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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Empowering for dignity: best practices of community
WASH committees in North Lebanon**

N. Arab, M. Hilal, & L. Montell (Lebanon)

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Since March 2011, the Syrian crisis has displaced nine million individuals with an estimated 1.5 million in Lebanon. The government of Lebanon has consistently resisted the establishment of formal refugee camps, so the refugee population is widely dispersed. As a result, WASH sector assistance has been highly individualized, providing services to small scale settlements. With mostly impermanent infrastructure, maintenance and aid dependency have become primary concerns. Now that humanitarian funding is in decline, and no end in sight to the conflict in Syria, the current situation is not sustainable. In an effort to provide a measure of stability into a future of declining humanitarian support, SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL (SI) has initiated community WASH committees intended to promote ownership and restore dignity. Based on a stepped mobilisation methodology, the committees have generated results far beyond their projected scope. This paper outlines the main steps of a positive shift from service-providing to fully community-driven initiatives.

Origin of the crisis

Since March 2011, Syrian civilians have borne the brunt of escalating violence in their country, provoking waves of displacement totaling an estimated 9 million individuals. The scale of this population movement is unprecedented. As of November 2014, UN sources estimated that 1.5 million Syrians had fled into Lebanon, with actual numbers probably higher. Counted together with the Palestinian refugees, approximately one out of four in Lebanon is a refugee. (GoL and UN 2014, p.3)

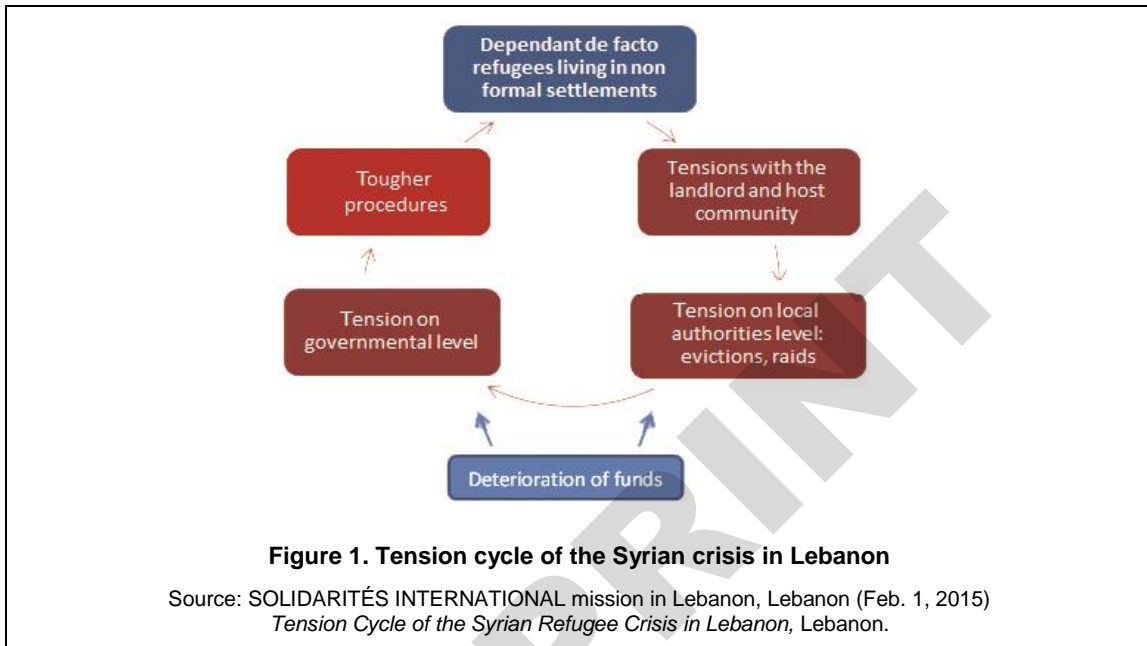
The living conditions faced by the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are varied, with perhaps half able to secure rental housing in urban zones. However, for lower income groups, forced into informal settlements and collective shelters (14% and 27% respectively), the WASH sector interventions are essential to their well-being and dignity. Tented settlements consist of grouped dwellings constructed of wood frames covered with plastic sheeting, while collective shelters range from basements, warehouses and uncompleted buildings, modified to accommodate inhabitants (UNHCR 2014).

Changing context

For four years, the government of Lebanon (GoL) has been consistently resisting the establishment of formal refugee camps. This aversion to permanent settlements can be explained largely as a function of the Lebanese experience with Palestinian refugees who have been in the country since 1948. Syrians in Lebanon are classified as “de facto refugees” due to the fact that the GoL has never ratified the UN refugee convention of 1951. These two phenomena have created a complex living and operating environment for Syrians and aid actors. No permanent materials have been permitted in the construction of settlement. Plus, according to the 2015 Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), refugees are scattered across 1500 localities, making service provision a significant logistical challenge (For more details, see *2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Lebanon*).

Before the Syrian crisis began, Lebanon had suffered from lack of resources and poor infrastructure. A commonly cited indicator relating to the WASH sector states that 92% of waste water goes untreated and is

discharged into waterways. The crisis has increased the pressure on natural resources and basic infrastructures, often enabling the blame to be focused upon the refugees. Increasing frustrations are, however, not difficult to understand; historic antagonisms between the two countries and recent movements of terrorist groups in the two territories standing as strong catalyzers. As a result, animosity on the part of the host community has swelled and evictions have become a common occurrence, creating an closed cycle of tensions between the two populations (see Figure 1).



Roll out of traditional WASH assistance and its challenges

For SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL (SI) and most aid actors, the delivery of WASH hardware was the focus during the previous phases of the crisis. As subsequent waves of refugees made their way across the border, this methodology was repeated to serve the newcomers. WASH hardware requires maintenance, particularly with the wear-and-tear of high volume usage of shared facilities. Although the program did include a strong hygiene promotion element, this did little to promote the facility maintenance and sense of ownership. Besides, after three years of crisis, SI assessed an urgent need to address aid dependency and support affected people in recovering their dignity, deteriorated by months of displacement. Furthermore, Lebanese law forbids refugees to work or receive assistance that would encourage them to remain in the country. Without the means of subsistence, many have turned to negative coping mechanisms (i.e., sale of belongings, prostitution, reduced food purchases) to offset the loss of their capital assets and savings. With humanitarian funding in decline and no end in sight to the conflict across the border, the situation was simply unsustainable.

Toward a sustainable response: CWC

To increase sustainability of the intervention, and enhance refugee autonomy and acceptance in the community, SI launched a program to establish community WASH committees (CWC) to take over maintenance of small scale infrastructure, solid waste management, and hygiene promotion. Employing the principles of good governance to the extent possible, it was expected that committee management would engage the communities toward a greater sense of ownership over their WASH facilities, reduce their dependence upon outside assistance, and offer a measure of sustainability that had been missing from programming during the emergency phase.

CWC methodology

Purpose

- Active beneficiary participation to ensure efficient self-management of WASH facilities.
- Efficient use of diminishing resources through small/medium scale WASH repairs by CWC volunteers.

- Empowering communities in Informal Settlement (IS) and Collective Shelter (CS) residents to conduct WASH related outreach services.
- Continued hygiene promotion activities conducted by CWC volunteers.
- Increased beneficiary resilience through community engagement.
- Provide an exit strategy to compensate for anticipated reductions in future humanitarian funding.

Composition of the CWC

In general, a CWC is comprised of 6 persons, but SI encourages flexibility depending on the needs of each site; it is very important that one of the CWC volunteers be literate; a chairperson (sometimes called the supervisor) will be chosen with the approval of the community.

Typically one committee will be established for each 25 HH; thus, it is possible to have two or even three CWC in a given site in order to accommodate community differences and provide adequate access to tools and spare parts.

CWC perform the following functions:

- 2 maintenance volunteers
- 2 hygiene promotion volunteers
- 1 water supply volunteer
- 1 waste management volunteer

Two types of kits were designed to meet the respective needs of Collective Shelter and Informal Settlement. The kit is composed of a toolbox with a set of appropriate tools, spare parts, and consumables to make small and medium repairs on the hardware that SI has installed. The spares and consumables are meant to cover a six-month period, with a planned distribution to replenish the supplies after the first six months. Then it is expected that the CWC will assume all operations, including collections for the purchase of necessary supplies.

Phases of CWC implementation

Information campaign: Introduces the program concept to the community representatives, landowners, and municipalities; ends with a scheduled date for the next phase.

Community assembly: Gathering that should include the maximum number of beneficiaries living in the site for a presentation on the program purpose and roles of the volunteers; should encourage volunteers to enlist for the committee.

Training: The CWC volunteers receive training according to their respective functions; maintenance volunteers attend technical training on maintenance and repairs with the aid of community mobilizers and professional plumbers; HP and waste management volunteers receive instruction from the SI Hygiene Promotion team (both groups also receive a general training on the best practices associated with public awareness campaigns; and a separate training session is provided to the supervisor to assist with the CWC management duties and the reporting of WASH related issues. In addition to the toolkit, CWC volunteers receive T-shirts, aprons for the women, and HP booklets to facilitate their work. Baseline data is collected in this phase to track the pre-program status of the WASH facilities and hygiene behavior.

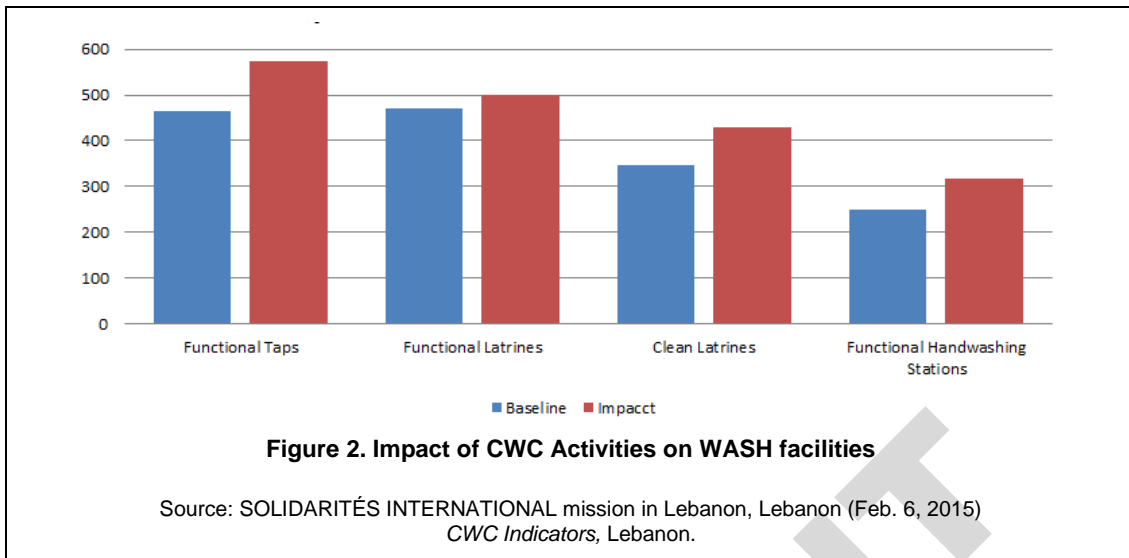
Toolkit distribution: Once the training phase is completed, the toolkit is issued to the committee, with a simple cross-check to ensure the contents are complete.

Follow-up: Typically three follow-up visits are scheduled for each site; however, in cases where the need is identified, more visits may be conducted to ensure that the committees are functioning according to the standard.

To date, 85 CWCs have been established in the larger collective and informal sites with a significant level of success (See Figure 3).

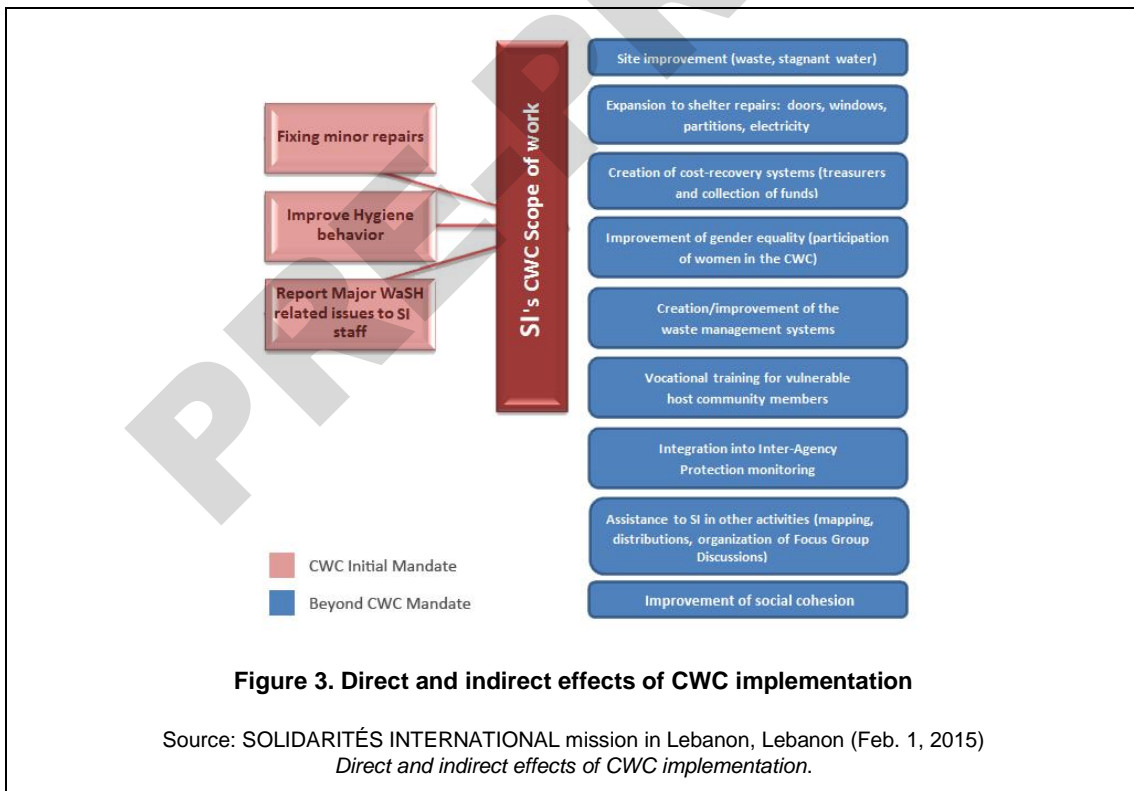
WASH management and beyond

Thus far, the CWC have demonstrated increased levels of community engagement. Small and medium sized repairs have been accomplished by the trained committee members and hygiene promotion activities have continued under their guidance.



As illustrated in Figure 2, Maintenance and hygiene in the sites were measurably improved after the establishment of CWC, which is understandable considering the fact that SI teams scheduled periodic visits for HP promotion and punctual repairs, while committee volunteers live at the site and therefore can perform maintenance and repairs on an as needed basis.

But there have also been several cases where the CWC have taken on a much more expanded role.



- Site improvement and creation/improvement of waste management systems:
Some CWC spontaneously set up clean up campaigns and addressed the issue of vectors and stagnant water. Significant behavioral changes were observed in several sites after only a few week of implementation.



Photograph 1. Site before CWC

Source: SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL



Photograph 2. Site after CWC

Source: SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL

- Expansion of the maintenance mandate:
There have been examples of CWC taking on shelter repairs such as doors windows, partitions, and even electricity.
- Creation of cost-recovery systems:
Several sites have appointed a treasurer to collect and hold funds in the event that larger repairs are required, demonstrating a move toward collective ownership of the facilities; an indicator of resilience. In another case, a CWC in a collective shelter (typically less cohesive than informal settlements because of the relative isolation of the inhabitants) organized a collection in order to pay a vulnerable Lebanese woman to clean the grounds. This served a dual purpose, providing subsistence for a vulnerable individual, and solid waste management for the surrounding area, an aspect often criticized by host communities (See Photograph 3).
- Improvement of social cohesion in the sites and with host communities:
Where relations between two adjacent communities had gone sour, the CWC process brought them together with a common purpose. Eventually, by working together, the differences became less pronounced and bonds of friendship were able to take hold. In Daraya (District of Dennie), CWC generated a non-existing dialogue between Syrians originated from different areas and with distinct political views. In three other sites, a decision was made by the residents to form mixed committees along with Lebanese from the neighboring host community. This helped turning infrastructure and spaces, originally patterned as dividers, into social connectors. Comparing baseline data with the first monitoring survey results, 54% of the sites have seen the internal tensions lessen and 41% of them have experienced better relations with host communities, according to the community representatives.
- Improvement of gender equality:
Participation of women as CWC volunteers were perceived positively in most sites, despite the conservative nature of the environment. This participation is a significant step toward the management of all specific needs in site.

A few other more rare indirect impacts were observed such as vocational training for vulnerable host community members and integration of the volunteers into Inter-Agency Protection monitoring. In most cases, CWC volunteers also became essential focal points for SI teams, providing a valuable and assistance in other activities (mapping, distributions, organisation of Focus Group Discussions).

Lessons learned

Building upon the experience of the first implementation phase, SI teams have been closely monitoring the various sites in order to respond to challenges in a timely manner.

Process: The final evaluation survey conducted in February 2015 revealed that 24% of beneficiaries were not well informed about the CWC and 39% were not involved in the selection process. This can perhaps be understood by looking at the dynamics of the collective sites where populations are rarely static and communications are problematic. The second generation of CWC will emphasize improved communications to include a higher percentage of residents. In Informal Settlements, interactions with the Shawishes, self-appointed site leaders, also pose a significant challenge for participatory approaches. SOLIDARITES

INTERNATIONAL teams found that Shawish involvement in some activities improved the dialogue with the residents and encouraged participation in site organization. Where tensions were found to discourage community involvement in a particular site, SI teams initiated the formation of an additional CWC. The approach was seen favorably by the residents who, during the final evaluation interview, expressed a satisfaction with the number of operational committees in their sites (6% would have preferred additional committees while 94% were satisfied).

Monitoring the effectiveness and acceptance of the CWC was also a challenge. A set of process/outcome/impact indicators along with collection tools (quantitative survey collected on ODK) had been set up at the beginning of the project. However, the actual repairs, needs and cleanliness was influenced by external factors that were difficult to neutralize (e.g., interventions by other NGOs). The SI M&E and program teams revised the tools in order to enhance proxy indicators to reflect resident perceptions with qualitative data collection methods. These tools are being tested and will be implemented in April 2015.

Impact: Because the field teams encountered high levels of illiteracy, they worked to develop more interactive tools such as visual aids and practical instruction. Initially, a rigorous training schedule had been established, but it threatened to interfere with precious livelihood opportunities, so SI teams reviewed their training plans to propose more flexible times and catch-up sessions. When the number of evictions sharply increased in early January 2015, the affected refugees had difficulty carrying on with the project. SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL responded by accompanying evicted beneficiaries to new locations to re-establish committees as soon as they were settled. This enabled continuity and encouraged other sites to carry on with CWC activities.

In 2015, CWCs will be formed at the outset of SI's intervention in a given site. In this way the committees will participate in the entire decision-making process, better understand the systems being installed, and take immediate ownership of the facilities. Although the establishment of CWCs is a step toward sustainability, it is far from autonomy. The circumstances of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon remain precarious at best. SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL, together with other humanitarian actors, will continue to advocate for increased efforts to provide the minimum living standards necessary for the refugees to wait out the crisis with health and dignity.

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Contact details

Nur Arab
Address: Al Arij Building, Dam wa Farz
Street, Tripoli, Lebanon
Tel: +961 70 759 196
Fax: + 33 (0)1 76 21 86 99
Email: am.cm.tripoli@solidarites-liban.org
www: www.solidarites.org

Leland Montell
Address: Al Arij Building, Dam wa Farz
Street, Tripoli, Lebanon
Tel: +961 71 581 712
Fax: + 33 (0)1 76 21 86 99
Email: field.coo.tripoli@solidarites-liban.org
www: www.solidarites.org