Lebanon Civic and Civic Support Initiatives

Final Evaluation (Public Release)
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Acronyms

ADS	Advocacy Development Specialist
CSO	Civil Society Organization
IT	Information Technology
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LCI	Lebanon Civic Initiative
LCSI	Lebanon Civic Support Initiative
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PDS	Project Development Specialist
PM	Prime Minister
PPS	Probability Proportionate to Size Sampling
SMT	Senior Management Team
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

Executive Summary

The goal of this program evaluation was to document the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the Lebanon Civic Initiative (LCI) and Lebanon Civic Support Initiative (LCSI) programs (2007-2012). The evaluation assessed the manner in which the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) responded to US foreign policy priorities and shifting dynamics in Lebanon, met programmatic objectives, and achieved both intended and unintended impact. The evaluation also identified best practices and approaches from the LCI and LCSI programs.

The Evaluation Team found that LCI and LCSI programs were based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change might occur. The Evaluation Team endorsed OTI's theory of change and agreed with OTI's balancing of what was ideal with what was possible. OTI pushed boundaries, working on more political issues and in more contentious areas of the country than previous USAID programming. The advocacy component introduced with LCSI programming in 2010 was a key factor in this success.

The delivery of OTI's program of development assistance to civil society in Lebanon was appropriate and based on an accurate understanding of conflict dynamics in the country and at the sub-national level. The Senior Management Team (SMT) was aware of shifting political realities in the country and revised its strategy appropriately given these shifts and in response to on-the-ground learning. Above all, OTI's focus on working with smaller, community-based organizations outside of Beirut was a strategic move that maximized impact and filled a gap in an already crowded donor environment.

OTI enjoyed a friendly and constructive relationship with most of its project partners. Project partners were generally satisfied, not only with the funding they received from OTI, but also with the technical assistance provided. OTI capacity building – helping conduct needs assessments, set goals, implement activities, network, and report on activities in a timely manner – was critical to the growth of partner organizations. Some, though not all, of OTI's project partners developed sufficient capacity over the course of their involvement with OTI to compete in competitive bid processes for future funding from USAID or other international donors.

The program was effective and largely successful at the outcome level. Both organizational and individual learning took place as a direct result of OTI programming. Organizations and individuals reported positive growth as a result of their work with OTI. Some two hundred organizations and thousands of youth participated in an OTI-funded project activity at some point from 2008-2012.

With regards to the attainment of advocacy skills, this was more pronounced in individuals than in organizations. Among youth, we found an increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of municipal authorities. When asked what they took away from their involvement in either an OTI training workshop or in an activity implemented by an OTI project partner, most stressed personal growth. Some said they felt more self-confident; others said they had become more open and learned to respect other perspectives, even around

sensitive issues. Many said they developed new interpersonal skills, learned to be more responsible, and lost their fear of saying what they thought, even in front of an audience.

Impact at higher levels was somewhat more difficult to determine and to attribute to the program. Project activities did help create new, open space for advocacy, but there was little evidence that this space significantly challenged political party dominance. Where participants demonstrated new advocacy skills or the values of active citizenship, this was primarily around highly local issues or municipal affairs. It remains to be seen if the youth who gained new skills or values as a result of their participation in an OTI-funded project will go on to also engage regional or national issues in the future.

The depth and breadth of OTI's programming alone was sufficient to help strengthen civil society in Lebanon. If considered only in terms of a dollar amount, this large injection of funds into civil society helped bolster this sector, which has historically championed democracy. Where the LCI and LCSI programs excelled, however, was in reaching out to new partners.

Based on its review of the OTI program in Lebanon, the Evaluation Team set forth the following recommendations. These refer to learning from the OTI experience in Lebanon and also represent some best practices reflected in the OTI program which may be instructive for future development assistance programming in Lebanon or for the provision of development assistance in countries in a similar state of transition.

1. Continue to engage with civil society in Lebanon. Actively seek out new partners in addition to supporting established NGOs. In the mentoring of youth who are not civically engaged and of less professional organizations, OTI excelled over the program period. Aside from funding, OTI was able to contribute less to larger and well-established NGOs. It is with smaller groups in strategic geographic locations outside of Beirut that OTI can offer the greatest added value.

2. Ensure that this and similar small grant programs have sufficient staff to maintain a similarly high level of engagement with partners. New organizations require far more assistance than do established organizations. OTI had a relatively high staff-to-project ratio over the implementation period. Certainly, projects of comparable size have been implemented by USAID with fewer staff. However, the very close mentoring relationship between OTI staff and partners was specific to the Lebanon program and required a comparatively high ratio of staff-to-project partners. Furthermore, consistent staff engagement with project partners was a critical component of the LCI and LCSI programs.

3. Allocate sufficient resources for research to be conducted before the start of similar programs and throughout implementation for monitoring and evaluation purposes. OTI's success in effectively revising strategy was based in large part on adequate access to information. Focus groups, public opinion surveys, and other research are critical tools for measuring progress and also for superior strategy design and revision.

4. Assist beneficiary organizations in conducting systematic needs assessments rather than on an ad hoc basis. Ensure that sufficient financial and time resources are available for the proper conduct of needs assessments. This will help ensure that project activities respond to real community demands.

5. In seeking to network multiple beneficiary organizations, consider also the risks of negative competition. Relationships, positive or negative, between individuals and organizations are likely to outlast any USAID program. Mitigate negative competition risk through transparent granting. Re-granting some organizations but not others can create false expectations about future funding. With organizations that are not re-granted, communicate clearly why this decision was made. If the organization failed to meet some expectation, this must be made clear.

I. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The goal of this program evaluation was to document the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the Lebanon Civic Initiative (LCI) and Lebanon Civic Support Initiatives (LCSI) programs (2007-2012). The evaluation assessed the manner in which the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) responded to US foreign policy priorities and shifting dynamics in Lebanon, met programmatic objectives, and achieved both intended and unintended impact. The evaluation also identified best practices and approaches from the LCI and LCSI programs.

This report is structured to provide an overview of the evaluation mandate, a description of the LCI and LCSI programs, a description of OTI's theory of change, a review of the evaluation methodology and activities, a detailed assessment for each of fourteen evaluation questions, and finally a summary and conclusion section with detailed recommendations for future US Government (USG) support of civil society in Lebanon or for USG support of civil society in other conflict-prone environments.

1.1 Intended Use of the Evaluation

This evaluation will be used in support of the USAID mission in Lebanon, in particular, to help better target development assistance with civil society actors in the country. Best practices and approaches discerned through this evaluation will be fed into OTI programming in other countries in similar states of transition.

The primary intended user of this evaluation is OTI. However, we also acknowledge a more comprehensive enumeration of stakeholders (evaluation readers), including the program implementer Chemonics International, local OTI program staff, over two hundred beneficiary organizations, as well as the Lebanese public and the Government of Lebanon, both of which have benefited from project activities implemented by OTI's non-governmental organization (NGO) partners. The thematic focus of this evaluation has been adjusted to provide information that is relevant and useful to the future decision-making of OTI and which may help identify best practices for other evaluation stakeholders.

II. LCI & LCSI PROGRAM RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

In September 2007, OTI initiated programming in Lebanon to further cross-confessional interaction and reduce community level sectarian conflicts. OTI began programming with the broad mandate of "preserving democratic space," with specific objectives to be determined by the field team at a later date. The task order also explained that,

> the initial approach is for OTI and its SWIFT Partner [Chemonics International] to work on initiatives to encourage cross-confessional dialogue and activities at the community level, with the view that dialogue can improve connectedness between the local and national levels, and ultimately improve governance prospects at the national level.

Both the LCI and LCSI programs have provided small, in-kind grants to a wide range of Lebanese organizations working with youth in marginalized and conflict-prone areas. Between September 2007 and August 2012, OTI staff awarded and administered 296 cash or in-kind grants to 196 organizations. The dollar amount of grants over both OTI programs ranged from a minimum of $4,000 to a maximum of $250,000, with an average grant of $77,000 (standard deviation: $55,000).

2.1 Program Goals

Program literature demonstrated how program goals changed over the course of the program, responding to on-the-ground learning and changes in social and political conditions. A challenge of this evaluation was assessing indicators of success against changing program goals. However, we do recognize a clear continuity between goals at different stages of the program and also that goals were modified only as a result of significant consideration and in consultation with a broad array of stakeholders, including with senior USAID/OTI and Chemonics International staff in Washington D.C.

The original LCI program goals are recorded in Section IV of the 2007-2008 annual report. These guided the first several months of implementation and approximately the first twenty grants of the program:

1. Strengthen civil society to be a more effective proponent of reform.
2. Promote community consensus building through community development.

In a May 2008 strategy review session, however, OTI significantly reformulated its program goals. This retargeting was based principally on the conclusion that that "cross-confessional dialogue was not a strategic area for OTI intervention" and that a political stalemate at the national level suggested that intervention would be more effective at the local level.

New objectives regarding conflict mitigation were intended to respond to US foreign policy, and decision makers believed that these goals addressed sensitive political issues that other donors were unwilling to broach in addition to maximizing OTI's quick impact approach to intervention. OTI stated that it could add value by targeting specific conflict "hot-spots" in the country. Concluding early on that sectarian tension writ large was too broad of a conflict catalyst to be addressed at the national level, OTI chose to concentrate activities in specific geographic locations with recurring conflict or with recent exposure to conflict. It was believed that intervention here would also have implications on the security and political environment at the national level.

The next significant adjustment to the program goals accompanied the transition from the LCI to the LCSI program in January 2010. With the extension of OTI civic initiative programming in Lebanon, the team added a third goal to those agreed in June 2008; this was "to build the capacity of CSOs to advocate for local or national issues." OTI staff promoted internally the need for this additional focus, citing a lack of advocacy and organizing skills as a recurring deficiency with potential organizational partners.

The addition of an advocacy and capacity building component to OTI's work was the primary feature differentiating LCSI programming from LCI programming. An additional senior staff member joined OTI to direct these program activities. This advocacy programming was built around the theory of change, and with the assumption that,

> programming on local level issues will contribute to a broadening, deepening and strengthening of the abilities of activists to advance reform more successfully and to withstand attempts to neutralize their work. It was necessarily a long-term undertaking that may be issue – rather than policy – oriented and in any case may not see concrete reform outcomes emerge over the three to four years of such a USAID program. Instead, smaller victories will likely result, along with a more pronounced understanding of how to both collaborate and advocate more effectively.

In 2010, OTI also introduced four "intermediate results," which could be used to measure progress against the three leading program goals:

1. Youth successfully influence decision-makers.
2. Independent space is created as a challenge to political party dominance.
3. CSOs create linkages to lay the groundwork for collective action.
4. Youth's attitudes and behaviors toward conflict change positively.

In the 2010 annual program report (March 2011), program goals were listed:

1. Promote leadership, critical thinking, activism, and advocacy.
2. Mitigate tensions in conflict-prone areas through reconciliation work, collective memory activities, and dialogue on key national and community-level issues.
3. Enhance civil society organizations' capacity to advocate for local or national issues.

The second of these three goals was dropped in 2011.

2.2 Activities

The primary program activity for OTI was the recruitment of partner organizations and the awarding of small grants. In the first years of the program OTI staff sought out potential partners; in the later years of the program, staff worked primarily with previously identified partners. At no time did OTI publish an open request for proposals. The program's project development specialists (PDS) described their jobs as primarily to seek out capable groups of youth, to help them develop and refine their project ideas, and to assist them in the implementation of their projects over the grant period. The OTI staff we consulted with emphasized *processes*; individual and organizational learning was expected to take place through the implementation of projects.

Grants were awarded according to several criteria, namely the alignment of the organization's project goals with one or more of OTI's program goals, the potential of the group to grow and develop, the potential for the organization to attract target youth, and the financial viability of

the proposed project. Some staff also said they considered geographic components, like catchment size or whether or not specific villages were politically "symbolic." Organizations were not generally expected to have clearly refined project ideas, and OTI staff were committed to a period of consultation before each award to refine project goals and activities. Senior OTI staff described the process of "green lighting" a specific project as a consensual activity, whereby all members of the OTI team were given the opportunity to offer constructive ideas, object, or to otherwise contribute. Final decisions on funding were made by the Senior Management Team (SMT).

With the incorporation of the advocacy component into the LCSI program in 2010, OTI placed additional emphasis on working with youth to engage local decision makers. For example, health or traffic-focused projects, which made up a sizable portion of LCSI grants, also included meetings with municipal leaders, like mayors, to obtain local buy-in for project goals but also to give youth the opportunity to formally engage with civic officials.

The SMT was responsible for balancing the portfolio of program grants so that it reflected program goals at any given time and for ensuring synergy between grants. In the last year of the program, senior OTI staff placed additional emphasis on establishing linkages between project partners, with the conviction that this would help partners continue activities and resist cooptation in the years following the close of the LCSI program.

2.3 System Conditions

The LCI program responded to a period of severe political crisis for Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanese territory later that year, and then a devastating 2006 war with Israel, in which Hezbollah and not the Lebanese Army was the primary combatant.

During and after the launch of the LCI and LCSI programs, Lebanon continued to face serious threats to its political stability. These included long periods of stalemate with no president, no prime minister, or no cabinet, as well as heated parliamentary elections with a high risk of violence. A series of unsolved bombings from 2005-2008 targeted high profile figures affiliated with the US-backed March 14 Coalition; these included the assassinations of Gebran Tueni, Samir Kassir, Walid Eido, Pierre Gemayel, Antoine Ghanem, Francois al-Hajj, and others. A Hezbollah-led occupation of downtown Beirut shut down this major economic center for much of the period from December 2006 to May 2008. And in the summer of 2007, a protracted battle in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the militant Islamist group Fatah al-Islam resulted in the deaths of over four hundred.

Throughout the period of implementation, conflict along sectarian and ethnic cleavages occurred sporadically, with major episodes of violence including the May 2008 Hezbollah and Amal clashes with mobilized Druze and Sunni forces in Beirut, the Chouf, and Halba. Violent conflict within and around the country's twelve Palestinian refugee camps was also routine. The camps of Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi in the North, Bourj al-Barajneh near Beirut, and 'Ayn al-Hilweh in southern Lebanon have been the camps with the most conflict internally, between Palestinian factions, and externally, with Lebanese security forces.

Though somewhat calmer domestic conditions prevailed in 2009-2011, political tensions persisted and provided the backdrop for the majority of the LCI and LCSI implementation period. In the last year and a half of the program, conflict in neighboring Syria threatened to further destabilize an already fragile Lebanon. The country saw an influx of Syrian refugees beginning in March 2011, who primarily fled to the Wadi Khaled and eastern Bekaa areas of Lebanon. Providing aid to these refugees was regarded as a US political and humanitarian priority.

Much of the political violence in Lebanon in the period 2011-2012 may be associated with the conflict in Syria. The history of Syrian intervention in Lebanon and lasting political and sectarian tensions in the country made Lebanon particularly vulnerable to a Syrian "spillover" effect. Clashes between Sunni and Allawi residents of the Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen neighborhoods in Tripoli escalated throughout the year, with Sunni residents supporting the Syrian Opposition and Allawi residents supporting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The killing of prominent Sunni cleric and advocate of the Syrian Opposition Sheikh Ahmad Abdel-Wahid by the LAF at a checkpoint in Tripoli in May 2012 provoked large protests, particularly within the Sunni community in Beirut and Tripoli.

Also in May 2012, the Shia Meqdad clan retaliated to the kidnapping of member Hassan al-Meqdad by the Free Syrian Army with a large scale kidnapping operation in which Syrian, Lebanese, and one Turkish citizen were targeted. Both pro-regime and anti-regime forces in Syria have allegedly been responsible for the kidnapping of Lebanese citizens, on both Lebanese and Syrian soil.

In August 2012, former Lebanese minister Michel Samaha was indicted for his involvement in an apparent plot to bomb several targets in the Akkar region of northern Lebanon. And in October 2012, in the first car bomb assassination since 2008, ISF intelligence officer Wissam al-Hassan and seven bystanders were killed in an explosion near Sassine Square in the Achrafieh neighborhood of Beirut. In November 2012, at least three were killed in Sunni-Shia clashes in the southern city of Sidon.

OTI programs, globally, are valued for their flexibility and their ability to seize windows of opportunity. A focus of this evaluation was to determine to what extent OTI was able to respond rapidly to changing system conditions in line with the OTI intervention model. System conditions often determined which programmatic objectives and approaches were feasible. Effectively responding to system conditions demanded a nuanced understanding not only of the Lebanese political scene but also of Lebanon's role in the region.

2.4 Logic Model and Impact Chain

Based on a review of project documentation and conversations with OTI staff regarding program theories of change, the Evaluation Team drafted a Logic Model (Figure 1) and an Impact Chain (Figure 2). These were reviewed by OTI in its approval of the Evaluation Plan and served throughout the evaluation as a reference and as a concise representation of program assumptions, activities, and theories.

We found that, though program goals varied slightly over the implementation period as a result of OTI responding to on-the-ground learning and changing system conditions, OTI maintained a consistent vision of how program activities might lead to the primary goal of preserving Lebanon's democratic space and civil peace. This vision is represented in the Impact Chain. The analytical value of an impact chain in evaluation research is in the disaggregation of impact across various levels of intervention. The vast majority of OTI's work over the program period was with individuals in small NGOs and community groups, yet the objective was to affect change at the national level through depth and breadth of programming. The Impact Chain represents a series of causal and testable links, stringing together OTI program activities with intended outcomes and impact at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

The task of the Evaluation Team was to discern how far "up the Impact Chain" OTI program activities created change and also to discern, where possible, how much change at higher levels may be attributed to OTI programming and not to other exogenous factors. The attainment of impact at lower levels on the impact chain is regarded as a necessary condition for establishing impact at higher levels.

As depicted in Figure 2, OTI envisioned a theory of change whereby the capacitation of both individuals and organizations at the local level would lead to more effective civil society engagement with state officials and political parties at the village, district, governorate, and ultimately national levels. First, both youth and organizations would learn new skills and strengthen or acquire key citizenship and democratic values. Second, the cumulative effect of individual and organizational change across thousands of engaged youth project participants and community members and hundreds of organizations would lead to a critical mass of youth and community organizations who could influence decision makers and who might support peaceful, democratic calls for reform over violent means of political redress. Third, these youth and organizations would be able to promote these values within their communities, leading to changes in individuals, organizations, and political structures beyond those directly engaged by OTI. Lastly, a shift in societal values would lead to changes at the national level in how politics are conducted, with new respect for democratic processes and democratic political institutions. Greater respect for democratic values among citizens, within political parties, and in all branches of government would lead to more effective national governance, thereby preserving Lebanon's civil peace and democratic space.

Figure 1: Logic Model

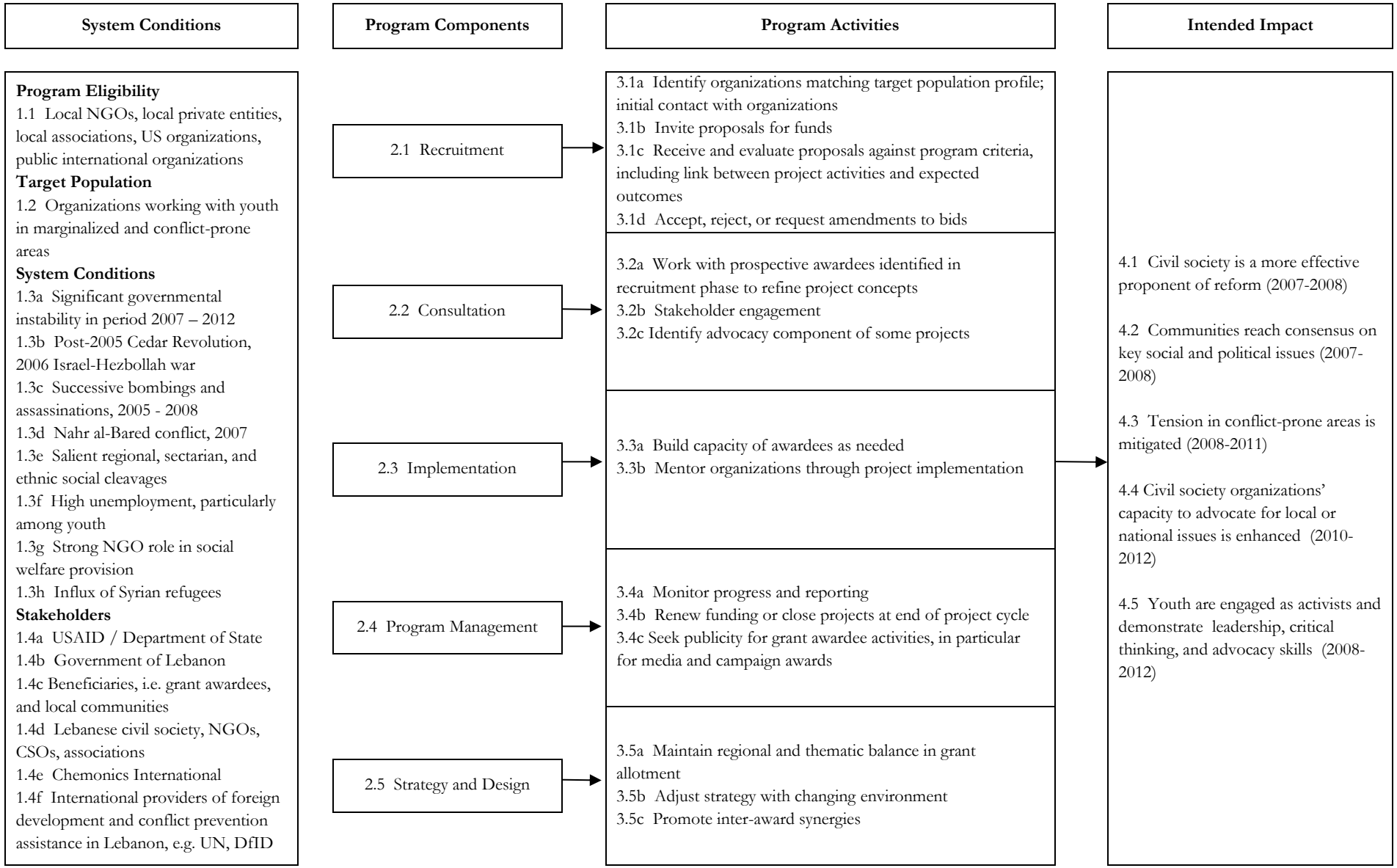
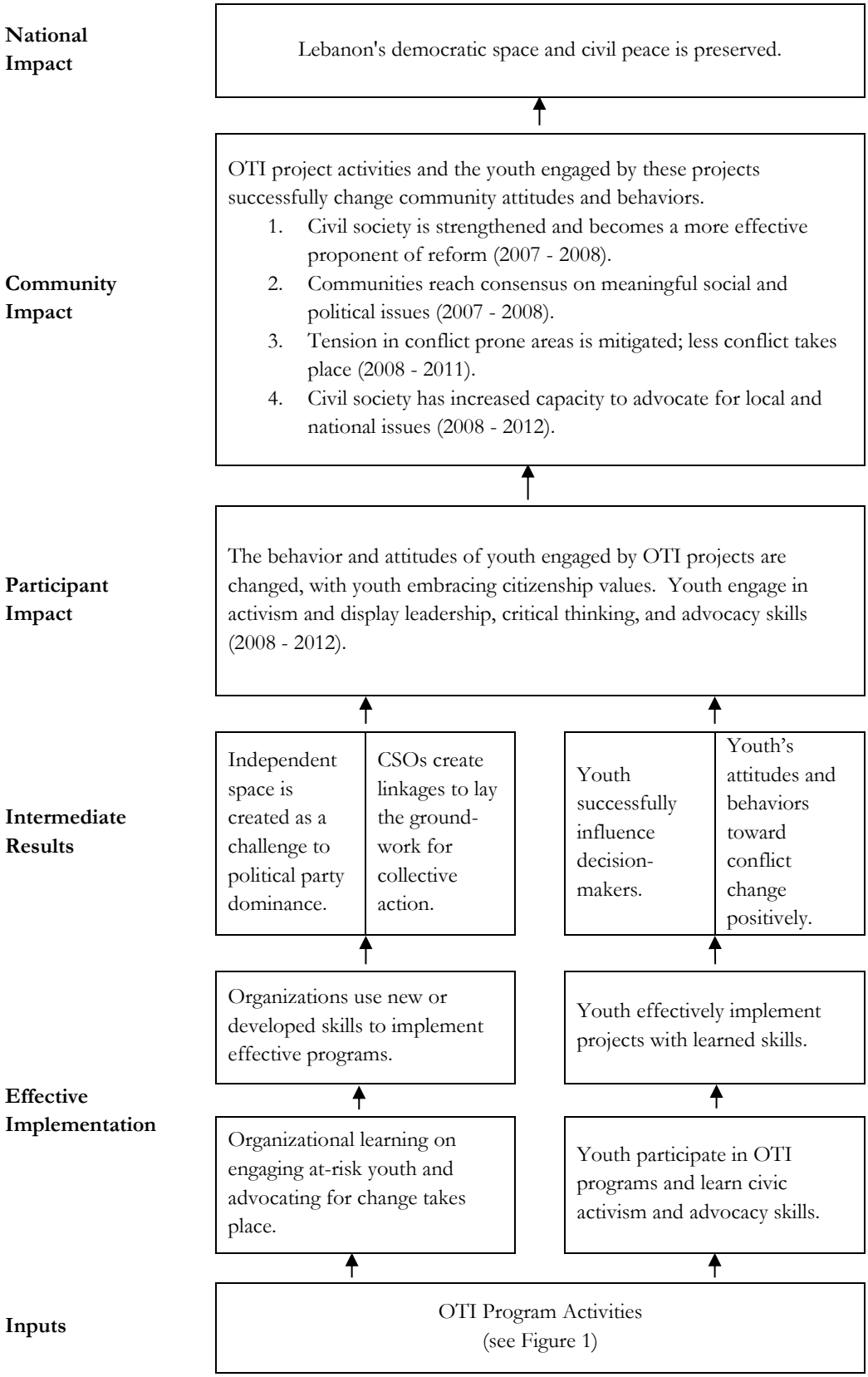


Figure 2: Impact Chain



III. EVALUATION QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

Based on a review of program documentation and initial consultations with OTI staff, the Evaluation Team identified twelve primary evaluation questions under four headings: Relevance, Effectiveness, Impact, and Lessons Identified and Best Practices. These reflected the mandate of the evaluation and were the primary questions guiding this final evaluation of the LCI and LCSI programs in Lebanon.

3.1 Evaluation Questions

Relevance:

1. Was the program based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change might occur, i.e. was the program designed in such a way that results might theoretically occur?
2. Were OTI's areas of programmatic and geographic focus appropriate given the political realities in Lebanon and OTI's role within a larger USG assistance portfolio?
3. Were OTI's revisions to strategy appropriate given shifting political realities and windows of opportunity?

Effectiveness:

4. Did the program reach the stated objectives? Was the program implemented according to its design?
5. Did individual activities logically address intended objectives?
6. Did activities respond to beneficiary needs and priorities?

Impact:

7. To what extent were intermediate results met and successfully fed into program objectives?
8. Did impact of OTI activities differ between geographic areas of interventions? If so, what were the distinguishing factors between districts or approaches taken?
9. Were there significant unintended impacts that resulted from the OTI program beyond its stated goals and objectives?
10. What impact, both intended and unintended, might be expected beyond the life of the OTI program?

Lessons Learned and Best Practices:

11. To what extent was OTI's approach to civic advocacy instructive for civil society strengthening programming in Lebanon?
12. Did OTI's branding approach influence attitudes about the United States or US assistance in targeted communities or beneficiaries?

A matrix of indicators for each evaluation question and data collection tools is provided in Appendix A. The Evaluation Team approached each focus area with somewhat different methodologies reflecting the nature of the evaluation questions. In the main, however, this evaluation relied on qualitative methodologies, including document review, focus groups, semi-structured key informant interviews, site visits, and workshop exercises with OTI staff, beneficiary organizations, and community members.

Interview, focus group, and site visit notes, as well as workshop exercise results were translated into English. Most interviews and focus groups were also audio recorded. In transcription, organizational names were retained, but the names of individuals were redacted to preserve respondent anonymity. Interviews with the SMT were not anonymized. All data was manually coded to identify trends. The evaluation mandate was to assess the overall performance of the OTI program rather than to assess the performance of individual grants or specific partners. In our findings section, we utilized data selectively to illustrate more general findings regarding the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the overall program. Where project partners are named, this should not be regarded as a comprehensive assessment of the named partner.

3.2 Sample Selection

Given the large size of the program, with nearly three hundred grants awarded over five years, the Evaluation Team wished to draw some general inferences regarding the effectiveness of the program over time and across thematic areas. In order to do so, we relied on a random sample of approximately ten percent of the program grants (approximately 25-30 grant awards). We selected this sample probability proportionate to grant size (PPS), and thus random, larger grants were somewhat more likely to be included in the sample. We chose this approach so that most of the grants selected would reflect a significant investment of OTI resources. This case selection accurately reflected the distribution of OTI grants over the five-year period, the geographic and thematic distribution of grants, as well as all OTI program goals.

However, the Evaluation Team did not limit its analysis to just the random sample of cases. While randomization was required to draw generalizable inferences regarding the impact of the entire OTI program, we were also interested in determining what set the highest impact grants apart from "average" grants. Thus, we also drafted a High Impact Case Selection roster. Here, we included partners recommended by OTI staff as well as partners named in quarterly and annual reports as success stories.

3.3 Key Informant Interviews and Site Visits

The Evaluation Team began with a series of interviews with current and former OTI senior staff. The Evaluation Team queried six senior staff and four programmatic teams[1] on their working assumptions, i.e. how they believed projects under their management might lead to the desired program objectives. Staff were asked to walk through their decision making process with the Evaluation Team: detailing how they recruited youth and partner organizations, how they set project objectives with youth, what criteria they used to evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of projects, etc.

Interviews were also conducted with one or more staff for each randomly selected case and for each High Impact Case. A total of 29 key informant interviews were conducted with beneficiary organizations. Staff were asked to describe their project, their working relationship with OTI staff, their satisfaction with the OTI program, and their perception of US government assistance to civil society in Lebanon, among other subjects.

In addition to the 29 site visits which accompanied key informant interviews with project partners, the Evaluation Team attended six OTI partner events, including trainings, conferences, and ceremonies.

3.4 Focus Groups

The Evaluation Team fed back in results from the 40 key informant interviews with OTI and beneficiary organization staff to establish a script for a series of follow-up focus groups with youth participants in OTI-funded projects and community members in prioritized geographic areas. The Evaluation Team moderated a total of fourteen focus groups. One focus group was conducted with project partners in Beirut, one focus group with partners in the North, one focus group with partners in the South, and two focus groups with partners in the Bekaa. Two additional beneficiary organization focus groups were conducted with one sample of media-themed grants and another sample of advocacy-themed grants. One focus group with community members was conducted in each of the North, Bekaa, and South. Furthermore, three focus groups were conducted with youth in the North, Bekaa, and the South. A separate focus group was also conducted with advocacy trainers who had worked closely with OTI partners.

In regional focus groups with project partners, representatives of different organizations were brought together to discuss common experiences in working with OTI. We believe this component of the evaluation synergized well with the current OTI objective to build networks between different partner organizations. Satisfaction with the project activities was assessed, as were characteristics of the youth participants. The Evaluation Team in these focus groups looked, in particular, for evidence of leadership, critical thinking, and advocacy skills.

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[1] The Evaluation Team met with members of the North, South, Bekaa, Advocacy and Media teams in addition to all members of the SMT.

In focus groups with community members, the Evaluation Team queried individuals on their reception of OTI projects in their neighborhood or village. The Evaluation Team was concerned not only with the relevance of CSO projects vis-à-vis objectives to instill citizenship values in youth participants but also in whether or not individual projects targeted clear needs in the communities in which they were implemented. Individuals were encouraged to discuss problems facing their community and whether or not they thought the OTI projects in their area addressed these problems.

3.5 Workshop Exercises

In addition to guided conversation through focus groups, moderators conducted a variety of workshop exercises with focus group participants. These included a Most Significant Change (MSC) exercise, whereby individuals were asked about the most significant change they could attribute to the project in the following domains:

1. Changes in the way our NGO operates
2. Changes I've seen in myself
3. Changes in my community
4. Changes in someone I work with

Other workshop exercises included the drawing of Impact Grids and Organizational Lifelines. In both exercises, participants were asked to map out both positive and negative changes in their organization and to assess how these changes may or may not be related to their partnership with OTI.

A final four hour self-review workshop was held with the entire OTI staff on November 2, 2012. Staff were provided with some preliminary findings from the evaluation and were invited to reflect on their experience of working with OTI over several years. Four primary questions guided this conversation:

1. Did we do what we said we would do?
2. Did it make any difference?
3. Was it the right thing to do?
4. What did we do differently that helped us succeed?

All staff also completed a questionnaire and responded to items related to strategy design, grant management, their relations with grantees, their relations with civil society more broadly, and their perception of OTI's outreach to the Lebanese public. Staff were invited to reflect more generally on US government assistance to civil society in Lebanon.

IV. FINDINGS: RELEVANCE

1. Was the program based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change might occur, i.e. was the program designed in such a way that results might theoretically occur?

LCI and LCSI program goals and the program's theory of change are summarized in sections 2.1-2.3 of this report and also depicted in a Logic Model (Figure 1) and Impact Chain (Figure 2). Though the initial mandate of "preserving democratic space" was vague, we found that OTI's initial goals of (1) strengthening civil society to be a more effective proponent of reform and (2) promoting community consensus building through community development were a logical starting point for OTI in 2007.

However, a timely strategy review based on a pilot program with twenty initial grants (2007-2008) produced valuable results. OTI correctly identified that progress against these two goals alone would be insufficient for achieving substantial and lasting impact. OTI's strategy review session in May 2008 was a key event and reflected best practices in both development and conflict management programming. The SMT carefully considered their working assumptions about how change might theoretically occur. Four key conclusions of this exercise were:

1. Even though confessional mistrust was at the heart of Lebanon's political crisis, there was very little will to reform the system. Lebanon's sectarian tensions were deeply structural and could not be meaningfully challenged with short-term funding "solutions." Further, confronting sectarianism head-on with development programming was not consistent with OTI's commitment to a "quick-impact" approach.
2. Working at the local or community level held more promise than working at the national level. Previous attempts to reform the system from above had met with questionable success.
3. Working to build consensus between confessional groups on apolitical issues alone would be insufficient, as "sects interact and agree on a daily basis on apolitical issues but always take refuge in confessional positions when the going gets tough." OTI would have to directly engage with political issues.
4. Working exclusively with established NGOs would produce minimal change, as "the donor environment in Lebanon was extremely crowded." There was no "gap" here that OTI could address; significant programming in support of civil society, generally, was already widespread. In order to achieve impact, OTI would have to not only work with existing civil society partners but also seek out new partners.

With the benefit of four years of hindsight, the Evaluation Team agreed that this was an accurate assessment of the situation at the time. Challenging the program's initial assumptions in a timely manner – within six months of inception – enabled the SMT to recalibrate their intervention strategy to reflect a better understanding of the environment in which they worked. This included setting new goals. These goals

represented a significant departure from OTI's initial goals, but they were more appropriate to the context and reflected an accurate understanding of what was achievable. We found in the documentation of this strategy review exercise evidence of the SMT's understanding of the dynamics of politics, conflict, and sectarianism in Lebanon.

OTI's small grant approach was a rational "bottom-up" approach to supporting change in Lebanon. Change could theoretically occur at both the individual level, through those youth engaged by OTI-funded projects, and at the organizational level, through project partners. Identifying "youth" and "youth organizations" rather than civil society more generally as the group of target beneficiaries also enabled OTI to narrow its focus, which was essential for maximizing OTI's quick-impact approach. An analysis of OTI's portfolio also reveals that OTI staff succeeded in working with new groups of youth at the very local level and not just with established NGOs. Seeking out new groups of youth, primarily through the personal contacts of local staff, theoretically enabled OTI to work within a "gap," reaching a population that was, by and large, not being reached by established NGOs or by other international donors.

The focus on individual youth, small and often informal organizations, and local or municipal politics was appropriate. However, one shortcoming of this highly localized approach was the decreased potential to achieve quick-impact at the national level, which was a key objective at the start of the program. While a review of OTI's thinking and system conditions in Lebanon does support the conclusion that a bottom-up approach was a more reliable approach to achieving lasting change, any change at the national level would necessarily have to be a long-term goal. In general, the more local the intervention, the longer it will take for change to work its way up to the national level. If affecting change at the national level was a primary objective, then working primarily at the very local level was a risk, given that OTI programs are typically of short duration. However, in this case, this risk was mitigated by two important factors: (1) that funding for additional years of programming was in fact made available, making the OTI program in Lebanon one of OTI's longest running programs and (2) that OTI engaged a very large number of beneficiaries in a limited amount of time, potentially quickening any cumulative effect.

Both the LCI and LCSI programs were based on coherent and logically connected sets of assumptions, and these assumptions and OTI theories of change were clearly documented in the program literature provided to the Evaluation Team.

2. Were OTI's areas of programmatic and geographic focus appropriate given the political realities in Lebanon and OTI's role within a larger USG assistance portfolio?

Both a conflict assessment and civil society assessment were conducted in 2008 and 2009, respectively, near the beginning of the LCI and LCSI programs in Lebanon. These assessments, in addition to other OTI documentation, stressed the need to engage individuals and organizations across the country and at the local level:

> Donors should not focus their developmental work in specific regions to the exclusion of others. They should try to target the broadest possible array of regions and communities, so as maximize impact and cultivate an image of fairness among all Lebanese.[2]

Further, OTI emphasized in its design of the program that target geographies should be the North, South, and Bekaa regions, as these regions were where sectarian groups were most likely to recruit youth and also where there was a history of conflict which had not already been targeted with development programming. This prioritization was not meant to exclude Beirut and Mount Lebanon but rather done in response to the correct conclusion that the donor scene was crowded in the capital and that there was not a gap here that OTI could address.

Table 1: Geographic Distribution of Grants and Funds

Sector or Region	In Evaluation Sample	All LCI and LCSI Grants	Total Grant Amount*	Percent of all Spending
Beirut	0	10	$743,534	2.8%
Civic Advocacy	**	43	$3,735,382	14.3%
Cross Regional	1	38	$3,134,950	12.0%
Media	4	23	$2,657,446	10.1%
North	8	75	$6,633,632	25.3%
South	6	47	$3,956,379	15.1%
Bekaa	7	61	$5,348,533	20.4%
Totals	**26**	**297**	**$26,209,855**	**100.0%**

* Subtotals based on estimated grant amount in OTI database (August 2012), not disbursed funds.
** Sampled separately. See methodology section.

The focus on regional programming outside of Beirut also acknowledged an important conclusion in the civil society assessment conducted by OTI: that national-level civil society programming would have been ineffective or faced debilitating opposition. The Evaluation Team agreed with this assessment:

> Standard advocacy-type activities involving civic organizations or coalitions seeking to engage, lobby or pressure the state on policy reform issues at the national level are unlikely to yield significant results as the system has shown a strong ability to deflect, derail or ignore such pressures throughout Lebanon's modern history.[3]

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[2] Denoeux, Guilain, *Lebanon Conflict Vulnerability Assessment: A Preliminary Summary of Findings,* Management Systems International for USAID, 2008.
[3] Jennings, Ray Salvatore, Guilan Denoeux, and Amalia Prado, *An Examination of the Prospects for USAID Engagement Supporting Civil Society Development in Lebanon*, USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, 2009.

OTI largely adhered to its geographic commitments. As documented in Table 1, approximately 60% of program funds were directly in support of projects in the North, South, and the Bekaa. Most Civic Advocacy Grants, Media, and Cross Regional Grants were awarded to Beirut or Mount Lebanon-based partners but with the expectation that communities in the North, South, and the Bekaa would also benefit from this programming.

We found that the program was based on an accurate assessment of conflict "hot-spots." OTI projects were implemented in areas of the country which had seen significant conflict prior to the inception of the OTI program and which remained contentious areas throughout the duration of the program. OTI succeeded in recruiting partners and implementing projects in areas of the country that had hitherto been largely inaccessible to USAID and to other Western donors. Some particular villages and neighborhoods stand out in this respect: Anjar, Mejdal Anjar, Bint Jbeil, Baalbeck, Wadi Khaled, Haret Hreik, Ouzai, Chiah, and Nabatieh, among others.

3. Were OTI's revisions to strategy appropriate given shifting political realities and windows of opportunity?

As discussed above, OTI demonstrated facility in responding to on-the-ground learning and updated both implementation approaches and program goals accordingly. In addition to the recalibration of program goals in 2008 following OTI's initial ground-truthing exercise, the most significant revision to OTI strategy came with the 2010 transition from the LCI program to the LCSI program. This included the addition of an advocacy component to the OTI program.

In terms of program design, the Evaluation Team found that this additional component was merited and improved the overall strength of the program. Equipping project partners with additional advocacy skills would enable them to extend their reach both geographically and up the impact chain. The addition of the advocacy component helped mitigate the risk that OTI would effect change at only the very local level. We discuss the efficacy and impact of OTI's advocacy grants in the sections which follow.

The Evaluation Team questions the appropriateness of one strategy revision. In 2011, OTI dropped the goal to "mitigate tensions in conflict-prone areas." The SMT explained that the goal had been identified as a lesser priority for several reasons. The removal of this goal primarily reflected the natural evolution of the OTI program in 2011 and 2012, where advocacy programming was considered the most efficient use of resources. Staff also agreed that conflict reduction was more of an indirect goal, that they envisioned this being accomplished as a result of progress towards the other two goals. The SMT also mentioned differing perceptions between OTI and its partners of the need to mitigate conflict. Whereas the SMT favored programming with a conflict mitigation objective, the local community and partner NGOs were not disposed to work on these issues as proposed by OTI. OTI awarded a total of 34 grants in which conflict mitigation was identified as a relevant country objective; however, only one grant active in 2012 was funded under this objective. Removing this objective from the list of program goals in

2012 accurately reflected the composition of OTI's current portfolio. Nevertheless, Lebanon witnessed a sharp increase of conflict in the latter half of 2012 relative to the period 2010-2011. It is the opinion of the Evaluation Team that the potential to reduce tensions in a conflict-prone area remains a compelling criterion on which to grant future awards. This is not a goal that should be addressed only indirectly through advocacy programming.

V. FINDINGS: EFFECTIVENESS

4. Did the program reach the stated objectives? Was the program implemented according to its design?

A key structural point in this evaluation is the differentiation between effective implementation and program impact. Effective implementation refers to the implementation of all program activities as planned and as detailed in the Impact Chain (Figure 2), thereby fulfilling the following four objectives:

1. Organizational learning on engaging at-risk youth and advocating for change takes place.
2. Organizations use new or developed skills to implement effective programs.
3. Youth participate in OTI projects, and youth learn civic activism and advocacy skills.
4. Youth effectively implement projects with learned skills.

Both organizations (NGOs and CBOs) and individuals (participants) were intended beneficiaries of the OTI program. The first two objectives concern organizational learning, and the second two concern individual learning. In this section, we evaluate whether or not these objectives were met. Our findings on organizational learning derive primarily from key-informant interviews with project staff, and our findings on individual learning derive primarily from focus groups with youth who participated in the OTI program or in activities sponsored by OTI project partners. In the following section (Findings: Impact), we then evaluate whether or not achieving these objectives also led to the fulfillment of the program's intermediate results, higher-level outcome and impact measures, and plausible change at the national level.

What set this OTI program apart from other development activities with civil society in Lebanon was the team's commitment to working with new partners, informal associations of youth, and groups with very local concerns. In contrast to more conventional small-grants programs, which tend to award grants to established and more professional NGOs which are accustomed to bidding for awards, OTI staff sought out partners that would not generally have had the capacity to win an award in a competitive application process. OTI staff took on an intensive coaching role with project partners, working closely with them to identify needs in their community and to plan and implement activities. This entailed far more work than soliciting proposals, evaluating the merit of these proposals, awarding grants, and monitoring progress – the typical work

process in a small grants program. One project manager said that she would recommend OTI as a donor to other organizations like hers,

> because they are not like the typical donor. They sit with you and work with you, and they are flexible. It is not *only* the output that matters to them. They are not complicated like the EU.

The most significant change the Evaluation Team observed was in the domain of organizational learning. When asked to depict their organizational growth or decline since establishment through an organizational lifeline, all CSOs strikingly drew an upward trend from the beginning of their relationship with OTI. In many cases, this was also the point of creation of the group or organization. Partners spoke about OTI grants as milestones in the life of their group or organization that had much to do with the organizational learning and growth experienced through working on an OTI grant. The words of one organization are particularly reflective:

> Work with OTI helped us to develop an identity. If they had not helped us, we would have worked for much longer before we achieved this level of popularity and credibility in the area.

Those we interviewed highlighted what they learned about conducting needs assessments, booking venues, finding office space, keeping financial records, purchasing equipment and supplies, organizing events, and preparing progress reports for a major donor like USAID. In the words of one project leader:

> Everything related to paperwork; this is the first things I can tell you that I learned.

Organizational staff also clearly recognized that these were the skills their organization needed in order to obtain grants from other donors in the future. A project partner in the North commented:

> [OTI] opened us the space to submit other projects. The grant is over now, but we managed to get funding to continue our work, we are working with the US Embassy.

Another partner recounted:

> When we got the grant, [the organization] was like a child. Then we developed a strategic plan and a business plan for five years. Also, when we started, we were a number of enthusiastic people. Now, we have about 70 committed people working with us on various projects and we expanded our network of donors, we now receive funding from Italy, Germany, Norway, Denmark and the UN.

On interacting with OTI staff, partners voiced mixed opinions. The strength and quality of the working relationship between project staff and the PDS at OTI varied significantly across projects. However, this did not appear to be a function of staff competence. The same staff were regarded warmly by some partners and received critically by others. Rather, this appears to have been a function of individual relationships. No specific staff

or regional teams were consistently criticized or celebrated more than another. One organizational partner commented:

> Sometimes, we have to justify too much the activities that we are doing. Also, if staff is changing, it can be confusing, because you have to explain the same thing to the new person.

On average, organizations said that the OTI staff with whom they worked were professional and available when needed, bringing strong regional knowledge and helpful ideas. Several organizations expressed an initial concern that OTI would impose an American agenda, dictating what types of activities were or were not acceptable. However, most applauded OTI for helping their organization develop their own ideas and for not imposing specific types of activities. Several organizations also commented on the professional growth of the OTI staff with whom they worked; as the program progressed, the OTI staff came to better understand the structure, needs, and priorities of their organizations, thus making it easier to work with OTI.

Complaints with OTI staff generally centered on procedural affairs, for example, having to obtain multiple estimates from different vendors for the in-kind purchase of goods. One representative from an organization in the South complained:

> I don't see any impact from OTI on our administration. Simply, we worked more, because of the detailed OTI requirements.

Compared to a conventional small-grants program, OTI staff spent a great deal of time with project partners. This was a comparative advantage of the program that allowed it to successfully capacitate small, nascent groups in previously unreached parts of the country in order to enable them to effectively undertake project activities. This mentoring approach necessitated a larger proportion of staff time spent in field compared to other grant-making programs to ensure the impact of grants. Still, some grantees said they would have liked even more face time with OTI staff and, in particular, members of the SMT, which reflects the benefit derived from OTI staff support and the importance placed on it by partner organizations. In the words of one organization:

> Several times, we had important activities related to the project, and no one from OTI showed up to attend that event. We would have welcomed more OTI presence, to feel more encouraged.

A key factor in the program's ability to leverage this advantage and function effectively and efficiently was that ex-pat OTI and Chemonics staff were co-located with the local team. In multiple interviews, both staff and beneficiaries cited this arrangement as a major benefit to the program, greatly facilitating day-to-day management and decision-making. It further allowed for international and local staff to develop a deeper shared understanding of local realities and progress, thus enabling a rapid response from the senior management to changing circumstances on the ground.

Frequent field visits by ex-pat SMT members to partner grantees went a long way building trust between grantees and the program management; this relationship

development would have not been as possible had international staff been confined in movement or in alternative arrangements:

> They [OTI staff] are always participating in discussing ideas and agreeing to the program […] continuous support from them has helped the organization […] their involvement was very good… and it was very important that in these circumstances [the OTI Country Director] participated in our events.

Regarding skills building, the attainment of advocacy skills was more pronounced in individuals than in organizations. Organizational learning was primarily the domain of project management; however, youth participants demonstrated an increased knowledge of and commitment to advocacy. One of the most effective advocacy activities, implemented by multiple organizations (most notably in the South), entailed setting an appointment with the mayor or with other municipal authorities to discuss issues in the community. For example, one group of youth made an appointment with their mayor to discuss traffic safety in their community and to agree on a strategy toward improvement. Reportedly, some youth were shocked to find that they could get an appointment with the mayor, despite not having a personal connection (*wasta*) to him. Simple activities such as this increased the confidence of youth in municipal authorities and demonstrated how civic activism could take place outside of party politics. Youth focus groups consistently cited meeting with the mayor as a point of pride, transforming their perception that it was impossible for youth to meet with local authorities and empowering them to do so.

Among youth, we found an increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of municipal authorities. Youth discussed how mayors should be accountable to their city or village and not just to the political party that backed them in elections. However, it was less clear that this newfound active citizenship reached beyond the municipality. Youth were (perhaps rightly) skeptical when, for example, it came to setting a meeting with their member of parliament (MP).

When asked what they took away from their involvement in either an OTI training workshop or in an activity implemented by an OTI project partner, most stressed personal growth. Some said they felt more self-confident; others said they had become more open and learned to respect other perspectives, even around sensitive issues. Many said they developed new interpersonal skills, learned to be more responsible, and lost their fear of saying what they thought, even in front of an audience. An anecdote from one young man who participated in a theatre workshop is illustrative:

> I developed the capacity to freely express my own opinion in front of other people. My personality became stronger, and I became someone who could stand up in front of the community and say what I want. This change in myself came through theatre, where I was able to stand up and say what I wanted to say in front of an audience.

Another youth participant shared:

> I don't use my watch anymore when I am working. We worked hard and gave a lot of time for the project, the project became part of my social life. The main change was that I really began to live the project.

Aside from a commitment to inclusivity, most OTI programming did not have an explicit focus on gender issues. However, especially in the North, the Evaluation Team heard youth, both male and female, tell compelling stories about how much it meant to them to be able to work in a safe space with youth of the opposite gender – an opportunity that was not elsewhere available to them. At least one friendship fostered by an OTI partner organization led to an engagement, and one of the advocacy trainers mentioned a marriage between the children of two formerly-feuding families – the youth had met in an activity organized by an OTI partner. Youth affiliated with one NGO in the North told a story about how they were plagued by rumors that males and females were interacting inappropriately; they confronted this challenge creatively, erecting glass walls in their office space to ease parents' worries. In another instance, one young woman's father disapproved of her involvement in an organization that also had male members. She invited him to attend the next meeting, and he was reportedly so won over that he became an active supporter of the organization and also began to volunteer his own time.

5. Did individual activities logically address intended objectives?

As the focus of this evaluation was on the entirety of the OTI program in Lebanon, the Evaluation Team did not conduct a detailed evaluation of activities implemented by OTI project partners. However, we did ask a representative sample of organizations about what goals they set with OTI staff, what activities they implemented, and how successful they felt these activities were. The activities implemented by project partners were extremely diverse. Among those we interviewed, some examples of activities included recycling campaigns, street theatre, workshops and training sessions, mural painting and photography, opening a public park, and setting up shelters at bus stops. Most project activities were not explicitly political, though advocacy component projects, especially those in Beirut, tended to include more political activities than those projects implemented by small CSOs in the North, South, and Bekaa.

One OTI staff member commented, "The program objectives are so wide that, whatever we do, we will hit one of the goals." And indeed, the correlation between project partner objectives and OTI's larger programmatic goals, e.g., mitigating conflict, was not always obvious. This is perhaps a valid criticism, but we recognize that OTI's theory of change, as discussed in the previous section, did not rely heavily on the nature of individual project activities but rather on the assumption that collective action around virtually any objective, not matter how apolitical, could create open space and instill values of active citizenship.

Not all organizational representatives we met with were able to clearly articulate what specific activities they implemented looked like and provided vague descriptions of "youth empowerment activities" or "citizenship activities."

Unsurprisingly, organizations were much more willing to discuss their success with the Evaluation Team than their failures. In general, however, most partners we met with appeared to have successfully implemented activities they agreed with OTI. Where partners expressed disappointment in an activity, this generally had to do with minor failures, such as lower than expected attendance at a workshop or training session. Some partners also identified family pressure (the Akkar) and political pressure (the Bekaa) as having posed an obstacle to successful completion of one or more activities. But where these were identified as obstacles, project staff also demonstrated a commitment to overcoming these through trust building with the community, either by seeking positive media coverage or stressing the transparency of their organization to the community.

In our interviews with OTI's regional teams and PDSs, some staff noted that projects sometimes changed dramatically between the design phase and implementation phase. Larger, more established NGOs demonstrated greater fidelity to program design than did new or informal CBOs. The risk of non-fidelity with these smaller organizations, however, was mitigated by constant contact with OTI staff. Though these partners complained of too much paperwork (e.g. attendance lists and meeting minutes), it is likely that these project management checks on performance significantly improved fidelity to program design.

The Advocacy Team at OTI was notably less concerned with project fidelity than were OTI's regional teams. This team stressed process over performance. One member explained that the team had three primary objectives with each grant. Only one goal was achieving objectives of the campaign; equally or perhaps more important were the goals of "getting the advocacy skills" and "the grantees themselves working on other campaigns, spreading advocacy." We felt this accurately reflected OTI's theory of change. In fact, the Advocacy Team was the team of local staff that appeared to best understand their role in the "bigger picture" of OTI's program. Team members were able to articulate how their work might not only increase capacity at the local level – at the level of the individual or organization – but also lead to changes in the community or society at large. Constant reference to OTI's Advocacy Index appears to have helped with this. Indicators on this index like Coalition Building, Engagement with Decision Makers, and Outreach may have made higher level outcomes more proximal to the Advocacy Team, whereas OTI regional teams were primarily committed to also important, but lower level, outcomes related to capacity building, organizational learning, and project fidelity.

6. Did activities respond to beneficiary needs and priorities?

In focus groups, the Evaluation Team asked both youth and adult community members about what sorts of problems they saw in their community. Both youth and community members identified major social and economic problems: unemployment, political violence, school dropout, and fear and uncertainty about the future. The primary word that adults used to describe youth, across the North, South, and the Bekaa was "lost." Community members were not generally aware of apolitical youth groups in their area

and tended to associate both youth groups and NGOs with political parties. This was especially true in the North.

There was no direct overlap between individual activities implemented by OTI project partners and needs identified by the community. This was largely because community members were focused on systemic problems, like unemployment, whereas OTI partners tended to tackle more modest local problems, like littering. However, community members did respond positively to the idea of apolitical youth organizations and activities with the argument that *anything* was better than youth spending time idle on the streets.

Taken alone, individual project activities did not clearly address community needs, but taken as part of the overall OTI program, the goals of creating independent space for youth and the promotion of non-violent civic activism were commensurate with community grievances. In other words, while activities like a recycling campaign or street theatre did not directly appeal to the community, OTI's larger programmatic goals did.

As for addressing the specific needs of beneficiary organizations, which largely had to do with increasing capacity, it was the process of working with OTI that met this goal, not the specific activity implemented by the organization.

The quality of the needs assessment conducted in partnership with OTI varied significantly case-by-case. All beneficiary organizations had access to needs assessment trainings or to OTI staff with needs assessment expertise, but not all organizations took equal advantage of these resources. Advocacy grant partners conducted the most thorough needs assessments. Some organizations had a clearer understanding of their own needs and needs in their community than did others. Some project partners spoke dismissively of a needs assessment as just one more piece of paperwork they had to complete for OTI; these were, perhaps unsurprisingly, also the organizations that would have benefited most from a more thorough needs assessment. However, OTI staff also mentioned that conducting thorough needs assessments requires a certain amount of resources – both in terms of time and money – and that particularly for partners who received small and short-term grants, these resources were not available. Thus, despite the provision of needs assessment trainings, the needs assessment might not always have been conducted effectively. Most project staff we met with spoke positively of their interaction with OTI in discussing needs and setting goals. However, in many cases, this appears to have been a very informal process. A more formal needs assessment would have benefited a significant number of project partners. The Evaluation Team recommends that this be standardized in the future.

VI. FINDINGS: IMPACT

In Figure 3, we reproduce the Impact Chain in Section 2 but employ a traffic light scheme to demonstrate the extent to which we believe impact was obtained and the extent to which change may be attributable to the OTI program. The color green indicates that the Evaluation Team was able to observe significant impact and to attribute this to the OTI program; yellow indicates that some impact was observed but that not all objectives were met or significant limitations apply; and orange indicates that the attribution of any change to the OTI program is tenuous or unclear.

Implementation was effective at both the organization level and at the individual level. Given the depth and breadth of the program, coupled with this effective implementation, we can conclude that many organizations and many more individuals benefited from the OTI program. Both organizational and individual learning took place, and both individual and organizational capacity to plan and implement social development and advocacy projects increased as a direct result of the program.

7. To what extent were intermediate results met and successfully fed into program objectives?

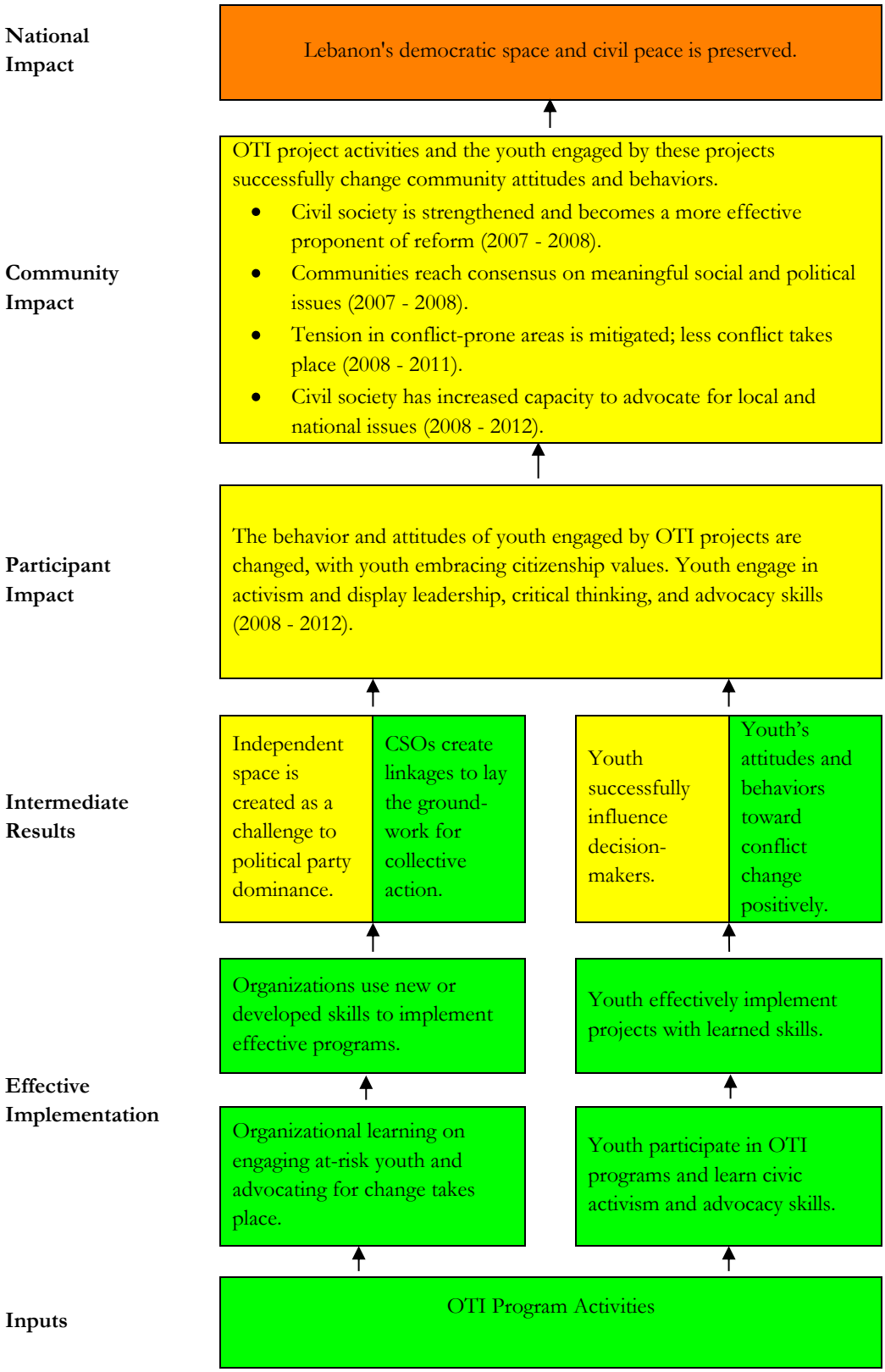
The intermediate results introduced by OTI in 2010 represent a direct linkage between project and program activities and higher level impact measures. The Evaluation Team found that all intermediate results were met but that some notable qualifications apply.

Without a doubt, significant independent space was created; many youth and organizations discovered valuable new means of active citizenship and political participation which were relatively free from many of the constraints of Lebanon's political party system. However, we found little evidence that this new independent space meaningfully challenged political party dominance, even at the local level.[4] While in OTI programming, many youth may have found an alternative to participation in party politics, it is not clear that participation was so high that it encroached on political party recruitment, nor was it clear that beneficiary organizations were so influential that they posed a challenge to political party dominance. As some representatives from one partner organization noted,

> We do talk about politics in the NGO, because parties are part of society, and even if there are differing opinions, we managed to spend time together, which is a positive thing. Also, there are parties that have similar social goals as ours. We do not take the approach that being active in the NGO is an alternative to being active in a party. Youth can do both things. Parties also do social work, not only political work. We do not tell the parties: "your work is wrong, and we are right."

[4] It is worth adding the caveat here that political parties in Lebanon spend considerable funds on mobilization and recruitment across the country and remain the civil society organizations with the most reach locally.

Figure 3: Impact Chain



CSOs established new linkages with other organizations and with other donors as a result of their involvement with OTI. Almost all organizations we spoke with reported increasing the size of their network over the course of their involvement with OTI. Those who were awarded an advocacy grant reported the greatest increase in their network size. Some organizations partnered with others to host joint events, and recipients of advocacy grants oftentimes were involved in joint actions.

Youth were able to successfully influence decision makers, but this was exclusively at the local level. Mayors and local officials demonstrated a willingness to work with youth to implement specific activities. But, we did not find widespread evidence of youth influencing decision makers at the regional or national level.

Youth attitudes and behaviors toward conflict did change positively. The most significant changes reported by youth participants were personal changes. Individuals spoke of feeling less anger, of stronger relationships with friends and family, and also of forming new friendships with members of other sectarian and ethnic groups. Youth demonstrated the ability to think critically about social issues and to consider alternative perspectives. We would expect this change in attitudes and behaviors to also influence youths' position on political violence. However, in focus groups with the Evaluation Team, youth did not discuss sectarian or political violence and were instead more eager to discuss personal relationships.

8. Did the impact of OTI activities differ between geographic areas of interventions? If so, what were the distinguishing factors between districts or approaches taken?

OTI was confronted with unique conditions and challenges in different geographic regions. For example, political parties posed more of a challenge in the South, while suspicious or conservative families posed more of a challenge in the North. But in the attainment of impact, the Evaluation Team observed no noticeable differences that could be attributed to different approaches in different regions. OTI's program in the Bekaa relied somewhat more heavily on the personal connections of local staff, but the personal connections of local staff were also a key to success in the North and the South.

Advocacy grantees and NGOs in Beirut appeared to have been somewhat more efficient in their implementation of project activities, but we do not attribute this exclusively to a different OTI approach. These organizations also tended to be bigger, more established, and many also received funding from other donors. Their increased efficiency may also be explained by more experience and greater access to resources.

9. Were there significant unintended impacts that resulted from the OTI program beyond its stated goals and objectives?

Some OTI staff suggested that the OTI program in Lebanon, which was the largest foreign program in support of civil society in the country, may have upset some balance in the NGO scene. They suggested that OTI may have "spoiled" some partners by working with them so closely to plan projects and prepare project documentation, giving

them an inaccurate perception of how donors work. When presented with the following statement, most OTI staff agreed that

> Even though our in-kind system and partner-based, rolling application approach may have unintentionally created "negative competition" and a "sense of lethargy" amongst civil society organizations, our close mentoring and support met the needs of civil society actors in Lebanon who would not have had the chance to succeed otherwise.

OTI also paid above the standard NGO wage, perhaps setting false expectations for future remuneration. Staff pointed out that some NGOs they have worked with for as long as five years "still don't get their paperwork right" and may be unprepared for a competitive bid process.

In future work entailing small grants to a large number of partners, OTI might make specific reference to the threat of negative competition and outline strategies for mitigating this risk where it is perceived.

10. What impact, both intended and unintended, might be expected beyond the life of the OTI program?

Later LCSI grants had explicit capacity building goals, and there was some interest in how organizations not only met immediate project goals but also in how beneficiary organizations were able to leverage their learning with OTI to implement new projects and raise funds without assistance from OTI staff. Some staff also voiced concerns regarding the future success of OTI beneficiary organizations without continued support from OTI after 2013. There was some concern that, without continued access to OTI mentorship and financing, organizations might fail to meet project goals, disband, or in some instances, be co-opted by political actors who do not share OTI's vision of civic activism.

OTI programming is conventionally very short-term and focused on delivering quick impact projects in countries experiencing political crises or emerging from conflict. OTI programming prepares the way for future, longer-term developmental assistance from USAID or other donors. Thus, sustainability is not generally a high priority objective for OTI programs, which instead seek immediate reduction in conflict and increases in accountability and transparency. The LCI and LCSI programs in Lebanon, however, differed somewhat from OTI programs in other countries. The combined LCI and LCSI program in Lebanon was active for five years (more than twice the OTI average) and in later phases incorporated explicit capacity building objectives. Logically, the program envisioned medium-term and long-term change which would result from the increased capacity of youth and youth organizations to advocate for meaningful social and political change, in both local and national arenas. Typically, programs of this scope, with such investments of time and money and with medium-term and long-term goals, would also invest in sustainability. The award of "legacy grants" to select beneficiary organizations

will ensure funding for some of the most promising OTI projects even after the close of the current program.

VII. FINDINGS: LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

11. To what extent was OTI's approach to civic advocacy instructive for civil society strengthening programming in Lebanon?

The depth and breadth of OTI's programming alone was sufficient to help strengthen civil society in Lebanon. If considered only in terms of a dollar amount, this large injection of funds into the civil society helped bolster what has historically been a strongly pro-democratic sector. Where the LCI and LCSI programs excelled, however, was in reaching out to new partners. CSOs performing advocacy work were heavily concentrated in the capital, as one might expect, given that Beirut is by far the most populous city in the country and also the seat of government. In contrast, CSOs in more rural areas or in smaller cities or villages have tended to cater to basic service provision or to socio-economic development demands: health services, clean water, vocational training, etc. OTI added significant value to civil society in Lebanon by extending advocacy work to the periphery – to areas of the country where no such work was being done.

The message that advocacy work in cities and villages far from Beirut could increase confidence in local government, help citizens make appropriate demands of their government, and motivate young people was instructive. OTI's focus on sub-national dynamics in civil society – the recognition that needs and demands vary significantly by region – was likewise instructive. Both Lebanese NGOs and international donors should heed this example. To limit development assistance in rural areas to basic service provision is to miss out on significant opportunities for meaningful advocacy work.

Political parties in the country tend to use social service provision, through politicized NGOs or other associations, for two purposes: to buy votes in election years and to attract participants in other forms of political contestation, for example, protests, demonstrations, strikes, or occasionally, violent action.[5] Lebanese tend to regard NGO work as highly politicized, with NGOs functioning as vehicles for a political party (e.g., Future, Hezbollah) or a country with outside interests (e.g., the US, Iran) to distribute awards to supporters. Advocacy work with new or established service providers in areas outside of Beirut has real potential to transform citizen-party interactions by undermining this perception. In contrast to the politics of distributing private goods (e.g., handouts to supporters, either as cash or social services), the politics of advocacy are about both government and political party accountability, as well as about democratic means of securing public goods (e.g., clean streets, safe traffic). A preference for public-

[5] Cammet, Melani and Sukriti Issar, "Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon," *World Politics* 62(3), 2010.

good social welfare over private-good social welfare in a political system is strongly associated with democratic processes.[6]

12. Did OTI's branding approach influence attitudes about the United States or US assistance in targeted communities or beneficiaries?

OTI targeted primarily small, local CSOsbut also worked with a number of larger, well-established NGOs. Among the latter, the Evaluation Team saw little evidence suggesting that the program produced any change in attitudes regarding US assistance. In this arena, USAID is already a well-known donor and is regarded as just one among many international donors (albeit the largest of them). The influence on these NGOs was minimal, but these larger NGOs tended to already have favorable perceptions of US assistance.

As for emerging NGOs, the flexibility in the question of branding was important for the development of the partner's credibility in the community. Activities were not branded where the partner's image in the community might have been threatened. Thus, a community's perception of US assistance can be influenced positively if linked to a NGO that is endorsed by the community.

Where the Evaluation Team saw the greatest shift in attitudes about the US or US assistance was with smaller project partners. From these organizations, we heard a common story. The summary from one partner in the South is illustrative:

> I don't have any concerns [about US government funding]. I find it normal to have USAID funding. In the end, I try to reach the objectives of my NGO… Most of the people know who is funding us, but we do not make it very visible… Every donor has an agenda. But I know that I will not follow any donor's agenda, because I follow the agenda of the NGO.

There was some perception that US funding might be stigmatizing for some NGOs, and this was truer in the Bekaa than in other regions, but most organizations had no grave concerns about their work being associated with US funding. Only one of the approximately thirty organizations we met with stated that they carefully kept their US funding a secret. About half said they advertised the source of their funding by hanging a USAID sign in their offices or putting OTI branding on publications.

Those organizations that did discuss concerns about advertising their relationship with USAID to the community, on average, said that this was more of a concern in the beginning of their partnership with OTI. The collaborative work process, with weekly instead of quarterly contact with OTI staff, did a great deal to build trust between OTI and partner organizations. Organizations did not feel pressured to implement certain activities or to subscribe to certain political positions because of their relationship with

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[6] Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

OTI. Organizations felt like OTI staff worked with them to help them realize their organization's goals. Many representatives stated that they "knew" the US had an agenda in Lebanon but were staunch in their defense of project activities, stating that the ideas were their own.

The OTI team developed a guideline document for use by staff to determine when to brand. Data on how branding decisions were reached for each grant was not shared with the Evaluation Team. However, given the large size of the program and the length of implementation, knowledge of OTI's support of civil society in the country was widespread and generally positive. Press coverage over the period of implementation linking project activities to USAID funding was extensive and generally presented as a neutral statement of fact – not an allegation.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The LCI and LCSI programs were based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change might occur. The Evaluation Team endorsed OTI's theory of change and agreed with OTI's balancing of what was ideal with what was possible. OTI pushed boundaries, working on more political issues and in more contentious areas of the country than previous USAID programming. The advocacy component introduced with LCSI programming in 2010 was a key factor in this success.

The delivery of OTI's program of development assistance to civil society in Lebanon was appropriate and based on an accurate understanding of conflict dynamics in the country and at the sub-national level. The SMT was aware of shifting political realities in the country and revised its strategy appropriately given these shifts and in response to on-the-ground learning. Above all, OTI's focus on working with smaller, community-based organizations outside of Beirut was a strategic move that maximized impact and filled a gap in an already crowded donor environment.

OTI enjoyed a friendly and constructive relationship with most of its project partners. Project partners were generally satisfied, not only with the funding they received from OTI, but also with the technical assistance provided. OTI capacity building – helping conduct needs assessments, set goals, implement activities, network, and report on activities in a timely manner – was critical to the growth of partner organizations. Some, though not all, of OTI's project partners developed sufficient capacity over the course of their involvement with OTI to compete in competitive bid processes for future funding from USAID or other international donors.

The program was effective and largely successful at the outcome level. Both organizational and individual learning took place as a direct result of OTI programming. Organizations and individuals reported positive growth as a result of their work with OTI. Some two hundred organizations and thousands of youth participated in an OTI-funded project activity as some point from 2008 – 2012.

Impact at higher levels was somewhat more difficult to determine and to attribute to the program. Project activities did help create new, open space relatively free from political party influence, but there was little evidence that this space *challenged* political party dominance. Where participants demonstrated new advocacy skills or the values of active citizenship, this was primarily around highly local issues or municipal affairs. It remains to be seen if the youth who gained new skills or values as a result of their participation in an OTI-funded project will go on to also engage regional or national issues in the future.

Based on its review of the OTI program in Lebanon, the Evaluation Team set forth the following recommendations. These refer to learning from the OTI experience in Lebanon and also represent some best practices reflected in the OTI program which may be instructive for future development assistance programming in Lebanon or for the provision of development assistance in countries in a similar state of transition.

1. Continue to engage with civil society in Lebanon. Actively seek out new partners in addition to supporting established NGOs. It is in the mentoring of youth who are not civically engaged and of less professional organizations that OTI excelled over the program period. Aside from funding, OTI was able to contribute less to larger and well-established NGOs. It is with smaller groups in strategic geographic locations outside of Beirut that OTI can offer the greatest added value.

2. Ensure that this and similar small grant programs have sufficient staff to maintain a similarly high level of engagement with partners. New organizations require far more assistance than do established organizations. OTI had a relatively high staff-to-project ratio over the implementation period. Certainly, projects of comparable size have been implemented by USAID with fewer staff. However, the very close mentoring relationship between OTI staff and partners was specific to the Lebanon program and required a comparatively high ratio of staff to project partners. Furthermore, consistent staff engagement with project partners was a critical component of the LCI and LCSI programs.

3. Allocate sufficient resources for research to be conducted before the start of similar programs and throughout implementation for monitoring and evaluation purposes. OTI's success in effectively revising strategy was based in large part on adequate access to information. Focus groups, public opinion surveys, and other research are critical tools for measuring progress and also for superior strategy design and revision.

4. Assist beneficiary organizations in conducting systematic needs assessments rather than on an ad-hoc basis. Ensure that sufficient financial and time resources are available for the proper conduct of needs assessments. This will help ensure that project activities respond to real community demands.

5. In seeking to network multiple beneficiary organizations, consider also the risks of negative competition. Relationships, positive or negative, between individuals and organizations are likely to outlast any USAID program. Mitigate negative competition risk through transparent granting. Re-granting some organizations but not others can create false expectations about future funding. With organizations that are not re-granted, communicate clearly why this decision was made. If the organization failed to meet some expectation, this must be made clear.

APPENDIX A: EVALUATION MATRIX

Evaluation Question	Indicators	Data Source
Relevance		
R1. Was the program based on a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change might occur, i.e. was the program designed in such a way that results might theoretically occur?	• The program was based on an accurate analysis of conflict in the country and understanding of civil society. • Each link in the logic model and impact chain is theoretically realizable.	• Project document review • Conflict and civil society academic literature review • Expert review
R2. Were OTI's areas of programmatic and geographic focus appropriate given the political realities in Lebanon and OTI's role within a larger USG assistance portfolio?	• The program was based on an accurate assessment of conflict "hot-spots." • The majority of OTI resources were utilized on projects in the North, South, and Bekaa rather than in Beirut. • There is evidence that national-level civil society programming would have been ineffective or faced debilitating opposition. • Sectarian groups exert influence over or recruit individuals from the locations where OTI implemented project activities.	• Project document review • Conflict and civil society academic literature • Interviews with USAID – Washington D.C. • Expert review
R3. Were OTI's revisions to strategy appropriate given shifting political realities and windows of opportunity?	• Revisions of programmatic focus (goals) were based on changing social and political conditions and reflected real on-the-ground learning. • OTI set new goals as windows opened and scaled back other goals when windows closed. • OTI had an accurate understanding of how system conditions were changing during implementation.	• Project document review • Conflict and civil society academic literature • Expert review

Effectiveness		
E1. Did the program reach the stated objectives? Was the program implemented according to its design?	• Organizational learning took place • Organizations implemented projects as agreed with OTI staff (i.e., planned activities actually occurred). • Individual learning took place • Youth participated in projects.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups • Consultations with OTI staff
E2. Did individual activities logically address intended objectives?	• Each project activity was associated with a specific program goal, and project activities could theoretically have contributed to meeting the identified program goal. • Project goals were clearly aligned with program goals.	• Database review (random case selection) • Consultations with OTI staff • Beneficiary organization interviews (random case selection)
E3. Did activities respond to beneficiary needs and priorities?	• A needs assessment took place with each civil society partner. • Beneficiary organizations felt that OTI understood their needs and priorities. • Communities thought that OTI projects responded to their needs and priorities.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups • Consultations with OTI staff • Survey results

Impact		
I1. To what extent were intermediate results met and successfully fed into program objectives?	• OTI staff demonstrate knowledge of intermediate results. • Youth successfully influence decision-makers. • Independent space is created as a challenge to political party dominance. • CSOs create linkages to lay the groundwork for collective action. • Youth's attitudes and behaviors toward change positively.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups • Consultations with OTI staff • Change stories (MSC)
I2. Did impact of OTI activities differ between geographic areas of interventions? If so, what were the distinguishing factors between districts or approaches taken?	• The magnitude of change stories (MSC) stories varies by region (e.g. North, South, Bekaa) or catchment size (e.g. village/city population). • Differences can be explained by OTI action rather than unique geographic features.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Focus groups • Change stories (MSC)
I3. Were there significant unintended impacts that resulted from the OTI program beyond its stated goals and objectives?	• Individuals or organizations attribute change to OTI intervention which was either not part of the OTI theory of change or incongruent with the broader goal of preserving democratic space and civil peace.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups • Change stories (MSC)
I4. What impact, both intended and unintended, might be expected beyond the life of the OTI program?	• Partners state that they believe they can/cannot continue activities beyond their relationship with OTI. • Past partners (organizations with closed grants) demonstrate lasting ability to advocate, provide youth with alternatives to conflict.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups • Consultations with OTI staff

Lessons Identified and Best Practices		
L1. To what extent was OTI's approach to civic advocacy instructive for civil society strengthening programming in Lebanon?	• Organizations awarded grants through the OTI program implemented additional projects with non-OTI civil society partners. • Civil society organizations which were not-funded by OTI imitated or adopted activities implemented by OTI partners.	• Beneficiary organization interviews • Consultations with OTI staff
L2. Did OTI's branding approach influence attitudes about the United States or US assistance in targeted communities or beneficiaries?	• Beneficiaries (partners, participants and communities) are aware that project activities are funded by USG • Change stories credit USG assistance	• Change stories (MSC) • Beneficiary organization interviews • Participant interviews • Focus groups

APPENDIX B: BENEFICIARY ORGANIZATION SCRIPT

1. Based on our conversations with OTI, we understand that your organization in the year _____ was awarded a grant entitled _____. Your organization may have been awarded more than one grant. Could you tell us a little more about the broad parameters of your collaboration with OTI?
    a. What is your role in the organization? How long have you been with the organization?
    b. How did your organization first come into contact with OTI?
    c. Why do you think that OTI chose to work with your organization? Do you think you organization's objectives match OTI's objectives?
    d. How did you identify needs in your community? Was this done with a particular assessment methodology? What was the conversation like with OTI staff?
    e. Do you remember the exact project goals you agreed with OTI?
    f. What sort of activities have you implemented with the funds or material provided by OTI?
2. We are interested in learning more about the kinds of people your organization works with. Many of OTI's partners work mostly with young people. Can you tell us a little about the people involved in your organization?
    a. What kind of people are working on this project? Teenagers, young adults, adults, the elderly? Were they from the area? Of average means? Well educated, still in school?
    b. Who does what? Can you describe the division of labor?
    c. What kind of people does your organization reach out to? That is, who would you describe as your beneficiaries or clients? Or, who do you try to attract for special events? Community members, students, municipal leaders, the poor or disadvantaged, drug users?
    d. Would you describe your organization as local (village or neighborhood), regional (e.g., North, South, Bekaa), national, or international?
3. Can you tell me more about some of the activities you planned with OTI's support?
    a. What activities do you think were the most successful?
    b. Which were you and your team most proud of? Which did you wish had gone better?
    c. With any sort of activities, some things go well, and other things don't quite go as we planned. What do you think you and your organization have learned from your success and failures?

d. To what extent do you think this partnership with OTI has helped your organization meet its goals?

4. We would like to know a little bit more of what you thought of the OTI staff you worked with. What you tell me will not be directly associated with your name or the name of your organization, nor will what you tell me be considered in future applications for funding by your organization.

    a. Overall, would you say your interactions with OTI staff were positive, negative, or a combination of both? Why?

    b. Were OTI staff capable and professional in your opinion?

    c. Do you feel like the OTI staff you met with really understood your organization and what it was trying to accomplish? If not, what do you think they failed to recognize?

    d. How did you set project goals with OTI? Do you feel like your organization and the OTI staff you worked with shared similar values and were interested in achieving similar goals?

    e. Were OTI staff minimally involved, somewhat involved, or very involved in your project? Do you wish they had been more/less involved?

    f. Would you recommended OTI as a partner/funder to other organizations like your own in Lebanon?

5. Have any of your activities been covered by the press. In a local newsletter or newspaper? On TV?

    a. If yes, can you give us a copy of this?

    b. If yes, did anyone at OTI help you in your publicity efforts? Can you tell us a little more about the nature of this assistance?

    c. Did you and OTI discuss any media plan related to your project? How helpful was this conversation?

6. Most OTI grants to organizations like yours are only for a few months, maybe a year. Many OTI organizational partners also have other sorts of funding, for example, from other donors or contributions from the community.

    a. How critical was OTI funding in your larger financial portfolio? Did OTI provide you with funds when you needed them most?

    b. Did you have to significantly alter the way you work after you received the grant? After the end of the grant? (If grant ongoing, ask about expectations.)

7. Different people in Lebanon may have different opinions about how appropriate US government funding is for Lebanese civil society organizations like yours.

    a. Was the source of funding ever a concern for you? If so, what were your major concerns? How were these concerns addressed?

b. Did you advertise your organization's relationship with USAID, for example, on posters or in newsletters?

c. Do you regard USAID as a impartial, or do you worry that USAID has an unhelpful political agenda?

8. We are engaged in a *program evaluation* of OTI work in Lebanon. This means that we are trying to determine if OTI's partnerships with organizations like your own succeeded in making any change. Do you have any material, printed or otherwise, on your organization that you think we might find useful?