host communities in Lebanon, focusing on the living environment (basic urban services, hygiene and shelter).

The evaluation report reflects findings of an evaluation which was conducted in May-June 2016, according to a qualitative methodology which included five phases: inception phase, desk phase, field phase, synthesis phase and feedback/dissemination phase. The exercise comprised five Focus Group discussions (FGDs), five site visits, and a series of interviews, covering up to 120 persons who represent UNDP staff, stakeholders, UNDP main partners, and direct beneficiaries. For the purpose of this evaluation, up to one hundred documents and websites were consulted.

The project has, in general, been marked by outstanding achievements, given its particular context conditions and timing of implementation and the constraints it has faced. Most of the answers to the evaluation questions with which we carried out the present exercise were positive.

The specific objectives of the project: 1) Linking relief response to longer-term sustainable development of the living environment in Palestinian Gatherings; 2) Strengthening the resilience of original host refugee communities and improving living conditions for new refugees from Syria in the Gatherings; and 3) Reducing tensions through addressing both host and new refugees in the Gatherings and engaging local actors and local authorities, appeared to be reachable and achievable goals in 2015.

Despite sporadic episodes of violence in specific areas, the project’s achievements included the timely, adequate, equitable and continuous delivery of services and improvement of existing ones, and the creation of new ones, in response to the needs that emerged due to the prevailing crisis. As evidenced in the course of the present evaluation, the project has prompted direct changes in beneficiaries’ lives.

**Main Findings**

The main findings of the Evaluation could be summarized by the following and is further explored throughout the report:

Relevance

Both the quantitative and qualitative data lends credence to the contention that the UNDP implemented interventions were relevant to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries, as well as aligned with the overall objectives and priorities of the overarching strategic planning documents, i.e. UNDP Country Programme, as well as the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP, 2015-2016). This has manifested at different levels with growing convergence, namely, resilience and social cohesion, institutions’ capacity and legitimacy, as well as conflict drivers and root causes.

Effectiveness/Efficiency

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected by the evaluator indicated that the various initiatives implemented in 2015 were effective at timely and accurately achieving the desired results. Under the different components, effective practices of PT members which remarkably contributed to the achievement of the project in 2015 included among others gender mainstreaming measures, participatory/inclusive approaches, protection measures, capacity building of local partners, women empowerment, etc. Taking into consideration the number of beneficiaries reached and the overall impact of the infrastructure and capacity building interventions of UNDP under the different components, empirical evidence indicates that the programme has been cost effective and efficient.

Sustainability/Impact

It is most probably difficult to answer at this stage whether the project has eventually led to better long-term impact for the affected communities. At the community level, majority of respondents acknowledge the comparative and competitive advantage of UNDP in local communities. The positive way both the project and the implementing Agency were perceived prevailed in respondents’ discourse, as well as local leaders’ collated statements. At the individual level, depending on one’s definition of “change”, as well as varying contexts, majority of statements avowed that “change” has been the fundamental achievement of the project.

Project Design and Management

The incremental increase in demand necessitated the scale-up of operations and a corresponding increase of operations and monitoring staff, which was well-achieved by the PT. The PT members’ personalities and ethical attitudes as well as their work behavior and the excellent relationships they created with all actors have tremendously contributed to the positive perception of UNDP in local communities, even the most underprivileged ones.

Stakeholders Participation and Ownership

The PT has managed to establish intensive cooperation with many of the essential stakeholders in the country. Overall, results showed that the project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘community ownership’. Of utmost importance was the participation of local communities; i.e. representatives of municipalities, PCs, CBOs, women groups, youth groups as well as local NGOs.

**Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned were suggested based on the answers to evaluation questions and associated findings set out above.

1. The project succeeded in linking local development issues to humanitarian response and answered immediate needs while upgrading the living conditions of local communities in a durable manner.
2. The project has successfully contributed to addressing grievances that followed violent conflicts (i.e. Nahr El Bared and Ain El Helwe); and has laid the foundations for collaboration with local authorities.
3. UNDP’s ability to deliver a highly satisfactory level of assistance relied essentially on several factors: vast operational presence of UNDP in Gatherings all over Lebanon with an outstanding reputation in local communities, the availability of funding for response, the Organization’s efforts to strengthen protection activities for Palestinian refugees, and the continuous presence of the PT members to oversee and control the operations in the field, under the most challenging circumstances.
4. In order to mitigate circumstances emerging from the evolving situation, UNDP adopted new management/institutional support modalities to address institutional capacity constraints including among others: increased capacity building efforts, short-term assignments and adjusted working schedules.
5. In the course of the project, UNDP managed to sustain accountability and transparency through quality control tools to maintain oversight on implementation and expenditure.
6. UNDP has contributed to improved capacity of local partners to adequately manage service networks, mitigate, implement and report.
7. UNDP has increased its outreach capacities to reach the most vulnerable/underserved and conflict affected Palestine refugees.
8. The project’s contribution to positive/critical changes in vulnerable populations’ lives has been highly successful on short to medium term at grassroots level.
9. In all evaluated support sectors, sustainability prospects were well reflected at ‘grassroots’ levels.
10. The working relationships established between the PT and PCs have demonstrated high effectiveness; the PT adopted an inclusive and transparent approach without compromising the neutrality, impartiality and professional/technical standards of interventions.
11. The project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘community ownership’.
12. The project has integrated cross-cutting issues such as child protection, gender equality, protection, poverty alleviation, and disability and human rights to various degrees in policy, planning and implementation phases.

**Recommendations**

The recommended interventions were offered according to the parameters of this evaluation. While many of the recommendations are categorized headings or descriptors, they should not be seen as free-standing or mutually exclusive. The recommendations below should not be read in rank order, as many should be carried out concurrently.

1. **Results measurement and accountability.** While the PT members’ archived reports of implementation measurement (input/output) have been fully compliant with designed budgets, work plans and schedules, new technologies could be introduced to involve staff on results measurement at the intermediate outcome and long-term impact level; i.e. use of tools such as social media, questionnaires or e-survey links to assess the improvement of living conditions/quality of life (before and after intervention), the way individuals and/or local communities perceived a selected level of action, etc.
2. **Consolidation of a common understanding of how such projects would contribute to crisis prevention and peacebuilding.** After conducting robust and participatory conflict analysis, successor similar projects could be built on clearly defined theories of change, where areas of intervention are defined as entry points to deliver conflict prevention and peacebuilding results.
3. **Coherence of comprehensive intervention strategies between UNDP and relevant stakeholders.** It is recommended that UNDP keep on the level of coordination, communication, and partnership with various sectoral working groups, so as to develop clear strategies to bridge between emergency, recovery, rehabilitation and long term relief.
4. **Dissemination of success stories.** UNDP should build on its existing communication capacitiesto broaden dissemination of success stories and information sharing.
5. **Vulnerability Assessment.** UNDP could strengthen its equity-based approach early in the design phases by considering the assessment of vulnerabilities at the scale of all Palestinian Gatherings, thus ensuring coverage to the most vulnerable.

# Introduction

In 2003, the Fafo report defined Palestinian Gatherings as “informal settlements constituting relatively homogenous refugee communities, such as smaller villages or households living in the same multi-story residential buildings”. This definition was first introduced by Fafo to indicate locations outside the camps that accommodate groups of Palestinian Refugees. According to the report, a Gathering “has a population of Palestinian refugees, including Palestinian refugees who are registered with UNRWA and/or the Lebanese government or are not registered”; “has a population with a sense of being a distinct group living in a geographically identifiable area”; “has no official UNRWA camp status or any other legal authority identified with responsibility for camp management” and “is expected to have clearly defined humanitarian and protection needs, or have a minimum of 25 households”.

According to UNRWA-AUB survey published in 2016, 37% of PRL (260,000 - 280,000) as well as 45% of PRS (counted at 42,189) live outside camps[[1]](#footnote-1). Similarly, almost half the number of Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) living in Lebanon is living in the Gatherings[[2]](#footnote-2).

In addition to the 12 official Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon, a total of 42 Palestinian Gatherings are distributed along the regions of Lebanon, housing Palestinian refugees in the South (Tyre and Saida), North, Beirut and Beqaa. Being informal areas, Palestinian Gatherings remain excluded from national strategies or local development plans. The forty-two Gatherings fall under the municipal domain of twenty-five municipalities; however, municipalities in general do not intervene to provide basic urban services or improve the physical environment in these areas. The lack of municipal intervention is attributed to a number of reasons mainly: lack of financial resources; the security situation in the Gatherings mainly adjacent to camps; and most importantly misconceptions that the Gatherings are served by UNRWA.

As for UNRWA, while it provides education, health and social services to all Palestinian refugees in Lebanon irrespective of their location; services related to Basic Urban Services (BUS) mainly sanitation and hygiene are bounded to the 12 officially recognized Palestinian camps. Alternatively, dwellers in the 42 Gatherings resort to a number of informal self-help initiatives to access and maintain BUS. While these informal practices that are affordable to dwellers ensure their access to some services, the services themselves are inadequate, insufficient and characterized by huge gaps and shortfalls. In addition, they are ultimately connected in an ad-hoc manner to the surrounding municipal networks or to the camps’ networks in the case of Gatherings that are adjacent to camps; however, no coordination mechanisms exist between the actors. Since 2012 and with the increased influx of Palestinian and Syrian refugees from Syria, the conditions of the living environment in the Gatherings have been dramatically worsening.

# Project Description

UNDP project “Improving Living Conditions in Palestinian Gatherings Host Communities: Towards More Comprehensive and Sustainable Solutions”, funded by KFW, the Government of Japan and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) in 2015 aims at providing more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to improve living conditions in the Palestinian Gatherings host communities in Lebanon, focusing on the living environment (Basic Urban Services, hygiene and shelter).

The project has the following objectives:

* Linking relief response to longer-term sustainable development of the living environment in Palestinian Gatherings;
* Strengthening the resilience of original host refugee communities and improving living conditions for new refugees from Syria in the Gatherings;
* Reducing tensions through addressing both host and new refugees in the Gatherings and engaging local actors and local authorities.

The project has the following outputs:

* **Output 1:** Provide environmentally and economically sustainable systems of basic urban services (including WASH) in the Gatherings.
* **Output 2:** Improve hygiene conditions for host and new refugee communities in the Gatherings.
* **Output 3:** Develop a national coordination and information sharing platform for response and development in Palestinian Gatherings.

# Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

The overall objective of the exercise was to assess the overall project contribution to improving living conditions in Palestinian Gatherings, responding to the needs escalated by the crisis; as well as to enhancing communication and coordination between local communities and the concerned municipalities and other actors, over the course of 2015. Of utmost importance was the assessment of the sustainability of interventions and the project attempt to bridge relief to longer-term development in the Gatherings. This evaluation report explicitly does not aim at providing a comprehensive progress report on the projects or on all the activities that have been carried out. If reference is made to individual activities this is mainly to serve as illustrations of observations made.

The specific objectives of the exercise were as follows:

* Determine the overall status of the project and the achievement of its intended objectives;
* Review and evaluate the approaches and processes set in place by the project;
* Identify lessons learned at the national and local levels;
* Provide recommendations to consolidate and sustain results.

# Methodology of the Evaluation

In accordance with the TOR and based upon the methodology developed in consultation with the Project Team, this evaluation exercise included five phases:

**Inception Phase.** Focusing of the evaluation by proposing evaluation questions and description of the main thrust of the methodological design including the strategy of analysis and detailed work plan.

**Desk Phase.** Finalization of evaluation questions and initial collection of evidence, first analysis and formulation of elements of answers and hypotheses.

**Field Phase.** Collection of additional information in the field leading to validation or refutation of hypotheses formulated during the desk phase.

**Synthesis Phase.** Bringing the results of the desk phase and Field Phase together in the final report.

**Feedback and Dissemination Phase.** Presentation of the results to UNDP team subsequent to which the final report was produced taking into account comments expressed at the presentation.

# Evaluation Questions

The evaluation has been based on a limited number of questions covering the following evaluation criteria: *relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.* For the specific purposes of this evaluation, the relative meaningfulness of the selected criteria was assessed and trade-offs discussed in each case to ensure that key questions were addressed and to avoid unnecessary effort. The main principles of the evaluation questions included levels of action and chain of results, outcomes and impacts.

Accordingly, the findings were grouped in the following key areas:

1. **Achievement of Project**: The extent to which overall project objectives and outputs/results were achieved;
2. **Project Design and Management**: The management processes used throughout project implementation;
3. **Stakeholder Participation and Ownership**: Networks and partnerships in support of project implementation and the degree of national and/or local ownership developed;
4. **Sustainability**: Key actions that were put in place to ensure sustainability of project outcomes.
5. **Lessons Learned**: The main managerial and institutional lessons that were learned and which can be applied to other projects.

# 

# Data Collection

Desk Phase – secondary data collection and review

In the course of elaboration of the desk study, the following tasks were achieved:

* Collection of information and documentation on the project;
* Interviews in person, by telephone/skype and by email with UNDP staff to discuss the strategy and programming of the evaluation;
* Analysis of available information and preparation of hypotheses and preliminary answers to evaluation questions which were meant to be tested during the Field Phase.

Field Phase – primary data collection

The Field Phase took place between May and June 2016, and was essentially devolved to collect additional information and appreciation of realities/specificities of the country context thus testing all hypotheses formulated during the desk phase. During this phase, the ethical safeguards were: protection of confidentiality, protection of rights, dignity and welfare of respondents (especially women and persons with disabilities), informed consent, constructive and transparent feedback to respondents and control procedures to shape the mechanism of the Evaluator and accompanying team).

Data Reliability and Analysis

Reliable data and information was essential for preparation of reliable findings and conclusions. Thus we built on primary (FGDs and interviews) and secondary (progress/interim reports and relevant documentation) sources wherever possible to cross check and triangulate different data collection techniques in order to assemble a body of relevant information to the highest possible levels of confidence and accuracy.

Difficulties and Limitations

During the course of the evaluation various issues and constraints have arisen which can be described as follows:

* **Quality in qualitative methods.** Based on the nature of qualitative methods, the evaluator uncovered objective and valid facts by following clear procedures, which included careful documentation of empirical/repetitive phenomena, impartial and logical argumentation, and objective analysis. In order to assure that the interviewee understood the questions in the way intended, the researcher used whenever possible at least two means of investigation (structured and unstructured). Answers generated were sorted/categorized and collated through ordering empirical perceptions and observations with regard to their similarity (or dissimilarity). However, the significance of the observations remains limited to the lifespan of the project, and the evaluation’s results context-bound and limited to the moment of production.
* **The prevailing security situation limited access to the field.** Although planned to take place along with field trips to different areas of catchment, the trip to the Adjacent Areas to Ain el Helwe Camp had to be interrupted and the evaluator returned to base due to the prevailing security situation. Respondents and interviewees were approached through phone calls.

# Methodology

The evaluation methodology adopted in this evaluation was guided by the latest draft of the UNDP Outcome-Level Evaluation Handbook and the UNDP Project Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Accordingly, the following methods of data collection were applied:

* **Review and analysis of documents:** Project documents, various documents including TORs, BOQs and Grant Agreements, narrative and financial progress reports, Mapping and Rapid Need Assessment documents, donor reports and evaluation reports.
* **Interviews and Focus Group Discussions[[3]](#footnote-3):** Between May and June 2016, the external evaluator organized 5 Focus Group discussions (FGDs), 5 site visits, and a series of interviews, covering up to 120 persons. These included but were not limited to: UNDP staff members, stakeholders such as other UN agencies, municipalities, local community leaders, local NGOs, PCs as well as direct beneficiaries.

# Main Findings

The PT successfully achieved outputs versus planned figures against the initial logical framework. In 2015, the project reached 55,000 dwellers in Palestinian Gatherings across Lebanon, including 38,500 PRL, 11,000 PRS and 5,500 other (mainly Lebanese dwellers and Syrian Refugees). The project team has built on the consolidation of earlier interventions and results[[4]](#footnote-4) to select specific and strategic interventions, and succeeded in maximizing the impact on the ground through making the best use out of human and financial resources.

Despite the sporadic deterioration of the political and security situation in many areas (notably the Adjacent Areas to Ain El Helwe Camp), through adequate mitigations, the PT managed to engage local stakeholders at all stages of the project cycle (from needs assessment, design, up to evaluation of outcomes). Precisely, strong working relationships with Palestinian PCs[[5]](#footnote-5), other local committees, women groups, youth groups, CBOs, local NGOs and children groups have greatly helped in building direct and trustworthy communication channels with local communities and beneficiaries and, consequently, appropriately identifying the needs of the neediest population. On the other hand, local authorities essentially represented by municipalities have been adequately involved in the different stages of the project cycle, which ensured smooth implementation, especially for infrastructure initiatives.

Overall, through the adoption of a participatory approach, the project succeeded in reinforcing responsibility sharing among actors at all stages of implementation.

Relevance

In terms of facilitating the process of defining the actual needs of the targeted beneficiaries during 2015, the evaluator has found that UNDP has succeeded in this regard. With regards to *Output 1 and Output 2,* mapping and definition of needs have been adequately established and validated by the PT via several channels, which included among others: case studies, needs assessments, case documentation, and validation of information and suggestions shared by local stakeholders.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data lends credence to the contention that the UNDP implemented interventions were relevant to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries, as well as aligned with the overall objectives and priorities of the overarching strategic planning documents, i.e. UNDP Country Programme, as well as the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP, 2015-2016). This has manifested at different levels with growing convergence, namely, resilience and social cohesion, institutions’ capacity and legitimacy, as well as conflict drivers and root causes. As demonstrated, in targeted communities, which are mostly emerging from violence (at various levels), UNDP initiatives have been developed and implemented to target the needs of vulnerable Palestinian refugees as well as the impacted communities in surrounding areas as well.

As for the national coordination and information sharing in *Output 3*, the Gatherings Working Group was perceived by most partners as relevant and effective, having for instance engaged in one event up to 50 local actors from all Gatherings in Lebanon to design priority interventions for 2015.

Effectiveness/Efficiency

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected by the evaluator indicated that *Output 1* and *Output 2* initiatives implemented in 2015 were effective at timely and accurately achieving the desired results. Overall, it was relatively easy to gauge the overall effectiveness of these initiatives at the community level because they are tangible.

The PT has done well at ensuring that it maintains effectiveness by utilizing an approach that involves close partnership and coordination between UNDP, the contractors, and the relevant stakeholders. Majority of project direct beneficiaries and PC members avowed that the implemented initiatives were of high quality and were completed with high professional standards.

Design and implementation under *Output 1* and *Output 2* have made men’s and women’s concerns and experiences stand equally as an integral dimension so that women and men benefited almost equally. Gender mainstreaming measures entailed bringing the perceptions, experiences, knowledge and interests of vulnerable Palestinian women as well as men to bear in design, decision making, implementation and evaluation.

On the other hand, effective practices of PT members which remarkably contributed to the achievement of the project in 2015 can be summarized as follows:

* Under *Output 1*, the approach used by the PT to assess the needs of the most vulnerable Palestinian households and implement shelter works has evidently increased their self-reliance, while addressing their urgent hygiene needs (i.e. installation of water boilers, showers, WASH connections, etc.) and vital protection concerns for adults and children (installing toilet units in the shelter, separation and privacy, structural soundness, etc.) as well as protection from natural elements (fixed roofs and openings). Same protection and hygiene/health conditions have been effectively addressed through the BUS component, which mainly focused on addressing pressure on existing systems through upgrading schemes. Moreover, hardware activities were accompanied by the development of appropriate coordination mechanisms between local actors in the gatherings and local stakeholders.
* Under *Output 2*, hygiene kits distributed to PRS households were distinct in that they provided locally appropriate, customized aid that addressed the specific needs of local communities. The PT has established strong partnerships with local NGOs and PCs for the distribution of hygiene kits, which served the dual purpose of facilitating interaction with beneficiaries and building local partner capacity. In addition, through effective coordination with other organizations, the PT has been able to create synergies in the delivery of aid to affected populations, avoid duplication of effort and enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the emergency response.
* Also under *Output 2*, the hygiene promotion/awareness raising component has been commended by majority of respondents. Culturally and socially appropriate, it evidently marked impartiality and equality scores by bringing together PRL, PRS, Lebanese dwellers and Syrian refugees. For instance, in murals initiatives in Ain el Helwe (South), awareness raising messages were culturally adapted and adequately communicated to ensure they have the highest effect. Selected messages essentially drew on roots and nostalgic feelings to homeland, through the geographic representation of cities in home country, in an inclusive and participatory manner.
* In addition to its hygiene face value, the project has built upon remarkable engagement of women, youth and other vulnerable groups in activities, to empower local communities. Project approaches included for instance the empowerment of local NGOs and CBOs through building their capacities on delivery of hygiene awareness in their communities. An impressive amount of activities has been undertaken to strengthen NGOs’ knowledge about the subject matter, as well as their quality of work. These have included among others training on basic skills and competencies as well as on-job coaching and monitoring through the regular and continuous presence of PT members in the field. Another aspect of credibility, to which many partners referred to, was the association between their scope of work and UNDP’s, which contributed in no small measure to their own reputation and credibility. The project has also successfully integrated women empowerment through the combining livelihood support and hygiene promotion, i.e. the way it was done in head lice and hairdressing training (in addition to the training on hair dressing, women received basic equipment needed for the start-up of their own businesses). Other outputs such as the “WASH Information Guide for Service Providers in Palestinian Gatherings”, “WASH Practical Guide for Service Providers in Palestinian Gatherings”, “Music in the Bathroom, A story coloring book for 6 to 8-year-old children” as well as “Mission impossible, an interactive board game for 9 to 12-year-old” have proven to be innovative and very well welcomed among the target population as well as NGOs who adopted these materials.
* Under *Output 3*, the Gatherings Working Group was considered by majority of respondents as an opportunity to facilitate networking and information sharing among NGOs, through actually bringing them together.

Taking into consideration the number of beneficiaries reached and the overall impact of the infrastructure and capacity building interventions of UNDP under the different components, empirical evidence indicates that the programme has been cost effective. Cost-effectiveness was used, since we considered it may be inappropriate to monetize effects such as “improved wellbeing or quality of life” in this case.

Furthermore, upon review of the project reports and supplementary documents provided to the evaluator, it can be concluded that overall, the project’s components implemented during 2015 were implemented with a sufficient level of efficiency, the review of the bidding process used to hire contractors further supports this claim.

Sustainability/Impact

The principal issue in this section is the effect or the change that has been brought about by the project. Obviously it is not always easy to attribute changes taking place unequivocally to the project only; there may have simultaneously been other events or developments which would have also influenced the situation. The explicit concern of the external evaluator in all the interviews and meetings held was to assess as much as possible the change resulting from participation in the various activities of the projects. It is most probably difficult to answer this question for long-term impact at this stage. Most of the activities are still ongoing; it is therefore too early to judge whether or not the projects are having impact at long-run on individuals, communities and institutions.

At the community level, majority of respondents acknowledge the comparative and competitive advantage of UNDP in local communities. The positive way both the project and the implementing Agency were perceived prevailed in respondents’ discourse, as it shows in the statement of one of the PC members interviewed in the South:

*“We know the difference between various implementing actors on the ground […] the security situation in our area is volatile and it is a pretext for not doing things the right way! […] the UNDP team came, assessed, didn’t promise anything, but didn’t disappear either […] they came back and delivered […] their actions speak for them […] we are at their disposal any time to collaborate and serve the most vulnerable”.*

Same applied when it came to a member of a municipality council in the North, referring to the football tournament that the project carried out to promote the concept of recycling:

*“Look at what happened in Bir Hassan yesterday, a young man was severely injured because of a silly football game […] if they consider the replication of the Lebanese-Palestinian football tournament of the North, do you know how great it will be? If you succeed in bringing in Lebanese players, PRS and PRL and Syrians in one game. Don’t you think we the same could be done at the national scale? Do you know what it took to make such a thing happen in Nahr El Bared? […] The social bonding that resulted from it cannot be described in words… we are more than relatives now… for better and worse”.*

On the project’s BUS component, he added:

*“They have really improved the living conditions of people around […], we’re not solely talking about provision of clean water […] clean water means clean environment, less pollution, less insects, less smells, less diseases [...] less conflicts as well […] They had the right approach to easily enter anywhere, even the most restricted areas […] transparent, credible and realistic, they had what it takes to plan and to implement even in the most challenging circumstances […] their work can be considered as a model for replication in other urban settings… not necessarily Gatherings or camps… there are needs in many pockets over the country”.*

At the individual level, depending on one’s definition of “change”, as well as varying contexts, majority of statements avowed that “change” has been the fundamental achievement of the project’s various components. For instance, one of shelter rehabilitation beneficiaries in the South gratefully advised:

*“Through the shelter rehabilitation they generously provided, I can take a shower more assuredly now, at least I have a door to the bathroom… They even took into consideration the access needs of my husband who is in a wheelchair”*.

At the community level, change has also been commended by PCs and dwellers as reflected by one of the PC members in Beirut commenting on a road rehabilitation project that included the installation of street lighting:

*“We feel safer and more secure when we move after dark […] We used to need boats to commute to work, to school or to prayers […] of course people with disabilities and pregnant women can move more easily now”*.

As for the hygiene component, change in the enabling environment, namely social and cultural norms, has been remarkably perceived by partnering local NGOs, as reflected by one respondent in the North:

“*Men accepted the fact that their wives and daughters go out to participate in hygiene promotion events and talk about their personal hygiene and reproductive health*”.

Furthermore, a young woman in the North who benefited from the hairdressing training that aimed at combatting head lice in a dignified manner was proud to share her achievement:

*“I like hairdressing and make-up a lot […] it used to be a hobby, I practiced it on all my relatives and siblings […] but through the basic training and the equipment I got, I can now support my family, I pay my father’s dialysis fees”*.

Elsewhere, the valuable outcome of the hygiene kits has also been commended in many collated statements by the PRS beneficiaries:

*“Kits made female beneficiaries feel remembered […] the provision of kits allowed families to purchase other important items needed in the emergency, such as food”.*

These statements can be of great significance by means of change, however, they remain limited to the particular context of the evaluation exercise and the quality of research methods, and hence, needs further investigation. Furthermore, early indications on the outcome of some of the UNDP-supported activities like infrastructure and WASH initiatives, in particular, are that these have potential for long term impact, and through these UNDP has built a good reputation for itself among local communities and various stakeholders. Based on interviews with beneficiaries and visual inspection of several project locations in Tyre and the North for example, the evaluator found that in several locations the water and sanitation facilities were outstandingly maintained. Hence, the strength of such interventions – in terms of sustainability – is contingent on the level of ownership of targeted beneficiaries and key stakeholders.

# Project Design and Management

The incremental increase in demand necessitated the scale-up of operations and a corresponding increase of operations and monitoring staff, which was well-achieved by the PT. Regarding the overall efficiency of the UNDP project, the evaluator found great strengths in several aspects of the programme during the period of time under evaluation (2015). A distinctive feature of the project is the quality of the work and the excellent relationships which the project manager and officers have created with all the relevant players in the field, thanks to their excellent qualifications and their personal engagement. The PT members’ personalities, ethical attitudes (conscientiousness, openness) and work behavior have tremendously contributed to the positive perception of UNDP in local communities, even the most underprivileged ones.

As a matter of fact, the project was able to streamline its productivity and establish a more efficient and effective structure; the roles and responsibilities of the PT became more clearly defined. This has helped to ensure better coordination and clearer channels of communication both internally (within UNDP) and externally (with partner organizations).

# Stakeholders Participation and Ownership

The PT has managed to establish intensive cooperation with many of the essential stakeholders in the country. The good partnerships with local authorities led to a wide sphere of influence. For instance, Mr. Ahmed Kassem, Chair of the Lebanon Shelter Working Group, seconded as advisor to the Minister of Social Affairs by UNHCR, considered this project as a mark of UNDP’s comparative advantage, and went further to promote it as a model to be considered by other actors in future programming, especially in urban settings.

As for sister Agencies, the collaboration and coordination with UNRWA has been central for designing and implementing WASH projects to complement those planned by UNRWA in camps’ adjacent areas. Joint efforts on hygiene promotion in UNRWA schools, which includes the production of training material for UNRWA health educators, can be considered as greatly promising, since it increases coverage and protection scopes of children.

Good partnership-relationships have also been built up with the donor community encompassing meetings, site visits and regular information sharing through various tools, i.e. progress reports, project quarterly newsletter, social media as well as UNDP website.

Overall, results showed that the project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘community ownership’. Of utmost importance was the participation of local communities; i.e. representatives of municipalities, PCs, CBOs, women groups, youth groups as well as local NGOs.

# Lessons Learned

Lessons learned were suggested based on the answers to evaluation questions and associated findings set out above.

1. The project succeeded in linking local development issues to humanitarian response and answered immediate needs while investing time, funds and efforts in shelter, infrastructure and hygiene promotion projects, consequently upgrading the living conditions of local communities in a durable manner.
2. The project has yielded a significant body of evidence that suggests that:
   1. It has successfully contributed to addressing grievances that followed violent conflicts (i.e. Nahr El Bared and Ain El Helwe);
   2. It has laid the foundations for collaboration with local authorities (municipalities) in successor projects through the level of coordination with local communities and the range of services (physical infrastructure) delivered in an effective, transparent and equitable manner.
3. UNDP’s ability to deliver a highly satisfactory level of assistance relied essentially on several factors: vast operational presence of UNDP in Gatherings all over Lebanon with an outstanding reputation in local communities, the availability of funding for response, the Organization’s efforts to strengthen protection activities for Palestinian refugees, and the continuous presence of the PT members to oversee and control the operations in the field, under the most challenging circumstances.
4. In order to mitigate circumstances emerging from the evolving situation, UNDP adopted new management/institutional support modalities to address institutional capacity constraints including among others: increased capacity building efforts, short-term assignments and adjusted working schedules.
5. In the course of the project, UNDP managed to sustain accountability and transparency through quality control tools to maintain oversight on implementation and expenditure. Mostly systematized and standardized, most of the models proved efficiency at the time of use.
6. UNDP has contributed to improved capacity of local partners to adequately manage service networks, mitigate, implement and report.
7. UNDP has increased its outreach capacities to reach the most vulnerable/underserved and conflict affected Palestine refugees, hence, contributed to improving vulnerable Palestine refugees’ access to quality basic services.
8. The project’s contribution to positive/critical changes in vulnerable populations’ lives has been highly successful regarding short to medium term project interventions at grassroots level.
9. In all evaluated support sectors, sustainability prospects were well reflected at ‘grassroots’ levels where beneficiaries had a more immediate involvement in maintaining the flows of results.
10. The working relationships established between the PT and PCs have demonstrated high effectiveness in all areas of catchment. The choice of partnership can be considered as a strategic one, where the PT adopted an inclusive and transparent approach without compromising the neutrality, impartiality and professional/technical standards of intervention.
11. The project was a demonstrated model of collaborative/participatory work among stakeholders and a good initiative towards ‘community ownership’. As a matter of fact, the project has built inclusive, participatory processes and helped manage societal expectations. This has included bringing a wide range of stakeholders together, including war-affected populations and groups in conflict, to find solutions for common social service-related challenges. It has also actively engaged dwellers to set and sequence post-conflict priorities. Particular attention was paid by PT members to ensure that participation did not raise societal expectations rather than manage them, and that stakeholders gave voice to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.
12. The project has integrated cross-cutting issues such as child protection, gender equality, protection, poverty alleviation, and disability and human rights to various degrees in policy, planning and implementation phases. This was evidenced in a variety of ways including: use of a rights-based framework and rights-related benchmarks, analysis of right holders and duty bearers and focus on aspects of equity, social inclusion and gender particularly. More emphasis could be put in future planning on disaggregation of data by specific criteria whenever feasible and appropriate.

# Recommendations

The recommended interventions were offered according to the parameters of this evaluation. While many of the recommendations are categorized headings or descriptors, they should not be seen as free-standing or mutually exclusive. The recommendations below should not be read in rank order, as many should be carried out concurrently.

**1. Results measurement and accountability.** While the PT members’ archived reports of implementation measurement (input/output) have been fully compliant with designed budgets, work plans and schedules, new technologies could be introduced to involve staff on results measurement at the intermediate outcome and long-term impact level. While noting the ambiguity of requirements for such measurements, and the available resources, it is recommended to build on earlier interventions and adopt a selection of impact indicators which can be assessed within the scope of similar projects, i.e. use of tools such as social media, questionnaires or e-survey links to assess the improvement of living conditions/quality of life (before and after intervention), the way individuals and/or local communities perceived a selected level of action, etc. Not to forget that results shall be project-bounded, and limited to the scale of measurement, and the quality of used research methods.

**2. Consolidation of a common understanding of how such projects would contribute to crisis prevention and peacebuilding.** After conducting robust and participatory conflict analysis, successor similar projects could be built on clearly defined theories of change, where areas of intervention are defined as entry points to deliver conflict prevention and peacebuilding results, either through sector guidance, institutional capacity building or direct service delivery, in a manner consistent with UNDP’s mandate. This would considerably bridge transition gaps in ways that are relevant for peacebuilding (between rapid delivery of important basic services and longer-term sector reform and/or institution-building efforts).

**3. Coherence of comprehensive intervention strategies between UNDP and relevant stakeholders.** It is recommended that UNDP keep on the level of coordination, communication, and partnership with various sectoral working groups, so as to develop clear strategies to bridge between emergency, recovery, rehabilitation and long term relief.

**4. Dissemination of success stories.** UNDP should build on its existing communication capacitiesto broaden dissemination of success stories and information sharing.

**5. Vulnerability Assessment.** UNDP could strengthen its equity-based approach early in the design phases by considering the assessment of vulnerabilities at the scale of all Palestinian Gatherings, thus ensuring coverage to the most vulnerable.

1. http://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/survey-economic-status-palestine-refugees-lebanon [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As a result of the Syrian Crisis, the situation in the Gatherings has dramatically worsened with the influx of some 26,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria in addition to some 4,000 Syrian refugees (UNDP & UN-Habitat, 2014). This has raised the population in the 42 Palestinian Gatherings from an estimated 110,000 to 140,000, doubling the population in some Gatherings. These refugees live in inadequate shelters that are connected in an ad-hoc manner to the available networks, exerting additional pressure on the already poor and insufficient basic urban services. As a result, health and environmental risks have increased and, due to the competition on resources, tensions have risen in the Gatherings between new refugees and host refugee communities on the one hand and between the communities in the Gatherings and the surrounding areas on the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Meetings with local stakeholders were scheduled in Saida, Tyre, Nahr El Bared and Beddawi; randomly chosen direct beneficiaries were also interviewed during the visits and direct observations from the field were taken into consideration in the evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. UNDP/UN-HABITAT Joint Programme, which was in turn implemented based on the findings and recommendations of the “Investigating Grey Areas: Access to Basic Urban Services in the Adjacent Areas of Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon” study. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Popular Committees are semi-official committees, who enjoy a certain legitimacy in the Gatherings and the local committees under them. As catalysts or even mediators when needed, the PCs play an important role in the provision of basic services and conflict resolution in the Gatherings. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)