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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflections on the Initiatives of NGOs, INGOs, and UN Organizations in Eradicating Poverty in Lebanon Through the Case Study of RMF

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Abstract

Despite several measures aimed at helping the poor, almost three-quarters of the Lebanese residents plunge into poverty (ESCWA, 2021), owing to a severe political, economic and financial crisis that hit the country since the last quarter of 2019 (WorldBank, 2021). These combined shocks have resulted in a drop in the living conditions for a large percentage of the Lebanese, minorities, and refugees. Many efforts have been set to lower the levels of poverty by INGOs, NGOs, and UN organizations in the country whether by providing direct relief support to the poor, minorities and refugees or by funding SMEs and startups, yet the changes in the poverty levels are still low.

This paper aims at exploring the effects of the programs and projects being implemented by key local NGOs, International NGOs, and UN organizations in the country in an attempt to examine their ability in changing the lives of the beneficiaries and in reducing poverty in the nation. To do so, the paper considers one of the relief programs implemented by René Moawad Foundation RMF; the “Food for Assets through the Construction and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Canals and Agricultural Roads” project that is funded by the European Union MADAD Trust Fund – WFP. The Yin case study protocol was used (R. K. Yin, 2011) (Stake, 1995) (Tellis, 1997) to gather data and analyze them. The paper concludes that such interventions are important and can change the living conditions of the beneficiaries temporarily, but for reducing poverty, sustainable interventions are needed to achieve long run goals.

Keywords: Poverty, INGOs, NGOs, UN organizations, Relief and emergency response, Economic and Social impact

1. Introduction

Poverty is a condition in which one lacks access to necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. It can also refer to a person whose financial situation makes it difficult for her/him to pursue their goals in life, including accessing education, medical care, finding a stable job, and engaging in leisure activities (Okalow, 2022). The United Nations indicate that the major goal is to eliminate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by the year 2030. This is an extremely important condition to achieve sustainable development (UN SDG, 2015). At September 2000 Millennium summit, 189 countries unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration, where

they pledged to invest all their efforts to free all men, women, and children from the extreme poverty (see Table 1).

Although many efforts have been invested to decrease poverty, reducing poverty remains the principal challenge facing humanity, especially after the COVID19 pandemic confronted the world for the past two years (UN SDG, 2015). In fact, 10 percent of the world population, equivalent to more than 700 million people are still living in extreme poverty, more precisely they are living in less than 1.25 dollars a day (ESCWA, 2021; Stake, 1995; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2011).

In Lebanon, and as a result of the recent economic and financial crisis that was joined by the COVID19

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Table 1. Projects implemented by RMF (Source: <https://www.rmftogether.com/>).

Project	Donor	Description
Responding to humanitarian WASH and education needs in Lebanon	Norwegian Church aid and Finland Church aid	The project aims to support the communities affected by the crisis and demonstrate improved hygiene practices and access life-saving WASH services appropriate and relevant to their immediate needs. The project will improve the access to quality education for crisis-affected children in a safe and protective learning environment.
Beirut Emergency: Rebuilding the future Together	Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana (ARCI) and Fondazione Prosolidar	The project aims to support public and semi-private schools affected by Beirut Blast. The project activities include purchasing and distributing furniture for the schools, in addition to informatics tools for distance learning/digital labs.
Responding to Wash Needs in Lebanon	Norwegian Church Aid	The project aims to respond to the wash and hygiene needs of 7 schools in Zgharta, Koura and Tripoli.
Provision of life saving services for survivors and at-risk refugees and vulnerable host communities in North Lebanon	German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) implemented in partnership with International Rescue Committee (IRC)	The project aims to strengthening access to life-saving services to vulnerable and at-risk cohorts from refugee and host communities
Improve employability and ability to increase income generation for youth and women in North Lebanon	European Union & Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) implemented by GIZ and RMF	The project enhances the livelihood conditions of youth aged between 16 and 29 and women residing in T5 region in North Lebanon. It evolves around building the capacities of 250 Lebanese youth and women to strengthen their social, technical and practical skills, improving the likelihood of their employability and ability to increase income generation.

pandemic, poverty has become a major challenge in the country. UN experts estimate that four out of five individuals are in poverty. The number of Lebanese living under the national poverty line has increased by 9.1 pp by the end of 2021 (WorldBank, 2021). Although Lebanon has made progress toward the MDGs in the past, there are still problems with poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. The consequences and fallout of the Syria crisis significantly worsened the situation. While Lebanon has demonstrated unprecedented solidarity by temporarily housing 1.5 million Syrian refugees, the pressures on the country's infrastructure has led to incurring heavy costs, and has pushed Lebanon to its breaking point (UN, 2018). The deteriorating situation in Lebanon has attracted humanitarian assistance where many local NGOs international NGOs, and UN organizations have been providing relief and emergency response especially after the Beirut Blast to Lebanese citizens, the poor, and the refugees.

This paper targets NGOs, INGOs' and UN organizations' interventions to alleviate the living conditions of the Lebanese and refugees in an attempt to discover their impact on reducing poverty in the country. To do so, a case study was conducted by this study and considered one of the relief programs implemented by René Moawad Foundation RMF;

the “Food for Assets through the Construction and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Canals and Agricultural Roads” project that is funded by the European Union MADAD Trust Fund – WFP. The paper poses a major question: are the interventions of NGOs, INGOs and UN organizations capable of reducing poverty in the long run? Following a basic introduction to Lebanon's poverty and the paper's primary goal, a thorough literature analysis on Lebanon's poverty and the contribution of NGOs, INGOs and UN organizations to the country's fight against poverty is presented. After providing the research methodology, the case study analysis and outcomes discussion are provided. The paper then concludes by drawing attention to the fact that while immediate relief and emergency measures can momentarily alter the lives of the beneficiaries, longer-term, more lasting measures are thought necessary to provide the groundwork for income-generating models and so reduce poverty.

2. Literature review

Since the end of the civil war in 1990, Lebanon has been suffering from an economic crisis that lasted until its total collapse in 2019. Conflicts with the government started in the fall of 2019, a period that is now known as the October Revolution, and by

early 2020, the level of violence was rising. The first diagnosis of COVID-19 in the nation was made on February 21, 2020. On August 4, 2020, in the country's capital of Beirut, one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions ever recorded followed. In addition to damaging more than 300,000 people's homes and many hospitals, the horrific disaster left 204 people dead and over 6500 people injured. Protests persisted despite the lockdown and safety precautions because of the public's lack of confidence in the government's capacity to control the pandemic (WorldBank, 2021).

The Lebanese pound lost more than 80 percent of its value, and the banking systems collapsed, making the financial crisis worse. The economic destruction due to the corruption of the political and governmental leaders on the one hand, and the malmanagement of the banking system on the second hand, explain why Lebanon has fallen into the deepest recession in its history. As a result, the unemployment rate has significantly increased leaving thousands of Lebanese without jobs. Many small and medium enterprises had to shut down and consequently many employees lost their jobs. This has led to higher poverty levels in the country, noting that around 1.5 million of the population are refugees and are already suffering from terrible living conditions in the country (United Nations, 2021). This dramatic situation in Lebanon attracted the international community where donations through many UN organizations, INGOs and Local NGOs have been entering the country in the form of emergency response programs to support the people affected by the Beirut Blast, the poor, the refugees, and the most vulnerable groups. In this literature review part, insights on poverty in Lebanon is presented, and the role of UN organizations, NGOs and INGOs in Lebanon is summarized.

2.1. Poverty in Lebanon

The World Bank Organization defines poverty as: "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living 1 day at a time" (GBN, 2009). The assessment of poverty in the Middle East, and in particular in Lebanon, suffers from a substantial lack of data and information that is essential for poverty level monitoring and policy making (Makdissi et al., 2022). Since 1960, the first social and development study was conducted in

Lebanon by the Institut International de recherche et de formation en vue du développement harmonisé IRFED, followed by several studies using different samples, methodologies, and approaches. The inconsistency in methodologies and approaches made comparisons of yearly poverty levels ineffective (Kukrety & Al-Jamal, 2016).

Sleem and Dixon (2018) provide critical information on poverty in Lebanon. They claim that Lebanon has a diversified population with 1.5 million Arab refugees. Child poverty is a significant social issue since it has a negative impact on all affected children's development. Youth achievement is hampered by poverty. Over 1500 street children, the majority of whom are Syrian refugees, live in Lebanon, where 1.35 million people are below the poverty line. Another major social issue is the high unemployment rate, which now stands at 18.7% for men and 24.7 percent for women. Youth unemployment results in poorer levels of happiness and well-being as well as emotions of social rejection. Arab young refugees are making Lebanon's youth crisis worse, but the Lebanese government has not yet developed any comprehensive or well-tailored measures to address the country's unique social, economic, and political issues. Kukrety and Al-Jamal (2016) indicate that Lebanon is hosting more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians. Although the Vulnerability Assessment for 11,680 Syrian Refugees (VASyR) was conducted and provided that 70% of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line and that have unstable income, they receive support and humanitarian assistance, which Lebanese poor and most vulnerable groups do not benefit from. The Syrian refugees are protected against exchange rate volatility and inflation since they receive World Food Program's food vouchers.

Seshan and Cnobloch (2022) provide insights on the multidimensional poverty index MPI. They explain that the nationally representative Labor Force and Household Living Conditions Survey of 2018–2019 was utilized to create the MPI for Lebanon. The measure is based on 19 factors that encompass five categories: basic infrastructure, living conditions, financial stability, health, and education. According to the 2019 MPI for Lebanon, 53.1% of all residents there were multidimensionally poor were deficient in more than 25% of the variables. 16.2% of the population is classified as extremely poor, which means that they experience deprivation in more than 50% of the parameters. Lack of health insurance (24.8%), low school graduation rates (18.3%), and low-security employment (9.7%) are the main causes of national MPI poverty.

When aggregating by dimension, health (30.2%), job (25.8%), and education (25.3%) all contribute significantly to deprivation. The living standards and fundamental infrastructure elements each made an equal contribution of 13% and 6%.

Since 2019, the economic and financial conditions in Lebanon have been changing rapidly and have resulted in a new phase for the residents of the nation. [Baumann \(2019\)](#) says that Lebanese capitalism is currently experiencing a crisis due to public debt, an impending currency crisis, and deplorable public services, thirty years after Taif. The critical significance of Lebanon's dependence on Gulf rentierism is ignored in explanations that concentrate only on the sectarian “weak state” or on Syrian refugees. [Malaeb & Wai-Poi \(2021\)](#) state that in the last quarter of 2019, the Lebanese political, financial and economic crisis started in the country and then it was followed by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the Beirut Blast in August 2020. As a result, the poverty rate increased from 13% in 2019 to 28% in 2021 for Lebanese and from 39% in 2020 to 52% in 2021 for refugees.

[Rischke and Talebi \(2021\)](#) gathered extensive survey data for the TRANSMIT research project on the position of Syrians and Lebanese in Lebanon in 2019, 2020, and 2021. The survey results indicated that 40% of the households in the considered sample said that they had “money not enough to buy food,” according to baseline data in Lebanon obtained on the eve of the October revolution in 2019. 20% more people claim to be able to purchase food but no other necessities. Syrians experience higher rates of poverty than Lebanese. Massive demands for fundamental change have been made over the past couple of years, but the sample data reveal broad skepticism about whether these demands will be fulfilled as well as worries about a potential new war. Those who are still living in Lebanon, however, have virtually little immediate opportunity to migrate.

The Government of Lebanon, donors, and the international community are debating how to continue to meet the fundamental needs of the poor Lebanese, refugees, and minorities over the medium to potentially long term as the poor and the refugees contend with depleting resources and rising poverty. Numerous NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations have launched temporary cash support programs in various regions of Lebanon to prevent households living in poverty and under socioeconomic shocks from resorting to negative coping mechanisms. The section that follows sheds light on the role of the NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations in Lebanon.

2.2. The role of NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations in reducing poverty in Lebanon

NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations are becoming more valued for their ability to shape global policy on issues related to development, such as alleviating poverty, promoting sustainable development, and upholding human rights. Through their international development and humanitarian operations, INGOs significantly improve the lives of vulnerable people around the world; they interfere in emergency response programs to support refugees, provide shelter, protect the women and minorities against violence and enhance employability and social cohesion. For example, [Saleh and Karia \(2020\)](#) emphasized that INGOs' successful responses to the COVID-19 pandemic include donor policies and regulations, needs, expectations, and relevancy, coordination, staff management, business continuity plans, balanced short- and long-term planning, and ongoing adoption of successful modalities.

In Lebanon, the economic, financial, and social circumstances demonstrate the urgent need for the country to recover. However, and as [Fawaz and Harb \(2020\)](#) indicate, there is a major concern as practically the recovery is being handed over to activist movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in a manner that marginalizes the state. NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations are overwhelmingly present in the areas that have been affected. Because of the disintegration of the Lebanese state during the civil war, many competent local NGOs have been able to sustain some of the most important facets of social life. These organizations have a wide range of profiles and even if they assert an apolitical and secular character, all these organizations tend to operate in certain national areas, albeit the most well-established ones have crossed many boundaries and profited from and bragged an apolitical identity to secure room for manoeuvre.

Few INGOs have existed in Lebanon since the civil war or even before; however, following 2006, when they arrived at aid in the post-war reconstruction, their numbers significantly grew. However, it was the inflow of Syrian refugees that began in 2012 that put Lebanon on the agenda of most international NGOs. These INGOs have established the “relief” infrastructure across the nation, including UN-led coordination groups, refugee registries, and interventions organized in the humanitarian silos of shelter, WASH, security, education, health, and basic needs. This

infrastructure has been coordinated by United Nations bodies, particularly the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Sacca et al., 2022, pp. 1–16). Numerous of these organizations have taken the lead in delivering aid, restoring homes, clearing debris, recycling materials, and attending to basic needs in the wake of the Beirut port explosion. As a result, they have increased their coordination and relief efforts for Syrian refugees and host communities to include the areas in Beirut and its surroundings that were damaged by the explosion.

AbouAssi (2015) state that with more than 15,000 organizations, Lebanon boasts one of the most diverse and active civil societies in the area, making its citizen-NGO ratio the highest in the Middle East. Kingston (2013) explain that nonprofit groups carried out the duties of the government agencies throughout the civil war, and the number of NGOs grew steadily following the war as a result of subsequent humanitarian disasters including the 2006 July war, the 2012 Syrian refugees' crisis, the 2019 political and financial crisis, the February 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the August 4 Beirut Blast.

However, many NGOs goals were initially nebulous or out of date when they were established, so the value and clarity of programs implemented today are distant from the initial intension of the NGOs at the moment of their establishment (AbouAssi, 2015).

The fundamental reasons for the emergence of the non-profit sector are the shortcomings of government initiatives and the ongoing necessity in times of crisis (Hakim et al., 2022). Nonprofit organizations regularly modify their sorts of interventions, their sphere of operation, their strategies, and their policies in response to the political, social, and financial policies of the nation. Therefore, NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations work to empower people, particularly the impoverished and the most vulnerable communities. Reducing poverty in Lebanon have become on the top list of non-profit organizations due to the outlined reasons that were previously identified in this paper. Haddad (2017) indicate that despite playing a significant role in Lebanon, the third humanitarian sector is still unable to function effectively due to the lack of a comprehensive legal framework. In 2017, INGOs role was regulated by certain ministries like the ministry of energy, health, and education, where they are forced now to partner with local NGOs and public institutions to implement their projects.

Based on the UN (2018) voluntary national report, vulnerable communities were targeted by relevant

ministries and NGOs successfully. The 2018 UN report claimed that the solid healthcare and education systems show that the foundation of Lebanon is good healthcare and high-quality education. The social system has, however, become weaker due to years of hardship and crises. In host communities that were previously at risk and where displaced Syrians have relocated, poverty rates, which were already high before the Syrian crisis, have gotten worse. This hasn't stopped Lebanon from making steps to improve conditions for everyone, including focusing on the poorest through the National Poverty Targeting Programme and Reaching All Children with Education.

Although there are numerous dimensions to poverty, few solutions to combat it use an integrated strategy. While some continue to concentrate primarily on concerns of income and employment, others address various facets of poverty independently. Gamboaa et al. (2020) claim that the challenge with concentrating primarily on one aspect of poverty is not just that it presents an incomplete picture; the core problem is that it can hide the emergence of new forms of poverty. According to Abdebaki (Makkieh; & Abdelbaki, 2020) the poor Lebanese society, along with the most vulnerable populations and refugees, is the focus of the NGOs and INGOs now operating in the country. Due to the urgency of the humanitarian situation in the nation, emergency response projects and relief interventions have taken the place of development and cultural initiatives where the support is being directly made to ensure the survival of the poor and refugees without focusing on resolving the causes of poverty and preventing it for the future.

Figs. 1 and 2 below provide more details on the emergency response and relief projects that are being implemented in Lebanon by several NGOs and INGOs like WFP, Concern Worldwide, MEDIAR, Relief International, Himaya, UN Women, Caritas Lebanon, International Rescue Committee, and several others (OCHA Services, 2022). The major donors are United States, European Commission, Government of France, Government of Canada, United States Fund for UNICEF and many others. Fig. 1 below provide detailed information on the size of the amounts that are invested in response plan projects and the percentage being unmet. For example, in 2020, the response plan/appeal funding amount totaled 136, 500, 000 USD while 17, 975, 312 USD was not met. Fig. 2 presents the major sectors targeted. Mainly WASH, food security and logistics.

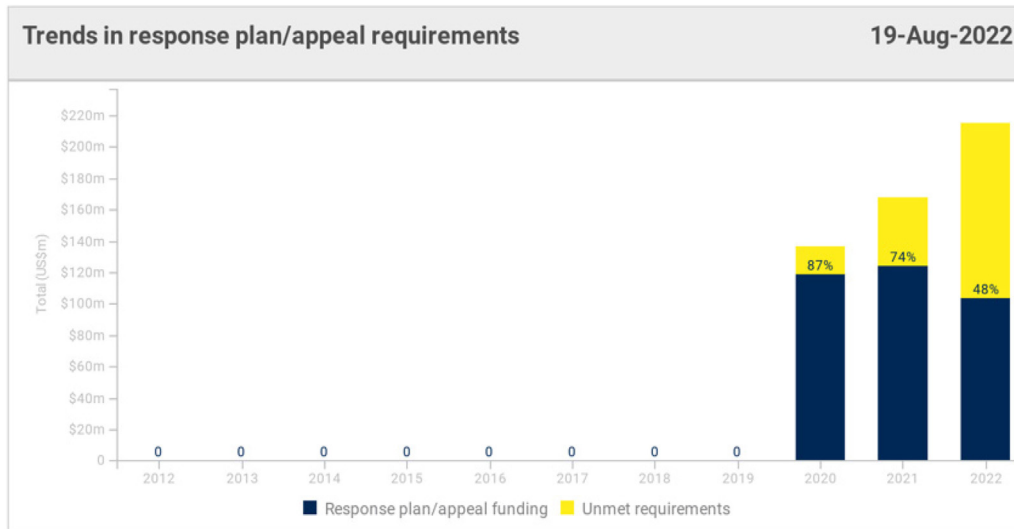


Fig. 1. Trends in response plan/appeal requirements (source: <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1050/summary>).

3. Methodology and case study description

3.1. Research method

The major aim of this paper is to examine and challenge poverty relief programs implemented in Lebanon; more specifically the paper targets the effects of relief projects in reducing poverty in the long run. Due to the lack of available data in the country, and the short amount of time available to conduct the study, a holistic analysis was made while covering only one national NGO's work in Lebanon; René Moawad Foundation RMF. RMF was selected while considering its intensive experience in the field as one of the largest NGOs working all

over the country, with partnerships with more than 20 INGOs and a budget reaching 20 million dollars in 2020. The case study focused on one of the relief programs implemented by RNF in collaboration with the World Food Programme: the “Food for Assets through the Construction and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Canals and Agricultural Roads” project that is funded by the European Union MADAD Trust Fund – WFP.

Yin (1994) case study approach was utilized for the case study analysis(K. Yin, 2017). The case study approach is explanatory in nature, since the paper examine the relation between the NGO's project and poverty reduction. Qualitative research design was utilized where in-depth interviews are

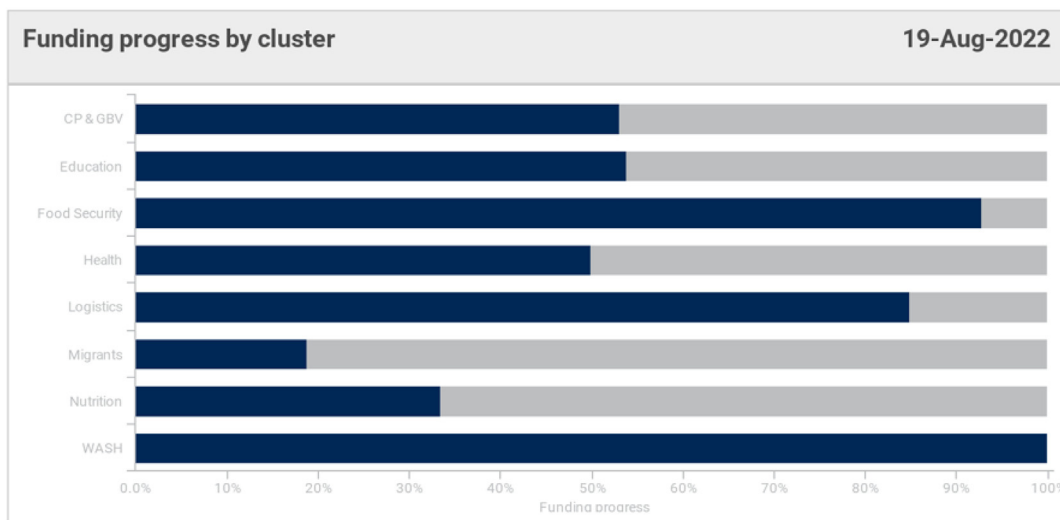


Fig. 2. Funding progress by cluster (source: <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1050/summary>).

conducted with the project manager [Anthonio Mouawad \(2022\)](#), the project coordinator (2022) and 16 beneficiaries in the specified project. Purposive sampling was used to select the 16 beneficiaries from the beneficiary database of RMF to allow the inclusion of participants relevant to the objective of the paper. In addition to that, data and documents provided by RMF on project internal evaluation, external auditor evaluation, and others were analyzed.

The Yin approach used in this paper helps in formulating the research question, decide on whether the case study can answer the research question, decide on what tools to be used to collect the data, apply chain evidence for analysis and conclusions (K. Yin, 2009).

3.2. René Moawad Foundation overview

René Moawad Foundation (RMF) established in 1991 with the mission of promoting social, economic, and rural development in Lebanon and the MENA region. RMF focuses on empowering humans both intellectually and financially through education, health, and economic development to guarantee their dignity and their basic rights. This falls perfectly within the poverty reduction SDG # 1 of 2015. RMF covers five core areas of interventions: Education and protection, economic development, health and social care, agriculture and rural development, local authorities, and decentralization. RMF includes a team of 270 members working across seven offices throughout Lebanon. Throughout 30 years, RMF have implemented several development projects in collaboration with INGOs like USAID, OCHA, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, Save the Children, NRC, Action Humanitaire France, GIZ, CHF International, German cooperation and many others. RMF has been audited by international auditing companies like KPMG and Grant Thornton to assure compliance and transparency. RMF projects benefited 316,731 beneficiaries in 2021 and have provided services to 278,276 beneficiaries with a yearly budget of 19.571 million dollars in 2020.

3.3. RMF activities to reduce poverty

In partnership with international donors, local and international partners, RMF is implementing several projects in different areas of intervention, all under the umbrella of human being empowerment. Human being empowerment within vulnerable communities will contribute to reducing poverty. The activities led by RMF target children, women, and families'

education, health, and wellbeing using established education centers, emergency response projects especially during the economic and financial crisis. RMF uses vocational training, WASH services, education services, and healthcare services to improve human wellbeing and reduce poverty. RMF implements economic development projects to increase job opportunities, while introducing circular economy, and ensuring sustainability. RMF is executing activities such as capacity building, training workshops, recruitment support, start-ups and entrepreneurs training, and funding in different sectors like agriculture, tourism, and artisanal production. The table below summarizes some relief and emergency response projects implemented by RMF.

3.4. Case study presentation

“Food for Assets through the Construction and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Canals and Agricultural Roads” funded by the European Union MADAD Trust Fund – WFP project was considered for the case study in this paper. In partnership with WFP, RMF is investing 793,699 USD to cover villages in North Lebanon: Sfireh, Beit Faqes, Bakhoun, Qarsita, Nemrin, Matal – Donnieh District, Tal Bireh, Bebine – Akkar District. The objective of the project is to rehabilitate and construct irrigation canals and agricultural roads benefiting 594 vulnerable farmers in the Dennieh and Akkar region while employing workers from the vulnerable hosting and refugees' communities in the area. The project consists of two types of beneficiaries: the beneficiaries who benefit by wages during the project and the farmers who benefit from the constructed irrigation canal and agricultural road. Through food for asset activities secured for eight months, the project intends to decrease the negative coping mechanisms and improve food security and nutrition of at least 500 of the most disadvantaged hosting and refugee segments. This includes rehabilitating agricultural roads totaling 660 m in length in Tal Hmayra-Akkar and 10,000 m in length in 10 locations in Minnieh-Dennieh and Akkar. It also targets 594 beneficiaries through irrigation canal rehabilitation.

3.5. Beneficiaries sample description

In the study, 16 workers in the Food for Assets project were purposely sampled 10 are men and 6 women. Out of which 8 were Syrian refugees and 8 were Lebanese. The ages of the workers sampled range between 25 and 61 years old. Two of the 10 men interviewed are still studying and have reached the undergraduate level of education. The remaining

8 did not finish school, and do not hold any degree. All the men don't have permanent jobs, three are professional construction workers, three are bus or pickup drivers and four are farmers. All women are not educated and are stay at home moms.

4. Case study results

The program manager, Mr. [Anthonio Mouawad \(2022\)](#) reported that this initiative hired 2084 people for a participation in the project in 2021, including 239 women and 776 Syrian refugees. According to Mr. Anthonio, the concept was conceived before the start of the 2020 financial crisis. Its goal was to provide economic aid to those in need while also encouraging those beneficiaries to make a permanent, sustainable impact on agricultural productivity. The farmers and employees, he continued, are also local inhabitants who were picked for the project because of their vulnerability within the community. Beyond just disbursing money and other benefits, the project's major goal was to foster communal togetherness and solidarity, especially between the host community and the refugees.

Mr. Anthonio also said that the project supported the development and upkeep of agricultural roads and irrigation systems. Farmers who own the land were the project's primary beneficiaries on that level; this portion of the project addresses the project's development aspect. Farmers formerly irrigated their land manually, but now they use irrigation channels, which makes the task easier and less expensive.

The workers' financial condition was reported by Mr. [Jean Moauwad \(2022\)](#), the project coordinator, who was on the job site and in close contact with them. He claimed that the majority of the men hired on this project were independent contractors who primarily worked by the hour or by the project, whether as laborers, workers, or drivers. The majority of Lebanese employees have tiny plots of land that they cultivate, harvest with their family, and sell the crops. Regarding the Syrian refugees that were employed in the project; they were all given some sort of additional support for their families from other organizations or initiatives run by the same organization. The majority of the women who worked for this program were married with children, had no prior experience, and did not want a permanent job. They were attracted to the project because of the program's reasonable compensation and short working hours.

By giving them paid work hours to build irrigation canals, the project seeks to empower disadvantaged people in the villages of Dennieh and Akkar. A

beneficiary claimed that in addition to the income, I also got construction experience that helped me get recruited after the project was completed to work on more building projects nearby. Another beneficiary who owns a bus and uses it to transport students to and from schools was jobless during his imprisonment but was given the opportunity to work as a bus driver in the project. When students didn't need to be driven to school and I used my time and bus for the project, he claimed that it assisted me in meeting my monthly obligations.

A stay-at-home mother claimed that the project gave me a place to work and feel useful, and it also allowed me to meet other women who shared my circumstances. With my Syrian education, this project was my first paid employment because I couldn't find a position in Lebanon that suited my needs while also allowing me to care for my four children. According to another beneficiary who is also a stay-at-home mother and had no employment before, said that I was connected to RMF through this initiative, and they helped me acquire vocational training in cooking, where I started to sell home-cooked meals.

All of the beneficiaries who were interviewed had positive comments to make about the project and how it had improved their lives. They emphasized how the project had given them a US dollar income that had protected them from the hyperinflation brought on by the devaluation of the Lebanese currency in 2021. All 16 interviewees stated that they would be open to working on more projects of a similar nature. Since the project's end, 87.5% of the beneficiaries who were interviewed said they have not found employment; some are finding it difficult to meet their family's needs due to inflation. With the exception of two beneficiaries, who are awaiting further direct help or were waiting for other cash-for-work schemes with the NGOs active in the region. Most of the women indicated that since they were all stay-at-home mothers and that they do not have the time, none of them expressed interest in vocational training when questioned.

The results of the interviews clearly show that while a bigger proportion of respondents said that their economic condition had improved over the project's working time, they also claimed that, overall, it had remained fairly stagnant. They occasionally receive cash assistance from NGOs and donors, whether or not in exchange for work. Although their financial status has improved during this time, their overall posture has remained essentially same. That means that, aside from the time when they receive aid, they continue to live in poverty all year round.

According to an internal RMF evaluation of the project with WFP, it was determined that the initiative succeeded in providing cash to the most disadvantaged community members over the project's duration, in addition to assisting farmers in becoming more productive and sustainable in their farming operations. But since then, the requirements of the community have changed. Mr. Antonio stated that the ongoing hyperinflation, the paucity of necessities, and the ongoing increase in fuel prices necessitate new types of initiatives. The Lebanese were having problems in 2021 due to the depreciation of their currency, and they required a monetary income in dollars. He continued by saying that since the summer of 2021, subsidies on bread, medicines, cooking gas, and heating diesel as well as transportation gas have been gradually eliminated. As a result, those products began to become scarce in the market, and health care costs skyrocketed with no support from the social security or private insurance systems supported by the ministry of health. People now require the items instead of cash because it is difficult for them to find it without receiving special treatment from the merchants or paying far higher prices on the black market. In-kind donations therefore seem to be the greatest way to assist those vulnerable communities in the future.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In an effort to assess the capacity of NGOs, INGOs, and UN organizations in improving the beneficiaries' lives and combat poverty in the country, this paper intends to investigate the impact of the programs and initiatives being carried out by significant local and international NGOs. The "Food for Assets through the Construction and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Canals and Agricultural Roads" project, which is financed by the European Union MADAD Trust Fund - WFP, and carried out by René Moawad Foundation RMF is the selected project for the case study analysis. Our case study presents a number of limitations, our findings although in-depth may not be generalizable to other settings or populations, as the case of RMF is particular to the Lebanese current crises, our sample is typically small due to the nature of our study, and it may not capture completely the complexity of the poverty situation worldwide while it is a well representation of the Lebanese situation.

The analysis of the selected cash for work project that also has a development impact indicates that the initiative was intended as a short-term fix that would provide temporary work until more

substantial forms of assistance and long-term employment prospects become available. For immediate relief in the Lebanese context, quick, urgent actions that are not sustainable are required. These activities were seen following the implementation of post-tsunami programs in Aceh Province, Indonesia (Doocy et al., 2006), during the Ukrainian crisis, during Syria's war (Piotrowicz, 2018), and in the Sanghar region, in addition to the Lebanese situation (Ali et al., 2021).

Overall, cash for work programs may provide temporary respite to the target communities, but long-term changes in people's economic circumstances are not occurring. In Lebanon, as in Ukraine and Syria, a middle-income nation with well-established institutions, a somewhat well-developed infrastructure, and big urban centers is experiencing a crisis. Humanitarian remedies in such situations are different from those in remote, destitute locations where there are no markets (Piotrowicz, 2018). Education disparities are not the main contributors to poverty in Lebanon; the country's population is well educated and literate. Furthermore, it is not due to a lack of common people's skills or expertise in utilizing resources to their fullest potential. The ongoing crises that the nation is experiencing with the deep governmental corrupted system are the main factors causing poverty. As a result of increased urbanization spurred on by migration and economic hardship, poverty has recently grown in Lebanon.

The inability of the wider population to utilize the resources that are available to them effectively has been identified as the main contributor to poverty in the Sanghar region. They occasionally receive financial aid from NGOs and donors and they are feeling better at the time of donations. However, they are often inactive. That implies that they remain in poverty all year round. (Ali et al., 2021). In Lebanon, poverty is caused by the never-ending tough circumstances the nation is experiencing. Even though programs that target sustainability and development are implemented (Al Hakim et al., 2022), the real need to relief vulnerable communities and reduce poverty in the midst of the severe crises the country is facing lies in the direct assistance to the vulnerable communities. Cash for work is one of the schemes that secure fast assistance in terms of cash distribution.

The problem moving forward remains that vulnerable communities are not improving their poverty status on the long run, so the poverty reduction strategy is not producing its benefits. Furthermore, the problem is getting worse because of the continuous deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon, in particular the scarcity of the

essential needs, which highlights the need for further direct aid such as essential goods and services provision and furthermore, maybe daily meals distribution plans. Development and growth triggering solutions are of course needed for long term poverty reduction such as promoting entrepreneurship, providing microfinance, providing vocational training, promoting sustainable agriculture practices, and others, but those are not considered a priority for the humanitarian community in Lebanon, because of the crises the country is facing. Short term, fast and direct solutions are instead adopted.

Informed consent statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data availability statement

Data may be available upon request.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix.

Interview Questions.

Interview questions for Beneficiaries

- What was your occupation/job before the program participation?
- How did you get introduced to the program?

- What are the consequences of the intervention on your lifestyle?
- What are the consequences of the intervention on the education level of your kids?
- Are you working after the program ended?

Interview Questions for Program Manager and Program coordinator

- What are the areas of your interventions?
- Who are your targeted groups?
- Do you provide in kind support or funds or both?
- How is the relief being distributed among nationalities?

- What economic impact do you create out of your programs?
- Are there any other major NGOs supporting the same groups that you support?
- How do you think you are fighting poverty, and do you have indicators?
- Don't you think that creating employment is better than relief activities?
- Numbers of beneficiaries along the years?
- What are the budgets used for relief?
- Based on your evaluations, what are the sources of poverty in Lebanon? How are you trying to solve it with your programs? Are the implemented solutions sustainable?