

## Unveiling Challenges and Do No Harm Strategies: A Cross-Sectorial Exploration through the Lens of NGO Staff in Lebanon.

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### ABSTRACT

*Lebanon's civil society, shaped by its history since 1943, has experienced a notable proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively addressing critical areas such as health, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts. Recent trends indicate a decline in public trust in NGOs, particularly among host communities. While challenges are commonly acknowledged by practitioners, there remains a gap in comprehensive exploration across sectors with clear documentation. Understanding these challenges is essential for implementing the Do No Harm approach, reducing potential impacts on the context, and ultimately improving the effectiveness of practices. This study addresses the research gap by exploring challenges faced by NGOs in Lebanon across sectors. Conducting seven focus group discussions with local and international NGOs from 2022 to 2023 and utilizing the Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum for participant selection, the study unveils nuanced challenges and offers practical insights for conflict-sensitive approaches. Investigating multifaceted challenges across diverse sectors, this research examines internal and external factors shaped by economic downturns, political instability, societal unrest, and the aftermath of the Beirut Port explosion. Internal challenges encompass financial constraints, manpower shortages, and technological limitations, while external challenges delve into governmental arrangements, systemic issues, donor dynamics, and community-related tensions impacting NGO operations. The findings highlight interconnectedness with Lebanon's context, and participant-recommended Do No Harm strategies, focusing on stakeholder collaboration, community engagement, and effective project management, align with existing literature. This nuanced understanding contributes not only to the body of knowledge surrounding NGO challenges in Lebanon but also serves as a valuable guide for organizations globally operating in similarly intricate environments.*

### Introduction:

Lebanon's civil society has held a significant role in shaping the nation's landscape since before its 1943 independence. Over time, the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) has surged, effectively addressing critical areas such as social and health services, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts (ICNL, 2023) where government presence may have been lacking. In

the aftermath of successive humanitarian crises – including the 2006 July war, the 2012 Syrian refugee crisis, the 2019 political and financial turmoil, the February 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, and the devastating August 4 Beirut Blast – civil society's role has only intensified, contributing significantly to post-war recovery. Presently, the country boasts an impressive count of over 15,000 entities, signifying a dynamic civil society and representing the Middle East's highest citizen-NGO ratio (Mawad & Makki, 2023). While public support for NGOs

remains robust in Lebanon, recent findings as of 2023 indicate a notable decline in overall trust towards these organizations and international agencies (Dagher, 2019). Concurrently, there's a growing perception that these entities have yielded negative impacts on daily life. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among host communities in contrast to refugees (UNDP/ARK, 2023). In fact, response efforts were significantly shaped by the active participation of civil society groups. Despite their pivotal role, their effectiveness was hampered by shortcomings in coordination and collaboration, ultimately resulting in less favorable outcomes (Haddad, 2023). Furthermore, the issue of local and international NGOs in Lebanon potentially straying from their fundamental missions due to external pressures has given rise to concerns (Hamdar & El Sabe, 2017). When non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and international entities have consistently extended aid to the most vulnerable populations, historical practice has not always adhered to this principle. The conduct of international and local NGOs (INGOs) can at times hinder the effectiveness of aid, inadvertently causing harm instead of providing assistance (Barber & Bowie, 2008). For instance, the expanded networking of NGOs can lead to societal contradictions and an escalation of violent conflicts (Mahoney, 2007). Moreover, excessive reliance on donors can deter self-help initiatives and result in the imposition of terms and conditions that may not align with community needs (Mahoney, 2007; Khanal, 2006). Furthermore, the augmented role of NGOs in relief and development has prompted inquiries into their efficiency and accountability while activist NGOs may even oppose industrial projects sanctioned by public regulators, leading to conflicts and raising concerns about transparency and their legal status (Daubanes & Rochet, 2016; Duflo et al., 2008).

Amid the challenges created by organizations operating in various sector, an approach known as the "Do No Harm" has emerged as a strategy for addressing these issues. This approach is rooted in the understanding that the assistance provided is closely tied to complex circumstances. The genesis of this idea can be traced back to the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The realization was that aid efforts could inadvertently worsen conflicts, exemplified by cases where certain hiring practices by aid organizations unintentionally fueled tensions. This recognition prompted the development of the concept of the Do No Harm approach, which emphasizes comprehending the potential outcomes of interventions to mitigate harm and enhance positive results. This led to initiatives like the "Do No Harm" project, aimed at providing aid in conflict zones without exacerbating the conflicts. This approach not only diminishes harmful impacts but also improves the effectiveness of aid by considering factors like power dynamics and local cultural aspects (Bruch et al., 2023; Yates et al., 2015). In essence, Do

No Harm involves understanding and managing conflicts to minimize negative impacts and foster positive outcomes. This entails comprehending the origins, workings, and consequences of conflicts and incorporating this understanding into the design and implementation of interventions or policies. Its frameworks offer practical guidance across various sectors, enabling practitioners to identify potential conflicts, assess their effects, and develop strategies to address them constructively. For instance, in environmental conservation, it helps in navigating conflicts among stakeholders, ensuring that conservation efforts don't exacerbate existing tensions (Caballero & Rombokas, 2019). Notably, the relevance of it extends to situations of transitional justice, where it prevents initiatives from inflaming tensions, rekindling conflicts, or disrupting power dynamics. In fact, sensitive projects are designed to anticipate potential conflicts that may arise during their implementation and include strategies to effectively manage and mitigate these conflicts (Hernandez-Cedeno et al., 2021). These projects acknowledge that conflicts can emerge due to factors such as inadequate information and participation, resistance to change, environmental impact, political motivations, among others (Kim & Lee, 2019). These project entails the integration of Do No Harm across all stages of the project lifecycle, encompassing planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation (Woomer, 2018). Through the adoption of such approaches organizations are better equipped to handle conflicts, thus augmenting the overall success of their projects; thus, this approach involves promoting broad-based participation, managing resources to prevent conflict, and addressing existing power imbalances (Haider, 2017).

Many factors play a role in the success of projects. One crucial aspect that consistently stands out is understanding the context and the conflicts involved. This understanding includes recognizing the challenges that are present. Addressing these challenges in the field is vital for the effective implementation of Do No Harm approach in projects. Those leading these projects must have a solid grasp of the situation (Woomer, 2018). However, the challenges faced by NGOs in Lebanon is commonly known among practitioners but still not very clearly verified. This is due to a lack of information, limited understanding of the issues, and difficulties in working together (Shaban, 2014). Even in 2022 and 2023, Lebanon lack a comprehensive understanding of the overarching challenges in various areas and sectors of Lebanon. This gap might be because not many studies have deeply explored the problems faced by NGOs. Additionally, there hasn't been much exploration of how non-profit organization actors would handle and embed Do No Harm approach in their projects.

In the context of the complex Lebanese social landscape, this study aims to deeply explore the intricate challenges encountered by non-profit organizations across different sectors and discover different steps that would reduce harm when intervening in the context. The primary objective is to gain a profound understanding of the nuanced obstacles these organizations face and to illuminate the different potential pathways toward adopting the Do No Harm approach through the lens of NGO staff in Lebanon. By delving into experiences, this research seeks to uncover insightful strategies that can effectively alleviate tensions and conflicts that might emerge as unintended consequences of projects.

This research holds paramount importance and relevance in shedding light on the challenges and opportunities faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Lebanon. By unraveling the complexities that NGOs encounter within this context, the study contributes significantly to the broader domains of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and development in regions grappling with conflict. Understanding these challenges and exploring potential recommendation provides a foundational understanding of impediments to sustainable progress, and equipping practitioners and policymakers with insights into the practical implementation of Do No Harm approach and its potential to mitigate tensions. Importantly, the findings from this study can serve as a compass for future strategies and policies not only for NGOs within Lebanon but also for organizations operating in similar complex environments globally. By incorporating insights garnered here, these entities can refine their approaches, anticipate conflicts, and foster inclusive and contextually relevant initiatives that promote lasting positive change, ultimately advancing both local and global peacebuilding efforts.

### Research Methodology:

In line with the research objectives, a qualitative research design has been adopted. This approach involves conducting seven focus group discussions with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating across diverse sectors in Lebanon, including Health, Education, WASH, Social Stability, Livelihood. This choice of design is well-suited to delve deeply into the challenges faced by these NGOs during the years 2022 and 2023 in Lebanon and to gain valuable insights into their perceptions of harm minimization strategies during project implementation. Qualitative research allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complex and nuanced aspects of NGO operations, especially within the specific context of Lebanon, taking into account the multifaceted socio-political and economic factors that may impact their work. Through these focus group discussions, the research aims to extract subjective experiences and practical recommendations

that can inform NGO practices and contribute to a holistic understanding of the challenges and harm mitigation strategies in this context.

### *Participant Selection and Sampling Methods:*

The research project unfolded over a span of approximately 13 months, commencing in November 2022 and concluding towards the end of 2023, specifically in December. During this period, a recurring monthly cycle of Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum (LCSF) meetings, a platform orchestrated by House of Peace, was conducted, each focusing on a different sector for discussion. The LCSF served as a pivotal arena for fostering discussions centered on the integration of conflict sensitivity principles among staff members of NGOs operating in Lebanon. The participant selection criteria and sampling methods were intricately intertwined with the operational dynamics of the LCSF. To facilitate participation in the focus group discussions, House of Peace employed an invitation-based approach, specifically extending invitations to NGO members through the email list maintained by House of Peace, which encompassed a variable number of NGOs within their network. Crucially, the participants were staff members who had already registered for the LCSF meetings, and their attendance at the respective focus group discussions was automatic. It's noteworthy that the study featured seven distinct focus group sessions, each aligned with a specific sector (Health, Education, WASH, Social Stability, Livelihood). While some participants might have attended multiple meetings focusing on different sectors based on their involvement in a sector, the majority of the attendees were new employees specialized in each of the seven sectors. The scheduling of LCSF meetings was contingent upon reaching a predetermined threshold of 12-15 registered staff attendees. If registrations fell short of this mark, the LCSF meeting would be postponed, ensuring that a minimum number of participants necessary for meaningful discussions was met. The resulting composition of participants in these focus group discussions was characterized by its diversity, representing staff members from various NGOs within the House of Peace network. This diversity aimed to encompass a wide spectrum of experiences, backgrounds, and expertise related to their respective sectors, thereby facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by NGOs in Lebanon during the pivotal years of 2022 and 2023.

### *Data Collection Methods:*

The data collection methods employed in this study involved a structured process conducted during the four-hour meetings of the Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum (LCSF). The meeting commenced with a brief theoretical session addressing the quality of evidence and information sharing, providing

updates on the context of the sector, a brief introduction to conflict sensitivity principles, and the presentation of a case study or activity conducted by one of the attending NGOs, which was relevant to or worked within the sector being discussed.

Demographic data, including information on sex, age, sector of expertise, and position within their respective organizations, were collected through an attendance sheet at the welcoming time. Subsequently, focus group discussions were organized, with small groups consisting of a minimum of three to four participants coming together to address two central questions. The first question explored the factors, both internal and external, that hindered the implementation of social stability projects in the current Lebanese context, evaluating their impact and likelihood. The second question delved into potential strategies to mitigate the risks of causing harm during project implementation and strengthen community connections. These discussions spanned approximately 40 to 50 minutes to each question, with each group allocating an additional 10 to 20 minutes for the presentation of their findings. Throughout this process, data collection took various forms, written form on flip charts answering the two questions unfolded by the groups, and audio recording (if participants consented) note-taking by designated facilitator featuring the presentation of answers questions and serving as supplementary data sources.

In order to enhance the depth and clarity of the discussions, several facilitation strategies were thoughtfully integrated during the focus group sessions. To ensure a common understanding of the research questions, facilitators provided guidance. For instance, in response to the first question concerning internal and external factors hindering social stability projects, facilitators clarified the meanings of these terms, creating a shared frame of reference for the participants. Similarly, when discussing strategies for minimizing harm, they elucidated the concept, ensuring that all participants comprehended the nuances of harm mitigation. Notably, these discussions were conducted in the local language, respecting the participants' linguistic preferences. In cases where non-Arabic speakers were present, English translation services were readily available to ensure inclusivity and facilitate effective communication. Moreover, facilitators maintained an active role during the discussions, offering guidance when needed. This proactive facilitation approach served to keep the discussions on track, ensuring that participants remained focused on the research questions. It also fostered a supportive environment, allowing participants to provide more comprehensive and holistic input.

The rationale for selecting these data collection methods is multifold. First, the structured format of LCSF meetings offered an ideal environment for gathering qualitative data, enabling participants to engage in focused discussions while drawing

upon their contextual expertise. The combination of theoretical sessions, context updates, and case studies provided a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent focus group discussions, ensuring that participants had a shared understanding of the issues at hand. The use of focus groups facilitated dynamic interactions, allowing participants to exchange diverse viewpoints and insights, which is invaluable in qualitative research. Furthermore, the two central questions addressed during the focus group discussions were directly aligned with the research objectives, enabling the collection of targeted information on challenges faced by NGOs in Lebanon and harm mitigation strategies. Multiple data collection methods, including audio recording, note-taking, and sticky notes, were employed to ensure data triangulation and reliability, accommodating participant preferences regarding data capture. These demographic details not only bolstered the contextual understanding of the responses but also facilitated subgroup analyses, shedding light on potential variations in the challenges and harm mitigation strategies based on participant profiles. Moreover, these facilitation strategies were purposefully employed to create an inclusive, accessible, and conducive atmosphere for qualitative data collection, enriching the quality and depth of the insights gathered during the focus group discussions. Overall, this approach was selected for its effectiveness in eliciting rich, context-specific information, aligned with the study's qualitative nature and research goals.

Following the data collection phase, meticulous steps were taken in the data processing and transcription process. Initially, the written answers of participants were digitized into word documents, ensuring that all contributions and discussions were accurately captured in a written format. Additionally, the digitized data were cross-referenced with other sources of information, including notes taken by facilitators during discussions and recording sessions during the presentations. Afterward, data were translated from Arabic to English. In cases where discussions were conducted in English, no translation was conducted. Such a comprehensive approach to data processing aimed at preserving the richness and authenticity of the participants' contributions while also ensuring that the data were accurately and comprehensively documented. This meticulous data management process enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the collected qualitative data, reinforcing the robustness of the research findings.

### *Reliability and Validity:*

The reliability of the data collection instruments in this study was supported by several factors. First, the structured format of the LCSF meetings ensured consistency in data collection procedures across sessions. Second, the use of both audio recording and trainer note-taking allowed for data triangulation,



enhancing the reliability of the collected information. Lastly, the engagement of participants from different NGOs and sectors provided diverse perspectives, contributing to the overall reliability of the findings. The validity of the measurement instruments in this research is supported by their alignment with the research objectives and the use of qualitative methods for data collection. The focus group discussions were designed to directly address the research questions, ensuring content validity. Moreover, the inclusion of multiple data sources, such as audio recordings, trainer notes, and participants' written responses, enhanced the trustworthiness of the data and further contributed to construct validity. The use of actual case studies and experiences shared by NGO staff members during the LCSF meetings added ecological validity by grounding the discussions in real-world contexts.

### Design:

In our quest for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Lebanon, along with potential pathways toward adopting Do No Harm (DNH) approaches from their perspectives, we strategically embraced a qualitative research design. This methodological choice acknowledges the historical endorsement of qualitative research by German sociologists Max Weber and Georg Simmel, signifying its enduring significance in understanding complex social phenomena (Hetenyi et al., 2019). The application of qualitative methods is imperative in applied research, particularly when delving into the complexities of the human experience, allowing for deeper examinations of experiences (Watkins, 2017). This design is most congruent with our research aims; this strategic alignment resonates with Lester et al.'s (2020) assertion of its effectiveness in producing findings that inform practical applications, offering detailed descriptions of the problems at hand, and providing insights into professional practices within specific contexts (Lester et al., 2020).

### Approach:

In navigating the expansive realm of qualitative research methodologies, this research carefully deliberated on the most fitting approach for the study. Among the myriad qualitative analysis methods, we opted for thematic analysis, drawn to its efficacy in the realm of Human Resources Development (HRD). Lester et al. (2020) underscored the utility of thematic analysis in the context of HRD, highlighting its ability to unravel complex themes and patterns within qualitative data. Given the inherent link between our research objectives and the practical implementation of Do No Harm principles, a fundamental aspect of HRD, thematic analysis emerged as an apt choice. This approach offers tremendous 'theoretical

flexibility,' potentially serving as analytic method rather than a strict methodology as other approaches (Lester et al., 2020). This flexibility allows us to engage several disciplinary theories and perspectives when conducting our analysis, thereby generating a more meaningful and relevant analysis for our specific field of study. Furthermore, thematic analysis aligns with several other approaches. It entails standard procedures and practices commonly observed across various qualitative analytic approaches like sorting and sifting through datasets to identify similar phrases and relationships. The method's versatility extends to its applicability in analyzing different types of data and accommodating a range of dataset sizes, enhancing its adaptability to the nature of our research material.

### Phases:

Lester et al. (2020) proposes a phased approach to thematic analysis, recognizing the overlapping nature of these phases and the overall malleability of the process. In this study, we leaned on this framework, making selective modifications. Our adaptation of Lester et al.'s framework involved merging some phases to enhance coherence and accommodate the intricate interconnections between different elements of the analysis. Specifically, we divided our analysis into two stages drawing inspiration from Lester et al.'s (2020) seven suggested phases. Beyond the delineated phases proposed by Lester et al., our qualitative analysis incorporated additional theories, strategies, and methods to enrich and deepen the analysis. This extension exemplifies the inherent flexibility of thematic analysis, enabling the integration of diverse qualitative approaches to enhance the richness and relevance of our findings. In the initial stage of our qualitative analysis, our adapted framework encompassing Lester et al.'s (2020) first phases ("Preparing and organizing the data for analysis" and "Transcribing the data"). In this phase, we strategically integrated the rationale of Rigorous and Accelerated Data Reduction (RADaR) technique proposed by Watkins (2017). Acknowledging the time-consuming nature of qualitative data analysis, we sought a more expedited approach to efficiently manage, organize, and analyze the data. The RADaR technique, known for its rapid and comprehensive qualitative analysis strategy, employs tables and spreadsheets to transform raw data into a condensed and user-friendly format. Although not applied precisely, the foundation of the technique guided our data collection and organization and subsequently, analysis. Its rationale was taken into consideration early in the data collection phase, particularly during focus group discussions. It has indeed helped to reduce any additional costs over the four focused-group discussions while engaging a high number of expertise during the meetings. Guided by the motivation of rigorous and accelerated data reduction, we instructed participants to format their responses

in a way conducive to table creation. Each group in every sector provided answers in a table format, ensuring that transcriptions were consistent. The transcribers then synthesized this formatted data, generating sector-specific tables that distilled essential information for further analysis. This approach minimized extraneous details, allowing for a focused and efficient examination of crucial data points.

Following the structured steps outlined by Watkins (2017), we ensured uniform formatting of all data transcripts (Step 1) and compiled them into all-inclusive Phase 1 data tables (Step 2&3). This technique was used to allow us to streamline the organization, coding, analysis, and reduction of data, aligning with the overarching goal of expediting the qualitative data analysis phase.

The subsequent seamlessly integrated phases 3, 4, 5, and 6, recognizing the inherent interlinked and intricate nature of these analytical stages. Our engagement in this section encompassed becoming familiar with the data corpus, memoing key insights, coding the data, and ultimately deriving categories and themes from the underlying coded passages. Departing from a mechanistic approach, we were guided by the understanding that overly mechanistic methods may compromise the richness of insights derived from qualitative research (Bradley et al., 2007). Acknowledging that formal rules and processes should not replace analytic thought, we embraced a grounded approach where conceptual richness prevailed over oversimplified separation from contextual nuances.

Conscious of the absence of systematic rules for analyzing qualitative data, we adhered to Thorne's (2000) perspective that data analysis is inherently complex and mysterious (Houghton et al., 2015). Our focus was on rigorously and creatively organizing, identifying patterns, and eliciting themes from the data while maintaining logical coherence in the analysis. In alignment with the argument against the use of software for coding, we deliberately opted not to utilize any software, acknowledging the potential risk of over-proliferating codes and losing a comprehensive overview of the data (Elliott, 2018).

Our methodology involved a meticulous process of refining codes through ongoing examination. Initial readings and examinations facilitated the identification of codes directly emerging from the data. A comprehensive review of the entire set of transcripts ensured the appropriateness and specificity of the codes within the current dataset. We read, re-read, coded, categorized, and systematically compared all data independently to develop themes. Collaborative meetings were held to review and compare coded transcripts, leading to consensus on common themes for all sectors. Not only was each factor systematically analyzed through thematic analysis,

unraveling nuanced themes embedded within the responses, but also, a risk analysis for each factor was conducted. In the tabulated data, we had responses to inquiries regarding the impact and frequency of each factor affecting program implementation in the sector. Building upon this organized data display unfolded by the participants, we employed a risk analysis strategy to assess the impact and frequency of each identified factor. Drawing inspiration from Frechtling et al. (1997), who emphasize the significance of data displays in allowing analysts to discern systematic patterns and interrelationships (Frechtling et al., 1997), we developed risk matrices for each sector. These matrices incorporated color coding to identify factors associated with identified themes, positioning each factor on the axes based on its impact and frequency. This strategic risk analysis approach not only provided a visual representation of the data but also allowed for the extrapolation of systematic patterns beyond those initially discovered during the data reduction process.

## Results:

In the course of this qualitative research endeavor, a total of 93 contributors actively engaged in the focus group discussions across various sectors, offering diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within the Lebanese context. It is important to note that the number 93 is a total of attendees that contributed to the focus group discussions, with some individuals actively engaging in more than one sector. The participant count is a cumulative representation, acknowledging that some attendees (7), particularly managers and coordinators, took part in discussions across multiple sectors. Therefore, the reported count encapsulates the total number of participations, providing a comprehensive reflection of insights from distinct voices within the various sectors examined. The total number of participants, removing counts of participations of same individuals is 83. These participants, hailing from different professional backgrounds, brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the table. Among the attendees, 36 individuals held managerial roles, providing strategic insights into organizational operations; 13 were coordinators, who contributed their knowledge, offering valuable coordination and planning perspectives; and 28 were officers who provided on-the-ground insights into the challenges faced during program implementation (The 6 remaining participants did not specify their positions). The cumulative wealth of knowledge gathered from this array of roles provides a comprehensive understanding of program implementation across education, health, livelihood, social stability, and WASH sectors. As outlined in the methodology section, our study employed a thematic analysis approach to unravel the multifaceted challenges hindering the implementation of initiatives across

diverse sectors. Through an iterative and in-depth examination of participant responses, a set of overarching themes emerged, encapsulating the various factors obstructing project success and the recommendations to reduce tensions within each sector. These themes, meticulously derived and organized through a unified coding framework, provide a comprehensive lens through which we explore the intricacies within each sector.

The following thematic outline represents a comprehensive set of factors and recommendations derived from participants' responses across all sectors, reflecting a unified coding framework employed to ensure consistency and comparability.

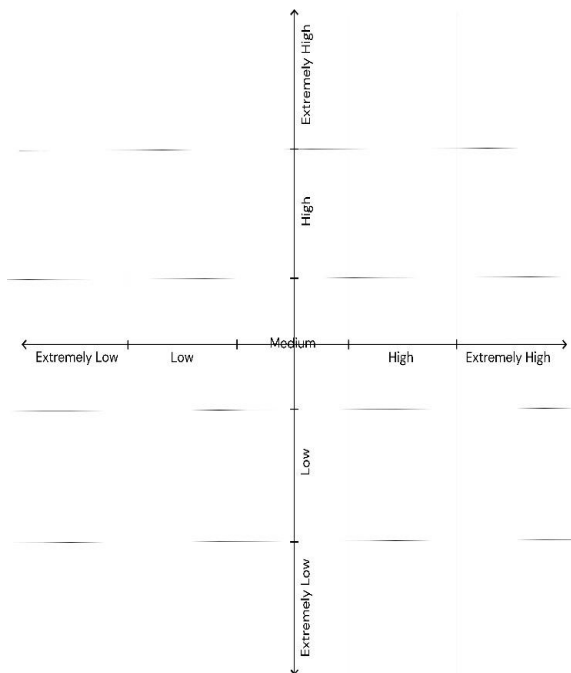
### Factors Obstructing Implementation:

The following four overarching themes emerged from the participants' responses, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors obstructing the implementation of initiatives in their respective sectors.

#### 1. Internal Factors

##### A. Operational Challenges:

Participants highlighted challenges within the internal



operations of their projects or organizations. This theme encapsulates issues related to the daily functioning, processes, and procedures.

##### B. Resource Challenges:

This theme encompasses factors related to resource constraints, including financial limitations, insufficient manpower, or technological shortcomings affecting project implementation.

#### 2. External Factors

##### A. Challenges at the Level of Governmental Arrangements and System Structure:

Participants pointed to obstacles originating from governmental arrangements and systemic structures among non-governmental organizations, impacting the projects and organizations at a broader institutional level.

##### B. Socio-political Challenges:

This theme encompasses factors influenced by social and political dynamics, illustrating how external sociopolitical factors can hinder initiative implementation.

##### C. Challenges at the Level of the Community:

Factors related to the community's involvement, support, or resistance emerged under this theme, emphasizing the role of the community in project success or hindrance.

##### D. Challenges at the Level of Donors:

This theme encompasses issues associated with donor-related challenges, highlighting the impact of external funding sources on project implementation.

##### \*Risk analysis:

In all sectors, risk of each factor was analyzed according to impact and frequency levels, and displayed in a risk Matrix graph. The matrix serves as a visual tool to analyze the impact and frequency of factors obstructing the implementation of different programs in Lebanese context. The x-axis represents the frequency of each factor, categorized from extremely low to extremely high, while the y-axis indicates the impact, also ranging from extremely low to extremely high. (See graph below).

##### Key Zones:

Extremely High Impact & Frequency (Top Right): Factors in this zone have an exceptionally high impact and are prevalent, indicating critical challenges.

Extremely Low Impact & Frequency (Bottom Left): Factors in this zone are identified as having minimal impact and occurring infrequently.

Medium Impact & Frequency (Middle): Factors in this zone have a moderate impact and frequency, suggesting a balanced occurrence.

High Impact & Frequency (Upper Middle, right): Factors with a high impact and occurring frequently are represented here, highlighting their substantial presence.

Low Impact & Frequency (Lower Middle, left): Factors placed here signify a low impact and occur with moderate frequency.

A risk matrix analyzing the impact and frequency of factors identified by participant groups was created for each sector. Color-coded based on subthemes, each of the matrices provides visual representation of the associated risks of each of the factors presented by the participants, offering insights into the nuanced interplay between different elements affecting program implementation in the education sector.

### Recommendations to Reduce Tensions:

The set of recommendations derived from participants' responses aligns with four key themes, providing actionable insights into reducing tensions and improving project outcomes.

#### 1. Stakeholder Collaboration and Coordination

Recommendations within this theme emphasize the importance of fostering collaboration among stakeholders involved in the project, ensuring effective communication and coordination.

#### 2. System Arrangements

This theme encompasses recommendations related to systemic adjustments, emphasizing the need for structural changes or enhancements to existing systems for smoother project implementation.

#### 3. Community Awareness and Involvement

Recommendations under this theme focus on enhancing community awareness, engagement, and involvement to mitigate potential challenges and increase local support.

#### 4. Project Management

This theme encapsulates the overarching strategies and practices related to project oversight, ensuring that each aspect—from initial design to day-to-day operations—is meticulously considered.

### A. Project Design, Operation, and Implementation Consideration:

Recommendations within this subtheme emphasize the significance of thorough project design, streamlined operations, and efficient implementation strategies.

### B. Human Resources Management:

This subtheme highlights recommendations related to human resources, emphasizing effective management practices to address challenges related to personnel. **The Education Sector :**

*Insights in the education sector were gleaned from three focus group discussions, totaling 10 participants. Within these groups, the diverse perspectives included 3 managers, 3 coordinators, and 4 officers.*

### Factors:

Amidst the multifaceted challenges encountered in the education sector, a comprehensive analysis unveils a dichotomy of factors shaping the implementation landscape. Operational challenges underscore concerns related to project design, recruitment intricacies, deficiencies in funding usage particularly in educational spaces (emphasized twice), and disruptions stemming from delays in critical dates. Simultaneously, resource challenges are characterized by fundamental needs and their availability, with an imperative on adept fundraising strategies.

Externally, the intricacies of governmental arrangements and systemic structures surface as influential determinants. Participants voice apprehensions regarding decisions made by ministries, non-compliance issues, and the disruptive impact of new policies. The systemic intricacies encompass a nexus of political influences, financial intricacies, and national policies, amplifying the complexity. Conditions within classrooms, infrastructural constraints, preferential treatment between Lebanese and Syrian students, teacher protests, and economic downturns weave a tapestry of challenges, reflecting the external scene.

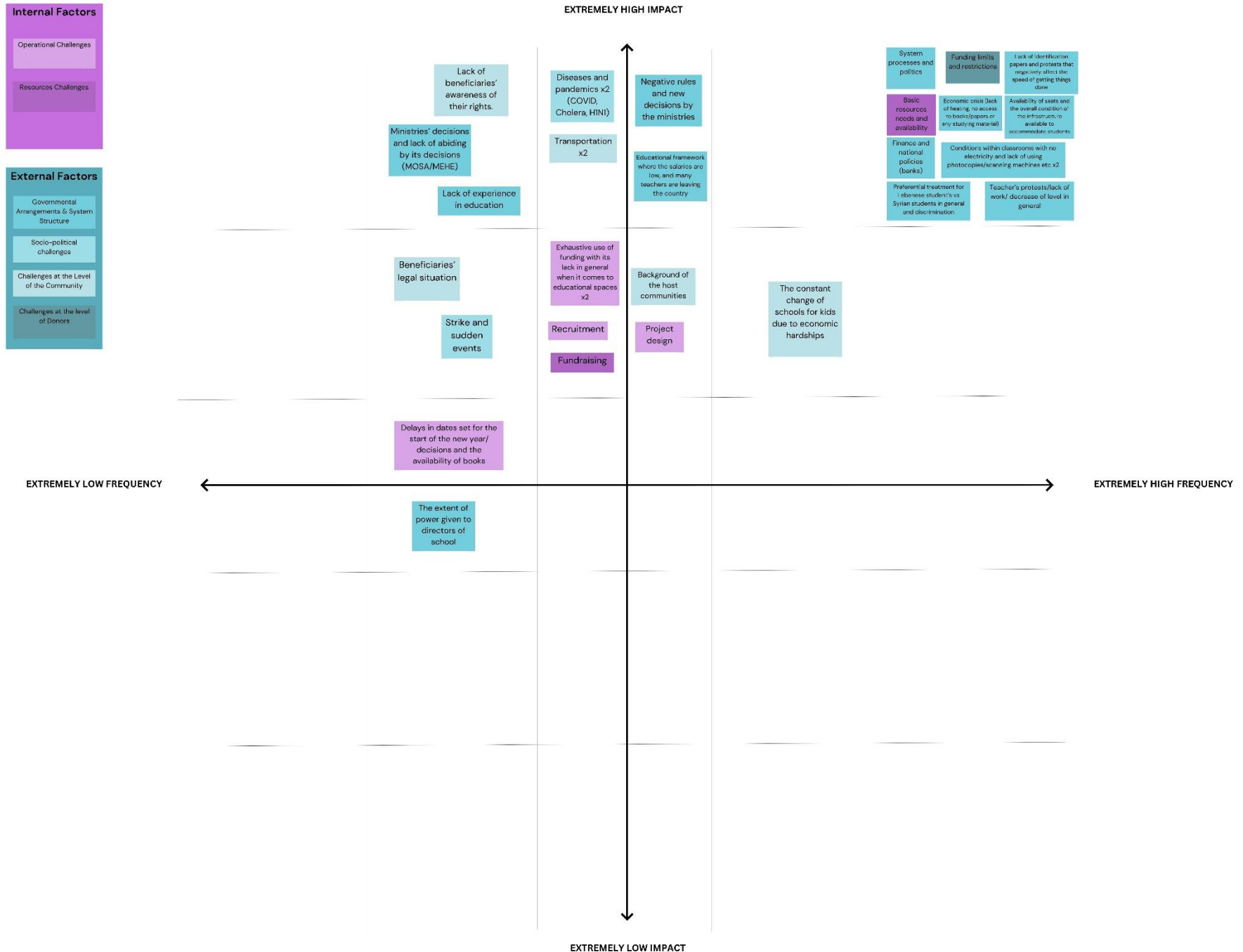
Socio-political dimensions introduce additional layers of complexity, marked by challenges triggered by diseases and pandemics like COVID-19, Cholera, and H1N1. Strikes and unforeseen events further underscore the sector's vulnerability. Community-level challenges are entrenched in a lack of awareness among beneficiaries, legal intricacies, transportation hurdles (echoed twice), continuous school changes driven by economic strains, and nuanced considerations related to the host community's background.



Funding constraints and donor restrictions interplay with internal and external dynamics, shaping the narrative of challenges in the education sector

# Risk Matrix

Factors Obstructing the Implementation of Educational School Programs in the Lebanese Context



### Interpretation:

The provided matrix offers a visual depiction of the factors influencing the implementation of educational school programs in the Lebanese context. A notable observation is the prevalence of external factors (blue blocks), significantly outnumbering internal factors (purple blocks) at 21 versus 6. This count increases to 23 versus 6 when considering the "x2" markers, indicating factors voiced twice.

The color-coded matrix underscores that external factors exhibit both extremely high impact and frequency, as evidenced by the concentration of blue blocks in these zones. In contrast, internal factors are dispersed across different impact and frequency levels, with only one factor sharing the high impact and frequency zones, while others at high impact medium frequency and low impact low frequency.

This analysis suggests that in the education sector, the factors posing the greatest risk to program implementation are predominantly external, particularly those related to governmental arrangements and system structure. These factors, indicated by the highest impact and frequency (as per color coding), play a pivotal role in shaping the challenges faced in the Lebanese educational landscape.

### **Recommendations:**

Our participants advocated for the formation of an expert committee comprising education and integration specialists to collaboratively work with the Ministry of Education. Additionally, fostering collaboration with local municipalities, communities, and NGOs emerged as a crucial strategy for effective communication and coordination. Participants stressed the need for flexible donors and funding, urging support for non-formal and online education alongside craft work. Recommendations also included proposing a joint position paper to highlight challenges and connect with the insights of children. The importance of advocating for more inclusive advocacy work and learning from international experiences to explore similar initiatives in different contexts was emphasized. Furthermore, encouraging collaboration between NGOs was seen as instrumental in undertaking larger-scale projects to reach a broader audience of children.

To address system-related challenges, recommendations focused on the establishment of a process for the transfer and certification of degrees obtained in the host country. Evaluating the education system to identify areas for improvement and recognizing the value of non-formal education were highlighted as essential strategies.

Participants stressed the importance of implementing an awareness campaign involving both host and refugee communities to highlight the long-term positive effects of education on the community.

Under the theme of Project Management, recommendations were categorized into Project Design and Operation & Implementation Consideration. Advocating for clear guidelines for project implementation from funders and within the implementing community was a key recommendation. Learning from evaluation reports on the outcomes of current projects, introducing conditionality of funds based on rights and reports, and ensuring flexibility in program design to target both Lebanese and Syrian communities equally were emphasized.

The Operation & Implementation Consideration subtheme further highlighted the importance of inclusive educational settings, where both Syrian and Lebanese students can coexist without exclusionary measures. Emphasizing the importance of respecting the customs and traditions of the host community, involving local committees, municipalities, and those directly affected in project design and implementation, and promoting the hiring of locals and encouraging the purchase of products from local shops and businesses were identified as vital strategies.

These recommendations, stemming from the insights of participants within the education sector, form a comprehensive approach towards addressing challenges and enhancing the implementation of initiatives. Their applicability is not only limited to the education sector but extends to a broader context where collaboration, systemic arrangements, community involvement, and effective project management are pivotal elements for successful outcomes.

### **Health Sector:**

*In the health sector, discussions were held specific under the Primary Healthcare Centers across three focused groups, engaging a total of 12 participants. Among these participants were 9 managers and 3 coordinators, offering valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions within the sector.*

### **Factors:**

The examination of factors influencing tensions at Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCC) within the health sector, congruent with all other sectors, revealed both internal and external challenges. Operationally, poor health communication among staff emerged as a notable concern, potentially affecting patient communication and staff collaboration. Additionally, issues related to staff well-being and cultural dynamics within the

healthcare team, such as perceived superiority among physicians, were identified.

Externally, challenges within governmental arrangements and system structures were evident. Medical shortages, inadequate waste management practices, and a scarcity of health human resources were significant concerns. Discrimination in service provision based on patients' backgrounds further highlighted systemic challenges. Socio-political factors, including the economic crisis impacting Lebanese citizens and an increase in refugee patients, compounded challenges, resulting in heightened waiting times and crowded facilities.

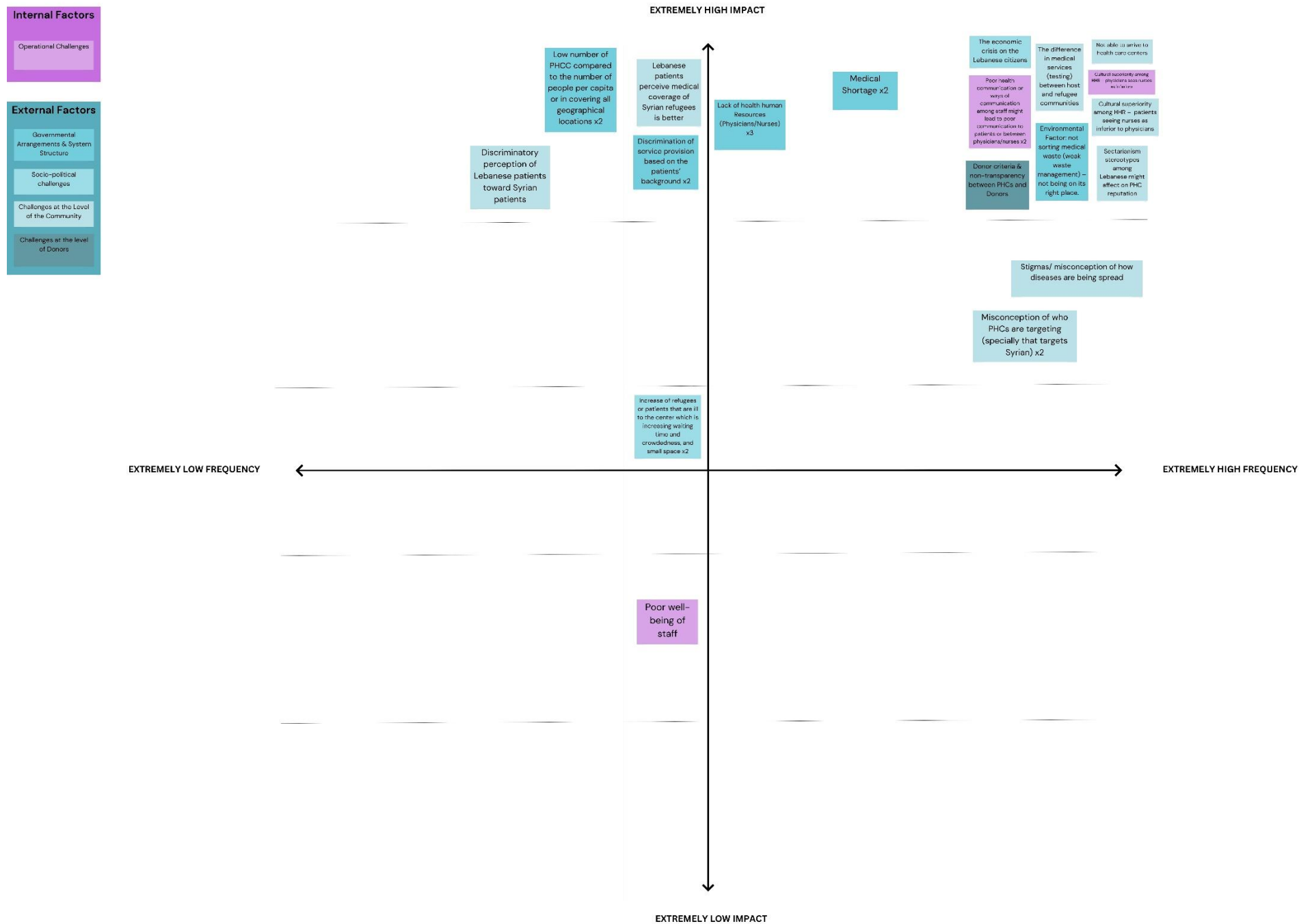
At the community level, various factors contributed to tensions that were seen as major challenge. Internal conflicts, discriminatory perceptions toward Syrian patients, and stigmas surrounding disease spread were prevalent. Misconceptions about the target demographic of PHCCs, particularly concerning Syrian patients, indicated a need for improved communication and awareness. Accessibility challenges, cultural stereotypes, and disparities in medical services also emerged as key concerns.

Moreover, the analysis considered challenges stemming from donors' criteria and non-transparency between PHCCs and donors. These external factors added complexity to the already intricate landscape of healthcare provision.



# Risk Matrix

Factors Obstructing the Implementation of Health Related Programs at PHCs in Lebanon



### Interpretation:

The matrix provides insights of the factors influencing the implementation of health initiatives within Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCCs) in Lebanon. As in the education sector, a notable observation is the prevalence of external factors (blue blocks), significantly outnumbering internal factors (purple blocks) at 16 versus 3. This discrepancy is further accentuated by the repetition of certain factors, with, among external factors, 6 being voiced twice (x2) and 1 thrice (x3), indicating heightened concern across various participant groups and 1 internal factor voiced twice. Consequently, the total count increases to 24 for external and 4 for internal factors.

Despite the relatively low count of internal factors, they exhibit notable characteristics. Two of the three internal factors, particularly "Poor health communication or ways of communication among staff," are identified with extremely high impact and extremely high frequency. This underscores their critical importance in influencing the dynamics of healthcare delivery within PHCCs. The third factor has low impact and medium frequency.

The preeminence of blue blocks in the high impact and high-frequency zones is major, with 7 external factors situated in this critical space. These factors span issues related to the healthcare system, environmental concerns, donor criteria, and community dynamics, encompassing challenges such as the economic crisis, sectarian stereotypes impacting PHC reputation, and environmental waste management. An additional 6 external factors, despite lower frequencies, also exhibit extremely high impact, contributing to the overall risk landscape.

Of the remaining factors, two external factors, mainly at community level, ("Misconception of who PHCs are targeting" and "Stigmas of how diseases are being spread"), showcase extremely high frequency and high impact, accentuating their significance, and one has medium frequency and medium impact.

This comprehensive interpretation elucidates the intricate dynamics within the Health sector, shedding light on the multiplicity of factors impacting PHCCs, particularly emphasizing the prominence of external challenges and the nuanced nature of community-related factors.

### **Recommendations:**

In addressing the factors identified as influencing tensions and hindering efforts within Primary Health Care Centers (PHCCs), several key recommendations emerged. Collaborative efforts through stakeholder coordination, particularly between PHCs

and NGOs, were highlighted as integral to fostering effective partnerships and mitigating community tensions. Community awareness and involvement were deemed crucial, emphasizing the implementation of awareness sessions with patients and broader awareness campaigns involving both host and refugee communities, although there was no specific mentioning of what type of awareness to be conducted. Under the theme of Project Management, recommendations emphasized the importance of understanding the unique context of PHCs, organizing patient schedules to reduce crowdedness, and implementing clear and transparent policies and procedures. The establishment of complaint systems and the generation of inclusive services, guided by a participatory approach involving the community through mechanisms like community committees, were underscored to enhance effectiveness. In Human Resources Management, fostering diversity among staff by recruiting from different backgrounds and communities was identified as a key strategy. Training programs focused on conflict sensitivity and health communication were recommended to equip staff with the necessary skills, with an additional emphasis on raising awareness about inclusion. Acceptance of diversity within Health Human Resources, along with the implementation of recruitment policies supporting this diversity, was deemed essential for building an inclusive and harmonious healthcare environment.

### **Livelihood-Sector:**

\*In the case of the Livelihood sector, unique challenges emerged during the data collection process that impacted the comprehensive analysis undertaken in this study. Unlike other sectors, the discussions related to Livelihood were conducted online due to various security constraints. As outlined in the methodology section, our initial approach involved tabulating factors, impact, and frequency to facilitate a detailed risk analysis and the creation of risk matrix charts. However, the shift to online discussions hindered our ability to gather precise data on the impact and frequency of each identified factor within the Livelihood sector. Consequently, this limitation restricted our capacity to perform the risk analysis exercise for this specific sector. While the absence of this element is acknowledged, the study still endeavors to provide valuable insights into factors and recommendations based on the thematic analysis conducted for the Livelihood sector.

*Exploring the livelihood sector involved four focus group discussions, encompassing 23 participants. Among these participants were 7 managers, 2 coordinators, and 10 officers, offering a diverse array of perspectives and experiences within the sector.*

### **Factors:**

Embedded within the intricate fabric of challenges facing the Livelihood sector are internal dynamics that intricately intersect with external forces, shaping the landscape of initiatives. Operation challenges manifest in specific projects where the sustainability of work is compromised, often stemming from an inadequate understanding of the context, unmet community needs, and a drive to fulfill goals without aligning with actual community requirements. Resource challenges are marked by a stark imbalance between available resources and the escalating needs, setting the stage for internal constraints.

Externally, the sector contends with the formidable impact of governmental arrangements and systemic structures. Regulatory barriers, including the Lebanese labor law restricting refugees from employment, coupled with legal challenges, pose significant hurdles. Additionally, competition over services and resources, a dearth of specialized NGOs, a low wage rate, and the volatile, rapidly changing context create external impediments. Stakeholder collaboration and coordination, an essential external factor, is hampered by insufficient and inefficient coordination among Livelihood actors, leading to service duplication and barriers in accessing essential services.

Socio-political challenges amplify the complexity, encompassing political instability, economic crises such as the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, and the overarching impact of global crises. The Syrian crisis and global events further compound challenges, diverting attention and resources. Instability within the Lebanese context, with its multifaceted facets ranging from safety concerns to economic and political instability, hinders youth involvement in Livelihood programs.

Community-level challenges reflect perceptions of aid bias, cultural aspects influencing participation, and tensions between the Lebanese community and Syrian refugees. These nuanced dynamics, deeply rooted in local perceptions, add layers of complexity to Livelihood initiatives. The role of donors emerges as pivotal, marked by biases, restrictions, delayed responses, and a preference for international organizations, challenging the sector's sustainability. Donors' prioritization of urgent humanitarian needs over long-term sustainability further accentuates challenges, often sidelining crucial dimensions like women's inclusion, people with disabilities, and vulnerable groups. This thematic analysis underscores the intricate interplay of internal and external factors shaping the terrain of Livelihood programs.

### Recommendations:

To enhance the efficacy of Livelihood programs and mitigate tensions, a critical focus on stakeholder collaboration and

coordination emerges. A pivotal recommendation involves fostering better coordination within the sector, particularly addressing the perception of aid bias that can lead non-beneficiaries to believe that certain communities or target groups are favored. This step aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment.

Community awareness and involvement stand as crucial pillars in the recommendations landscape. Initiating peacebuilding and social stability training within the sector, incorporating conflict sensitivity training and conflict resolution, emerges as a proactive step. Additionally, raising awareness about the concept of needs assessment, emphasizing its role in serving the community, and extending the understanding of monitoring and evaluation to community members are pivotal strategies. Transparency and accountability toward participants are advocated, emphasizing the importance of presenting how scoring and selection processes are conducted. Furthermore, involving community members and key figures in decision-making processes seeks to address concerns about stakeholders feeling left out and unconsulted.

Within the realm of project management, specific recommendations unfold. Utilizing the evidence pyramid is highlighted, offering a structured approach to minimize the risk associated with data credibility and mitigate the impact of infodemics. Avoiding pre-conceived ideas that may influence community participation, conducting micro-scale context analyses, and planning targets and activities based on real needs are integral steps. Risk assessments, engagement of focal points from specific contexts, and building trust through self-awareness and cultural sensitivity constitute vital aspects. Transparent communication with the community, steering clear of jargon, and localizing communication further enhance project effectiveness.

A participatory approach in project design, involving grassroots communities through focus group discussions and surveys, is emphasized. Realistic planning, aligned with culture and community needs, is underscored to prevent frustration arising from unmet expectations. Early-stage needs assessments and identification of connectors within the community are proposed to enhance project alignment with community expectations and avoid duplication. Ensuring activities do not disrupt market values and contribute to conflicts is crucial, while the inclusion of peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities adds a holistic dimension to Livelihood projects. These recommendations collectively form a comprehensive strategy to navigate challenges and enhance Livelihood initiatives.

### Social Stability Sector:

*For the social stability sector, a comprehensive exploration unfolded across seven focus group discussions, involving 36 participants. This extensive engagement brought together 19 managers, 5 coordinators, and 10 officers, providing rich insights from various vantage points.*

#### **Factors:**

Internally, operational challenges surfaced as significant hurdles. These encompassed the nature and targets of projects, issues related to safeguarding, the absence of inclusive programs, staff's mental health concerns, and difficulties prioritizing long-term initiatives. Resource challenges, another internal facet, included limitations in project funding, insufficient human resources within NGOs, lack of staff skills and professionalism, and obstacles arising from the unavailability of funds for additional fees such as transportation and internet costs.

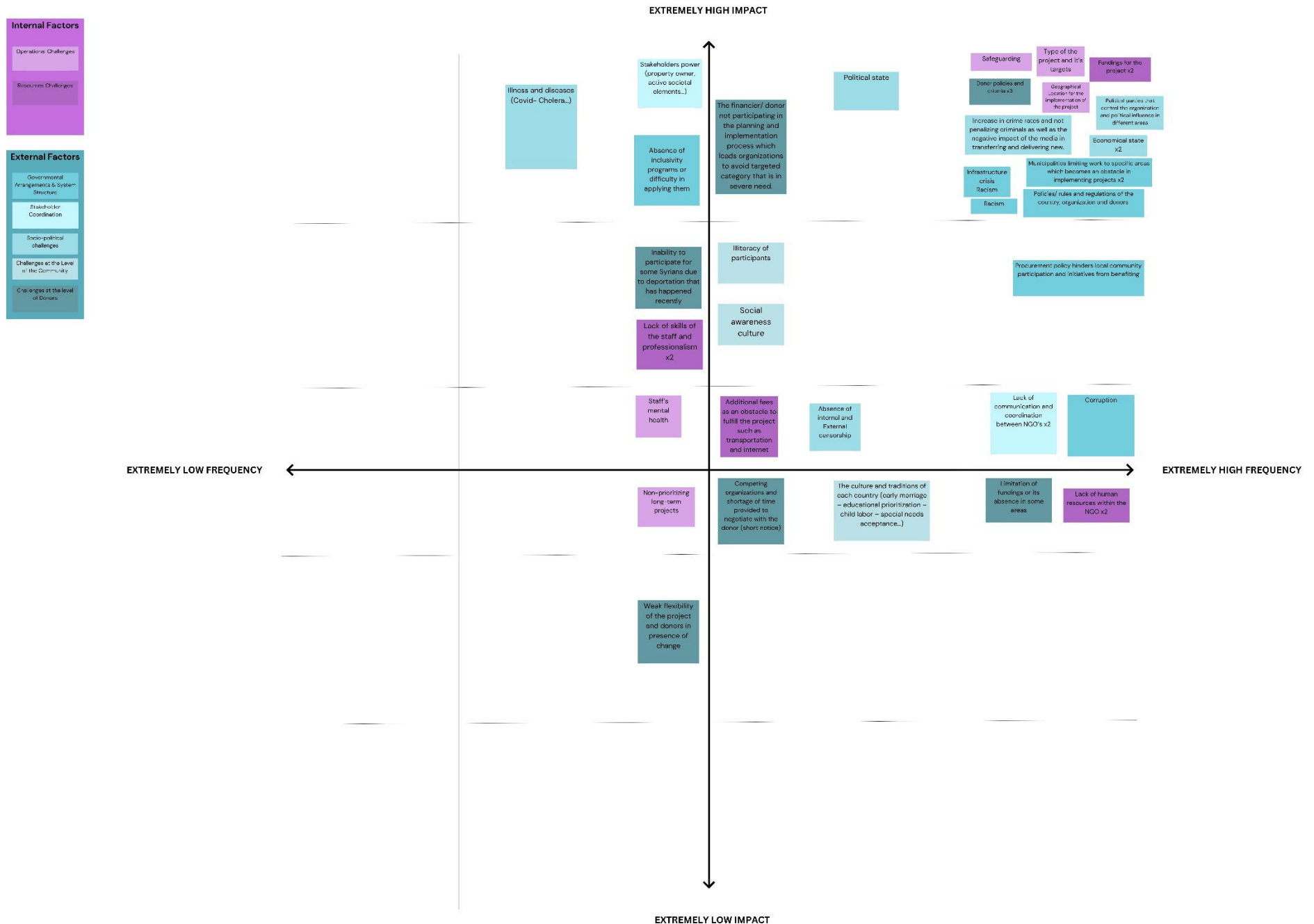
Externally, the challenges spanned a wide spectrum of issues related to governmental arrangements and systemic structures. Infrastructure crises, racism, policies, rules, and regulations at the national and organizational levels, corruption, and municipal limitations on project implementation areas were prominent concerns. Stakeholder coordination challenges highlighted the lack of communication and collaboration between NGOs, and the influence of stakeholders, such as property owners and active societal elements, was noted. Socio-political challenges delved into the impact of political parties, economic states, political conditions, illness and diseases, as well as rising crime rates and negative media influence.

At the community level, factors influencing social stability programs included the illiteracy of participants, cultural and social awareness, and the adherence to specific cultural norms and traditions. Lastly, challenges associated with donors played a crucial role. Issues ranged from donor policies and criteria, limitations or absence of funding in certain areas, lack of donor participation in planning, and implementation processes to competition among organizations and the shortage of time for negotiations. Additionally, the inflexibility of projects and donors in the face of changes, and the inability of some Syrians to participate due to recent deportations, were notable concerns. The thematic analysis of the social stability sector thus provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate challenges impacting program implementation.



# Risk Matrix

Factors Obstructing the Implementation of Social Stability initiatives in Lebanon



**Interpretation:**

The risk analysis analysis reveals that, when it comes to social stability, as in other sectors, external factors significantly outnumber internal ones, evident in the prevalence of blue blocks over purple, standing at 23 versus 9. Further scrutiny, considering the repetition factors (x2 and x3), accentuates the weight of certain issues, with a net count of 28 external factors compared to 12 internal ones.

Despite the relatively low count, half of the internal factors exhibit substantial impact and frequency, these include funding for the project, the type of the project and its targets, and safeguarding. The remaining internal factors tend to cluster around the medium zone.

The preeminence of external factors is underscored also in the extremely high impact- extremely high frequency zone, totaling eight. These external challenges are primarily associated with themes of governmental arrangements and system structure, and socio-political challenges- encapsulating issues such as municipalities limiting work areas, political party influence, and challenges stemming from the policies and regulations of the country and donors. Five other external factors exhibit extremely high impact despite varying frequencies.

Factors related to donors present a diversified pattern, scattered across impact levels and frequencies, reflecting the nuanced dynamics of donor-related challenges. The residual factors gravitate towards the medium zone, leaning towards higher impact and frequency.

This analysis portrays a nuanced understanding of the risk landscape, shedding light on the pivotal areas demanding attention and strategic interventions within the social stability sector.

**Recommendations:**

The focus group discussions allowed for the gathering of valuable insights and suggestions to mitigate tensions when it comes to social stability programs. As the analysis of participants' views showed, effective collaboration and coordination are the cornerstones of successful social stability programs. In this context, robust communication among local and international NGOs, municipalities, religious figures, and stakeholders is vital. Considering the opinions of owners, donors, and stakeholders in decision-making processes becomes pivotal, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility. This collaborative approach extends to the enforcement of communication tools, including awareness meetings, fostering

understanding and cooperation between societies, citizens, and local authorities.

Building on the importance of community engagement, honesty, and transparency emerge as key principles. NGOs engaging in social stability initiatives must prioritize open communication channels to establish trust with beneficiaries. By actively involving the community in decision-making processes through awareness meetings and regular updates, NGOs can empower and align their actions with the community's expectations and needs.

Effective project management is fundamental for the success of social stability initiatives. Conducting thorough assessments, including community evaluations, location considerations, and evaluating NGO capacities, sets the stage for impactful projects. Pre-implementation focus group discussions provide valuable insights into societal impact. Principles such as non-discrimination, inclusivity, clear internal structures, respect for local traditions, and fair service provision are central to long-term project success. Creating a safe space for expression, communication, and negotiation fosters a collaborative atmosphere, contributing to successful and sustainable projects.

In the realm of human resources management, fair employment practices, the selection of qualified team members, and the promotion of collaboration within the team are paramount. Observing the team for proper implementation, including effective communication, coordination, and execution, ensures that projects align with their intended goals. The careful management of human resources enhances the overall effectiveness and impact of social stability initiatives.

**WASH:**

*Within the WASH sector, insights were drawn from three focused group discussions with a total of 12 participants. The participant breakdown included 6 managers, 2 coordinators, and 4 officers, each contributing to the understanding of challenges and recommendations within the sector.*

**Factors:**

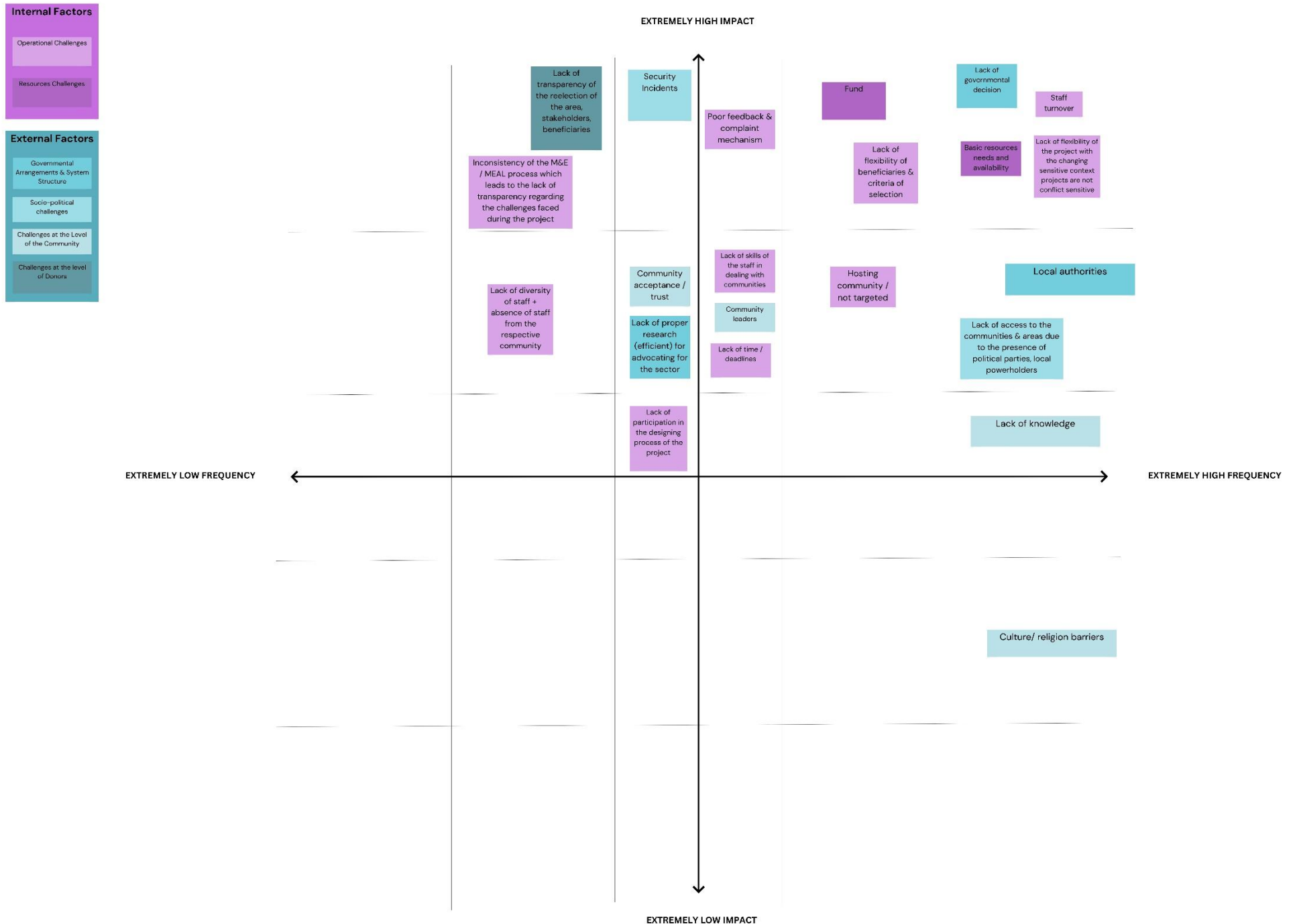
The factors hindering the implementation of WASH programs in the Lebanese context exhibit a multifaceted landscape encompassing both internal and external dimensions. According to our participants, operation challenges at the internal level reveal critical aspects such as the inadequacy of feedback and complaint mechanisms, high staff turnover, and inflexible project criteria. The inconsistency in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process contributes to a lack of transparency concerning project challenges. Additionally, the

absence of a conflict-sensitive approach and insufficient diversity among staff further accentuate the operational hurdles. Resource challenges, both financial and in terms of basic resources, compound the internal barriers, impacting the effective execution of WASH initiatives.

Externally, challenges stemming from governmental arrangements and system structures pose significant obstacles. The absence of decisive governmental decisions and local authority constraints limits the efficacy of WASH programs. Socio-political challenges, including security incidents and restricted access due to political entities, further complicate the external landscape. At the community level, acceptance and trust issues, leadership dynamics, knowledge gaps, and cultural or religious barriers emerge as critical factors. Finally, challenges associated with donors and the international community, such as a lack of transparency in the reallocation of resources and limited knowledge about stakeholders and beneficiaries, contribute to the complexity of implementing WASH initiatives.

# Risk Matrix

## Factors Obstructing the Implementation of WASH Projects in Lebanon





### Interpretation:

The risk matrix graph for WASH programs in the Lebanese context stands out with a distinctive pattern, diverging from trends observed in other sectors. Notably, internal factors, predominantly clustered under the theme of "operational challenges," surpass external factors in quantity, an exception to the observed trends in other sectors. The matrix delineates 12 internal factors, a relatively high number compared to the 10 external factors, where each factor was voiced once, contributing to a balanced representation.

Within the quadrant of extremely high impact and frequency, four factors emerge, notably three internal factors—lack of flexibility of the project with the changing sensitive context, projects not being conflict-sensitive, basic resource needs and availability, and the external factor pertaining to the lack of governmental decisions. These factors underscore critical operational and systemic challenges that significantly impact the implementation of WASH programs.

Several internal factors demonstrate extremely high impact, though with varying frequencies. These include challenges related to operational aspects such as the lack of flexibility in project criteria, issues with feedback and complaint mechanisms, and deficiencies in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems within organizations. Funding, a critical resource-related factor, also features in this high-impact category.

Additionally, four internal factors related to staff, diversity, skills, targeting beneficiaries, and organizational time constraints show high impact with varying frequencies. The only factor within the medium zone is associated with the design of the WASH programs.

External factors exhibit a diverse distribution across four themes, showing no discernible trend. This diversity underscores the multifaceted challenges arising from governmental arrangements, system structures, socio-political dynamics, and community-level factors.

### **Recommendations:**

The insights of our participants show that mitigating tensions within the context of WASH programs also requires a nuanced and collaborative approach. Stakeholder collaboration and coordination emerge as pivotal components. Adapting project criteria to cover new groups, including host communities grappling with economic crises, demands flexible approaches. Lobbying efforts with donors to embrace innovative and conflict-sensitive strategies are essential, underscoring the

importance of stakeholder inclusion in project design and feedback mechanisms for a comprehensive understanding of community needs.

In navigating system arrangements, the formulation of policies restricting service provision based on economic needs becomes a strategic focus. Coordination across the sector is advocated to address economic gaps resulting from such policies. Ensuring fair distribution of resources and effective advocacy for these policies necessitate thoughtful planning and engagement with stakeholders.

Community awareness and involvement play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and equity. Engagement strategies that involve community members, particularly the youth, in conflict-reducing projects, alongside raising awareness about WASH, contribute to responsible resource distribution and community understanding.

Effective project management strategies are paramount. Investments in water treatment facilities, reformulation of mechanisms for diverse cities or cultures, and the establishment of community committees for support and follow-up are pivotal steps. Transparent selection criteria and detailed communication of scores and decisions enhance community trust. Adapting project designs to serve diverse beneficiary backgrounds ensures inclusivity and effectiveness.

Human resources management emerges as a key factor in ensuring project sustainability. Diversifying team members, including local community representatives, and training staff in conflict sensitivity and resolution equip them with the necessary skills to navigate challenges and maintain positive community relations. These multifaceted recommendations collectively contribute to fostering resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability within WASH programs, addressing the intricate challenges faced in their implementation.

### **Discussion:**

This study embarked on a crucial exploration, aiming to unravel the intricacies faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating within the challenging landscape of Lebanon. The multifaceted challenges and opportunities encountered by NGOs were meticulously examined across various sectors- encompassing education, health, social stability, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), and livelihood- by drawing upon insights gathered from those directly involved in the day-to-day operations of NGOs within these sectors. The wealth of information presented by participants not only offer a nuanced presentation of the Lebanese context but also harmonize with and extend beyond

existing literature. These invaluable insights serve as a foundational basis for the subsequent interpretative discussions, where we delve into the analysis of these findings, exploring both their alignment with established research and their unique contributions to our understanding of effective NGO practices in complex environments.

It has been highlighted in the literature that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often navigate a complex terrain of challenges that affect their operation to a huge extent, and that the intricacies of these challenges are profoundly influenced by the distinctive contexts of the countries they operate in (Tall et al., 2023). The scenario is especially pronounced in Lebanon, where the confluence of economic downturns, political instability, and societal unrest has cast a formidable shadow over the operational landscape of NGOs.

In recent years, Lebanon has weathered an unrelenting series of crises that have left an indelible mark on the nation. A severe economic downturn characterized by significant devaluation of the Lebanese pound, catalyzed by political instability, social protests, and the devastating Beirut Port explosion in 2020, has created a complex web of adversities (Bou Sanayeh & El Chamieh, 2023). Lebanon's economic crisis, the largest among 193 countries, is intricately linked to the aftermath of the explosion. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, transforming the fabric of daily life for the Lebanese population (Bou Sanayeh & El Chamieh, 2023), having far-reaching implications that pushed citizens into poverty (Noubani et al., 2020). The Syrian refugee crisis, with over 930,000 registered refugees in Lebanon, has added another layer of complexity, affecting Lebanon's health system, economy, employment, and infrastructure (Noubani et al., 2020). With these adversities, significant political instability and social unrest prevailed in Lebanon (UNICEF, 2022). This political turmoil has not only affected the internal governance mechanisms but has also led to the isolation of Lebanon on the international stage, exacerbating the challenges faced by the nation ("Lebanon's governance crisis," 2022). In essence, the past few years have witnessed Lebanon grappling with crises that extend beyond mere economic challenges, placing immense pressure on the system, making it impotent to respond to the needs of the population, thus further exacerbating the situation.

It has been shown that post-conflict settings often exhibit specific characteristics and challenges, marked by a serious lack of institutional mechanisms, a high reliance on funding from international donors, and diminished civic trust and openness (Bozic, 2021). Notably, these are themes echoed in our research, voiced by our participants. This intricate and challenging backdrop underscores the relevance of the themes

identified in our study, where internal factors, encompassing operational and resource challenges, resonate – to an extent – with the strain felt within the country due to economic downturns and instability. More rigorously, external factors, demonstrated as challenges at the governmental, socio-political, community, and donor levels, manifest the political and social unrest and underscore the broader institutional impact of Lebanon's multifaceted crisis. The intricate web of challenges in Lebanon aligns with the broader assertion that the challenges faced by NGOs are deeply interlinked with the contextual nuances of the countries in which they operate. The repercussions of the crisis have cast a long shadow over various sectors, including the operational landscape of NGOs, adding a layer of complexity to their endeavors within the country.

As we delve deeper into the analysis, our discussion, especially when it comes to external factors, will elucidate pronounced connections between the Lebanese context and challenges faced by NGOs in the different sectors.

## Challenges

### Internal Factors: Operational Challenges and Resource Constraints

NGOs operating in Lebanon face significant challenges within their internal operations, encompassing operational hurdles and resource constraints. These internal factors were unveiled through a comprehensive exploration of the daily functioning, processes, and procedures within these organizations.

Resource constraints, including financial limitations, insufficient manpower, and technological shortcomings, emerge as a pervasive theme in our findings. The literature emphasizes the critical role of resource allocations in successful program implementation (Omondi et al., 2013). In our study, each sector highlighted resource-related challenges, indicating a clear subtheme across all sectors.

Participants in our study highlighted several operational challenges that resonate with broader issues identified in the literature. The operational landscape in NGOs is often marred by weaker and flatter organizational structures compared to enterprises, impacting decision-making processes and creating tension between senior management and staff (Tall et al., 2023). Factors related to “staff” surfaced under both the resource challenges subtheme – when it was voiced as scarcity in human resources and skilled workforce- and the operation subtheme-when factors were relating to performance and operation when it comes to staff. These factors were included in all sectors particularly in the health sector, where issues related to staff

dynamics underpin performance and operational effectiveness and were the only internal challenges voiced. This aligns seamlessly with the broader concerns voiced in the literature regarding the fragility of NGOs in staffing, management, recruitment, and human resources areas (Tall et al., 2023).

Other factors explored in our study related organizational structure, project design and operation, and sustainability. Drawing insights from the literature, it becomes evident that these factors are interconnected and play a pivotal role in shaping the success and effectiveness of NGOs.

Aggregated data from various studies emphasizes the paramount importance of organizational practices in determining the success of NGOs. An NGO's organizational structure serves as the bedrock for its overall management practices, and maintaining a stable structure is crucial for ensuring a proper management system. These practices, as identified in the literature, have a statistically significant impact on the sustainability of NGOs (Gul & Morande, 2023). Sustainability, in this context, was referred to the organization's ability to maintain and retain its operations over the long term, a process continually shaped by the experiences of those working within and contributing to the organization (Gul & Morande, 2023).

The concept of sustainability is multifaceted, varying across cultures, countries, regions, and communities. Each organization, whether governmental or non-governmental, profit or not-for-profit, requires sustainable growth, with contributing factors adapting to the unique characteristics of different contexts (Gul & Morande, 2023) – this makes it an essential aspect of the success of any organization.

Evidence from the developing world, including countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, underscores the challenges faced by NGOs in sustaining their operations due to a lack of financial stability and organizational effectiveness (Gul & Morande, 2023). The experiences of emerging nations echo these challenges, revealing a recurring pattern where NGOs struggle to establish a clear association between their mission and the interests of stakeholders (Gul & Morande, 2023).

In Lebanon, as in many other regions facing complex socio-economic challenges, the relevance of these findings becomes apparent. The lack of alignment which poses a threat to the sustainability of NGOs in the developed world actually resonates with the challenges expressed by participants in our study within the Lebanese context.

In essence, the literature provides a robust foundation for understanding the internal factors shaping NGO operations,

emphasizing the need for stable organizational structures, effective management practices, and a clear alignment between mission and operation.

### External Factors:

In examining the landscape of social innovation, our study reveals a noteworthy pattern wherein external factors outweighed internal ones across diverse sectors, emphasizing their profound impact. This consistent trend underscores the substantial influence of external contextual factors on NGOs' operations. This prevalence of external factors held true for each sector we explored, except for the WASH sector, where unique dynamics unfolded.

The literature supports this observation, emphasizing the significant role played by external contextual factors in shaping the trajectory of social innovation. As elucidated by Bozic (2021), internal organizational structures undoubtedly contribute to the impact of social innovation. However, the study underscores those external elements such as economic, legal, political, and socio-cultural conditions wield substantial influence in steering the diffusion of innovative practices within NGOs. The embedded nature of NGOs in their environment, coupled with their dependency on external actors and resources, intricately shapes the contextual impact of social innovation. This approach, aimed at addressing unmet social needs, evolves within the intricate relationships among diverse actors, ecosystems, and environments, which can be sources of opportunities but also potential obstacles for its diffusion and development (Bozic, 2021).

### Governmental arrangements and System Structure:

Within the external factors theme, the subtheme of Governmental arrangements and System Structure emerges as a critical aspect influencing the operational landscape of NGOs within Lebanon. Our study underscores the prevalence of these external challenges, as suggested in existing literature. Omondi et al. (2013) emphasize the pivotal role of policy regulations in determining the successful implementation of strategic plans (Omondi et al., 2013). Other studies also support this rationale. It has been shown that the implementation of innovative ideas across borders faces significant hurdles due to variations in welfare systems, cultures, and levels of economic development, particularly evident in low-income countries. Bozic (2021) stresses that many such nations lack the requisite government policies and institutional structures to support innovation (Bozic, 2021).

Our findings echo this sentiment, revealing a tangible relationship between policy regulations, conflicts among

legislators and government officials, and the preferences of senior management. These dynamics, as highlighted in our impact-frequency risk matrices, signify the high-risk nature of challenges at the governmental level, affecting the day-to-day operations of NGOs.

The nuanced challenges identified in the Livelihood, Social Stability, and WASH sectors - such as legal impediments, the infrastructure crisis, corruption, municipalities and local authorities' influence, and the lack of governmental decisions-echo the overarching impact of governmental and system arrangements on NGOs' day-to-day operations.

While these sectors provide specific examples, the depth of impact on NGOs becomes even more apparent when examining the extensive data from the health and education sectors. These sectors serve as powerful illustrations of the profound influence of governmental and system arrangements on a sector's dynamics. The challenges faced in the health sector, ranging from infrastructure crises to corruption, and those in the education sector, encompassing policy constraints and systemic shortcomings, exemplify the broader patterns identified in our study. These sectors, teetering on the verge of collapse, have been prominently featured in scientific articles, media reports, and international news, garnering attention as critical focal points for urgent action.

#### *Health sector:*

In Lebanon, the health sector has been plagued by an array of crises. The persistent lack of access to medications - a national tragedy, showing no signs of improvement (Shukar et al., 2021), the severe mental health crisis, described as a potential “pandemic” (Farran, 2021), and the perilous specter of food insecurity that looms large with its effects on the health of individuals (UN, 2023) are only few examples of the significant predicaments occurred.

Regardless of the crisis, and which aspect of health it falls under, the underlying causes are always related to the governmental arrangement and system structure. Lebanon's healthcare governance arrangement is characterized by fragmentation and a lack of central coordination, with multiple ministries and public agencies overseeing different aspects of healthcare. This disjointed structure results in inefficiencies and coordination challenges, amplifying the impact of crises and making the system more susceptible to disruption and failure (United Nations, 2023).

Moreover, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) has faced decades of struggles, hindering its regulatory role. Weak organizational structures, insufficient qualified human

resources, and inadequate infrastructure within the MOPH contribute to the system's fragility. The healthcare sector's vulnerability is further exposed by corruption, intensified during crises, which reveals weaknesses in accountability mechanisms. Limited coordination among financing agents and service providers creates siloed operations, exacerbated by a lack of political will. The absence of a shared vision impedes efforts to address the economic crisis's effects, leaving Lebanon without a comprehensive national strategy for human resources in health (El-Jardali et al., 2023).

These systemic shortcomings underscore the profound impact of governmental and system structures on the healthcare sector in Lebanon. The challenges highlighted not only affect the sector as a whole but also have direct implications for NGOs operating within this complex and fragile environment.

#### *Education:*

The socio-political challenges that have plagued Lebanon, pushed the public education system to the brink of collapse. Government policies, particularly the prioritization of the private sector over public education, have undermined the sector instead of providing the necessary support (Hdaife, 2023). The socio-economic crisis has increased operating costs for schools, leading to recurring teachers' strikes due to salary devaluation. Inequities in the education system, particularly affecting children from displaced Syrian families.

The protracted Syria crisis, economic deterioration, and the COVID-19 outbreak stretched the public education system to its limits. The extended lockdown further hampered the quality of education and impeded planned activities and reforms, including early childhood education, addressing learning outcomes, curriculum development, and teacher performance standards (*LEBANON CRISIS Response Plan 2022-2023*, 2022).

Media outlets and news headlines have extensively covered the critical state of the education sector, shedding light on the government's role in shaping this crisis (Hdaife, 2023). A Harvard International Review article delves into the instability of teaching, highlighting gaps in the sector and emphasizing the government's limited funding and capabilities to address ongoing educational issues (Corry, 2022).

These multifaceted challenges underscore the profound influence of governmental and system arrangements on the education sector. The Lebanese context, as explained earlier, affected the governmental and the system structures which in turn led to the collapse of the sector.



The implications affect every part of the sector, including NGOs operating within the complex landscape of education in Lebanon. In our study, the impact of governmental and system arrangements is starkly evident. 12 out of 20 external factors affecting the sector were identified under this subtheme, with many of them carrying a high risk based on the impact-frequency matrix analysis. These factors encompass a range of challenges, from ministries' decisions and their lack of adherence to negative rules and new decisions, to systemic processes, economic policies, and the overall educational framework – all of which are system-related obstacles that impede their operation.

### Challenges at the level of Donors

In the landscape of NGO operations in Lebanon, challenges at the level of donors emerged as a salient subtheme across all sectors, highlighting the intricate relationship between NGOs and their financial supporters. The dependency of Lebanese NGOs on external donors, primarily multilateral organizations like the European Union agencies, international non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and embassies, underscores a crucial aspect of their operational framework (Makdissi et al., 2023).

The reliance on external funding sources has become a standard practice, necessitated by the complexities of funding chains and the need for intermediary organizations to facilitate the flow of funds to local NGOs.

The literature further illuminates the nuanced challenges associated with donor funding. Kagendo (cited in Tall et al., 2023) emphasizes that while external funding is essential for NGO survival, it comes with potential constraints and implications for their autonomy. Receiving funds from external sources can limit an NGO's actions, especially when there are differences in strategic factors between the donor and the NGO. The impact of funding on decision-making processes is significant, with greater dependence on external funding correlating with increased difficulty in meeting objectives due to imposed constraints. The need to adhere to donor demands becomes crucial for sustaining funding, influencing the decision-making process, technical assistance, and policy implementation.

The conditions imposed by donors can range from purchasing goods from their country, potentially prolonging timelines and reducing the impact on beneficiary countries, to influencing the overall decision-making process within NGOs (Tall et al., 2023). Every funding agreement establishes specific obligations and responsibilities for both donors and recipient NGOs, and each donor institution introduces its own set of

conditions. This intricate dance between NGOs and donors shapes the operational landscape, with the challenges at the donor level significantly influencing the strategic direction, decision-making processes, and overall effectiveness of NGOs operating in Lebanon.

As our study identifies challenges related to funding limits and restrictions, along with donor criteria and preferences across various sectors, the alignment with existing literature reinforces the universality of these issues within the broader context of NGO operations in Lebanon.

### Challenges at the level of the Community

Within the fabric of NGO operations in Lebanon, challenges at the community level emerge as the fourth pivotal subtheme - which mirrors the intricate dynamics of inter-communal relations. Across all sectors, our study identified multifaceted challenges within communities, including conflicts, tensions, discrimination, lack of trust, and a perceived aid bias. This subtheme finds resonance in existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with community-level challenges.

The escalation of negative inter-communal relations over the past three years has been a pervasive issue, with a significant increase in reported tensions among Lebanese and Syrian households. Various drivers, such as access to cash, competition for lower-skilled jobs, and the struggle for essential services, contribute to the heightened inter-communal tensions (LEBANON CRISIS Response Plan 2022-2023, 2022). The competition over resources, coupled with economic hardships, has led to increased polarization in both traditional and social media, reflecting the broader societal strain.

Gul & Morande (2023) shed light on the deep-seated concerns shared by Lebanese, displaced Syrians, and Palestinians regarding access to essential goods and services. The tangible fear surrounding access to food, fuel, water, medicine, and medical care amplifies community-level tensions. Moreover, the economic crisis's impact is felt acutely by families unable to afford education-related expenses, leading to heightened economic competition and a strain on intra-Lebanese relations (Bahous et al., 2022).

The perception of aid bias has further fueled tensions, with instances of physical confrontations and antagonistic sentiments towards NGOs and international organizations. The erosion of trust and a decrease in dialogue among communities exacerbate the isolation between them, directly correlating with increased tensions (LEBANON CRISIS Response Plan 2022-

2023, 2022). Additionally, barriers to accessing primary healthcare services, including financial constraints and increased fuel prices affecting transportation costs, intensify community-level challenges (LEBANON CRISIS Response Plan 2022-2023, 2022).

### Recommendations:

In our study, the value of the recommendations assembled lies not only in their specificity in their profound potential to address nuanced challenges within diverse contexts but also their consideration of harm reduction and conflict sensitivity.

The uniqueness of these recommendations stems from their contextual richness, intricately woven into the fabric of Lebanon's sociopolitical landscape. The participants, being experts deeply entrenched in the operational intricacies of NGOs, have offered tailored insights for each sector, demonstrating a keen understanding of the country's distinctive needs. Importantly, these recommendations transcend conventional approaches, incorporating considerations of harm reduction and conflict sensitivity—a dimension often overlooked in the realm of project planning.

While the recommendations emerge as distinct solutions shaped by the participants' expertise, they find resonance with broader themes discussed in existing literature. The themes underpinning these recommendations align with established principles in the field, reinforcing the significance of their potential impact. As we embark on a thematic exploration of these recommendations, it becomes evident that the participants' insights not only contribute to the uniqueness of the proposed solutions but also harmonize with established knowledge, thus enhancing their robustness and applicability.

### Stakeholder Collaboration and Coordination:

Inherent to the fabric of NGOs operating in Lebanon, the theme of Stakeholder Collaboration and Coordination emerged as a pivotal aspect. Recommendations stemming from our study underscored the imperative for concerted efforts, establishing Expert Committees, and fostering collaboration with local and international entities. This thematic alignment finds resonance in existing literature, substantiating the critical role stakeholder engagement plays in the success and sustainability of NGOs.

The collaborative nature of NGOs in Lebanon was consistently emphasized in the literature. A significant portion of an NGO's impact hinges on its ability to address community issues and effectively collaborate with various actors and agencies within its operational sphere (Makdissi et al., 2023). The significance of outreach to stakeholders is underscored, with effective

engagement deemed critical for organizational capacity (Antlöv et al., 2010).

Success stories in the NGO sector often intertwine with effective coordination and partnerships. The UNESCO event focusing on "Strengthening Lebanon's Education Reform through Strategic Partnership" serves as a testament to the transformative power of collaborative endeavors often through allowing high-level discussions, idea exchanges and the exploration of strategic collaborations that can drive positive transformations (UNESCO, 2023).

Literature further advocates for strategies to achieve institutional and organizational sustainability through flexible approaches, new partnerships, and the nurturing of existing relations with donors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries (Tall et al., 2023). These strategies, reflected in the recommendations from our study, signify a shared understanding of the pivotal role stakeholder collaboration plays in enhancing the impact and resilience of NGOs.

### Community Awareness and Involvement:

The theme of Community Awareness and Involvement, resonating across diverse sectors in our study, underscores the foundational role of community participation in the success of development projects. The recommendations emanating from our findings, including engaging community members in projects, conducting awareness campaigns, and fostering transparent communication tools, align seamlessly with established literature, reinforcing the pivotal connection between community involvement and sustainable development.

Numerous studies, including those by Tall et al. (2023) and Gul & Morande (2023), highlight community participation as a linchpin for the success of development endeavors. The sustainability of civil organizations is intricately linked to involving community members in various project stages, encompassing planning, implementation, and maintenance. Active participation, be it in the form of financial contributions, decision-making, labor, or support, is deemed essential for project success (Gul & Morande, 2023).

The success of NGOs, as indicated in the literature, hinges on projects and programs that are community-driven. Creating an enabling environment and fostering community interest and commitment to monitoring and completing programs are essential facets of sustainable NGO initiatives. NGOs are advised to invest in training, educating, and motivating community members to ensure active planning and participation, contributing to long-term organizational sustainability (Gul & Morande, 2023).

Communication emerges as a cornerstone in the literature, with an emphasis on a robust communication strategy for showcasing project results to a broader audience. A well-structured communication plan, including updates on webpages, social media profiles, and donor communications, is underscored as a valuable tool for maintaining community engagement and support (Makdissi et al., 2023).

The congruence between our study's recommendations and the insights gleaned from literature not only reinforces the importance of community awareness and involvement but also positions these factors as critical determinants in achieving sustainable and impactful development outcomes.

### **Project Management: Project Design, Operation, and Implementation Consideration & Human Resources Management**

The theme of Project Management, encompassing two vital subthemes, namely Project Design, Operation, and Implementation Consideration, and Human Resources Management, emerges as a cornerstone in our study, echoing the sentiments echoed in existing literature. Across diverse sectors, our recommendations spanned various facets of project management, including project design, guidelines, policies, procedures, and considerations for human resources. This alignment with literature underscores the profound impact of proper project management on the sustainability and effectiveness of NGOs.

Organizational management factors, such as governance structures, leadership quality, and adherence to motivating policies, are identified in the literature as critical contributors to the sustainability of NGOs (Gul & Morande, 2023). Structured models emphasize the importance of adapting NGOs to dynamic external environments, with insights into choosing either organic or mechanistic structures based on environmental predictability and strategic effectiveness (Hasan et al., 2021). The positive relationship between mission, vision, objective settings, and strategy further underscores the significance of well-defined project design and operation considerations (Hasan et al., 2021).

The intricate interplay between organizational structures and procedures, guiding how leaders and staff interact, resource handling, and collaborative efforts, accentuates the central role of effective project management (Antlöv et al., 2010). Performance management, a critical aspect highlighted in the literature, stands out as crucial for NGOs' survival, serving as a means to assess overall organizational achievement, inform decision-making processes, enhance effectiveness, and quantify results (Hasan et al., 2021).

In the realm of Human Resources Management, the literature underscores the importance of a long-term plan for managing NGO staff, maximizing individual potential, and supporting professional development. Strategies promoting collaboration, good communication, and a sense of belonging among staff members are pivotal for fostering commitment to shared causes (Makdissi et al., 2023).

### **Limitation:**

The research is not without its limitations, which warrant careful consideration when interpreting and applying the findings. One significant constraint lies in the reliance on online platforms for data collection. The use of digital mediums may introduce biases, as accessibility and proficiency in online engagement can vary among participants, potentially excluding certain individuals and influencing the representativeness of the study sample. Moreover, a notable limitation is the loss of data due to the absence of recordings and notes during focus group discussions. The challenge of collecting quotes is exacerbated by the impracticality of transcribing discussions, given the substantial participation and resource constraints. As a result, the data are confined to tables and modules, limiting the depth of qualitative insights that could have been gleaned from verbatim quotes. The repetition of a small number of participants attending multiple sessions introduces a potential bias. The recurrence of the same individuals may lead to a homogenization of perspectives, potentially affecting the diversity of viewpoints presented and influencing the overall findings. Furthermore, the research acknowledges a lack of expertise among participants in the domain of "Do No Harm." Despite efforts to introduce and define this concept during discussions, the potential for recommendations to be overlooked or misunderstood remains, impacting the overall quality of insights garnered. An imbalance in participation across sectors, with a higher representation from social stability compared to health, poses another limitation. This discrepancy may result in a disproportional emphasis on certain sectors, affecting the generalizability of the study's conclusions. Although both sectors yielded similar themes, the overrepresentation of one sector could skew the evidence derived from the data. The research's focus on only four sectors introduces a limitation in terms of generalizability to other sectors with potentially distinct challenges and perceptions. Broader applicability could be enhanced by considering a more diverse range of sectors and their unique contexts. While the involvement of managerial participants contributes richness to the information provided, a potential limitation arises from the relatively limited inclusion of officers with direct contact in the implementation context. Recognizing the distinct perspectives of officers on the ground is crucial, and future research should

strive to involve them more extensively to ensure a comprehensive understanding of practical experiences and challenges. While the research paper aimed to uncover challenges and recommendations, future research should delve deeper into the effectiveness of these recommendations in actually mitigating tension during the implementation process.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the intricate challenges faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Lebanon, emphasizing the urgent need for a nuanced understanding to navigate the evolving civil society landscape. As Lebanon's civil society, shaped by a rich history since 1943, witnesses a surge in NGOs actively addressing critical areas, recent trends reveal a concerning decline in public trust, especially among host communities. Through a qualitative approach, involving seven focus group discussions with local and international NGOs from 2022 to 2023, the study unveils internal challenges such as financial constraints, manpower shortages, and technological limitations. External challenges, including governmental arrangements, systemic issues, donor dynamics, and community-related tensions, are intricately linked to economic downturns, political instability, societal unrest, and the aftermath of the Beirut Port explosion in 2020. The participant-recommended strategies, emphasizing stakeholder collaboration, community engagement, and effective project management, serve as practical insights for current challenges and offer a foundation for future recommendations. This nuanced understanding not only contributes to the broader discourse on NGO challenges in Lebanon but also provides a roadmap for organizations globally navigating similarly intricate environments. By incorporating these insights, future strategies can be refined, conflicts anticipated, and initiatives designed to promote lasting positive change, advancing both local and global peacebuilding efforts. While offering practical insights into the current challenges, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The specific timeframe and reliance on qualitative methods may limit the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving socio-political landscape in Lebanon poses challenges in capturing the entirety of the dynamic context. Looking forward, future research should adopt longitudinal designs and incorporate quantitative methodologies for a more comprehensive understanding of NGO challenges and exploring the long-term impacts of Do No Harm approaches on project effectiveness.

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