SUMMARY
Since September 2019, Search for Common Ground (Search) has been implementing the “Partners for Justice” project with the overall goal of reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Lebanon. During the first three years, Search implemented the project in partnership with ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABaad). The project employed a robust Theory of Change (ToC) - IF men and boys are provided with a safe platform where they can deconstruct and change their own perceptions and attitudes around the socially built norms of masculinities that push men and boys to play the role of “protector” and “controller” of women and girls in the public and private space, AND they understand and embrace the role men and boys can play to contribute to shifting communities' perceptions and attitudes toward the permissibility of violence against women and girls, THEN they will become women’s and girls’ allies, model positive and equitable behaviors, ultimately contributing to changing negative social norms around violence against women and girls in Lebanon.

INTRODUCTION
The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index for 2022 places Lebanon 119th out of 146 nations, indicating that the country faces significant challenges regarding gender equality. All communities in Lebanon have seen an increase in VAWG, which is attributed to COVID-19, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, and civil turmoil. As a result, the need to have positive change in perceptions and attitudes and actions towards VAWG has grown. The rise in VAWG in the region and in Lebanon in particular is a key concern as the region witnesses a multiplication of femicides. In this context, since September 2019, Search has been implementing the “Partners for Justice” project. The overall goal of this project is to reduce VAWG in Lebanon by raising awareness on gender and masculinities and creating safe spaces and opportunities for men and boys to become allies in ending VAWG. The approach acknowledges that men and boys must be included in interventions to stop VAWG and to eliminate the social and patriarchal norms and practices that fuel it. Fighting VAWG requires not only the engagement of men and boys, but also the coordination of that participation across several sectors including social, economic, political, educational, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. The project implementation extended over five geographic areas- Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, South Lebanon, and North Lebanon. With the collaboration of 16 civil society organizations (CSOs) and 30 youth representatives in targeted areas, the project has managed to engage with people at a community level.
KEY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project implemented a variety of activities that involved several actors including the selected CSOs, youth representatives from the CSOs, young media professionals, and other relevant stakeholders. The project was implemented in two phases over three years with the aim of achieving two specific objectives: 1) Empowering men and boys to work with women to become allies and champions of gender equality and prevention of VAWG, and 2) Promoting a shift in communities’ attitudes in target areas around the permissibility of, and assumptions related to VAWG.

The primary project activities implemented under phase one included:

1) Empowering youth-led/youth-focused organizations (YLOs/YFOs) through capacity-building on gender and positive and equitable masculinities, Program Ra (including a training of trainers, coaching sessions, and the cascading of the training to local communities), and proposal development and writing; 2) a participatory, youth-led gender and masculinities research, which was followed by a knowledge-sharing workshop, and which informed the proposal development exercise; 3) engagement and capacity-building of 10 young media professionals on media for social change, gender sensitivity, and gender and positive and equitable masculinities; and 3) Bringing stakeholders and youth representatives together to increase public awareness about gender through the operationalization of a national awareness campaign and a launching event.

Under phase two of the project, three major activities were implemented; 1) Capacity-building for YLOs on various topics including; the Common Ground Approach (CGA), safe identification and referral, ToT on gender equality and equitable masculinities on the second edition of program RA, 2) Youth-led community trainings to cascade knowledge into the wider community, and 3) the implementation of youth-led initiatives in support to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

MAIN FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

Overall, the ToC and the framing of the project’s interventions were relevant and responsive to communities’ needs across the areas of implementation in Lebanon. The relevance of the project was perceived to have increased due to the socio-economic and political developments that took place in Lebanon over the project’s three years of implementation.

The needs being addressed by the project demonstrate its relevance and the different components of the project are aligned with community need for awareness raising around VAWG and gender dynamics and their implications on the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. This was supported by the CSOs’ youth representatives who stated that the project helped build their capacities and knowledge of the topic and provided sufficient technical support for the implementation of awareness raising and community engagement activities within their local communities. This made them more confident carrying out work with a focus on raising awareness and reducing VAWG within their communities. Additionally, most youth representatives were highly engaged in the program, reflecting their commitment to supporting the efforts in achieving gender equality and the prevention of VAWG whether within their work or outside. This also showed that the activities were successful in capturing the youths’ different interests and needs.

The youth representatives and young media professionals highlighted that projects of this nature were of great benefit to the local communities and were necessary to raise awareness and reduce VAWG. By focusing on the continuous engagement of the partner CSOs and extensively training the youth representatives, Search has created a network of youth that are championing the fight against VAWG in communities across Lebanon.

On a broader scale, one of the main objectives of Search’s greater Levant strategy is to enable youth to independently develop multi-dimensional identities. A part of this objective is to drain the fear of those with different identities and shift the perception of the other away from a threat to an acceptance of diversity. Not only did the different CSOs’ youth representatives collaborate on activities under the project, they also engaged in discussions and workshops on gender-related topics beyond the project itself. The project created a safe space where the youth representatives felt comfortable discussing their opinions and deconstructing false perceptions around gender, VAWG, and masculinities.

6 Program Ra is the Lebanese-contextualized version of the “Program H” Manual. This manual prepared by Promundo- a non-governmental organization in Brazil- is considered a revolutionary approach in explaining gender and masculinities to young men and boys. It provides easy communication methods to young men and boys in regards to various gender related issues using age-appropriate entertaining and interactive activities. To maximize its impact, the manual was amended to fit the context of different countries around the world. ABAAD adapted the manual and contextualized it in alignment with the Lebanese context in two versions, hoping to trigger the discussion about gender with young men and boys living in Lebanon (including host communities and refugee communities).

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

The project progressed towards the accomplishment of its first objective through its provision of a multitude of capacity building and development activities over the course of its three years of implementation. These activities helped enhance the knowledge and capacities of 30 youth (14 males and 16 females) to raise awareness on gender and VAWG through their organizations and personal circles. The youths demonstrated a 48 percent increase in their capacities to raise awareness around masculinities, gender, and VAWG through youth-led community cascaded training. Furthermore, the open line of communication maintained by Search also contributed to the achievement of this objective by making beneficiaries feel trusted and supported, which encouraged them to develop a sense of ownership over the project. Search also continuously emphasized the importance of maintaining safe spaces and upholding Do No Harm approaches and non-discriminatory practices throughout their training. This sensitivity is something that the youths carried into their communities, which helped them navigate the intricacies of talking about this sensitive topic.

“In search was very flexible when it came to the work that was carried out, they [Search] always took our opinion, and they never forced anything on us. Even if we [CSOs' youth representatives] had negative input, we felt that we can always speak up. It felt more like a family than a professional partnership.”

- FEMALE YOUTH REPRESENTING LEARNING THROUGH ACTION CSO IN THE BEKAA.

In support of this, local CSOs' youth representatives indicated that the project helped increase their knowledge on gender and masculinities and equipped them to train others themselves. They led multiple cascaded training sessions across their communities and demonstrated a very good performance, average score of 88 percent, in disseminating knowledge and utilizing the facilitation and ToT skills. The representatives also believed that the training gave them the necessary tools to shape Program RA messaging in a manner that is appropriate to their context and to better address the issues that are specific to their communities.

“Young youths were very interested to participate in the training and asked a lot of questions about the topics to be discussed. For this reason, we accepted more than the planned target regardless of the narrow place, because our aim is to disseminate the information to as many youths as we can hence as many families as we can.”

- MALE YOUTH REPRESENTING THE SAWA CSO IN THE NORTH

“The training was an opportunity for me to learn about sexual health, especially that these topics can't be discussed openly usually.”

- MALE YOUTH COMMUNITY MEMBER FROM THE NORTH

Furthermore, CSOs' focal points reported that participants were more comfortable talking about cases of VAWG and that the quality of the training helped them understand the seriousness of the problem and the importance of reporting cases. On a personal level, and through their participation in the Partners for Justice project, the youths beneficiaries have gained access to avenues to develop their academic and professional capacities. Through the high quality provision of the participatory research and Program RA training, some youth beneficiaries obtained access to paid employment and others were inspired to pursue gender-related studies.

“I have been participating in the Partners for Justice project for more than three years. Now and after being a part of this project and learning about gender from a different lens, I am very happy that I have been accepted by a university in Scotland to complete my studies through the "Grow Guest" program, which is concerned with global gender studies.”

- MALE YOUTH REPRESENTING THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION IN MOUNT LEBANON
“The training is very useful! I work as an activist in women’s health awareness raising, so this is an opportunity for me to ensure that my information is correct and updated.” - FEMALE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY MEMBER FROM BEKAA

As a culmination of the training provided to the youths, they demonstrated an increase in their capacities in designing and implementing community initiatives, where all of the youth showed an increase in skills in designing initiatives that engage men and boys in adopting and promoting better sexual and reproductive behaviors. Furthermore, upon evaluating their performance in implementing the initiatives, the youths recorded an average score of 76 percent. Moreover, the wide outreach of youth-led initiatives proved to be inclusive in terms of the targeted community members diversity, where youth representatives were able to cultivate a total of 921 champions (260 males, 650 females, and 11 preferred not to declare).

Of the targeted community members, 74 percent demonstrated an increase in their knowledge about gender related topics and SRHR with an average of 53 percent change in their knowledge (57 percent of females and 85 percent of males). The higher percentage recorded by men reflected the project’s success in engaging men and boys effectively in the promotion of gender equality and reducing VAWG. On the other hand, males were more likely to agree with statements reflecting social norms supporting or perpetuating VAWG; in fact, it is confirmed that these norms still hold a strong position and impact the lives of women and girls. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed concern about the pervasiveness of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted traditional and cultural stereotypes in Lebanon regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, the workplace, and society. These prevailing attitudes constitute serious obstacles to women’s enjoyment of their human rights and prevent the full implementation of the Convention⁷.

The most impactful achievement under the second objective of the project was the positive change in participants’ perceptions and behaviors related to VAWG. The masculinities and inclusive approach used - involving both men and women in the project - provided a broader ground for the dissemination of gender education and VAWG prevention in the target communities. In addition, the innovation in activities with direct participants, including the youth-led gender and masculinities research, allowed the project to foster a greater sense of ownership and security among participants, as they could relate with the people providing the different training.

Furthermore, activities such as the program RA⁸ cascading trainings have led to an increase in the number of people feeling comfortable talking openly and without shame about sensitive topics in relation to gender, masculinities, and VAWG. A number of 220 community members were engaged in the Program, with 95 percent of them expressing that these activities provided them with a safe space to learn and discuss SRHR related topics.

“This training offered me a very important space to learn about sexual health, especially that this topic can’t be discussed unless with educated persons.”

- MALE YOUTH COMMUNITY MEMBER FROM THE NORTH

While the project has not resulted in a dramatic change in VAWG reduction on a community level due to the patriarchal dominance and social norms that are nested in the targeted communities, the CSOs‘ youth representatives see that it has created a connection with participants, who have begun to disseminate what they have learned amongst their families and friends. Youth representatives stated they have voluntarily passed on the knowledge gained from the program to their networks, families, and professional environments. This indicates they have become true allies of gender equality and prevention of VAWG, who advocate for these topics confidently in their communities.

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As highlighted in the project's midterm evaluation, the change in the attitude of community members as a whole remains to be a significant challenge. However, as evidenced by the youth representatives and young media professionals, there have been positive changes in the level of awareness amongst them and those who received the Program RA cascading training. The youth representatives reported an average of 62 percent increase in their capacities in raising awareness around SRHR, masculinities, gender and prevention of VAWG. Furthermore, community members demonstrated an average of 33 percent increase in their level of awareness on Program RA related topics.

Finally, the project fostered points of reference for VAWG for women and girls in communities of implementation. This outcome led to members of the communities of implementation being aware of trusted personnel with which they can discuss matters related to VAWG. The programmatic localization approach and focus on the training and support of youths over the course of the Partners for Justice project’s three years of implementation has helped foster a sense of trust from the community towards the youth representatives.
“I feel proud and successful whenever my family refers to me anyone who would like to learn more about topics related to gender and sexual and reproductive health. Being trusted by people from my surroundings, especially girls and women, makes me feel even more satisfied that as a young member of the community, I was able to make a difference.”

-FEMALE YOUTH REPRESENTING JOSOUR AL NOUR ORGANIZATION FROM THE BEKAA

SUSTAINABILITY
Both Search and the youth representatives highlighted that the network formed as a by-product of this project is a main driver of the sustainability of the project and its impact within and beyond the communities. The youth representatives have formed a network that can continue communicating and collaborating on VAWG beyond the Partners for Justice project. The training contributed to boosting the confidence of the youth representatives encouraging them to carry out their work feeling more comfortable. Additionally, the youth and their CSOs formed a subcommittee under the MenEngage network, working to promote positive and equitable masculinities and support the reduction of VAWG.

On a programmatic level, the training provided helped increase awareness of gender sensitivities and positive and equitable masculinities, as well as SRHR for the CSOs’ youth representatives, focal points, young media professionals, and the partner CSOs. This helped them acquire the capacities and experience needed to expand their work on VAWG. Furthermore, the capacities gained from the implementation of tailored youth initiatives will be a springboard for the youth participation in and development of future community interventions as gender allies to contribute in shifting societal attitudes regarding VAWG in Lebanon.

The CSOs youth representatives also highlighted that a degree of community-level sustainability was achieved, with more community members requesting to join the CSOs as well as additional Program RA sessions. Youth representatives also believe that the knowledge and awareness gained will sustain itself through the community as participants continue to disseminate and apply the messages they learned within their circles.

COHERENCE
The project was found to be aligned with local and national initiatives. Stakeholders believed that the project was in tune with the community needs and filled an existing gap in the work on VAWG. The project’s activities complement other initiatives that support women and girls and equip them with tools to work on reducing VAWG but further adds an inclusive approach by involving men and boys to ensure a broader impact on society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
PROJECT DESIGN/STRATEGY:

- Need to increase the focus on developing the organizational capacities of CSOs Search is working with to continue working on VAWG. By doing so, Search and others in the sector can circumvent the risk of losing their investment in developing capacities should the youth representatives decide to leave their organizations. Additionally, through additional investments, CSOs could develop a specialized gender and VAWG department that carries out awareness raising activities, trains local youth on Program RA, and provides support to survivors of violence.

- Holding more Program RA cascading training within the communities of implementation would further contribute to the goal of fostering a change in attitudes and behaviors that sustain gender inequality, violence, and discrimination. Training, awareness raising and advocacy efforts should also be expanded to include schools and vocational training to expand the reach of the project.

- Offer long-term funding streams to allow for the establishment of strategic partnerships with CSOs that have proven their commitment and capacity to carry out work on VAWG. This would also allow CSOs to allocate more resources towards the development of their VAWG-focused departments and even grow to become safe spaces within their communities.
GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION:
- Further strengthen the CSOs network by holding more networking events for them on both a regional and national level. Networking events could be held within the communities of implementation so that the networks grow to include local CSOs, opening up the space for greater communication and coordination.
- Establish connections with the local authorities and CSOs. This would facilitate communication with governmental counterparts and pave the way for potential future collaborations.

PROGRAMMING:
- Enhance livelihood support to alleviate domestic pressures through the provision of small stipends and in-kind support.
- Focus on facilitating men and women artisans’ access to marketplaces or aiding them in setting up their own shops or stands to alleviate economic pressures that may trigger domestic violence.
- The initiatives and the national campaign should be broadcasted on national television to further expand the reach of the media component.
- Expanding the scope of local partnerships to include more than two CSOs per community to circumvent any potential CSO drop-out. The project should also expand activities into more communities to broaden the impact of the project.
- Integrate case management and psychosocial support training and mechanisms to support youth representatives and CSOs in dealing with individuals reporting instances of VAWG.