Workshop in Development Practice 2020-21

Formative Evaluation of MECI's Programs and M&E System

Final Report - May 7, 2021

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Acknowledgment

The SIPA team would like to acknowledge that our research would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and organizations. The team would like to specifically express gratitude for the continued guidance provided by Middle East Children's Institute board members and staff and SIPA Faculty.

Special thanks to Lola Grace, Lara Bouchedid, Nicholas Stravs, Mohammed Said, and Ru'a Rimawi from MECI, and to professors Julie Poncelet and Eugenia McGill, and Ilona Vinklerova from SIPA.

List of Acronyms

AWID - Association for Women's Rights in Development

IRB - Institutional Review Board

MECI - Middle East Children's Institute

M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PA - Palestinian Authority

SIPA - Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs

UN - United Nations

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

WA - Women's Association of Deir Ghassaneh

Executive Summary

Introduction

In November 2020, the Middle East Children's Institute (MECI), a non-profit organization with a presence in the West Bank area since 2007 and with a regional office based in Jordan since 2014, requested for a team of master's students from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) to evaluate its three main programs in Palestine, and to review the organization's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy.

MECI's three main programs in the villages of Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh in the West Bank area are the After-School Program, the University Scholarships, and the Women's Empowerment Program (present in Deir Ghassaneh). Currently, the organization reaches 60 percent of the children in these two villages, supports seven scholars, and provides jobs and training that empower women.

Evaluation Methods

The SIPA team conducted a comprehensive desk review of MECI documents and a literature review to provide context on the region and best practices in program implementation and M&E. The team developed a formative evaluation plan approved by Columbia University's Institutional Review Board. The SIPA team conducted interviews with different stakeholders and distributed three surveys among the program's beneficiaries. Finally, the team facilitated three sense-making meetings with MECI staff and board members.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- **MECI has built a sense of trust** between the locals and the organization and is already considered as an important part of the community. Moreover, a mindset change around inclusion and women's participation in the community is perceivable since MECI's arrival in the region. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MECI was proactive and launched its new program *Technovate to Educate* focusing on computer skills.
- The **After-School Program** has had a positive impact on how children develop their socio-emotional skills. Parents and alumni report having an increased sense of belonging, self-esteem, and motivation from the program. However, there is a mismatch between health outcomes and parent's perceptions of these outcomes.

- The support provided by the **University Scholarships Program** is life changing for the students. They feel close to MECI and motivated to excel academically and become role models in the community. Nevertheless, MECI must make the selection process more transparent and continue to offer guidance for those students who are not awarded a scholarship.
- The **Women's Association** has created crucial economic opportunities for almost 40 women from Deir Ghassaneh and has given them increased feelings of independence and satisfaction. MECI has successfully delivered instruction for relevant skills such as computer skills, but the WA still shows some dependence on MECI.
- MECI's biggest successes with its current **monitoring and evaluation system** are its frequent data collection and the communication and feedback process between the regional office and the board. While MECI has accumulated significant amounts of data, it is not standardized, which has led to a lack of continuity between reports. Additionally, The SIPA team recommends a transition from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (an externally validated psychometric currently used by MECI) to a more updated tool for measuring socio-emotional learning. The SIPA team has identified limitations for MECI to implement more complex M&E due to cost, time, and capacity of staff for the implementation and analysis.

The Middle East Children's Institute

MECI is a child-centered NGO that addresses the needs of children, young adults, and women in impoverished and conflict areas in the Middle East. MECI's programs create safe spaces to allow learning, healing, and development. They intend to empower the beneficiaries to promote positive change and become agents for peace in their communities.[1]

MECI was founded in 2005 and launched in 2007 in Beit Rima, a village in the West Bank (Palestine). It expanded to Jordan in 2013 and currently operates in 34 schools across Jordan and Palestine. It has reached over 25,000 children in its 15 years of operation. MECI offers different programs, including a Comprehensive After-School Program, a Summer Peace Camp, a University Scholarship Fund, a Women's Empowerment Program in Palestine, and an Informal Education Program for young adults in Jordan. MECI developed and implemented the programs to ensure beneficiaries have access to essential health, nutritional, and academic resources while stimulating healing and encouraging broader community engagement.[2] The organization believes a holistic approach is needed to break the vicious cycle of conflict; therefore programs support each other and are interdependent.[3]

MECI is registered as a Public Charity Organization (501c3) in the USA and as a public charity (utilite publique) in Switzerland, Fondation Middle East Children's Institute International. It operates two distinct programs through locally registered branches of the Swiss foundation, MECI Palestine and MECI Jordan, which hire local staff to run its programs.

Lola Nashashibi Grace is MECI's founder, Executive Chair, and on the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is made up of twelve experts in the fields of the Middle East region, education, and women empowerment, and two honorary founding members. The Board of Directors is supported by an Advisory Board. The organization has a regional director in Jordan, Lina Farouqi, and a program director in Palestine, Mohamed Said. In Switzerland, MECI has a partner organization, Fondation MECI International, where Lara Bouchedid is the Director of Operations and Marketing. In Jordan, 225 local staff are affiliated with MECI, including Ministry of Education teachers, school principals, and mobilizers. Also, MECI

[1] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Our Story." The Middle East Children's Institute. Accessed December 15, 2020. https://www.mecinstitute.org/our-story

[2] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Programs." The Middle East Children's Institute. Accessed December 15, 2020 https://www.mecinstitute.org/all-programs

[3] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Women Empowerment". The Middle East Children's Institute. Accessed December 15, 2020 https://www.mecinstitute.org/womens-empowerment

currently creates employment opportunities for 40 local women as counselors or through the Women's Association (WA), which makes MECI the second largest employer in the village.

According to the 2019-2020 Annual Report, the program budget was around 1.5 million USD.[4] A majority of the funds, 93 percent, was used to fund the programs with the remaining funds allocated for headquarters' expenses. The most extensive program budget is the informal education in Jordan, which accounts for 66 percent of the year budget and receives significant funding through its partnership with UNICEF.[5]

A. MECI programs in Palestine

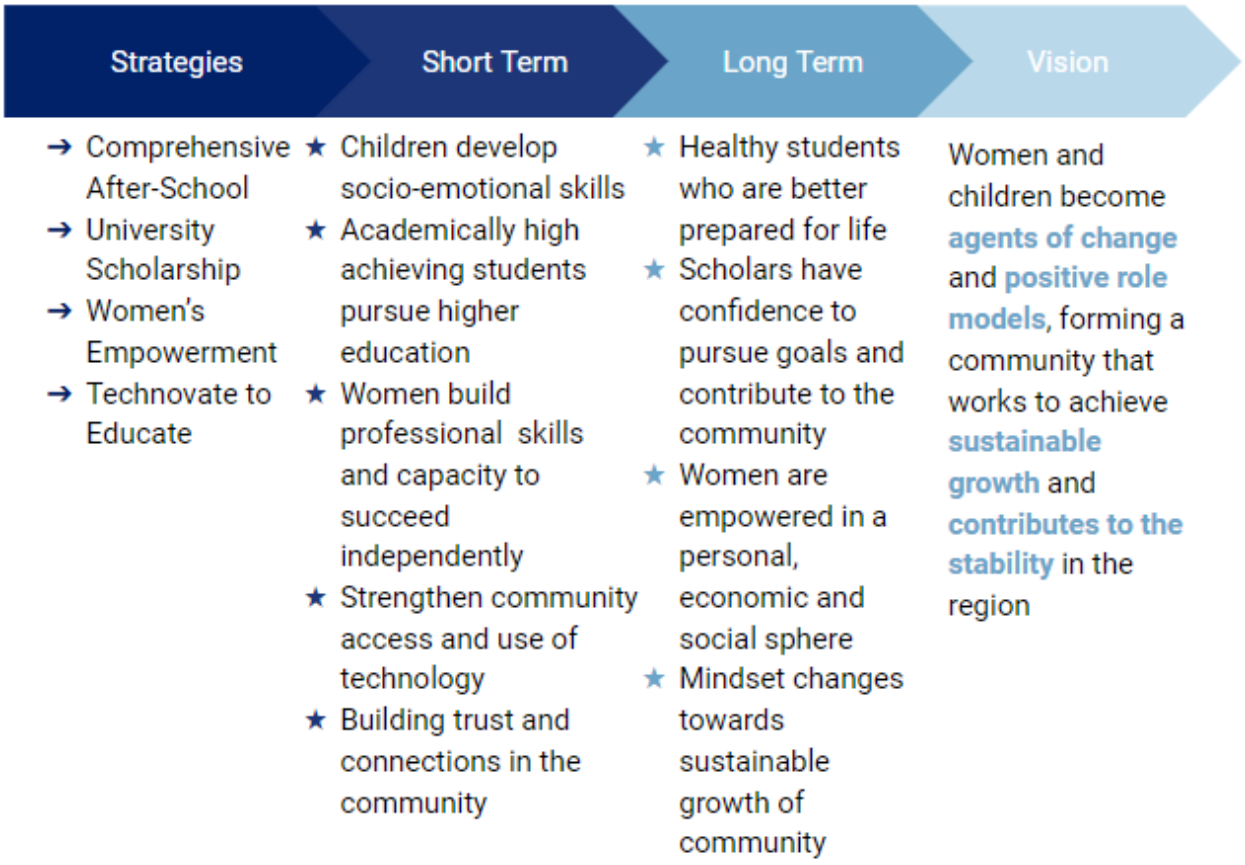
The purpose of the project is to evaluate three programs implemented by MECI in Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh, two villages located in Bani Zeid municipality, in the West Bank. MECI's child-centered community development model intends to impact the beneficiaries through a three-pillared approach: (1) children's health and education, (2) women's empowerment, and (3) community service. It pursues this goal through different programs which are briefly described.

The SIPA team created a comprehensive theory of change (ToC) of MECI's model (Appendix 1). A summarized version of the ToC is visualized in Figure A. The ToC was developed using MECI documents, focusing on their model, objectives, and processes, along with input from current staff and board members through a participatory workshop and visioning survey. The ToC was used to identify areas that the team wanted to explore further in our evaluation plan using surveys and interviews and revealed opportunities for improvement in MECI's model.

[4]Middle East Children Institute (MECI), *Hope Through Education 2019/2020 School Year Repor*t. 2020. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f63ae5ea9fd645b792982fc/t/5f8dd34328260610f0593bce/1603130190464/MECI+Annual+report+19-20.pdf

[5]Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Programs." https://www.mecinstitute.org/all-programs

Figure A: Theory of Change Summary



Source: SIPA team developed a ToC based on MECI's internal documentation, a visioning survey, and a remote outcome mapping workshop. Full Version in Appendix 1.

I. Comprehensive After-School Program

The After-School Program delivers academic tutoring and psychosocial support to children in grades one to twelve in five schools, three elementary and two secondary schools. MECI launched its pilot program in 2007 in one elementary girls' school in Beit Rima, and gradually expanded to all the schools in the villages. During the 2019 academic year, the After-School Program served 1,180 students, representing more than 60 percent of the students in the municipality.[6]

The program includes different subjects, ranging from Arabic to coding, and implements a life skills curriculum developed by MECI. This curriculum teaches students self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and strategies to protect themselves from harm, exploitation, and abuse.

[6] MECI, Hope Through Education 2019/2020 School Year Report.

Psychological support is provided through arts, sports, and music and drama therapy classes. The program's objective is for students to build capacities (i.e., resilience, teamwork, cooperation), to cope with trauma and stress, and to promote students' wellbeing. Additionally, small group and personal counseling is offered to children that present psychosocial or mental health issues. The counseling is delivered by MECI's full-time psychologists, who also refer children to outside providers when additional care is needed.

Aligned with the holistic approach of MECI, the program offers students basic medical checkups, including dental and vision care, provides nutritious snacks and meals, community service opportunities, and environmental awareness activities (i.e., recycling, litter collection, and gardening).

II. Summer Peace Camp

MECI has been running summer camps for village children since 2017. In 2018, the summer camp was redeveloped as a Summer Peace Camp to raise students as peacebuilders to contribute to the goal of bringing peace to the community. It offers various artistic, athletic, and community service activities for six weeks in July and August. It is open to children in all four schools in Beit Rima. The 2019 Summer Peace Camp served 350 students from elementary and secondary boys and girls schools.

The Peace Camp is organized and run by MECI's counselors, with MECI University Scholars as volunteers. Additionally, the WA provides participants with snacks and meals.

III. University Scholarship Fund

In order to continue to support MECI's graduates from the after-school program, MECI created the University Scholarship. Since 2015, MECI has selected female students based on their academic performance, community leadership, and financial needs. The selected students receive funds for their tuition ($3,500-$8,500 per year) and are asked to volunteer in MECI's Summer Peace Camp or After-School Program. In 2019, the scholarship program was opened to male students.[7]

As of today, 23 scholarships have been awarded[8]. Of those students, twelve have graduated and seven students are pursuing their degrees. The scholars study at or graduated from Bir Zeit University or Al-Quds

[7] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Programs." https://www.mecinstitute.org/all-programs

[8] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Impact." The Middle East Children's Institute. Accessed April 27, 2021. https://www.mecinstitute.org/model-outcomes

University, pursuing degrees in Medicine, Physics, Computer Science, English, Journalism, Law, Accounting, and Business Administration.[9]

IV. Women's Empowerment

MECI supports women's mobilization and financial independence, with a special focus on students' mothers, by creating job opportunities and offering diverse training. MECI hires the women as counselors for the after-school program and in collaboration with local women's associations. In collaboration with the Deir Ghassaneh Women's Association (WA), MECI creates employment opportunities for between 15 and 40 disadvantaged women, including widows, for a catering and bakery business that supplies snacks for the After-School Program and 300 daily meals for students at local schools. Workshops provide training in developing entrepreneurial skills to set up and manage businesses, and health and parenting topics. Additionally, MECI offers technical and financial support for women starting a new business.[10]

Moreover, recently an internet café was opened at the local WA to teach computer literacy to local village women and support students.

V. Technovate to Educate

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the humanitarian community and its ability to reach those most in need. MECI programs were affected by the pandemic and the organization reacted by moving the activities online (through Facebook and WhatsApp channels). However, new needs emerged increasing the urgency to adapt programs to deliver support in an already challenging environment.

In October 2020, MECI launched its new technology program "Technovate to Educate" in the secondary boys' school to respond directly to the challenges of e-learning and equip the community with the 21st-century skills necessary to progress and play an active role in society. The program was rolled out to the rest of the schools in December 2020.[11]

[9] MECI, *Hope Through Education 2019/2020 School Year Repor*t.

[10] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Programs." https://www.mecinstitute.org/all-programs

[11] Middle East Children Institute (MECI), *The Middle East Children'S Institute New Technology Program "Technovate To Educate",* 2020.

Background

The MECI programs that were evaluated operate in Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh, villages located in the highlands of the West Bank in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, northwest of Ramallah and Jerusalem. The two villages are part of the municipality of Bani Zeid al-Gharbiyya. In the early 2000s, following the Oslo Agreements, the municipality was integrated into Area A and remains under the civil and security administration of the Palestinian Authority. The area has experienced several violent events, including Israeli army activity during the second intifada[12] and afterwards.

Beit Rima has a population of 4,308 people, among who 574 were poor, according to the Palestinian census of 2017.[13] Deir Ghassaneh had a population of 1,682 people in 2017, among who 224 were poor. In Beit Rima, 43 percent of the population had not completed secondary education, while in Deir Ghassaneh it was 50 percent. [14] Unemployment rate was close to 10 percent in Beit Rima and close to 8 percent in Deir Ghassaneh. In both villages the majority of the population is Muslim.

The team conducted extensive research on the background in which MECI operates, which can be found in Appendix 2, which comprises: the Palestinian geopolitical context, third sector, education, psychosocial support, and women empowerment.

Local Context and COVID-19 Pandemic

The region: As of April 20, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported more than 311,000 cumulative cases in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, among which 30,015 were active at the moment, as well as 3,315 deaths.[15] The Palestinian Ministry of Health recognized that they had limited capacity to respond to the health emergency due to shortage of equipment and medication.[16] The government of Palestine announced a state of emergency on March 5, 2020 and requested the

[12] The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem(ARIJ). "The Israeli Army Ravages Beit Rima." Monitoring Israeli Colonizing Activities in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. 2001. http://poica.org/2001/11/the-israeli-army-ravages-beit-rima/

[13]The Palestinian 2017 Census defines defines "poor" as people whose expenditure on food and non-food items falls belows the official poverty line. The poverty line is at the median expenditure level of certain key items of the poorest 25 to 30 percent of households and is calculated every year.

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. *One Indicator Map*. Accessed December 1, 2020. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/1221/default.aspx

[14] The Palestinian 2017 census of 2017 reports the percentage of people whose highest level of completed studies is basic or who did not complete basic education with respect to the overall population aged 21 or above.

[15] World Health Organization (WHO). "Coronavirus disease (2019) in the Ocupied Palestinian Territory." Accessed April 21, 2021. https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiODJlYWM1YTEtNDAxZS00OTFlLThkZjktNDA1ODY2OGQ3NGJkIiwidCI6ImY2MTBjMGI3LWJkMjQtNGIzOS04MTBiLTNkYzI4MGFmYjU5MCIsImMiOjh9

[16]Moss, Dana, and Ghada Majadle. 2020. "Battling COVID-19 In The Occupied Palestinian Territory." *The Lancet Global Health* 8 (9): e1127-e1128. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(20)30237-0

closure of all schools and universities to prevent the spread of COVID. The closures include 3,037 schools and 2,017 kindergartens, affecting a total of 1,430,000 children in the West Bank and Gaza.

MECI context: One of the sectors most significantly affected by closures due to COVID-19 in Palestine is education, with childcare facilities, schools, colleges, universities, and training centers all shut down in March 2020 and transitioning to online or distance learning.[17] Children in Palestine face many obstacles to e-learning, including infrastructure, weak internet networks, power outages, insufficient awareness among students and their families on the importance of e-learning, and lack of access to technology, with only 37% of households having access to computers.[18]

MECI response: MECI responded to the emerging needs in the area due to the COVID-19 pandemic by launching a new technology program, "Technovate to Education," in October 2020. This program was intended to respond directly to the challenges of e-learning and to equip the community with the 21st century skills necessary to progress and to play an active role in the society.

Literature Review

This section presents a summary of the comprehensive literature review conducted by the SIPA team. The research areas included are After-School Programming, Women's Empowerment, Psychosocial Support, and Community Engagement, all in conflict-affected contexts. The complete version of it can be found in Appendix 3.

B. After School Programming in Palestine

Providing youth with a set of life skills that enables them to understand themselves and their environment, to make responsible choices, and to plan and manage life transitions is of particular importance in the MENA region, and Palestine, in particular.[19] Research on the barriers of learning in the region are structural and cultural, such as collectivist culture, or a culture of giving one group priority over the individuals within it, and a paternal authority structure. According to the World Bank, another barrier to holistic learning is strong ideals among adolescents on completing higher levels of education and obtaining high-status jobs and the perception that without a college or advanced degree chances of

[17] Education Cluster, *Advocacy Brief – COVID 19 Response*. 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/education-cluster-advocacy-brief-covid-19-response

[18] UNESCO. "COVID-19 in Palestine: how distance learning will help student[s] continue education". UNESCO. Accessed April 21, 2021 https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-palestine-how-distance-learning-will-help-student-continue-education

[19] Buchert, Lene. "Learning Needs And Life Skills For Youth: An Introduction". *International Review Of Education* 60, no. 2 (2014): 163-176. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-014-9431-3

getting a good job are severely reduced.[20] Given these cultural and economic hardships in the region, there is evidence from other programs that a holistic, psychosocial approach to after-school programming can improve student wellbeing.

The literature revealed limited evidence on effective implementation of after-school programming in conflict-affected contexts but there is research on school-based interventions in Palestine or similar contexts. Communal support and caring were cited as one key factor in building resilience within Palestinian society. Research shows that familial and development factors, such as supportive parenting combined with flexible and multiple coping strategies, are particularly helpful in establishing resilience and supporting mental health in Palestinian children.[21]

Research also points to the importance of activities to support secondary stakeholders beyond children, such as parents, teachers, community members, and counselors who implement the interventions, as key to the successful school-based interventions. In addition, a UNICEF project to develop a child protection curriculum in social work schools in Palestine pointed to the importance of family, community, and the social welfare system in developing protective resources for children and youth in Palestine.[22]

The review also identified some tools piloted in emergency contexts that measure social emotional learning. For example, the Student Learning in Emergency Checklist[23], which assesses children's perceptions of safety, self-regulation, self-efficacy, social support, academic functioning, and feelings of hope in the context of school-based psychosocial interventions. Overall, the literature pointed to the importance of collecting qualitative data alongside quantitative data, to help provide a more nuanced picture of a complex context, and engaging beneficiaries in data collection as important elements to responding to the complexity of the fragile contexts.[24]

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[20] World Bank, *Aspirations on Hold?: Young Lives in the West Bank and Gaza*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012. *https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26875*

[21] Constandinides, Despina, Sarah Kamens, Bassam Marshoud, and Fathy Flefel. "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones: Effects Of A School-Based Intervention For Palestinian Children." *Peace And Conflict: Journal Of Peace Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2011): 270-302. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2011.587174

[22] Costello, Susie, Teresia Kanyi, and Matthew Dalling. "Child Protection And Family Group Conferencing Curriculum For Social Workers In Palestine." *Critical And Radical Social Work* 7, no. 2 (2019): 173-188. https://doi.org/10.1332/204986019x15646885499989

[23] Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). "Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (SLEC)." Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). Accessed April 21, 2021. https://inee.org/resources/student-learning-emergency-checklist-slec?webform_id=toolkit_resources

[24] Department for International Development (DFID). Working Effectively in Conflict-affected and Fragile Situations: Briefing Paper D: Promoting Non-discrimination. DFID, 2010. https://gsdrc.org/document-library/working-effectively-in-conflict-affected-and-fragile-situations-briefing-paper-d-promoting-non-discrimination/

C. Psychosocial Support Programming

Palestinians are at high risk for mental health distress and disorder, for which political and military violence and economic hardship are major contributing factors.[25] A study in 2010 showed that exposure to armed conflict has adverse effects on Palestinian children's mental health, wellbeing, and risk behavior.[26] In this context, the need for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is well documented; however, evidence on effective programming to provide this support is not extensive in the literature.[27] The gap in broad based community interventions is extensive in the Middle East, and studies reveal mixed results of these interventions.[28]

Recently, group-based non-specialized interventions - as an alternative to individual specialized clinical treatments - have been beneficial in humanitarian settings. These types of interventions allow a holistic approach to MHPSS, which recognizes the role of social context on mental health and psychological wellbeing.[29] Interventions need to start with a thorough assessment of the social structure that protects the children or harms them and focuses on building the communities' capacity with training and mentoring to make responses more effective.[30]

Key programmatic interventions identified in the literature include generating child-friendly spaces for structured play and recreation, which can be combined with other health skills or parental support interventions, and building child strength and resilience. The community approach is especially important in Palestine due to the cultural notion of resilience in the Palestinian society.[31] The literature also indicates

[25] Shawahin, Lamise, and Ayşe Çiftçi. "Counseling And Mental Health Care In Palestine." *Journal Of Counseling & Development* 90, no. 3 (2012): 378-382. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00048.x

[26] Harel-Fisch, Yossi, Qasrowi Radwan, Sophie D. Walsh, Avital Laufer, Gabriel Amitai, Haya Fogel-Grinvald, and Ziad Abdeen. "Psychosocial Outcomes Related to Subjective Threat from Armed Conflict Events (STACE): Findings from the Israeli-Palestinian Cross-Cultural HBSC Study". *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34, no. 9 (2010): 623-638. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.12.007

[27] Kaufmann, Deborah, *Children in Emergencies : Psychosocial Support as a Holistic Protection Mechanism*. Columbia University, 2016. https://inee.org/resources/children-emergencies-psychosocial-support-holistic-protection-mechanism

[28] Elrha. *Review and Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Intervention in Humanitarian Settings*. 2021. https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MHPSS-research-review-2021.pdf

[29] Wood, Benjamin Mitchell, and Per Kallestrup. "A Review of Non-Specialised, Group-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions in Displaced Populations." *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care* 14, no. 3 (2018): 347–59. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmhsc-02-2018-0010

[30] Kaufmann, *Children in Emergencies*. https://inee.org/resources/children-emergencies-psychosocial-support-holistic-protection-mechanism

[31] Constandinides, Despina, Sarah Kamens, Bassam Marshoud, and Fathy Flefel. "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones: Effects Of A School-Based Intervention For Palestinian Children." *Peace And Conflict: Journal Of Peace Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2011): 270-302. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2011.587174

that developing community-based interventions that enhance parental support, or from other significant adults, is essential to generate effects in children's mental health.

According to a recent review and assessment of MHPSS in humanitarian settings, using adequate measures that are aligned to the intended outcomes of MHPSS programs and adequate to the context is important.[32] Adequate measurement tools will lead to understanding the true effect of MHPSS interventions and improving programs. Finally, in efforts to standardize the measurement of MHPSS interventions, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee published a common framework to measure progress in humanitarian settings, which lists different outcomes and indicators that programs could measure.[33]

D. Women's Empowerment Programming

In the MENA region, women tend to have less access to education and work, fewer opportunities to inherit, limited access to courts, and have higher levels of maternal mortality. These inequalities are seen in the West Bank, where women have less access to and lower participation in the labor market compared to men, and experience employment discrimination. Women are further inhibited by mobility restrictions within the West Bank, lack of vocational and technical training, and a weak social safety net that is not supportive of women's entrepreneurship[34]. Empowerment is also difficult because of "de-development" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. De-development, caused by Israeli occupation, has created structural limitations, patriarchal domination and the gender gap, and spatial and social fragmentation[35].

Effective empowerment strategies increase women's power as different categories

- Power to- a woman or girl's ability to make decisions and act on them
- Power within- a woman or girl's sense of self-esteem, dignity, and self-worth

[32] Elrha. *Review and Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Intervention in Humanitarian Settings*. 2021. https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MHPSS-research-review-2021.pdf

[33] Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings: A Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Geneva: IASC, 2017. https://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/IASC_MHPSS_M_E_30.03.2017.pdf?ua=1

[34] UN Women, Women's Economic Empowerment through Decent Work. Jerusalem: UN Women, 2012. https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field office palestine/attachments/publications/2019/4/wee_fact sheet_25 march_final.pdf?la=en&vs=114

[35] Kuttab, Eileen. "Empowerment As Resistance: Conceptualizing Palestinian Women's Empowerment." Development 53, no. 2 (2010): 247-253. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2010.22

- Power with- a woman or girls' strength gained from solidarity, collective action or mutual support[36]

Women's empowerment is fundamentally about the process of challenging and changing existing power structures to create a more equitable distribution. It requires a shift in individual psychology and societal norms. Studies have shown that empowerment programs are most effective when women organize and act collectively to amplify and support each other and their community. In this way, empowerment is both a tool and an objective[37]. Two empowerment considerations that are relevant especially in the MENA region is the patriarchal structure and religion[38]. Men are key actors in women's empowerment because they often act as barriers to women and girls. Their opinions and actions as fathers, partners, and community leaders can be critical. This means any action to address women empowerment must consider the role of men[39].

Assessing the impact of women's empowerment programs is difficult because empowerment is steeped in the social and cultural context of a country; benchmarks and measurements are not universal. Empowerment is a constantly iterative and non-linear process, which also makes it difficult to measure using traditional techniques[40]. M&E is so complex that the Association for Women's Rights In Development recently found that over half of Millenium Development Goal 3 Fund grantees use more than four M&E approaches. The most successful approaches use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, along with a small but effective set of indicators that are specific, measurable, and relevant[41].

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[36] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. What Gets Measured Matters: A Methods Note for Measuring Women and Girls' Empowerment. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019. https://www.gatesgenderequalitytoolbox.org/wp-content/uploads/BMGF_Methods-Note-Measuring-Empowerment-1.pdf

[37] Cornwall, Andrea. "Women's Empowerment: What Works?" *Journal of International Development* 28, no. 313 (2016): 342–59. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210

[38] Imam, Ayesha. *The Devil Is in the Details: At the Nexus of Development, Women's Rights, and Religious Fundamentalisms*. Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2015. http://awdflibrary.org/handle/123456789/125

[39] Eerdewijk, Anouka Van, Franz Wong, Chloe Vaast, Julie Newton, Marcelo Tyszler, and Amy Pennington. *White Paper: A Conceptual Model of Women and Girls' Empowerment*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), 2017. https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BMGF_KIT_WhitePaper_web-1.pdf

[40] Kuttab, "Empowerment" 247-253

[41] Batliwala, Srilatha. "Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for Women's Rights: Thirteen Insights for Women's Organizations," 2011. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/strengthening_monitoring_nad_evaluation_-_thirteen_insights.pdf

E. Community Engagement Programming

Community engagement programs are very diverse in methods and content. The most relevant programmatic approaches to community engagement include community-based service learning[42], participatory action research[43], or summer camps.[44] These approaches to community engagement can be based on individual contribution (e.g., hours of individual volunteering) or joint action, with a coordinated group engaging in a common task (e.g., participatory action research).

Community service programs may focus on a wide range of interconnected activities in different fields such as music, arts, health, participatory governance, activities related to digital literacy, 21st century skills, or clean-ups of public spaces.

Research on community engagement programs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is limited. Some research suggest that the inflow of international funding following the Oslo Agreements has notably decreased social capital in the form of traditional volunteering and community engagement.[45] [46] Traditional forms of volunteer community engagement have been progressively substituted with Palestinian Authority and NGO professionals. Additionally, many NGOs have reduced grassroot connections, constrained by administrative and reporting requirements of international donors and the Palestinian Authority[47]. To mitigate this deficiency, joint ownership by beneficiaries can be promoted through local need assessments, local partnerships, as well as the use of local procurement systems, in

[42] There is significant variation in the definition of service learning among researchers and practitioners, but the common ground is that it is a pedagogy which combines service and learning objectives.

Blouin, David D., and Evelyn M. Perry. 2009. "Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-Based Organizations' Perspectives On Service Learning". *Teaching Sociology* 37 (2): 120-135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055x0903700201

[43] Participatory Action Research (PAR) "is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for [a range of] issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it."

Kindon, Sara Louise, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London: Routledge, 2007.

[44] Bircher, Lisa S., and Bonnie Sansenbaugher. "Our OASIS: An Elementary Science Summer Day Camp Uses High School Mentors to Get Students Excited about Science." *Science and Children* 54, no. 7 (2017): 46–50. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26387094

[45] Schulz, Michael, and Lina Suleiman. "Palestinian NGOs' Changed Work Dynamics: Before, During, and beyond the Oslo Process." *Middle East Critique 29*, no. 4 (2020): 433–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1826735

[46] Awad, Mohammad. "International Funding to Palestinian NGOs and Its Impact on Social Capital in the West Bank." *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal* 18, no. 1 (2013). https://innovation.cc/scholarly-style/2013_18_1_10_awad_palestinian-gov.pdf

[47] Schulz, Michael, and Lina Suleiman, "Palestinian NGOs", 433–99.

line with known best practices like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness[48].

Holistic approaches for community development, like MECI's model, rely on the assumption that schooling by itself is necessary, but not sufficient for achieving community development and peacebuilding goals. Research[49] points out that in the context of poverty and oppression of the West Bank, the effects of schooling on cognitive development are limited, compared to those found in western countries or associated with age.

In the West Bank, the non-profit organization, Ruwwad runs a youth organizing program to promote civic engagement among youth through scholarships linked to service-learning.[50]

Community service activities might be designed to address immediate community needs, but overall, a key programmatic outcome of community service is the improvement in social capital among community members. Some research defines social capital as "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit".[51] Research also discusses a possible link between social capital and economic development, without reaching a clear consensus on the extent of this relation.[52]

Researchers and practitioners alike have frequently debated the best ways to measure social capital.[53] In 2020, Robert D. Putnam developed a Social Capital Index primarily using figures of community organizations as a proxy[54], but other authors have also used community volunteering[55] [56] as well as other

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[48] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*. OECD, 2008. https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf

[49] Jabr, Dua, and Sorel Cahan. "Schooling Effects on Cognitive Development in a Difficult Environment: the Case of Refugee Camps in the West Bank." *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 24, no. 2 (2014): 165–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2014.900949

[50] Ruwwad. "Palestine - Areas of Impact." Ruwwad. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://ruwwad.ngo/where-we-work/3/areas.

[51] Putnam, Robert D. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65-78. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002

[52] Häuberer, Julia. "Introducing the Civic Perspective on Social Capital -- Robert D. Putnam's Concept of Social Capital." In *Social Capital Theory: Towards a Methodological Foundation*, 53–86. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92646-9_3

[53] Häuberer, "Introducing the Civic Perspective on Social Capital", 53–86.

[54] Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[55] Casey, Terrence, and Kevin Christ. "Social Capital and Economic Performance in the American States." *Social Science Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2005): 826–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0038-4941.2005.00358.x

[56] van Oorschot, Wim, Wil Arts, and John Gelissen. "Social Capital in Europe: Measurement and Social and Regional Distribution of a Multifaceted Phenomenon." *Acta Sociologica* 49, no. 2 (2006): 149–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699306064770

variables such as trust, number of civil society organizations, corruption indexes, economic freedom[57] and many others[58]. However, most of these measurement proposals are designed for European or North American communities, which may limit their fit in other regions, especially conflict-heavy contexts like the West Bank. Some of the toolkits suggested in this report include components that can be used for measuring social capital and other community engagement outcomes.

Objectives and Methodology

A. Objectives

There are two main objectives for this project, as defined by the SIPA team and MECI client, they are:

- To conduct a **formative evaluation**[59] **of the MECI model,** focusing on the After-School, Women's Empowerment and University Scholarship Programs[60] to inform and guide improvements to the programs' design and implementation of these programs in alignment with current academic and programmatic best practices.
- To **evaluate MECI's monitoring and evaluation system** and the extent that it is meeting MECI's informational needs.

B. Key Evaluation Questions

According to the project objectives and description, this report intends to respond to the following key evaluation questions:

1. What are the outcomes and impacts of MECI's After-School, Women's Empowerment and University Scholarship Programs on its beneficiaries in Bani Zeid (participating children, women and community)?
2. What components of these three programs in Bani Zeid contribute to the observed outcomes with beneficiary children, women and the community?

[57] Bjørnskov, Christian. "The Happy Few: Cross–Country Evidence on Social Capital and Life Satisfaction." *Kyklos* 56, no. 1 (2003): 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6435.00207.

[58] Häuberer, "Introducing the Civic Perspective on Social Capital", 53–86.

[59] A formative evaluation aims to improve a program, proposing adjustments in the design or implementation of the program. A formative evaluation does not assess the overall merit or worth of a program.

[60] These three programs are based on our understanding of the Preliminary Terms of Reference, further refinement on the programs included in the evaluation will be done based on conversations with the MECI Committee.

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the M&E system that MECI has implemented for the three evaluated programs?

C. Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the formative evaluation is to identify strategies to improve the design, implementation, and, ultimately, the impacts of MECI's After-School, Women Empowerment, and University Scholarship Programs in Bani Zeid. Also, to point to actionable recommendations to improve and update the M&E system.

The findings from the evaluation will provide helpful guidance for the decisions of the MECI's Board of Directors and key managers on innovations to the programs, their implementation, and M&E system, intending to serve target beneficiaries better and support expanding to other locations.

D. Data Collection Methods

The Sipa Team developed data collection tools including a visioning survey distributed to MECI's Board and selected staff, an outcome mapping workshop, and surveys for program beneficiaries. To increase the validity of findings, the SIPA team used a data cross-checking technique by relying on diverse data collection mechanisms, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods implemented with diverse program stakeholders.[61]

Data collection methods used for this project are described in Table A.

Table A: Data Collection Methods

Tool	Description	Tool Implementation	# responses / participants
Visioning survey for MECI staff and board members	Initial survey with 14 questions to capture insights about programmatic strategies, intended short-term, and medium-term outcomes of MECI. The data collected served to draft a preliminary ToC for MECI, in preparation for the remote outcome mapping workshop.	Programmed and analyzed by the SIPA team using Google forms. Survey link distributed by MECI in January 2021.	11 responses

[61] Using different data collection methods is also referred to as triangulation in data collection. Data collection triangulation is meant to increase the internal validity of the evaluation, i.e. to make the conclusions more reliable for the particular setting and scope of the evaluation. The team triangulated data across different data collection tools, sources of information (different stakeholders involved) and researchers (e.g., at least two students conducted each interview).

Table A: Data Collection Methods

Remote outcome mapping workshop MECI staff and board members	Participatory workshop to collectively engage key stakeholders in a visioning process, to develop a shared vision of what MECI expects to achieve through its programs. The exercise helped to verify information and details in the drafted ToC.	The workshop consisted of a 2 hour session facilitated by the SIPA team conducted on Zoom on Feb 9, 2021..	7 participants
Semi structured interviews with MECI staff, head of WA, board members, local and national officials.	Informational interviews to understand MECI's operational model and program, major changes achieved and challenges.	Each interview was 1 hour-long and conducted on Zoom with the assistance of a translator (if applicable) during February and March 2021. Interviews were scheduled by MECI.	15 interviewees. See a full list on Technical Appendix 4.
Survey for after-school alumni and university scholars	Digital survey with 17 questions to get insights from beneficiaries of the After-School Program and the University Scholar Program.	Programmed and analyzed in Qualtrics. The survey link was distributed by MECI in March 2021.	29 respondents finished the survey (the number of responses to each question may vary). The current number of scholarships awarded is 23[62]. The number of after-school alumni is not available.
Survey for women in the Women's Association	Digital survey with 9 questions to get insights from beneficiaries of the Women's Empowerment's Program.	Programmed and analyzed in Qualtrics by the SIPA team. The survey link was distributed by MECI in March 2021.	52 respondents finished the survey (the number of responses to each question may vary). The updated number of women in the association is not available.
Survey for parents with children in the After-School Program	Digital survey with 8 questions to get indirect insights from beneficiaries of the After-School Program.	Programmed and analyzed in Qualtrics by the SIPA team. The survey link was distributed by MECI in March 2021.	89 respondents finished the survey (the number of responses to each question may vary). MECI estimated a population of 1,233 parents based on the number of students.

[62] Middle East Children Institute (MECI). "Impact." https://www.mecinstitute.org/model-outcomes

E. Limitations

The evaluation process faced challenges and constraints that need to be acknowledged to interpret the findings and recommendations. The major constraints to the project are related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the remote working environment and the resulting limited direct access to beneficiaries, and time.

The SIPA team could not travel to the West Bank due to the mobility restrictions associated with the pandemic. Therefore, the team could not directly observe program operations and experienced specific challenges to understanding the local context; none of the team members had previous experience in the West Bank. To overcome this challenge, the team relied on indirect sources of information, such as background research, a literature review and desk review of MECI documents, and staff interviews.

All data collection was done remotely with direct assistance from local MECI staff, including the distribution of surveys and selecting interviewees. While this data collection procedure was the best possible means of carrying out the evaluation, it might be a possible source of bias, as beneficiaries who are close to MECI or more familiar with technology were more likely to respond. This possible self-selection challenges the representativity of the sample since the SIPA team is more likely to have heard success stories than receive insights from people who were less pleased with MECI.

There was limited confidentiality with the interviews as the SIPA team relied on a local translator who was a current recipient of MECI's scholarship. The team tried to mitigate these challenges by reaching stakeholders external to MECI (such as the mayor of Beni Zaid and the Ministry of Education) and by surveying alumni of the after-school program (over the age of 18 years).

The project's short timeline was also a constraint. The project's calendar and the fixed end date could not easily adapt to the changing circumstances on the ground, such as a COVID-19 outbreak in the area where interviewees resided. Additionally, the evaluation required Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the participant recruitment and data collection process and tools to ensure that it did not harm vulnerable populations. Data collection tools could only be implemented once approved by IRB and could not be adapted to changing circumstances. Therefore, surveys and interviews were conducted in a moment of uncertainty, which increased the difficulty of reaching respondents and might have conditioned their responses. In a severe health crisis, people may be prone to pessimistic perspectives on health outcomes or focused on short-term challenges rather than systemic preconditions.

Furthermore, the team could not directly reach beneficiaries of MECI programs who were younger than 18 years old as per IRB research limitations with underage populations. Not being able to engage

directly with the beneficiaries of the After-School Program, the cornerstone of MECI's model is a significant limitation to the evaluation. Given the project context in Palestine and the global pandemic, it would have been difficult to engage children and adolescents in research. Surveying children or adolescents would also require a lengthy process of IRB approval that did not suit the evaluation timeline.

F. Institutional Review Board Process

The IRB review is required for any study that includes gathering or analyzing personally identifiable information or other sensitive data, gathering information from children or other vulnerable groups, or gathering information on sensitive topics. The SIPA team went through the IRB review process to gain access to beneficiaries of MECI's programs, which the team considered critical to inform the evaluation.

To put together all the necessary documents, the SIPA team collaborated closely with MECI and was able to get approval for the project in time for the SIPA team to proceed with data collection.

Findings

A. Overall Findings

The evaluation demonstrates a shared understanding of MECI's objectives across staff (e.g., counselors and psychologists) and the board and headquarters. Everyone at MECI agrees on the objectives for the model's three-pillared approach: to build life skills in children (e.g., leadership, confidence, decision-making, problem-solving, opinions), the empowerment of women and children to support the growth of the community as a whole, and supporting overall health and wellbeing by providing emotional support and creating safe spaces for people to congregate.

According to the evaluation findings, triangulated from multiple data collection methods and sources, **MECI successfully builds trust in the community and supports familial attitudes between those in the villages and program**. Trust better enables the program to deliver its services. In accordance with the literature for effective psychosocial support, the hiring of local staff appears to be essential in building this trust in addition to MECI's capacity to adapt the programming based on the community needs and stakeholders' feedback.

"What I like about the MECI project, and what makes it unique, is that it is the only project in Palestine that cares about children in all aspects. Especially in recent years, [MECI] became more involved and had

more results in serving the local community, which helped it be more positive and beneficial than if it had been managed by any other institution." - Parent of child in the After-School Program

"What makes the MECI scholarship program special is that you grow up as a part of MECI's family. You don't grow up as a scholar, you grow up as a kid."- Former MECI Student and Scholar

"I have a very strong relationship with Mohammed who is very kind and communicative, always hearing our problems and helping us find solutions. He is like a friend to us, not just a supervisor and we face all problems as a family, working together to overcome challenges. No one faces something alone." - Former MECI Student and Scholar

The evaluation also revealed that MECI involves its beneficiaries in programming and data collection to ensure feedback loops and adapt programs according to the context. This responsive and adaptive approach is at the core of MECI's organizational values and contributes significantly to generating trust. Open feedback loops and informal style of communication between MECI staff and community members, such as impromptu Whatsapp messages and phone calls with parents to check in, help to establish trust and ensure the responsiveness and adaptability of the programs. This finding around regular communication and engagement with the local community as key ingredients to building familial feelings of trust emerged in most of the interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders. A word cloud representing the key feelings of trust that came out of the interviews can be found in Appendix 6.

"Meci is giving all the support they can and don't say no and are in continuous communication, offering support and help whenever needed."- Mayor of Beni Zaid

An example of the adaptiveness and flexibility of MECI's model is the dynamic and rapid response to COVID-19, which also helped nurture ongoing feelings of trust in the community. MECI's "Technovate" program responded to the needs of the community around a lack of access to the internet and technology necessary to continue MECI's services online and education programming. In addition, MECI provided training in computer skills to students, parents, counselors, and community members in the internet cafe housed at the WA. Another example of MECI's adaptive model when they helped the town of Beit Rima access ventilators to support its patients, meeting an essential need of the community through activity outside of MECI's scope of work and further built the communities' trust in them as being responsive to local needs.

Finally, the evaluation shows that MECI's activities successfully change the mindset of individuals (i.e., instilling a positive sense of confidence in scholars and students) and the community. The programming

has aided in community-level mindset shifts thanks to effective strategies like co-ed activities, visiting and engaging with elders and children with disabilities, and having students demonstrate their skills at celebrations and festivals for the community. Changing taboos and mindsets have been possible due to the community's trust in MECI.

B. After-School Program Findings

MECI staff excel at providing students with social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health support. More than eight out of ten parents or alumni stated that MECI improved their child's self-esteem, leadership skills, respect for others and empathy, capacity to maintain healthy relationships, and communication skills. Remarkably, 96 percent of parents report MECI helped their children be more self-reliant.

The evaluation demonstrates that the self-expression activities designed to support the development of students' non-academic skills (i.e., art, music, and theater) were successful in shifting both parent's and children's focus away from prioritizing purely academic achievement. Sports and arts activities were remembered more frequently by parents and alumni over tutoring activities. Further, the May 2018 Evaluation Report shared by MECI presents evidence that some of the students who participate in the After-School Program participate in the after-school component.

"If you don't get very high grades, you are perceived by parents and families as a failure. It is very hard for a kid to have this kind of pressure. MECI came and gave kids a new idea. What matters is not just grades. If you know how to dance, if you know how to sing, if you know how to draw, that is a great talent."
– MECI After-school Alumni

MECI adapts programs based on feedback from program beneficiaries. As captured in monthly reports from counselors, MECI actively solicits feedback from program beneficiaries and uses it to adapt their After-School Program according to local needs. In one case, monthly reports from counselors noted that activities in the After-School Program needed to be more engaging for students and updated its contents to make them more appealing.

MECI beneficiaries did not perceive receiving significant physical health support. According to the surveys, one quarter (25 percent) of alumni respondents noted that MECI did not reduce health problems or improve health habits. Parents also reported low agreement with health outcomes and stated the need to better support healthy eating habits. According to the sense-making process with MECI, this finding

may be attributed to MECI not effectively communicating the relationship between program activities (e.g., sports, dance) and receiving healthy meals, and health outcomes.

Another challenge that affected MECI's program implementation was border control closures impeding some MECI staff from entering the villages, which is a systemic issue outside of MECI's control. In addition, the interviews revealed that one of the primary reasons that children in the village did not participate in the program was because they live far away and it is difficult for them to physically get to the program.

C. University Scholarship Findings

MECI scholarships make a significant material difference in the lives of the recipients, who would otherwise face serious difficulties to pay for the cost of higher education. This finding was very salient both in interviews and surveys, with more than 90 percent of scholars surveyed declaring that the scholarship financial aid was sufficient to meet their needs.

"[I] saw the scholarships as a rescue from the stress [I] was feeling about paying for university" - University Scholar

"It is such a great rescue to have the scholarships pay not just the university fees, but also transportation." - University Scholar

Additionally, **MECI maintains strong and regular communications with the scholars that generates a feeling of trust and support**. In the interviews, scholars expressed that the fact that MECI believed in them makes them feel motivated both for academic and personal life[63].

"[MECI] makes you know that people believe in you, it gives you motivation in your life." - University Scholar

The scholarship program also motivates its beneficiaries to participate in community service activities. In fact, all interviewed scholars expressed this result and 70 percent of scholars surveyed declared that they had become more engaged with the local community in Beni Zaid after being awarded the scholarship. Most scholars also report that participation in the Summer Peace Camp was useful for their personal development (82 percent of surveyed scholars agreed or strongly agreed to this statement).

[63] The SIPA team cannot provide an exhaustive list of all the specific aspects of personal life in which MECI motivates scholars, given the limited number of interviews. Some examples include overcoming feelings of non-belonging at university or increased ambition to be "successful" in life

However, participants in the outcome mapping workshop identified the **potential to further enhance the long-term outcome of scholars becoming role models in the community**.

The scholarship also motivated scholars to improve their academic performance while at high school (83 percent of surveyed scholars agreed or strongly agreed to this statement) and at university (70 percent of surveyed scholars reported this).

Nevertheless, **scholars are less enthusiastic about leadership and professional outcomes associated with the scholarships**. Among scholars responding to the survey 30 percent reported that the scholarship improved their leadership skills and 46 percent mentioned that it increased their career opportunities.

Scholarship applicants and recipients are unclear about the program's application criteria, and selection process. Given the scholarship effects mentioned above, the program is high-stakes with big expectations leveled against applicants. One out of three scholars responding to the survey (33 percent) reported that the scholarship process was not transparent, 16 percent did not think the program criteria or application is clear, and 15 percent do not agree that the selection process is fair. These figures of discontent with the selection process are not extremely high, but are striking when compared with satisfaction in other aspects of the program. Among non-scholars who responded to the survey 4 (50 percent of respondents) believed that the criteria to award the scholarship are clear, transparent and fair, while the other 4 believe the opposite. However, the reduced number of non-scholars who responded to this part of the survey limits the degree of certainty that the SIPA team can have about the perceptions among the overall population of after-school alumni. Negative perception may be attributed to some level of resentment among applicants who do not receive the scholarship, especially given its high-stakes nature. Nevertheless, non-scholarship recipients do recall receiving from MECI guidance on alternative paths to university such as vocational training or alternative careers. The sense-making with MECI staff revealed that they distribute program information via word of mouth throughout the village, a non-systematic outreach strategy that may lead to confusion or missed information.

Scholars revealed that they do not feel like a cohesive group or a community. During the interviews, scholars highlighted their connection with MECI and their local community, but did not mention a sense of group with other scholars. When asked specifically, they indicated that they were not close friends or did not really keep in touch with other scholars. MECI acknowledged the lack of cohesion and is working with the newest cohort on generating spaces to share their experiences to avoid the lack of cohesion observed in previous cohorts.

D. Women's Empowerment Program Findings

MECI's women's empowerment program supports women to strengthen their communication, organization, and leadership skills. The women's empowerment survey found that 88 percent stated that MECI activities improved leadership skills; 86 percent stated that it strengthened their organizational abilities; and 92 percent reported improved communication skills; Women also report learning computer skills through the Technovate program. The head of the WA stated that women felt they had acquired hard skills outside of handicrafts and food, which they valued significantly. The internet cafe and training in using computers were the activities that survey respondents attended the most (47.9 percent and 45.8 percent respectively).

MECI's programs have helped women develop general self-esteem, confidence, and improved the way they perceive themselves in the community. 91 percent of respondents agreed that MECI activities improved their self-esteem; 95 percent stated they now see themselves as agents of change for good in their community; and 91 percent felt that the program strengthened their relationships in the community. The theme of self-esteem and confidence was also one that was consistently mentioned during the interviews. Integrating women into the community is a key function of MECI's programming. Through their catering business they have made connections with local authorities and have supported the local economy through purchasing local supplies.

"The Women's Association is currently one of the most powerful institutions in the region and it helped to empower women and to make them more engaged and more involved in the community. Currently, as part of the local authorities, we always make sure to invite these women to our meetings so women can feel their importance in the community and that they are playing a major role in the decision-making and change we're seeing in the community." - Mayor of Beni Zaid

MECI has successfully provided women with income generating opportunities by hiring women as counselors for the After School Program and providing employment opportunities to the local Deir Ghasseneh WA to provide catering services, which are valued by the women. In March 2019, they employed 29 female counselors and 9 women were engaged in the WA and the revenue earned by the WA was $100,335[64].

"For women in the village, 400 shekels can feel like 1000 shekels because it makes them feel financially independent. I heard a woman say that her son asked for money after school and that it felt so good to be

[64] Middle East Children Institute (MECI), Collected and Analyzed Data 2018-2019 School Year. 2019.

able to give her child her own money. It made her feel very good to be financially independent." - WA Member

However, the tough economic context is a consistent challenge for the villages and **MECI has struggled to succeed in creating broader economic opportunities** for many of its beneficiaries. One out of two survey respondents (50 percent) disagrees or strongly disagrees that MECI's activities improve their options to find paid employment outside of the WA. Since a key goal of the Women's Empowerment Program is to seed social enterprise this is an area of weakness. The evidence reflects women's ambition to achieve economic independence, but also an indication of dependence on MECI to provide them with what they need.

There is also concern from MECI staff that there is an issue of aid dependency in the WA. Long-term goals for the WA include that they will become financially self-sufficient, take management of the education programs, and expand into other business opportunities. However, according to staff there are still mental and structural barriers to achieving these goals. While women stated that their leadership skills increased they are not yet at a level where they are comfortable being independent from MECI. According to the surveys, training was very much appreciated by women, but some pointed out that business management training could be improved. The structure of the relationship between MECI and the WA could also lead to oversized WA dependency on MECI because of MECI's payment of salaries.

Finally, the evaluation shows that **knowledge of health and nutrition as a result of MECI's activities was less salient compared to other outcomes**. Our survey asked from a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree about health and nutrition outcomes. Only around 70 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge of these issues improved. This is more than 10 percentage points less than any other activity outcome scored "agree" or "strongly agree".

E. Monitoring and Evaluation Findings

Regarding the M&E system, MECI **effectively collects information on program elements and measures some individual and community-level outcomes**. MECI's current M&E practices include:

- Monitor basic program data such as attendance to the After-School Program, number of psychosocial sessions, health checks, health indicators, meals, women employed, and community activities.
- Monitor program satisfaction with yearly surveys to parents, staff, students, and school principals. The surveys use a combination of closed and opened-ended questions.

- Compare the academic performance of MECI and non-MECI students with official information from the Ministry of Education, in three levels (excellent, very good, and good).
- Implement limited, selected items from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory School Form (CSEI-SC) assessment with a sample of students from the elementary and secondary schools, including MECI and non-MECI participants. The CSEI-SC measures evaluative attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family, and personal areas of experience, mainly intrapersonal competencies.[65] MECI implements the survey twice a year (i.e., before and after the program is implemented) and does not score the assessment as per the developer's user manual.

In addition, MECI **staff is aware of the importance of reporting** and does so periodically for most of the activities. The **tracking of data** is mainly done through monthly internal reports that are created by the program director with input from counselors and psychologists. Generally, these documents include tables with attendance, a calendar of activities, the number of psychosocial support sessions, and satisfaction with those sessions. Based on the monthly documentation, the program director builds a year report that includes academic performance data, and the findings from the satisfaction surveys. All these reports help MECI to register the feedback received from beneficiaries and respond by adapting the programming according to it. For instance, monthly and yearly reports show the changes to the After-School according to student's satisfaction results. In addition, special reports are created for special activities (e.g, Worlds Children's Day Celebration).

Despite the efforts in reporting, the analysis indicates that **MECI's M&E system is in an early stage**. The **data collected and reports are not part of a clear and organized strategy**, implying that some reports don't have a defined purpose. Document review revealed that **data is stored in separate reports and Excel files** (e.g, monthly After-School activities and attendance, health exams results, and monthly community service activities), making it difficult to understand the status of the programs. External audiences tracking progress and understanding reports is also challenging because the format and content of **reports change between programs and over time**. Further, data analysis -especially in internal reports- tends to focus on the positive outcomes, lacking the critical component to identify program improvements.[66]

[65] Mind Garden. "Our Products: Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory" Accessed April 15, 2021. https://www.mindgarden.com/85-coopersmith-self-esteem-inventory

[66] For instance, the psychologist report on satisfaction surveys with the summer camp lacks growth opportunities in the findins. MECI, Report of the Summer Peace Camp Questionnaire.

The SIPA team realized that **MECI does not have specialized staff trained to analyze data**. The need for external support to analyze survey results is explicit on monthly reports, and MECI has tried to solve this with the support of MECI scholars.[67] Additionally, the lack of capacity to track and analyze data is reflected in certain mistakes on tables that report data[68], inconsistencies in reports[69], and missing labeling of scales or descriptions of the data.[70] In some cases, data is presented without making explicit conclusions or interpretations.[71] For analyzing psychometrics, MECI usually hires two psychologists that have the capacity to implement a psychometric instrument, however, they do not necessarily have the training needed to analyze psychometric information.

Finally, the evaluation shows that **data collection tools are not optimal to evaluate program outcomes,** in particular, those used to evaluate program outcomes. All data collection tools need to be age and culturally appropriate and aligned with MECI program outcomes. Externally tested, also known as validated, tools would ensure that MECI is able to measure outcomes. Ideally, tools should demonstrate evidence of use or testing in the Middle East. For example, the CSEI-SC was designed to measure self-esteem constructs in relation to academics, for children up to the age of 15. The tool was developed in 1968 and tested throughout the 1970s in the global north, primarily.[72] The CSEI-SC has a strict administration protocol and manual to structure the data analysis process (also referred to as scoring the sub-scales) to be an effective tool to measure change over time in beneficiaries. MECI does not currently use the CSEI according to the developer's requirements; MECI uses the tool for children over the age of 15, does not follow the scoring instructions, and report findings directly for some of the elements in the questionnaire without reporting the overall self-esteem or the sub-scores that the tool is designed to inform. Finally, the use of CSEI-SC does not align with best practices identified through the literature

[67] Middle East Children Institute (MECI), *Monthly Report. February, 2020*. 2020.

[68] Totals in the academic results table do not fit the data.
Middle East Children Institute (MECI), *Academic Achievement 2018-2019*. 2019.

[69] e.g., the total of students for summer camp in the report differs 350 and 370.
MECI, *Hope Through Education 2019/2020 School Year Report*.

[70] The scale used in the satisfaction with psychological is not explained in monthly report. MECI, F*inal Field Report: Comprehensive After-School Program Reporting Period – Spring 2018*

[71] Academic achievement report shows percentages by group, without showing the difference between groups or making any conclusions of the data presented (MECI, *Academic Achievement 2018-2019*). Also, year report does not mention the evolution of achievements, for instance in attendance to the activitites with respect to previous years (MECI, *Hope Through Education 2019/2020 School Year Report)*.

[72] RAND Corporation. "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (School Form) (CSEI-SC)." RAND. Accessed March 23, 2021. https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/assessments/tool/1967/coopersmith-self-esteem-inventory-school-form-csei.html

review for MECI's holistic program model nor was it validated for use in conflict areas in the Middle East. The CSEI-SC has not been widely used in recent academic research.

Recommendations

The SIPA team identified the following recommendations as possible strategies to improve MECI's programming and M&E system. It is important to consider these recommendations in light of the evaluation's limitations, especially in terms of the representativeness of the sample of beneficiaries contacted and the lack of direct participant and program observations.

A. Overall Recommendations

While the findings indicate that the program saw mindset changes at the individual and community level, MECI does not accurately document program activities that are connected to the mindset changes they hope to achieve. Therefore, it is advisable to incorporate the activities that MECI conducts that intend to change mindsets or challenge cultural taboos into its theory of change. For instance, an initial approach to contribute to this mindset change could include: co-ed activities in schools, inclusion of children with disabilities, involve more the male members of the community, and promote initiative in the WA through training and motivational workshops. This exercise may help to identify better ways to achieve mindset change at the community level.

B. After-School Program Recommendations

MECI should **conduct a needs assessment with their counselors to evaluate their psychosocial wellbeing** and whether they need support, in addition to the students. This was identified in the literature review as a best practice for programs in conflict regions. One possible action would be to **conduct a sensemaking meeting with counselors** to understand their main concerns or needs and listen to their suggested solutions.

MECI should **increase its outreach efforts to ensure all students from the village have access to the program and** explore the possibility and value of providing transportation support for students that live farther away from schools, or that commute from one village to another to attend school. These types of transportation services could help address the finding that distance is one of the key reasons that children

are not able to access the MECI program. Alternatively, MECI could coordinate groups of children that live in the same neighborhood for them to move together, in order to help address the challenge of accessing the program while also generating a sense of safety in their parents.

Following the results from parent feedback about MECI's After-School Program, MECI should strive to **improve communication to parents about health and healthy habits activities and their intended effects on children**. Parents showed an interest in how MECI can help kids improve their healthy habits and while the activities may have an impact on the children's health, parents are not aware of that impact. A possible action would be to design a "Healthy Week" in which counselors talk about healthy habits and the importance of a balanced diet, sports, and mental health. Also, continue providing parents with information sessions that focus on how to support the development of healthy habits in their children.

C. University Scholarship Program Recommendations

MECI needs to strengthen communication on its university scholarship program and clarify the application and selection process to minimize resentment from applicants. MECI should provide clear information on the process to all interested students, acknowledging that the scholarship has high standards for entry to ensure realistic expectations. In addition, it should communicate to applicants how the award decisions are made and by who. MECI could share the instructions for application and the criteria for selection in a simple format that is easy to understand for students, such as a video or brochure.

The SIPA team recommends adapting the selection process design to increase confidence from applicants. Indicating in the scholarship call a range of points awarded for each selection criterion or the percent each criterion represents in the overall assessment are feasible tools for enhanced objectivity. In order to formalize the recommendation process and reduce informal pressure from MECI staff, letter of recommendation can also be added to the application process[73]. MECI should continue to support those who do not receive the scholarship by offering future readiness guidance such as alternative paths to university, like vocational training and jobs.

[73] Letter of recommendations should only be required if they are culturally appropriate (i.e. students are familiar with this kind of document) and do not cause an excessive burden on the applicants. Recommendations are one of the forms in which social capital can be displayed (see Appendix 3 for more information on social capital). MECI should consider to what extent is social capital evenly distributed among applicants and families in order to evaluate whether letters of recommendations would be equitable.

The SIPA team recommends continuing and formalizing efforts to **build a sense of community among scholars**, to promote the expected mindset changes through peer feedback and the possibility to share job or internship opportunities. MECI could organize regular meet-ups and support an online community through WhatsApp, Facebook, or LinkedIn (according to what is more helpful to scholars). If scholars find it useful to improve their professional opportunities, MECI can also consider providing career development advice (e.g., building their CV or cover letters, giving career advice, or LinkedIn training).

MECI can **formalize efforts for scholars to serve as role models in the community through a mentorship initiative**. Part of this work is already done by MECI activities such as having scholars talk to highschool students about their experiences or engaging scholars in the Summer Peace Camp. Having a mentorship system would create opportunities for peer relationships that would enhance personal and professional development. MECI should reflect on the best design of this activity. For example, graduate university scholars could mentor students who have been recently awarded the scholarship or current university scholars could mentor after-school program students, especially around future readiness (e.g., university and career pathways). After piloting mentoring in the University Scholarship Program, MECI may consider replicating mentoring activities in other programs (e.g., alumni who completed vocational training can mentor after-school students or scholars with experience in business can mentor women).

D. Women Empowerment Program Recommendations

Clearly communicate MECI's role as a WA supporter through provision of skill training and assistance setting up social enterprises but not its lead facilitator. The objective is to build women's capacity to perform independently and gain leadership skills by managing WA projects directly so that the women can self-organize to solve challenges before seeking out MECI for help. The long-term goal is that the WA is financially independent and sustainable with profits that can go towards the After-School Program. However, it is important to recognize that this is not a role that can immediately be taken by the WA and MECI must take more steps to build capacity. MECI must also create a more detailed plan and map out actions that will lead to these goals. MECI can also work on changing mindsets and building capacity through communication campaigns and by providing more targeted business management and entrepreneurship or mentorship to the WA's leaders. **Increased mentorship and networking opportunities for the women** could prove a powerful incentive and method to increase women's

agency[74]. By helping women organize themselves into networks it creates a support system and a pathway for collective action.

Continue to provide training for high demand skills that could contribute to improved economic opportunities, such as computer literacy and business management. As part of its ongoing M&E system, MECI should review its training curriculum and teaching methodology periodically, to understand what is working, what is not working, and what can be improved.

Continue to work with the WA and other women to innovate and search for new income generating opportunities. As mentioned in findings, women are not yet at a level where they can create business opportunities for themselves, however, with the help of MECI they could expand on the activities and businesses they already have. Consider exploring expanded opportunities of business such as ecotourism possibilities in the region, handicraft market expansion, and receiving coaching from entrepreneurs from Ramallah. In addition, it is important for MECI to continue to engage women in planning and decision-making to promote joint ownership and mitigate aid dependency.

Lastly, reflect critically on the **activities needed to generate the mindset changes in the community that are related to women's role.** For example, how could MECI engage boys and men to discuss the role of women and gender equity in the community? MECI has done very well in increasing women's self-esteem and perception of self. To change community-level mindset around gender equity requires engaging all community members, including men and boys. So can working with influential members of the community such as local government officials or religious leaders to promote women empowerment. MECI can leverage existing programs and research, from organizations such as Gender at Work, The Bill and Melinda Gates Gender Toolkit, and the Association for Women's Rights in Development that have published documents on how to view holistic women empowerment (See Appendix 3).

E. Monitoring and Evaluation Recommendations

The recommendations for the M&E system are organized into two parts: general and strategic.

[74] UN Women, *Women's Economic Empowerment through Decent Work*. Jerusalem: UN Women, 2012. https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field office palestine/attachments/publications/2019/4/wee_fact sheet_25 march_final.pdf?la=en&vs=114

General M&E Recommendations

The first opportunity is to **improve how MECI organizes and manages its information or data**. For this, starting from the existing Excel file format that was developed some years ago[75], create a central repository that captures and gathers the key measures of outputs from the programs. Having information centralized will ease the generation of monthly and annual reports.

Second, MECI should **standardize the format of reports**, establishing a clear goal and audience. This is especially important for the annual reports that are shared with external audiences. In Appendix 4, the SIPA team presents a basic sample format for reports. Another recommendation is making sure that data and tables are clearly labeled, and automating calculations of percentages and totals to avoid small errors.

Also, the SIPA team recommends MECI **use simple data collection applications** so that on-site MECI staff collect data more easily and reliably, avoid mistakes, and simplify data analysis. Applications like Kobo,[76] which is easy to use and inexpensive, and already in use by MECI Jordan could leverage community member's access to technology through the Technovate program. Other options include Survey Monkey, which has already been used by MECI Palestine in previous years and has a fee to use all the features[77]; or Google forms[78]. All these options offer some level of data analysis and visualization that could be useful to staff.

Finally, **we highly encourage MECI to train local staff in excel, data analysis, and basic data visualization**. Keeping in mind the sustainability of the project and the grassroots approach of MECI, the SIPA team recommends making efforts to build local capacity to support basic M&E functions. MECI could explore bringing an external consultant to guide and train someone in the local team or one of the scholars that are in a degree related to data analysis. Another possibility would be asking for guidance from the Jordan team for implementing Kobo for data collection and analysis.

Strategic M&E Recommendations

Regarding the M&E strategy, **the SIPA team recommends MECI build a basic M&E plan aligned with the organization's capacity and priority program goals.** This will allow the organization to continue to

[75] Middle East Children Institute (MECI), *Excel with Results developed by Tamara*.

[76] KoBoToolbox. "Simple, Robust and Powerful Tools for Data Collection." KoBoToolbox. Accessed April 20, 2021. https://www.kobotoolbox.org/#home.

[77] SurveyMonkey. "Compare our full set of features." SurveyMonkey. Accessed April 18, 2021. https://www.surveymonkey.com/pricing/teams/details/?ut_source=pricing-indv-details.

[78] Google. "Get answers fast." Google Forms. Accessed April 18, 2021. https://www.google.com/forms/about/

monitor basic program activities and their outcomes and track progress more consistently. A basic plan will aid MECI to better utilize, learn from, and share the information currently collected, without imposing a significant burden on the on-site staff. Also, this will be a starting point for MECI to develop its M&E capacity to eventually develop a more robust system.

The basic M&E plan needs to take into consideration the staff's capacity in terms of time, skills, and resources to collect, analyze and interpret data using a common set of tools, and the stakes involved in the evaluation process. It is important to note that the RAND corporation does not recommend attaching psychometric tools like the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory or other SEL assessments to high stake evaluations such as the ones on which funding or continuation of the program depend on.[79] Also, following the MECI values of community building, the basic M&E plan should be community centered, including frequent opportunities for feedback loops from and with the community at all stages. The complete M&E process must involve the different stakeholders actively by collecting information from them, sharing the results when applicable and asking for feedback when necessary.

The steps to develop this basic M&E plan are:

1. **Identify what success looks like for MECI**: Starting from the theory of change that resulted from this evaluation. MECI needs to confirm the main changes it wants to see in the different stakeholders in the community.
2. **Identify the priority outcomes to monitor:** For each program, select the most meaningful changes that MECI is trying to achieve. MECI should work with staff to select from the short-term outcomes in the ToC the programmatic priorities. No organization has the resources to track all outcomes and not all outcomes should or can be assessed.
3. **Select tools (e.g. surveys, checklists, rubrics, focus group protocols) to measure the priority outcomes:** MECI should pay special attention to the cultural relevance of the tool, whether it has been tested in similar contexts, whether it covers what the team wants to measure (i.e., priority outcomes), and how costly (time, staff capacity, and associated fees) and difficult it is to implement. MECI should ensure it has access to the tool's user manual with the instructions on how to implement the tool and analyze the resulting data. Additionally, some data collection tools, particularly psychometric assessment tools (like the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory),

[79] Taylor, Jeremy J., Katie Buckley, Laura S. Hamilton, Brian M. Stecher, Lindsay Read, and Jonathan Schweig, *Choosing and Using SEL Competency Assessments: What Schools and Districts Need to Know*. Assessment Work Group (AWG); RAND Corporation, 2018. http://measuringsel.casel.org/pdf/Choosing-and-Using-SEL-Competency-Assessments_What-Schools-and-Districts-Need-to-Know.pdf

should be administered as designed: in its entirety and without *ad hoc* modification. Tested, or externally validated, psychometric tools are designed to identify patterns and render an overall measure based on the aggregation of different questions in the tool. Thus, the integrity of the administration process and completeness of the tool are essential for them to provide an accurate and consistent measure.

4. Build the M&E plan: Pull the previous elements together into a table or document, adding a few elements, to develop a basic M&E plan. As shown in Table B, select an output or outcome, describe or define how MECI will know it has realized an activity output or a program outcome. This could be a numerical indicator for your activity outputs or a description of what change looks like for your selected beneficiary. Then, include data collection details such as how the information will be monitored or evaluated, from who (i.e., beneficiaries), when and who will collect the data. This will help to clarify the objectives of each data collection tool implemented during the year in the different programs, and what information needs tracked. Such a Table B an aid MECI to monitor targeted activities and evaluate program outcomes.

Table B suggests a guideline on how to begin structuring an M&E Plan. In the first column, it must be specified whether the following entry will be a monitoring of an output or the evaluation of an outcome. Outcomes (which are evaluated in the plan) are those results that MECI would like to observe in order to assess whether the desired impact is being achieved, while outputs (which are monitored in the plan) are those actions and events that will help MECI reach a specific outcome. For both of them, tools must be defined to measure whether they are occurring as desired, this measurement will be observed through indicators.

Table B: M&E Plan Format

Monitor or Evaluation	Program activities	Program Activity Output or Priority Outcomes	What are you looking for?	Data Collection			
				How?	From whom?	When or how frequently?	Who is in charge?
i.e Monitoring (outputs) or Evaluating (outcomes)	i.e. specific activities	i.e. outcome or short-term outcomes to measure	i.e. specific program output or outcome indicator or description	i.e. tool to measure	i.e. stakeholder	i.e. time in the year	i.e. staff member(s) who should collect and analyze info
Monitoring	Activity 1	Output 1	Indicator 1	Tool A	Students	Monthly	Counselors
Evaluation	Activity 2	Outcome 1	Indicator 2	Tool B	Students	Yearly	Psychologists
Evaluation	Activity 3	Outcome 2	Indicator 3	Tool B	Students	Yearly in Summer	Psychologists (lead) and counselors

As a reference, the SIPA team created an example of what MECI's M&E plan could look like (in Appendix 5), but MECI should adapt it according to what they find to be the key outcomes and descriptions/indicators. It is worth noting that the table includes quantitative as well as qualitative measures.

In addition, the SIPA team identified data collection tools that can be implemented by MECI. Table C presents four tools that the SIPA team believe align closely with MECI's theory of change and what the organization hopes to measure. It included information about who developed the tool and other key characteristics to help MECI determine if they are appropriate to use. The tools presented in Table C have been tested in international settings similar to where MECI operates and include metadata that helps guide the user on the implementation and scoring procedures of the tools. It is not recommended that MECI modify the tools (e.g., SLEC or ISELA) as they are tested for use as is. Before adopting any of the suggested tools, the SIPA team recommends that MECI reach out to the developers or owners of the tools, whose information is included in the tool documentation, for guidance and support. Additionally, we recommend that **MECI seeks parent consent and youth assent to implement the tools**. This will increase the transparency with participants (and their guardians) about what they are implementing, especially with children who are not enrolled in MECI's program. This is especially critical if MECI wants to move towards a more robust M&E system. A complete list of tools identified as potentially relevant to MECI is included in Technical Annex 3.

Table C: Data Collection Tools Suggested

Tool	Organization that developed it	Audience & Testing information	Category	Measures
Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (SLEC)	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) , Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø	Children ages 12 - 16 (tested on 789 Palestinian students)	Education / Social Emotional Learning	Adolescents' sense of safety, self-regulation, self-efficacy, social support, academic functioning, and feelings of hope
International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA)	Save the Children	Children ages 6 - 12 years (tested on 620 Kurdish-speaking Syrian refugee children in Iraq)	Social Emotional Learning	Development of self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, relationship management, and conflict resolution

Table C: Data Collection Tools Suggested

Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology	Rick Davies	Program or project stakeholders (children, women, community members)	Women's Empowerment / Community Engagement	How change comes about (processes and causal mechanisms) and when (in what situations and contexts)
Empathy mapping	Action Evaluation Collaborative	Program participants (and their families or communities) (children, women, community members)	Women's Empowerment / Community Engagement	Current situation and status of participants, their life goals aspirations, necessary transformations to achieve goals

Once the M&E Plan has been established, the **next steps** are **identifying and setting targets**. Targets are specific values or goals for each one of the outcomes that the programs aim to achieve. Setting targets is a slow process in which MECI will have to identify **realistic, measurable and relevant** goals that will guide their future actions.

Some of the board members expressed a strong interest in implementing more complex and quantitative evaluation methods such as Cost-Benefit Analysis, Social Internal Rate of Return (i.e., Social IRR) and experimental or quasi-experimental statistical analysis (e.g., randomized control trials (RCTs)[80], Regression Discontinuity). The SIPA team considers that such methodologies are not necessarily appropriate for the needs of MECI. At this time, MECI is limited in its ability to design, implement, and use these advanced M&E approaches. These limitations include -and are not restricted to-:

- Lack of the appropriate data. Some events from the past are now not observable or comparable since the necessary data was not collected at the moment (e.g, individual data of beneficiaries before MECI implemented their programs);
- Absence of technical staff with the necessary training to design, implement, and analyze advance M&E approaches;

[80] Randomized controlled trial is an experimental method that aims to reduce estimation bias through randomly allocating the observed individuals in the treatment and control group in order to assess the effectiveness of a specific treatment.

- Higher cost of implementation, which would depend on the required qualified staff hiring, data collection costs (softwares or survey implementations, possibly needing to engage with stakeholders in other villages) and time constraints; and
- The applicability of the methods to the specific context of MECI, since not every tool is applicable to every program.

Instead, the SIPA team recommends that MECI focus on monitoring key outputs and priority outcomes, which will bring value in understanding how to perfect the program and validating the theory of change[81]. Nevertheless, if MECI decides to do an impact evaluation it is important to first identify if a control group would be required, and if it is the case, then still acknowledge the limitations in attributing causality based on a comparison of groups' outcomes. In the case of MECI, finding a control group could be complicated and would not be possible within the villages where the organization is present. Since MECI offers programs to all students in these villages, there is no random assignment to the programs, therefore using non-participant students as a control group[82] will result in biased results. On one side, self-selection bias could be present since non-participants differ from participants in unobserved characteristics[83] associated both with the probability of participation in the program and SEL or academic outcomes. On the other side, the program possibly has spillover effects, meaning that children not participating in the program are affected to some extent by the programs (that is inherent of the intended community outcomes of MECI), even if they do not directly participate in them.[84]

Finally, it is important that MECI identifies and measures elements affected directly by their program to avoid the pitfall of attributing to their work indirect effects to which they may contribute. For instance,

[81] Gugerty, Mary Key,and Dean Karlan. "Ten Reasons Not to Measure Impact—and What to Do Instead." *Stanford Social Innovation Review Summer* 201: 41–47. https://ssir.org/pdf/Ten_Reasons_Not_to_Measure_Impact_and_What_to_Do_Instead_1.pdf

[82] A control group is composed of non-participant in a program whose characteristics are equal to participants in all aspects except program participation. If the only difference between groups of students is the participation in a program, changes in outcomes may be attributed to the effect of the program. This is one of the requirements to engage in causal inference -but not the only one-.

[83] The SIPA team -nor MECI- cannot assess the magnitude of the difference between participants and non-participant because these characteristics are unobserved, i.e. we do not have data to verify them and even if we did there would still be many other characteristics that we do not observe. For example, non-participant might live farther from school, or come from more conservative families who disagree with MECI's values.

In complex impact assessment research methodologies, like randomized controlled trials or RCTs, potential beneficiaries are assigned randomly to participate or not participate in a program which is expected to make unobserved characteristics equivalent in participants and non-participants. For MECI, this kind of approach is not feasible because they require strong econometric skills and are very costly. Additionally, there would be severe ethical concerns in depriving potential beneficiaries from participation in such a vulnerable context.

[84] For example, non-participant could be benefiting from a better equipped school or from a cohort with students with better psychosocial outcomes.

acknowledging that SEL and academic results are interconnected, the bulk of work that MECI is doing is in the socio-emotional component. Therefore, MECI should make clear that the academic results or attendance to school changes are indirect contributions and not direct outcomes of the programs since the after-school has only limited time dedicated to tutoring and academics.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, for the communities of Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh, there are clear effects of MECI's arrival in the region. The organization has succeeded in understanding the main challenges that the locals face in their daily lives and has acted to assist those facing those challenges. The community accepts MECI and has expressed their wish for the organization to stay present for many years to come. Moreover, the organization's proactiveness during the pandemic led to a new effort: Technovate to Educate which was highly appreciated by community members, who have expressed their interest in the continuity of the program and to keep training the locals in computer skills.

Even though MECI's presence in the region has had a relevant impact, there are still opportunities for the organization to grow within Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh, as well as expanding to other villages. There are several aspects of each program that are essential: the socio-emotional skills provided, the sense of trust and the motivation they generate in the individuals. MECI has numerous opportunities to leverage their strengths to attain a deeper impact at the individual and collective levels. Moreover, a careful revision of the MECI's position in the community is necessary to avoid the locals developing a stronger dependency on the organization.

MECI's biggest challenge is its M&E system, which despite the large amounts of collected data and the effective communication between the local staff and the Board of Directors, needs to be standardized and systematized to effectively track and measure the organization's progress towards its goals and vision. By designing and implementing a basic M&E plan, MECI will be able to better use its resources and guide its efforts to achieve realistic, measurable, and meaningful outcomes.

While MECI has several challenges to face, none of these can eclipse how Beit Rima and Dei Ghassaneh have benefited from its presence. Moreover, the long-term outcomes and impact from MECI's main 3 programs in the region are yet to be seen. As the first children to be beneficiaries from the programs are growing to become productive members of the community, MECI is achieving a deeper impact in these

communities that, even though face tough conditions, are finding new opportunities and are opening to new perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

The theory of change, as illustrated in Figure B below, includes the three programs the team was asked to evaluate plus a 4th program, Technovate. It is important to note that the holistic nature of the MECI model makes it hard to capture the full model accurately in a theory of change because the programs are broad, diverse, and include a range of activities that vary according to community needs. The key short-term outcomes of the model range from the development of socio-emotional skills at an early age to building trust and connections at the community level. One key assumption is that the success of the model is conditional upon activities and strategies being rooted in the community and the use of local staff and partnerships with community organizations and government institutions, all of which further enable the building of trust in the community. Serving independently from any political affiliation enables them to offer reliable services and trust in a community that has been traumatized by conflict. Finally, the long-term change is based on beneficiaries of MECI's program ultimately giving back to the community and changing mindsets at the community level towards peace, wellbeing, empowerment, and stability.

An editable version of this ToC diagram was provided to MECI along with this report in the shared Google folder.

Figure B: Theory of Change

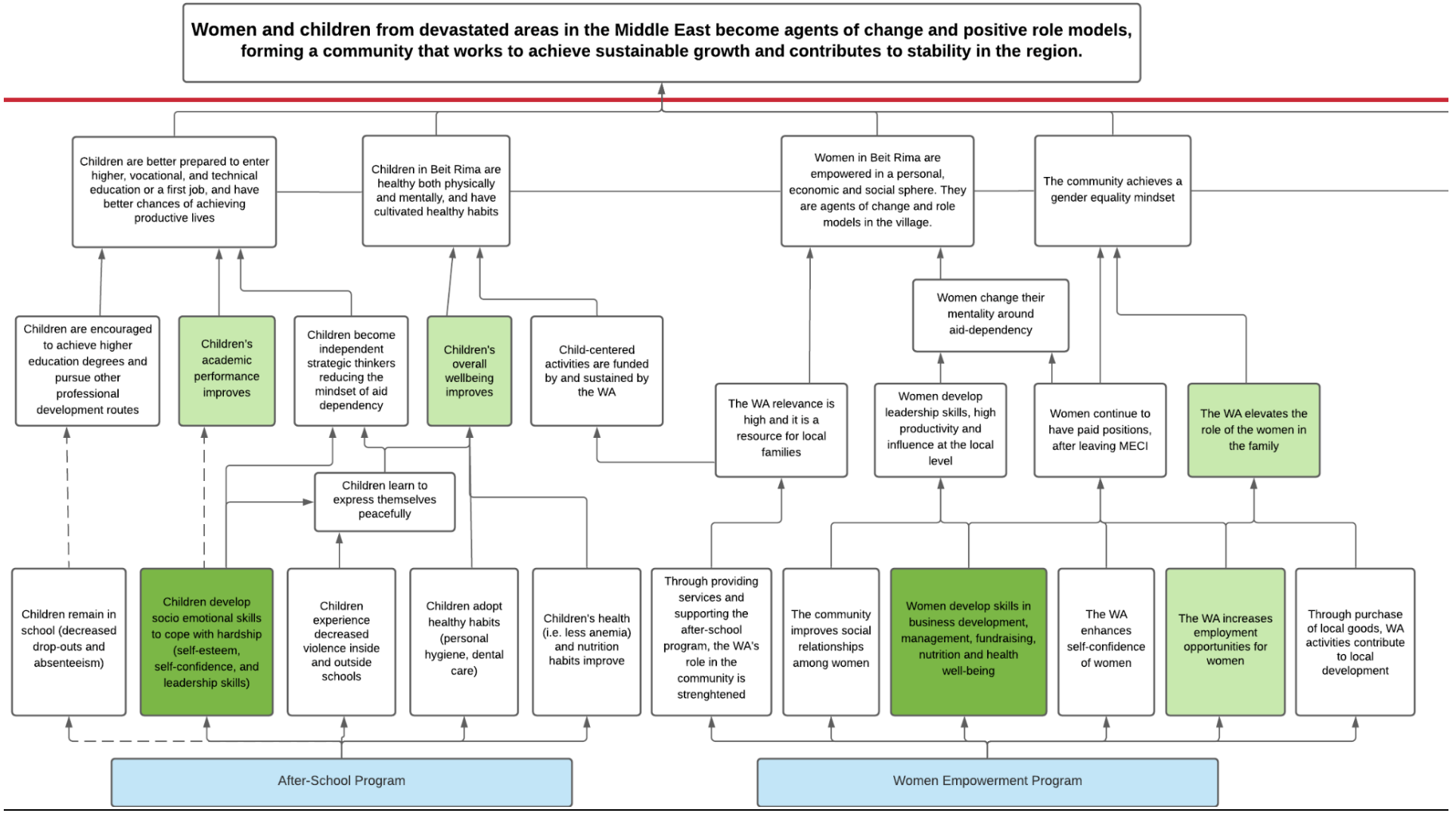
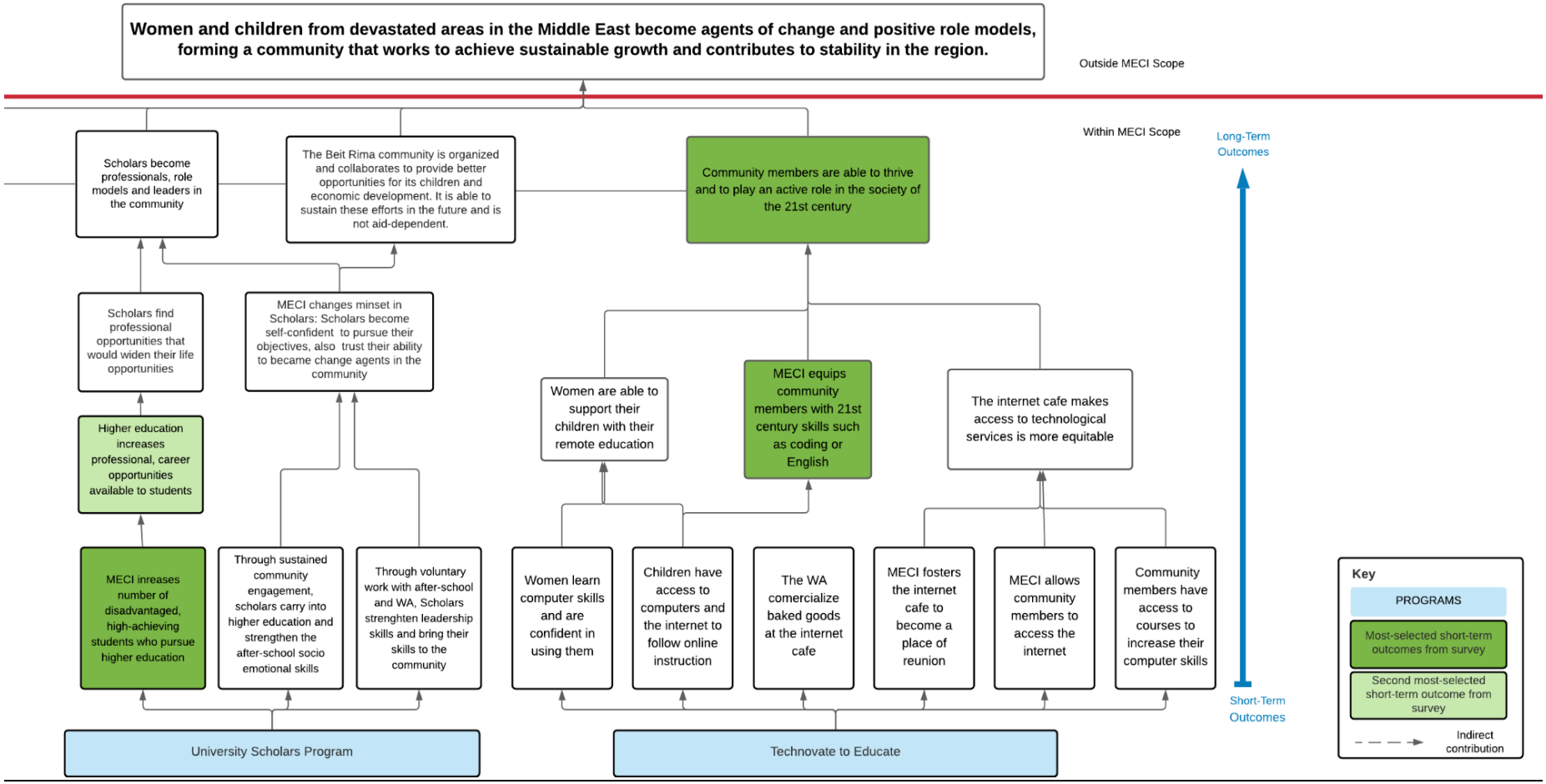


Figure B: Theory of Change (continued)



Appendix 2: Background Details

A. Geopolitical Context of Palestine

Palestine experienced great geopolitical tensions along the 20th and 21st century leading to a progressive dissemination of its people and territories. The historic territory of Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1922 when the League of Nations established a British Mandate in the area. The British Government had expressed their support for the creation of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine85, and large flows of Jewish people migrated to Palestine during the following decades, many of whom were fleeing Nazi repression. In the aftermath of World War II, the recently created United Nations (UN) adopted a partition plan at the General Assembly86 aiming to solve the emergent conflict between Arabs and Palestinians on one side, and Jewish people on the other side. The UN partition plan drew a two-state map dividing the territory between a future state of Palestine, a soon-to-be declared State of Israel, and Jerusalem, which would have a special international status. However, the UN plan was not accepted and led to the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli War. The war ended with the Israeli occupation of West Jerusalem, Galilee, and other areas. A new border was established, beyond the UN 1947 frontier, that came to be known as the Green Line. The remaining Palestinian territory (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) did not become an independent state as the UN plan had foreseen; instead, Egypt took control over the Gaza Strip and Jordan took control over the West Bank. Half of the Palestinian population fled or was expelled as a result of the war87, an exodus that became known as nakba.

In 1967, following the Six-Day War, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, the Sinai (formerly controlled by Egypt), and the Golan Heights (formerly controlled by Syria). After other armed confrontations between Israel and neighboring countries in 1970 and 1973, the Camp David Accords were signed in 1978 between Israel and Egypt, leading to the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the Egyptian recognition of the State of Israel. In 1995, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) divided

[85] United Nations. "Balfour Declaration." United Nations. Accessed December 15, 2020. https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Balfour_declaration_unmarked.jpg .

[86] United Nations General Assembly. "Resolution 181 (II) Future Government of Palestine." United Nations. Accessed December 15, 2020. https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253

[87] United Nations "History of the Question of Palestine - Question of Palestine." United Nations. Accessed December 22, 2020. https://www.un.org/unispal/history/

the West Bank in three areas: Area A under full civil and security administration of a new Palestinian Authority (PA), Area B under Palestinian administration for civil purposes and joint Israeli-Palestinian administration for security, and Area C controlled by Israel corresponding to the majority of West Bank territory and housing most of the natural resources. This territorial allocation has been undermined by the favoring of Israel across the years of uninterrupted settlement of the Israeli population in the West Bank, which has been reported as a violation of internal law[88]. Today, the areas under Palestinian rule in the West Bank remain fragmented by illegal settlements and secluded by walls, whose construction was not interrupted despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice that declared the wall was illegal under international law[89]. The Palestinian Authority has control of civil administration in Areas A and B of the West Bank, but Area C was never transferred. The economic and social development of Palestine has been seriously affected by the proliferation of Israeli settlements, the construction of walls isolating the Palestinian population, obstacles to celebrating new elections, Israeli military operations, and other constraints[90].

In 2019, the USA launched a "Peace to Prosperity Plan"[91] and no longer considered Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal. Concurrently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the future annexation of Area C and the constructions of new settlements. These movements were strongly opposed by Palestinian institutions and civil society, the UN, the European Union (EU), and other international organizations. In a recent mission to Palestine, the European Parliament delegation acknowledged that the situation on the ground had worsened with these actions and that the construction of new settlements had accelerated[92].

[88] International Court of Justice (ICJ). *The Road to Annexation - Israel's maneuvers to change the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory*. 2019. https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/131/131-20040709-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf

[89] International Court of Justice (ICJ). *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Advisory Opinion*. 2004. https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/131/131-20040709-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf

[90] Wrange, Pal, *Occupation/Annexation of a Territory: Respect for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and Consistent EU Policy*. European Parliament, 2015. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/534995/EXPO_STU(2015)534995_EN.pdf

[91] White House. *Peace to Prosperity. A vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*. 2020. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf

[92] European Parliament, *MISSION REPORT following the Delegation Mission to East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron on 24-27 February 2020*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/mission-to-palestine-on-24-27-february-2/product-details/20200304DPU24645

B. Local Context

The MECI programs that were evaluated operate in Beit Rima and Deir Ghassaneh, villages located in the highlands of the West Bank in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, northwest of Ramallah and Jerusalem. The two villages are part of the municipality of Bani Zeid al-Gharbiyya. In the early 2000s, following the Oslo Agreements, the municipality was integrated into Area A and remains under civil and security administration of the Palestinian Authority. The area has experienced several violent events, including Israeli army activity during the second intifada[93] and afterwards.

Beit Rima has a population of 4,308 people, among whom 574 were poor, according to the Palestinian census of 2017.[94] Deir Ghassaneh had a population of 1,682 people in 2017, among whom 224 were poor. In Beit Rima, 43 percent of the population had not completed secondary education, while in Deir Ghassaneh it was 50 percent.[95] Unemployment rate was close to 10 percent in Beit Rima and close to 8 percent in Deir Ghassaneh. In both villages the majority of the population is Muslim.

C. Third Sector in Palestine

The NGO scene has changed significantly since the Oslo Accords. Inflows of foreign donors following the agreement have transformed the third sector, which has become more professionalized, less linked with Palestinian political movements and grassroot organizations, and more dependent on international donors[96]. According to MECI, international aid to Palestinians has been restricted or at times cut off in different periods and the economy is unstable.

NGOs are subject to administrative supervision. They need to register with the Ministry of Interior, provide annual reports to the PA, and obtain certificates.

[93] The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem(ARIJ). "The Israeli Army Ravages Beit Rima." Monitoring Israeli Colonizing Activities in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. 2001. http://poica.org/2001/11/the-israeli-army-ravages-beit-rima/

[94] The Palestinian 2017 Census defines defines "poor" as people whose expenditure on food and non-food items falls belows the official poverty line. The poverty line is at the median expenditure level of certain key items of the poorest 25 to 30 percent of households and is calculated every year.

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. *One Indicator Map*. Accessed December 1, 2020. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/1221/default.aspx

[95] The Palestinian 2017 census of 2017 reports the percentage of people whose highest level of completed studies is basic or who did not complete basic education with respect to the overall population aged 21 or above.

[96] Schulz, Michael, and Lina Suleiman. "Palestinian NGOs' Changed Work Dynamics: Before, During, and beyond the Oslo Process." *Middle East Critique 29*, no. 4 (2020): 433–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1826735

D. Education in Palestine

The education system in Palestine is run by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education whose goal is to ensure education for all, improve quality of education, and develop citizens with sound and balanced characteristics[97]. They have worked closely with various UN bodies and civil society to improve their education system and create a national curriculum. In Palestine, education is highly valued with 95.4% of children enrolled in basic education and youth literacy rate (the ages 15-24) at 98.2%. Despite these high numbers, by age 15 22.5% of boys and 7% of girls have dropped out of school[98]. Children who drop out are at increased risk of child labor, child marriage, sexual violence, being trapped in poverty, and being recruited by extremist groups.

Children in the West Bank face increased challenges to education such as the detention of children, settler violence, military operations, shortage of physical infrastructure, and restriction of movement such as checkpoints[99]. Palestinian schools are frequently the target of military assaults, and due to the planning restrictions imposed on Area C, which makes up 61% of the occupied West Bank, there is a shortage of educational infrastructure. Those who do receive an education are unequipped with the skills to enter the job market. Much of this comes from the lack of work opportunities for youth before leaving school. Youth unemployment rates are 40% in the West Bank.

E. Psychosocial Support

Children in Palestine face high levels of violence and exploitation in school and communities. In 2019, the number of children in the West Bank and Gaza who required mental health and psychosocial services was 321,962 while the children reached by these services was only 9,000. The number of those reached and the funding provided has decreased through the years. Many NGOs compete for limited funding and community-based organizations and local NGOs find it hard to access funding due to limited capacity. The need for psychosocial support has only increased during COVID-19 due to the stigmatization of those

[97] Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Education Development Strategic Plan 2008–2012: Towards Quality Education for Development. 2008 .

[98] UNICEF. “Education and adolescents”. UNICEF. Accessed December 12, 2020. https://www.unicef.org/sop/what-we-do/education-and-adolescents

[99] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). “Education”. Accessed December 15, 2020. https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/education

testing positive for COVID-19 and from increased levels of domestic violence. Providers of mental health services have been scaling up remote psychosocial consultations.[100]

Besides funding there are a series of other challenges facing the provision of mental health and psychosocial support. Coordination between groups needs to be strengthened to address operational issues and to share information. Currently there is little contact between groups and it leads to overlap or duplication of efforts across sectors, which hinders the creation of a holistic response.

Governmentally, the Ministry of Social Development is not able to dedicate the resources or personnel to this issue and is often completely separate from what humanitarian channels and NGOs are doing. Due to this lack of communication, there is little understanding of what national policy towards mental health is.[101]

F. Women Empowerment

Palestinian women and girls are among the most educated in the Middle East. They have a 94% literacy rate and have a near equal rate of enrollment in primary schools compared to boys.[102] However, unemployment for youth and women is high. There is a 42% rate of unemployment for skilled women compared to a 18% rate of unemployment for men. The unemployment rate for women has increased by 16% in the past two years.[103] Women are also expected to prioritize unpaid family caring roles over paying jobs.[104] Moving forward will require addressing a series of obstacles such as segregation of occupations by gender, social pressures, household economic imperatives and limited access to safe workplaces, childcare, and transportation.[105]

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[100] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt): COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report No. 4*. OCHA, 2020. https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/OCHACOVIDSITREP_140420.pdf

[101] Child Protection Working Group. *A review of the humanitarian mental health and psychosocial needs and gaps in West Bank and Gaza*. 2019. https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/1031/file/MHPSS%20Rapid%20Review%20Palestine%202019.pdf

[102] Cardwell, L. "The State of Girls' Education in Palestine". 2018. The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/the-state-of-girls-education-in-palestine/

[103] Abumaria, D. "Traditional Values Make it Difficult for Palestinian Women to Find Work". The Jerusalem Post. Accessed December 1, 2020.
https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/traditional-values-make-it-difficult-for-palestinian-women-to-find-work-620462

[104] Schuster, Roseanne C., Alexandra Brewis, Peggy Ochandarena, Angie Abdelmonem, Sereen Hoso, and Khaled Faqeeh. "Measuring Community Norms around Women's Empowerment in the West Bank: Opportunities and Challenges of a Novel Approach Using Cultural Consensus." *SSM - Population Health* 9 (2019): 100489. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100489

[105] UN Women. "Women's Economic Empowerment". Accessed December 07, 2020.
https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/womens-economic-empowerment-2018

Appendix 3: Literature Review

The SIPA team conducted a comprehensive literature review in four main areas applicable to the formative evaluation of MECI programs in the West Bank. These research areas are: after school programming, women's empowerment, psychosocial support, and community engagement, all of those in conflict-affected contexts. The scope of the review comprised geographically and chronologically relevant academic publications as well as grey literature of international organizations, government and NGO.

After the revision of MECI's documentation (including logframes and ToC working documents), the SIPA team discussed with MECI their main topics of interest for the literature review. Based on this discussion and consultation with faculty, several key search terms for academic research were identified, as well as more than 20 organizations whose work relates to the topics under the scope of this review.

I. After School Programming in Palestine

Providing youth with a set of life skills that enables them to understand themselves and their environment, to make choices, and to plan and manage life transitions is of particular importance in the MENA region, and Palestine.[106] The barriers to learning in the region are structural and cultural such as collectivist culture and paternal authority structures. According to the World Bank, another barrier to holistic learning is strong ideals among adolescents about completing higher levels of education and obtaining high status jobs as well as the perception that without a college or advanced degree, chances of getting a good job are severely reduced.[107] The World Bank research also points to more pessimism from young men from poorer families towards the value of education as they are more likely to withdraw from school early to begin earning income, as well as women who cut their education short due to economic hardships, gender norms, and insecurity.

Given these cultural and economic hardships in the region, there is evidence from other programs that a holistic, psychosocial approach to after-school programming can improve student wellbeing. Results four years post-implementation from a school-based psychosocial program run by Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) for children and adolescents support the hypothesis that West Bank

[106] Buchert, Lene. 2014. "Learning Needs And Life Skills For Youth: An Introduction". *International Review Of Education* 60 (2): 163-176. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-014-9431-3

[107] World Bank, *Aspirations on Hold?: Young Lives in the West Bank and Gaza*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012. *https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26875*

schoolchildren who participated in the intervention would exhibit higher psychosocial wellbeing scores and academic achievement in school than control group children.[108]

The Effective Implementation of Education Programming in the West Bank

A review of the literature revealed limited evidence on effective implementation of after school programming in conflict-affected contexts, but there is research on school-based interventions in Palestine or similar contexts. Communal support and caring were cited as one key factor critical to building resilience within Palestinian society.[109] Research shows that familial and development factors, such as supportive parenting combined with flexible and multiple coping strategies, are particularly helpful in establishing resilience and supporting mental health in Palestinian children.[110] Research also points to the importance of activities to support and engage secondary stakeholders beyond children, such as parents, teachers, and psychosocial workers who implement the interventions, as key to the success of school-based interventions.

An evaluation of the Better Learning Program implemented by Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Palestine found strong evidence of the effectiveness of activities targeting improved psychosocial wellbeing of children, a shift to more inclusive and engaging teaching methodologies, greater parental engagement and involvement in their children's education, and improved teacher motivation and professionalism.[111]

Findings from the NRC pilot program suggested that a holistic, overarching approach to teacher development and wellbeing is what makes the difference with regards to a quality education system. According to the study, teachers and school counselors received insufficient support through the formal system and their own sense of wellbeing was damaged as a result of the protracted crisis in Palestine. In order to address this challenge, the Better Learning Program implemented teacher and school counselor focused components into its activities that included capacity building activities focusing on self-awareness and stress management techniques, expressive arts therapy, recreational games to improve wellbeing, a phone hotline where qualified operators can provide online counseling services on the stressors affecting teachers' personal and professional lives, and the provision of psychosocial support (PSS) materials in

[108] Constandinides, Despina, Sarah Kamens, Bassam Marshoud, and Fathy Flefel. "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones: Effects Of A School-Based Intervention For Palestinian Children." *Peace And Conflict: Journal Of Peace Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2011): 270-302. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2011.587174.

[109] Constandinides, "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones", 270-302.

[110] Constandinides, "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones", 270-302.

[111] Shah, Ritesh. Evaluation of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Palestine Education Programme 2010-2014.

tandem with capacity-building activities to staff on implementing PSS-related activities in schools. These new activities led to teaching staff reporting an increased sense of personal resilience and wellbeing and strengthening service provision to children suffering from trauma. Teachers and school counselors reported the combined psychosocial and trauma-focused approach was compatible with their educational perspectives and appeared to enable teachers to be more proactive when teaching pupils affected by war.[112]

A UNICEF project to develop a child protection curriculum in social work schools in Palestine pointed to the importance of family, community, and the social welfare system in developing protective resources for children and youth in Palestine[113]. The UNICEF project also expressed the difficulty and importance of striking the right tone in psychosocial work and that the project depended on skilled interpreters to provide locally driven insights about linguistic, cultural, and gender sensitivities.

Assessment of After School Programming

The Norwegian Refugee Council developed, piloted, refined and tested an assessment tool to respond to the complex nature of implementing education programs in conflict-affected areas that meet local needs and are sensitive to local culture and context. The Student Learning in Emergency Checklist[114] is intended to provide data for program monitoring and evaluation purposes and assesses children's perceptions of safety, self-regulation, self-efficacy, social support, academic functioning, and feelings of hope in the context of school-based psychosocial interventions. This was based off five widely accepted and empirically supported principles of comprehensive review of intervention research of those exposed to disasters and mass violence that were identified during a comprehensive review of intervention research of those exposed to disasters and mass violence:(1) to promote a sense of security, (2) to calm, (3) to foster a sense of self- and collective efficacy, (4) to promote connectedness, and (5) to instill hope.[115]

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[112] Schultz, Jon-Håkon, Laura Marshall, Helen Norheim, and Karam Al-Shanti. "School-based Intervention in Ongoing Crisis: Lessons from a Psychosocial and Trauma-focused Approach in Gaza schools." Journal on Education in Emergencies 2, no. 1 (2016): 142- 156.
http://hdl.handle.net/2451/39659

[113] Costello, Susie, Teresia Kanyi, and Matthew Dalling. "Child Protection and Family Group Conferencing Curriculum for Social Workers in Palestine." Critical and Radical Social Work 7, no. 2 (2019): 173-188, https://doi.org/10.1332/204986019x15646885499989

[114] Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). "Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (SLEC)." Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). Accessed April 21, 2021. https://inee.org/resources/student-learning-emergency-checklist-slec?webform_id=toolkit_resources

[115] Forsberg, June T. F., Jon-Håkon Schultz, Camilla Lodi, and Carly T. Dolan. *Development of the Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (26) (SLEC-26): A Measurement Tool of Promoters and Barriers for Learning among Conflict-Affected Students in Palestine.* Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2019.

The tool was first tested on a sample of 789 Palestinian students ages 12 - 16 who participated in NRC's Better Learning Program in the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, Hebron, and other areas of the West Bank. Given the relevant context and external validity of this tool, MECI should consider adapting it for their monitoring and evaluation purposes.

II. Psychosocial Support Programming

Palestine is identified as of high risk for mental health distress and disorder. The political and military violence, and the economic hardship are the major factors contributing to this.[116] A study in 2010 showed that exposure to arm conflict has negative effects on Palestinian children mental health, wellbeing and risk behavior.[117] Recent research has found a strong relationship between exposure to violence among young people in Palestine and symptoms of global distress, depression or anxiety, especially among women.[118] In addition, a study in the West Bank evidences a connection between cognitive development and poor mental health, especially for boys who can lag one academic grade compared to their peers. Thus, reinforces the need for protection of kids from trauma.[119]

There is a necessity to increase the availability, quality of mental health care and training of mental health professionals in Palestine.[120] The provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in Palestine is characterized by NGOs, Palestinian Government Agencies, and the United Nations Agencies. Research points out that major areas of growth exist in regulation, training and professional development.[121] Most services are provided in schools as preventive care by counselors, who lack adequate training. Additionally, efforts to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of different mental health services providers are needed. Finally, the importance of needs assessment for NGOs to provide

[116] Shawahin, Lamise, and Ayşe Çiftçi. "Counseling And Mental Health Care In Palestine." *Journal Of Counseling & Development* 90, no. 3 (2012): 378-382. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00048.x

[117] Harel-Fisch, Yossi, Qasrowi Radwan, Sophie D. Walsh, Avital Laufer, Gabriel Amitai, Haya Fogel-Grinvald, and Ziad Abdeen. "Psychosocial Outcomes Related to Subjective Threat from Armed Conflict Events (STACE): Findings from the Israeli-Palestinian Cross-Cultural HBSC Study". *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34, no. 9 (2010): 623-638. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.12.007

[118] Wagner, Glenn, Peter Glick, Umaiyeh Khammash, Mohammed Shaheen, Ryan Brown, Prodyumna Goutam, Rita Karam, Sebastian Linnemayr, and Salwa Massad. "Exposure to Violence and Its Relationship to Mental Health among Young People in Palestine." *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 26, no. 2 (2020): 189–97. https://doi.org/10.26719/2020.26.2.189

[119] Jürges, Hendrik, Alexandra Schwarz, Sorel Cahan, and Ziad Abdeen. "Child Mental Health and Cognitive Development: Evidence from the West Bank." *Empirica* 46, no. 3 (2019): 423–42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-019-09438-5

[120] Marie, Mohammad, Ben Hannigan, and Aled Jones. "Mental Health Needs and Services in the West Bank, Palestine." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 10, no. 1 (2016): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-016-0056-8

[121] Shawahin, Lamise, and Ayşe Çiftçi. "Counseling and Mental Health Care in Palestine." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 90, no. 3, (2012): 378–82. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00048.x

adequate services is highlighted. A recent review by UNICEF finds the need of strengthening the coordination between MHPSS providers, and the M&E systems to create clear and comprehensive evidence of MHPSS in Palestine.[122]

Effective Implementation of Psychosocial Support Programming in the West Bank

The need of MHPSS is well documented, however evidence on effective programming to provide this support is not extense in the literature.[123] Some traits can be identified from the literature. Recently, group based non-specialized interventions -as an alternative to individual specialized clinical treatments- have been found beneficial in humanitarian settings. This type of intervention allows a holistic approach to MHPSS, which recognizes the role of social context (also known as "ecological model") on mental health and psychological wellbeing.[124] The so-called ecological approach has to start with a thorough assessment of the social structure (key actors, systems and actions) that protects the children in the local context or the deficit of them.[125] Building the capacity of the communities with training and mentoring makes responses more effective.[126] Key programmatic interventions identified in the literature include generating child friendly spaces for structured play and recreation, which can be combined with other health, skills or parental support interventions, and building children strengths and resilience. The community approach appears to be especially important in Palestine due to cultural notion of resilience in the Palestinian society.[127]

The literature also indicates that developing community-based interventions that enhance parental support, or other significant adults, is essential to generate effects in children's mental health. Evidence shows that, in humanitarian settings, there is a connection between parent mental health[128], and that parental support has a direct positive outcome, and also acts as a buffer to prevent negative effects from

[122] Child Protection Working Group, *A Review of the Humanitarian Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and Gaps in West Bank and Gaza*. UNICEF, 2016. https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/1031/file/MHPSS Rapid Review Palestine 2019.pdf

[123] Kaufmann, *Children in Emergencies*.

[124] Wood, Benjamin Mitchell, and Per Kallestrup. 2018. "A Review of Non-Specialised, Group-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions in Displaced Populations." *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care* 14 (3): 347–59. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMHSC-02-2018-0010.

[125] Kaufmann, *Children in Emergencies*.

[126] Kaufmann, *Children in Emergencies*.

[127] Constandinides, "Research In Ongoing Conflict Zones", 270-302.

[128] Panter-Brick, Catherine, Marie Pascale Grimon, and Mark Eggerman. "Caregiver - Child Mental Health: A Prospective Study in Conflict and Refugee Settings." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 55, no. 4 (2014): 313–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12167

violence in Palestine.[129] This is a pressing issue because 20% of Palestinian children are at risk of low levels of parental nurturing.[130]

The Inter-agency Network for Education on Emergencies (INEE) guidance on PSS indicates that intentional and consistent PSS investment in the education system to protect children through routines, friendships, hope, reduced stress and collaborative behavior is effective.[131]

Effects of Psychosocial Support Programs on Palestinian Children and Youth

Recent review of research in MHPSS shows a remaining gap in broad-base communitary interventions, and limited representation of the Middle East in the literature, and studies reveal mixed results of interventions.[132] An evaluation of a program that implemented structured activities (recreational, cultural and non-formal activities in a safe setting) with Palestinian children to develop resilience proved to be successful in improving children's emotional and behavioural wellbeing, however not improving feeling of hope. The intervention was also linked with increased parental support for children in the West Bank.[133] Another short school mediation intervention in the Gaza strip was effective only in preventing friendships from deterioration, but was not enough to improve their mental health and social functioning.[134] A short time intervention in the Gaza Strip didn't find significant impact on children's post traumatic or depressive symptoms of a group intervention that encouraged expression of experiences and emotions. The authors discuss the limitations of the study, which included not randomizing the treatment, not involving parents and continued exposure to conflict, and conclude that artistic expression and free playing (non-active treatment) might not be enough to reduce stress reactions in children.[135] A psychosocial narrative school-

[129] Harel-Fisch, "Psychosocial Outcomes", 623-638.

[130] Harsha, Nouh, Luay Ziq, Margaret A. Lynch, and Rita Giacaman. "Assessment of Parental Nurturing and Associated Social, Economic, and Political Factors among Children in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (WB/OPt)." *BMC Pediatrics* 20, no. 1 (2020): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-020-02317-0

[131] Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). "Guidance Note, Psychosocial Support, Facilitating Psychosocial Wellbeing and Social and Emotional Learning." INEE. Accessed on March 10, 2021. https://inee.org/resources/inee-guidance-note-psychosocial-support

[132] Elrha. *Review and Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Intervention in Humanitarian Settings*. 2021. https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MHPSS-research-review-2021.pdf.

[133] Loughry, Maryanne, Alastair Ager, Eirini Flouri, Vivian Khamis, Abdel Hamid Afana, and Samir Qouta. "The Impact of Structured Activities among Palestinian Children in a Time of Conflict." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 47, no. 12 (2006.): 1211–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01656.x

[134] Peltonen, Kirsi, Samir Qouta, Eyad El Sarraj, and Raija Leena Punamäki. "Effectiveness of School-Based Intervention in Enhancing Mental Health and Social Functioning Among War-Affected Children." *Traumatology* 18, no. 4 (2012): 37–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765612437380

[135] Thabet, Abdel Aziz, Panos Vostanis, and Khalid Karim. "Group Crisis Intervention for Children during Ongoing War Conflict." *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 14, no. 5 (2005): 262–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-005-0466-7

based intervention in the Gaza Strip to empower positive emotions, life satisfaction, and optimism in children as protective factors in preventing post traumatic reactions showed to increase positive emotions and life satisfaction, but negative feelings were stronger as well.[136]

Unicef interagency evaluation of PSS programs revealed increased resilience and lower psychosocial risk on children that participated in programs in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. Improvements were most significant in the level of engagement at home, in community, social relations and problem solving.[137] Also, the study showed that programs in the West Bank that focused only on recreational activities (didn't include clinical counseling) and that were short-term were more effective compared to those that included a clinical counseling component.

Assessment of Psychosocial Support Programs in Palestine

According to a recent review and assessment of MHPSS in humanitarian settings, using adequate measures that are aligned to the intended outcomes of MHPSS programs and adequate to the context is important.[138] There are different assessment tools used depending on what's being measured.

A study of the effects of mental health in cognitive development in the West Bank combined different tools since research shows that children's self-assessments have less explanatory power than parents' or teachers' assessments.[139] This study also highlights the need to control for confounding factors (demographic, physical health, household structure, socio-economic status, and school climate variables). The assessments used are:

- The Depression Self- Rating Scale (DSRS), also known as the Birleson depression scale, was developed for children between the age of 8 and 14 years. Students are asked to rate themselves with regard to the occurrence of depressive symptoms during the preceding week. The DSRS is usually used for screening depression and morbidity in clinical settings.
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief screening questionnaire for 3–16 year olds. Three different variants of the questionnaire were developed to be administered to children,

[136] Veronese, Guido, and Gianpiero Barola. "Healing Stories: An Expressive-Narrative Intervention for Strengthening Resilience and Survival Skills in School-Aged Child Victims of War and Political Violence in the Gaza Strip." *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 23,no. 2 (2018): 311–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104518755220

[137] UNICEF. *Interagency Psychosocial Evaluation Project*. 2011. https://www.unicef.org/oPt/FINAL_OPT_psychosocial_evaluation.pdf

[138] Elrha. *Review and Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Intervention in Humanitarian Settings*. 2021. https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MHPSS-research-review-2021.pdf

[139] Jürges, "Child Mental Health and Cognitive Development", 423–42.

parents, or teachers, respectively. SDQ is a widely accepted instrument for nonclinical screening, such as diagnosing ADHD.

The assessment of a group intervention in Palestine used the following methods:[140]

- The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) measures the children's emotional and behavioural problems, which has extensive use in cross-cultural settings.
- The Parental Support Scale is a 10-item scale that was designed to assess Palestinian children's degree of satisfaction with parental support. The scale includes tangible support (i.e., presents, money, food and clothing), emotional support (i.e., affection, love and warmth), and social support (i.e., help and caring).
- The Hopefulness Scale, youth version, is a scale developed based on the premise that hope is a primary factor in identifying youth who may be resistant to 'long-term unfavourable outcomes'. The scale has 10 items designed to assess children's levels of hopefulness.

The Palestinian Psychosocial Interagency Evaluation Questionnaire, develop by UNICEF in 2011, is an assessment tool that measures the following seven psychosocial outcome areas: a child's general resilience, level of engagement at home and with their family, engagement in school, engagement in the community, social relations, problem solving abilities, and reduced troubling thoughts and feelings.[141] Other organizations have developed tools to measure MHPSS variables. For instance, Save the Children developed the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA). It is a scenario- and performance-based measure designed to assess the development of self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, relationship management, and conflict resolution in children ages 6 - 12 years old. It was created for the Iraq context (it is available in English and Arabic) and has been adapted for several other contexts.[142]

Finally, the Interagency MHPSS Monitor and Evaluation guidance established a common framework to measure progress in humanitarian settings, which lists different outcomes and indicators that programs could measure.[143]

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[140] Loughry,"The Impact of Structured Activities", 1211–18.

[141] UNICEF. *Interagency Psychosocial Evaluation Project*. 2011. https://www.unicef.org/oPt/FINAL_OPT_psychosocial_evaluation.pdf

[142] Save the Children. *International Social & Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA)*. Save the Children, 2019. *https://inee.org/resources/international-social-and-emotional-learning-assessment-isela*

[143] IASC, *Reference Group for Mental*, 2017.

III. Women's Empowerment Programming

In the MENA region, women tend to have less access to education and work, less opportunity to inherit, less access to courts, and have higher levels of maternal mortality. These inequalities are seen in the West Bank, where women have less access to and lower participation in the labor market compared to men, experience discrimination in employment and are expected to prioritize unpaid reproductive and family care roles over a full-time job or profession[144]. While the rate of unemployment has decreased 1.5 percent between 2005 and 2017 for Palestinian men, the rate for Palestinian women has increased to 25.2 percent. Often women's labor is in the low-skilled and low-income activities. Women are further inhibited by mobility restrictions within the West Bank, lack of vocational and technical training, and a weak social safety net that is not supportive of women's entrepreneurship[145]. Empowerment is also difficult due to the situation of "de-development" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. De-development, caused by Israeli occupation, has created structural limitations, patriarchal domination and the gender gap, and spatial and social fragmentation[146].

The Effective Implementation of Women's Empowerment in the West Bank

Women's empowerment is fundamentally about the process of challenging and changing existing power structures to create a more equitable distribution. It requires a shift in individual psychology and societal norms. Studies have also shown that empowerment programs are most effective when women organize and act collectively to empower each other and their community. In this way, empowerment is both a tool and an objective[147].

Gender at Work's framework highlights the interconnectedness of gender equality with individual change and organizational change that occurs within the larger context of community power dynamics. The below graphic explains what can be changed in each of these areas[148].

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[144] Hilal, Randa. "TVET Empowerment Effects within the Context of Poverty , Inequality and Marginalisation in Palestine." International Journal of Training Research 15, no. 3 (2017): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2017.1376384

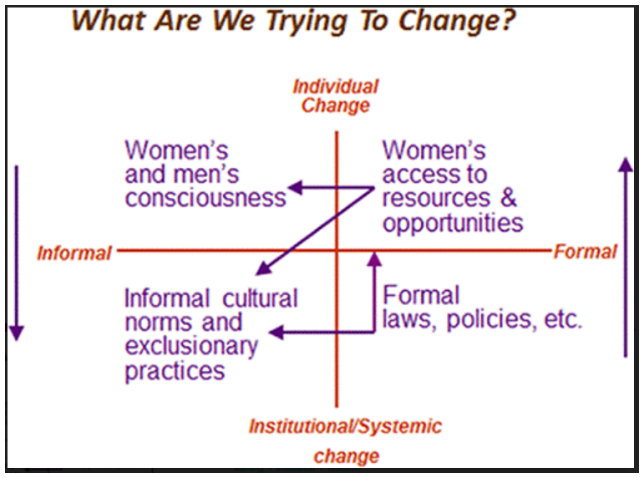
[145] UN Women, *Women's Economic Empowerment through Decent Work*. Jerusalem: UN Women, 2012. https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field office palestine/attachments/publications/2019/4/wee_fact sheet_25 march_final.pdf?la=en&vs=114

[146] Kuttab, Eileen. "Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualizing Palestinian Women's Empowerment." *Development* 53, no. 2 (2010): 247-253. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2010.22

[147] Cornwall, Andrea. "Women's Empowerment: What Works?" *Journal of International Development* 28, no. 313 (2016): 342–59. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210

[148] Gender at Work. "Gender at Work Framework." Gender at Work. Accessed March 24, 2021. https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/

Figure C: Gender at Work's Framework



Source: Gender at Work. "Gender at Work Framework."

The ILO compiled data from various case studies throughout the MENA region and found ten factors that contributed to the success of women empowerment programs. These included factors such as aligning with international or regional standards; adopting a multi-stakeholder and multi-sector approach; fostering women's participation and leadership; and addressing restrictive social norms[149].

Empowerment programming also contains many cross-cutting considerations. Two such considerations that are relevant especially in the MENA region are the patriarchal structure and religion[150]. Men are key actors in women's empowerment because they often act as barriers to women and girls. Their opinions and actions as fathers, partners, and community leaders can be critical. This means any action to address women empowerment must consider the role of men in the society as both challenges and opportunities[151]. The United States Institute of Peace found that one way that this was done successfully in Islamic contexts in South Asia and the Middle East was to engage the religious

[149] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and CAWTAR, *Changing Laws and Breaking Barriers for Women's Economic Empowerment in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia*. Paris:OECD, 2020. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1787/ac780735-en

[150] Imam, Ayesha. *The Devil Is in the Details: At the Nexus of Development, Women's Rights, and Religious Fundamentalisms*. Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2015. http://awdflibrary.org/handle/123456789/125

[151] Eerdewijk, Anouka Van, Franz Wong, Chloe Vaast, Julie Newton, Marcelo Tyszler, and Amy Pennington. *White Paper: A Conceptual Model of Women and Girls' Empowerment*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), 2017. https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BMGF_KIT_WhitePaper_web-1.pdf

community, including Imams, on issues of women's rights. It greatly reduced the risk of women's advocates being dismissed because these religious leaders have legitimacy on all levels of society[152].

The Effects of Women's Empowerment

A commonly used model views women's power as different categories

- Power to- a woman or girl's ability to make decisions and act on them
- Power within- a woman or girl's sense of self-esteem, dignity, and self-worth
- Power with- a woman or girls' strength gained from solidarity, collective action or mutual support[153]

Effective empowerment strategies increase all of these areas.

A study by the World Bank of women in Israel found that empowered and free women were labelled by other women as strong, confident, brave, and were looked to as leaders in the community[154]. Other studies[155] also showed that women's statuses in their communities and families increased.

Assessment of Women's Empowerment

Assessing the impact of women's empowerment programs is difficult because there are many dimensions to consider. Additionally, since empowerment is steeped in the social and cultural context of a country benchmarks and measurements are not universal. Empowerment is a constantly iterative and non-linear process, which makes it difficult to measure using traditional techniques[156]. Various organizations have attempted to create standardized methods of measurements and international databases which shall be discussed in this section. M&E tools vary from measuring cultural norms[157] to measuring more traditional reach and process indicators. M&E is so complex that AWID recently found that over half of Millenium Development Goal 3 (MDG3) grantees use more than four M&E approaches.

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[152] Angarola, Anne, Steven E. Steiner, and Shannon Zimmerman. "Engaging Men in Women's Rights and Empowerment in South Asia and the Middle East." Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2013. https://wayback.archive-it.org/3453/20150903193603/http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB145-Engaging-Men-in-Women%27s-Rights.pdf

[153] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. *What Gets Measured Matters: A Methods Note for Measuring Women and Girls' Empowerment.* Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019. https://www.gatesgenderequalitytoolbox.org/wp-content/uploads/BMGF_Methods-Note-Measuring-Empowerment-1.pdf

[154] World Bank, *Aspirations on Hold?: Young Lives in the West Bank and Gaza*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012. *https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26875*

[155] Gardiner, Drew. Promoting Women's Empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa A Rapid Evidence Assessment of Labour Market Interventions Investing in Rural People. IFAD; ILO, 2017, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_563865.pdf

[156] Kuttab, "Empowerment as Resistance", 247-253.

[157] Schuster, Roseanne C., Alexandra Brewis, Peggy Ochandarena, Angie Abdelmonem, Sereen Hoso, and Khaled Faqeeh. "Measuring Community Norms around Women's Empowerment in the West Bank: Opportunities and Challenges of a Novel Approach Using Cultural Consensus." *SSM - Population Health* 9, (2019). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100489

The most successful approaches use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. This does not mean that the purpose is to collect mountains of data but it is to identify a small but effective set of indicators that are specific, measurable, and relevant[158]. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has also created a comprehensive Gender Equality Toolbox where they highlight three steps to effective measurement.

1. Articulating empowerment of women and girls in a results chain (theory of change)
2. Creating specific empowerment outcomes within the results chain
3. Developing appropriate and relevant indicators to measure those outcomes and how data collection and analysis will occur.

They also reference certain indices with measurements that can be used across contexts such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index and the Demographic Health Survey[159].

Another measurement tool is the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology that appears in various toolkits and studies. Through this method participants are asked to share their most significant change stories. It can be very helpful to explain how and when a change comes about, which helps support theory of change models[160]. MSC is also the cornerstone of Gender at Work's Gender Action Learning process that prioritizes reflection on self and organizational practices as well as the ability to learn from one another[161].

IV. Community Engagement Programming

Community engagement programs are very diverse in methods and content. The most relevant programmatic approaches to community engagement include community-based service learning[162],

[158] Batliwala, Srilatha. "Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for Women's Rights: Thirteen Insights for Women's Organizations," 2011. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/strengthening_monitoring_nad_evaluation_-_thirteen_insights.pdf.

[159] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, "*What Gets Measured Matters"*, 2019.

[160] Causemann, Bernward, Eberhard Gohl, and Verena Brenner. *Tiny Tools: Measuring Change in Communities and Groups An Overview*. 2012. http://www.ngo-ideas.net/mediaCache/Tinytools_Overview/Tinytools-Overview.pdf

[161] Gender at Work. "Gender at Work Framework."

[162] There is significant variation in the definition of service learning among researchers and practitioners, but the common ground is that it is a pedagogy which combines service and learning objectives.

Blouin, David D., and Evelyn M. Perry. 2009. "Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-Based Organizations' Perspectives On Service Learning". *Teaching Sociology* 37 (2): 120-135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055x0903700201

participatory action research[163], summer camps[164], etc. These approaches to community engagement can be based on individual contribution (e.g. hours of individual volunteering) or joint action, with a coordinated group engaging in a common task (e.g. participatory action research) .

Community service programs may focus on a wide range of interconnected activities in different fields such as music, arts, health, participatory governance, activities related to digital literacy, 21st century skills or clean-up of public spaces..

Research on community engagement programs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is limited. Some research suggest that the inflow of international funding following the Oslo agreements has notably decreased social capital in the form of traditional volunteering and community engagement[165] [166]. Traditional forms of volunteer community engagement have been progressively substituted with Palestinian Authority and NGO professionals. Additionally, many NGOs have reduced grassroot connections, constrained by administrative requirements of international donors and the Palestinian Authority[167]. To mitigate this deficiency, joint ownership by beneficiaries can be promoted through local need assessments, local partnerships, as well as the use of local procurement systems, in line with known best practices like the OECD Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness[168].

In the West Bank, the non-profit organization Ruwwad runs a youth organizing program to promote civic engagement among youth through scholarships linked to service-learning.[169] Scholars spend four hours weekly doing community service and benefit from business skills workshops, cultural discussions and trips. In 2021, 2% of UNICEF's funds designated to the West Bank region will be destined to

[163] Participatory Action Research (PAR) "is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for [a range of] issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it."

Kindon, Sara Louise, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London: Routledge, 2007.

[164] Bircher, Lisa S., and Bonnie Sansenbaugher. "Our OASIS: An Elementary Science Summer Day Camp Uses High School Mentors to Get Students Excited about Science." *Science and Children* 54, no. 7 (2017): 46–50. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26387094

[165] Schulz, Michael, and Lina Suleiman. "Palestinian NGOs' Changed Work Dynamics: Before, During, and beyond the Oslo Process." Middle East Critique 29, no. 4 (2020): 433–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1826735

[166] Awad, Mohammad. "International Funding to Palestinian NGOs and Its Impact on Social Capital in the West Bank." The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal 18, no. 1 (2013).

[167] Schulz, Michael, and Lina Suleiman. "Palestinian NGOs' Changed Work Dynamics: Before, During, and beyond the Oslo Process." *Middle East Critique 29*, no. 4 (2020): 433–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1826735

[168] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*. OECD, 2008. https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf

[169]Ruwwad. "Palestine - Areas of Impact." Ruwwad. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://ruwwad.ngo/where-we-work/3/areas

community engagement programs (most of them focused on COVID-19).[170] USAID's Conflict Management and Mitigation Program currently runs 24 grants focused to mitigate the conflict between Israel and Palestine by enhancing the participation of community members through sports, science, arts and infrastructure among others.[171]

The Effects of Community Engagement Programs in the West Bank

Holistic approaches for community development, like MECI's model, rely on the assumption that schooling by itself is necessary but not sufficient for achieving community development and peacebuilding goals. Research points out that in the context of poverty and oppression of the West Bank, the effects of schooling on cognitive development are limited, compared to those found in western countries or associated with age[172].

Community service activities might be designed to address immediate community needs, but overall a key programmatic outcome of community service is the improvement in social capital among community members. Research defines social capital as "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit"[173] . Social capital is not evenly distributed among all members of a community.

Social capital is considered a key factor not only for peacebuilding and resilience but also for democratic governance. Researchers also discuss the possible links between social capital and economic development, without reaching a clear consensus on the extent of this relation[174].

In 2011, Stewart[175] reported that the Ruwwad model developed social capital, cognitive skills, psychosocial skills and work-related skills. However, his findings are exclusively based on focus groups that are not suitable for measuring impact quantitatively and attribute causal relationships.

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Assessment of Community Engagement Programs

Researchers and practitioners alike have frequently debated the best ways to measure social capital[176]. In 2020, Rober D. Putnam developed a Social Capital Index using primarily figures of community organizations as a proxy[177], but other authors have also used community volunteering[178] [179] as well as other variables such as trust, number of civil society organizations, corruption indexes, economic freedom[180], and many others[181].

However, most of these measurement proposals are designed for European or North American communities, which may limit their fit in other regions, especially in conflict-heavy contexts like the West Bank.

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Appendix 4: List of Interviews Conducted

	Interviewee Name	Title or Role
1	Mohammed Said	Program Director, MECI Palestine
2	Tamara Pironnet	MECI Board Member
3	Jasmine Nahhas di Florio	MECI Board Member
4	Mais Zoheir Hedmi	MECI Psychologist
5	Samaher Mohammad Shaker Snaf	MECI Counselor (Sports, Yoga)
6	Amal Akel Mohammad Hajjaj	MECI Counselor (Arts)
7	Haleemah	MECI Staff and Former Scholar
8	Hassna Kanan	MECI Staff and Former Scholar
9	Ru'a Rimawi	MECI Staff and Scholar
10	Yazan Al-Rimawi	Mayor of Beni Zaid
11	Insaf Al-Shuaibi	Head of women's association
12	Mahmoud Aatta	Head of the parents' association
13	Eman Rajaj	School Principal (Basic girls school)
14	Baseem Iriqat	Ministry of Education Staff (General Manager)
15	Ikram Abd Al A'll Issa Isnaf	School Principal (Upper Boys School)

Appendix 5: Monitoring and Evaluation Guidance

Suggested Report Structure

1. **Introduction and purpose of the report**: this section would clearly define the main purpose of the report (as well as who is the audience for this report (donors, evaluation, board, etc.)
2. **Follow up from takeaways from the previous report**: every report must close with main takeaways and this section should address how these takeaways have been assessed during the period.
3. **Program objectives and period goals**: whether the report is monthly or annual, this section should state which were the main goals.
4. **Evaluation**: if the goals were met or not, provide evidence. In this section, KPI's should be presented, explained, and analyzed to understand why goals were met or not. The analysis must not be a snapshot of the period, it must bring back the evolution through different periods in order to tell the story and provide context.

5. **Conclusion and takeaways**: close the report by stating which goals were met, as well as what will be the follow-up to ensure continuity; the goals that were not met, as well as what actions will be taken in consequence. If there are any new goals for the next period, it must also be stated here along with the planned actions (short and long term) to achieve it

Table D that follows presents a sample M&E plan for MECI, with examples of program outputs and outcomes. An editable version of this table can be found in the shared Google folder.

Table D: Sample M&E Plan for MECI

Monitor or Evaluation	Program Element	Program Output or Outcome	What are you Looking for?	Data Collection			
				How?	From whom?	When or how frequently?	Who is in charge?
i.e Monitor (outputs) or Evaluation (outcomes)	i.e. specific activities	i.e. outputs or short-term outcomes to measure	i.e. specific program output or outcome indicator or description	i.e. tool to measure	i.e. stakeholder	i.e. time in the year	i.e. staff member(s) who should collect and analyze info
MONITOR	After-School Activities linked to SEL	Students participate actively in SEL activities	- Frequency of the activities - % of school students that attend activities	Programming and attendance data	Counselors	Monthly	Counselors
			Students are motivated and satisfied with activities	Satisfaction survey	Students	End of year	Program Director
	Scholarship provision	High achieving students have access to funds to pay for university	- Number of scholarships provided and amounts - Number of Female, Male Scholars - Areas of study	Programming data	Program staff	End of year	Program Director
	Scholars activities linked to role model	Scholars participate in activities that connect with After-School Program students	- Number of community service activities led by scholars, - Number of university talks with After-School participants led by scholars - Number of After-School participants engaged by scholars	Programming data	Program Staff	End of year	Program Director
	Women's Empowerment activities	Increased participation in training and workshops	Increased number of women that attend workshops	Attendance data	Women	End of year	Program Director
EVALUATION	After-School Activities linked to SEL	Students develop and strengthen Socio-emotional core competencies	% and Degree to which MECI students demonstrate self-awareness	SEL survey	Students	Start & end of year	Psychologist
			% and degree to which MECI students demonstrate self-management				
			% and degree to which MECI students demonstrate social awareness				
			% and degree to which of MECI students demonstrate relationship skills				

Table D: Sample M&E Plan for MECI

			% and degree to which of MECI students demonstrate responsible decision-making				
	After-School Activities linked to academic improvement	Improved academic interest and performance*	Decrease in school absenteeism of MECI students	MoE official attendance data	MoE / school Principals	- End of year - Program director	Program Director
			% of participants' grades ranked excellent				
	Scholars activities linked to role model	Scholars express change in mindset	- Scholars express interest in their professional development - The degree to which the scholar program has affected the scholars career pathways - The degree to which mentorship opportunities strengthen scholar self-esteem, leadership skills, sense of connection/bonds to the community	Regular conversations with scholars	Counselors	- End of year - Counselors	Counselors
	Women's Empowerment activities	Women develop work-related and soft skills	% of women that express having developed soft skills	Satisfaction survey	Women	- End of the year - Program director	Program Director
			% of women that express having developed work related skills	Satisfaction survey	Women	- End of the year - Program director	Program Director
		Employment opportunities	Number of women that work	MECI employee data	Women	End of year	Program director
			Number of businesses run by women in the community**	Official data	Mayor Office		
EVALUATION	Overall change in community	Community mindset changes	Reported observed changes in community	Sense-making meeting	Program director, WA head, PA	Quarterly	Program Director

Notes:

* This represents an indirect contribution of the program that MECI can track, but it is not a direct outcome of the activities.

** Longer term -- precondition is women developing the adequate skills for this. this is predicated on the achievement of the previous goals of skill development

Appendix 6: Trust Word Cloud

The following word cloud is a compilation of key words taken from quotes related to MECI's role in building feelings of trust from the interviews conducted by the SIPA team. The word size corresponds to the number of times the word was used. The text in the word cloud comes from a total of 18 quotes from 8 individuals. Some key words of note include family, relationships, parents, attention, needs, feedback, local, honest, opinions, motivation, safe, and support, among others.

Figure D: Trust Word Cloud