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Arab Region

PARTICIPATION OF
**LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL SOCIETY** IN THE
BEIRUT PORT BLAST
RESPONSE

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A Policy Brief
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unprecedented explosion of the Beirut Port on August 4, 2020 was met with a prompt humanitarian intervention by local, national civil society, and international organizations. Because of the intensity of the intervention deployed in a short time window in densely populated areas, many obstacles, including issues related to coordination among organizations and with the government, access mechanisms to the affected areas, as well as meager resources versus dire socioeconomic needs, raised questions about the efficiency of the intervention. Quite expectedly, issues of fairness and equity in the humanitarian aid were unveiled, especially in poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

This policy brief furnishes grounded data on the humanitarian intervention in the immediate aftermath of the Beirut Port blast drawing on the lived experiences of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), affected women, and humanitarian workers. As consultants commissioned by ActionAid, we refract our analysis on contributing to transforming the humanitarian system in Lebanon into a fairer and more transparent one utilizing lessons learned from the intervention.



The research adopts a Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) because it provides a participatory space that promotes women's voice and advocates for inclusion and equal rights. Data collection took place during the period of 1 February -29 March 2021. It involved CSOs of varied backgrounds, humanitarian workers, and women recruited from Mdawar, Khandaq el Ghamiq, Zuqaq el-Blat, Sin el-Fil, Gemmayze, Bourj Hammoud, and Bechara El-Khoury. Data were collected from structured interviews conducted online with 12 participants representing 8 CSOs, Focus Groups (FGs) conducted face-to-face with 10 affected women and 3 humanitarian workers, discourse analysis of CSOs websites, and secondary sources. Interviews were thematically coded using the qualitative data analysis and research software, Atlati.ti.

Affected women and humanitarian workers accentuated the role of CSOs in mitigating the dire socioeconomic needs of vulnerable communities that predated the explosion due to protracted government's neglect. CSOs coordinated with many constituencies including the army and municipalities to identify needs and access affected areas. The coordination was tactical rather than strategic premised on a national humanitarian framework. Bureaucracy and overlaps in humanitarian service provision were among the reasons for the delayed intervention. Further, humanitarian workers and affected women lamented incidents of favoritism and discrimination that rendered the intervention partly non-inclusive. Some women reported instances of humiliation by some humanitarian workers, voiced concerns about false promises of aid provision, and casted doubt on 'parasite organizations. Further, incidents of harassment against humanitarian workers were reported. Humanitarian aid in one area was deployed along a vector of sectarianism, manifesting solidarity among cross-border coreligionists. Earmarked funds distributed by affluent Lebanese to help chosen areas raised questions about fairness in the humanitarian space.

This policy brief concludes with evidence-driven policy recommendations to UN agencies, INGOs, local, and national NGOs. It also accounts for policy formulation aimed at promoting fairness in the humanitarian space as well as providing sustainable development opportunities for the marginalized, particularly women.

BACKGROUND OF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

With a population of approximately 6,806,180 inhabitants estimated in 2021 and an area of 3950 Square Miles¹, Lebanon accommodates a mosaic of religious sects that coexist through a power-sharing formula known as consociation. In fact, Lebanon's impasse rests in its divided sectarian groups that have failed thus far in establishing a viable state. Sectarian divisions pose challenges to civic action that advocates for secularism and participation,

It is commonplace knowledge in Lebanon that the tempo of sectarianism speeds up when the rights of marginalized groups such as those of women and refugees are defended. For instance, discrimination against women, which has roots in the prevailing patriarchal society, intersects with sectarianism, which cloisters women to traditionally demarcated 'feminine roles'. Moreover, the issue of refugees has always fueled internal divisions being perceived as a lurking demographic threat to the fragile sectarian balance. These conditions create a fertile ground for practicing forms of discrimination against refugees. For instance, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who occupy a uniquely racialized position² and are considered temporary "campers"³, are denied access to decent employment, health care, and education. Further, displaced Syrians, who represent the recent addition to the refugee make-up in Lebanon, endure multiple-deprivations similar to those experienced by Palestinian refugees. Despite the relief and development efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) together with international and local organizations that serve displaced Syrians, refugees remain at risk since Lebanon is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, neither is party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

Today, Lebanon endures a compounded humanitarian crisis. Ongoing political disagreements, endemic corruption, and system-deficit governance have enervated the country's resources and rendered its public institutions dysfunctional. The economic crisis, the current pandemic, and more recently the Beirut Port blast have exacerbated the living conditions of Lebanese of whom 55% currently live in poverty⁴.

Results ensued from the string of rapid need assessments were confounded with dire socioeconomic needs that predated the explosion. Poverty-stricken areas hit by the explosion are dense and house underserved communities with limited access to basic infrastructure and public utilities—the explosion has unveiled existing poverty levels partly due to chronic governmental neglect. The sectarian quota system that nullifies equitable development among regions is a factor chiefly responsible for the government's neglect. Overall, existing government's initiatives rarely enable marginalised population groups, especially women, to become self-reliant. Sona, from Khandaq el Ghamiq described her household living condition as: "I don't have a mattress at home to sleep on". Karla, from Mdawar added: "My husband is in the army and they put a black point [Not entitled for aid by an organization] for me considering that I am not entitled to aid, and now the \$100 is not enough for my baby's milk and diapers". The deteriorating socioeconomic conditions have prompted the civil society to direct its focus on the provision of basic services and fill in the gaps left by the government.

1-<http://srv1.worldometers.info/world-population/lebanon-population/>, accessed March 31, 2021.

2-Serhan, W. (2014). Palestinians in Lebanon: A Racialized Minority or One of Many "Others"? Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies.

3-Belényesi¹, P. and Abuhaydar, Z. (2017) 'The Palestinian-Lebanese paradox the socio-cultural conundrum of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: law, economics and culture'. *Society and Economy* 39(2): 251-270.

4-<https://www.unescwa.org/news/Lebanon-poverty-2020>, accessed April 4, 2021.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN LEBANON

The term Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) will be used as a cognate term to women-led and women's rights organizations along with multi-faith dialogue-oriented, LGBTIQ+, and relief and rehabilitation organizations that participated in the research for this policy brief.

Lebanon enjoys a vibrant civil society sector predating the formation of the Lebanese Republic in 1926 and is considered the most active and progressive in the Middle East⁵. It serves a wide spectrum of constituencies that range from advocacy to relief and development addressing, inter alia, women, children, LGBTIQ+, people with special needs, refugees, and migrant workers. It has foundations in one of the most legacy liberal laws of associations in the region (Abdel Samad, 2007)⁶, the 1909 Ottoman Law of Associations which is traceable to the 1901 French Law of Associations. The civil society operates under Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926, which "ensures the protection of the freedom of assembly and the freedom of associations". It also functions under the state constitution in that "Lebanon is a civil state, so the constitution is civil, and it provides for freedom of belief"⁷.



The civil society comprises a vast array of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), associations, foundations, religious institutions, communitarian, and fourth sector organizations. These are of two types:

- Administrative associations, which focus on development and work with the government to provide social and welfare services for citizens. This strand includes family associations (which are widely present in rural areas) and religious associations (which constitute approximately 80% of the local voluntary sector in Lebanon (Karam, 2006 cited in Haddad, 2020)⁸. This sector has gained traction as a state partner, particularly under the tenure of the third president of Lebanon, Fouad Chehab (1958-64), which witnessed important secular reforms implemented by the government of technocrats, including regulating the law of associations.

- Advocacy associations that have played a significant role in the civil life of Lebanon and established partnerships with international organizations and governments to address issues related to democracy, gender, education, environment, and more recently relief and rehabilitation in response to the Beirut Port blast.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of 2017 CSOs covering a host of areas. People include children's development CSOs and Finance refers to the provision of micro financing for rural development projects.

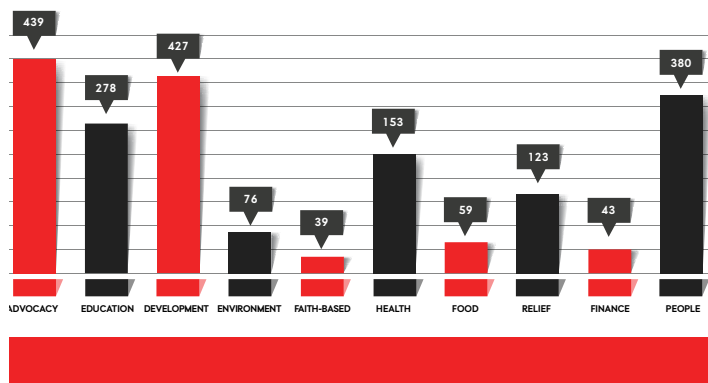
5-<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/lebanons-uncivil-society>, Accessed February 19, 2021.

6-Abdel Samad, Z. (2007). Civil society in the Arab region: its necessary role and the obstacles to fulfilment. *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, 9(2), 3-24.

7-<https://aawsat.com/home/article/2494591>, accessed February 16, 2021.

8-Haddad, T. (2020). Religious Welfare Organizations, Citizenship, and the State in Lebanon. *Nonprofit Policy Profit*, pp. 1-13. DOI: 10.1515/npf-2019-0040.

Figure 1: Scope of work of CSOs9



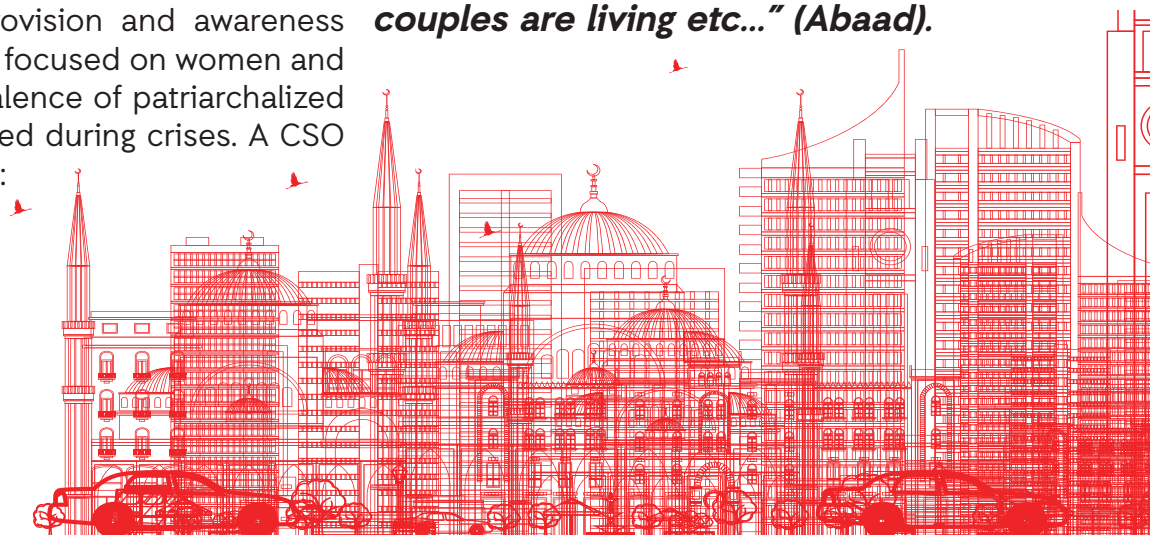
THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

The civil society performs the role of ombudsman advocating for equality and protection as well as promoting wider representation of women in social and political spheres. It has also played a significant role in social and political change and has made some advancements, glacially though, since the sectarian quota system forms the basis for participation along sectarian lines rather than on democratic participation.

CSOs, affected women, and humanitarian workers have collectively accentuated the pivotal role of the Lebanese civil society to providing health, education, relief, and rehabilitation services. Sonia, from Mdawar confirmed: "We feel the current economic situation by 50% because the associations are providing support. But what if they stop this aid". An interviewee from Loubnaniyoun explained: "I think if there were no NGOs in Lebanon in these days, I don't know what the situation will be like". Besides humanitarian service provision and awareness raising, some CSOs have focused on women and inclusion given the prevalence of patriarchalized practices that are triggered during crises. A CSO representative explained:



"During crises, the needs of women and girls normally got forgotten. In all crises, not only during the Beirut blast, there's like a huge increase in gender based violence in general due to the anger and stress expressed by men because of the situation and because of the miscommunication, the negative communication due to the stress that the couples are living etc..." (Abaad).



THE SHIFTING ROLES OF CSOS

During the protracted 1975-90 war, divisive politics and feud among Lebanese warring factions have influenced the role of many CSOs in their response to the state of emergency focusing on parochial communitarian and provision of local services rather than on national ones. The paralysis of governmental institutions during civil strife allowed for an increase in the number of CSOs to meet community needs. Citizens increasingly rely on the services provided by CSOs, which were able to benefit from financial resources pouring into Lebanon from Western Northern countries (Karam, 2006 cited in Haddad, 2020)¹⁰.

9 <https://arab.org/directory/activity/people/region/lebanon/>, accessed February 16, 2021.

10 Haddad, T. (2020). Religious Welfare Organizations, Citizenship, and the State in Lebanon. Nonprofit Policy Profit, pp. 1-13. DOI: 10.1515/npf-2019-0040.

As the protracted 1975-90 civil war intensified, both communitarian and geographical cleavages debilitated efforts for trans-regional and trans-communitarian activities and some associations became intro-converted (Ibid). Following the assassination of the former prime minister, Rafik Hariri in 2005, the country was put at the throes of a new political momentum that revitalized the role of CSOs in the realm of advocacy for citizenship rights and equality in different spheres with women, gender, disability, peace, participation, and development put at centre of their agendas. The role of CSOs is most progressive as they challenge established pillory, traditionally held prejudices and stigma by founding the LGBTIQ+ organisation, Helem that has yet to be granted registration from the Ministry of Interior, more than 10 years after its creation¹¹. Part of the delay is due to the theme addressed by the NGO being deemed “controversial” as homosexual relationships are still considered “contrary to nature” as per article 534 of the Penal Code.

Analyses of the discourse of national CSOs have shown a close relation between year of establishment and the emerging needs they seek to address. For instance, two years of the Chim earthquake that occurred on March 16, 1956 prompted the establishment of CSOs to provide emergency humanitarian and health aid to the affected populations. When Lebanon was marred by structural inequalities manifested in the emergence of poverty belts encircling the capital Beirut in the early 1960s, more CSOs were founded to provide support for the communities in disadvantaged areas. It is worth noting that one CSO promoting gender equality was founded in 1976 at a time when civil strife was rampant. This civic trend was revitalized in the mid- 2000s with a clear surge into advocacy for LGBTQ, women’s rights, and refugees, particularly after the pouring of displaced Syrians into Lebanon in 2011 (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The trend of CSOs’ scope of work since 1945



FUNDING

The work of CSOs depends largely on external funding so they establish cooperative relationships with international organizations and governments to submit projects that often align with funders' policies and guidelines. A CSO representative from Dawaer Foundation exemplified:

"We actually have a lot of opportunities we have so far been funded by: UNESCO, UNDP, UNRWA, by EU, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Deutsche Welle, by Konrad Adenauer, ActionAid, and also a consortium with UNESCO Morocco by the UN women".

A representative from Loubnaniyoun added: ***"Everything you want to accomplish here in Lebanon is not easy. ... but at first you have to ensure the budget, I think".***

The international community allocates donor funding to Lebanon aimed at redressing poverty and helping in sustainable economic development. CSOs, which are funded by INGOs and Western governments, tend to be sensitive with issues of discrimination since they abide by criteria set forth by the funders including observance of equal opportunities in the humanitarian space. Nationally funded CSOs, which also receive funds from INGOs, abide by criteria set in the TOR.

"We have to adhere to the requirements that were presented or put in TORs. These requirements also always ask them [CSOs] to adhere to non-discrimination to all-inclusive approach and a gender-based approach" (Dawaer).

It is estimated that 74% of CSOs receive funding from INGOs, while the rest come from private sector and donations as estimated by the Regional Capacity Building Program-South Facility in 2015¹². A CSO representative estimated that the yearly budget of donors to Lebanon is more than US\$1.2 billion (RMF). However, other CSOs downplayed such figures providing a lesser amount. We could not crosscheck these figures due to the near absence of transparent financial information accessible to the public, reducing financial figures to guesswork and improvisation. However, it became clear from the interviews with CSOs that both funding and emerging needs directed the compass of the humanitarian response.

¹¹<https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/civil-society-lebanon-implementation-trap>, accessed March 20, 2021.

METHODOLOGY

The research was guided by the GTA because it promotes gender equality and empowerment for all groups central to humanitarian intervention¹³. The data came from multifarious sources including individual semi-structured interviews with CSOs, Focus Groups (FG) with affected women and humanitarian workers, and discourse analysis of the websites of CSOs.

Participants in Focus Groups

Ten affected women and 3 humanitarian workers were recruited for the face-to-face FGs from Mdawar, Khandaq el Ghamiq, Zuqaq el-Blat, Sin el-Fil, Gemmayze, Bourj Hammoud, and Bechara El-Khoury. These areas represented crisis zones containing poverty-pockets that have predated the explosion.

CSOs' Participants

Data were collected from structured interviews conducted online with 12 participants representing 8 CSOs of varied backgrounds. The interview scheduled covered 12 themes revolving around the coordination during the intervention and issues of equality in aid distribution.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the declared discourse in the involved CSOs converge and/or diverge with interviews tapping on themes related to mission and scope of work.

Limitations

Due to its limitedness to a relatively small number of participants, from a methodological point of view, the results are non-generalizable. Despite this limitation, common sense recommendations may help prevent the vicious circle of inequitable and disorderly humanitarian intervention from perpetuating itself in the future.

¹²https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/lebanon/documents/news/20150416_2_en.pdf, accessed May 2, 2021.

¹³<https://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/technical-areas-and-activities/gender-transformative-approaches/>, accessed January 2, 2021.

ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF CSOS IN THE BEIRUT BLAST RESPONSE

The Beirut Port Blast in the Eyes of Affected Women

On August 4, 2020, an explosion in Beirut Port wreaked havoc in the capital and its surrounding accompanied by an aftershock earth tremor that was detected by the United States Geological Survey as a seismic event of magnitude 3.314. It is estimated that the explosion caused the death of 220 people and injured over 6,500 individuals. Around 300,000 of Beirut residents became homeless, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese became in need of immediate assistance¹. Sonia from Mdawar who described the blast on that day as some kind of Armageddon shared her story:

“We were all at home, my mother, who is 90 years old, my grandchildren and my children. Windows and furnisher have flown as if we were in a mixer spinning us around — a terrifying and strange feeling — we had never heard such a sound before. When the second fire broke out, panic struck us again, and immediately evacuated the area. We went to some relatives – every time we go to sleep, we feel scared”.

Fear and angst were prevalent. Jackeline, from Bourj Hammoud narrated: ***“I was heading with my sister, who is a cancer patient, to receive treatment, and I am still feeling afraid, organizations stepped in to help us”.*** The traumatic sequel of the explosion calls for psychological intervention as Mona, a displaced Syrian woman expressed: ***“We were all injured, and my son has been deformed — my children need psychological treatment”.***

Further, the explosion has made it difficult for people to protect themselves from COVID-19 and new cases were reported among healthcare and humanitarian workers⁴.



Humanitarian Emergency Response

The United Nations established an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and experts from the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team conducted a rapid analysis of the situation and helped coordinate emergency relief activities in response to the Beirut Port explosion¹⁵. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners launched a Flash Appeal to mobilize nearly \$565 million in assistance for a target of 300,000 persons, as well as psychosocial support, basic assistance and eventually recovery and reconstruction.⁷

Further, the World Food Programme (WFP) provided logistics supplies to enable the Beirut Port to become operational. WFP has also allocated food ration for families affected by the blast. The Red Cross and the Lebanese Army deployed relief assistance in the affected areas. CSOs and INGOs rushed into the humanitarian theatre to provide essential health care, food, water, hygiene, shelter, and protection¹⁶. Self-organized citizens from all over Lebanon participated in the humanitarian intervention. Sonia, from Mdawar, explained: ***“Immediately after the explosion, people from Tripoli and all of Lebanon came to help”***. Volunteering schoolchildren and college students took part in the response through distributing aid to affected families either in their shattered apartments or through erecting tents as center points for aid. Schoolchildren were seen carrying brooms to remove debris and glass shards. Our participants praised solidarity and volunteerism that brought a positive aspect amidst the agony. Iman from Gemmayze commented: ***“I would like to say that I personally completely lost hope, but when the youth came to help in the first days, they returned a part of hope to me”***. But she added: ***“I soon lost hope again, when we were taken advantage of”***, tacitly referring to favoritism during the intervention. Aida, from Mdawar used a Lebanese proverb that denotes favoritism ***“There was leg and arm”***.

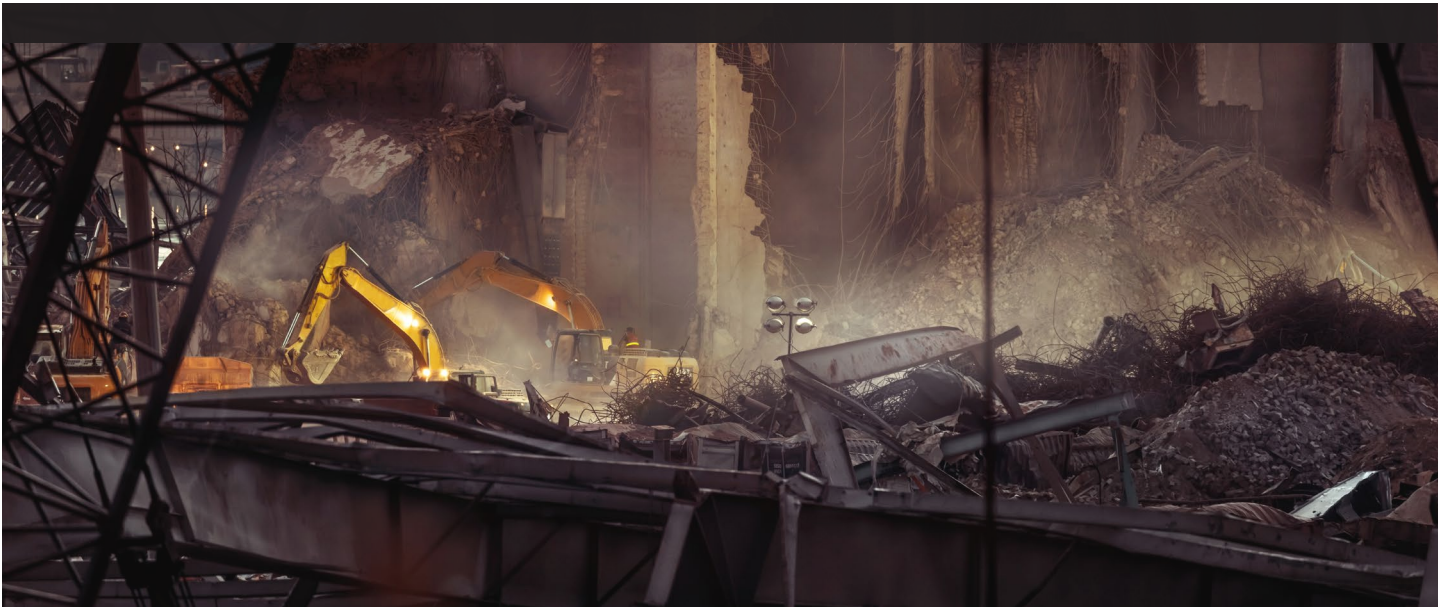
Humanitarian Theatre during the Intervention

The damaged areas became at times a hostile place for the affected residents, as there have been reports about neglect, theft, bureaucracy, and inefficiency. Karla, from Mdawar, said: ***“On the first night, all the doors were open, so there were a lot of robberies, and we needed everything”***. Sonia, from the same area added: ***“Some of the robberies were made by the workers of associations”***. Concerning neglect, Amal, from Sin el-Fil, explained: ***“The army came after two weeks to survey damages”***.



¹⁴-<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2020/08/06/beirut-port-explosion-triggers-magnitude-3-earthquake/?sh=106a0dd01426>, accessed May 2, 2021.

¹⁵-<https://www.unocha.org/story/un-and-partners-respond-disaster-lebanon-immediate-deployments-and-assessments>, accessed February 20, 2021.



Rapid Assessment

TA rapid assessment of 55 primary health-care centres in Beirut found that 37 per cent of them were damaged, 13 per cent had health workers injured in the blasts and less than half (47 per cent) are able to provide full routine health services. Hospitals, schools, higher educational institutions, cultural and historical sites were damaged, altering the cultural aura and touristic flair of popular areas in Beirut such as Mar Mikhail and Gemmayze into disaster areas. Organizations working in the shelter sector conducted needs assessments, mobilized emergency weather-proofing materials, and helped with repairs¹⁷. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) through its implementing partners conducted on-going needs assessments across different areas in Beirut surveying 909 household-level assessments. Eighty nine percent of interviewed households reported assistance needs including medical and health. Affected women said they were in need for all sorts of aid in the immediate aftermath of the explosion.

Reaction to the Rapid Assessment

Desperate for immediate assistance, affected persons de-prioritized rapid assessments being more interested in receiving immediate aid than filling out forms. Amal, from Sin el-Fil, loathed the bureaucracy involved in the needs' assessment process itself: "Questionnaires, questionnaires...". Others went farther accusing volunteering youth of lying to them saying, according to Dawaer Foundation **"You will only do this needs' assessment and then you will not provide us with the needs"**.

16-<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Lebanon%20Flash%20Appeal%20FINAL%2014%20Aug%202020.pdf>, accessed May 3, 2021.

17-<https://www.unocha.org/story/lebanon-humanitarian-response-continues-one-week-after-port-explosion>, Accessed February 19, 2021.

Delayed Intervention

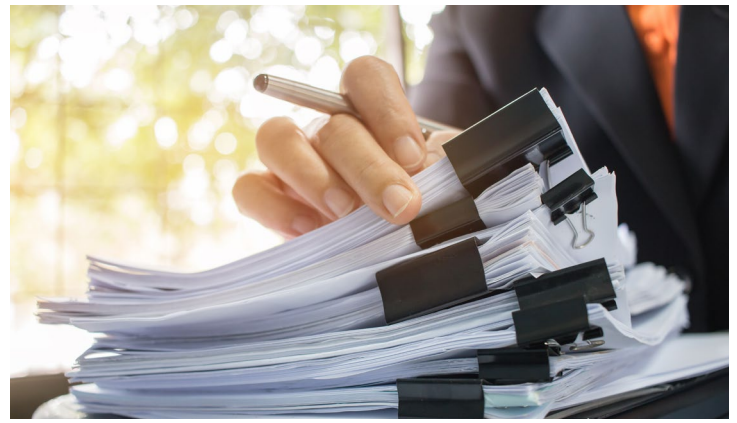
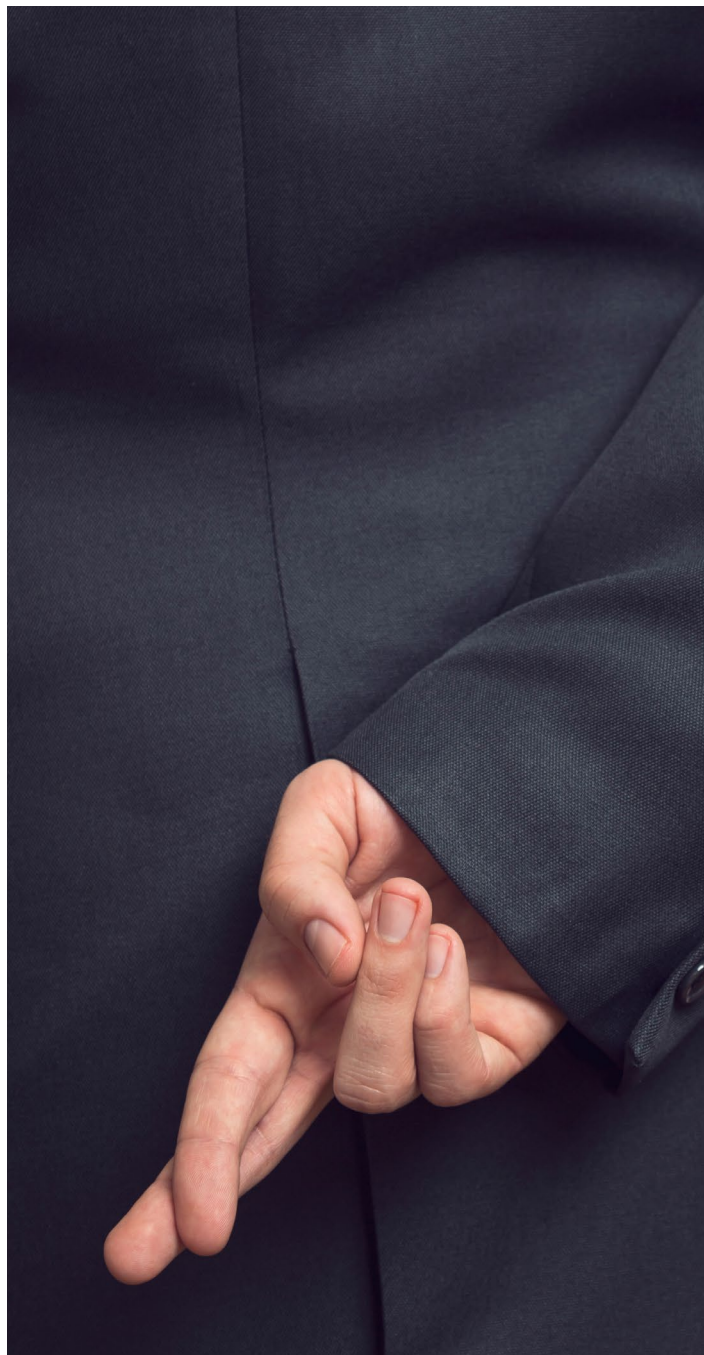
Affected women associated neglect with delayed intervention. Karla, from Mdawar, explained: **"The associations were slow, so I went looking for additional ones on the Internet, so we had two organizations working at the same time"**. A possible explanation of the delayed intervention in some areas is due to poor planning coupled with unpreparedness. Sonia, also from Mdawar, explained: **"The associations focused on certain places while we lived in the neighborhood directly opposite the port, so the aid came in the opposite direction"**. The explosion was severe and unprecedented to the extent that CSOs were taken by surprise and most of them were not prepared to deal with a catastrophe of this magnitude. Before the blast, CSOs have focused on citizenship issues, women's rights, education, and development, not on immediate aid during disasters. Lack of needs assessment during the first days of the explosion procrastinated the intervention until needs were properly identified. A CSO representative explained:

"But really it was a mess at the beginning. So, for these reasons, as Rene Mouawad Foundation, the first 2 days we distributed food and we stopped. We said no, we don't want to distribute anymore, let's keep what we have in order to see things settle and see really who are the people in need and plan on the long term" (RMF).

Failed state services were one of the causes for slow response. For instance, poor rural and urban mapping by the government have rendered the distribution of aid inefficient. For instance, CSOs groped for preliminary information about affected people by getting building addresses from municipalities or from the Makhateer (Elected community representatives), of whom many were unavailable due to the lockdown.

False Promises

Reports of false promises during the intervention were common. Sonia, from Mdawar, shared her experience: ***“When an association visited me and I was crying, the officer in charge told me, ‘Don’t cry, Sonia, we’re going to fix everything’. But then no one contacted me”.***



‘Parasite Organizations’

The presence of too many CSOs alongside fourth sector groups comprising spontaneous volunteers in the affected areas has further complicated the emergency response. Karla, from Mdawar, explained: ***“Immediately after the explosion, more than 50 associations visited us and took pictures and asked questions. They took private information. We do not know who begged on our names”.*** Humanitarian workers and affected women lamented neophyte organizations that suddenly propped up during the intervention ostentatiously marketing themselves as active participants in the emergency response through image manipulation and false reporting. For example, some workers in these organizations took pictures of themselves next to a fixed window or door that had been restored by others. A key informant from RDFL described these organizations as “Parasite Organizations”. Affected women lamented the intrusive role of CSOs that infringed on their privacy. Interviews with CSOs confirmed that some affected communities were wary about the motives of some CSOs. Hiyam, a humanitarian worker from Bechara El-Khoury used a Lebanese proverb to describe parasite organizations as ***“Look at me Mounira”***, indicating impression-making by a self-flattering woman called Mounira. A representative from Adyan voiced a maverick stance on CSOs:

“I think that the Lebanese civil society suffers exactly the same problems that both the society in general suffers from or the political class suffers from. Unfortunately, those who do stand out in this civil society are very, very few and sometimes this opinion is not well received”.

Affected women, humanitarian workers, and CSOs have distinguished between good CSOs and duplicitous ones. They praised CSOs that had played a significant role in alleviating the burden on the affected communities during the emergency response, while they criticized budding organizations that hastened to register with the government in the wake of the explosion to become eligible for funding.



Discrimination

Participants were diverse in their narratives about discrimination in aid distribution. Some spoke directly about discrimination against Palestinians and Syrians by the Lebanese army and Lebanese citizens. Others dodged talking about discrimination and preferred to resort to Lebanese proverbs that might also indicate favoritism in aid provision. There were talks by humanitarian workers and CSOs about positive discrimination in favor of Syrians. However, it was striking that there was no discussion on discrimination against women. Perhaps some affected women have acquiesced to gender discrimination that has been internalized in their behavioral structure due prolonged patriarchalized norms in Lebanese society.

Discrimination against Displaced Syrians and Palestinian Refugees

Two humanitarian workers mentioned discrimination against Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrians and one mentioned discrimination by the Lebanese army. Iman from Gemmayze said: ***“I have Palestinian employees and a Syrian employee who were affected but faced significant discrimination. The army was distributing on the basis of presenting the Lebanese identity card”***. She added: ***“Discrimination and racism in the army. There were people who received aid and others who did not”***. Amal from Zuqaq el-Blat, who described the army as a red line, enticed a nervous reaction by Iman from Gemmayze: ***“The army is not a red line, we are the red line”***. Hiyam, A humanitarian worker from Bechara El-Khoury confirmed incidents of discrimination against Syrians: ***“Syrians in Karantina faced so much discrimination that they were expelled from their homes”***. Mona, a displaced Syrian who lives in Mdawar alluded to discrimination by her neighbors. She explained: ***“As for the aid, people got help and others did not during the first phase after the explosion; I was oppressed”***. A CSO spokesperson elaborated on discrimination against Syrians attributing it to prejudice and xenophobia.

“There are many refugees in Nabaa, but then because of the political situation, because of the preconceptions and the situation in Lebanon and the relationship with the Syrian population, there was bound to be these prejudices. We even heard that in some areas people were reporting that buses of Syrian refugees were coming just to receive the assistance. We personally did not witness that and we were in areas in Beirut working on a daily basis. But it’s hard to explain the actual situation because there is a lot of misconceptions around this, and because there is a lot of prejudice and there is xenophobia” (IRC).

In fact, the Beirut Port blast recalled a narrative about the horrendous situation endured by what he described as **“people, community, and refugees”**. In his words:

“That blast area was filled with police and with army, which is very scary and very problematic to people who are afraid of being arrested although they have done nothing wrong. Anyway, people, community, and refugees are very afraid of the Lebanese police and of the army because of the way they get treated because the amount of torture and the amount of mistreatment and the amount of haphazard and arbitrary detention that take place is very severe to these communities” (Helem).

Favoritism in Aid to Lebanese

A CSO representative talked about restricting aid to Lebanese due to earmarked money donated by affluent Lebanese to help specific areas affected by the explosion.

“...we have so many people living in Lebanon, they are wealthy, and they want to support. They mentioned that don't want to help the displaced Syrians or any kind of other nationalities, regardless of religion” (RMF).

While donations from affluent Lebanese reinforced solidarity with affected Lebanese brethren, the one-sided support based on nationality, rewarded the idea of unfairness and all-inclusive approach in the humanitarian space.



Claims of Favoritism in Aid to Syrians

Quite contrary to the narrative of discrimination against Syrians, Hasan, a humanitarian worker, claimed **“There were associations that were distributing aid only for Syrians. So they [Syrians] contacted each other to get aid”**. Aid to Syrians could have stirred feelings of injustice among some affected Lebanese. A representative from Abaad spoke of claims purported by some beneficiaries of preferential treatment to Syrians, saying: **“But we might have heard this from the field— from beneficiaries saying that they are helping Syrians and forgot Lebanese, for example, those in dire need”**. Claims of favoritism in aid to Syrians could have unveiled a discriminatory mind set among some Lebanese, particularly among those who have not been treated fairly in aid provision. Mona, a displaced Syrian who lives in Mdawar said: **“My neighbors who are in the same building, said the Syrians were taking the aid”**.



Contrasting Results regarding Aid in Affected Areas

We investigated claims that aid was delivered based on identified priority zones in close proximity to the blast site (Gemmayze, Mar Mikhael, Ashrafiyeh), while other affected areas such as Khandaq el Ghamiq had not been included in the priority intervention list at first. Amal, a humanitarian worker from Zuqaq el-Blat gave a testimony about the impact of the explosion in Khandaq el Ghamiq and rampant poverty that existed before the explosion:

“Khandaq el Ghamiq became a psychological disaster area. My husband died in the blast because of internal bleeding from pressure. We took him to the hospital, and he died four hours later. We are broken 5 months on the rent of the house. Today someone called and told me that my husband had borrowed \$1,000 from him”.

An interviewee from Abaad explained: ***“...talking about the most neglected areas, it’s not Karantina nor the Gemmayze or Geitawi, it was the other side such as Khandaq el Ghamiq”.*** Sona, confirmed that food in Khandaq el Ghamiq was scarce. However, Amal said the opposite: ***“Khandaq el Ghamiq is flooded with aid, when we wanted to help, we moved away from Khandaq el Ghamiq”.*** She added that the all residents of Khandaq el Ghamiq received financial subsistence from His Eminence, Sayyid Ali al-Sistani in Iraq. In her words: ***“Yes, Mr. Sistani gave every person in one million pounds, whether he was Muslim or Christian, without discrimination”.*** Sona, from Khandaq el Ghamiq nodded approvingly. However, Hasan, a humanitarian worker questioned whether there were Christians in Khandaq el Ghamiq to start with since Shiites overwhelmingly populate the area. The explosion has served to cultivate the traditional solidarity of Iraqi Shiites with their coreligionists in Khandaq el Ghamiq.



Capacity Limitations

Other CSOs said they did not have the resources to get to work in some areas and opted instead to provide humanitarian assistance to other areas that were directly affected by the port blast.

“We didn’t try because we went twice, we visited two houses, but we didn’t have the capacity to do more. If we had the capacity, maybe we would have helped there but money wise our resources were limited and the demand in Karantina and Burj Hamoud was crazy” (Loubnaniyoun).

Restriction on Access

Restriction on access was an impediment to aid provision. An interviewee said that her CSO had not been granted permission to visit the Khandaq el Ghamiq even after negotiating with what she described as ‘key actors’. Mona, from Bechara el-Khoury explained: ***“We tried to work in Khandaq el Ghamiq, but we needed the approval of the parties”.*** When the political party in control does not grant a CSO access, the latter may request another CSO, which had been granted permission, to do the work on its behalf. We also found that established political networks with political parties in control of certain areas have granted access to politically affiliated CSOs. This may partly explain how a politically affiliated CSO was able to visit Khandaq el Ghamiq without encountering obstacles.

Discrimination in Registration

Women described their own experiences in a context where discrimination during the emergency response was commonplace. Jackeline, from Bourj Hammoud said: ***“We go for help, they don’t give those who don’t have children”.*** But Aida, from Mdawar, alluded to favoritism in registration: ***“If they liked you, they would register you and the whole family”.*** In fact, the explosion has acted as a precursor to revealing discrimination by some CSOs as Karla, from Mdawar, put it: ***“There were people who received aid and people who did not”.*** within the geographically prioritized areas. To be fair, some were not able to register because they had evacuated their homes immediately after the explosion as confirmed by Mona, a displaced Syrian woman from Mdawar.



love is

Discrimination against LGBT

Reports about discrimination were not limited to aid distribution but against LGBT such as Helem. In fact, 'culturally demarcated' stigma has reflected the tendency to judge LGBT by some CSOs based on preconceived ideas, and to exclude the opportunity of cooperating with it. A representative from Helem explained his experience in a powerful statement:

"Why it is the first time anyone called us was after when the European Union started saying no money unless you include LGBT people None of these organizations had called us before. Because they didn't want us. So now after one month of the biggest explosion in the city's history you're coming and you're telling us let's join hands. How on earth I am going to trust you, I will never trust you".



Mistreatment and Harassment

Some women narrated their own experiences in a context where mistreatment was commonplace during the intervention. Randa, from Mdawar, quoted a humanitarian worker saying to her: ***“You are beggars and are still asking for more?”***. Labelling affected women as beggars was repeatedly heard during focus group discussions.

Harassment against Humanitarian Workers

There were also reports about harassment and threats against humanitarian workers curtailing the movement of CSOs in certain areas. Hasan, a humanitarian worker, explained:

“Outlaws are in all regions, but why should you take permission? This is a de facto authority. An official in the Amal movement told me: ‘If you come to this place one more time, I will break your legs’.

Referring to Khandaq el Ghamiq, Amal from Zuqaq el-Blat confirmed: ***“Yes, gangs hit representatives of the Relief Social Association. They want to be the one taking aid and distributing it at their discretion”.***

Interviews indicated that harassment of humanitarian workers was not limited to one specific area. Hasan, humanitarian worker, explained: ***“Even in Karantina, I was escorted by the security forces (gendarmierie), to distribute aid”***, indicating lack of safety in that area. Other forms of harassment were reported. A CSO representative told a story about a humanitarian worker who had been harassed in Geitawi by a man who asked her to get into his apartment during a door-to-door visit.

FINDINGS ON ENGAGEMENT IN THE COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Humanitarian coordination mechanisms are set to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring accountability and partnership to reduce duplications and ensure efficiency in the humanitarian response.¹⁸ Our data revealed two main forms of coordination during the intervention: Inter-CSO coordination and coordination with the government.

Inter-CSO Coordination

We found piecemeal initiatives of coordination among CSOs mainly in the form of complementary restoration work and referral of cases. Complementary restoration work was based on a CSO's specialization and distribution of tasks in a complementary manner. For example, a CSO would fix doors or shattered windows while another CSO would paint walls and tile the floor. For referrals, a representative from Dawaer Foundation explained: ***"It was more like referral of case to NGOs that are specialized within a specific scope. We faced this in the psychosocial sessions when we felt that some participants need more focused sessions, so we directed them to other NGOs"***.

Coordination with the Government

There was coordination with the Municipality of Beirut, Makhateer, municipalities of the affected areas, and the Civil Defense to identify needs and tailor humanitarian aid accordingly.

In tandem, CSOs coordinated with the army primarily to get access to geographically divided zones. Many CSOs praised the division of affected zones by the army to facilitate the humanitarian response.

¹⁸<https://www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination>, accessed May 2, 2021.



Perceived Lack of Coordination

Many CSOs lamented the bureaucracy entailed in getting permission from the army to access affected areas. A CSO representative referred to the lack of coordination among all the stakeholders in different sectors in Lebanon, mainly the government (RMF). In his view, the lack of coordination is due to the lack of a strategy that would mobilize humanitarian efforts in a planned manner. Lack of coordination resulted in duplications, overlaps, and redundancies such as providing the same type of aid to the same affected population repeatedly by different CSOs debilitating the efficiency of the humanitarian intervention. Hiyam, a humanitarian worker from Bechara El-Khoury said: **“I went to help from the first day, we were cleaning the houses, and it was all messy —no coordination, we didn’t know what to do”**. We conclude by quoting a representative from Helem who summarized the situation as:

“...to be honest, things were so bad that I don’t blame them [CSOs] because things are so bad in Lebanon, but some people couldn’t get anything because they didn’t do all the paperwork or because they didn’t know how to do that. And this is one of the most unfortunate repercussions of the lack of coordination and more importantly the lack of integration of organizations like ours into the greater organisational scheme” (Helem).

Duplication in Needs Assessment

Too many need assessments were taking place simultaneously on the ground in the wake of the explosion— a late awakening of the importance of need assessment in a disaster-ridden country. The IRC representative rightly described the multiplicity of needs assessment following the Beirut Port blast as **“Assessment Fatigue”**. As alluded to earlier, people were desperate for aid not assessment, while CSOs and INGO conducted needs assessments in order to make the intervention responsive to needs. The lack of coordination among CSOs regarding needs assessment had negative repercussions on the affected people engendering mistrust against CSOs.

Earmarked Funds

Earmarked money was also a cause of duplication of aid in which CSOs might use funds to specific needs that are also covered by another CSO at the same time. A representative from Loubnaniyoun, whose domain of work is not in the health sector, explained: **“For instance, too many donors wanted to distribute medicines, so we were not able to say no because all people needed everything. It was a catastrophe”**. The fact that many CSOs had to work in a barrage of domains, led to a congestion of aid provision of the same type to the same affected communities.



Competition among CSOs

It was mentioned that competition among CSOs was an impediment to coordination as many CSOs try to find a niche or trademark in the humanitarian space for widening opportunities of accruing funds from the INGOs. It can be said that coordination among CSOs was scattered and based on immediate and spontaneous piecemeal initiatives in the absence of a national strategy for humanitarian intervention in times of crisis.

Overall, we can safely generalize that coordination based on a systematic deployment of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in an effective manner such as utilizing strategic planning and assessment data was absent¹⁹.

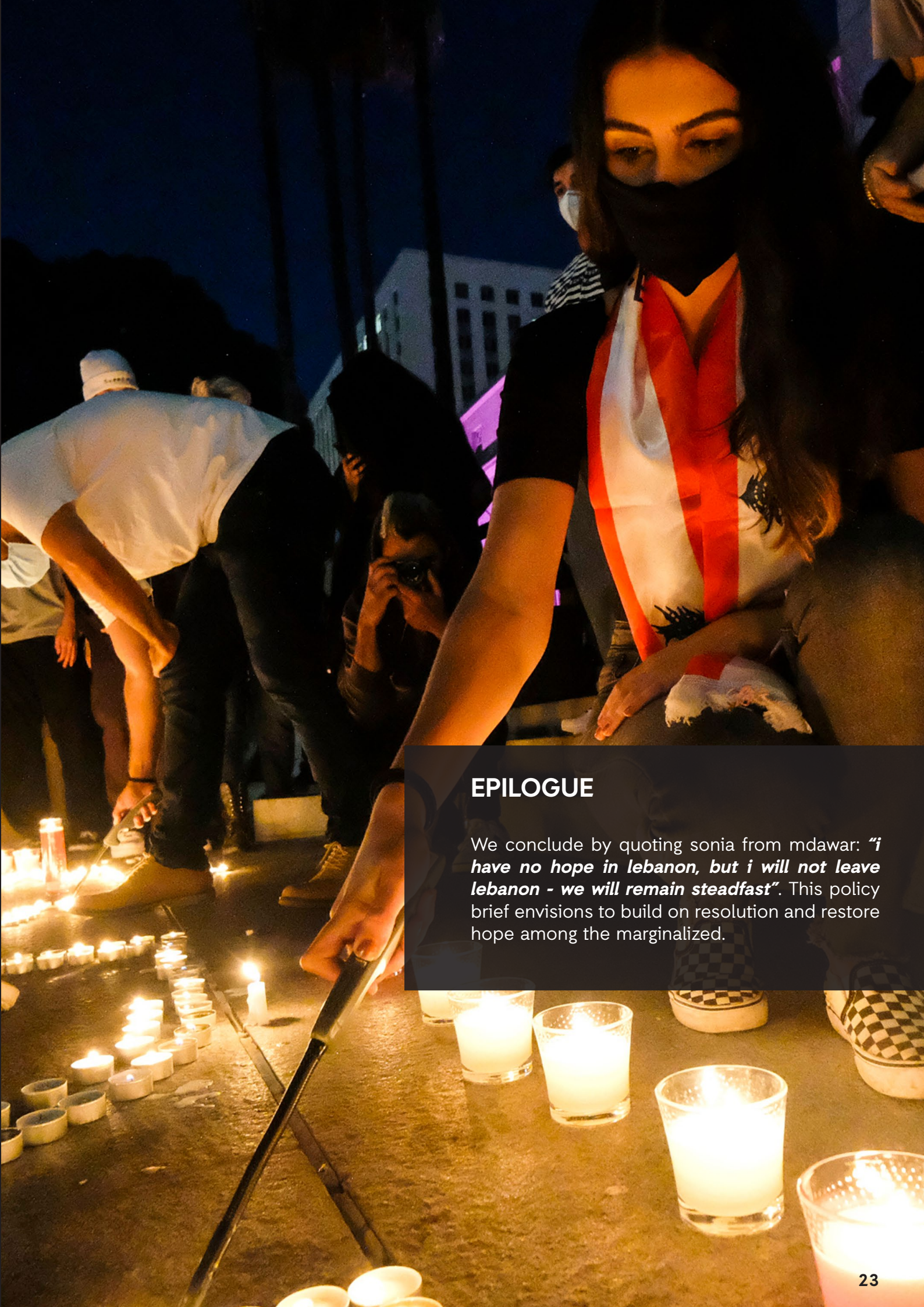
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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy brief examined the complex trajectories and mechanisms of the intervention deployed in the aftermath of the explosion raising questions of fairness and equality to the forefront of the humanitarian regime in Lebanon. Based on results yielded from fieldwork, we recommend the following:

- Launching a consortium of CSOs, fourth sector civil society, and government representatives in order to set out a coordination scheme among humanitarian players for future crises. CSOs, fourth sector organizations in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs are to develop an emergency preparedness plan / unit for effective intervention in future crises.
- We are concerned with the wariness of CSOs to work directly with the government because the latter might find it suitable to coopt CSOs and limit their freedom. To address this concern, we recommend that a forum between CSOs and the government be established to regularly engage each other on issues related to the country's humanitarian needs and programs.
- Creating a standardized data depository that houses information from all CSOs and fourth sector organizations for pooling of needs and scope of work for each constituency. Data should be posted on the websites of CSOs for transparency, information sharing, and accountability.
- Initiating in-service training on emergency response to prepare humanitarian workers to deal with complex humanitarian crises in Lebanon.
- All-inclusive humanitarian intervention and building sustainable livelihoods among women and refugees is a priority. Participating women accented the need for self-reliance. A humanitarian worker from Zuqaq el-Blat said: ***"We want to work. We don't want to beg"***.
- Establishing an observatory by CSOs and the Ministry of Social Affairs to receive complaints and deal with grievances related to unfairness in aid distribution to the vulnerable.





EPILOGUE

We conclude by quoting sonia from mdawar: *“i have no hope in lebanon, but i will not leave lebanon - we will remain steadfast”*. This policy brief envisions to build on resolution and restore hope among the marginalized.