

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EVALUATION PRACTICES IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS IN LEBANON: NGOS COPING WITH
THE RELIEF OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

by
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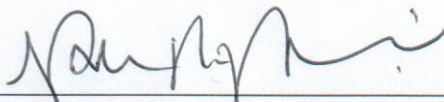
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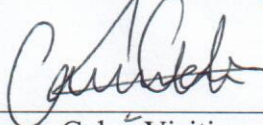
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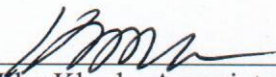
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Evaluations Practices in Nongovernmental Organizations in Lebanon: NGOs Coping with the Relief of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

Since 2011, the huge influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon necessitated that Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) respond to the humanitarian crisis largely due to the weak capacities of the Lebanese governmental agencies. Despite the involvement of NGOs, there is little research on evaluations among such organizations - both in relief settings as well as in Lebanon. In this context, this thesis is an exploratory study about evaluations in NGOs in Lebanon especially, NGOs coping with of the relief of Syrian Refugees. It aims to understand the context of evaluations in similar situations. It explores evaluation in NGOs through two main questions: First: Is Evaluation an active item on the agendas of NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon? And how NGOs practice evaluation? Second: What are the factors that influence evaluation in NGOs?

The study included conducting twenty interviews with representatives of national and international NGOs in Lebanon. The results of the study shows that all interviewed NGOs are aware of evaluation and the vast majority of NGOs conduct evaluation, yet, the practice of the conducted evaluation is a major challenge. Most NGOs struggle with poor resources, and evaluations are not given priority during relief, without a noticeable difference among national and international NGOs. Furthermore, the major uses for evaluation in the majority of NGOs were compliance with internal policy or replying to funding conditions and requests, in addition to helping in learning and decision making. The study concludes with recommendations to NGOs, Donors, and Evaluators to enhance the practices and uses of evaluation.

This study would be of interest to non-governmental organizations in Lebanon, NGOs watchdogs, funding organizations and donors, in addition to the evaluators. The thesis will provide an addition to the literature on NGOs and evaluation.

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To My Beloved Kids
Ghazal & Hassan

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“I worked in many NGOs in Lebanon, in different contexts, but what is still common in the field is that the same project is repeated in the same place with similar mistakes but with different players, producing evaluation reports and lessons learned from it would help to avoid those situations.” Interviewee 5, director of an international NGO in Lebanon.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are “corporations that do not belong to the public (government) or the private (for-profit) sector. They aim to serve particular societal interests on a local or global level. Consequently, they advocate and/or focus their operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection and human rights. Being non-state and non-market actors, NGOs constitute the “third sector”, representing the civil society” (Schwenger, Straub & Borzillo, 2014, 1).

In Lebanon, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have historically played significant roles in various sectors, including social, education, relief and development. NGOs were mostly formed as religious foundations or endowments. Over time; and particularly during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and in post-civil war periods, the number as well as the scope of NGOs significantly grew (Chaaban & Seyrfert, 2012).

Lebanon is considered to have the largest number of NGOs in the Middle East compared to the size of its population, about four million (Abou Assi, 2013). NGOs operate in flexible conditions, free from restrictions or regulations on funding, NGOs operate in different areas, including humanitarian and environmental fields; providing social, education, economic, health, and legal services (Abou Assi, 2013).

Several characteristics have affected the work of NGOs recently, especially the

lack of governmental policy towards the Syrian refugees accompanied by the deterioration of the security situation in the country. The two mentioned factors shifted the work of many NGOs to relief and social services, instead of contributing to policy making and development.

NGOs are in a situation of contributing to filling the gaps of basic governmental services mainly in education and health, and are challenged in replying to the needs, which fall beyond their capabilities, but cannot be ignored (Camett, 2011). Since the onslaught of the internal Syrian crisis in 2011, NGOs have had a noticeable role in responding to the needs of Syrian refugees. Many NGOs have shifted their priorities, increased their size, and now focus on direct relief and service delivery to refugees and hosting communities (Beyond Reform & Development, 2015).

A. Objectives and Significance

NGOs in Lebanon are acting vitally on coping with the huge influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. The official public records on NGOs in Lebanon are generally scarce and very limited; not only regarding their number, but also their sources of funding, activities, and impact. One major aspect of information particularly lacking in this field is about evaluation, in the absence of standard requirements imposed by government in the NGOs bylaws for evaluation in this sector.

This scarcity of information on evaluations is common in social research, and particularly in NGOs (Campos, Andion, Serva, Rossetto & Assumpção, 2011). On December 17, 2014 the international year of Evaluation started and the torch was lightened by the United Nationals Evaluation Group UNEG to advocate better evaluations and improve national evaluation capacities. Year 2015 was named the International year of evaluation by the Secretary General of United Nations in a global

initiative to promote the use of evaluation and the evidence based policy making. This global initiative was intended also to improve evaluation theory (UNEG, 2015).

In the abovementioned context, the current study aims at providing valuable contributions to the debate around the role of evaluation within NGOs. It particularly looks at NGOs working at times of refugees' response, those NGOs particularly coping with the relief of Syrian refugee's in Lebanon. The study further attempts to explore how NGOs approach and practice evaluation, the quality of the conducted evaluations, in addition to triggering further debate on the role of evaluation in NGOs. It also aims at proposing practical recommendations to relate to NGOs, donors, and evaluators.

The thesis is guided by two main questions:

- Is Evaluation an active item on the agendas of NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon? And how NGOs practice evaluation?
- What are the factors that influence evaluation in NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian Refugees?

For the mentioned purposes, this paper is designed in five main chapters. Following the introduction, chapter two presents the literature review, the context of the study, including definitions and types of evaluations, in addition to the history of NGOs in Lebanon as the study explores NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Chapter three presents the methodology of the study, while chapter four presents the main findings and discussion.

Lastly, chapter five presents the conclusion with recommendations addressed to: non-governmental organizations, donors and evaluators. The recommendations are the outcome or results of the conducted interviews, which constituted the major part of this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

NGOs in Lebanon played and are still playing a vigorous role in development and providing services that substitute the governmental services at several times, in the context of a weak state, and in the absence of detailed bylaws that regulate or keep an eye on the NGO sector.

Although NGOs played vital role in the history of Lebanon, an essential concern demands itself in this situation, which is keeping an eye on this huge sector operating in the country, with the rising requests for further transparency, which could be attained through exploring how NGOs understand, practice, and use evaluations. This study focuses on NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, an issue which requested great efforts from NGOs, and attracted huge amounts of funds within a limited governmental response.

A. Context of the Study

1. Lebanon

The Republic of Lebanon – of which the capital is Beirut –is geographically located on the eastern Mediterranean coast spread over 10,452 square kilometers. The Lebanese population is estimated to be around four million. The primary language is Arabic; however, English and French are also commonly spoken (UNDP, 2015).

Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943; since then, Lebanon has always been affected by the situation of its neighboring countries, especially Syria, whose policies and actions have continuously influenced Lebanon at different levels. In

2005, the Lebanese Prime minister Rafic Al Hariri was assassinated in Beirut; later in 2006, Israel started a war against Lebanon. Following 2005 and 2006, the general situation in the country was marked by instability and assassinations of political leaders (UNHCR, 2013).

Following the assassination of the prime minister and Israeli war on Lebanon, the country was divided into two main groups pro and against the Syrian regime. The country entered in a continuous path of insecurity and instability, and the state continued to weaken, with an absence of major authorities, without a president of the state, a suspended parliament and weak government, the influx of Syrian refugees was not accompanied by any responding policy.

Lebanon is not a signatory on the 1951 Refugee convention; however, Lebanon hosts 450,000 Palestinian refugees registered in the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), and has the highest percentage of Palestinian refugees living in miserable poverty (UNRWA, 2015). Currently, Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2015b)

2. NGOs' Intervention

To understand the role of NGOs in Lebanon, it is essential to give a glimpse of the rise of the role of NGOs internationally; followed by the origins and development of NGOs in Lebanon.

The roots of NGOs are diverse and related to cultural, political, and historical characteristics in different geographical parts of the world; yet, NGOs are currently receiving unique consideration (Lewis, 2001). The intervention of NGOs historically found its path through providing humanitarian aid or resolving the relationships between citizens and governments in cases of violence and human complications

(Edwards, Hulme & Wallace, 1999). The emergence of NGOs dates back to 1775 and the development of the role of NGOs range from 1775 to 1918. However, NGO's "empowerment" era was noticed from 1992 (Lewis, 2001, 40).

The role of NGOs was better recognized after the cold war, their number and size expanded vastly, and they were able to attain larger amounts of international funds (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015), and became the "favored child" of the western funding agencies which aimed for promoting democracy and raising the voice and participation of minorities and marginalized categories (Edwards & Hulme, 1995). However, several NGOs that developed in the same period in different areas in the world like south Asia have strong cultural and historical roots beyond the western aid (Lewis, 2001). Following the Cold War, NGOs expanded their focus from direct aid to advocating more sophisticated human morals of rights and democracy, rejecting violence and poverty (Edwards & Hulme, 1995).

The literature includes several critiques to the work, role of NGOs, and their increased power in governance, which reduced the power of states in contrast to the power of NGOs (Sending & Neumann, 2006). Other critiques question the "neutrality" of the humanitarian aid offered by NGOs especially during crisis situations, in countries where serious violations of human rights exist, thus resulting in benefiting the different parties of conflict (Storey, 1997).

3. The Origin and Development of NGOs in Lebanon

NGOs in Lebanon date back to the Princedom of Mount Lebanon in the sixteenth century, but the actual development of the sector dates back to the second part of the nineteenth century (Abou Assi, 2006).

In Lebanon, the work of NGOs is regulated by the Laws of Association issued

in 1909, which does not require a permit, but requires the NGOs to inform the Ministry of Interior about their association and bylaws to be able to start operating (Ministry of Interior in Lebanon, 1909). In the Lebanese National Action Plan for Human Rights (2014-2019), the Lebanese parliament recognizes the important role of national NGOs in raising awareness and cooperating with international NGOs to elevate the status of human rights in the country (UNDP, 2013).

The history of Lebanon has an impact on the operation and number of NGOs in the country. The following overview facilitates the understanding of the NGO sector in Lebanon and its development.

The Lebanese civil war is a major period in the development of NGOs in the country. Before the war, many NGOs in Lebanon were established following the influx of immigrant communities including Armenians and Palestinians after conflicts in their respective countries, whereby each community formed institutions supported by political and/or religious parties (Chaaban & Seyrfert, 2012).

During the civil war, the authority of government was paralyzed, which encouraged NGOs to focus on providing the population with services that were not provided by the government. This has empowered those NGOs, even after the end of the civil war during which they still provide “complimentary” services to those provided by the government (Abou Assi, 2006).

Following the civil war, NGOs continued to play a major role in providing citizens with basic public goods and social protection in Lebanon, when the war and post war corruption drained public resources and institutions (Camett, 2011). As of March 2011, the number of registered NGOs in the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities was 8,311 NGOs; however, the number of unregistered groups and movements is increasing (Beyond Reform & Development, 2015).

Geographically speaking, the highest rate of NGOs is located in central Lebanon, i.e. in both Beirut and Baabda governorates where 60 percent of NGOs operate. This can be linked to the high population density in both areas, where 50 percent of the Lebanese population resides. As for the lowest rate of NGOs, it is present in far rural areas where it reaches only 0.4% in Baalbeck, Hermel governorate (Yassin, Mhanna, Azer, Masri, Merhi & Eghnatiou, 2005).

The dominant category of NGOs in Lebanon is civil associations that represent 62.6%. In terms of services, 53.8% of NGOs provide scientific and cultural services, 29% provide health services, and 32% provide environmental services (Yassin *et al.*, 2005).

NGOs in Lebanon are widely subcontracted by the public sector to provide extensive range of services. For instance, the Ministry of Health estimates that 60% of health clinics in Lebanon are operated by NGOs in Lebanon, while in the ministry of social affairs, 80% of educational and health services, in addition to services provided to orphans, are subcontracted to NGOs (Chaaban & Seyrfert, 2012).

The information on the budgets and turnover of NGOs in Lebanon is the least discussed. In 1998, the annual turnover of NGOs in Lebanon was estimated at 250 to 300 million US Dollars; however, this estimation is expected to be recognizably higher after 2006 war and the huge funds received by NGOs in Lebanon after this war (Chaaban & Seyrfert, 2012).

Compared to other Arab countries, the high number of NGOs can be related to the liberal and democratic ambiance of the country. In Lebanon, a large number of those NGOs are affiliated to religious communities, big families, or political parties. Those NGOs were primarily initiated by sectarian politicians following the civil war and still “provide 60% of health and education services” (Beyond Reform & Development,

2015, 29).

4. Lebanon and the Syrian Crisis

The year 2016 marks the fifth year of the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis that started in March 2011 is considered one of the most difficult humanitarian crisis that took the lives of more than 250,000, injured more than a million and provoked the internal displacement of 6.5 million. In addition to 4.8 million refugees out of the country (UNOCHA, n.d.).

Since 2011, Lebanon adopted the open border policy that allowed Syrians to enter the country without a visa, and to renew it free of charge (Bobseine, 2015). The Syrian refugees registered in UNHCR in Lebanon currently represent 25% of the Lebanese population (UNDP, 2016).

In January 2015, Lebanon implemented new regulations in efforts to manage the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon (Al Sharabati & Nammour, 2015.). The mentioned regulations categorizes Syrians entering Lebanon into those registered with the United Nations High Commission of Refugees, and those who are not, thus need to find Lebanese sponsor to their legal stay in Lebanon, and all visa renewals are subject to 200USD annual fees except for children under the age of 15 (Bobseine, 2015).

Despite implementing the mentioned new regulations on refugees entering the country through the borders with Syria on January 2015, the five years of Syrian war continue to pressure the Lebanese economy, society, and public institutions (UNDP, 2016).

The huge influx of Syrian refugees raised the concerns from security implications on Lebanon (Dionigi, 2016). In addition, the influx of the refugees alerted sectarian fears of imbalance caused by the dominance of Sunnis among refugees, and

repeating the experience of Palestinian refugees crisis who are still in the country from eight decades without solution (Yahya, 2015). More serious social problems including increased violence and discrimination against the refugees, in addition to a greater number of host families that fall beyond the poverty line (SNAP, 2015).

The implications of the Syrian crisis exceeded the humanitarian nature of the huge influx of refugees, to a negative growing spillover on the social and economic levels (World Bank, 2013). The huge influx of the Syrian refugees marked further burdens, in terms of increasing demands on the quality and supply of education and health systems, water, electricity, sanitation and solid waste management (World Bank, 2013) The number of people in need in Lebanon is estimated to reach 3.3million out of 5.9 million residents by the end of 2016 (OCHA, 2015).

On the economic level, the major disruptions appear in trade and tourism, and increasing unemployment rates, in addition to the instability and security incidents related to the spillover of the armed conflict in Syrian on Lebanon (Calì, Harake, Hassan & Struck, 2015).

5. NGOs in Lebanon in the Context of the Relief of Syrian Refugees

There are many NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon including local, national and international NGOs, faith based organizations, in addition to local campaigns and initiatives. However, an official list of all those NGOs is not documented or published in governmental records.

The only publicly available list of NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is provided by the UNHCR, which serves as the major interlocutor of NGOs in the field (UNHCR, 2015b).

NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees provide various services that

fall in the following categories: community services, gender biased violence, protection, child protection, cash assistance, core relief items, food security, nutrition, education, health, reproductive health, HIV/AIDs, mental health and psychological support, environment, water and sanitation, livelihood, information technology, logistics, shelter, registration, return, transportation, and telecommunication (UNHCR, 2015b).

However, there seem to be a weak coordination among the NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees from one side, and NGOs and the Lebanese authorities from the other side, in the absence of standard procedures or definitions of the relations among the different relief organizations, the government, and the refugees (Shibili, 2014). The huge number of refugees and needs is challenging the coordination of efforts among the various relief NGOs and keeping several refugees deprived from basic services (Beyond Reform & Development, 2013).

The work of NGOs responding to the influx and needs of Syrian refugees is threatened mainly by their presence in vulnerable and risky areas in the Northern Bekaa, Tripoli, and Akkar. Short intermittent armed conflicts occur more often in such areas, and the acceptance of aid workers among host communities is decreasing. In addition, NGOs do not have adequate information on the numbers of refugees in general, numbers of refugees with special needs, area of presence and needs of non-registered refugees (SNAP, 2015).

After presenting a brief understanding of NGOs and its role, and a briefing on NGOs in Lebanon, it is essential to provide in the following section an overview on evaluation and the context of evaluation in NGOs both internationally and in Lebanon.

B. Evaluation

The following section examines evaluation, its major applicable definitions, its

different types and usages. It then explores the literature of evaluation within NGOs.

1. Definition

Evaluation is a “periodic, objective assessments of a planned, ongoing, or completed project, program, or policy used to answer specific questions related to design, implementation, and result.” He also adds “their design, method, and cost vary substantially depending on the type of question the evaluation is trying to answer” (Getler, Martinez, Premand, Rawlings & Vermeersch, 2011, 7). According to Freeman (2004), evaluation is “the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (Freeman, 2004, 16).

Evaluation is usually used synonymously with program evaluation, and is not limited to measuring the results of a program, but the complete process of the program; i.e., program evaluation is concerned with both understanding the problem and the need for the program, in addition to measuring how the program operates and why, before evaluating its results. The application of program evaluation is not limited to one field (Metcalf, Aitken & Gaff, 2008).

Metcalf, Aitken & Gaff (2008) in addition to Thomson (2010), agree that evaluation is an applied field rather than a research (Metcalf *et al.*, 2008; Thomas, 2010). However, on the use of evaluation, the literature reflects a discrepancy among different scholars in what relates to the importance of certain utilizations over others, which illustrate the presence of various evaluation models (Contandriopoulos & Brousselle, 2012).

In terms of timing, evaluations are carried out annually, biannually or every

third year. In many cases, evaluations are performed for specific programs, thus, are carried out depending on the length of the program. Most evaluations are conducted after the completion of the program by specifying indicators to judge the efficiency of the program (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008). For many NGOs, the timing of evaluation is frequently linked to the conditions of the funders who require it either by the end of the grant of the program, or in the middle as a mid-evaluation (Ebrahim, 2010).

As for the cost of evaluations, evaluations are seen as “necessarily expensive” (Thurston & Potvin, 2003). The World Health Organization recommends assigning a minimum of 10% of the budget of the program for evaluation (Gene, 1991).

2. Models of Evaluation

Several distinctions are present in the literature of different models or types of evaluations. Distinctions are based on data collection methods used, practice, timing, function, use, and impact of evaluation. For this, it was hard to find a typology of evaluation, as different practitioners create various approaches based on their need and type of work.

Some scholars distinguish between qualitative and quantitative evaluations. The qualitative aspect of the work of NGOs hardens measuring their performance and impact (Edwards & Hulme, 1995). Evaluators use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, to reach a balanced analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. This allows better identification of the presence or absence of causal relationship between the program and its intervention and its results (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008).

Others distinguish evaluation based on whether evaluation is conducted internally or externally. Evaluations are performed by evaluators who set the criteria and indicators for the process. It can be performed internally through members of the

organization but are not a part of the management of the program, or externally by external evaluators or evaluation firms (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008). Internally, few numbers of NGOs have the required knowledge and skills to critique the impact of the NGO, especially in serious complex political and social situations (Edwards *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, NGOs usually are limited with their number of staff and budgets, the fact which hinders internal evaluations (Ebrahim, 2010). For the purpose of internal evaluation, it varies among either assessing the results of a program funded externally, or judging compliance of the results of the program to the mission and vision of the organization (Ebrahim, 2010).

Another distinction of evaluation is based its function, resulting in Formative or Summative evaluations. A formative evaluation is meant to provide information to the staff and serve to improve the performance of the staff while summative evaluation is intended to provide information to decision makers (Scriven, 1991). Impact evaluations are centered on causal relation of the effect a certain program (Getler *et al.*, 2011); it links the outcome to a specified intervention (Copestake, 2014).

In relation to this study, a distinct type of evaluation is the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action; it is a type of evaluation concerned with conducting evaluation during conflicts, when complex emergencies can be extended. This type of evaluation recognizes the limits NGOs and evaluators encounter while conducting evaluation of humanitarian action (ALNAP, 2006). The limits include not only the access to information that might affect having “objective” evaluation, but also the nature of humanitarian action in terms of immediate planning and response. In addition to the absence of clear indicators during planning period, the settings of humanitarian action in terms of time (rapid response), place, and society, in addition to the high turnover of staff (Kareithi & Lund, 2012).

a. The Use of Evaluations in NGOs

The witnessed growth of NGOs in number and size, and reliance on donor funds, came with additional requirements in terms of the results of their programs, for monitoring and evaluation (Edwards & Hulme, 1995). Currently, further requests are raised for “NGO performance measurement” that goes beyond program evaluation and calls on NGOs to evaluate the functioning of the organization itself (Kareithi & Lund, 2012).

Ebrahim (2010) and Edwards & Hulme (1995) agree that one major purpose of applying evaluations is demonstrating accountability as a facet for gaining legitimacy towards various stakeholders, including internal staff, beneficiaries, governments, and most importantly donors (Ebrahim, 2010; Edwards & Hulme, 1995). By definition, accountability is the “the means by which organizations are held responsible for their actions” (Edwards & Hulme, 1995, 5). It includes accounting for resources, outputs and outcomes. NGOs are being questioned more about their role in development and results of their intervention especially when they operate in areas lacking governance, democracy and accountability (Edwards & Hulme, 1995). In addition, NGOs are currently in a time of competition for funds, and evaluation can be influential in convincing funders that they deserve funds (Carman, 2011).

Both Freeman (2004) and Thomas (2010) agree that the use of evaluation is diverse; its results are used to support the accountability of the program, or organization itself thus supporting it in seeking further funds (Freeman, 2004; Thomas, 2010). But evaluation is used mainly for the betterment and development of the program. The use of evaluation in social programs was prominent, as it has a role in developing the notion of “social betterment” through identifying good and bad results of the program (Freeman, 2004; Thomas, 2010).

Evaluation also assists in planning and decision making as it foresees and detects the intended as well as the unintended objectives of a certain program; in addition, to the reasons of the observed results. It helps in setting clear and measurable goals, which when implemented, helps future program planning (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008).

According to Thomas (2010) Nilsen & Ejler, (2008) with the development of use of evaluation, the concept of evaluation became more complicated to include multifaceted utilization (Thomas, 2010; Nilsen & Ejler, 2008). The categorization of the mentioned utilization differs among different scholars including: conceptual, strategic, tactical, political, symbolic, legitimization, process and organizational learning.

In international NGOs, evaluation serves various levels. First, it is used to show the efficiency and progress of the efforts of the organization in general (Yu & McLaughlin, 2013). Second, it is used for the evaluation of a specific program. The difference between both levels is represented by the different level of personnel in the organization including managers, employees, and volunteers, taking into consideration that the evaluation can be performed at any time of the life cycle of the program, before, during, or after the implementation of the program (Yu & McLaughlin, 2013). However, the use of evaluation results and recommendations is still not common and lacking in humanitarian action (ALNAP, 2006)

The results of a study on the capacity of evaluation distinguishes among three types of nonprofits: the first are those satisfied with their evaluations, the second have some struggles mainly in evaluation design and implementation but enjoy internal support for evaluation, while the third type have major struggles with basic resources like time, staff, and funding and are not well supported internally with their evaluations (Carman & Fredericks, 2010).

3. Examples of Evaluation in NGOs

The literature on evaluation in NGOs is generally scarce (Edwards *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, various evaluation results of NGO programs are not published and some are kept confidential, as NGOs tend to conceal negative results and highlight the positive results for various concerns, especially the fear of losing funding (Kareithi & Lund, 2012).

According to ALANAP (2006), a five years review of evaluations of Humanitarian Action revealed a deep presence of evaluation in the humanitarian sector, however, the quality of evaluations and utilization for learning, accountability and performance was still not certain. Improving the quality of evaluation will result in improving humanitarian action (ALNAP, 2006).

Another study on evaluation in NGOs in Brazil showed that most NGOs use internal evaluations for programs focusing on the results of the program for decision making purposes, rather than benefiting from evaluation for learning (Campos *et al.*, 2011). Evaluation in those NGOs preserves both government and donor control over NGOs (Campos *et al.*, 2011).

On the national level, finding published evaluations or evaluation studies was highly limited. In a review of evaluations carried out in 2012 and 2013 covering ten countries including Lebanon, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) concluded that their utilization of evaluations was not being “embedded” as it should be, in addition, the main findings of the review revealed Poor monitoring, evaluation and learning (NRC 2014).

In conclusion, the scarcity of information on evaluation on one hand, and the importance of evaluation in NGOs on another hand, might explain the growing initiatives for raising awareness and promoting conducting and utilizing evaluations.

With this being said, the following chapter explains the methodology used in this study to explore how evaluations are carried out and utilized in NGOs in Lebanon.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research approach as it attempts to explore evaluation within NGOs, focusing on NGOs working on relief efforts associated with the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. Qualitative methods are advantageous in exploratory studies as they give the respondents the flexibility of replying and explaining in their own words without limiting them with a fixed set of answers to choose from; in addition to giving the researcher the opportunity to ask further questions based on responses to better understand the reasons behind the responses especially if the responses were not as expected (Mack *et al.*, 2005).

The following sections explain: Sampling and Recruitment, Data Collection, Data Coding

A. Sampling and Recruitment

Stratified random sampling of representatives of key NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon was employed.

Stratified random sampling allows proportional representation of different groups. It is based on subdividing the sample into two or more “mutually exclusive” segments called strata according to a clear criteria then selecting a random sub sample from each resulting strata, the subsamples are then combined to make the whole sample (Singleton, JR. & Straits, 2005).

In this study, the NGOs coping with the Syrian refugees are both national and international NGOs that provide different types of programs, humanitarian aid and/or

development projects to Syrian refugees. Those NGOs were identified after reviewing the literature on NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

NGOs were selected based on their listing in the partner list of UNHCR, which is the main coordinator of the relief work of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The partner list of NGOs includes NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. Another list was adopted from the mentioned partner list for the purpose of this study, where the NGOs working in Lebanon were specified and includes 62 NGOs. The 62 NGOs were categorized into two groups: the first group includes national NGOs while the second includes international NGOs. The number of international NGOs was 46, and the national NGOs were 16. The NGOs are present in different governates in Lebanon, in Bekaa, Akkar, Tripoli, Beirut, Saida, and Sour.

Although there are many other NGOs working outside the moderation of UNHCR, or contracted by UNHCR for particular projects before and after the duration writing this paper, especially in the areas of high presence of Syrian refugees, but those are not documented in particular lists or official sources.

The list of partner NGOs to UNHCR included both international and national NGOs, whose number reaches 62 partners including the ministry of social affairs and several UN agencies whose work is allocated among the following categories: camp management, cash management, child protection, community assistance, coordination, core relief, education, food security, gender based violence, health, HIV/AIDS, information management, livelihood, logistics, mental health and psychological support, nutrition, protection, registration, reproductive health, return, shelter, transportation, water and sanitation. (UNHCR, 2015a)

The criteria used for stratifying the sample are their origin, national or

international. A random sample was then selected from each stratum, from the national and international by writing the names of NGOs in each group on separate papers in a separate box, and selecting from each box.

The selected NGOs were contacted via the publicly available phone numbers of each NGO, requesting to speak to the NGO director. Upon speaking to the director, the context of the study and the goals behind the interview were explained to ensure assigning the correct representative of the NGO and to avoid any vagueness before approving or disapproving the request. Once the interview request was approved, a meeting was scheduled for an interview. Several NGOs requested to send an email before scheduling the interview, so an email including the consent form was sent.

The interviews occurred in the offices of the NGOs, for NGOs located outside Beirut, the NGOs directors were very generous that they agreed to schedule the interview during their visits to Beirut, in such cases, the interview occurred in the office of another NGO.

The sample intended to recruit 24 interviewees of NGO representatives from the two aforementioned categories. But data collection was concluded once thematic saturation has been reached at 20 interviews. Thus, the sample size decreased based on the theoretical saturation; therefore, the data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection.

Table 1. The Sample

The Sample	
# of Targeted NGOs	48
# of NGOs who did not respond	21
# of NGOs refused participation	4
# of incomplete interviews	3
# of complete interviews	20

B. Data Collection

According to De Leeuw (2008), face to face interviews “are the most flexible form of data collection” (De Leeuw, 2008, 317), as they allow the researcher to encourage respondents to flow further information (De Leeuw, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews are tools for data collection used in qualitative studies to understand behaviors and opinions and generate extensive information that might result in rich data due to the nature of the open-ended questions that form the interviews (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001).

This method is also flexible in allowing the researcher in encouraging the interviewee or explaining the question when it is not clear. Semi structured interviews allow “follow up on questions and exploration of topics unanticipated by the interviewer” (Mabry, 2008, 218). Each interviewee was scheduled for a separate interview that was recorded and followed by transcription. During the interview using open-ended questions, recording the responses is highly recommended for transcribing purposes (Babbie, 1990).

Semi structured interviews consists of fixed sets of questions known as interview guide and is characterized by allowing the researcher to ask further questions of matters brought by the interviewees for a better exploration and understanding (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Writing the right questions that cover the objects of the research is a key to the successful data gathering, and structuring questions is essential to facilitate the flow of information from the respondents (De Leeuw, 2008). Gathering data is subject to the successful question development (Yin, 2009). During interviews, the interviewee should be consistent to his questions especially that open-ended questions stimulate a fluid rather than a rigid conversation (Yin, 2009).

Following approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the American

University of Beirut, face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study.

The interview included eight main questions and lasted maximum for forty minutes. It was recorded and notes were taken upon arrival of the interviewee. The interview guide, attached in Appendix II, was used to confirm uniformity.

Interviewees were treated as regulated by International Review Board in terms of revealing their identity, and explaining process and objectives of the interview and study. A consent form (attached in Appendix I) was provided to the interviewees to read and sign before commencing the interview. Data collection was concluded once thematic saturation was reached (Bryman, 2001). So the number of interviews decreased from 24 to 20. Each interview was transcribed on Word document. The names of NGOs and interviewees will be masked in the study to avoid bias.

C. Analysis and Data Coding

Data analysis is usually the next step where the content of the interviews is analyzed. The thematic analysis framework was adopted for this study. Thematic analysis is a commonly used method of analysis of qualitative data in understanding social and cultural phenomena. It allows further contribution from the researcher in the analysis of clear and hidden ideas or themes in texts. Its strength lies in that the interpretation of the researcher is backed by the collected data, its use for finding solutions in real world problems (Mac Queen, 2012).

The literature does not provide an agreed definition of thematic analysis, however, many scholars agree on themes emerging during data analysis. According to Braun & Clarke, thematic analysis is: “A method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 6). A theme is an idea

that captures “something important in relation to the overall research question(s)” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 10).

Thematic analysis can be summarized in the following steps:

- Becoming familiar with the data
- Transcribing data
- Concentrating on both clear and unclear themes conveyed in the collected

data.

- Assigning codes to the themes for analysis
- Identifying themes
- Producing the report

In this study, the researcher was the transcriber, which made the step of familiarizing with data smooth. Thematic analysis of the interviews also included reading the transcripts several times to confirm familiarization with data, reading it again to code the themes, clarifying the identified themes, then discussing the results. The analysis of the transcriptions resulted in five main themes:

(A) NGO’s Perception of Evaluation, (B) The rationale behind conducting evaluation in NGOs (C) The Evaluation Practices of NGOS (D) Dissemination and Sharing Evaluation Results. (E) Evaluation between capacities and constraints.

D. Limitations of Study

The number of the NGOs included in this study was small. It does not include all NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. There are many other national, local and international NGOs coping on the relief of NGOs in Lebanon, however, including all NGOs is beyond the capacity of this study.

As for the number of interviews, this study aims to explore evaluation in NGOs

coping with the relief of Syrian refugees that is still an ongoing humanitarian action, which made reaching the interviewees a hard process. The response of NGOs to participate in the study was low in the beginning. Several NGOs refrained from taking part of the study due to their work load, which made gathering information through interviews takes further time than the anticipated. In addition, many interviewees did not reveal the needed information and were limited in their answers.

In conclusion, the implemented methodology intended to answer the research questions. The total sample of twenty open-ended interviews was fulfilled, including ten national NGOs and ten international NGOs. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed and the results will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions. It is divided into sections that represent the five themes that resulted from the analysis and is supported by quotes of the interviewees.

The five themes are the following: (A) NGO's Perception of Evaluation, (B) The rationale behind conducting evaluation in NGOs (C) The Evaluation Practices of NGOs (D) Dissemination and Sharing Evaluation Results. (E) Evaluation between capacities and constraints

A. NGO's Perception of Evaluation

This theme provides an overview on how NGOs perceive evaluation, it also describes their understanding and knowledge of the concept of evaluation.

All interviewees have showed general awareness of evaluation that was neither new nor unknown concept for them. A general understanding and knowledge of evaluation, in both national and international NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, does exist, however, NGOs responses provoke examining the level of professionalism and the quality of evaluations performed.

Many NGOs do not seem to have a clear knowledge of the foundations of evaluation. For instance, the vast majority of interviewees did not distinguish between evaluation and monitoring. The majority of interviewees were often unable to provide pertinent information to the inquiry according to their understanding of evaluation. In other words, when they were supposed to conduct evaluations, their clarifications

revealed that they were referring to their performed data collection and monitoring methods like check lists, complaint forms, and focus groups.

As for the methodology followed, the responses of the vast majority of the NGOs reflected a limited knowledge in this aspect. NGOs revealed mixed answers. Most NGOs stated that they perform “informal” evaluations. On the other hand, all interviewees were able to differentiate between three levels of evaluations: staff level, organization level, and program level. The pattern in all NGOs was focusing on program evaluation.

Both national and international NGOs, who do not have evaluation units, revealed their intentions of hiring evaluation specialists, and including program evaluation as an internal requirement for all their programs. Yet, all interviewees agreed that conducting any evaluation is a hard task during relief and is not considered priority for them.

We look forward to conducting evaluation in Lebanon, before it was impossible due to the emergency situation, but now, there is resilience in the Syrian refugee crisis, so we are aiming to start evaluating our programs soon. Interviewee 6, the head of an evaluation unit in a branch of an international NGO.

In brief, all participating NGOs showed awareness on the importance of evaluation and the increased demand on conducting it for various reasons (discussed in the following theme). In addition, all interviewees stated that they are carrying out more efforts to accommodate it. Yet the knowledge of the majority of NGOs in evaluation was very limited.

B. The Rationale behind Conducting Evaluation in NGOs

The current theme investigates the rationale behind conducting evaluation in NGOs. It attempts to convey a deeper insight on the reasons that provoke NGOs to

evaluate.

NGOs revealed conducting evaluation for many reasons without obvious differentiation between reasons of national and international NGOs. The main reasons can be summarized in the following subthemes:

- The Role of Funding in Evaluation
- Learning and Decision Making
- Compliance with Internal Policies

1. The Role of Funding in Evaluation

The role of funding in evaluation for NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees can be described as dual.

From one side, several national and international NGOs explained that they perform evaluation to respond to donor's requests. Those NGOs reported that evaluation are recently required as conditions to receive grants and funds. However, the funding aspect was dominant for the majority of national NGOs more than the international. *"The decision of conducting evaluation depends first and above all on the donor; on the amount of the money given and its allocation."* Interviewee 12, the head of a national NGO said.

For national NGOs, many of them build on the evaluation of previous programs to write grant proposals to ensure funds for new programs, which is not the case for the international NGOs. In such acts, most national NGOs build on evaluation to ensure their financial continuity. Whereas the majority of international NGOs reported that they rely in their funding on their headquarters.

In addition, most national NGOs reported that they intend to evaluate in their efforts to influence directing the funds towards the needs in the field. However, several

NGOs admitted that this attempt is not always successful. “*Many donors still want to see tangible use of their money, they want to help those in need through providing goods or services, and they are not really interested in assigning money for Evaluation.*” Interviewee 9, the director of a national NGOs noted.

On the other side, most national and international NGOs expressed a paradox in the effect of funds on evaluation. Those NGOs revealed that the shrinking of funds and its’ lack at certain times is positively influencing evaluation; i.e. NGOs are adopting evaluation in their internal policies to show and convince donors that their work and programs are based on needs and documented evaluation reports from the field.

2. Learning and Decision Making

All NGOs agreed that conducting evaluation will produce best practices and lessons learned; thus, evaluation is performed to learn from previous experiences and ensure high standards of work through avoiding recurring problems and for some of them correcting the path of the programs.

Although the two reasons seem to be complimentary, it is essential to mention that the majority of international NGOs emphasized that one of the main purposes behind conducting evaluation they clarified that they don’t usually produce evaluation reports or do not refer to previous evaluations before launching new programs. Almost all NGOs were also not aware of evaluation reports published by other NGOs.

Furthermore, it was clear that many international NGOs build on the results of their evaluations to decide whether to continue or stop cooperating with local or national NGO partners, then to adapt or modify an ongoing program. On the other hand, most national NGOs rely on evaluation results to confirm continuing or stopping programs.

On the other hand, very few NGOs considered evaluation to ensure meeting the program's goals and to measure the effectiveness of their work. Interviewee 14, a director in a national NGO, summarized the reasons saying: *“Why we evaluate is really textbook answer. We want to make sure we are on the right track, effective and efficient and what we are doing is a typical answer of why conducting evaluations. In our NGO, we do not evaluate just to verify our work's effectiveness and efficiency in responding to our projects' goals, but also to link the projects' outcomes and results- whether good or bad- to evaluate our NGO.”*

3. Compliance with Internal Policies

The results of the study showed that many international as well as national NGOs require program evaluation in their internal policy for each program. *“Program Evaluation is required for each program conforming to our internal policy; we do have evaluation unit and staff dedicated for that.”* Interviewee 6, the branch director of an international NGO said.

As for *interviewee 8*, the director of a national NGO, said: *Evaluation is internally required for every program, we do it as a part of our job, which is very hard to accomplish during relief.*

It is essential to mention that only few of NGOs reported that their main reason for conducting evaluation was to build a good reputation. *“Evaluation is a means to show transparency and credibility to our internal and external audience.”* Interviewee 16, the head of a national NGO clarified.

C. The Evaluation Practices of NGOs

“I don't know if I have to be honest to that extent, although we have M&E (monitoring and evaluation) unit, we haven't yet conducted any evaluation, we were barely able to monitor.”

Interviewee 5, the evaluation specialist in an international NGO explained.

This theme describes the dominating evaluation practices in NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees; those can be divided into three sub themes: 1. The Level of Evaluation. 2. The methodology of the implemented Evaluation and 3. Evaluation: Internal or External?

1. The Level of Evaluation

It is clear that all NGOs were able to differentiate between three levels of evaluations: staff level, organization level, and program level. However, the results did not reveal consistency in the level of performed evaluation among all NGOs.

On the organizational level, very few NGOs conduct Organizational or Mission evaluation. It was obvious that almost all international NGOs do not conduct evaluation for the branches, except for two of them. The interviewed international NGOs clarified that their presence in Lebanon is a response to the emergency situation. For those NGOs, evaluating their mission will not affect the decision of being present in other similar emergency situations, since they are responding to humanitarian needs.

The type of presence of international NGOs in Lebanon seems to be a factor influencing the tasks they do i.e. it affects the level of evaluation they conduct. For example, all participating international NGOs conduct evaluation on the organizational level in their Headquarters; however, most NGO branches are not conducting evaluation on this level in Lebanon. When asked about the reason, the interviewed NGOs stated that they are present in Lebanon for some missions due to emergency situation, thus they do not have permanent staff whom they can rely on to perform evaluation.

Evaluation of our mission and vision is performed on the global level every six years, but we have never performed evaluation for our

branch in Lebanon. Interviewee 7, an evaluation specialist in a branch of an international NGO commented.

For national NGOs, the majority of them don't conduct evaluation on organizational level, for financial reasons, they claimed that their focus is mainly on program Evaluation.

On the staff level, all interviewed NGOs stated that they conduct either annual or mid-term or end-of-contract performance evaluation for their staff. As for the stage of evaluation, the vast majority of NGOs revealed that when conducting evaluation, they conduct outcome evaluation.

The trend in all NGOs was focusing on program evaluation. Many national and international NGOs have program evaluation in their internal policy as a requirement for each program. However, very few NGOs have a dedicated evaluation unit and evaluate every program.

It was recognized that some international NGOs have evaluation units but conduct only monitoring and have never conducted any evaluation. "*Program Evaluation is required for each program conforming to our internal policy, for this, we have evaluation unit and dedicated staff.*" Interviewee 6, the branch director of an international NGO said. However, most NGOs who conduct internal evaluations assign evaluation to their staff as part of their jobs while few NGOs perform it through specialized evaluation staff in dedicated evaluation units.

2. The Methodology of the Implemented Evaluation

The current sub theme investigates the technical aspect related to the practice of the implemented evaluation. It explores the implemented type of evaluation, the evaluated stage, the evaluators and the evaluation's frequency.

As for the methodology followed, NGOs revealed mixed answers. The vast majority of NGOs stated that they perform “informal” evaluations, they explained that they do not initiate an evaluation plan, or follow a methodology. Rather, they perform ongoing monitoring and focus groups, be content with surveys on sample of the audience, either one year following starting the program or upon its end, and build evaluation reports on it.

Almost all NGOs reported that they tailor their evaluations according to the program. But when requesting further details, the majority of interviewees did not know what methodology was followed in their evaluation. Very few NGOs reported that they conduct formative evaluations or follow logic models. Most NGOs revealed that they conduct focus groups and satisfaction surveys, as they consider it evaluation. The above mentioned might hint to the poor evaluation trainings whether in frequency or quality.

It is essential to note that the majority of the interviewees- except four of them- revealed they do not perform desk review on previous or similar evaluation reports. However, few NGOs expressed that their evaluation relies merely on desk review of the reports and on monitoring generated during the period of the program. Other few NGOs expressed using various methods including qualitative and quantitative evaluations, while the majority of the national NGOs follow the logic framework.

Both national and international NGOs include the beneficiaries in their evaluation. Most national interviewed NGOs explained that they try to include most beneficiaries, while most international NGOs revealed that they attempt to include representative samples in their evaluations.

3. Evaluation: Internal or External?

Interviews revealed that most national and international NGOs perform internal

evaluation for all their programs, which seems to be very positive result. However, when providing details on the performed internal evaluations, several concerns arose, especially when NGOs described their evaluations as being “informal” or “brief”, and when revealing information related to publishing evaluation results (which will be discussed in the next theme).

As for external evaluation, the trend revealed that external evaluations were only implemented when requested by the donor or budgeted in the proposal, except for one national and other international NGOs. All interviewees explained that external evaluation is costly, and acts as a burden on their budget. In addition, the majority of the interviewees, in both local and international NGOs were skeptical of the value or outcome of the conducted external evaluations.

Most NGOs were not satisfied with external evaluation, as they found external evaluation were generally performed in very quick manner. The vast majority of NGOs reported that external evaluations were generally conducted at the end of the program, through running interviews with members of the team who worked in a program, in addition to a sample of the beneficiaries.

Interviewee 17, the director of national NGO, who also with worked with several international NGOs in Lebanon said: *“I think external evaluations are superficial, at least, I can speak about my experience. I can’t believe that a 3 or 5 day evaluation can cover a one year program’s work for a member of the organization. It is hard for the external evaluator to understand a program and then to evaluate its work over a year in few days.”*

One exception was noted in two –local and international- NGOs, which conducted external evaluation, however, the external evaluation they referred to was planned with the external evaluator upon launching the program, and continued until its

end. Both were driven by a decision from the NGOs who considered the programs essential in the life of their NGOs.

D. Producing and Disseminating Evaluation Reports

“We didn’t have the department or the time to produce and publish the reports.” Interviewee 7, an evaluation specialist in an international NGO said.

The majority of both national and international NGOs clarified that the evaluation reports when produced are generally “very basic analysis”, thus they prefer not to disseminate it. Most international NGOs do not publish evaluation reports or results. Some international NGOs revealed publishing impact evaluations.

For national NGOs, all NGOs do not publish the results of the evaluation except one of them. The majority of those NGOs stated that their evaluation are usually performed on small scale. Only one national NGO published the results of external evaluation in a conference, and made it available to the public, beneficiaries, and donors.

For international NGOs, the majority do not publish evaluation reports conducted internally; they publish only evaluations conducted by external evaluators.

While the majority of all NGOs showed the possibility of sharing evaluation results with public upon request, several national and international NGOs share evaluation results with other NGOs in the working group of NGOs coping with the Syrian refugee crisis. All NGOs that produce evaluation reports, even when marked as “informal” or “very basic” share the results of the reports with staff.

Interview results revealed that national NGOs share the evaluation results only with donors when requested by the latter while almost all international NGOs always supply donors with results of the evaluation reports.

We submit the results of the evaluation to the donor, but we do not publish it to avoid sharing only rosy results, we will not publish our internal findings and faults. Interviewee 1, the director of international NGO commented.

As for following on the evaluation reports and results of other NGOs, the majority of national and international NGOs were not aware of any published evaluation reports for other NGOs. In addition, they stated that follow up on such reports is not always possible due to the workload and priorities in acting and responding to the needs of Syrian refugees.

All international NGOs revealed that they always follow on evaluation reports of similar programs in other branches of their NGO. On the other hand, the majority of national NGOs revealed that they are not aware of the availability of published evaluations in Lebanon.

E. Evaluation between Resources and Constraints

This themes includes the resources and constraints that hinder conducting evaluation as described by the interviewed NGOs. National and international NGOs shared similar limits encountered during performing evaluations. The limits can be summarized by two sub themes: the first is linked to the resources of NGOs, time, human and financial resources, and training. While the second is related to the acceptance of evaluation among refugees.

All NGOs agreed that the emergency nature of working during relief is a major challenge for evaluation. The fast humanitarian respond (time) in addition to the financial and human resources act as major constraints against performing evaluation during emergency and relief. All NGOs agreed that the primary focus in humanitarian work especially during emergency is to respond to the needs of refugees.

In addition, all NGOs revealed that performing evaluation takes a lot of time whether performed internally by staff or externally by external evaluators. In addition, performing evaluation requires allocating a budget for the evaluation, and this is another issue due to the continuous decrease or limitations of funds received to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. *“Performing evaluation is time consuming if you want to do it internally and a financial burden if you are hiring external evaluator.”*

Interviewee 12, the head of a national NGO said.

On the other hand, a poor knowledge of evaluation appeared to be another major limitation for conducting Evaluation. This includes scarcity of evaluation expertise and the staff’s limited evaluation knowledge.

All NGOs agreed that finding experienced external evaluators is a crucial factor. Although all NGOs did not deny the presence of experienced external evaluators, those NGOs revealed that those are very few in Lebanon, and hiring them is very costly. The trend is hiring external evaluators when requested by the donor or when a part of the budget is allocated in advance for evaluation.

Regarding staff conducting evaluation, NGOs explained that evaluation is not yet widely accepted among many staff in the field. When requested to perform evaluation as a part of their tasks, several staff are afraid to perform it, thinking it might reflect negatively against their work. In addition, the majority of staff lacks evaluation’s technical skills, which act as a major hindrance against the evaluation standards. *“Staff and refugees need to understand that we perform evaluation not necessarily to show a problem, but to improve, there is always something we can improve.”* Interviewee 3, the director of a branch on an international NGO said.

1. Training on Evaluation

Results showed that very few local and international NGOs provide training on evaluation for their staff. The trend in NGOs is that they prefer to hire staff with previous expertise in evaluation. Many national and international NGOs have never received or provided any type of training on evaluation for their staff.

For international NGOs who provide training, this training occurs via the headquarters of each NGO, mainly through providing manuals and evaluation modules to the staff. For national NGOs, training occur mainly through outsourcing evaluation specialist who provides training for managers, or through workshops provided by international NGOs and United Nations agencies.

National NGOs clarified that they prefer training managers as they are usually permanent staff. Due to the emergency criteria of the work in the relief of the Syrian refugees, NGOs need to hire many staff temporarily, usually for the period of the programs, and providing training for all staff requires both time and funds, which are not always accessible during emergencies.

From the side of refugees, NGOs reflected that the acceptance evaluation seems to be absent among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. All NGOs agreed that having the refugees participate in the evaluation is hardly attainable. Refugees are afraid to participate in evaluation fearing to lose relief services or benefits. In other situations, the refugees request rewards to accept to participate in the evaluation, thus challenging the credibility of the evaluation. Furthermore, the frequent displacement of refugees makes evaluation hard to achieve, especially that addresses are not recorded and tracked.

“Their voices should be heard, yet including them is always a challenging process.”

Interviewee 7, an evaluation specialist in an international NGO explained.

Table 2. Common Constraints as described by NGOs

Constraints related to the NGOs	Constraints related to refugees
The focus is on responding to humanitarian needs, most NGOs barely limited time and financial resources to respond to needs	Almost all refugees request rewards to participate in evaluations.
Most of the staff take evaluation as if it is personal matter, they are afraid that it might affect their continuity at work	Refugees are afraid of losing services or benefits, it is hard to get them participate in an evaluation
The majority of staff do not have any experience in evaluation. Gaining their commitment to perform evaluation when knowing with their stressful nature of work and load is challenging.	
Staff are usually hired per project during humanitarian aid, so investing in training them on evaluation requires a lot of money and time, while they will leave by the end of the project	It is common that refugees move a lot, which makes evaluation even harder, we can't track or reach them to perform our evaluations

With the above being said, the majority of NGOs revealed conducting informal, small scale, or very basic evaluations. Moreover, almost all NGOs except very few did not publish evaluation reports (not even internally) and limited submitting evaluation reports to the donors. Thus, the claimed learning from evaluation results, decision making based on evaluation, and ensuring high standards of work through evaluation seems to be questionable.

Taking in consideration that the resources of NGOs is highly affected by the context of their work during emergency and relief. All NGOs stressed that conducting professional evaluation during emergency and relief is rarely attainable, while some NGOs criticized the possibility of performing evaluation following scientific standards during relief.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of the twenty interviews conducted for this study unveil the context of evaluation in NGOs in Lebanon; however, information was not striking. The context of evaluation in NGOs in Lebanon seems to come in line with the literature on evaluation in NGOs.

The synthesis of the findings reveals that both national and international NGOs in Lebanon are aware and considerate of the concept of evaluation, however, the practice of evaluation is still a challenge especially that it comes in the context of responding to a humanitarian need of the relief of Syrian refugees. This corroborates with previous international research on evaluation of humanitarian action which found that evaluation is deeply present in organizations responding to humanitarian action, but its quality and use is yet uncertain or “poor” (EvalPartners, 2006, 19).

The study not only reveals acceptance of NGOs to evaluation, but it also shows that evaluation is seen by all the interviewed NGOs as essential. All NGOs share the same opinion: evaluation is expensive, and that supports the description of evaluation by WHO being “necessarily expensive” (Gene, 1991).

The main gap that might be present in the majority of NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon lies in the practice of evaluation. The majority of national and international NGOs claim to tailor their specific evaluation model; however, they fail to explain or clarify their model, or summarize it by monitoring and satisfactory surveys. Most NGOs did not distinguish between the qualitative or quantitative evaluations, or between summative or formative evaluations, even choosing

between external and internal evaluations, was mainly related to the conditions of funds. Few NGOs used logic models. In addition, all NGOs claimed struggling in performing evaluation due to poor conditions of basic resources and working in humanitarian relief.

Almost all NGOs, national and international, distinguished between internal and external evaluation. In addition, many NGOs revealed shortage in the number of staff and budget, which limits their ability to conduct evaluation or encourage them to conduct internal evaluations by their staff to evaluate the results of the program. From one side, this corroborates with the research of Ebrahim (2010), but what is different in the Lebanese context is that only very few NGOs perform internal evaluation to confirm the compliance of the program with the vision and mission of the NGO.

The vast majority of both international and national NGOs working on the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon perform evaluation, yet, almost all NGOs are not satisfied with the performed evaluations, whether conducted internally or externally, except two NGOs. The findings revealed that almost all NGOs do not have the capacity to perform evaluations. They suffer from poor basic resources of time, staff, money, and expertise to conduct evaluations. In addition, they always prioritize responding to humanitarian need to any other requirement, including evaluation. Thus, most NGOs working on the relief of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon seem to fall in the third type of NGOs suggested by Carman, those who struggle with basic resources to perform evaluations (Carman & Fredericks, 2010).

Concerning the level of evaluation, most NGOs consider conducting program evaluation only, which supports the literature that evaluation is used synonymously with program evaluation (Metcalf *et al.*, 2008). But, other research reveals the international requests are currently for “NGO performance measurement” that goes further than program evaluation (Kareithi & Lund, 2012), which is not yet a concern of the majority

of NGOs in Lebanon.

Regarding the rationale and uses of evaluation, the study shows that NGOs considered conducting evaluation, initiating evaluation units, or hiring evaluation specialist primarily to comply with donor requests, or with internal policy.

In most situations, national NGOs considered performing evaluations to respond to the requests of the donors and funding organizations, which support the research of Ebrahim (2010) and Edwards & Hulme (1995) who found that evaluation is mainly conducted for accountability purposes towards donors mainly. On the other hand, most international NGOs performed evaluations mainly for compliance with internal policies. Both national and international NGOs in Lebanon did not reveal conducting evaluation for accountability towards government.

The interviewed NGOs perform evaluation for various purposes and use it diversely. National NGOs mainly use evaluation to seek further funds which supports the findings of Thomas (Thomas, 2010) and Freeman (Freeman, 2004). However, international NGOs in Lebanon do not share the same purpose of seeking funds, as they mainly rely on their mother organizations for their missions in Lebanon. On the other hand, the majority of NGOs demonstrated a will of learning and better decision making from previous programs through evaluation which supports the research of Nilsen and Ejler (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008).

On one hand, performing evaluation to respond to the funding conditions in enhancing the number of performed evaluations, yet it does not seem to be providing satisfying evaluations for NGOs.

On disseminating evaluation, the study points out that the vast majority of NGOs issue informal or descriptive reports. In addition, those NGOs do not publish their evaluations, either to avoid sharing only rosy results, or because they consider it

internal confidential information. This support the findings of other research and might clarify the scarcity of information on evaluation (ALNAP, 2006). The majority of national NGOs consider reporting evaluation for fundraising purposes, while international NGOs consider reporting to send it to their headquarters. Only two NGOs issued detailed evaluation reports and published the reports.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

Evaluations are present in NGOs coping with the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. All interviewed NGOs are aware of evaluation and the vast majority of NGOs perform evaluation, yet, the practice of the performed evaluation is a major challenge. It is clear that evaluation became an item on the agendas of NGOs; however, it is essential to note that most NGOs have poor capacities, and evaluations are not given any priority without a noticeable difference among national and international NGOs.

Evaluation is commonly conducted by most NGOs, with a main criterion of distinction between internal and external evaluations. Excluding three NGOs, the performed evaluation in both national and international NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees in Lebanon can be fairly described as poor. Evaluation is most commonly conducted in the field by field based staff with no or very limited training, lacking expertise and professionalism. Evaluations are mostly performed “informally” and end with descriptive reports.

External evaluations are seen as expensive by all NGOs. Most external evaluations are outsourced by donors or following funding conditions.

Even when performed by external evaluators, it is most of the times conducted to reply to donor request, through the donors immediately, but in short time, not giving the work done enough time to be evaluated. The vast majority of NGOs were not satisfied neither with internal nor with external evaluations performed. In addition, the design on evaluations is not clear; monitoring, satisfactory surveys, and focus groups

are considered the evaluation of programs for many NGOs.

The major challenge according to NGOs is their work in humanitarian action during emergencies, where the focus is on responding to humanitarian needs, thus making evaluation not of their priorities. Other important challenges can be demonstrated mainly by struggling with limited financial and human resources.

There seems to be a gap between the “seeming” knowledge of evaluation and the actual practice of evaluation in those NGOs. The effort of the NGOs in the field of evaluation is still very shy and unremarkable. Evaluation is yet not taken seriously by the majority of NGOs, it given limited or absent effort/time in terms of planning. The effort for reviewing evaluations of other NGOs and by other branches of the NGOs is very narrow. In addition, publishing the evaluation reports or results is highly limited.

As for the use of evaluation results, it is also very limited. Using evaluation for decision making and learning is claimed, but most NGOs failed to explain it. In addition, it is still questionable how many NGOs were able to use evaluation results for learning, especially that the evaluations were poor in practice, as evaluations were described by NGOs as “informal” or “very basic” and were not based on evaluation plans, or summarized by monitoring and satisfactory surveys.

In addition, taking into consideration that evaluation reports are not being produced or produced but not published in many NGOs signals another question on the conducted evaluations and their use. The major rationale and uses for evaluation in the majority of NGOs were compliance with internal policy or replying to funding conditions and donors’ requests, in addition to helping in learning and decision making.

B. Recommendations

Despite the limits encountered by NGOs in conducting and publishing

evaluations, it is essential to organize and exert further efforts in evaluations to reach concrete results that support the efforts of the NGOs. Building on the analysis and conclusion of the study, the following section explains recommendations that are stipulated mainly towards NGOs, evaluators, due to their expertise in both knowledge and practice of evaluation, in addition to donors, due to their role in funding NGOs.

1. For NGOs

Both national and international NGOs are urged to ensure better practices and utmost benefit from evaluation. The following activities would facilitate achieving the mentioned goals.

- Ensure that evaluation manuals and policies are available to all staff.
- Hold training workshops to support staff with the knowledge and expertise in evaluation.
- Cooperate with other NGOs coping with Syrian refugees when related to evaluation and sharing knowledge.
- Ensure publishing evaluations to share knowledge and learned lessons.

2. For Evaluators

The analysis of the current study revealed poor evaluation practices in NGOs as well as dissatisfaction with the evaluation whether conducted internally and externally. Thus the following suggestions are intended towards evaluators being experts in the knowledge and practice of evaluation.

- Develop regular forums and training workshops to illustrate the value of the information evaluations can generate and its potential benefits.
- Promote maximizing the use of evaluations especially in fundraising,

learning, and decision making.

3. For Donors

The current study reveals that NGOs coping with the relief of Syrian refugees are struggling with their resources, thus donors are encouraged to support the financial resources of the NGOS in the following aspects to enhance both the frequency and practice of evaluation through:

- Ensuring allocating a budget for evaluation in all funds.
- Supporting NGOs with funds dedicated to capacity building for evaluation, especially for training staff on evaluation.

Further studies such as in depth case studies to investigate the role of donors in evaluation and the donors' perceptions and expectations of evaluations in NGOs would continue the efforts of this study. Other studies are also needed to assess the quality of the conducted evaluations and to explore evaluation in NGOs working in Lebanon beyond those coping with Syrian refugees.

APPENDIX I

CONSENT DOCUMENT

Institutional Review Board
American University of Beirut
25 AUG 2015

American University of Beirut
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Department of Political Studies and Public Administration
Graduate Program in Public Administration

Consent Document

Evaluation in Non-Governmental Organizations in Lebanon: NGOs coping with Syrian Refugees

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nasser Yassine
Student Investigator: Rola Awada

We are asking you to participate in a research study. Please read the information below and do not hesitate to ask any questions that you may have. This research is about the evaluation in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); focused on NGOs responding to Syrian refugees. Taking into consideration your related field of work, you are invited to give us information that will be valuable contribution to the understanding of the role of NGOs and evaluation in this specific area.

- A. The research is being conducted with the goal of completing a Masters' thesis by student researcher Rola Awada, who can be reached at raa129@aub.edu.lb or via phone at 03-062115. The research is under the supervision of Primary Investigator Dr. Nasser Yassin, who can be reached at ny05@aub.edu.lb and 01-350000 ext4680. His office is located on AUB campus, IFI building, 4th floor. For further inquiries you may contact the Institutional Review Board of AUB at irb@aub.edu.lb and 01-350000 ext. 5445.
- B. In this study, you will be asked to answer questions in an interview that will be recorded on a digital recorder, transcribed then analyzed. The recorded interview will not exceed 40 minutes. The digital material will be destroyed following the completion of the analysis upon your request.
- C. Your participation in this research does not include any physical or emotional hazard on the informants. You have the right to withdraw your consent or terminate your participation at any stage for any reason. The research doesn't include any benefit or risk to yourself and to your privacy. Your name, name of organization or other identifiers will not be attached to your answers so that your confidentiality can be maintained. The keys that link the interview subject to the data provided will be available to the PI only.
- D. Your participation is entirely voluntary and denial to participate or to terminate your participation at any stage does not induce any penalty. You may stop your participation at any time without any drawback. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer. Records will be monitored and may be audited by IRB without violating confidentiality. Refusal to participate or deciding to withdraw from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and neither will it affect their relationship with the NGO you represent or with AUB.
- E. You can request a copy of this consent document and the interview. This document will be kept in a locked drawer in the IFI department and will not be retrieved during the data analysis to avoid disclosure of your identity.
- F. You were recruited for this study by direct contact through personal contact or a phone call with the researchers. The research looks forward to recruiting 24 informants. In case of phone call, we assure there will be no one in the room or on the phone listening to the conversation while conducting the interview except for the authorized team member.
- G. Once you agree and sign this document, the interview and the recording will start immediately. By the end of the interview, the recording will be stopped

Do you voluntarily consent to take part of the study?

YES () Date: Time: Signature:

Do you also voluntarily consent to this interview being digitally recorded?

YES () Date: Time: Signature:

Signature of the Researcher:

Date: Time: Signature

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Institutional Review Board
American University of Beirut

26 AUG 2015

APPROVED

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE

NGO Name: _____

Major Program in relief of Syrian Refugees: _____

Position of Representative: _____

Questions

1. Did your NGO perform evaluation at any time in its life cycle or in its relief to the Syrian refugees?
2. What was the primary purpose behind the evaluation?
 - a. What are the other purposes?
 - b. Is the purpose identified before launching the evaluation? What was the pre identified purpose? (Is it determined by donor or internal requirement, other?)
3. What is the evaluation methodology you use? (Is your evaluation desk review or field based?)
 - a. Why you have chosen this methodology?
4. At which level you perform evaluation, what do you evaluate? (Needs, process of your work, impact, or outputs)
5. Who performs the evaluation? And who pays for it?
 - a. Do you have the capacity for internal evaluation? Is the team trained (If Internal?)
 - b. Why you choose external evaluation? Is it costly? (If external)
6. Do you include beneficiaries in your evaluations? (Clients, do you interview them?)
 - a. Why do you include them or not?
7. What are the common limitations you encounter during evaluations?
8. How do you use the results of the evaluation?
 - a. Do you publish your evaluations and avail it to public?
 - b. Do you share and discuss the results among partners?

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