

EVALUATION REPORT

ENHANCING THE ECONOMIC RESILIENCE OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON – FINAL EVALUATION

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1 BACKGROUND

The Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) of the Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon has commissioned an independent final evaluation of the multiyear project entitled “Enhancing the economic resilience of vulnerable communities in North Lebanon” which phase 1 was implemented starting January 2020 and is expected to end in March 2023 (following a 3 months no-cost extension). The evaluation was undertaken in September 2022, i.e 5 months before the official end of the project. The project is in line with the Swiss Cooperation Middle East program that aims at contributing to safe, viable and peaceful living for conflict-affected and vulnerable people, reducing fragility, preventing and transforming conflict.

The project was implemented by local partners active within Tripoli and North Lebanon, namely the Safadi Foundation (SF) and the NAWAT consortium coordinated by Ruwwad and inclusive of SHIFT and TEC.

The project implementation strategy

The project overall goal is to strengthen MSMEs, start-ups and entrepreneurs’ ability to grow, create jobs and wealth, and contribute to the socio-economic inclusion of youth and women. Project activities revolved around 4 outcomes / Objectives, namely

- Outcome 1: Enhanced MSMEs capacities and practices for better market opportunities and improved sustainability. Under Outcome 1, implemented by all partners, the project intended to:
 - o Deliver BDS and Skills development training to MSMEs (Output 1.1)
 - o Implement tailor action plans based on MSMEs need to grow (Output 1.2)

Under Outcome 1, the project initially targeted a total of 40 MSMEs (20 for the SF – increased to 35 in the course of the project, and 20 for the consortium). SF strategy focuses on the selection of MSMEs with potential for growth in the hospitality, tourism, textile manufacturing, and trade sectors – with consideration for the cultural and traditional aspect of the business activities. SF training was divided into part, in the first part a general training on topic such as finance, leadership and management, etc.. was provided. Then this initial training phase was followed by the provision of in-depth capacity building training on marketing, including digital marketing and promotion strategies, with the aim of allowing MSMEs to access a wider client base.

The consortium focus was on MSMEs owned and managed by highly vulnerable individuals. The consortium provided the MSMEs with a standardized one-month BDS program, followed by a BDS coaching program tailored to the MSME need.

For both partners MSMEs received a financial grant to support them implementing the action plan development through the BDS training.

- Outcome 2: Enhance entrepreneurial capacities in terms of technical, operational, and strategic skills to establish and operate a business efficiently. Under Outcome 2, implemented by the consortium, the project intended to:
 - o Engage and support Start-ups and entrepreneurs with knowledge (business training) and innovation (Output 2.1)
 - o Increase awareness of local community (youth, women, families’ local businesses) on entrepreneurship and skills development (Output 2.2)

The project strategy relies on the consortium well established start-ups support program implemented by TEC to train entrepreneurs on business planning. The project also aimed at supporting 20 existing start-ups¹ with in-kind grant and a mentorship program, in addition to providing support to 6 new start-ups (either created by the project or established independently) to kick-start their business.

- Outcome 3: The skills of vulnerable groups meet better the demand of the labor market. Under Outcome 3, the project intended to
 - o Ensure access of vulnerable youth and women to short term vocational and work-force skills training (output 3.1) (all partners)
 - o Support Vulnerable youth and women with apprenticeships and job placement (Output 3.2.) (Consortium only)
 - o Link employers and employees through an interactive platform facilitating the matching of skills needed and provided (Output 3.3) (all partners)

Both partners build their TVET activities on markets analysis to identify training needs. However, each partner implemented a different approach for the implementation of Outcome 3 activities. TVET training also included a soft-skills training module and were followed by an apprenticeship program for selected trainees (consortium only). The specificity of each training approach is discussed in the relevant section of the evaluation report.

- Outcome 4: Organization management and sustainability of implementing partners is improved. Under Outcome 4, the project intended to
 - o Developed and put in place management and strategies (for the implementing partners) (Output 4.1) (all partners).
 - o Increase (build) capacity of staff to design, develop and deliver high quality trainings. (Output 4.2) (all partners)
 - o Enhance the sustainability of the consortium partnership (Output 4.3)

Building capacities of the project partners was fully incorporated into the project through a dedicated project Outcome. The aim was to ensure long-term sustainability and improve the action of the project partners. This component was based on a Partners Risk Assessment conducted by the SCO and conducted to evaluate partners capacity and procedures. initially this component focused on:

- Support Ruwwad on improving the quality of program delivery, monitoring and evaluation and internal procedures.
- Support SF in setting up BDS activities in support to MSMEs including the training and coaching of internal resources, in addition to improve SF internal HR management

The established of Social Enterprises within each member of the consortium, with the aim to provide a potential source of employment and apprenticeships to graduates of the vocational training programs, was considered as a way to sustain on the long-term the outcome of the project.

Ultimately, the capacity building activities which were initially intended to support Ruwwad and SF, also provided support in project management and M&E to SHIFT and TEC.

¹ Initial logframe target was 10 existing start-ups, it was adjusted to 20 during project implementation.

2 THE EVALUATION PLAN

2.1 Evaluation questions and methods of inquiry

The final evaluation was undertaken in September-October 2022, and focused on the line of inquiry indicated by the SCO:

Lines of inquiry indicated by the SCO

- Provide an in-depth assessment, per partner wherever relevant, of the project achievements and performance, from the start of the project till date, including lessons learnt
- Provide evidence-based recommendations in views of a potential 2nd phase of the project and for the SCO's engagement in the domain of income generation beyond this project.

To that end, the evaluation utilized the indicated OECD DAC criteria proposed in the evaluation TORs, with a slight adaptation. The first step will consist on the review of the project documentation and existing data with a view to better understanding its impact chain (or log frame). As the project must be based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change will happen, the evaluators will interrogate those assumptions in light of the economic and social crisis, utilizing their expertise, publicly available research, as well as the program's own research findings. This step will constitute the first step in assessing the project *relevance* and planned contribution to livelihoods in North Lebanon.

The hereunder evaluation matrix outline the proposed methodology.

Table 1: evaluation matrix

Criteria		Evaluation questions	Methods of inquiry
Relevance	1	How much and in what ways did the project address the priorities and problems identified by the targeted direct beneficiaries in the field of Vocational Skills Development and Private Sector Development? And are the services provided by the project perceived as relevant by the beneficiaries on the one hand, and by key stakeholders (local economic actors, such as Chamber of Commerce, Municipality, private sector) on the other hand? If so, how? If not, why?	-Focus groups with beneficiaries of TVET programs, and BDS support disaggregated by Gender and nationality -Desk review of local economic assessment and development policies developed by relevant local stakeholders, such as chamber of commerce and municipalities. - Interview with local stakeholders, including partners (local and international organizations) - Group interviews with trainers / coaches
	2	To which extent were the objectives adequately updated in order to remain relevant in light of massive changes in the context? What contributed/hindered successful adaptive management? To which extent does the project Theory of Change remain valid in the current context?	-Desk analysis of the impact of the crisis on the local economy -Interview with local stakeholders, including partners (local and international organizations) -Interview with the project staff -- Group interviews with trainers / coaches
Effectiveness	3	What has been achieved, based on the logframe with a focus on outcomes?	-Desk review of project M&E reports

	4	What were the internal or external factors that facilitated or hindered the achievement of the project's objectives and how effective was the project in harnessing or mitigating them?	-Situation analysis (desk and interview the local stakeholders) - Interviews with the project staff - Group interviews with trainers / coaches
	5	How inclusive was the project design and implementation of women and vulnerable groups and what specific results did it had for these groups?	-Desk review of project M&E reports - Interviews with project staff -Focus groups with beneficiaries
	6	To which extent was the implementation of the Conflict Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM) principles (incl. do no harm) effective, in particular for beneficiaries but also for the wider community?	-Desk review of project documents - Interviews with project staff. - Focus Group with beneficiaries
Efficiency	7	How efficient are the set up and modalities chosen by partners to implement this project (e.g. consortium structure for NAWAT, use of consultants vs. self-implementation). What alternatives would have been more efficient?	-Desk review of project report - Interviews with project staff - Desk review of other intervention in the region - Interviews with local stakeholders - Group interview Consortium partners directors
	8	Carry a cost-effectiveness analysis for the results achieved at impact level? What other approaches could have been more efficient in reaching the same objectives at outcome and impact level?	-Desk analysis including review of other existing interventions - Budget analysis
Coordination and partnership	9	How did the project ensure complementarities and exploited synergies with other similar programs, as well as with stakeholders at local and national level (NGO, CSOs, private sector, and local authorities) to strengthen the local market system and improve effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the project? Is the project aligned with public policies? Is the project duplicating other efforts in any way?	-Interviews with project staff -Desk analysis including review of other existing interventions - Group interview Consortium partners directors- Interviews with actor in the field
Impact	10	What has been so far the project positive intended impact on its beneficiaries?	-Focus group with beneficiaries -Group interviews with trainers / coaches - Interview with project staff
	11	Did the project generate any unintended positive or negative impact, both on its direct beneficiaries and on indirect beneficiaries (beneficiaries' families, wider urban Lebanese and Syrian communities)?	-Focus groups with beneficiaries -Interview with Project staff
Sustainability	12	Was sustainability integrated into the project design? how?	-Desk review of project documents
	13	What results (outcome, impact) of the project are bound to be sustainable, and to which extent? What are factors hindering the sustainability of results and to which extent does/can the project address them? What can be project further do to improve long-terms sustainability?	-Interview with project staff - Group interviews with trainers / coaches

2.2 Data collection

Data collection took place between September 20 and October 10

Focus group discussions

A total of 12 focus groups were organized in Tripoli on September 20, 21 and 22, focus group discussion will be followed by a de-briefing meeting with project staff. The focus groups are disaggregated as follows.

The Focus Group Discussions guidelines are annexed to this report and are aligned with the evaluation matrix.

Table 2: List of focus groups

FDGs		Remarks
Safadi Foundation – TVET and life skills training		
1	Female Syrian beneficiaries	12 participants
2	Female Lebanese beneficiaries	12 Participants
3	Safadi Foundation – TVET Male Lebanese beneficiaries of TVET and life skills training	8 Participants including a person with disabilities
4	Safadi Foundation – TVET Male Syrian beneficiaries of TVET and life skills training	7 Participants
Consortium – TVET and entrepreneurship		
5	Female Syrian beneficiaries	14 participants
6	Female Lebanese beneficiaries,	16 participants
7	Male Lebanese beneficiaries	8 Participants
8	Male Syrian beneficiaries	9 Participants
Safadi Foundation – BDS		
9	MSMEs supported by Safadi Foundation	10 Participants
Consortium – BDS		
10	MSMEs supported by the consortium	3 participants*
Consortium Start-ups		
11	Starts-up (existing and early stage)	6 participants
12	Business planning for young entrepreneurs	7 participants

* As the number of participants was low over the phone interviews were carried out with 10 MSMEs, over all 13 out of the 20 businesses supported by the consortium were consulted (either through the FDGs or the phone interviewees)

Semi structured interviews

A total of 22 interviews / group interviews were carried out, with project staffs and trainers. The evaluation plan also proposed to carry out group interviews with trainers and BDS consultants coach, as well as a group interview of the consortium director to discuss strategic orientations. A total of 20 businesses that received on-site-trainees (Safadi Foundation), as well as entrepreneurship (Consortium) were also interviewed (over the phone), to discuss relevance of the activities and skills matching.

The table below list the proposed interviews.

The interview guidelines are annexed to this report, and are aligned with the evaluation matrix.

Table 3: List of interviews project team

	Organization	Position	Name
1	Safadi Foundation	Project manager	Khaled Hannouf
2	Safadi Foundation	Project coordinator	Farah Sherif
4	Safadi Foundation	VT coordinator	Hiba Chouaa
5	Safadi Foundation	M&E manager	Severine Carreira
	<i>Safadi Foundation</i>	<i>Samar Boulos</i>	<i>Previous director – was not available for an interview</i>
6	<i>Safadi Foundation</i>	<i>BDS consultants/coaches</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
7	<i>Safadi Foundation</i>	<i>TVET trainers</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
8	Safadi Foundation	Business unit	Tarek Kassab
	Safadi Foundation	Life skill trainer	
9	Ruwwad	Project manager	Hoda Rifaii
10	Ruwwad	MEAL coordinator	Fawaz Ghiyeh
11	SHIFT	Project manager	Jihane Balsheh
12	SHIFT	Project officers	Rabih Yassine and Amani Nashar
13	TEC	Project manager	Melissa Yammine
14	TEC	Project coordinator	Farah Sabsabi
15	<i>Consortium</i>	<i>BDS consultants/coaches</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
16	<i>Ruwwad</i>	<i>TVET trainers</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
17	<i>SHIFT</i>	<i>TVET trainers</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
18	<i>TEC</i>	<i>BDS consultants/coaches</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
19	<i>Consortium</i>	<i>Directors</i>	<i>Group interview / discussion</i>
20	<i>Consortium</i>	<i>Consultant</i>	<i>Joseph Feghaly</i>
21	<i>SCO</i>	<i>National program officer</i>	<i>Zeinab Farhat</i>
22	<i>SCO</i>	<i>Deputy Head of international cooperation (Beirut)</i>	<i>Alice Thomann</i>
	<i>Businesses that have received</i>	<i>One per type of training</i>	<i>A total of 15 businesses were contacted</i>

Finally, to develop recommendations on the project second phases, the evaluator reviewed existing local economic development plans as well as international implementation strategies in Tripoli. A series of interviewees were carried out with local institutions and organizations, including:

Table 4: List of interviews partners

	Organization	Comments / contribution
1	LCRP – sector coordinator	Yursa Taleb, Mapping of intervention in Tripoli / North Lebanon
2	RDPP / DANIDA *	Mayssa Hammady – capacity building coordinator Mireille Chiha – Livelihood programs Donors working with SF
3	IECD *	TVET / Micro-finance, Maya Boustani
4	Al Majmouaa	Micro-finance , Alya Farhat
5	GIZ	Insight on the latest development in the TVET sector, Sarah Al-Helou
6	UN women*	Insights on their women economic empowerment program , Yara Nassar

2.3 Reporting

The report includes answers to the evaluation questions and recommendations on the way forward. The recommendation will follow the TORs guidance in terms of areas of interest to the SCO, as defined below:

1. Does the review team advise to have a second phase of this project (see entry proposal as a reference) and why? What would be a plausible, conflict-sensitive theory of change in light of the current context? Should partners prioritize certain approaches and if yes which ones (e.g. skills training vs business support; service delivery vs. business environment focus on specific sectors; focus on certain modalities like technical assistance, training or grants) to respond to the beneficiaries' needs in a sustainable way?
2. Based on the findings and lessons learnt, what recommendations can be made to improve relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, impact and sustainability of results of a phase 2?
3. Which key results and innovations generated under this project and similar projects in the intervention area deserve to be further scaled up and how (incl. through strategies for advocacy, policy dialogue, alliances)?
4. Which projects/programmes in the intervention area are consistent with local needs, priorities, and partners' capacities on which the SCO can build on when designing a second phase?
5. What other recommendations can the review team make for the involvement of Switzerland in the livelihoods/income sector in North Lebanon?
6. Beyond this project, which overall conclusions can be drawn to guide the SCO future decisions to support projects aiming at improving prospects for income in Lebanon, incl. main gaps and opportunities?

After the SCO review of the report a project meeting, inclusive of the SCO and all partners, was organized to present the report findings and receive feedback from the project's partners.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 EQ1: Relevance of the activities from the beneficiary's perspective

Evaluation Question (EQ) 1a: How much and in what ways did the project address the priorities and problems identified by the targeted direct beneficiaries in the field of Vocational Skills Development and Private Sector Development? and Are the services provided by the project perceived as relevant by the beneficiaries on the one hand, and by key stakeholders (local economic actors, such as Chamber of Commerce, Municipality, private sector) on the other hand? If so, how? If not, why?

Under outcome 1:

- **The business development + grant support provided to businesses are highly relevant to the business needs.** This applies to both businesses supported by Safadi Foundation and the Consortium.

Businesses that participated in the focus group discussions reported having highly benefited from the training and coaching programs. “We were in survival mode; the project gave us the tools and also supported the investment needed for us to move from survival mode to a more positive approach”, this quote from one of the consulted business owners reflects the overall businesses’ feedback on the BDS component implemented by the Safadi Foundation. Businesses highlighted the importance of financial support given the current situation and the difficulties to access finance. For many, the financial grant was essential and complementary to the training they have received, allowing them to implement businesses plans and activities developed throughout the training. Similar feedback was received from businesses that participated in the activities implemented by the consortium, however, the delay in the provision of the grant support (see sections on effectiveness and efficiency) has created a feeling of being “left in limbo”.

Under outcome 2:

- **The business development support and the grant provided (or to be provided) to businesses are highly relevant to the start-up needs.** Although most of the start-ups were already established, they reported benefiting from the coaching support to fine-tune their vision and plan and allowed them to minimize “the trial-and-error process” of running a business for the first time. Several participants mentioned that the program did not provided support for registration or for building relationship with the chamber of commerce, hosted IDRAC center, a need that was deemed necessary for businesses working in the food sector and willing to export part of their production, or potentially using the services provided at the chamber of commerce. Participants to the focus groups discussion also mentioned that the delay in the provision of the financial grant support does highly impact the relevance of the coaching they are received. Since coaching sessions and business plan are build around the idea of an upcoming investment (either fully or partially) granted by the project, beneficiaries considered the technical and financial support components as being complementary.
- **The bootcamp activities was deemed not relevant by participants to the focus group discussion.** Participants found the information interesting but was described as introductory information only, as many of the participants had previously participated in several similar

trainings: “the information in the bootcamp is becoming very repetitive and some instructors are the same ones giving the sessions with multiple organization”. The focus group discussion pointed out to the significant challenges face in organization for the selection of beneficiaries and the overlapping of several programs. Participants also complaint regarding the delay in implementation of the mentorship activities, which they believe should tackled their need for more in depth skills learning and business linkages. To note that the relevance of full process planned in support to young entrepreneurs could not be evaluated as the mentoring sessions had not yet started at the time of the evaluation.

Under outcome 3:

- **The relevance of vocational training activities implemented by the Safadi Foundation differed based on the type of activities, and the gender of participants.**

Within the skills improvement activities implemented by Safadi Foundation, the following training were deemed relevant to by the beneficiaries, in terms of both skill acquisition and market needs: 1- Split AC installation and maintenance, 2- Networking, 3- Low voltage, 4- Wood repair. Beneficiaries who attended these training reported improvement in skills, as well as improvement in employability, regardless of nationalities. In several instances, self-employed focus groups participants reported improved clients based and potential to enlarge services offering. In several instances, beneficiaries have mentioned the need for advanced and longer training, as well as longer on-site training and internship/apprenticeship opportunities. The (limited number of) women that participated in these training reported improved skills, but difficulties in integrating the job market – and limited relevance of on-site-training activities as often business owners did not allow them to practice their learning.

Trainees participating in the (5-) Sea food training reported significantly improved skills, however, few reported improved employability potential, especially if they did lack more general hospitality services skills (e.g. skills related to occupations such as assistant chef). People already employed in restaurants, and/or snack, did not report using the skills they have learned during the training at their place of employment, but believe they will have the occasion to do so in the future. Interviewed women referred to social obstacles not allowing them to look for work in the hospitality sector because of working hours, especially lunch time and evening working hours.

Similarly, trainees that have attended the wood carving training reported improved skills, employability and diversification of services provided, only in cases in which trainees were already working or had experience in the wood industry sectors. People that had no previous experience in the sector, reported limited relevance of the training in increasing their employability, and a low relevance of the on-site-training as business owners did not allow them to work directly on the wood, but only allowed them to observe. Similarly, **trainees that participated in the (7-) traditional sweets training, reported low relevance to the skills they have learned with the need of the market,** as most sweet shops are looking for more general and advanced sweet making skills.

Trainees that participate in traditional craft training curriculum found the training to not be relevant to the current labor market demand., while they do report an improvement in skills, they believe these types of skills are currently not in demand in the market. These training includes: 7- brass /copper carving, 8- soap carving, 9- straw crafting, 10- Stone restoration, 11- Clay plastering. In fact, for many vocational training courses, that could have led to home-based employment, the limited financial capacity to engage in production, as well as the current limited market demand have hampered

the capacity of trainees to engage in self-employment. This is particularly true for all craft trainings. One indicator that reflect the low relevance of craft training, from both the beneficiaries and the private sector perspective, for most craft and traditional renovation trainings only one business was identified and was able to provide on-site training: i.e. this is the cases for: clay plastering, straw crafting, soap carving, and copper carving, while only 3 businesses received on-site trainees for stone construction. For other training, an average of 8 to 9 businesses received on-site trainees.

The evaluation could not assess the relevance toward beneficiary need for the following training: 12- 2D / 3D resin furniture, 13- Spray paint, 14- furniture cushioning, either because the training was still ongoing, or have not yet started.

- **Training implemented by the consortium were relevant to the beneficiaries in terms of both skills' improvement and employability.**

The hospitality training was deemed by beneficiaries to be highly beneficial and relevant in terms of skills improvement and employability. Trainees have reported high quality of training curriculum and commitment of the trainers. The training certification issued by the LAU constituted a key incentive for most of the people attending the training. Many of the trainees reported having received jobs offers but could not accept it because of low wages (see section on impact). While the training was mostly provided to men beneficiaries, women participants also expressed their willingness to work in the sector, and to adapt to the sector specific hours. To note however, that the cohort of beneficiaries trained by the consortium tend to be younger and more educated than the cohort trained by Safadi Foundation, this is especially true for women. In fact, several Syrian beneficiaries considered that the education training was more relevant to them, and although they are ready to work in the hospitality sector, they would have ultimately preferred to take part in the education training.

The education training was deemed by beneficiaries to be highly beneficial and relevant in terms of both skills' improvement and employability, this is particularly true for Syrian women. In fact, a vast majority of Syrian women that attended the training reported having been offered jobs at the education centers in which they spent their partnership, although sometimes this job offer was conditional on the center being able to access additional funds and/or registered children. However, Lebanese women tended to be offered jobs less often, and were less willing to accept jobs offers. This is potentially due to the significant number of existing Lebanese school teacher that may also work in after school education centers, as well as the fact that most Lebanese women that participated in the focus group discussion were still undergoing university education and/or had not yet made choices on their professional orientation and preferences.

The rainmakers training was deemed by beneficiaries to be highly beneficial and relevant in terms of both skills' improvement and employability. Trainees reported being highly satisfied with the training and reported improved employability. Most of the participants in the focus groups have had offered job opportunities either at the place where they undertook the apprenticeship or with a different business. In fact, the rainmaker's program is highly integrated into the ecosystem of start-ups and innovative businesses that are directly linked to TEC. The matching process in which TEC has matched trainees to businesses was deemed very successful in ensuring adequate entrepreneurship placement. The rainmakers' program which is highly relevant to young, educated Lebanese men and women, could also target and be more inclusive of Syrian beneficiaries.

All beneficiaries reported high relevance of the life skills training provided by both the consortium and the Safadi Foundation to their personal needs.

Under outcome 4:

- **The capacity building activities were relevant to the needs and priorities of the partners organization.** The capacity building program provided to the Safadi Foundation was in line with the organization strategic capacity and restructuring plans, including plan to enlarge the scope of action to include a business development unit and restructure the organization through the creation of an HR department and the clear separation between the work of the Safadi Foundation and the Safadi Cultural center. Similarly, capacity building activities for the consortium partners were based on a need assessment focused on the improvement of the partners action through improvement MEAL and reporting systems.

3.1.2 EQ 1: Alignment of the project activities with local economic actors

Given the current situation and the absence of a strategic vision and a local economic development plan, it is difficult to align activities with the municipality actions. The crisis has halted the implementation of local economic development plans and strategies. As matter of fact, the municipalities of Tripoli and surroundings never played an active role in coordinating or setting priorities for the action of development programs funded by international donors. Nonetheless, the project activities are aligned with suggested economic plans and market assessment that saw high potential for the growth and development of the knowledge based and innovative businesses, hospitality services, traditional crafts, increased tourism through the revalorization of the on the city tangible (historical buildings and monuments) and intangible (sea food cuisine, and traditional sweets) heritage. While sectors such as hospitality and innovative and knowledge-based economy can, to a certain extent, thrive based on private initiatives, economic activities based on craft and cultural heritage cannot thrive without public interventions and policies supporting the valorization process. In a way, the absence of public and policy support has lessened the relevance of project activities focusing on these sectors.

The business development support activities provided to businesses focus on innovative process in the furniture, start-ups, and food industry sectors are in line with the chamber of commerce and local economic actors action, especially:

- The BIAT business incubator center (hosted by the Chamber of Commerce), and that focus on the provision of business development services to start-ups as well as established businesses
- The IDRAC center (hosted by the Chamber of Commerce), that have specialized in the provision of technical and production services to businesses working in the food industry
- The Minjara Platform (hosted by the Rachid Karame Center and managed by Rene Moawad Foundation), that provide technical, administrative and production services to wood manufacturer.

However, the project has not capitalized on potential linkages with these institutions.

3.1.3 EQ 3: The effect of the crisis

EQ 2: To which extent were the objectives adequately updated in order to remain relevant in light of massive changes in the context? What contributed/hindered successful adaptive management? To which extent does the project Theory of Change remain valid in the current context?

In more general terms, the crisis has increased the need for interventions that support employability of young people, and support to small businesses:

- **The economic crisis has threatened the survival of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Businesses.** MSMEs constitute a livelihood option for vulnerable groups and have the capacity to absorb a large number of unskilled and low skilled workers. As saving value in LBP and Bank foreign currency deposit lost more than 80% of their value, and financial institution stop all form of loans and credit. Micro and Small enterprises lack of financial capacity have hampered the capacity to sustain activities, and thus to maintain and create jobs. According to the ESCWA (2022)² decreased demand for full-time employment in micro and small enterprises, which hire most poor and vulnerable groups. Employment demand dropped by almost half in microenterprises and by a fifth in small firms. Micro and small enterprises shut down for an average of nine weeks owing to the pandemic in 2020, putting many of them on the brink of bankruptcy. MSME employees constitute around 91 per cent of full-time employment, but 45 per cent of these employees are multidimensionally poor. The ESCWA policy brief suggests the implementation of programs facilitating upskilling and reskilling programs for those who lost their jobs and further recommend that young people and women be at the heart of these reskilling and upskilling programs.
- **The crisis is highly impact women and youth, further impacting their capacity to access the labor market.** According to UNICEF, 3 in 10 young people in Lebanon have stop their education, 86% of surveyed youth report feeling anxious, and 41% felt their only chance was to seek opportunities abroad³. It is estimated that by October 2020, around 40,000 women have left the labor market: either due to losing their jobs or resigning⁴. Transport costs from and to the workplace sometimes surpass income and that obliges women to leave their work. This consequently restricts the freedom and movement of women and isolates them from the public sphere.

Within that difficult context, the approach of the project, its theory of change and its activities remains highly relevant to the crisis context. However, this does not apply equally to all sectors of interventions selected by the project:

- **The financial and economic crisis effects have significantly reduced the relevance of activities that focused on the revival of traditional craft.** As mentioned, these activities required support from public institutions, tourist flow, and the a sustain costumer demand.
- Sectors such as hospitality businesses, and high value products and services (home catering, ready to eats foods, children's recreational activities, products, and services with export capacity) seems to be more resilient and cater to upper middle class, and people that have access to payment in

² ESCWA (2021) Lebanon's Formal Private Sector: the Bitter reality of 2020. E/ESCWA/ CL2.GPID/ POLICY BRIEF 1

³ UNICEF (2022). Searching for hope. A grim outlook for youth as Lebanon teeters on the brink of collapse.

⁴ Salti, N. and Mezher, N. (2020). Women On the Verge Of An Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon.

USD. As such, programs' activities that focus on these sectors, either through the TVET or the Business development component remained relevant to the current context.

- **The education training program is highly relevant and linked to community needs for improved education services.** With the collapse of the public education sector, and the recurrent closure of schools, either due to COVID restriction, social-movement road closure, and/or teachers strikes, local households need for extra-scholar education support has increased with the crisis, even with the overall reduced purchasing power.

3.2 Effectiveness

The following section reports indicators as measured and reported in October 2022, i.e. 5 months before the end of the project.

The evaluation report propose amendment to the logframe, the review of the logframe is presented at the end of the effectiveness section.

3.2.1 EQ 3 and 4: Outcome achievement

EQ 3: What has been achieved, based on the logframe with a focus on outcomes?

EQ 4: What were the internal or external factors that facilitated or hindered the achievement of the project's objectives and how effective was the project in harnessing or mitigating them?

The answers to EQ3 and EQ4 is discussed below for each outcome.

Outcome 1: Enhanced MSMEs capacities

Table below present the indicators for outcome 1: Enhanced MSMEs capacities.

Table 5: outcome 1 indicators

Indicators	Results and Evaluator Comments
<p>20 (SF) and 20 (consortium) MSMEs who participating in trainings demonstrate improvement in knowledge and skills regarding basic business practices, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1) 10% of trained MSMEs report increase in sales 1.2) % of trained MSME report increase in profit 1.3) Total number of jobs of MSMEs created/maintained/improved <p>Note on output indicators. The Safadi Foundation has overachieved its output indicators by providing support to 35 businesses, the consortium provided support to a total of 19 businesses. At the time of the evaluation, the consortium had not yet achieved its output indicator 5. Related to the provision of in-kind grants. The log frame does not document an output indicator on grant for the Safadi Foundation and need to be revised accordingly</p>	<p>Results have not been reported yet for the consortium. Businesses supported by the consortium may not achieve these indicators because of delay in the provision of financial grants</p> <p>Safadi Foundation reported over achievement, reaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 37% for indicator 1.1 - 28% for indicators 1.2 - 58 jobs created and 38 jobs maintained/improved <p>To note that no information has been collected on the work conditions of newly created jobs, wage, formality, benefits, and the indicators does not express the number of jobs created as equivalent full time job.</p>
<p>1.4) Change in business practices: 90% of MSMEs utilizing adjusted processes, practices, or methods for managing their businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% of MSMEs receiving tailored coaching session who demonstrate improvement in knowledge and skills regarding in-depth business practices, by: 1.5.1) Increased capacity utilization 1.5.2) Number of commercial linkages for MSMEs (new contract(s), client(s), market(s) accessed. <p>All related output indicators have been achieved or a likely to be achieved by the end of 2022</p>	<p>The consortium reports a 100% achievement for indicator 1.4, 1.5.1 and 1.5.2.</p> <p>The Safadi Foundation reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 90% achievement for indicator 1.4 - 80% achievement for indicators 1.5.1 - 80% achievement for indicators 1.5.2 <p>There is a high probability that these indicators are achieved by the businesses supported by both the Safadi Foundation and the Consortium.</p> <p>The indicators on increased capacity utilization is not clear in term of both definition and measurement methodology. Project partners have used different methodology to measure the indicators, e.g. SF and Interphase asked the MSME to report on the evolution of different resources: HR, equipment, premises, other between before/after the project.</p>

Based on the interview and focus groups carried out by the evaluation, it is likely that outcome 1 indicators will be achieved for business supported by the Safadi Foundation. As reported in the relevance section, businesses reported a high alignment between their needs and the support provided, as well as a high quality in the coaching session provided. Several interviewees mentioned a change in the management process, either in terms of planning, accounting, but also more complex managerial tasks such as client and suppliers' relationship and responsibility delegation.

Businesses supported by the consortium may not achieve outcome indicators related to increase in revenues, profit, and job creation/sustainability. The key factor affecting the achievement of outcome 1 for these businesses is the delay in the reception of the financial grant. To recall that in the current crisis period, businesses have limited access to financial sources and the grant component of the projects play a key role in insuring outcome achievement and ultimately impact. Most interviewed businesses were very frustrated with the delay in-kind assistance component of the project. In fact, none of the businesses contacted by the evaluation had received grant assistance, with some having waited for more than 1 year, others more than 6 months. The process was described as bureaucratic, and several businesses mentioned that the papers were requested multiple times. The delay has created a feeling of discouragement and being disrespect by the project. One participant mentioned that the delay is stalling and thus harming his business on the short-term and may lead him to lose significant business opportunities.

Regardless of the delay in the grant, businesses supported by the consortium report improved skills and implementation of new management procedures. Interviewed businesses reported having learnt from the training given, even those who had previous knowledge about some of the topic given. The most popular topics were accounting and marketing. They also benefited from the networking opportunities and the community created. One of the participants uses the lab space/workshop provided by the program to create the items she designs. The employees within firms stated that the knowledge they gained benefited them in their jobs; they also now have the capacity to handle more responsibilities.

The selection process and the type of businesses selected might have played a positive role in the achievement of the outcomes. The Safadi Foundation went with the support of interphase through a well-documented selection process. As a matter of fact, businesses interviewed by the evaluation were already established, and showed high potential for growth, having an average of more than 5 employees, with some of them working with technological top edge food processing technology. To note that Safadi Foundation selected businesses from all Tripoli neighborhoods as well as from Tripoli Surroundings. On the other hand, the selection process undertaken by the consortium may have limited their capacity to reach out to more efficient businesses, especially because of:

- The higher vulnerability of the area of intervention of the consortium, Beb Al tebanneh and Jabal Mohsen.
- The provision of training and coaching sessions to employees within medium-sized business, and thus potentially limiting the willingness of business owners to implement business plans in which they were not directly involved. This in addition to the expressed willingness of businesses staff to use the skills acquired to develop their own business. The latest elements raise a concern in term to the relevance of BDS support provided to business staff rather than to the business owner/main manager, as this typology of participants should be redirected to participate in the activities of outcome 2.
- A less documented selection process.

The effect of the crisis may reduce the magnitude of the achievement of outcome 1, especially in regards, to increase in profit and job creation. Supported businesses are still facing significant challenges especially in their investment and hiring capacities. The increase in transportation cost has put a high pressure on wages, and businesses are not able to hire new staff, but rather use increase revenues to improve salaries of existing staff “in order to not lose them”. The higher wages provided in Beirut and Mount Lebanon are also creating hiring challenges for Tripoli Businesses⁵. Ultimately, structural challenges, especially in terms of access to water, energy, and availability of quality raw material, constitute a significant burden on Tripoli businesses. Overall, none of the supported businesses have reported an immediate risk of closure, however, some have mentioned reporting investment and expansion plans because of the current situation.

⁵ Ultimately the very high wage discrepancies between Tripoli and Beirut, also reflect the lack of integration of Tripoli businesses within the national markets. Additional effort to ensure integration and expand Tripoli businesses integration is needed.

Outcome 2:

Table 6 below present the indicators for outcome 2: Enhanced entrepreneurial capacities.

Table 6: outcome 2 indicators

Indicators	Results and Evaluator Comments
2.1) 40% of Start-ups generating increased revenues or increased job posts 2.2) 30% of start-ups linked with investors to receive funds or establish partnership with other entities 2.3) # of new start-ups established (functional after 6 months) 2.4) # of early stage MSMEs launching in the market	Results have not been reported yet The indicators are not specific to each activity, there is no differentiation between the already established start-ups that have received grants and mentorship programs, and the early-stage start-ups that went through the start-up seeds programs. The differentiation between “new start-up established” and “early stage MSMEs” is unclear (indicators 2.3 and 2.4) Separate specific indicators should be created for revenues, and job creation (indicator 2.1). Similarly separate specific indicators should be created for investment in start-ups, and establishment of partnership (indicator 2.2) The project is likely to reach its outcome indicator 2.1 related to increased income and/or job creation for established start-ups that have received both mentorship and financial grant support. No information was shared regarding investors’ funds and/or partnership with other entities (indicator 2.2). None of the consulted start-ups had mentioned establishing partnerships and/or receiving funds. It seems unlikely the project will be able to reach the outcome indicators related to investors and partnership. The project is unlikely to reach its objective for the entrepreneurship program (early seed start-ups programs).
Output indicators: The number of start-ups that have received a mentorship program has been overreached (42 instead of 20) The initial output indicator on the provision of grant has been overreach with 22 existing start-ups receiving grants instead of 20 planned Having overreached its mentorship targets, The project should provide full support for all businesses mentored , i.e. the project should provide grant support to the 42 start-ups that have received mentorship programs (assuming they are align with the technical selection criteria). This is of particular importance given the relevance of the BDS + Grant “package”, to the business and start-ups needs. The output targets for the early stage have not reached at the time of the evaluation with only 23 out of 60 trained on business planning (bootcamp). At the date of the evaluation, no mentorship program for early-stage young entrepreneurs had been provided. This activity initiated in October 2022.	

From one side, the quality of the business support provided as well as the financial grant are key factors that play in favor of the project achievement of outcomes indicators. Consulted established start-ups have reported high benefits from the mentorship process, which has supported them in improving their business management and performance. From the other side start-ups, similarly to MSMEs, face significant challenges because of the ongoing financial and economic crisis. **It is reasonable to assume that the crisis context may have significantly reduce willingness of investors to invest and up-scale Lebanese start-ups,** and thus reduce the likelihood of the project reaching its investment and partnership outcome indicators.

The delay in implementation of the support to young entrepreneur programs is likely to reduce the project capacity to reach the related outcome indicators. The young entrepreneur programs⁶ that were planned to be implemented in year 1 and year 2 of the project, witnessed significant delay. At time of the evaluation process, only one bootcamp had been organized in September 2022, and another one was planned for October 2022. Mentoring sessions have not started yet. Given the remaining time for the finalization of activities of 6 months, there is significant concern regarding the ability of the project partners to finalize the activities on time, while ensuring quality of the mentorship, and timely delivery of the financial support grant.

⁶ inclusive of a bootcamp (for 2 times 30 beneficiaries), a 5-month mentorship program for selected beneficiaries (2 times 20), a pitching event for selected 20 beneficiaries (2 times 10), and finally the provision of grant for at least 6 early stage-start ups.

Outcome 3:

Table 7 below present the indicators for outcome 3: Improved skills of vulnerable groups

Table 7: Outcome 3 indicators

Indicators	Results and Evaluator Comments
3.1) 80% of beneficiaries (sex disaggregated) participating in vocational training report improved employability by an increase in occupational knowledge and vocational skills	The consortium report 96% achievement Safadi Foundation report 75% (of total target) The project is likely to achieve indicator 3.1. by the end of the 2022
3.2) 40% of trained beneficiaries (sex disaggregated) placed in an apprenticeship program (consortium)	The consortium reported a 39% achievement for indicator 3.2 – and have achieved the indicator.
3.3) 70% of apprentices (sex disaggregated) report increased skills and enhanced competency in selected vocation (consortium)	The consortium reported a 100% increase in skills and enhance competency after the apprenticeship program and has overachieved indicators 3.3.
3.4) 20% of beneficiaries (Sex disaggregated) found jobs related to their training 3 month after completing the training program (consortium)	The consortium has not reported on indicator 3.4. At the time of the evaluation, Safadi Foundation reported an under achievement of 5.7% out of total target of 30% for indicator 3.5
3.5) 30% of beneficiaries (sex disaggregated) who found jobs (part/fulltime) related to their training report an increase or new income (Safadi Foundation)	
All outcome indicators are likely to be achieved by the end of 2022.	

The high quality of developed curriculum, and the learning experience from exposure to apprenticeship for trainees from the consortium was one of the keys facilitating factor for the achievement of the project outcome 3. In fact, interviewed businesses who received apprenticeship⁷ or on-site-training had overall positive feedback on the trainee skills, e.g.:

- Businesses that received beneficiaries from the rainmakers' program reported that the apprentices gained a diverse set of skills including content creation and marketing. However, the progress and learning curve depends greatly on the level of computer skills. Businesses reported their willingness to hire apprentice, with several businesses having hired more than one beneficiary.
- Businesses that received hospitality services apprentices reported a high level of skills in the kitchen, and a relatively lower capacity for apprentice that trained as bartenders or table services

⁷ Businesses that received apprenticeship or on-site-trainees were not supported by the project with a BDS+Grant packages, with potential exception within the rainmakers training programs.

and express their willingness to hire apprentices, although their capacity to provide adequate wages is a key barrier to hiring

- Education centers were satisfied with the level of skills of the apprentices, who seems to be more comfortable working with younger children. The apprentices were exposed to innovative teaching methods and education pedagogies. Apprentices were also trained on how to manage and discipline a classroom and communicate with children, an area in which education centers report there was great improvement throughout the course of the apprenticeship. In the education sector, the interviewed establishments reported that would hire the trainees as they have been very responsive to the training and show potential.

To a lower extend the on-site-training implemented by the Safadi Foundation supported beneficiaries in increasing employability skills in specific sectors, however, feedback from businesses that received on site trainees were mitigated, e.g:

- For AC installation, it was noted that the trainees were experienced enough to handle simple tasks, such as installing simple small split units' models, but did not have the skills for more complex installations like central units, or maintenance (thus the need for additional training). However, they would be able to work as part of a team with more experienced workers. Similar feedback was provided for Network and low voltage occupation.
- For clay plastering, businesses considered that the trainees acquired the knowledge that they need, but the vocation requires long years of practice before anyone can become a craftsman "moua'lem". As such, the trainees would be skilled helpers, but are not yet craftsmen; however, they would be able to achieve expert status in 3-5 years. Similar feedback was provided for stone construction / renovation.
- Spray painting trainees seem to show a significant mismatch between the skills acquired and the skills needed for work as the generally used technique for painting furniture is not spray painting. Spray painting is only minimally used in certain cases when furniture is painted black, and a gold spray is used to give it some shine. Nonetheless, the trainees were able to work and learn the techniques used in the furniture sector during the on-site-training.
- Wood repair seemed to have the highest matching between the skills learnt and those applied, as the business interviewed stated that the serious trainees were 60-70% ready to take on the job. "Some had previous experience and with the training they received on site, would be able to handle projects on their own, and others had no previous experience other than the training received but were very competent and absorbed the knowledge like a sponge." However, the interviewed business pointed out that on-site training requires more resources, in order to allow trainees to rotate and cover the building of most furniture type (bed, closet, desk...).

The high relevance of certain training, including the certification of the hospitality training the rainmakers program, the education training, and the non-traditional craft training provided, **versus the low relevance of other,** such as training on traditional craft, **played a key role in facilitating or hampering the achievement of the project outcomes.**

The crisis and the increase cost of transportation was a major factor hampering the project outcome achievement. Often beneficiaries have mentioned refusing a job offer as the proposed wage could not cover the transportation costs. The absence of an efficient public transportation system is a major barrier for access to work of vulnerable communities. Public transportation still rely quasi-solely

on the “taxi services” model, no bus lines either formal or informal are in function in the city. Making daily commuting to work highly expensive.

Outcome 4: partners capacity building

Table 8 below present the indicators for outcome 4: partners capacity building.

Table 8: Outcome 3 indicators

Indicators	Results and Evaluator Comments
4.1) Partners NGOs reporting enhanced capacity, better systems and new tools implemented	The project is on track to achieved outcome 4 indicators 4.1, and 4.2
4.2) Partner staff trained report being better qualified to undertake their tasks	Partners are measuring indicators 4.2 based on self-reporting tools.
4.3) # of new training programs, services and actions developed by the BDS department (SF)	At the time of the evaluation indicator 4.3 was behind schedule⁸
4.4) Business model of the 3 social enterprises on track (consortium).	Business model for the 3 social enterprises have been developed, however, the indicator definition is unclear regarding the practical meaning of “on track”.
All relevant output indicators have been achieved	

The capacity building program provided to Safadi Foundation allowed the organizations to develop new systems, management tools and activities. The program was in line with the organization institutional strategy developed with the framework of its RDDP funded projects. Through the capacity building program funded by the Swiss cooperation an HR department was created, a new salary scale was approved, and operationalized, and clear separation was made between operations and programs, with a development of an organigram delimiting roles and responsibilities. The program also triggers internal discussion on the relationship and the organization and distribution of task between the Safadi Foundation and the Safadi Cultural Center, through the discussion the operation of the Foundation was separated from the operation of the cultural center, and procurement manual were developed. **However, changes in human resources and staff, may have slowed down the process as new staff was handed over.**

The program also allowed the Safadi Foundation to engage in business development activities. The organization engaged in a process gradually, through the support provided by Interphase, who implemented first phase of business support activities coaching and gradually delegating responsibility to the Safadi Foundation newly established business development unit. “The system allowed to gradually build the organization knowledge and capacity, introducing concept and principles of business development activities”. Overall, the partnership with Interphase and Safadi Foundation has allowed for an increase efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of the BDS activities, while the creation of

⁸ At evaluation, date this indicator was behind schedule with no new services implemented. Nevertheless, SF staff informed the evaluator that the BDS unit is preparing the set-up of training activities for SF alumni who started working as self-employee. This intervention will be developed between October 2022, and March 2023.

the business unit will allow Safadi Foundation to design, and coordinate the implementation of BDS interventions, with the focus on the creation of business-to-business linkages as well as access to markets and finance supports to businesses. The unit does not yet have the capacity to provide coaching and technical support to businesses, in fact, partnership with specialized BDS organization is recommended.

The consortium capacity building program provided support to the organization in project management and MEAL. Staff were further trained on the use and implementation of project management tools and system such as project logframe, meal plan and Gant chart. Standard operation procedure was put in place and regular meetings for management, technical and meal staff were organized to follow-on the implementation of the project. Nonetheless, the outcome of the capacity building program remains unclear as issues in reporting and MEAL capacity remain palpable and have impacted the project implementation capacity, such as delay in grant disbursement and activity implementation. .

To note that, the capacity building program provided to the consortium has also supported the gradual localization of similar projects in Tripoli and North Lebanon, through transferring leadership and coordination with the donors directly to local organizations. This has constituted a significant change in the consortium partners implementing strategies and accountability toward both donors and beneficiaries.

The business model for the social enterprise were developed and progress on the implementation of business operation have been for the three partners. While the creation of social enterprises, that could create jobs, increase businesses sales, and/or work as a platform between services providers and consumers, is relevant to the socio-economic needs of young vulnerable people and businesses, **its** relevance to the capacity building program of the institutions, and therefore its contribution to outcome 4, remains unclear, and limited to the use of the social enterprises as training and apprenticeship centers, and sale outlet for supported businesses. An element that could to a certain extend be contradictory with the partners accountability towards reaching out to the private sector, and improving business agencies and control over value chain downstream operations.

Furthermore, the social enterprises ownership is disconnected from the organizations, and as such it is unclear how its revenue stream will not be used to build long-term financial capacities and generate revenue stream that is independent from donor funds. With the exception of Ruwwad's social enterprise commitment to use funds to support the organization scholarship. For example, SHIFT concept note mentions that the enterprise will be employee-owned. However, no details are provided on how this system would work⁹. Overall, elements related to the structure of ownership and to the contribution of the social enterprise, its relationship with beneficiaries and businesses, and its link to the capacity building of the organization need to be further defined.

⁹ Do employees received incentives or share of the profit? What if an employee leaves the organization? What will be the legal structure of the enterprise being in the absence of a social enterprise legal framework?

3.2.2 EQ 5: Women economic empowerment

EQ5: How inclusive was the project design and implementation of women and vulnerable groups and what specific results did it had for these groups?

The project has overreached its output targets in terms of women participation. MEAL data shared with the evaluation show that by September 2022:

- 34% of participant in Safadi Foundation vocational trainings were women, overreaching the 30% target
- 65% of participants in the consortium vocational trainings were women, overreaching the 50% target
- 62% of apprentices (consortium) were women
- 23% of business owners supported by the Safadi Foundation were women (no initial target set)
- 32% of business owners supported by the consortium were women (no initial target set)

The education program implemented by the consortium was particularly successful in empowering young educated Syrian and Lebanese women. “The project made us want to wake up early”, this quote reflects the positive attitude and change in behavior of women beneficiaries of the education program. The high relevance of the activities (see relevance section), quality of training and the great potential for employment have worked toward the successful outcome of this activities in terms of women economic empowerment.

For instance, the low relevance of the traditional craft training has led to limited results in term of economic empowerment of the vocational training program implemented by the Safadi Foundation. Around 55% of women involve in the skills improvement activities participated in training related to traditional sweet, soap carving and straw crafting. They reported a limited increase in employability, limited potential for home-based activities, and hard-working conditions and limited relevance of the on-site-training provided in by Khan al-Saboun for all participants to the soap carving training. Women that participated in other training, reported difficulties in integrating the workplace, either because of transportation issues, lack of responsiveness and trust of business owners, or social limitation related to the job working hours and workplace (i.e. in the hospitality sector). Nonetheless, in cases where business owners were open to women integration in traditional male dominated vocations, positive outcomes on women were tangible E.g. Women trainees in wood repair received very positive feedback from the businesses they worked with, noting that they are skilled, competent, and motivated. The interviewed business owner stated that “both women were competent enough to be hired or work on their own as skilled workers, which was not the necessarily the case for other male trainees, especially those with no prior experience. If, I have the capacity to, I would have offered them a job”

Life skills trainings, especially the training provided by the Safadi Foundation, had a significant positive impact on women. The training supported women to work on their skills and gave them an opportunity to change at the personal level. Women reported that the life skills training led to significant change in their everyday behavior, created friendship, and offered them an opportunity to meet other people and learn from their experience. For many the training supported them in breaking their shyness, and be more open to talk about their experiences, opinions, and aspirations. The training also worked toward accompanying women in the gradual change of their perception towards works. Some beneficiaries stated that the training provided them with the courage, and the skills to discuss with their parents and

households' members and convincing them of the importance of work, at both a personal and financial level.

The business and start-ups support program mainstream women participation. Women business owners and participant to the starts-up program reported positive feedback on the activities, with no difference between the support provided to men and women business owners.

The program did not put emphasis on the participation of people with disabilities. In total only a person with disability participated in the activities.

3.2.3 EQ6: Conflict sensitive program management

EQ 6: To which extent was the implementation of the Conflict Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM) principles (incl. do no harm) effective, in particular for beneficiaries but also for the wider community?

The project partners did not have a comprehensive CSPM strategy to reduce tension and did not undertake a conflict analysis. However, they have implemented a series of actions to ensure the project adherence to the “do no harm principles”. Apart from the beneficiaries’ complaints presented in this section, the evaluation did not identify any harm done by the project to the beneficiaries or to the local communities.

Project partners implemented procedures in line with the CPSM program. Consortium partners attempted to gender mainstream activities (see section 3.2.3), and ensure culturally sensitive, training topics were selected based on observation and context understanding. The partners ensured the “Do No Harm” principles through the implementation of PSEA policies and reporting mechanisms. A grievance mechanism was put in place, “Takalam 1”, the program is visible and accessible to everyone. The Feedback and Complaints Mechanism (FCM) as a system including Guidelines, and a Beneficiary Complaint Form (in Arabic and in English). The consortium also implemented protection referral protocol as per the inter-agency RIMS system. The consortium also worked in improving its SOPs especially in terms of beneficiary’s selection and improved its policies by developing anti-fraud and corruption, as well as safety and security policies. The RIMS referral system was also used by the Safadi Foundation to send and receive protection and livelihoods referrals.

The Safadi Foundation designed the project activities in a way to optimize accountability, through:

- **Information sharing and transparency:** at project launch, selected MSMEs beneficiaries participated in an introduction session, during which, the project team presented the project activities, and expected outcomes. Vocational training beneficiaries were also introduced to the project, the vocational training topics provided and the process of enrolling, by the social workers of the outreach team. The selection process procedure aimed at maximizing transparency and fairness.
- **Participation:** The needs assessment conducted in the beginning of the project assisted the team in the development of the business training program, while taking into consideration the needs expressed by the MSME owners to address them during the sessions. In addition, the program implemented was participatory; beneficiaries were able to express themselves and their demands

freely. According to interviewed Safadi Foundation staff, recommendations provided by the trainees will be taken into account for the development of future vocational training.

- **Feedback/complaint:** The individual coaching sessions were a space for MSME owners to provide their feedback or complaints about any phase in the program. When applicable, the project team took their recommendations into consideration and made the changes in the course of the activities, if applicable. On another hand, the beneficiaries participating in the vocational training programs were introduced to the case management unit in the training center, its hotline and the complaint box, which they can use for complaints and feedback at any moment in an anonymous manner, if willing so.

During the evaluation three complaints were made by the beneficiaries to the evaluators, they were:

- Beneficiaries of the Safadi Foundation TVET program complained about
 - The lack of clarity on the training transportation fees, and the non-harmonization of transportation fees between different projects implemented by the organizations “ the other trainee took x USD per day, we received y”. While this did not have a negative impact on the project activities, it did create a perception of iniquity for some beneficiaries, although at a limited scale and magnitude.
 - Not receiving “training kits¹⁰”, while other trainees (from other projects) had received one.
 - Both complaints were reported and discussed between the evaluator and Safadi Foundation staff. It was agreed that donors and implementing partners share a common responsibility in ensuring harmonization of transportation costs, and kits distribution across all TVET programs, and that the Safadi Foundation will raise these issues with its donors. Harmonization should be agreed upon at sector coordination level.
- Beneficiaries from the BDS program implemented by the consortium complaints about delay in provision of grants and stated that this delay is harming their businesses. This issue is discussed in the relevant section of the report.

3.3 Efficiency

EQ 7: How efficient are the set up and modalities chosen by partners to implement this project (e.g. consortium structure for NAWAT, use of consultants vs. self-implementation). What alternatives would have been more efficient?

EQ 8 Carry a cost-effectiveness analysis for the results achieved at impact level? What other approaches could have been more efficient in reaching the same objectives at outcome and impact level?

Limitation: : The evaluation of the project efficiency was only partially done, i.e. assessment of cost effectiveness of activities and output, but does provide limited information on the actual cost-benefit ration at outcome and impact level. This is due to the limited availability of data that related to the wages offered

¹⁰ Usually inclusive of tools and raw material that can be used to start a self-employment business, or use in a workshop.

for created jobs, the amount of sales generated by businesses, the level of leveraged investment from businesses and start-ups.

Table 9 below, shows a series of indicators extracted from the project budget. These indicators will support the evaluation analysis on the project efficiency.

3.3.1 EQ 7 and 8: Project timeline: time efficiency

The project did not witness significant delay in implementation of the skills improvement activities and is expecting to finalize the activities before the end of 2022. Except for the rainmakers training, which was implemented as early as year 1, most vocational training module implementation started in year 2 and were completed by the end of year 3. The challenges faced during 2020 (COVID-19, Beirut Blast), the prioritization of capacity building activities, and the long process of developing training curriculum may justify the postponing of implementation of TVET activities to year 2. However, an earlier start of skills training activities may have improved the partners ability to follow-up and reflect on post-training interventions, improved linkages with private sectors and reporting on the project impact indicators.

The BDS activities implemented by the Safadi Foundation did not witness delay and were implemented efficiently with the support of Interphase. This has allowed Safadi Foundation to document outcome achievement in terms, and follow-up results with supported businesses, especially in terms of job creation, increase in sales and revenues. In fact, the implementation of the activities through the support of a specialized consultancy firms have proven to be efficient and allow for synergies between the implementation of the BDS activities in synergies with the capacity building program aimed at improving the Safadi Foundation capability in terms of support to businesses.

BDS activities implemented by the consortium witness significant delays between the provision of the training / mentorship program and the provision of the financial support grants. This has significantly impacted the ability of program to reach its outcomes (see section on effectiveness). The factors that have led to the delay are related to:

- Delay in payment from the Swiss Cooperation Office, which are in turn due to
 - the non-alignment of payment schedule with the project activities needs, i.e. non availability of funds for grants at the end of the end of the business training/ mentorship program
 - inadequate financial and narrative reporting from the partners – an issue that should have been solved through the project capacity building component, and by the allocation to the project of one full time project finance assistant, 4 part-time finance officer, and one part time grant and procurement officer (the total being equivalent to 2.45 full time employees solely dedicated to the project operations support).
- The burden of the administrative process, with interviewed businesses often reporting having been asking for the same paperwork several times.

The start-ups seeds activities witness significant delay and have only started in the last quarter of 2022. Such delay in the start of the activities have been linked by interviewed staff to delay in payments.

Table 9: Project Budget indicators

Indicators	Safadi Foundation	Consortium
Human resources		
Share of human resources out of total budget	27.7%	43.3%

Capacity building		
Cost of capacity building out of total project cost	3.3%	2.5%
BDS support		
Share of BDS support activities out of total support	17.3%	4.8%
Cost of BDS support per business – excluding grants	2,738 USD (planned) 1,564 (achieved)	1,333 USD (planned) 786 USD (achieved)
Share of business grant out of total budget (including prizes of start-up seeds competition)	11.1%	6.5%
Share of business grant out of BDS activity budget	64.6%	55.6%
Average grant for existing MSME	5,000 USD (planned) 2,857 (achieved)	1,500 USD (achieved) 1579 USD (achieved)
Average grant for existing start-ups	N/A	3,000 USD (planned) 1,363 USD (achieved ¹¹)
Start-ups		
Cost of all activities supporting start-ups out of total budget	N/A	19.1%
Share of start-up seeds competition out of total budget	N/A	8.0%
Cost of start-up seeds competition per number of start-ups to be supported	N/A	17,166 USD
Cost of start-up seeds program per trainee (excluding prizes)	N/A	1,316 USD
Share of start-ups seed competition out of total grants to businesses	N/A	28%
Cost of awareness raising events as share of total budget (inclusive of IBDA platform and start-ups forum)	N/A	11.0% 7.5% (start-ups forum) 3.5% IBDA platform
Skills improvement		
Share of skills improvement activities out of total cost	34.2%	12.4%
Share of training rental venues out of total activity cost	39.1%	0%
Cost of skills training per trainee (excluding the start-ups seed program)	679.9 USD	530.1 USD
Share of cash transfer to skills improvement training beneficiaries' beneficiaries out of total budget	5.7%	4.2%
Average cash transfer to beneficiaries (transport to training)	113.3 USD	Not mentioned in budget

¹¹ Based on a total of 22 start-ups provided with grants (as per data shared by the consortium)

3.3.2 EQ 7 and 8: Use of resources and modalities of implementation efficiency

The consortium was overstaffed, with total human resources, representing 43.3% of total budget compared to 27.7% for the Safadi Foundation. This ratio increased to 45.8% if the resources were dedicated to the consortium advisor. The overstaffing is reflected in the duplication of efforts for the implementation of training activities, e.g. repetitive outreach for similar training in the same community. The role of the consortium advisor was key in organizing and improving the efficiency of the implementation; however, the advisor tasks were similar to the task a livelihood coordinator, or a consortium chief of party could have played to coordinate tasks and ensure timeline delivery of project output. Although the coordination of the relation with the donor by Ruwwad and the centralization of the MEAL process play a role in improving the efficiency of the project implementation, it remains that the consortium human resources were staffed as if the project was implemented by three different entities. A better designed governance structure would have allowed a more efficient implementation and a shifting of financial resources from staff to activities. The NAWAT consortium should review its governance structure. It should establish a steering committee that pro-actively set strategic directions and meet on a regular basis, as well as a consortium management unit inclusive of a dedicated Chief of Party coordinating and managing project implementation, one technical advisor that would support the chief of party in its managerial role, and one MEAL focal point, and three project officers.

The BDS support activities of the consortium was under budgeted, representing only 4.8% of the consortium budget and with an average of 786 USD per business supported, compared to 17.3% of the Safadi Foundation budget with an average cost of 1,564 per business support (excluding grant). The modality of implementation used by the Safadi Foundation, that included the subcontracting of the activities to a specialized consultancy firm seems to have allowed a more efficient implementation, an extensive selection process, and better learning and monitoring outcomes. While the modalities used by the consortium may have led to a less efficient selection process, a lack of coordination in the implementation process due to the decentralized training, mentoring, and coaching. While the modality implemented by the consortium allows for a better matching between mentors and MSMEs/start-up; a minimum of centralization, and interaction between coaches is needed for a more efficient implementation, especially in regard to documentation, reporting, time lags between different businesses reception of technical and financial services, and assessment of impact.

Financial grant provided to businesses varied between different type of supported entities. The average grant allocated to businesses¹² amounted to:

- 2,857 USD for businesses supported by the Safadi Foundation
- 1,579 USD for businesses supported by the consortium
- 1,363 USD for existing start-ups supported by the consortium
- 4,000 USD planned for the 6 potential winners of the start-up seeds program, which constitute around 28% of the total budget dedicated to grants.

This difference may be justified by identifying different needs; however, these needs are rather linked to the business' activities, its potential and plan, rather than an a priori categorization. In all cases, such discrepancies should be justified and documented at the planning stages, or fund dedicated to business grants should be harmonized. Note that the share of business grants out of the total project budget remained limited, giving the current credit crunch and business need for investment, the project phase 2

¹² Assuming all the budget line has been spent

may consider an increase in budget, and/or the establishment of a blended grant mechanisms (loan +grant) in coordination with local micro-finance institutions.

The start-ups activities are over budgeted relative to their contribution to the project outcome.

Activities related to support start-ups constituted 19.1% of the total consortium budget, and up to 35.4% of the total cost of activities budget (i.e. excluding human resources). The start-up forum awareness raising activities (start-up forum), and the start-up seed competition amounted alone to respectively 7.5% and 8.0% of the total consortium budget. In average the start-up seeds competition cost 1,316 USD per trainee (excluding prize), i.e. equivalent to almost twice the cost of the support to one established business/ start-up. The average cost of support compared to the final number of supported nascent start-up amounts to 17,166 USD (including prize), i.e. equivalent to the support of 7.6 existing start-up or MSMEs (inclusive of grant). Given the reported low relevance and the repetitive characteristics of the bootcamp training, as well as the significant number of established start-ups and business in need for support, the reallocation of funds toward the BDS and support to established/existing/new start-ups program should be considered for phase 2.

The average cost of the skills improvement amounted to 679.9 USD and 530.1 USD for the Safadi Foundation and the consortium respectively (not considering human resources budget).

The activities seem to have been appropriately budgeted for. However, the reported cost of rental venues for the Safadi Foundation amounted to 39.1% of the total activity cost, compared to 0% for the consortium. It is unclear if this cost represents an actual rental transaction between the Safadi Foundation and the SAVOTEC center or reflects the cost of operation related to the center itself. In all cases, all project partners should ensure the cost of operation of their centers is accounted for in the project budget, either as indirect cost to be covered by the donors, or as part of the partners cost-share.

3.4 Coordination and partnership

EQ 9: How did the project ensure complementarities and exploited synergies with other similar programs, as well as with stakeholders at local and national level (NGO, CSOs, private sector, and local authorities) to strengthen the local market system and improve effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the project? Is the project aligned with public policies? Is the project duplicating other efforts in any way?

3.4.1 EQ9: complementarity with other projects

Partners ensure complementarities of the project actions with other similar projects funded by other donors. The Safadi Foundation aligned its capacity building program with the institutional strategy developed through its RDDP funded program. As for the consortium partners the project is aligned with similar action undertaken under the MAKANI project implemented in partnership with OXFAM Italia and the NAWAT project financed by BMZ and implemented in partnership with CARE international. Furthermore, Safadi Foundation and Interphase undertook significant consultation with relevant local stakeholders. In the framework of the market assessment study, Interphase met local, national, and international stakeholders to assess the impact of the already ongoing crisis, understand the macro-environment, benefit from the Lessons Learned of previous similar projects and ensure complementarity with the existing initiatives. Moreover, these actors advised Safadi Foundation within the outreach phase, and supported and informed on potential commercial linkages.

The evaluation has not identified synergies with other similar programs apart from the one above, nor coordination of the action with other local economics actors and stakeholders.

The evaluation has identified a potential duplication of actions with other programs, including programs implemented by the same organizations. However, the information available to the evaluation

did not allow us to fully assess whether this duplication is justified by needs or not. However, available information allows to identify potential saturation in:

- The start-ups program. Feedback from beneficiaries, and coaches have highlighted the repetitive characteristics of certain projects and the lack of homogeneity within the selected start-ups, pointing out to the fact that some of the start-ups receiving support may not be entitled to it either because of their low capacity or because of the business model per se.
- TVET training with beneficiaries, especially women, participating to numerous training activities with different organizations.

3.4.2 Alignment with public policies

In terms of alignment with public policies, **the project is aligned with the LCRP strategy**, under the livelihood sector action plan, especially under

- Outcome 1 – Stimulate local economic growth and market systems to foster income-generating opportunities and decent and safe employment.
 - Output 1.1 - MSMEs strengthened to enable decent job retention and creation, boost productivity and competitiveness– This activity aims at supporting Lebanese MSMEs, start-ups and cooperatives, with a specific focus on women-led businesses, to enhance local economic growth in the most vulnerable areas, activities included under LCRP output 1.1. and implemented by the project include:
 - Technology transfer and business skills and financial management to support the efficiency of business operations in key sectors.
 - Enabling access to financial and non-financial services to strengthen resilience and adaptability to shocks.
- Outcome 2 – Improve workforce employability.
 - Output 2.2 Career guidance, awareness-raising sessions, job matching, and work-based learning opportunities offered to female and male job seekers. Under output 2.2 LCRP recommend prioritizing targeting of new entrants to the labor market such as youth and women

As part of the LCRP framework, the program is line with the Government of Lebanon Stabilization Roadmap (embedded in the strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs), the Ministry of Economy and Trade's Lebanon SME Strategy (Roadmap to 2020), and the UN strategic Cooperation Framework (UNSCF) that include lines of intervention in support to private businesses and employability of vulnerable population with a focus on women and youth.

The program is also in line with the current National Strategic Framework for Technical and Vocational Education and Training new strategy 2018-2022¹³, to note that SF is also part of the discussion on the new strategic framework 2023-2027.

¹³ Safadi Foundation is also part of the discussion on the new strategic framework 2023-2027. In general, Safadi Foundation refers to the relevant Ministry either to validate, contribute to the TVET curricula and/or to certify the Foundation trainees.

3.5 EQ 10 and 11: Impact

3.5.1 EQ 10: intended impact

EQ 10: What has been so far the project positive intended impact on its beneficiaries?

The project impact indicators, presented in the table below were not fully reported by the project MEAL team, as most activities were still ongoing at the time of the evaluation. Safadi Foundation has shared preliminary collected data.

The M&E framework does not allow for a full assessment of the project impact. The project impact indicators remained highly connected and only slightly differ from the outcome indicators. Impact indicator I.1 is an aggregation of outcome indicators, while I.2 is directly linked to the increase in profit and revenues of supported firms, although the term “competitiveness, and how it would be measured need to be further defined within the project MEAL plan. Indicators, I.3 scope include supported businesses but also businesses that have employed beneficiaries trained through the skills improvement activities, which make of I.3 a proxy for the gender disaggregation of indicator I.1, as it can be fairly assumed that every woman or girl employed thanks to the project has contributed to the improvement of MSMEs gender balance staff. This is particularly the case as I.3 do not refer to a specific activity that have promoted change of businesses owners’ attitude toward women participation in the workforce.

Therefore, the evaluation feedback on research question 11, is based on the analysis developed for the effectiveness section and conclude that:

- It is likely that the project will achieve a satisfactory number of jobs created given the crisis circumstances. Key programs that seem to have performed well for job creation are the education training provided to Syrian women (consortium), the certified hospitality training (consortium), the rainmakers program (consortium), as well as the BDS support training, especially the component implemented by the Safadi Foundation
- It is likely that the project BDS program improved the competitiveness of businesses that have received the full support packages in a timely manner (Technical support + Grant), e.g. some businesses supported by the Safadi Foundation have been able to export their products.
- It is likely that the project created jobs for women, however, the low relevance of specific training and the lack of women economic empowerment strategy may have reduced the impact magnitude.

Table 10: impact indicators

Impact	Indicators	Data reported by SF
Strengthen MSMEs, start-ups, and entrepreneur’s ability to grow, create jobs and wealth and contribute to the socio-economic inclusion of youth and women	I.1) # of girls and boys, men and women fully employed (disaggregated by nationality)	41 / 95*
	I.2) # of MSME’s, start-ups and enterprise report being competitive on the market	18 (51.5%)
	I.3) Improve in the gender balance of employed staff in MSMEs in general	N/A

* Impact indicator I.1 is not specific in regard to the source of employment, i.e. if the employment has been generated through the Skills employment activities, or through job creation in supported MSMEs. Shared MEAL data with the evaluation was not disaggregated by gender.

Review of impact indicators

Impact	
Indicators	Comments
I.1 # of girls and boys, men and women fully employed (disaggregated by nationality)	<p>The indicator is adequate to measure impact, and aggregate outcome indicators.</p> <p>The definition of “fully employed” is unclear, as whether it refers to full time job only? Or to the duration of the agreement with the employer. A more specific indicator would be to determine the equivalent full-time jobs generated by the project.</p> <p>An additional indicator on the capacity of the created jobs to support employed individuals and their households reaching the Survival Minimal Expenditure Basket. information on wages may be collected.</p> <p>A proposed indicator would be to determine the wages received by each created job and determine the percentage of coverage of the SMEB.</p> <p>The proposed indicators may be collected during the no-cost extension phase of the project, or during the inception phase of phase 2, which may include an impact assessment study.</p>
I.2 # of MSME's, start-ups and enterprise report being competitive on the market	<p>The indicator is adequate to measure impact, it is however unclear how results from outcome indicators</p>
I.3 Improve in the gender balance of employed staff in MSMEs in general	<p>This indicator is not specific nor relevant to the project activities as no specific activities aimed at directly improving gender balance in MSMEs. Furthermore, it is unclear if this is related to supported businesses or to a more general ecosystem. The evaluation recommends dropping this indicator and rely on the number of full-time jobs created for women and girls.</p>

3.5.2 EQ 11: Unintended impact

EQ 11: Did the project generate any unintended positive or negative impact, both on its direct beneficiaries and on indirect beneficiaries (beneficiaries' families, wider urban Lebanese and Syrian communities)?

Although it was not able to gather enough evidence, the evaluation has identified two highly probable indirect positive impact of the project on the community,

- The improve of households' dynamics and attitude change towards women active engagement in the workforce. The reported high satisfaction of beneficiaries of the soft skills training, especially the training provided by the Safadi Foundation, seems to have not had a significant impact on vulnerable women and on households' dynamics.
- The expected improvement of education center services and its positive impact on young school student, especially in the context of downfall of both public and private education system because of the repercussion of the economic and COVID-19 crisis (loss of human resources, repetitive closure, loss of infrastructure capacities (for heating, procurement of school supplies, ect.)

The evaluation has not identified any negative impact on beneficiaries or on the community.

3.6 EQ 12 & 13 Sustainability

EQ 12: Was sustainability integrated into the project design? how?

EQ 13: What results (outcome, impact) of the project are bound to be sustainable, and to which extent? What are factors hindering the sustainability of results and to which extent does/can the project address them? What can be project further do to improve long-terms sustainability?

The projected design integrated the following element of sustainability:

- Within the capacity building component provided to Safadi Foundation **the creation of an HR department, and business development unit** with clear procedures and relevant staffing should ensure the sustainability of the action. However, particular attention is needed to ensure the proper handover of acquired knowledge and skills to new HR staff .
- **The establishment of social enterprises** may support the project sustainability, if the business model proposed ensure synergies and cooperation between a significant number of supported businesses, allowing for economy of scale and better market outreach, .
- **The development of business plan** by supported business is a key element ensuring medium-term sustainability of the support to MSMEs and the start-ups component, similarly the provision of grant is a key factor in ensuring the feasibility and implementation of the business plan.
- The organization and institutionalization of marketing and promotion events such as souk al balad, are elements that improve the sustainability of the interventions.

Actions that could improve the long-term sustainability of the project interventions include:

- **Post-training activities** are key to improve the long-term sustainability of the action. The establishment of a job counselling and job placement desk for Tripoli and North Lebanon in coordination with local stakeholders, including the National Employment Office of the Ministry of Labor, local municipalities and chambers of commerce, is needed , may support the sustainability of all livelihood's interventions in Tripoli.
- Linking beneficiaries willing to engage in self-employment as well as business **to micro-financing institutions** is also a major element of long-term sustainability of the technical services provided to the beneficiaries.
- **Linking the interventions with local economic actors**, and services centers such as the Minjara platform, IDRAC, and the services provided by the chamber of commerce may allow further growth of supported businesses and may further support the sustainability of the action.
- Ultimately, linking the action to **public policies** at the local level and **advocating** for the implementation of a coordinated local economic development plan is a sine qua none condition for long-term sustainable economic development.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of key findings

4.1.1 Relevance

The economic crisis has threatened the survival of MSMEs and highly impacted vulnerable populations, especially youth and women, capacity to access the labor market. Within that context the overall theory of change of the project- that assume that support to businesses, and skills improvement will lead to job creation and improved employability remains relevant to the current socio-economic context.

In regards to the relevance of activities to current market dynamics and beneficiaries, some selected sectors and particular activities may prove to be more relevant and adapted than other:

- The coupled support (BDS + grant) provided to businesses is highly relevant and has allowed them to move from “survival mode” to a more dynamic coping approach to the financial and economic crisis.
- The start-up seed program shows low relevance to the beneficiaries at the bootcamp level and has a low ratio of cost efficiency compared to other activities. Furthermore, interviewed coaches have reported a stagnation in the development of start-ups, a high heterogeneity in the start-ups selected for the coaching, and a certain level of duplication / repetition of activities.
- The traditional craft training appears to show low relevance for the beneficiaries, especially women. In fact, the crisis and the lack of support public policies significantly impacted efforts to revalorized and improve both demand and supply of traditional goods and services.
- Technical training on furniture occupations. AC repair, Networking and Low voltage were relevant to the beneficiaries and show significant potential for employment and self-employment. The training on hospitality services and education provided by the consortium as well as the rainmakers program were highly relevant and showed significant potential for employment generation.

4.1.2 Effectiveness

Outcome 1: Enhanced MSMEs capacities. It is likely that the Safadi Foundation will achieve the project’s outcome 1 indicators, however businesses supported by the consortium may not achieved outcome 1 indicators related to increase in revenues, profit, and job creation/sustainability. The key factor affecting the achievement of outcome 1 indicators for these businesses is the delay in the reception of the financial grant. In addition to the financial grant, the partnership with private sector services provider, the businesses selection process, and the quality and relevance of the technical training provided may have been key to the achievement of the desired outcomes. To note that the current crisis context may reduce the magnitude of the achievement of outcome 1, especially regarding increases in businesses profit and job creation.

Outcome 2: Enhanced entrepreneurial capacities. The project is likely to reach its outcome related to increased income and job creation for established start-ups that received both mentorship and financial grant support. The project is unlikely to reach its outcome indicators related to investments and partnership. The early seed start-ups program is unlikely to reach its objectives.

Outcome 3: improved skills of vulnerable groups. All outcome 3 indicators are likely to be achieved by the end of the project. The high quality of development curriculum, the exposure to apprenticeship and on the job, training are key factors facilitating the achievement of the project outcome 3. However, the current economic crisis and the increased cost of transportation relative to low wages are hampering the project capacity to create jobs. Overall, the high relevance of certain training, hospitality, rainmakers' programs, AC repair, networking, furniture, compared to the low relevance of others, was the most important factor determining the capacity of beneficiaries to find jobs.

Outcome 4: capacity building . The capacity building program provided to Safadi Foundation allowed the organizations to develop new systems, management tools and activities. However, changes in human resources and staff may have slowed down the process as new staff were handed over. The consortium capacity building program provided support to the organization in project management and MEAL. Nonetheless, the outcome of the consortium capacity building program remains unclear as issues in reporting and MEAL capacity remains palpable .

4.1.3 Efficiency

The project did not witness significant delay in implementation of the skills improvement activities and is expecting to finalize the activities before the end of 2022. The BDS activities implemented by the Safadi Foundation did not witness delay and were implemented efficiently with the support of Interphase. BDS activities implemented by the consortium witness significant delays between the provision of the training / mentorship program and the provision of the financial support grants, similarly the start-ups seed program has witnessed significant delay and has started only in the last quarter of 2022. The delays in implementation of the BDS and start-ups seed program are likely to have significantly impacted the capacity of the project to reach its objectives.

The consortium was overstaffed, and was not organized as a consortium, but rather as 3 independent but coordinated entities. The overstaffing is reflected in the duplication of efforts for the implementation of similar activities. To note that the total budget dedicated to human resources, including the consortium advisor, amounted to 45.8% of the consortium budget.

4.1.4 Impact

The M&E framework does not allow for a full assessment of the project impact. Although it is likely that the project achieves a satisfactory number of job created and/or sustained, the M&E framework does not allow for the assessment of the typology of job created including skills level, wages and decent working conditions. Similarly, it is likely that supported businesses and start-ups have benefited from technical assistance and grants, however the magnitude of the impact could not be fully assessed given the M&E framework. To note that Safadi Foundation is planning on undertaking an impact analysis in the first quarter of 2023.

4.2 Recommendations to project partners

The project is in line with the LCRP, and 3RF and the UNSCF in terms of support to the employability of vulnerable population and the support to small and medium enterprises. This line of intervention is key to gradually allow the Lebanese economy to recover from the impact of multiple crisis. Nonetheless, several interviewees have pointed out to the limitation that technical skills training to generate employment within the current context of economic crisis. An intervention approach that puts support to business as a priority may be recommended, including the creation of micro-businesses to support income generation for the most vulnerable. In that regard, the graduation approach used to support people out of

poverty may be recommended in the poorest neighborhoods of Tripoli, while BDS interventions with well selected businesses and start-ups may allow for improved competitiveness and decent job creation. Within that background and based on the findings of the project evaluation, the hereunder recommendations were identified:

1. **[Blended Financing]** The lack of available finance and business owners' difficulties in adapting to the crisis are the major challenges for MSMEs. The BDS + grant component has been highly relevant to local business and start-ups' needs. Partnership with private sector providers (Safadi Foundation and Interphase) has improved effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation and should be encouraged in phase 2.

Overall, The BDS + grant component can be improved by tailoring the approach to the type of businesses supported while supporting access to finance through the development of blended financing products. After the 2019 credit crunch, development projects are becoming one of the few sources of business finance. There is a risk of failure and collapse of previous sustainable and well performing micro-finance institutions, if donor funded projects focus solely on the provision of grants and refrains from activities that support businesses in accessing other sources of finance. A blended financial (i.e grant + loan) product could be a way to support businesses, reduce aid dependency, and sustain activities of micro-financing institutions.

2. **[Adaptive BDS support]** Three types of business can be identified in Tripoli: potentially competitive established businesses with at least 5 employees, start-ups recently established by young educated and skilled entrepreneurs, micro-businesses evolving in vulnerable neighborhoods – such as Beb Al-Tebenneh and Jabal Mohsen. This streamlined categorization of businesses reflect different economic dynamics within a city, with high potential for growth, but with chronic poverty, inequal neighborhood development, and lack of public support policies. Within that context, it is recommended that project partners build on their experience, knowledge, and capacity to implement adaptive and complementary BDS support:

- a. **Safadi Foundation** could build on its partnership with a private sector provider to support well-established competitive small and medium businesses. Support to competitive business should allow ad hoc linkages with existing organizations such as IDRAC (for businesses working in the food manufacturing sector), and Minjara (for businesses working in the furniture sector).
- b. **TEC** may improve its support to established start-ups by strengthening its ecosystem through the establishment of a start-up's coaches' community of practice. Furthermore, TEC should commission an independent impact assessment of the TEC start-ups program since inception, the assessment should quantify the long-term social and economic impact of the project, highlight success stories, outline the challenges and opportunities, and ultimately assess the priorities forward.
- c. **SHIFT and Ruwwad** could capitalize on their embeddedness within the local communities and adopt a graduation approach targeting the most vulnerable households supporting self-entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises The adaptation of the graduation approach may require a capacity building and training process to adapt interventions. This can be done at the inception phase of any project. .

3. **[Relevant skills training]**. Market-relevant technical skills training has allowed a number of beneficiaries to find jobs in local businesses¹⁴. However, the provision of TVET training should be based on the engagement with the private sector, or implemented within the framework of the graduation approach to ensure maximum effectiveness given the current crisis context. Therefore, it is recommended to not determine topic of TVET training a priori, but rather determine each TVET training based on the interaction and outreach to the private sector. The apprenticeship approach should be mainstream and preferred to the on-the-job training modality.
4. **[Women economic empowerment]**. Specific emphasis should be provided to women economic empowerment, through supporting business creation, access to finance and soft skills development, especially within the framework of the graduation approach. Furthermore, the project partners should distance themselves from conventional type of training provided to women, and refrain from supporting work from home activities – as several projects are already engaging and supporting this approach (i.e. Leb Relief project on sewing funded by RDPP). The project may coordinate its action with UN women, which has implemented successful program in supporting women in the ICT, education, health and care sectors, as well as in non-conventional activities such as mobile repair and photography. Lessons learned from UN women program can support Safadi Foundation in better integrating women trained on non-conventional vocation in the labor market, i.e. AC repair, Low Voltage, networking, wood repair, in the labor market.
5. **[Impact and results-based M&E framework]**. Organization implementing TVET and BDS programs should be able to show outcome and impact. Beneficiaries' self-reported satisfaction, increased in individual employability and business competitiveness are not sufficient to determine outcome achievement and project impact. From inception, livelihoods project should develop an impact and results-based M&E framework, that could allow them to clearly differentiate between:
 - a. Jobs created from direct support to businesses, and individual job placement obtain thanks to increase skills and employability.
 - b. Job opportunities generated by the project should be assessed against indicators of decent work conditions including assessing wages received against the Survival Minimal Expenditure Basket. The project should capitalize on the success of the education training, by further setting up a program in support to education center. This is particularly relevance to the current situation, and to the gradual collapse of the public and private education sectors.
6. **[Advocacy]**. Lebanese public authorities, at both the government level and the municipality of Tripoli, are not undertaking the needed policy reforms and actions needed for a healthy recovering of the on-going economic and financial crisis. This makes coordination of the project action with local authorities a difficult and unfruitful exercise. Nonetheless, project partners, in coordination with local organizations implementing development projects in Tripoli and surroundings municipalities, should link their action to public policies at both local and national level, and advocate for the implementation of a coordinated local economic development plan. The

¹⁴ As per Safadi Foundation a total of 54 job were created by supported MSMEs and 38 were maintained/improved. No data was available from the Consortium at the time of the evaluation.

implementation of a sustainable development plan, and the involvement of public institutions, is a *sine qua none* conditions for the long-term sustainability and impact of the project's actions.

4.3 Recommendations to the SCO

- 1- **[Tailor BDS intervention to specific MSMEs' ecosystems]** Interventions within the livelihoods sector can be classified into three categories:
 - a. Support to local economic development plan through strong partnership with local authorities. These types of interventions are difficult to implement in Tripoli and its surroundings, as Tripoli Municipality lacks a clear strategic vision and leadership. The SCO may support local stakeholders' efforts to advocate for the implementation of a strategic sustainable development plan for the city.
 - b. Support to value chain / sectorial interventions. Some specific sectors in Tripoli can be developed based on private actors' initiative and dynamic and show potential for Public Private Partnerships – assuming responsive local authorities. Such sectors include wood manufacturing, food manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, knowledge economy, as well as maritime services (all types). Such interventions need to rely on key value chain actors with who a partnership can be build, example of such actors including the IDRAC center for food manufacturing, and the Minjara platform for wood manufacturing. The SCO may reach out to such actors to discuss potential intervention and or coordination with existing projects. Value chain interventions should be designed after consultation with local actors and cannot be based on phase 1 of this project under evaluation.
 - c. General support to BDS and employability (non-sector specific). These interventions are similar to the actions of the current project. These interventions are based on the assumptions that MSMEs have high capacity to create jobs and are local drivers for economic growth. **The SCO may be built on phase one of this project to improve its interventions in support to MSMEs.**

In line with the recommendations in section 4.2, the SCO may add value to its interventions in Livelihoods by:

- d. Proposing innovative solutions for MSMEs financing, such as blended finance products, but also through direct investment in established and potentially competitive start-ups.
 - e. Ensure BDS interventions are tailored to the type of business, support local partners specialization.
 - f. Provide need based TVET training, after consultation and coordination with private sectors.
 - g. Implement a graduation approach in Tripoli poor neighborhoods.
- 2- **[Maintain and improve strategic partnership]** Although efforts should be made to build their capacity and to facilitate the development of a common long-term common action plan, the consortium partners are grassroots organizations well connected to the city social fabric and are strategic partners for the SCO localization strategy. The Safadi Foundation is a well-established organization with significant resources and assets. Despite its political affiliation, the Safadi Foundation is acting as a non-partisans organization. Its leadership is showing a will to improve procedures to ensure good and fair governance and decision-making processes. The Foundation TVET training center is a strong asset that can support the SCO livelihood interventions in

Tripoli and North Lebanon. **The projects partners constitute a strong base for the implementation of non-sector specific livelihoods interventions in the city of Tripoli.**

- 3- [Improve donors' coordination for program implemented by NAWAT consortium partners]** Several donors have engaged in partnership with the same organizations and are funding highly similar projects in terms of activities and target population. There is a need for donor coordination, including potentially the establishment of a formal coordination mechanism to oversee the implementation of similar projects and activities in Tripoli.

ANNEX 1: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Focus Groups Guidelines: MSMEs and Starts-ups

Question to be adapted to the audience.

[INTRODUCTION]

Hello, my name is Kanj Hamade, and I am in independent evaluators. I have been asked by the SCO to undertake the final evaluation of the “Enhancing the economic resilience of vulnerable communities in North Lebanon” project.

All donor funded projects undergo an evaluation process at the end of the project, and sometime at mid-term. The project evaluation does not aim at evaluating Safadi Foundation, Ruwwad, TEC or SHIFT or at evaluating you, but aim to understand if the project did what is said it will do, if it seems there are high probability it will reach its objective; and if not, what can be done to ensure it does.

All information you will share with us during this focus group discussion will remain confidential. In no cases, what you will say today will influence the support you receive from the project (neither positively or negatively).

I will ask you a series of questions, you are not obliged to answer them, and can refuse to answer any questions. I do, however, encourage you to express yourself freely, and tell us about your experience with the project and what you believe can be done to improve project activities.

The discussion will take around one hour of your time.

Anchor

1. Can you tell us about yourself and what do you do? What is your favorite food?

Relevance

2. Let's now dive into the serious stuff, can you tell us about the difficulties and the challenges you are facing when managing your business [or trying to establish your start-up]?
 - a. Probe on opportunities
 - b. Probe about the effect of the crisis, and how their businesses [start-ups, entrepreneurs' ideas] are coping with this difficult period.
 - Further probe on additional challenges faced by women business owners

Effectiveness and Impact

3. How did you come to know about the project? How did you apply to be selected?
 - a. Probe on the selection process for women business owner [start-ups, young entrepreneurs]
4. What type of support have you received from the project?
 - a. What this support beneficial? What new did you learn?
 - b. Did the project help you overcome the barriers you were facing?
 - c. Was the support you received adapted to your needs?

- d. Ask about what can be done to further improve their resilience to the on-going changes, and potentially help them grow and expand [or established, kick-off] – cross cutting with relevance
 - e. Is there a role for the municipalities and the Chamber of commerce? What actions from these stakeholders can help businesses? – Cross cutting with relevance
- 5. Can you tell name three changes in your life you believe happened thanks to the project support?
 - a. Probe: if the project was not there, do you think you would have access to the same opportunities? Would have undertaken the same investment?
 - b. What else can be done?
- 6. When the project ends, do you have specific ideas for improving your business [start-up]? What will you do? What are your expectations for the future?
 - a. Probe: do you think that what you have learned from the project that will allow you to cope with forthcoming challenges?

Focus Groups Guidelines: TVET and apprenticeship

[INTRODUCTION – Identical for all FDGs]

Anchor

1. Can you tell us about yourself and what do you do? What is your favorite food?

Relevance

1. Let's now dive into the serious stuff, can you tell us about the difficulties and the challenges you are facing when looking for a job?
 - a. Probe on the impact of the crisis? What change did it brought to your families, standard of living? What did you do to cope with its effect?
 - b. What are the challenges you faced when you look for employment?
 - Probe on specific issues faced by women (Women FDGs)
 - Probe on specific issues faced by Syrian (Syrian FDGs)

Effectiveness and Impact

2. How did you come to know about the project? How did you apply to be selected?
 - a. Probe on the selection process for women
3. What type of support have you received from the project?
 - a. What this support beneficial? What new did you learn?
 - b. Did the project help you overcome the barriers you were facing when looking for a job?
 - c. Probe on the training and skills learned
 - d. Probe on the apprenticeship impact? Where they offer a long-term job?
 - e. Ask about what can be done to further improve their households' resilience to the on-going changes,
4. Can you tell name three changes in your life you believe happened thanks to the project support?
 - a. Probe: if the project was not there, do you think you would have access to the same opportunities? Would have undertaken the same investment?
 - b. What else can be done?
5. When the project ends, do you have specific ideas for improving your job/ employability? What will you do? What are your expectations for the future?
 - a. Probe: do you think that what you have learned from the project that will allow you to cope with forthcoming challenges?

Interview Guidelines: Project Staff

Anchor

1. Can you tell me about your role in the project
 - a. Probing: Responsibilities / tasks / coordination with other staff
 - b. Probing: Can you describe the project and its objectives?

Relevance

2. How do you think the project activities were adapted to the beneficiaries needs?
3. What was in your opinion the impact of the crisis on the project? Were the activities still relevant?

Effectiveness

4. Do you think the project was able to reach its outputs? What were the internal and external factors that facilitated or hindered project implementation (apart from the economic crisis)?
5. What did the project do to ensure women, youth and Pwds integration into its activities?

Efficiency

6. Do you think the modalities of implementation of the project were efficient?
 - a. Probe on project governance structure
 - b. Probe on the use of in-house resources versus the use of consultants
 - c. Probe on the relation with the SCO

Coordination and partnership

7. Do you think the partnership Consortium- Safadi Foundation, and the consortium per se improved the implementation strategy or created a burden? Can you provide more details and examples?
 - a. What did you learn from partners?
 - b. How did you interact with them?
 - c. What were the challenges?
2. Do you think there can be synergies and cooperation with similar projects in Tripoli and North Lebanon? Which ones?

Impact

8. Did the project impact beneficiaries? How?
 - a. Was there a positive or negative impact of the project that was not foreseen?
 - b. Probe on the do no harm principle – did the project harm local communities
9. Did the project impact your institution? How?
 - a. Probe on the capacity building component.

Peace building effect

10. Do you think the project had a peace building impact? Did it help reduce tension and conflicts? How?

Group interview Guidelines: Consortium Directors

This guideline will be adapted for the interview of the Director of Safadi Foundation

Anchor

1. Are you still happy working together? / Where you happy to work with the consortium?

Impact

2. Let's dive into the project activities, overall do you think the project positively change the life of beneficiaries? How?
 - a. Was there a positive or negative impact of the project that was not foreseen?
 - b. Probe on the do no harm principle – did the project harmed local communities
3. Did the project impact your institution? How?
 - c. Probe on the capacity building component.

Coordination and partnership

4. How does your partnership integrate into the local development landscape in Tripoli, i.e. how could you define your interaction with other actors?
 - a. Probe on interaction with Safadi Foundation [the consortium]
5. Is your action aligned with local economic development plans?
 - a. Probe: is there a local economic development plan for Tripoli, even if kind of informal?
 - b. Do you have a role as a consortium in advocating for the development and implementation of such plan? What would then be your priorities?

The future

1. Do you plan to keep working together?
 - a. Probe: do you have a common vision?
 - b. What do you think could help up significantly upgrade your interaction within the consortium [with the consortium and other actors in Tripoli]?

Group interview guidelines: TVET trainers and BDS coaches

Anchor

1. Can you tell us about yourself and what do you do? What was your role in the project? Have you done something similar before?

Relevance / impact

2. How did you develop the training topics you would provide to beneficiaries? what are the element you focused on?
 - a. In your opinion, did the activities had an impact on individuals / businesses / start-up?
 - b. Can you give us example of what you considered a personal success story – or of business/start-up that show high potential for success?
 - c. Can you give us examples of how the project positively changed the life / behavior / livelihood of individual beneficiary / businesses?
 - d. Can you name the most important skills or achievement you have helped beneficiaries acquire

Effectiveness / efficiency

3. What were the key challenges faced during the implementation the activities?
 - a. What factor helped you implemented, what created delays and challenges?
4. Can you name the most important skills or achievement you have helped beneficiaries acquire?

Probe for both individual and businesses

Sustainability / crisis

5. In your opinion, what can de done to establish a sustainable TVET- skills [BDS] sustainable service to individuals [Businesses]?
6. Do you think the project can reach its expected outcome given the crisis? what can be done in your opinion in such a difficult political and socio-economic context?

Interview Guidelines stakeholders

Context: I am carrying out this interview in the framework of the final evaluation of the SCO “Enhancing the economic resilience of vulnerable communities in North Lebanon” project. In addition to the evaluation per se, the SCO is looking for recommendations regarding its livelihoods action in Tripoli and North Lebanon, including potential coordination and synergies with other actors.

As such the aim of the interview is to:

- Understand the overall intervention strategies in Tripoli and North Lebanon
 - o within the different funding and implementing framework (LCRP, 3RF, UNSDF)
 - o your organization specific strategy – especially regarding the needed interventions change to cope with the on-going political and economic crisis.
- Explore current synergies, and the potential synergies for the future between your organization and project funded by the SCO.
 - o Including synergies with local authorities and private sector stakeholders.
- Discuss the key challenges your organization faces when implementing programs in Tripoli and North Lebanon

Signed by Kanj Hamade,
Independent Evaluator

