Promising Partnership Models for Education in Emergencies: A Global-Local Analysis

Final Report

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The ideas expressed are those of the authors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, humanitarian organizations worked alone, siloed from one another. However, in recent years, humanitarian action has increasingly embraced notions of inter-agency collaboration. Through this cooperative environment, humanitarian actors seek to enable greater coordination between agencies in order to avoid duplication and competition.

Moreover, in addition to traditional actors—UN agencies, multilateral banks, bilateral donors, and non-governmental organizations—the private sector, including businesses and foundations, has increasingly engaged in humanitarian response. Humanitarian action also now prioritizes a "localization agenda" where actors and communities affected by crisis—or "beneficiaries"—are meant to engage in and inform crisis response at every step of the process. Humanitarianism, including policy-making, funding, and implementation, now rarely involves merely one or two agencies, but instead looks increasingly like a system that encompasses a wide network of global, national, and localized actors and organizations working in partnership.

In this context, we conducted a study to generate evidence on the nature and impact of partnerships in EiE, using the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon as a case study. Four research questions guided this study: (1) What is the extent and nature of the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon? (Who is involved? In what ways? In partnership with whom?) (2) To what degree has the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon shifted over time? (2018-2021) (3) What are some of the "promising practices" of partnerships that promote the foundational tenets of coordination and community participation? (4) What are the impacts of these partnerships on (a) how coordination and community participation is experienced at the local level, and (b) with what potential effects, including on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education?

To answer these questions, we conducted a three-year (2018-2021) vertical case study, including over 100 interviews, 250 documents, a network analysis of 440 different organizations, and over 30 site visits and observations of partnership activities. These data, moreover, were collected during a time period that saw multiple crises within Lebanon and globally, including political and economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a devastating explosion in Beirut port. The study also coincided with the Black Lives Matter protests and a global reckoning on racism.

The vertical analysis allowed us to grasp macro-phenomena as well as micro-level processes, situating local action and experiences within global social and political arenas. Through this analysis we uncovered several themes that emerged from across our datasets. As well, a longitudinal analysis revealed changes over time and how shifts and responses played out globally and locally.

We found that partnerships in EiE have grown, diversified, and been shaped by crisis. Our findings point to a shift in humanitarianism and education characterized by increased partnership as well as the necessity of partnering. Partnerships have increasingly embraced a range of actors who might support many different kinds of educational activities. And the crises that occurred over the course of our study appear to have accelerated the establishment of partnerships in EiE, driven by urgent needs for technology and resources.

Our findings suggest that many partnerships would benefit from improved coordination. According to global interview responses and organizational document rhetoric, coordination acts as a means to elicit greater efficiency, less duplication, gap identification, streamlining and standardizing approaches, and collaborative action. Challenges to coordination in EiE partnerships remain prevalent at both the global and country-levels, including issues of transparency due to competition.

Within Lebanon, we found that effective coordination often takes place through peer-to-peer organizational activities and support, facilitated through strong and well-established lines of communication. Communication, which helps to enable coordination, promotes transparency, trust, and care. Our analysis suggests that effective coordination is inseparable from ongoing and organic communication. However, a narrative around coordination—which emphasizes efficiency—appears to drive global policies rather than stressing the significance of communication—which emphasizes care.

Our vertical analysis of all data exposed an environmental shift in EiE that reflects increased marketization of the humanitarian response, in education and more generally. This shift is evidenced in two general ways; first, through increased private sector participation in EiE partnerships, where companies in particular have become more engaged; and second, through a more business-like approach to EiE, in terms of a competitive, outcomes-based, and data-driven environment that focuses on outputs and targets. Based on our research, partnerships that reflect this marketized approach—including an increase in business actors in conjunction with embracing more business-like ways of working—spur several critiques.

Our findings brought to light the sometimes intangible and difficult to quantify, but significant impact that personal relationships and the roles of particular pivotal individuals have on the success of EiE partnerships. The significance of personal relationships was made most clear through our analysis of the country-level case studies. The social capital of individual actors often dovetailed with personal

characteristics—entrepreneurship, energy, patience, kindness—that enabled them to bring about change.

The study found that despite widespread agreement that participation of beneficiaries and localization of EiE efforts would contribute to the success of partnerships, each level of our analysis exposed the limited nature of both participation and localization.

The country-level analysis during crises showed the importance of regular participation of beneficiaries. Our data exposed the resilience and creativity of local stakeholders and beneficiaries, especially teachers and students. The pivot to virtual learning, while challenging and not without problems, was done quickly and flexibly, with care, kindness, and humor. Our findings brought to light the vital work of local actors, how they embraced beneficiary participation, and how this helped to sustain education through a series of emergencies. We posit that participatory practices, including end beneficiary participation, helped to sustain partnership activities and in turn supported student retention in virtual school and their attendance in classes.

An unfortunate finding that we uncovered from both the global and country analyses relates to discrimination, marginalization, and racism, both direct and systemic, within partnerships. Global partnerships that address EiE appear to be dominated by actors from the Global North who speak English fluently. Those not from dominant groups may be present, but their participation is often limited. The participation of affected communities is very low in global spaces and when they are involved, they are often tokenized. Within Lebanon, discrimination was felt by both Lebanese and Syrians as end beneficiaries, such as educators, parents, and students.

However, we found that some partners attempt to work through discrimination. We interviewed representatives of global-level organizations which are enacting major structural changes to address white supremacy and colonial legacies in their work. In local-level organizations, activities that bring together Lebanese and Syrian families have helped to break down some of the assumptions about one another. Local respondents explained that participatory activities helped to ameliorate discrimination, where people began to know one another as humans. In terms of academic achievement, our findings suggest that working against discrimination will contribute to a key factor in student success: integration of refugees into schools and wider communities.

A key overarching theme that emerged from the vertical analysis, intersecting with several of the other above-described themes, is that of power asymmetries and how some partnerships manage to address power imbalances and create more meaningful partnerships. Issues such as discrimination, limited participation and localization, increased marketization, and poor coordination all contribute to and are shaped by particular power dynamics in EiE. However, those partnerships that addressed discriminatory practices, prioritized participation, took on a culture of mutual learning, and coordinated through communication and care, appeared to ameliorate such

asymmetries.

From these findings we arrive at five intersecting guiding principles for partnerships in EiE: (1) care; (2) trust and respect; (3) ongoing and organic communication; (4) mutual learning and multi-directional knowledge sharing; (5) self-reflection and interrogation of power dynamics. The five principles do not merely provide guidance, but demand a shift in orientation away from more commonplace thinking and action in education in emergencies, suggesting the need for an overarching transformation in traditional ways of operating in the humanitarian sector.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, humanitarian organizations have increasingly advocated for partnerships to ensure the right to education in sites of disaster, conflict, and other emergencies. With an estimated 128 million children and youth out of school in crisis-affected countries (UNICEF, 2020, p. 4), an urgent impetus for partnerships in education policymaking, funding, and implementation reflects a broader momentum towards greater collaboration in humanitarianism. Through this expansion of partnerships, education in emergencies (EiE) has come to resemble a wide network of actors and organizations working together across global, national, and local scales.

This research seeks to understand why international and national actors have embraced partnerships to address education in emergencies and explores relationships and dynamics within EiE partnerships. More specifically, the study aims to generate evidence on the nature and impact of partnerships in the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis. It further seeks to inform partnership practices in education in emergencies by gaining a deep understanding of the ways in which private entities have contributed to refugee education, in partnership with each other and with public institutions at the global, national, and localized levels of educational programming. Drawing on the case of Syria refugee education in Lebanon (2018-2021), the study uncovers (1) the interaction, relationships, and proliferation of actors over time; (2) the characteristics of their partnerships; (3) the impact of these partnerships on coordination and community participation mechanisms that promote the engagement of localized actors in educational processes and programming; and (4) the potential impact of partnership practices on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education. The study employs a three-year iterative vertical case study design, with an embedded global mapping and network analysis, to produce a robust evidence base from qualitative, quantitative, and longitudinal data.

This report presents an overview of the research design, data analysis, and findings. We then consider the implications of these findings for partnership practices in education in emergencies.

1.1 Partnerships in Education in Emergencies

Up until only the past decade or so, humanitarian organizations worked primarily alone, siloed from one another. And when engaged in joint work, a clear hierarchy placed United Nations (UN) agencies in a position to direct policy and activities (Davey, Borton, & Foley, 2013; Fiori et al., 2016). More recently, however, humanitarian action has embraced notions of inter-agency collaboration. Through this cooperative environment, humanitarian actors seek to enable greater coordination between agencies in order to avoid duplication and competition (ODI, 2018). Moreover, in addition to traditional actors—UN agencies, multilateral banks, bilateral donors, and

non-government organizations (NGOs)—the private sector, including businesses and foundations, has increasingly engaged in humanitarian response (Barnett, 2005; OCHA, 2013; Scott-Smith, 2016).[1]

Humanitarian action also now prioritizes a "localization agenda" where actors and communities affected by crisis—or "beneficiaries"—are meant to engage in and inform crisis response at every step of the process (Fiori et al., 2016; IASC, 2020). For instance, several global education agencies have signed onto the "Grand Bargain"—an agreement between donors and aid providers that commits to localizing humanitarian efforts through "respect for the role of local actors" and "can be viewed as a way of re-conceiving the humanitarian sector from the bottom up" (IASC, 2020). Policy-making, funding, and implementation in humanitarianism now rarely involve merely one or two agencies, but instead look increasingly like a system that includes a wide network of global, national, and localized actors and organizations working in partnership (Currion, 2018).

The EiE arena reflects this wider shift to a humanitarian network. As the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) notes in its Minimum Standards, organizations ought to prioritize collaboration in order to achieve the goals of coordination and local participation (INEE, 2010). Organizations that include a mandate to support EiE have joined together in several partnership arrangements, such as global partnerships that bring together state and non-state actors to collaborate on advocacy, policy-making, implementation of activities, and sometimes pool funding in order to directly respond to educational crises (Menashy, 2019). For example, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECW), the INEE, Elevate Children, Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-E), the Global Partners Project, and others each support initiatives directed at education in contexts of emergency. Recent partnerships have been established to target specific crises, such as the Global Education Coalition for COVID-19 Response (International Commission, 2020). Many of these partnerships include private actors—foundations and/or companies—within their governance bodies.

At regional and country levels, partnerships between local and global actors have also grown more commonplace in humanitarian and education response. Collaboration through country level education clusters, for example, embrace the "principle of partnership [being] at the core of the cluster approach" (GEC, n.d.a). The Global Education Clusters Partners Forum acts as a platform for a range of organizations to support EiE, to "share information, priorities and advocate for enhanced coordination" (GEC, n.d.a). Regional partnerships such as the Whole of Syria response and No Lost

1 By "private sector" we refer to both businesses and foundations, acknowledging these to be different entities; businesses directly seeking profit from educational activities, while foundations are ostensibly "non-profit." Yet because many foundations hold affiliations to companies, were established through business profits, and contribute indirectly to the associated companies' fiscal success (see McGoey, 2012), we apply the umbrella term "private sector" to both entities. As well, the majority of our interview participants conflated business and foundations when describing private sector participation in EiE.

Generation Initiative represent the response of country level education actors in partnership with international actors to improve access and quality of education (GEC, n.d.b; NLG, n.d.).

1.2 Private Actor Engagement in EiE Partnerships

The engagement of private actors in the education sector is highly contentious within international humanitarian, development, and academic circles. Debates hinge on questions of rights to equitable access and quality schooling, as well as the role of the state. These issues are particularly salient in contexts of conflict and fragility where challenges to educational governance and provision are markedly acute (Menashy & Zakharia, 2021).

Citing issues of access and quality, proponents of private sector engagement contend that private participation in educational governance, financing, and provision is a reliable and efficient mechanism through which to effectively educate children and youth in contexts of conflict and fragility. This involvement, they argue, is critical as a form of humanitarian assistance in the absence of a stable, functional public sector (DfID, 2013). From this perspective, partnerships involving the private sector can contribute to more predictable and sustainable funding and can serve as sources of reliable technical expertise. The private sector is also viewed as more adaptable and responsive in rapidly evolving contexts (Watkins, 2016).

Opponents in this debate argue that private participation in settings of fragility, particularly when driven by profit motivations, can result in inequities and exploitation (Verger et al., 2016). Critics also argue that because non-state participation deteriorates already weak public education systems, private engagement can undermine the responsibility of the state to provide schooling and may undercut state legitimacy (Menashy, 2013; Smith & Ellison, 2015; Tomasevski, 2003). Moreover, earlier research on private participation in Syria refugee education has exposed issues of decontextualized interventions, duplication, and poor coordination, spurring questions about the value of private engagement in complex crisis settings (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017).

Recognizing both the potential roles and shortcomings of private participation in conflict-affected contexts, our research nuances these debates through a careful examination of partnerships involving the private sector in response to the Syria refugee crisis.

1.3 Building on Prior Research

Previous research has begun to examine the emerging roles of private actors in

education crisis response, often criticizing private sector activities through uncovering the impacts of profit-oriented motivations (Zakharia & Menashy, 2020; Le 2019; Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016; Jabbar 2017; Williamson and Hogan 2020). Scholarship on educational partnerships has grown in recent years as well. For instance, studies have tackled global partnerships, including analyses of power asymmetries and the roles of private actors within them (Menashy, 2015; 2019; Faul, 2016; Knutsson & Lindberg, 2020), and a small number of studies have looked at specific partnership-based responses to education in crisis contexts (Talbot & Taylor, 2015; Pherali & Lewis, 2019; Shohel, 2020). Several scholars have conceptualized education policy within countries as a network including partnership arrangements, oftentimes drawing attention to the relatively new participation of private actors (Au and Ferrare, 2015; Ball, 2016; Ball & Junemann 2012; Hogan et al., 2016; Olmedo, 2014).

These bodies of scholarship, however, have not adequately dovetailed to examine the cross-cutting themes we explore in this research. To our knowledge, no research has examined the EiE sector as a partnership-based network through a vertical lens, analyzing both global and localized partnership activities and impacts in EiE. This study also builds on prior research on Syria refugee education in Lebanon, including a study on the role of NGOs in widening access to quality education for Syrians in Lebanon (Shuayb, Makkouk, & Tuttunji, 2014), a donor mapping (Shuayb, 2016), and more recent research that focused on business involvement in Syria refugee education in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017).

1.4 Contexts of Study

Spanning a decade, the war in Syria (2011-present) has prompted mass displacement on an unprecedented scale. The conflict has displaced over 5.5 million Syrian people to date, largely to neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2020a).[2] With approximately half of all Syria refugees under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2019b) and an estimated 1.2 million school-age Syria refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (3RP, 2019), the Syria crisis has been a catalyst for partnership-based interventions in education.

The proliferation of partnerships directed at Syria refugee education, involving a variety of international, regional, national, and sub-national organizations, makes the Syria response context an appropriate case to examine the nature and impact of partnerships in EiE.

Since 2011, various arrangements of partnerships between organizations have been established to respond to the Syria refugee crisis in education, combining the funds and

2 The total number of Syria refugees registered with UNHCR in November 2020 was 5,580,396 (UNHCR, 2020a). Since not all displaced persons register with UNHCR for a range of reasons, it is likely that the number of individuals displaced by the Syria crisis exceeds this figure.

technical expertise of multilateral agencies, bilateral donors, civil society organizations, companies, philanthropies, governments, and local implementers. Notably, private sector actors—including businesses, philanthropies, religious entities, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—have taken an increasingly visible role. Partnership-based initiatives have resulted in a range of activities, situated at the global, national, and local levels, and reflect a transnational mass proliferation of actor engagement in the education of Syria refugees.

Figure 1.1: Map of Lebanon

Source: Adapted from UN (2021, p. 5): Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017–2021, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85374

Lebanon presents a notable case of proliferating partnership involvement in the education of Syria refugees, and more specifically, in the context of a fragile and conflict-affected state. With government and society deeply divided over the crisis, and consequently, assistance to refugees (Naufal, 2012), debates about educational financing and provision have been highly contentious from the outset. Lebanon has attempted to absorb into its schools 568,540 registered Syrian school-aged refugees (UNHCR, 2017), comprising one-third of all children in Lebanon.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) created a response program called "Reaching All Children with Education," RACE I, with the goal of providing vulnerable school-aged children, including both vulnerable Lebanese and Syria refugee children, access to both formal and non-formal schooling. RACE II continued the legacy of its predecessor in 2017 in hopes of further expanding access to all vulnerable children in Lebanon. Given the scale of the crisis and a decentralized educational system that is already highly privatized, non-state actors have been central to the provision of educational services to refugees (Shuayb et al., 2014; Zakharia, 2013;

2016). In fact, the exponential increase in funding by international and private donors has created an economy of its own, with various private entities mushrooming to "capture the funds" (Zakharia, 2016).

The Lebanese context embodies a multifaceted dynamic between public and private educational actors, both domestic and international. Given the size and scale of the refugee population, Lebanon, which hosts the greatest per capita refugee population in the world (3RP, 2019),[3] presents an important case of surging global involvement, including numerous international actors oftentimes partnering with local organizations. Given the contentious political landscape and diverse actors involved in the education of an exceptionally large number of Syrian children, Lebanon offers a fitting and important case study of the expansion of partnerships in refugee education. Furthermore, as host to a number of earlier refugee populations, Lebanon provides a timely context with historical antecedents in which to examine these phenomena.

1.5 Lebanon's Compounding Crises

After nearly a decade of parliamentary election extensions, the 2018 elections emphasized the stronghold of major political parties and citizen distrust in government. A year later, the country's debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio was the third highest in the world, and unemployment was increasing. In October of 2019, as mass wildfires broke out in its northern regions, so did protests throughout the country after the government implemented several new taxes on citizens who were already suffering from the start of an economic crisis. Though the government quickly reversed the tax proposal, protests continued and escalated in the days and weeks that followed as frustration grew over lack of government accountability. This led to bank and school closures across the country for weeks at a time while citizens still suffered from continued electricity cuts and water and food shortages. Since the 2019 protests, Lebanon has seen a 400% increase in food prices as the economy continues to decline because of the COVID-19 pandemic (ESCWA, 2020), and a rise in unemployment by 0.6% (World Bank, 2020). Compounding the ongoing political, economic, and COVID-19 pandemic crises, on August 4, 2020, a blast described as one of the largest non-nuclear explosion in history (University of Sheffield, 2020) detonated in Beirut port, killing over 200 people and injuring more than 6500 (MEHE & UNESCO, 2021). The Beirut Port blasts devastated a 6 mile radius of Beirut. Though protests slowed down at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the August 4 explosion led citizens to the streets once more. A formal investigation later confirmed that the explosion resulted in decades of negligence on behalf of the government. The deepening frustration regarding the economic and political environment of the country eventually led to the cabinet's resignation in August 2020.

3 Approximately 1 in 5 individuals in Lebanon are Syria refugees.

During the course of this study (2018-2021), the situation in Lebanon impacted education at all levels. Many children in Lebanon had already been out of school in late 2019 because of the protests, but the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in mass school closures around the country and the world. According to one study, children in Lebanon only received between twelve and eighteen weeks of schooling during the 2019-2020 academic year, versus the offered and expected 31-33 weeks; meanwhile, roughly 45% of Syria refugee children in Lebanon were out of school entirely during this period (Save the Children, 2021). A separate report states that despite the need for financial support to participate in remote learning (for purchasing laptops, tablets and internet access), 90% of 137 children surveyed stated they used the support to pay for food and medical needs (Save the Children, 2020). Further pressure was added to the education crisis when the August 4 blast damaged 94 public schools; 132 private schools; 22 public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) facilities; and 20 buildings of the Lebanese University, the only public university in Lebanon. Donor support to the Education Sector shifted focus to physical rehabilitation, combining funds from partners such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Education Above All (Qatar), UNESCO, ECW, the European Union (Germany), and Spain to address the destruction of public sector schools; and donors such as France, UNESCO, ECW, UNICEF, the Lebanese Red Cross, and Christian faith-based organizations L'Oeuvre d'Orient and World Vision-Lebanon partnered to rebuild private sector schools. Education Above All (Qatar) supported the reconstruction of TVET facilities and the Lebanese University.

As a result of the political and economic crisis, steep inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Beirut Port blast, the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) 2020 found that 89% of Syria refugee families in Lebanon faced extreme poverty. This proportion jumped from 55% the year prior, indicating the severity of the compounding crises on Syria refugee families (UNHCR, 2020b). Drawing on a nationally representative sample of 4,563 Syria refugee households across all districts of Lebanon between August to September 2020, VASyR also indicated a precipitous decline in food security, a near doubling of children ages five to 17 engaged in child labor since 2019, and a majority of Syria refugee students not attending remote schooling, with lack of access to Internet and the need for income generation among the primary reasons reported.

The deteriorating conditions within Lebanon impacted our research team and participants and necessitated unanticipated new ways of working together and conducting this project. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for racial justice shifted the ground in global education circles, requiring additional attention to methodology as we connected global and country level changes and the ways these were experienced through partnerships in EiE.

2. DATA COLLECTED AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study aims to generate evidence on the nature and impact of partnerships in the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis. In particular, it seeks to inform partnership practices in education in emergencies by gaining a deep understanding of the ways in which private entities have contributed to refugee education, in partnership with each other and with public institutions at the global, national, and more localized level of educational programming. Drawing on the case of Syria refugee education in Lebanon (2018-2021), the study seeks to understand (1) the interaction, relationships, and proliferation of actors over time; (2) the characteristics of their partnerships; (3) the impact of these partnerships on coordination and community participation mechanisms that promote the engagement of localized actors in educational processes and programming; and (4) the impact of partnership practices on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education. A key objective is to identify features of promising partnership practices that advance coordination and community participation.

Figure 2.1: Study goals

To this end, our study was guided by four research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon? (Who is involved? In what ways? In partnership with whom?)
2. To what degree has the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon shifted over time? (2018-2021)
3. What are some of the “promising practices” of partnerships that promote the foundational tenets of coordination and community participation?
4. What are the impacts of these partnerships on (a) how coordination and community participation is experienced at the local level, and (b) with what potential effects, including on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education?

2.2 Research Design

The research design entailed an iterative, three-year vertical case study (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009), with an embedded global mapping (Ball, 2012) and network analysis (Menashy & Shields, 2017). Data collection took place at three primary interconnected levels, conceptualized as a global analysis, a country analysis involving localized case studies, and a network analysis at the interface of global and country-level interaction (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Research design

Data was collected iteratively over a three-year period in order to understand phenomena at various levels, over time, and within a rapidly changing context. Through its simultaneous commitment to understanding macro-phenomena and micro-level processes, the vertical case study design allows us to situate localized action and interpretation within a broader investigation of global social and political phenomena. The embedded mapping and network analysis offers a quantitative examination of relationships and interactions, allowing clear visualizations of global, national, and local engagement, connections between actors, and changes to relations over time. Thus we drew on both qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies, including interviews, observations, document analysis and network data, in order to understand the interaction and dynamics of global, national, and localized partnership efforts and their effects.

Source	n
Interviews	113
Documents	250
Database Entities	440
Site Visits	16
Observations	15

Table 2.1: Total data collected and analyzed across vertical study

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of partnership processes at the national and more localized levels within Lebanon, our country analysis included a study of 16 different partnerships selected through purposive sampling to represent various types

of organizations and relationships. Through site visits, in-depth interviews, and an analysis of documents relevant to their educational programs, we sought to understand how partnerships were initiated, for what purpose, and how they have evolved over time. We further identified a subset of three partnerships to develop in-depth case studies that highlight promising partnership practices at the sub-national or "local" level. Each case study included at least one private sector partner, as detailed below. Drawing on ethnographic methods, including site visits, interviews, observations, student data, and document analysis over a three-year period, we uncovered the ways in which these partnerships promoted shared ownership through clearly articulated mechanisms and practices that promoted coordination and community participation, and with what effects, particularly in terms of student retention, progression, and integration in education. A central concern of this aspect of our investigation was to understand how localized actors might describe a "promising partnership;" how they have experienced this partnership; the key features of the partnerships; and impacts on students.

The longitudinal aspect was mapped onto the key "policy moments" derived from the global level analysis, as well as the INEE (2017) Education in Emergencies Timeline (2011-present). The last months of the study were dedicated to eliciting from the data guiding principles and practices that have been shown to promote the goals of coordination and community participation with effects for sustained programming and student outcomes.

2.3 Data Collection, Sources, and Analysis

We describe our methods of data collection, sources of data, and approach to analysis in this section and organize these by "level" of analysis: (1) global analysis, (2) partnership database and network analysis, and (3) Lebanon country study. We acknowledge that the levels of analysis are interconnected, inform each other, and serve as a means of organizing the research methods rather than representing discrete categories of practice or interpretation. Table 2.2 summarizes the primary levels of analysis, methods, and data sources that guided the response to each of our research questions.

Table 2.2: Overview of methods

Research question	'Level' of analysis	Methods	Data sources
What is the extent and nature of the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon?	Global Network Country	Interviews, document analysis, global mapping and network analysis	Websites, public documents, key informants at global and country level
To what degree has the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon shifted over time?	Global Network Country	Interviews, document analysis, global mapping and network analysis	Websites, public documents, key informants at global and country level

What are some of the "promising practices" of partnerships that promote the foundational tenets of coordination and community participation?	Global Country	Interviews, document analysis, site visits, observations	Key informants at global and country level, organization documents, partnership activities
What are the impacts of these partnerships on how coordination and community participation is experienced at the local level and with what effects?	Country	Interviews, document analysis, site visits, observations	Key informants at global and country level, organization documents, partnership activities

Global level analysis

We collected two primary datasets to inform the global level analysis: (1) Key informant interviews (n=55) with actors directly involved in global partnerships in EiE; and (2) published documents (n=227) from organizations with global and Middle East regional scope.

Key informant interviews

From October 2018 through February 2021, we conducted 55 key informant interviews with actors based in the Global North and South who identify as stakeholders involved in global partnerships that address education in emergencies, including for instance Education Cannot Wait, the Global Partnership for Education, Elevate Children's Funders Group, International Education Funders Group, INEE, among others. Interview participants comprised representatives of international non-governmental organizations and civil society; bilateral donors; UN agencies; foundations; and secretariats of global partnerships (see Table 2.3). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on an established set of criteria, including experience in EiE partnerships and professional seniority. Of these, 22 also had direct involvement in EiE partnerships in Lebanon. Interviews were conducted in English and took place in-person, over the phone, and virtually, and lasted on average one hour each.

Type of Organization	n
Bilateral	4
Consultant	1
Foundation	15
Global Partnership	5
INGO	23
Religious	1
UN	6
Total	55

Table 2.3: Global interviews by organization type

Interviews were scheduled in two rounds, corresponding to the research period prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (October 2018-February 2020) and after (October 2020-February 2021). Interviews elicited views on the functioning, goals, and challenges of EiE partnerships at the global level and aimed to uncover promising practices of such partnerships that might enable more effective and equitable policy practices in the education in emergencies sector. The second round of interviews

also probed changes to partnerships and partnership practices since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the influence of growing attention to the Black Lives Matter movement in global circles.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, with the consent of the participants. Interview transcripts were analyzed through an iterative coding process using both deductive and inductive codes. From the coded data, we identified emergent categories and broader thematic areas which we subsequently used to organize the coded interview excerpts. We triangulated findings from these interviews with the other data sources and to provide a vertical analysis to understand how these global level data might relate to local, sub-national findings.

Organizational documents

We collected and analyzed 227 organizational documents published between 2011 and 2019 from 24 global and regional organizations or partnerships to better understand the broader policy context and how global and regional agencies conceptualize partnerships in EiE within their institutional publications. This dataset comprised strategic plans, annual reports, and other documents published since 2011 by such multi-stakeholder entities as ECW, Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-E), Global Education Cluster (GEC), GPE, and No Lost Generation Initiative, and organizations with regional scope such as UNICEF MENARO, UNHCR MENA, and partners. All organizations within the document database were working in Lebanon at the time of the study. The documents were identified through keyword searches relating to education in emergencies and cross-references to the following four areas, aligning with our research questions: coordination; partnership; private sector; and participation.

The 227 documents were searched using a number of keywords for any reference to the following four areas:

1. **Coordination:** reference to collaboration, communication, harmonization, etc. with other organizations working on the same issues or with the same populations.
2. **Partnership:** reference to the idea of partnership, e.g. with other organizations, government entities, "community actors", "beneficiaries" etc.; including how this term is used, what it refers to.
3. **Private sector:** reference to any non-state actors, including business, corporate, companies, philanthropies, foundations, religious organizations, charities, NGOs, civil society, etc.
4. **Participation:** reference to "community" or "beneficiary" participation, also sometimes termed Southern, recipient, local, the involvement of "affected populations" – as partners, as "targeted communities" or targets of interventions.

The findings of this search resulted in a large textual dataset constructed through a process of deductive coding. The dataset then underwent a broad content analysis to

elicit inductive codes.

Next, to conduct a deeper analysis, the dataset was reduced, allowing us to compare similar types of documents across organizations. In this phase of the analysis, we focused on 147 annual reports and other similar documents. This subset of data was re-analyzed through an iterative process, using emergent themes from the larger textual data set, as well as our interview analysis. This allowed us to triangulate our findings from different sources and to identify overarching themes and an emerging conceptualization of partnerships from a global policy rhetoric perspective.

Coding

Data gleaned from key informant interviews and organizational documents were coded deductively (based on codes identified in the literature on partnership, private participation, and education in emergencies), inductively (based on codes emerging from the global and country level analyses), and iteratively (based on emerging themes from data across the study).

Partnership database and network analysis

In order to capture partnership arrangements within Lebanon and changes to partnerships over time, we created a comprehensive original database of organizational entities engaged in Syria refugee education in Lebanon at two collection points near the beginning and end of the research timeline. The first collection point, or Phase 1, took place from November 2018-February 2019, corresponding to the research period prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second collection point, or Phase 2, took place two years later from November 2020-February 2021. Together the Phase 1 and 2 datasets were used to generate a global mapping (Ball, 2012) and network analysis (Menashy & Shields, 2017) of partnerships engaged in Syria refugee education within Lebanon.

The purpose of the partnership database was three-fold: (1) to compile a comprehensive list of the organizations and activities in the country and sector; (2) to conduct a network analysis that allows us to understand and analyze relationships between organizations; and (3) to observe changes to the network structure over time, and in particular, following a period of acute political, economic, and health-related crises causing devastation to life and physical infrastructure.

To produce the partnership database, we undertook the following search activities in Phase 1:

1. Contacted via email individuals in well-established intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations to request partnership information
2. Searched online databases related to education in Lebanon, such as UNHCR's data portal (https://data2.unhcr.org/en/working-group/17?sv=4&geo=71) and OCHA financial tracking services (https://fts.unocha.org), to identify active entities, then

visited their websites to identify their partners from (1) website, (2) their annual reports, or (3) their linked social media pages (e.g. Facebook) that list collaborative activities and partnerships. This snowballing method produced a large number of entities that were each explored for their linkages to other partners.

3. Conducted open Internet searches on search engines (e.g. Google) using preselected terms such as “education programme Syrian refugee Lebanon”; “non-formal education Syrian refugee Lebanon”; “partnership education Lebanon refugee”; “initiative education Syrian refugee”; and “Syrian learning in Lebanon” in Arabic, English and French, filtering out any partnerships that did not include Syria refugee children
4. Searched publicly available information for Syria refugees about education services and searched the sites of the entities mentioned (e.g. in the Q&A https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/uploads/poster/poster_153907747632.pdf)
5. Reviewed the Lebanon Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) website and departmental Facebook pages to identify partnerships
6. Cross-checked online documentation with other sources of data, such as key informant interviews, organizational documentation provided to us, press releases, and publicly available meeting or event participant lists

All partnerships that included education- and Syria refugee-related activities in Lebanon were included in the database.

In Phase 1, we documented 377 separate entities involved in Syria refugee education in Lebanon and the nature of their connections to one another (November 2018-February 2019). The resulting dataset was coded for descriptors, such as types of organizations—for example, UN agency; bilateral agency; foundation; company; INGO, national NGO; government—and their connections to one another (see Table 2.4). Organizations were also coded for year established; headquarter location; and partnership activity in order to detail relationships between the different organizations within partnerships. Coding was based on information from webpages, documents, and social media from each organization, and corroborated where needed through communications with organizational representatives.

Table 2.4: Descriptors for organizational type

Network Code/Descriptor	Types of Organizations
Academic/Research Institute	higher education institutions, universities, research centers, think tanks (e.g. University of Toronto; American University of Beirut; Goethe Institute)
Bilateral Aid Agency	high-income country donors (e.g. USAID; UK's DfID)
Foundation	private philanthropic organizations, family foundations, corporate-affiliated foundations (e.g. MacArthur Foundation; Open Society Foundation; Porticus)

International NGO	global-focused non-governmental agencies (e.g. Save the Children; World Vision)
National NGO	non-governmental organization headquartered within Lebanon (e.g. Ana Aqra; Basmeh & Zeitooneh)
Private Company	for-profit corporation, corporate social responsibility branches of companies (e.g. McKinsey & Co.; SABIS)
Religious Organization	explicit religious mandate and affiliation (e.g. Youth for Christ Lebanon)
Other	organizations that do not readily fit within this classification

Based on the data included in the original dataset, we conducted a network analysis. Using R, a free software used for statistical computing and graphics, our analysis found the degree centrality of each individual entity and type of organization in our database. Degree centrality refers to the number of connections—or "ties"—to each actor in the network. From determining degree centrality measures, we could interpret and assume a higher level of partnership-based activity for those with higher centrality values, meaning more relationships with more entities. More importantly, degree centrality may denote influence, as an organization with higher centrality measures might hold the ability to determine or distort flows of information and resources to serve its own interests.

Our analysis also produced visualizations of the network structure, using graphing techniques and R compatible code packages to enable visualizing the properties of the network. Using an R geographic mapping package, our analysis also determined the geographic distribution of the entities in the database, and connections between them as network ties plotted on a world map.

In Phase 2, we repeated this methodology (1) to check the activity of partnership links identified in Phase 1; and (2) to identify any new links between existing or new entities and the nature of these new partnerships. The status of links from Phase 1 was captured through communication with organizations via email or key informant interviews; and Internet searches using site-to-site webpage visits to check content, reports, and news updates. These were cross-referenced with organizational social media pages. Where it was not possible to tell if a link that had been active in 2019 was still active in 2021, we recorded it as Unknown.

We compared the Phase 2 partnership database, network analysis, and visualizations with Phase 1 in order to understand changes to the partnership structure over a three year period marked by acute crisis.

Lebanon country study and partnership case studies

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of partnership processes at the national and more localized levels of educational programing within Lebanon, we analyzed a

subset of 16 different organizations and their partnerships, selected through purposive sampling to represent different types of entities. Criteria for inclusion in the initial list of partnerships included:

1. K-12 educational initiative, formal or nonformal
2. Aimed at serving Syria refugees
3. A partnership of 2 or more organizations, one of which must be a non-state actor
4. Includes an objective relating to improving student performance (for instance, retention, enrolment, progression, integration)
5. Includes an objective relating to community participation
6. Operational in Lebanon for at least one year

Through site visits, in-depth interviews with program directors, and a review of documents relevant to their educational programs, we sought to understand the nature of the partnerships, how they were initiated, for what purpose, and how they have evolved over time. We focused in particular on those partnership-based initiatives that participants considered among their most successful or promising.

We then selected 3 of the aforementioned 16 organizations and their partnerships to look at more closely. In collaboration with the Lebanon-based organizations' directors, we agreed upon three partnership case studies. Criteria for selection included:

1. Willingness to participate in the study and openness to ethnographic inquiry
2. Willingness to share internal documents with the research team
3. Diversity of the partnership (e.g. for profit, non-profit, faith organizations, local community-led NGOs, business-led organizations, international)
4. Involvement of community actors in the partnership-based initiative
5. Other potentially unique characteristics

After careful analysis of transcripts and organizational characteristics, we arrived at the following three partnerships for inclusion in the partnership case studies. All three Lebanon-based organizations within the partnerships preceded the Syria crisis and began serving Syria refugees at the onset, before their partnerships came into effect. Table 2.5 summarizes key characteristics of the selected partnership case studies, which are further described below.

Table 2.5: **Summary of key characteristics of partnership case studies**

	Partnership Case Studies		
	Partnership Case A	**Partnership Case B**	**Partnership Case C**
Type of Lebanon-based organization	Non-profit, non-governmental, non-sectarian, non-political, Syrian-led organization	Non-profit, non-governmental, non-sectarian, non-political, Lebanon-led organization	Non-profit, non-governmental, faith-based, Lebanon-led, private school

Type of partner	International non-governmental, based in the Global North	1-Large international organization 2-Private foundation based in the Global North	1-Faith-based, Lebanon-led, non-governmental 2-Faith-based, international non-governmental
Partnership activities with Syria refugees	English education in nonformal learning centers to support Syrian student integration into public schools Professional development for Syrian teachers	Basic literacy and numeracy Student retention	Nonformal education to support Syrian student integration into formal schools, both public and private Formal, integrated education for Syrian students in private faith-based school
Location of activities within Lebanon	Bekaa and Beirut	Akkar, Bekaa, Beirut, South Lebanon, and Mount Lebanon	Beirut

Partnership Case A

Partnership A includes a non-profit, non-governmental, non-political, Syrian-led organization in partnership with an international non-governmental organization, based in the Global North. The partnership-based initiatives operate in Bekaa and Beirut. They involve: English education in nonformal learning centers to support Syrian student integration into public schools where English is required to follow the Lebanese official curriculum and professional development for Syrian teachers. The Lebanon-based Syrian partner has been involved in multiple concrete, short-term partnerships and identified this partnership for investigation because of its direct involvement with the teaching and learning of Syrian refugees and its ongoing nature.

Partnership Case B

This partnership is between a Lebanon-based non-profit, non-governmental organization (non-sectarian, non-politically aligned) with a long-term presence in Lebanon of over 25 years and two of their sustained partners. The first partner is a large international organization. The second partner is a private foundation based in the Global North. Based in Lebanon and working in diverse areas, including Akkar, Bekaa, Beirut, South and Mount Lebanon, the partnership activities focus on basic literacy and numeracy and support for student retention. The Lebanon-based organization selected the two partnerships for the study because they viewed them as successful in terms of impact.

Partnership Case C

Partnership C includes a non-profit, private faith-based school, a Lebanese faith-based NGO, and a faith-based international NGO. The partnerships operate in Beirut. Activities include: a nonformal, afterschool program that supports the integration of

Syrian students into formal schools and funding to support the integration of Syrian students directly into the private, faith-based school, alongside other students. The director of the faith-based private school identified the two organizations as their sole partners. The partnerships are based on shared faith and personal relationships.

Data collection for the three partnership case studies took place in two phases between 2018 and 2021 and involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with various actors from the partnering organizations, site visits, document collection, and participant observation of partnership activities. Observations took place in person in 2019 and virtual in 2020, following school closures due to the spread of COVID-19. All data were transcribed and translated from Arabic into English.

A summary of data collection for the country study is summarized in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Data collection summary for country study

Timeline	Interviews	Observations	Documents
Initial partnerships (2018/19)	16	0	7
Partnership case studies (2019)	22	7 (in person)	11
Period of compounding crises (2020)	20	8 (online)	5
TOTAL	58	15	23

2.4 Data Management and Vertical Analysis

Data management was coordinated between the US and Lebanon-based teams through monthly meetings, systematic practices including shared storage, and methodological workshops to develop and pilot interview and observational protocols, documentation, and coding schemes. The teams undertook initial data collection together to refine this process and come to a shared understanding of data collection and management. The teams also met to discuss emerging analyses and findings at key points in the research process and to make joint decisions about issues arising from the research, such as the identification of key informants and documents, or selection of case studies.

The US-based team and two independent research collaborators in different world regions met quarterly to produce the partnership database and network analysis. Meetings focused on procedures and issues arising from the research process. Data sharing took place through secure shared storage, and regular communication was furthered via email and WhatsApp.

The research team analyzed each dataset independently, after which the findings were triangulated with findings from the other data sources (1) to identify convergences and discrepancies and (2) to provide a vertical analysis to understand the relationships

among global, network, and country level findings.

This report presents the findings of each dataset before presenting the vertical analysis, first thematically and then, to conclude, in relation to the research questions.

2.5 Research Ethics

We are committed to ethical research practices. US ethical frameworks for conducting research with human subjects governed the research, which underwent review by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the University of Massachusetts Boston, the University of Maryland College Park, and the Lebanese American University for compliance. All members of the research team involved with human subjects research underwent IRB training, as required. Ethical practices included clear processes for informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection. Furthermore, data collection procedures were developed and regularly reconsidered with sensitivity to the rapidly evolving political, economic, and social conditions in Lebanon, the well-being of the research team and participants impacted by the deteriorating situation, and the global health crisis affecting participants in the study worldwide.

Both the Lebanon-based and US-based teams had extensive experience conducting research in Lebanon and among Syria refugees and global and national actors prior to this study. The researchers were also acutely aware of political sensitivities, as well as the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic particularities of the context. They used these insights to help guide their practice through emerging issues, grounded in an ethic of care.

2.6 Disruptions and Limitations

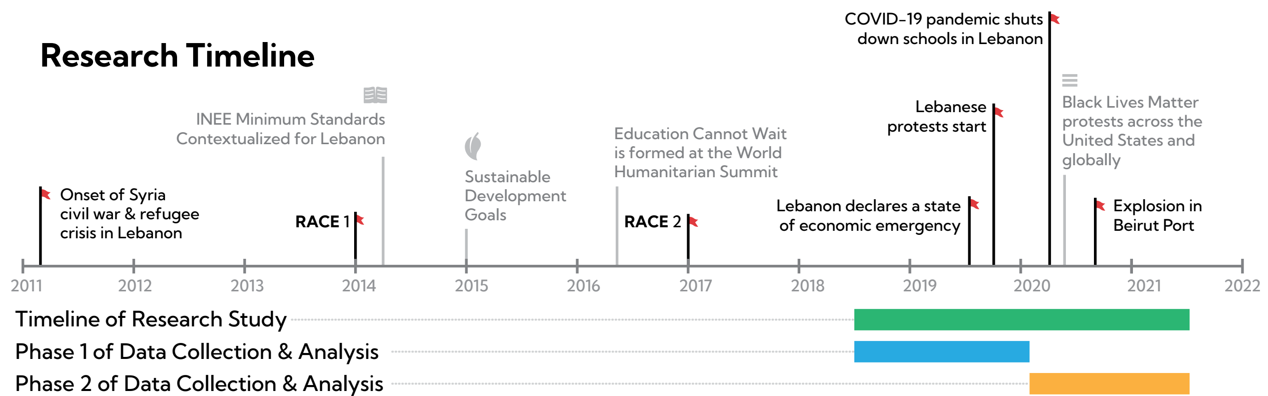
We acknowledge the limitations of our study, given the rapidly evolving nature of the Syria crisis and the educational response within the Lebanon focal case, as well as deteriorating conditions in Lebanon over the course of the study. The context impacted the research team and the participants, requiring us to rethink aspects of the research. The compounding crises also made some of our data in the earlier stages of the research potentially out of date by the time of the study's conclusion. For this reason, we designed the study with an iterative process in mind over the three-year period, returning to interview participants at different points in the research timeline to revisit research themes in light of the evolving situation. This allowed us to "check" for developments or departures from earlier data and to ensure a measure of accuracy in our analyses and findings.

It is important to note, too, that the surge in partnerships involving private actors is a relatively recent phenomenon, largely dating from 2015 (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017), thus participants may not be able to identify what particular features or practices

make partnerships productive, and evidence of partnership effects on educational programming may be based on data from a limited number of years. Our approach to case study selection sought to mitigate an aspect of this limitation by identifying cases with established documentation of impacts, as well as through sustained engagement with case study participants in order to understand how partnerships are experienced and with what effects.

The database and network analysis only includes those actors who have been engaged in the Syria response within Lebanon. Still, we believe it provides a lens to understand global actor engagement in EiE partnerships more generally, anchored within a complex, albeit single country case, and allowing us to bridge interview responses about the broader EiE sector to a national context. Our database may have also overlooked those organizations that do not have an online presence or work anonymously, despite that we aimed to fill information gaps through document analysis and interviews. Another limitation stems from the possibility that key informants may have been reluctant to critique partnerships, due to concerns related to competition for resources and future funding. However, the findings we present are substantiated by various sources and types of data, which enables us to draw reliable conclusions.

Figure 2.3: Research timeline



2.7 Research Team and Collaboration

Our research team comprised a US-based team and a Lebanon-based team, as well as two independent researchers. Together the researchers spanned four world regions and worked collaboratively throughout the three-year study. As individuals and teams, we have different strengths. Thus each member was in a position to learn from the other, from our various methodological and contextual knowledges, and from our various participants. We did not view this research partnership through a "local capacity building" lens, but rather, as a team process that involved knowledge sharing and production in partnership with each other and with our participants.

The core research team, Dr. Francine Menashy (Institute for International and

Comparative Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston), Dr. Zeena Zakharia (University of Maryland, College Park), and Dr. Maha Shuayb (Center for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University, Beirut), bring a breadth of relevant research and work experience to the study. Dr. Menashy has expertise in case study and network analysis methods, and has conducted several studies on private engagement in global education and aid to education in humanitarian crisis. Dr. Shuayb is Director of the Center for Lebanese Studies. Her research expertise includes refugee education in the context of Lebanon, on which she has led a number of donor funded large-scale studies. Dr. Zakharia's expertise is grounded in over two decades of educational research and leadership in war-affected contexts, and in Lebanon in particular. She has been studying Syria refugee education since 2011. The core research team is multilingual and able to conduct research in Arabic, French, and English, the main languages of instruction and social interaction in Lebanon. They have each served in an advisory capacity to international organizations, UN agencies, governments, NGOs, teachers unions, and schools on issues related privatization in education and education in emergencies.

Dr. Robin Shields (University of Bristol) and Therese Cregan (independent consultant) served as lead researchers on the partnership database and network analysis.

The research team was supported by talented and hardworking associate researchers and research assistants at various points in the project: Samira Chatila, Olivia Maamari, Ola Alsamhoury (Center for Lebanese Studies); Nina Kunimoto, Sara Nino (University of Massachusetts Boston); Langan Courtney, Erin Sorensen, Katya Murillo (University of Maryland College Park).

The outputs of this study are conceptualized as global public goods—openly accessible and non-rivalrous for all actors engaged in education in emergencies. They include a research report, guidance brief, a methodological toolkit, and a project website.

3. GLOBAL ANALYSIS

Our global analysis involved interviews with 55 global actors involved in partnerships and an analysis of 227 organizational documents. Together these provided insights into key themes relating to our research questions, including private sector engagement, coordination, and participation. As well, in later interviews, we gained insights on emerging themes relating to the impacts of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement.

3.1. Interviews with Global Actors

Interviews with 55 global actors engaged in EiE partnerships elicited insights on several themes, including some reasons behind a recent surge in partnerships in EiE, including the need for increased coordination, participation, and seeking private sector engagement. Respondents discussed challenges associated with each of these areas. Many respondents discussed issues of power asymmetries within EiE partnerships as reflecting a structural problem in the sector. Interviews conducted later in 2020 and early 2021 revealed the impact of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement on EiE partnerships.

A rise in partnerships

A majority of global-level interviews indicated that partnerships in EiE are on the rise. Interview respondents who have engaged directly in EiE partnerships explained that although the education space has always included relationships between different organizations, where “theoretically partnerships have underpinned education and emergencies work for a long time” (interview, INGO, July 2019), formalized partnerships are relatively new: “I would say over the past three, four years there’s definitely been a shift [to establish formal partnerships]” (interview, INGO, Sept 2019); “I’ve absolutely seen a rise” (interview, INGO, Sept 2019); and partnerships in EiE have “increased exponentially over the last several years” (interview, INGO, Jan 2021).

Respondents observed a rise in EiE partnerships generally, and also more specifically in terms of the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon and elsewhere: “for our work, especially in Lebanon and for the Syria crisis, the number of partners that we have involved is really huge” (interview, UN, Aug 2019b).

In discussing the rise in partnerships, several respondents referenced the Syria refugee crisis and the grave need for resources and capacity to respond in the Middle East region, which has presented an insurmountable challenge for single organizations to tackle: “we can’t do it alone” (interview, bilateral, Nov 2018); “You need to partner with different actors on the ground to ensure that education is implemented effectively. But it’s more so, I think, coming from my experience, because Syria response is a special context, there’s no other option but to work with partners in order to reach the people

in need and in order to reach out to vulnerable children" (interview, INGO, Feb 2020). Working together in partnership can allow agencies to build on one another's expertise, resources, and spur collective advocacy: "the need is increasing and the number of people displaced just continues to increase. There's a general sense that funding is gradually decreasing... so all organizations are looking at how do we actually meet the needs and ultimately on the ground to be effective, it means working together... It means we need to work together" (interview, INGO, June 2019b); "It's just more sustainable. You can leverage; your voice is bigger; [and] it's a group of you saying the same thing" (interview, INGO, Jan 2020).

In order to address such an enormous challenge, partnerships are deemed the only way forward, as actors "recognize that the reality is, if we really want to have systems change, we really do need to partner... we're not going to have the kind of impact that we would expect to see it unless we partner" (interview, foundation, Feb 2020c); "we need to work together basically" (interview, INGO, June 2019b).

Respondents agreed that although many actors appear to embrace notions of partnership, the donor community has been particularly enthusiastic about partnerships in EiE: "The donors that are actively engaged are looking in that direction... the donor push for collaboration, the context, the economic, social and technological context and the government engagement are all some key reasons why I think we're seeing high levels of partnerships in the region. And possibly the high profile of the process as well" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019a); "it was because the donors wanted to push this" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019c).

We elaborate on the rationales for partnering in the sections that follow in which we uncover some challenges and opportunities of partnerships in EiE.

EiE partnerships: Challenges and opportunities

Private sector engagement

Partnerships in EiE include diverse stakeholders, with many respondents noting a growing role for companies and foundations as new partners in global initiatives. Several respondents suggested that a rise in partnerships in EiE results from a push to engage the private sector specifically as partners: "I guess what's new is the engagement of the private sector" (interview, INGO, July 2019); "there's been for some time, I think, attempts to figure out how to effectively engage the private sector" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019). A representative from a religious organization explained: "the role of the private sector absolutely has increased over the last few years" (interview, religious, Nov 2020). As one respondent explained, "There was a big push... with the Sustainable Development Goals, that development needed to include the private sector... [As a result,] those players are on the rise" (interview, INGO, Jan 2020).

For governments, multilaterals, donors, and NGOs, partnering with the private sector means a potential additional funding source: "I think organizations are trying to diversify their funding portfolio, to be quite honest" (interview, INGO, Sept 2019). As an INGO representative explains, "we're really trying to increase our corporate partnerships and donations from individual philanthropists or philanthropies to go toward the emergency sector" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b); "they just see dollar signs. You know, automatically, they just think there's this big bag of money" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019). Respondents suggest that private actors hold policy-making roles based primarily on their resources: "I think they're seen as a pool of resources. Because they're a pool of resources, then they get to sit at tables with policymakers who use resources. I think it's just as simple as that" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019).

Despite that partnerships appear to readily embrace the private sector, several respondents voiced some reluctance to partner with private actors and expressed skepticism around private participation, especially relating to companies and their profit-oriented motivations for engagement in the EiE space: "The reason is of course to get a profit, to return on whatever they do" (interview, INGO, Feb 2019); "At the end of the day, they want the market" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019); "I would say it's always, because this is their business and business is business, it's always with an eye to future profit… They want that market. That is quite an interesting spec to walk in when you are a humanitarian and your motivations are completely different" (interview, INGO, Jan 2020); "private sector engagement in the Syrian context… to support a certain product or a certain alliance [to] companies. So, they have the face of an NGO, but in reality, they are trying to sell you a product" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019).

Moreover, some respondents view the private sector as less than effective partners: "I'm still not sure if it's true partnership, to be honest. I'm a bit of a skeptic when it comes to the private sector engagement in this space… I think that for the private sector, it's been a lot of rhetoric, a lot of promises" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2018); "they kind of work in these kind of quiet and covert ways more behind the scenes" (interview, INGO, July 2019); "it's great to have the resources, capacities and innovation that private sector can bring, on the other hand, it can actually be a bit distracting, a bit gimmicky and not necessarily really contributing to the overall response" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019a).

Coordination

Beyond agreement that multiple organizations can meet refugee needs better together rather than alone—a belief hastened by the Syria refugee crisis—respondents attributed the rise in partnerships also to a demand for stronger coordination in the EiE sector. Respondents cited coordination issues between agencies as motivating partnership in EiE: "in actually coming together, you're able to much more efficiently identify places

of overlap" (interview, foundation, Oct 2020). In terms of the Syria crisis "donors are kind of demanding or encouraging consortia partnerships, streamlining of approaches, standardization of approaches" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019a), where a more coordinated environment can ensure less duplication and more efficient practices.

Partnerships are thought to increased efficiency through avoiding duplication and identifying gaps: "I think it's sort of both hands. You see a need to come together, but then in actually coming together, you're able to much more efficiently identify places of overlap and potential partnerships" (interview, foundation, Jan 2019a); "we know that we will not be able to solve all these problems by ourselves. So it is important to hear about what other peer organizations are doing. One, not to duplicate what is being done out there. Two, identify gaps where our resources will be helpful, because that is what we do. We try to look for gaps, where are the gaps in education in emergency? And that is where we come in. So, partnership first to understand what is going on in the field to identify those gaps" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020b).

Although the need for increased coordination may spur partnerships, several respondents noted that despite more formalized relationships between organizations, competition still widely characterizes the EiE sector. Efforts toward coordination are widespread, for instance through donor groups within countries; personnel within global partnerships responsible for coordination; and the Global Education Cluster. Because of such efforts some believe coordination is getting better: "I actually think coordination is improving" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b).

However, the majority of respondents found that even in the context of increased partnership, coordination issues arise frequently because "stuff gets in the way. If you have to do a very, very quick response, people will go in there, respond and maybe think about [coordination] later. Definitely that's the reputation… the disaster management team, the cowboys, they just roll in" (interview, INGO, Jan 2020).

According to a majority of respondents, coordination in the EiE sector and between global partnerships remains weak. In fact, competition tends to characterize the sector, rather than coordination: "In an emergency specifically, there's really not a lot of support in terms of financial support, so there's this natural competition between agencies. Coordination is trying to help that, but it's challenging for folks to share information when they have yet to secure funding to operate" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019c); "when you have all this fragmentation, and all these influences of course you have the issue of competition among agencies for research, for resources and so on. It's a real like, a mix of not very helpful influences on coordination" (interview, INGO, Feb 2019).

A key barrier to coordination appears to manifest from each agency seeking to ensure its own survival, and so competition emerges: "there are a lot of efforts on coordination, and a lot of inter-agency groups. But I think the issue is, everybody wants to have a reason to exist, in a way. Everybody wants to implement and everybody wants

to get funding, and then you can't really stop some … I mean, you see a lot of groups or agencies working on the same things, or some things that are done and done again" (interview, UN, Aug 2019b). Another respondent described the sector as "a tug of war" (interview, INGO, July 2019). Despite an expansion in partnerships, the EiE funding environment "naturally creates incentives for competition… There's always a race to get out the flash appeal and then a race to get in funding proposals… the urgency is really about, 'I need to get there first before the other contrasting partners, so that I can get the funding.' It's not the urgency of the children who are out of school" (interview, foundation, Oct 2020); "everyone is very territorial of what they're doing, everyone's competing for funding" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019).

As individual agencies compete with one another for resources, they hesitate to share knowledge or information on their activities even within partnerships. This lack of transparent communication exacerbates poor coordination. According to a respondent from a global partnership, coordination depends on trust, information-sharing, and transparency; all rare: "I think despite all the talk about coordination, it's still very, very weak. I think it's something that I always tell our members, we can be effective in terms of coordinating, our effectiveness is very much linked to how much information they share with us. So if they're not going to share the information around where they're funding, how they're funding, we're very limited in our role in terms of how we can support coordination" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019). Another respondent similarly states how an effort to coordinate "really easily crumbles if there isn't the goodwill and trust among partners to coordinate" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2018).

Participation

As well, respondents expressed a goal to engage local actors in particular as partners, rooted in the mandate set out in the Grand Bargain: "the Grand Bargain commitments have also definitely increased the amount of local partnerships that NGOs are doing with local NGOs" (interview, INGO, Sept 2019); "we are not on the ground to do the work ourselves, because we don't know how to do it. So in humility, we recognize the fact that we need to partner with the experts to do the work. And for us, when we talk about refugees, the experts here, the organizations on the ground, either where the conflict is, or the host countries and especially the communities where refugees are hosted, they are the experts. So it is key to partner with them, and it's important to partner with government as well, to provide the relevant support for them to be able to provide the needed assistance for refugees as well. We don't have the skills and this knowledge to do partnering with government. So we work through our grantee partners to do with that" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020b). Local participation is deemed necessary in some contexts: "In Syria for example, because of the nature of the crisis and our inability to be there in person or directly implement education activities, we had to implement education activities through partners and with partners, in order to reach those most vulnerable" (interview, INGO, Feb 2020).

Global organizations engaged in EiE widely advocate a localization agenda through

community participation in their organizational rhetoric, citing the need for local "buy in," "input," or "local ownership" as being integral to the impact and sustainability of programs. Respondents observe a growing need to engage local actors as partners. One interviewee explained that "there really is this push to work more and to reach out more to local partners on the ground in the countries that we're working in, with the understanding that these organizations have been there for far longer than [the INGO] has, and they've been there before an emergency hits, and they will be there after an emergency hits" (interview, INGO, Sept 2019). Yet respondents overwhelmingly agreed and lamented an absence of substantive local participation or deep engagement of affected communities in partnerships. As one respondent noted, "I think the sector preaches about localization but I haven't seen much action yet" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b). Despite a clear desire for increased beneficiary[4] participation, structural and organizational challenges often act as barriers, at both global and country implementation levels.

When asked about participation of affected communities within partnerships, we were told: "I think the true answer is, they're not represented very well. Like definitely not sufficiently… I think they recognize that as an issue and a gap" (interview, INGO, July 2019); "it's very much what [partnerships] would like to see in place, that representation, but it's also the challenge in organizing all of that" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019c). Another respondent explains that partnerships have "struggled to really partner at a more local level or have beneficiary voices represented" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2018). A respondent from a foundation explained, bluntly: "I don't know that we would call them even stakeholders, truthfully" (interview, foundation, Jan 2019b).

Several respondents mentioned a growing acknowledgement that participatory processes need to be more strongly implemented, but explained some of the structural challenges partnerships face: "I feel like [local participation] is being talked about more and more… but it's just the way that I suppose funding mechanisms are set up and where the money's coming from and where it's channeled through, and then of course who gets to be at the table for the decision making" (interview, INGO, June 2019b); "in the midst of the crisis and the running down that everybody's doing to come up with solutions very fast, and to spend money where money is needed in a fast way, I don't know to what extent are we really engaging people the way we should be engaging" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019).

According to some respondents, when actors from affected communities participate in global partnership spaces, their participation is often viewed as merely symbolic: "The beneficiaries are rarely in the room, and oftentimes if they're in the room, it can take a

4 We use the term "beneficiary" to refer to those individuals, communities, or populations intended to benefit from a program or service because this conceptualization is widely used in EiE. However, we advocate using terms that more accurately represent the agency of participants who actively engage (or resist) programs ostensibly aimed for their benefit.

very tokenistic, paternalistic lens to it" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019). As one respondent noted, "We walk a fine line of tokenism, I have to say" (interview, INGO, Jan 2020). Another further explained, "They're brought in too late in the deliberations, or after the deliberations. They're brought in at the point where it's like, okay, let's figure out monitoring. Or, okay, let's figure out the delivery as opposed to being at the table when the partnership is established. So, they are engaged after the fact as opposed to being a real partner from the beginning" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019).

According to some global actors, local participation in implementation of global partnership activities remains elusive: "[Within countries] you see this happening over and over. Things just, they fall on the hand of one or two [international] consultants who draft something and then this kind of process that's not necessarily … doesn't involved the participation of the actual beneficiaries" (interview, UN, Aug 2019b). Despite that many organizations have developed policies that prioritize beneficiary participation "what is written is completely different from what they act… You cannot deal with human problems from offices, from far away" (interview, INGO, Aug 2019).

Respondents discussed the related problem of poor contextualization of global partnerships' policies, resulting from low participation: "sometimes I feel that they are dealing with Yemen as if they are dealing with Denmark. Sometimes they don't understand the context. And sometimes when they put their strategy, they don't give the space for those who [are] living on the ground to plan or to engage in the planning" (interview, INGO, Aug 2019). Another respondent echoes: "the picture that I get in terms of what's needed on the ground, is a bit skewed and it's through the lens of these bigger organizations" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019).

Limited local participation within partnerships relates to a lack of trust, where international actors "distrust the people on the ground. And the people on the ground feel insulted, how this international organization who got millions to work with them… This lack of trust which creates [an] unsettled psychology for those whose active in a very difficult situation" (interview, INGO, Aug 2019). Respondents spoke of a need to build "that trust in that space for people to meet those shared goals and the collective missions" and ensure "real strengthening for the voices of people of all ages who have been impacted by emergencies and humanitarian crises to themselves be not only able to access the quality inclusive education that they have the right to, but then also be able to become part of the decision-making for future crises settings" (interview, global partnership, Nov 2020).

Issues of power and influence

Despite a vocal push for greater participatory processes and equitable relationships, power hierarchies remain prevalent in EiE partnerships, with international actors driving policies and programming. According to global actor interviews, limited community participation and localization reflects these power asymmetries: "localization needs to be much more meaningfully implemented… in order to shift

some of the power" (interview, INGO, Oct 2020).

Although certain stakeholders and organizational rhetoric might present EiE partnerships as equitable and non-hierarchical, respondents clarify that power asymmetries persist, and those international actors with resources tend to hold most sway. When asked which stakeholders hold most power within partnerships, we were told: "the donors definitely… Because they have their red lines, which are very politically driven" (interview, UN, Oct 2019). One respondent put it this way: "It's always the big donors and the big partners. In Lebanon's case, it would be UNICEF, for sure, and its donors. So, the EU, Germany, DFID… France. These are the big donors on the table" (interview, UN, Aug 2019b). This was echoed repeatedly, as exemplified by the following statements: "Donors. There's certain donors that are super influential and really throw their weight around" (interview, INGO, July 2019); "Whoever has money" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019); "I'd say primarily donors because money talks and people who hold the purse strings are able to influence" (interview, INGO, June 2019b). An INGO actor observes these dynamics at work with global partnerships in EiE, suggesting that actions need to better reflect organizational rhetoric: "If you want to really signal that this is about developing country partners and they're in the driver's seat, give them more seats at the table because it's about them. It's not about the donors, it's about the developing country partners and what they want, not what the donors wants. So stop. It's about walking the talk" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020).

And while resource-holding organizations wield most influence, local beneficiaries and recipients of funding remain skeptical of partnering with those that might not share their interests, due to these power asymmetries: "a lot of organizations do not want money from these organizations because they feel like their agenda or whatever that donor says, they're going to come in with an idea of how they should spend their money, what they think the needs are, not what the organization sees what the needs are" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019).

Power hierarchies remain prevalent despite a push for equitable partnership: "the power dynamics in humanitarian response are fraught with problems" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b).

Changes over time

In addition to major disruptions to education within Lebanon specifically, during our study two large-scale global events triggered pronounced changes in EiE partnerships, including their mandates, ways of working, and the activities they support: the COVID-19 pandemic and a global reckoning with racism spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement.

COVID-19: An opportunity to "Build Back Better"?

All respondents interviewed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic discussed

dramatic shifts in ways of working and the types of projects supported through their EiE initiatives, including those with partners. Many discussed a change in narrative as well, in which international actors began to conceptualize EiE activities with an aim to "build-back-better" post-pandemic. Some respondents defined this a seeking to establish more resilient, equitable, and inclusive education systems, which can withstand future crises: "this is an opportunity to build back better… So we have from the beginning taken a resilient approach to our COVID response, and the technical tools, resources and guidance that we've been putting out" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2020). Another pointed to "a true opportunity to make education systems more resilient so when this potentially happens in the future we already know how we would approach building back better" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b). Others view the pandemic as an opportunity to create more equitable systems: "I see this as an opportunity for sure, because from my perspective, COVID has just laid bare tremendous inequalities within education that we knew existed, but now they're right in your face. So it gives us an opportunity to say, hey, we can't turn a blind eye to this anymore" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020).

Others offered critiques of the build-back-better framing, in particular that it has been adopted before with little impact: "I think honestly it's a slogan I've heard so many times, but I've never seen it. I've worked in some crisis situations, so it was always framed as building back better, but I've never seen anything being built back better and I think it's the same here" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020). Another respondent reflected: "I've heard that framing and that language, but it does remind me that that's something in our sector we've been saying for quite a while" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020c).

Some respondents questioned the mandate and authenticity behind the words, and how actors in EiE have "taken on the kind of rhetoric of transformation, which is for someone like myself that works with social movements and [the] idea of education as a transformative power, it feels a bit like they're co-opting the kind of language to talk about transforming education systems" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020); "I personally think, pessimistically, I guess I will say that I think it's rhetoric…. I guess I am pessimistic that these will be long-term systemic, overhaul changes" (interview, foundation, Oct 2020b). Others pointed out that the concept of the pandemic as opportunity resides primarily in the Global North: "I've only really come across it as a northern-based narrative" (interview, INGO, Oct 2020).

COVID-19: Accelerating localization?

A major change in EiE partnership activities during the pandemic involved the near-complete cease of travel. In a short period of time, actors from organizations located in the Global North could no longer fly to crisis settings and work alongside local partners. Respondents noted how "this pandemic has emphasized the organic resilience that exists within communities and reminded us that we as international NGO workers, we have a limited view into what will work in a given context" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020).

Some believe that because COVID-19 has shown that local partners and communities hold the capacity to implement new educational programs and sustain activities on the ground without the direct involvement of international actors, the pandemic has accelerated localization in EiE: "it is an opportunity for stronger localization and expression of needs in a different manner… it wasn't fair, just wasn't okay to continue like this, shipping people from the North. So it's just accelerating the change of the way they do business" (interview, bilateral, Dec 2020). In this way, some organizations have thought differently about their practices, that the pandemic was "helping us to put in practice some of this decolonization way of working, to listen to grantees rather than telling grantees what to do" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020). Others explained that the change in travel helped them to reflect on the necessity: "When I think about, actually, the travel that I missed, and the reasons for the travel, it was frivolous. It was. I mean, the connections and the personal engagement? Absolutely, but that's probably 50% of them at best. At best. You know? So I think that will certainly cause a change in the sector" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020).

However, others expressed skepticism about any long-term or structural change to humanitarian practices and localization efforts: "If things are changing, I hope they stay like this. And I hope that especially all the flying and all this waste of resources will end. But I am not sure. As you know, the bigger, bigger, underlying causes of inequality and poverty and exploitation are not really addressed through this. We know how to work remotely, but we're not really looking at our bigger kind global inequalities or the climate crisis. None of this is really relevantly addressed in our response to the COVID crisis" (interview, INGO, Jan 2021b). Another respondent skeptically explained: "The other question I think whether or not that is going to result in systemic change, I would certainly hope so. It depends, like with a lot of these things, about how willing people are to give up power, even if they don't see it as power, power of privilege, see that kind of devolution right to the geographic areas that, the affected areas, affected countries, affected population. … the big challenge is, is there substance behind this? And whether or not it's just lip service, because there's a lot of entrenched power and privilege in the humanitarian system in the Global North" (interview, INGO, Dec 2020).

COVID-19: Accelerating private sector participation?

Respondents also reflected on the role of the private sector within their partnerships and how companies and foundations, particularly those associated with educational technology, became even more pivotal partners during the pandemic: "the private sector also, given the nature of the emergency and the need for e-learning… so I also saw that there was more mention of companies that we never used to talk about in the sector" (interview, UN, Dec 2020); "And I think, with some of our other partnerships COVID accelerated that step forward into commitment. Because the need was so compelling. And I think that, particularly private sector partners couldn't sit by the sidelines and saw an opportunity to really jump in, when maybe we could have taken months more to develop and settle on something to collaborate on" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2020); "I think we've seen that the private sector set up in two areas, one

is distance learning and how do you make that happen just because of the acute need, and then distribution channels and how can we get things to homes for young people to use, whether it be a hard copy if it's not a technology based learning situation. I think COVID forced the hand on that and also brought a lot forward" (interview, INGO, Jan 2021).

BLM and a global reckoning on racism?

The summer of 2020 protests against anti-Black violence, beginning in the US with the Black Lives Matter movement and rapidly spreading worldwide, spurred a reckoning on racism within international development and humanitarianism. This included some serious conversations about decolonizing these industries and the need for explicit anti-racist policies. Respondents involved in EiE partnerships discussed how this movement led to new personal reflections, organizational responses, and relationships with partners. Some reflected on individual awakenings: "I've noticed changes and I think a lot of that just stems from the fact that I am trying to be more hyper aware of my own biases and really trying to be more considerate in how I approach all of my interactions with my colleagues" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020b). Others noted that organizations have introduced anti-racism activities for their staff: "we have been inviting different experts to help us to learn more about racial justice issues and learn more about equity issues... So we as an organization are also putting our house in order, by educating ourselves about racial justice, educating ourselves about equity issues, by educating ourselves about neo-colonization and decolonization and demonstrating how we can do that in our grant making process, in our grantee application process" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020b). Some respondents reflected on the fact that anti-racist efforts in international development and humanitarianism are long overdue: "It's a defining issue of our time, and there's a way that it plays out in the United States, but there's a way that it plays out also in other parts of the world, very much tied with a de-colonization framework. Frankly, for the field of development and for international education, it is long overdue to have this discussion" (interview, foundation, Oct 2020); "there's been a big internal reckoning, and a cry from people of color within the organization and the allies to take anti-black racism seriously" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020).

However, the majority of respondents remained skeptical that these efforts will make long-standing differences when it comes to racism in the humanitarian and development sectors. We were told that most often, the subject is essentially silenced, with respondents lamenting "race and power and how it remains unexamined" (interview, consultant, Feb 2019) and how issues of race are "nowhere even on the agenda" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020). One leader of an international non-governmental organization explains that in policy development, discussions on race are deemed controversial and NGOs are "wary of using terminology that might be offensive" (interview, INGO, Nov 2020c).

As well, despite clear evidence of the connections between development, colonialism,

and racial inequities, most respondents situated outside of the United States appeared to consider racism a distinctively American problem. For instance, when asked about anti-racist work, a European-based respondent explained "I think from a US perspective, I think there's a lot of stuff happening, but I think it's happening because of events in the US so I think it's within the US perspective" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020). Other representatives of global education organizations with offices both within and outside of the US explained: "we are a bit more aware of it here in the US because of the Black Lives Matter movement. But I would say in terms of the global organization, we haven't launched any sort of global effort on this at all" (interview, religious, Nov 2020). Another similarly observes: "in the United States in particular, we've seen this very happening very, very, very close to us… unfortunately, in terms of the [global education] work, I have not seen enough of that or hardly any to be quite honest" (interview, global partnership, Dec 2020).

Effective global EiE partnership practices

Respondents spoke in a general sense, based on their experiences in various partnership arrangements, of qualities characteristic of a positive, effective, and "true" partnership. As discussed above, global interview respondents widely agree on the need for robust coordination between partners and active, meaningful participation of affected communities and local partners, while also lamenting the deficiencies in these areas.

In addition, several respondents noted that all partners must hold shared visions and goals relating to their collaborative work: "It is about a shared vision, I would say. What is it that we bring, and what is it that they bring?" (interview, INGO, Jan 2019c); "really having a clear mission and vision of what the partnership … the goal of that partnership, and that sense that everyone has the same idea and mission around what the path forward is" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019); "a true partnership is, first begins with shared outcomes. So that we have, that all parties have defined the problem that, in a similar way. And defined and have a shared vision on what the outcome is that they're seeking to achieve together. And that either through their combined pathways that they're going to achieve that or work together on the same pathway to achieving that outcome" (interview, bilateral, Nov 2018).

Yet while interviewees agreed that shared goals are paramount, this does not mean similar activities and focus areas, so that the partnership reflects "complementarity… the idea of the partnership is really very distinct roles and responsibility. Reaching out to each other's results, but don't step into each other's mandates" (interview, INGO, Feb 2019). Such complementarity can only be achieved if actors consider themselves a community of practice and not in competition: "It is not about one organization putting a flag there, that I did this or I did that, but it's about that common vision for us to come together and recognizing the strength in the diversity. So the education group has different diverse groups, but those diversities that we have strengthens the network and bring us together" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020b).

In order to ensure complementarity and an effective trajectory towards shared outcomes, partners must know, understand, and appreciate each other's differences, including structure and organization: "in my experience the best partnerships are when both or all, depending on the number of partners, understand each other and understand how each other function and what their priorities are and why they're doing that, and when the aims or the reason for working together aligns" (interview, INGO, June 2019b). This can happen through prioritizing transparency in communication: "We really like to be conversational about what's going on, we really try to build a relationship with trust with our partners so that they know it's okay if things are not going as planned, that we can talk about it and that we can really try to troubleshoot together" (interview, foundation, Nov 2020); "of course there needs to be transparency, information needs to flow" (interview, foundation, July 2019).

Some respondents stressed the need for all partners to be open to "thinking outside the box": "There is not a lot of imagination sometimes in the sector. And people are often fearful of new things and skeptical of new things, and they revert to status quo and things that they're comfortable with… A strong partnership is one that does not overthink itself, that doesn't get caught up in bureaucracy because of the urgency of the humanitarian crisis" (interview, INGO, Jan 2021).

And a core element to positive and effective partnership relates to trust and respect: "at the heart of any good partnership is trust. So there's this trust among all the partners that are around the table. I think that's something most people say, 'Oh, let's have trust.' But I think that takes quite a bit of time to build that trust among all the partners around the table. There's a sense of equity among all the partners" (interview, global partnership, Feb 2019). Trust goes hand-in-hand with respect and humility: "I look for trust and care in partnership… having that humility to go through the real aspect and recognize that, I believe that is partnership" (interview, foundation, Dec 2020b).

This trust is most important when it comes to funders and their local partners: "you have to understand the people. You have to understand their context, their culture. Then you have to respect… trust is very important" (Interview, INGO, Aug 2019).

3.2 Organizational Documents

A tiered content analysis of 227 published documents (2010-2019) from 24 organizations engaged in partnerships in EiE provides insights into the broader policy context surrounding global partnerships and the rhetoric and impetus behind partnership arrangements in EiE. All organizations which published documents in our database were working within Lebanon at the time of the study. In addition to analyzing documents from organizations with global scope, we examined documents with regional scope in order to gain insights into alignments or divergences from global rhetoric. Findings from our document analysis were organized around four core areas: partnership; coordination; private sector engagement; and community participation. Together, these findings help us to better understand how various organizations conceptualize partnerships in EiE within their institutional publications.

Our analysis illuminated trends in institutional rhetoric which, when viewed in combination with our overall research findings, help to contextualize findings from the global level analysis, network analysis, and country study. In the sections that follow, we present salient themes from documents published by organizations with global and regional scope, noting divergences where pertinent.

Partnership

Global organizations that focus on EiE widely advocate for partnerships, and rhetoric relating to partnerships has grown more prevalent in recent years: “Strong education systems require strong partnerships. No country, not even the most successful, has all the knowledge and resources it needs” (UNICEF, 2017, p. 64). In their published documents, global organizations working in the EiE sector cite the need to seek “new partnerships” among their areas for future growth (e.g., ECW, 2018; UNICEF 2019a). For example:

> Implementing the Strategic Plan is highly dependent on the engagement of members, the development of effective strategic partnerships, the effective functioning of Working Groups and Task Teams, the attainment of adequate funding, and the continued support of hosting and supporting agencies. (INEE, 2015a, p. 32)
>
> We will never reach the world’s 250 million conflict-affected children by ourselves. […] In order to increase our reach – and ensure that our work has maximum impact – War Child will increasingly collaborate with organisations across the world […]. (War Child Holland, 2017, p. 11)
>
> Partnership and coordination are vital for more efficient and effective response to

> crisis (UNESCO, 2017, p. 5)

Global organizations highlight increased engagement in partnerships in their annual reports and strategic plans. For example:

> One of the most striking developments of the period covered by the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 has been the increase in the number of partnerships in which UNICEF has engaged. This has been a crucial step for implementing an increasingly complex mission within the education sector. Many have been global partnerships. UNICEF plays several core roles in the GPE, including using its own financing to support GPE engagement at country level. UNICEF also played a key role in establishing Education Cannot Wait – a new partnership focused on education in emergencies. (UNICEF, 2017, p. 14)

> 2019 saw us invigorate collaborative practices. The year as a whole saw increased recognition from, and engagement with, key actors including the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF and Save the Children – particularly in relation to our global coalition programmes TeamUp and Can't Wait to Learn. 2019 also saw us intensify our participation in the Dutch Relief Alliance - both to boost collaboration within the Dutch humanitarian sector and deepen our involvement across four programme countries. (War Child Holland, 2019, p. 12)

Yet the term "partnership" is loosely defined within organizational documents, and is commonly used either without further qualification, or followed by a list of partners. Furthermore, partnership is often discussed in relation to both coordination and private sector engagement. We discuss these aspects of global organizational rhetoric further in the sections that follow. In this section we focus on three prominent ways in which documents refer to partnerships: (1) as a solution, essential to effective programming, progress, and funding in EiE; (2) as an organizational commitment; and to a lesser extent, (3) as an area that is challenging, requiring greater attention.

Global organizational documents refer to partnership as essential to effective programming and progress on meeting educational goals in EiE. For example, in referring to "delivering through partnership," UNICEF states:

> In 2017, UNICEF was called upon to do more for children – to be more efficient, more agile and more innovative. By partnering with the private sector and deepening public-sector cooperation, UNICEF accelerated programmatic interventions and advocacy while driving new research, development and innovation. As a result, UNICEF is actively involved in the 'frontier issues' that are changing the world, including biotechnology, cyberspace and artificial intelligence. Each new arena offers the promise of innovative solutions to the challenges of equitable development. (UNICEF, 2018, p. 8)

In this illustrative excerpt, partnership is depicted as not only essential for progress in

meeting “the challenges of equitable development,” but also as a solution to problems of responsiveness, efficiency, and innovation in the sector. In a related vein, ECW refers to partnership as essential in moving toward “collective outcomes”:

> Through the global Trust Fund, Education Cannot Wait pools resources together and allows donors to work together towards common objectives. In countries affected by crisis and displacement, the co-financing model of multi-year resilience programmes facilitated by Education Cannot Wait embraces a similar collaborative approach. It ensures coordination, collaboration and joint efforts between host-governments, communities, humanitarian and development actors, and the private sector at the country level. This optimized and results-driven approach is geared towards complementarity and collective outcomes towards learning outcomes, systemic change and sustainability. (ECW, 2019a, p. 18)

Furthermore, within documents, partnership is presented as essential for progress toward the goal of upholding the right to education in emergencies. For example:

> ECW will build on relevant networks and advocacy platforms to generate stronger solidarity, political commitments and policy change for education in emergencies. Through this movement, it will advocate for stakeholders to uphold the obligations spelt out in the United Nations Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergencies and to translate these commitments into additional financing to support the achievement of its overarching goal. ECW will strengthen and expand engagement with donors, and build new partnerships with the private and philanthropic sectors, while pursuing innovative financing. (ECW, 2018a, p. 5)

As the excerpts above illustrate, documents often represent partnership as a solution to myriad challenges in EiE, including funding. The excerpt below also presents partnership as an organizational commitment to building on established networks and further expanding engagement with new partners, in particular the private sector. For example, in referring to their investment in building on institutional capability and strong education systems, UNICEF states:

> We will support the alignment of all inputs and actors in the system – national and local governments, communities, the private sector – to the goal of learning [...] We will support multiple learning pathways for children and adolescents, including but not limited to formal education and drawing on inputs from multiple sectors and corresponding UNICEF teams. (UNICEF, 2019b, p. 33)

In addition to presenting partnership as an essential way forward in addressing challenges in EiE, and as an organizational commitment to meet those challenges, rhetoric in published documents refers to partnership as a potential challenge, requiring greater attention. For example, World Vision notes:

> Working in partnership creates further challenges that we need to appreciate

> and address. It is in World Vision's interest to ensure partners are aware of our accountability standards and have the capacity to support our agency accountability commitments – such as ensuring there are safe and accessible community-level feedback and complaints mechanisms in place. (World Vision, 2014, p. 39)

UNICEF notes the implications of focusing on partnerships, stating:

> The increasing focus on partnerships is changing the nature of UNICEF's work and providing greater flexibility, but also creating broad new responsibilities for donor partner coordination, programme implementation and policy dialogue on behalf of the most marginalized children. These changes will have significant implications for staffing and financing the education sector. (UNICEF, 2017, p. 15)

In referring to the risks that "new modalities and expanded partnerships" introduce, ECW mentions the need to "incentivize partners to deliver results" (ECW, 2016, p. 14). Furthermore, partnerships demand and pose challenges to coherence. For example, the Global Partnership for Education, when discussing the Out of School Children Initiative (OOSCI), notes:

> As end users begin to expect more of OOSCI, additional work will be required to make it conceptually sound, and coordinate effectively across sectors and among stakeholders. OOSCI's external coherence was also low, due to weak cross-sectoral coordination and failure to attract the necessary non-traditional partners. There is still a need to improve coordination and strengthen leadership on programming, to seek out and engage with less prominent but significant partners. (Global Partnership for Education, 2018a, p. 27)

In this illustrative excerpt, attracting non-traditional partners is presented as necessary and the inability to do so a failure.

Documents from organizations with MENA regional scope echo the themes presented above, with some key elaborations. The MENA documents emphasize national governments, local governments, and relevant ministries (e.g. Ministry of Education) as partners or leads with whom agencies should both align and partner to the greatest extent possible. Furthermore, the rhetoric within regional documents offer greater detail on what these partnerships could or should look like. For example, UNHCR Lebanon states:

> Working differently to end need: reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems; deliver collective outcomes that transcend the humanitarian-development divide. (UNHCR, 2019a, p. 223)

UNICEF Jordan, citing an internal planning document, similarly states:

> A UNICEF planning meeting document concluded: 'Given the scope and scale of the humanitarian response for Syrian refugees, there is a growing sense that it is not possible to continue the response as is. A greater shift to system strengthening is required, making it possible for the existing systems and institutions in the country to provide services to Jordanians, Syrians and other children alike. Accordingly, partnership should move from a project-based to a more system-wide, holistic approach.' The emergency response invested in short-term partner programmes that provided much needed capability and a fast response; however, a 'more system wide, holistic approach' with longer-term goals has yet to emerge. This will become more urgent should donor funding diminish. (UNICEF Jordan Country Office, 2015, section 2.2, p. 31)

Additionally, in documents from organizations with regional scope, local partners were discussed in greater detail and often as essential partners. We elaborate on this point further in the section on Community Participation below.

Coordination

Documents from organizations with global scope laud the beneficial, if not essential, role of coordination and suggest that a consensus on the need for improved coordination in EiE provides an impetus for more partnering. The linkage between partnership and coordination was evident across the document database. Coordination appeared in the dataset in three interconnected ways: (1) in terms of an urgent gap to be addressed through partnership; (2) as essential to progress towards shared goals; (3) and as an outcome of partnership.

As UNICEF's 2019-2030 Education Strategy describes: :

> …there is a growing consensus on the urgency for coordinated action, as outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)…the increasingly broad range of partners providing learning opportunities, bring the potential to deliver learning opportunities anywhere, to anyone, at any time. (UNICEF, 2019, p. 5)

Organizational documents present the possibility of addressing this urgent need for coordination through partnership among various organizations, through pooled funds, and through other formal and facilitative mechanisms. For example, in describing its approach to coordination, the INEE (2017) states that it "complements other more formal inter-agency mechanisms by employing the 'soft power' of convening and facilitating, not directing and competing, to draw agencies together, sustain commitment, and strengthen collaboration" (p. 11). In this excerpt, the INEE thus establishes a role for complementing formal coordination mechanisms with enhanced collaboration through convening and facilitation among partners. Organizational documents commonly referred to partnership and coordination simultaneously, for example:

> This report discusses coordination on two levels, illustrating the importance that WV places on these activities. The first is partnering and coordination at the programming (or local) level. The second, using our Global Capitals as an example, shows the breadth of organisations that WV belongs to, is affiliated with, partners with, or in which it participates. (World Vision, 2013, p. 89)

Coordination was also commonly discussed as essential to partners' progress toward shared outcomes, including fulfilling the right to education. For instance, in describing its approach, Education Cannot Wait cites "coordination, collaboration and joint efforts between host-governments, communities, humanitarian and development actors, and the private sector at the country level," further stating that "This optimized and results-driven approach is geared towards complementarity and collective outcomes towards learning outcomes, systemic change and sustainability" (ECW, 2019a, 18).

The INEE describes Education Cannot Wait as "an education crisis fund designed to transform the global education sector, including both humanitarian and development responses… [T]he fund aims to deliver a more collaborative, agile, and rapid response to education in emergencies in order to fulfill the right to education for children and young people affected by crises" (INEE, 2016, p. 8). In a similar vein, the Global Partnership for Education discusses "Cross sectoral engagement and coordination [as] vital to successful planning, implementation, integration and the achievement of sustained impacts over the long term" (2018, p. 4).

Documents from global organizations also present improved coordination as an outcome of partnership at both global and national scales. For example, the Global Partnership for Education lists the policy impact from a partnership-based project as including "Improvement of the coordination among development partners and between ministries on monitoring and planning tools, led by the Ministry of Education" (GPE, 2018a, p. 10).[5]

In each of the illustrations above and across the dataset, coordination and partnership tend to be interlinked in global education documents. Globally focused organizations view coordinated action as an urgent need to be addressed through partnership and as essential for progress towards partners' shared goals. Furthermore, success in improved coordination is associated with partnership at the global level.

The interconnection between coordination, partnership, and progress towards shared goals was reflected within some MENA regional documents as well, specifically publications of those organizations who worked closely with, or were regional affiliates of, large international organizations. However, coordination in these documents was

5 It should be noted that when coordination is discussed negatively, it is frequently linked to "weak coordination" at the national or local level. For example, the GPE states: "There is weak coordination between government ministries and their departments, limiting the government's capacity to address key challenges and bottlenecks of a sectoral nature." (GPE, 2018j, p. 27)

largely articulated in terms of “collaboration.” For example:

> Our vision of making learning accessible to all children means we strive for 100% literacy among all children. While this is an ambitious goal, successful implementation and positive impact over the years have proven that it is, indeed, an attainable goal. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and other government organizations, the collaboration of local and international funding agencies as well as volunteers and philanthropists, all children, citizens, and refugees can get the opportunity at a brighter and independent future. (Ana Aqra Association, 2018, p. 6)

MENA regional documents included much less rhetoric on coordination in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in meeting goals than did global documents. This divergence might indicate that coordination goals are more significant at the global level or more important to global organizations. As well, this difference in narrative from the global to regional levels may suggest that coordination reflects a Northern-driven discourse.

Private sector engagement

Organizational documents suggest a global impetus towards increased private sector engagement in EiE, often referring to the private sector as “non-traditional players,” “actors,” or “partners.” Indeed, the private sector emerges as a key partner across the document database, through calls for the private sector to engage in EiE, as well as acknowledgement of partnership “increasingly with the private sector” (World Vision, 2013, p. 13). For instance, as an outcome of its strategic plan, the INEE notes the following priority area:

> Increased engagement and partnerships with non-traditional players including the private sector, multinational companies operating in fragile contexts, non-traditional government partners, social innovators from the global North and South, and technology companies. (INEE, 2015b, p. 22; INEE, 2016, p. 20)

Similarly, the Global Partnership for Education states:

> GPE also recognizes that the business community […] can, in collaboration with other global development partners, offer innovative solutions, creative thinking and new technology that will drive improvements at community, regional, national and, ultimately, global levels. (Global Partnership for Education, 2018b, p. 40)

Advocacy for partnering with the private sector in EiE ostensibly links to innovation, cost effectiveness, access, and quality. For example, in 2016, the Education Commission listed among its recommendations to “Improve partnerships with non-state actors,” arguing that: “The role of non-state partners will become more critical because they can provide capacity where the state system hits constraints and because they are well

placed to innovate to raise standards, increase access, and reduce costs" (Education Commission, 2016, p. 81). Similarly, UNICEF states it "will keep working to strengthen public- and private-sector partnerships for enhanced results" (UNICEF, 2018, p. 78). In its Private Sector Engagement Strategy, the Global Partnership for Education states: "the humanitarian community has partnered with the business community in delivering innovation and technology solutions to refugees, complementing host government responses" (Global Partnership for Education, 2019, p. 14).

Document rhetoric link private sector engagement to a range of goods, including resources, decreased risk, and expertise in EiE: "A strong partnership between the education system and industry is crucial to integrate firm resources, share risk burdens, develop industry wide skill standards, and deliver apprenticeship training at scale" (World Bank, 2018, p. 158). As such, documents from organizations with global scope suggest that private sector engagement benefits learners both directly and indirectly:

> To support children in the future, we must develop new ways to reach them today. We will test new partnerships that can work effectively in different settings, from low-income and fragile contexts to middle and high-income countries where many children still face exclusion. We will explore innovative business models and ways of partnering with others, including with the private sector and civil society, to put our Theory of Change into action. Alternative financing models and social enterprise will drive transformative and cost-effective programs that bring new partners to our work and find new solutions for children. (Save the Children, 2019, p. 8)

Documents tend to discuss private engagement as desirable or essential to meeting organizational needs or as a "given," wherein private actors are portrayed as assumed partners. For example,

> For more than 70 years, funded entirely by voluntary contributions, UNICEF has worked to save and improve the lives of children and young people around the world. This history includes a proven record of partnership with both the public and private sectors – along with civil society and development organizations, other United Nations agencies, individual supporters and prominent advocates. The results UNICEF has achieved reflect the diversity and strength of these alliances, as well as a continuing effort to maximize resources through efficient and effective operations worldwide. (UNICEF, 2018, p. 74)

Documents with a MENA regional focus tended to reflect a similar conceptualization of private sector engagement in EiE, discussed in positive or neutral lights, and in recent documents often described as an assumed partner. For example, in the following illustrative excerpt, UNICEF Jordan (2015) describes Public Private Partnerships as a funding solution:

> Another funding option is to use Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to pay for school infrastructure. In this model, the private sector builds infrastructure, and the government rents it back. PPPs have been used in other countries (including Egypt, the UK and Spain) under circumstances in which governments lack the capital to build school infrastructure. Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Coordination (MOPIC) should consider these measures. (UNICEF Jordan Country Office, 2015, p. 103)

Community participation

Most documents made reference to the importance of engaging "local stakeholders," suggesting that: "Community partners are important for success" (Dahya, 2016, p. 15) and that "A whole-of-society partnership approach across the local, national and international levels requires strong partnerships between and collaboration across government actors; United Nations agencies and coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society, the private sector and other financial actors, and refugees themselves" (UNESCO, 2019, p. 21). The INEE includes "community participation" as one of its foundational standards (INEE, 2010). Yet, community participation, as a coded category, was the least prevalent, detailed, or substantial across documents from global organizations in our dataset.

While nearly all global documents referenced "local participation" or "community participation" in some way, reference to or description of community participation was the least consistent across organizations and documents. Furthermore, detail about community participation varied considerably across documents, and in most instances did not include a clear description of what is meant by community participation, which community members are included, or how it such participation might be operationalized or accounted for. The global documents we examined rarely reference local community stakeholders among other entities, such as UN agencies, INGOs, governments, and private actors. For example:

> UNICEF works closely with funding agencies at country and global levels, with civil society organizations, academia, private foundations and the private sector. For the Strategy period, UNICEF will particularly seek to grow impactful partnerships with the private sector, based on a principle of 'shared value' and a shared commitment to access, learning and equity in education. At the regional level, UNICEF will collaborate closely with the regional bodies such as the African Union and the regional development banks. At the country level, UNICEF is an active partner in Local Education Groups and other coordination mechanisms for education, often playing a leading role for the development community; for example, as Coordinating Agency for the GPE. (UNICEF, 2019b, p. 48)

In the instances where documents list "local partners" or the "local community" (or similar) as a partner (along with the UN, INGOs, private actors, and others), most often local actors are depicted as a group who should be "engaged/involved,"

"consulted," "empowered," or "worked through," and who benefits from programming ("beneficiary"). As such, the global documents suggest that community participation in EiE generally does not entail modalities of partnership ascribed to other entities who engage via collaboration, implementation, service provision, etc. Rather, global organizations engaged in EiE widely advocate a localization agenda through community participation in their organizational rhetoric, citing the need for local "buy in," "input," or "local ownership" as being integral to the impact and sustainability of programs.

For example, the Global Business Coalition for Education states: "The response architecture must rely on the buy-in and input of local actors. Community and local-buy-in is critical to determine a sustainable investment and deploy financing in a responsible manner" (Global Business Coalition for Education, 2015, p. 2). Similarly, Education Cannot Wait cites the need for "respect for national ownership and the resilience inherent in local capacities, including refugees, host communities and all affected populations" (ECW, 2018, p. 101). Furthermore, ECW states that: "Through its localization approach, ECW also ensures affected people and local stakeholders are actively involved in designing and implementing the response, empowering local capacities, supporting better and more sustainable education outcomes and increasing national ownership" (ECW, 2018, p. 10).

Organizational documents often associate the benefits of "local engagement" or "local partnerships" with programmatic success:

> Local partnerships are particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected areas. For example, a program that built community-based schools in Afghanistan reduced the distance to school, increased enrollment, and improved learning outcomes, particularly for girls. Yet these local partnerships tend to work best when supported by responsive higher-level institutions, which are sorely lacking in fragile environments. (World Bank, 2018b, p. 206)
>
> Collaborate with children, civil society organizations, communities, governments and the private sector to share knowledge, influence others and build capacity to ensure children's rights are met. (Save the Children, 2019, p. 2)
>
> …without community participation, the shared learning, responsibility and ownership that underpins community development cannot be sustained. (World Vision, 2011, p. 20)
>
> Partnerships remain critical, and UNICEF continues to collaborate closely with governments, donors, businesses, civil society organizations, and children and young people. In 2018, for example, UNICEF helped launch a new partnership, Generation Unlimited, which connects secondary-age education and training to employment and entrepreneurship for adolescents and young people. The partnership brings together the private and public sectors, civil society and youth to co-create large-scale breakthroughs that can secure a better future for the

world's 1.8 billion young people. (UNICEF, 2019a, p. 8)

Among the documents reviewed, World Vision's publications included the most extensive references to community participation, stating, for example: "We recognise the importance of community involvement and participation in all activities and plans that affect the lives of communities" (World Vision, 2015, p. 11). They cite efforts "to understand and strengthen community ownership in our local programmes, in particular strengthening our ability to continually engage with the community and adapt our programming accordingly" and working towards a "community-owned vision for the well-being of children, together with a set of priorities around which joint planning and action take place" (World Vision, 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, World Vision appeared to associate community participation with partnership. For example:

> Informed participation through processes of consultation that include feedback and response mechanisms keep us honest. We value people. Effective partnerships with all of our different stakeholders (children and communities, first of all), build joint ownership and shared responsibility for outcomes through the integrated programming model and strengthening the resilience of local institutions. Other partnerships include different kinds of engagement with supporters, donors, churches and other faith communities, businesses, suppliers, contractors that are essential for efficiency and effectiveness. Finally, we are a partnership – and are accountable to one another – as staff, as entities. We are partners. (World Vision, 2011, p. 49)

> Across all our programming, our commitments to provide information to, consult with, promote participation by and collect and act on feedback and complaints from the children and communities affected by our work is summarised in our Programme Accountability Framework. (World Vision, 2019, p. 11)

Organizational rhetoric within documents indicates difficulties in ensuring effective partnership with local communities. As captured below, the reasons for this vary, including unpredictable circumstances, various operational risk factors, differing understandings and values, divergent visons. For example:

> … foundations seem to be more likely and more comfortable to work directly with local actors than are government and multilateral donors and not only through international organizations. Foundations could help the wider EiE sector to better understand how to implement the localization agenda, select local partners, and supervise grant implementation from afar. (ECW, 2019b, p. 27)

> Community participation in the management of schools is a cornerstone of strategies to improve access, quality, and protection in refugee education (INEE, 2010b; UNHCR, 2009c). Yet just as in the larger humanitarian field, the rhetoric of participation and the practice of genuine participation often diverge. (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 66)

> The continuing transition to a community-based approach in our program implementation encountered difficulties. Not all stakeholders are convinced of the value of the new approach and integrating individual projects has also proven difficult. (War Child Holland, 2016, p. 36)

> Facilitating a participatory process may be more challenging than usual, however, if some areas of the country are inaccessible due to the crisis. Creative means may be needed to achieve the broad participation and input vital to building consensus and fostering ownership of the plan. […] If some regions are inaccessible, it may be possible to obtain input with the assistance of key partners, including NGOs and UN agencies with a presence in the inaccessible regions. (UNESCO and Global Partnerships for Education, 2016, p. 9)

> We conduct our work in complex and unpredictable circumstances - and this context presents a number of operational risks. We frequently work in partnership with local organisations to deliver our programmes - and we have stringent policies and tools in place to ensure partners share our vision and can meet our performance targets. (War Child Holland, 2018, p. 34)

Additionally, the following except from the World Vision 2011 Accountability Report sheds some light on the way in which interaction with local communities and partners has been shaped in some instances, and the ways in which "local partnership" has been traditionally associated with risk:

> While partnering with local organisations brings benefits in the sustainability and depth of our reach, this approach also gives rise to accountability and risk issues. For example, when World Vision transfers resources to a local partner, or relies on the promise of partner resources, World Vision may be exposed to the following risks:
>
> 1. Legal (it may be illegal to fund the partner if it is not locally registered)
> 2. Reputational (the local partner's reputation or actions may taint World Vision)
> 3. Operational (the local partner may not have the expertise or experience to accomplish the program/project objectives)
> 4. Financial (transferred resources may be misused, or the local partner may fail to deliver the promised resources thereby requiring World Vision to find supplemental funding to fulfil its community or donor obligations)
>
> To minimize this risk, World Vision undertakes a range of measures including due diligence to provide assurance that a local partner has appropriate legal standing, experience and expertise." (Gwynne & Miller, 2011, p. 26)

This quote from War Child Holland (noted above as well) further highlights this challenge. Additionally, this quote captures an emphasis on alignment held by many global organizations, wherein "partners" or "sub-grantees" must align with the values

of larger organizations in order to be “partners,” and they may shoulder operational risks.

> We conduct our work in complex and unpredictable circumstances - and this context presents a number of operational risks. We frequently work in partnership with local organisations to deliver our programmes - and we have stringent policies and tools in place to ensure partners share our vision and can meet our performance targets. (War Child Holland, 2018, p. 34)

This form of due diligence, in combination with the frequent emphasis on alignment with certain larger partners, limits who is able to serve as a “community partner” and therefore the mechanisms through which localized forms of community participation are legitimized and made possible.

As noted earlier, within our textual dataset, organizational documents with global focus tended to describe local partners and communities as entities that needed to be “engaged” and/or as beneficiaries rather than as essential or equal partners. In contrast, documents from organizations with MENA regional scope spoke more directly about the essential nature of substantial community partnerships and meaningful community participation.

> The 3RP places a strong emphasis on continued outreach and partnership in a number of areas. First, engaging local organizations in the response, including grassroots women’s organization, as they understand the local context and ensure that solutions are community-owned. Second, engaging the private sector and entrepreneurs, who can often offer technical expertise, insight and innovation not readily available in the humanitariancommunity. Third, young people and adolescents whose voice is critical if 3RP response programming is to be reflective of their needs and unlock their full potential. Fourth, by expanding knowledge and research jointly which enables humanitarian and development actors to fill gaps in understanding and improve programming and policy. (3RP, 2019, p. 14)

> Amel has actively contributed to the design of Lebanon Country Response Plan 2015/2016, a strategic and fundraising document for concerted and effective action. By reinforcing fair partnerships with beneficiaries, as well as with the local communities and other civil society actors, we are certain of contributing to a better, common future. (Amel Association International, 2014, p. 5)

> Since the elaboration of quality guidelines defining the content of FFS training in 2013, IECD and its local partners initiated a significant collaborative work, producing and updating the FFS training materials (technical training booklets, alternation workbooks, trainers’ guides). This work reinforced exchanges between teams of local partners. (IECD, 2013, p. 18)

> Local institutions and municipalities are the first level responders to provide

> services for refugees and host communities and thus play a key role in preserving social cohesion. Given these critical functions, enhancing the capacity of impacted municipalities in terms of technical skills and human and financial resources is a key aspect of the response. 3RP partners are providing technical support to strengthen public institutions at local and national level to adapt and transform their response and management practices. (3RP, 2019, p. 11)

Additionally, documents from organizations focused on the MENA region included some discussion of the way in which organizations with global scope often attempted to implement models developed elsewhere with new forms of local engagement which often had limited success. For example, UNICEF Jordan Office (2015) stated:

> As an NGO partner noted in an interview, the response community was used to working in refugee situations in Africa and other parts of Asia and were bringing those skills to Jordan, with both advantages and disadvantages. Another NGO official said, 'The humanitarian sector has come with a package that was African.... It is getting better, but these NGOs have packages which are based on research based elsewhere.' Another elaborated, 'Implementing partners need further understanding of community needs to provide relevant services.' The advantages included the international community knowing how to operate camps and NGOs knowing how to offer parallel services. The international community is less familiar with supporting the existing capabilities of national organisations in a functioning state with a robust, albeit imperfect education system. Specifically, this has resulted in tensions over infrastructural spending, described above, and a concern that Jordanian NGOs and civil society organisations have been bypassed in favour of international agencies. (UNICEF Jordan Office, 2015, section 2.1, p. 32)

3.3 Discussion

Our interviews with global actors revealed a notable rise in EiE partnerships, driven by a consensus on the need to collaborate in order to reach educational goals in crisis contexts. As well, global organizations have increasingly seen the private sector as an important partner primarily due to private resources, and not without some criticisms relating to the practices and motivations of businesses. Respondents agree that coordination remains a challenge for the sector, despite the rise in partnerships. Some interviewees discussed how competition in fact characterizes the sector. Although global partnerships widely advocate for participatory practices, it appears that actors from the Global South, recipients of funding, and members of affected communities do not participate to nearly the same degree as those from the Global North, and are sometimes tokenized in partnership spaces. This limited participation reflects ongoing and deeply entrenched power hierarchies in EiE global partnerships.

Our study revealed some significant changes in global EiE partnerships over the course of our study. COVID-19 spurred a new narrative within many global organizations on the need to "build back better," although some actors took this as merely rhetoric. The

pandemic also may have accelerated localization efforts in EiE due to the lack of travel and absence of international actors within crisis-affected countries. COVID-19 may have also accelerated the participation of companies as holding the capacity to develop technological solutions to support remote learning. Finally, the BLM movement appears to have brought about a global reckoning on racism, including within the education and development and humanitarian sectors, although to a greater degree in the US-based organizations than elsewhere.

Our analysis of published documents from global organizations engaged in partnerships in EiE reveals a surge in rhetoric pertaining to partnerships; increased engagement in partnerships; and a commitment to seek additional or new partnerships in future plans. In these documents, partnership is represented as a solution to challenges in EiE, essential to effective programming, progress, and funding. Although the term "partnership" is not well-defined within organizational documents, it is commonly discussed in relation to coordination and private sector engagement. Documents suggest consensus and urgency on the need for improved coordination, which in turn provides a rationale for increased partnership. This focus on coordination, however, was less evident in MENA regional organizational documents, which articulated coordination more often in terms of collaboration. In addition, our analysis indicates a global impetus towards increased private sector engagement in EiE, with private sector actors emerging as key partners across the document database. Advocacy for partnering with the private sector is associated – in most cases, uncritically – with a range of goods, commonly represented as innovation, cost effectiveness, access, quality, expertise, and funding.

While community participation is a foundational standard for the INEE, it emerged as the least clearly defined area in global organizational documents. Organizations with a MENA regional scope, however, tended to underscore the importance of effective community participation and partnership while also providing greater detail on the nature of each.

In global documents community or "local" stakeholders were rarely referenced as equal partners in the same manner as UN agencies, INGOs, governments, and private actors. Rather, local actors were commonly referred to as a group to be engaged, consulted, or empowered, with partnership activities requiring their "buy in." And yet organizations with global scope generally advocated a localization agenda in their published documents, whereby community participation was associated with programmatic success. Our analysis of global and regional organizational rhetoric suggests that local partners, where mentioned, were expected to align with the values of global organizations and served to mitigate certain forms of operational risk. The vetting of local partners in combination with frequent emphasis on alignment with global values appears to limit the vision for who may serve as a "community partner" and the mechanisms through which localized forms of knowledge and community participation are legitimized and made possible.

4. PARTNERSHIP DATABASE AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

As described in detail in our methodology section, our unique dataset of organizations engaged in Syria refugee education in Lebanon was collected in two phases. From these data, we conducted a network analysis. Below, we offer a longitudinal analysis that derives from the dataset and network analysis, aiming to examine and highlight changes in partnerships' organizations, activities, and relationships over the course of the study. We first explain the descriptive data as detailed in the two-phases. We then describe the findings from the network analysis, including geographic distribution of entities, the centrality and brokerage measures of different types of entities and individual organizations, and offer insights from the changing network structure across the two phases.

4.1 Partnership Database Analysis

We compiled a comprehensive original database of organizations working on the issue of education for Syria refugees in Lebanon. For each organization, we collected data on its headquarter location, and coded for type of organization and types of activities each has engaged in.

The purpose of this database was three-fold: first, to compile a comprehensive list of the organizations and activities in the country and sector; second, to conduct a network analysis that allows us to understand and analyze relationships between organizations; and third, to understand changes in participation and relationships over time.

Types of organizations

We coded for type of organization, including the following categories: Academic/ Research Institute; Bilateral Aid Agency; Foundation; International NGO; National NGO; Private Company; Religious Organization. An "Other" category includes organizations that do not readily fit within this classification or about which we were unclear.

As discussed earlier in this report, between the two rounds of data collection, several significant events occurred globally and within Lebanon: political upheaval resulting in mass protests in Lebanon; economic downturn in Lebanon; the COVID-19 pandemic; the blast in Beirut. As will be described, the events precipitated some significant changes in educational partnerships for refugees as revealed through our dataset.

Across the two phases between January 2019 and January 2021, we found 440 total unique organizations engaged in Syria refugee education in Lebanon. 357 of these organizations were active in Phase 1.[6] Between the two phases, several organizations

6 We initially found 377 entities in Phase 1. Following the Phase 2 data collection, we eliminated 20 organizations due to uncertainty as to status.

were both dropped from the database (meaning they left their partnerships) and others added (joined or created new partnerships). Phase 2 includes 404 organizations, 83 of which are new additions.[7] Table 4.1 details the number of organizations included in the database, categorized by type

Type of Organizations	Phase 1	Phase 2
Academic/Research Institute	25	36
Bilateral Aid Agency	31	33
Foundation	44	52
International NGO	100	106
International Organization	11	14
National Government	12	13
National NGO	55	63
Other	29	26
Private Company	47	57
Religious Organization	3	4

Table 4.1: Counts of organizations by type, Phase 1 and Phase 2

Types of activities

The database also included the type of activities organizations engaged in to support Syria refugee education. Although several organizations engaged in more than one type of activity, we coded for what was the main focus of their engagement specifically in the context of their partnership within Lebanon. Some categories include sub-activities (for example: Early Childhood Education and Care: Social-Emotional Support). The activities include:

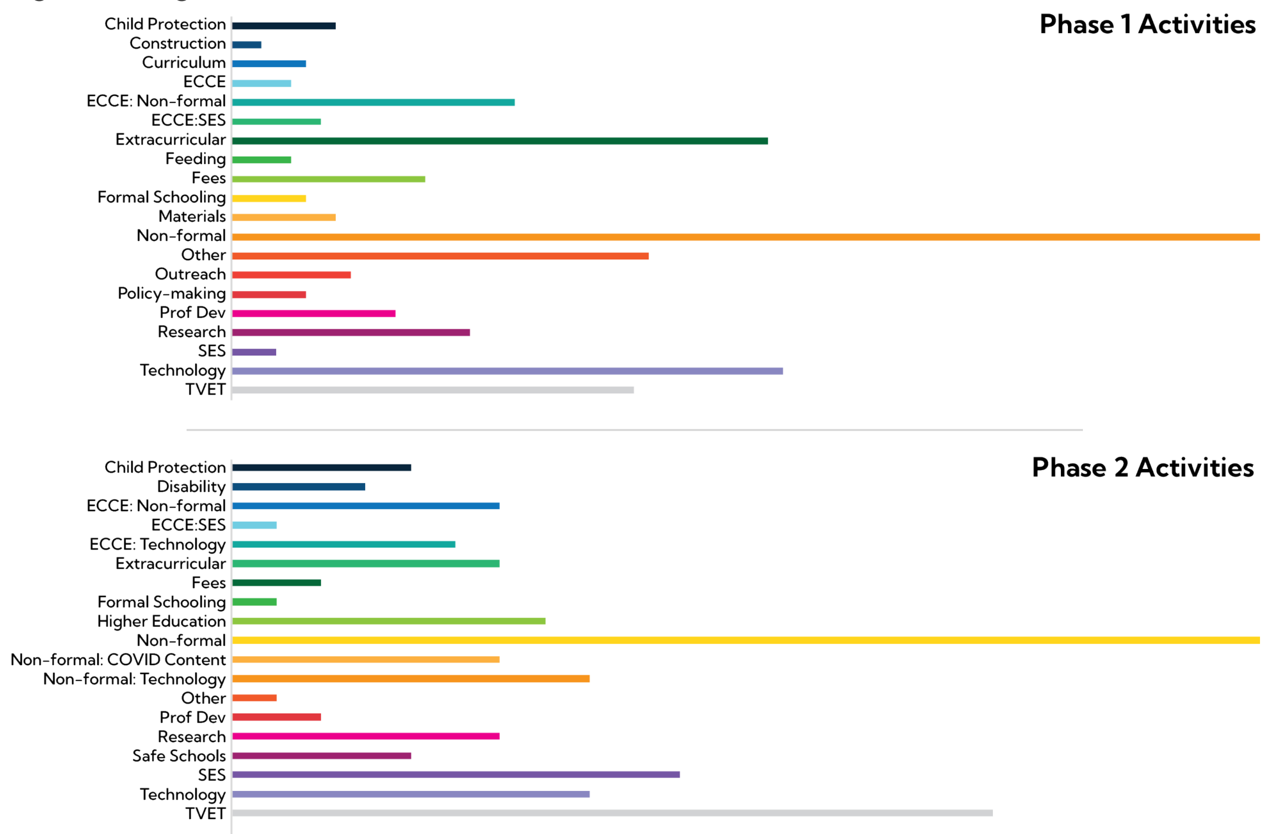
- **Child protection** – programs to keep children free of violence, exploitation, abuse
- **Curriculum** – academic instructional material and support
- **Early childhood education and care (ECCE)** – education and care for children kindergarten and younger; these include sub-categories including social-emotional support and technology
- **Education for children with disabilities**
- **Extracurricular activities (Extracurricular)** – programs outside of school hours; non-academic
- **Feeding** – in-school food provision programs
- **Fees** – support for tuition and other school related costs (textbooks, uniforms, etc)
- **Formal schooling** – support to traditional public schools
- **Higher education** – post-secondary, university education
- **Materials** – classroom materials, furniture
- **Non-formal education** - includes remedial support, education in non-formal school settings; includes sub-categories on technology; SES; and COVID-related education
- **Outreach** – community outreach to parents, families, students

7 We collected separate data for "large" and "small" partnerships, where those considering large included three or more entities. The data in this report include both large and small partnerships, but the visuals only capture the small partnerships as the full dataset visualized was unclear. The difference between the large and small dataset's centrality measures and network structures were not significant.

- **Policy-making** – design and decision-making on school curriculum, finance, management, etc
- **Professional development (Prof Dev)** – instruction and assistance for educators
- **Research** – studies on education, for instance on achievement, equity, student experiences, etc
- **Safe schools** – support to safe learning facilities, disaster management, risk reduction
- **Socio-emotional support (SES)** – mental health support; building children's social and emotional skills
- **Technical-Vocational Education (TVET)** – post-secondary technical and vocational schooling
- **Technology** – education technology, digital and virtual learning, in K-12 formal, non-formal, and ECCE settings

The "**Other**" category includes less common activities, such as youth empowerment, transportation, gender, and monitoring and evaluation.

Figure 4.1: Organizational activities – Phase 1 and 2

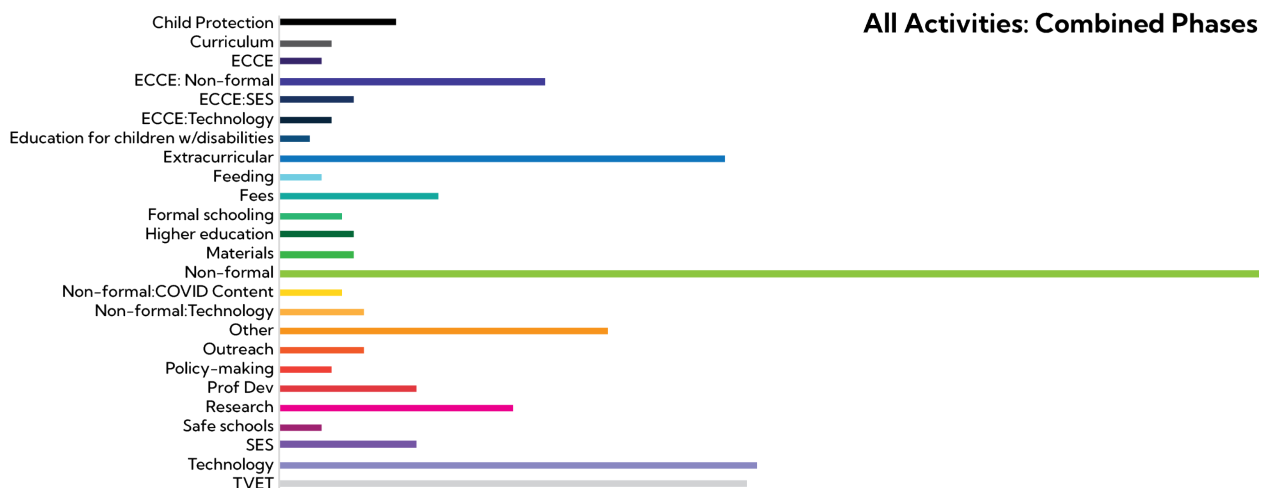


In Phase 1, partnering organizations were engaged in a range of activities, with support to non-formal education being most prevalent. Extracurricular activities, educational

technology, and technical-vocational education were also common. Fewer activities supported social-emotional supports, child protection, and formal early childhood education and care programs.

In Phase 2, the types of activities supported by partnering organizations expanded to include new categories such as education for children with disabilities; ECCE programs specifically targeting technology; safe schools programs; and higher education. Non-formal education expanded into additional sub-categories of technology and COVID-related education. By Phase 2, partnering organizations within our database no longer supported, as primary activities, formal ECCE programs; school construction; curriculum; feeding programs; materials; community outreach; and policy-making. Phase 2 also saw a decline in support to extracurricular activities, professional development, school fees, and activities within formal schooling. The category that most grew in Phase 2 was social-emotional support. The two categories that remained most prevalent across Phase 1 and 2 were technology and non-formal education. In total, across both Phases, the most common activities partnering organizations supported were non-formal education; TVET; social-emotional support; and educational technology (both in formal and non-formal education).

Figure 4.2: All organizational activities



4.2 Network Analysis

Centrality and brokerage

Our analysis found the degree centrality of each individual organization in our database as well as by type of organization. Degree centrality refers to the number of connections—or "ties"—to each actor in the network (Freeman, 1979). From these centrality measures, we can interpret and assume a higher level of partnership-based activity for those with higher centrality values, meaning more relationships with more entities. As well, centrality may denote influence and power, as an organization with higher centrality measures might hold the ability to determine or sometimes distort flows of information and resources to serve its own interests.

Type	Centrality Phase 1	Centrality Phase 2
Academic/Research Institute	3.81	3.48
Bilateral Aid Agency	6.09	7.77
Foundation	4.51	4.24
International NGO	6.56	8
International Organiza-tion	23	17.38
National Government	7.27	12.15
National NGO	7.42	7.31
Other	5.04	7.70
Private Company	3.54	2.71
Religious Organization	4	5

Table 4.2: Degree centrality by type of organization

The centrality measures of each type of organization in the network, comparing Phase 1 and Phase 2, are shown in Table 4.2 below. In Phase 1 (2019), the most central type of entities in the network were international organizations. While IOs remained in central positions in Phase 2 (2021), their centrality reduced, while other types of entities gained in centrality, for instance national governments, bilateral donors, and international NGOs.

The two most central actors in terms of degree centrality are shown in Table 4.3. In both phases of the study, UNICEF is--by far--the single most central actor in the network, followed by the Lebanese Government's Centre for Education Research and Development.

Table 4.3: Top 2 degree centrality, Phase 1 and Phase 2

Phase 1		Phase 2	
Name	Central-ity	Name	Central-ity
UNICEF	124	UNICEF	108
Centre for Education Research and Development - MEHE	60	Centre for Education Research and Development - MEHE	72

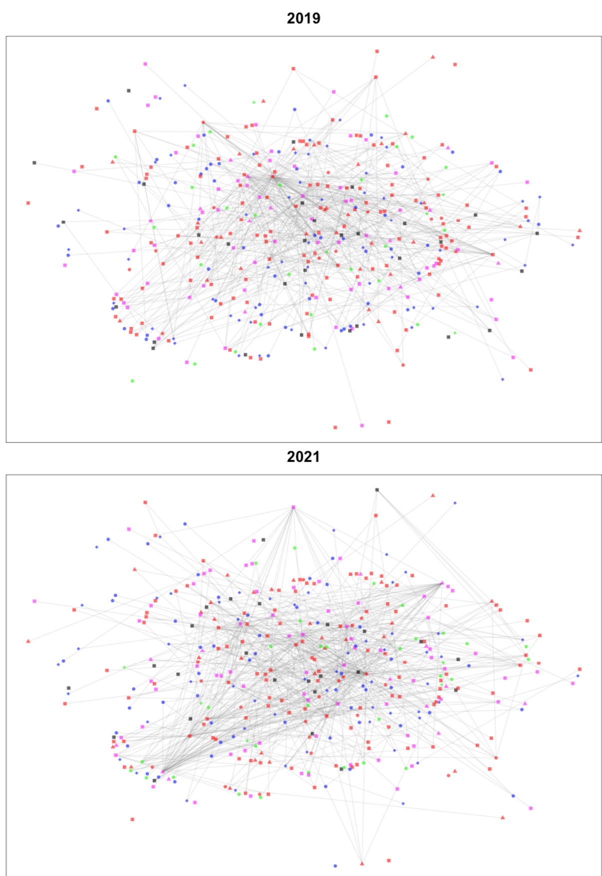
Our network analysis also determined "brokerage" measures for each organization. An actor is a broker if it connects other actors of different types that are not directly connected to each other (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). For example, a foundation might connect two NGOs, or it could connect an NGO to an academic research institute. Table 4.4 shows brokerage by type of organization for Phase 1 and Phase 2. In Phase 1, international organizations held highest brokerage measures, meaning they frequently connected organizations of different types that otherwise had no direct connection to each other. In Phase 2, while IOs continued to hold highest brokerage, their measures dropped and the brokerage of national government agencies rose considerably. Bilateral aid agencies also become more prevalent as brokers between organizations. In both Phase 1 and 2, UNICEF holds the highest brokerage, as it connects the most entities to each other.

Type	Brokerage Phase 1	Brokerage Phase 2
Academic/Research Institute	5.14	4.19
Bilateral Aid Agency	7.74	14.15
Foundation	6.74	4.53
International NGO	21.77	39.86
International Organization	385.40	230
National Government	67.09	131.23
National NGO	25.69	28.49
Other	6	42.20
Private Company	1.79	0.71
Religious Organization	2	5.50

Table 4.4: Brokerage by type

The network structure

Our analysis produced visualizations of the network structure, using graphing techniques and software to enable visualizing the properties of the network (Butts, 2020). Figure 4.3: Network Sociograms show the connections between different organizations and offers a visualization of the network structure, the positionality of various organizations by type based on color, the overall distribution of ties, and how closely connected the entities are to one another. The plot uses the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm to place interconnected groups of actors close to one another and minimize crossing lines (although the high number of connections means there are still many crossing lines) (Fruchterman & Reingold, 1991).



Those organizations with the highest centrality measures are densely clustered near the middle of the figure and are represented by larger shapes. The color red—which denotes international NGOs (squares) and international organizations (circles)—can be seen as dominant, showing their large numbers in both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

- Private Company
- Academic/Research Institute
- Other
- International NGO
- National NGO
- National Government
- Foundation
- Bilateral Aid Agency
- Religious Organization
- International Organization

Figure 4.3: Network sociograms Phase 1 and Phase 2 comparison

However, comparing the two sociograms shows that the network both expanded to include more organizations and also more ties between them. Actors and relationships grew in number during this time. That the ties and organizations in Phase 2 are more densely clustered than in Phase 1 shows greater centrality of more organizations,

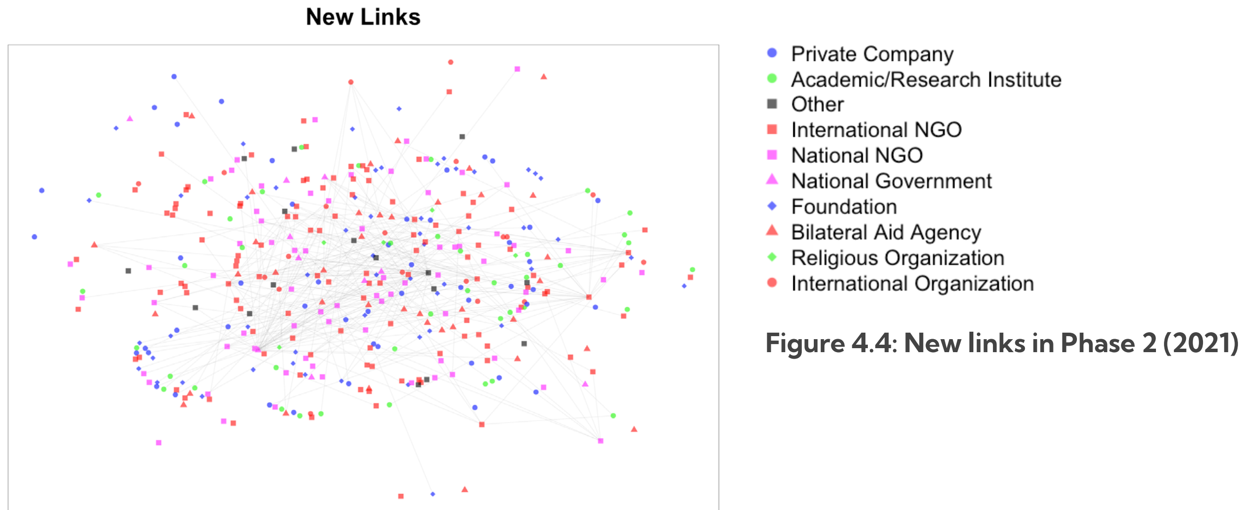


Figure 4.4: New links in Phase 2 (2021)

meaning more connections (partnerships) between more actors.

To highlight the changes from Phase 1 to Phase 2, Figure 4.4 isolates the new links, showing a high number of new organizations, of all different types, engaging in Syria refugee education in 2021.

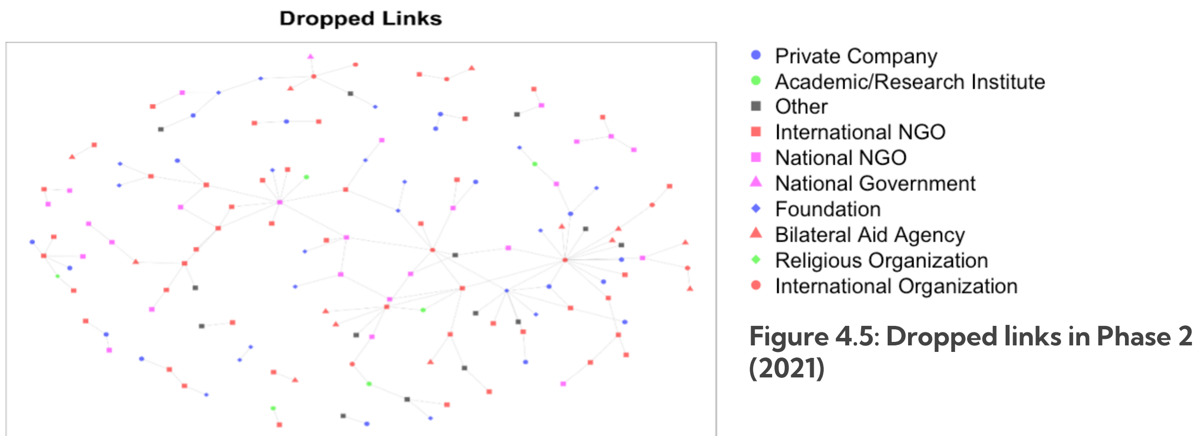


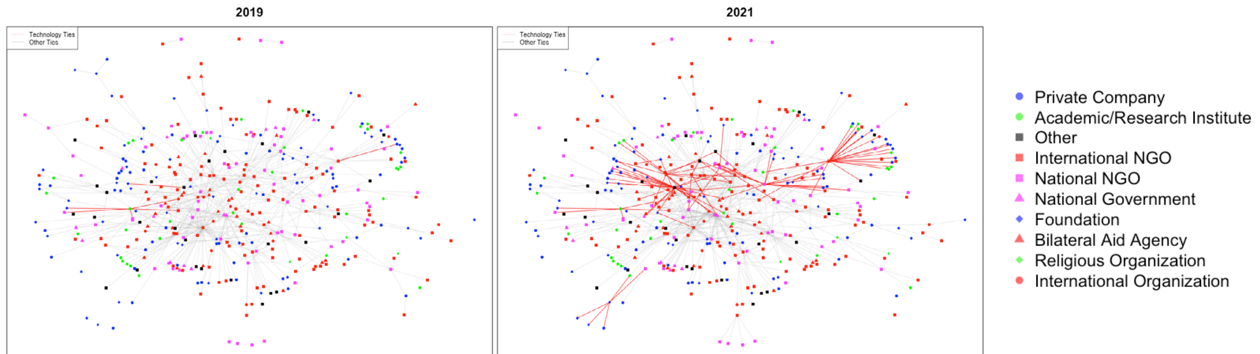
Figure 4.5: Dropped links in Phase 2 (2021)

While the longitudinal analysis shows an increase in ties, it also highlighted that a number of organizations left their partnerships between 2019 and 2021. Figure 4.5 shows the “dropped” links, or actors that stopped engaging in Syria refugee education in Lebanon.

The types of activities in which the partnerships were engaged changed between the two Phases as well, most significantly relating to a rise in educational technology activities. Figure 4.6 shows a clear shift between Phase 1 and Phase 2, where several

more partnership activities focused on educational technology, as can be seen through the red lines that denote ties between different types of many partners.

Figure 4.6: Technology-related ties Phase 1 and Phase 2



Geographic distribution

Our analysis determined the geographic distribution of the organizations in the database, and connections between them as network ties plotted on a world map. Figure 4.7: World Map Phase 1 and Figure 4.8: World Map Phase 2 show the geographic distribution of organization and ties during Phase 1 and 2 of data collection in 2019 and 2021 respectively. The two maps present very similar geographic distribution, with concentration points located in the Middle East and Northeastern United States. Ties primarily flow between these two regions, which likely represents ties between international organizations, companies, foundations, and international NGOs headquartered in New York and Washington DC, with recipients and implementing agencies in Lebanon. Other strong ties appear to connect within the Middle East region, and primarily represent government funding agencies and foundations within MENA to local organizations in Lebanon.

Figure 4.7: World map Phase 1

Figure 4.8: World map Phase 2

The similarity between the two maps indicates that although many changes occurred in the network over the span of the study, including new organizations joining and others leaving, as well as new types of activities, the geographic structure did not substantively alter.

National versus global entities

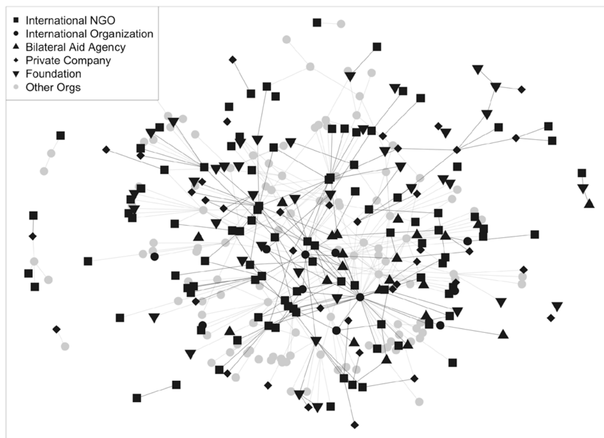


Figure 4.9 displays the analysis conducted in Phase 2, highlighting in dark shapes all those organizations considered "global," or headquartered outside of Lebanon, in contrast to the light shapes of national, Lebanese organizations. This visualization makes clear the dominance of global actors within a national context in terms of both number and connections to other organizations.

Figure 4.9: Sociogram of global in contrast to national organizations

4.3 Discussion

Our longitudinal database and network analysis shows clear and significant changes in organizations and activities involved in educational partnerships in the Syria refugee response in Lebanon. We posit that the crisis moments that occurred between the two phases, globally and nationally, led to relatively rapid responses to these emergencies, which in turn altered the partnership network structure. As a clear example, the notable

rise in technology-based ties between partners reflects school closures and the shift to remote learning during the protests, COVID-19 pandemic, and Beirut blast. As well, activities relating to social-emotional supports increased in Phase 2, likely due to mental health impacts on students resulting from compounding crises.

Between the two Phases, 47 organizations left the network, while 83 new organizations became engaged. These new entities supported a variety of activities, most commonly education technology-related. As shown above in Figure 4.4: New links in Phase 2 (2021), national NGOs (purple squares) and INGOs (red squares) are the most prominent type of organizations that joined the network. This increased non-government participation may relate to prioritizing flexibility in response to emergencies at the global and national levels from organizations not beholden to government bureaucratic processes. National NGOs in particular gained in numbers, likely in part because their presence within Lebanon facilitated increased participation during a time when international actors could not travel, and so local partners became ever more necessary, with expanding roles. The rise in national NGOs possibly also relates to acknowledgement of government corruption and economic collapse, which drove funders to find alternate arrangements for their programs. These hypotheses regarding the changing participation and function of particular organizations during the political, economic, and health crises within Lebanon will be discussed further in our analysis of in-country case study data and the vertical analysis.

The centrality of technology-focused organizations rose in Phase 2, meaning their connections became stronger and more plentiful. In the second Phase, three of the top 10 organizations for centrality were predominantly engaged in EdTech, whereas these were not among the top 10 central organizations in Phase 1 (see Table 4.3). An expansion in partnerships where relationships were mainly based on provision or development of technology, as exhibited in Figure 4.6, shows that tech-based ties gained in clear prominence.

Private actors (foundations and companies) grew in number from Phases 1 to Phase 2, yet the centrality of private organizations diminished somewhat. These participation patterns may relate to findings from our global-level analysis, which implied a growth in private sector participation in order to address COVID-19. But at the same time, the lower centrality indicates smaller and more peripheral partnerships in-country.

Despite some key changes to the network, based on the geographic distribution of organizations as displayed in the world maps (Figures 4.7 & 4.8), the links geographically did not substantively change between the two Phases, where strongest connections continued to flow from Europe and the Northeastern United States to the MENA region.

Another way in which the partnership network did not substantially change relates to the centrality of particular organizations, which retained high centrality over the course of the study. International organizations in particular remained the most central

type of organization, magnified by a contrast to their relatively low numbers. UNICEF was the single most central organization in both phases, and also the most common broker, tying other organizations to one another. Despite multi-crises, UNICEF and other IOs appeared to hold the ability to sustain their work and relationships within Lebanon. This may be due to long-standing involvement (and influence) in the country, established long-term relationships with local actors and other partners, and a high level of resources that are designed for crisis-response. As well, the overarching aid architecture which determines resource flows, most notably deriving from multilateral and bilateral sources, has not substantively changed despite the onset of crises. The centrality of particular organizations, resulting from such factors, may imply the continued wielding of power and influence, including not only monetary flows, but also policy directives, information, and in-country processes.

Our database and network analysis thereby shows the extensive involvement of global actors, headquartered in the Global North, within a national network. While some global entities may hold higher degree centrality measures than others, overall Northern-based organizations dominate and spread across the network, tied to both other global organizations and those nationally-headquartered.

The positionality and dominance of certain types of organizations and specific organizations within the network—in particular, various types headquartered in the Global North—indicate influence and potential power dynamics that we further discuss in our vertical analysis. Figure 4.9: Sociogram of global in contrast to national entities in particular illustrates the extensive and dominant nature of global involvement, and likely influence, within Lebanon.

5. COUNTRY-LEVEL ANALYSIS

To gain in-depth understanding of partnership processes at the national and more localized levels of educational programming, our Lebanon country study involved two tiers of data collection and analysis. As described in our methodology, Tier 1 comprised a broader analysis of 16 organizations engaged in partnerships to support Syria refugee education within Lebanon (see 5.1), whereas Tier 2 comprised three in-depth partnership case studies (see 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4). Data collection for both tiers took place in two phases, corresponding to the periods prior to and following the onset of Lebanon's compounding crises. The three case studies in Tier 2 we derived from the Tier 1 broader analysis, from which we could discern appropriate cases that appeared "promising." The tiered analysis allowed us to situate the three partnership case studies within the experiences of a broader set of organizations involved in EiE partnerships at the country level and suggested insights into the nature of partnerships in EiE based on the positionality of our case studies within a wider partnership network (see 5.5).

5.1 Broader Analysis

The majority of NGOs in our country study were Lebanese-registered and Lebanese-led organizations, established before the onset of the Syria crisis. Of the 16, five were INGOs and three were Syrian-led, either registered in Lebanon as Lebanese NGOs or registered in another country. What distinguished the Syrian NGOs from their Lebanese counterparts is that, although they were registered as Lebanese NGOs, they were headed by a Syrian team. Registering an international NGO in Lebanon required cabinet approval. Therefore, Syrian-led NGOs required Lebanese partners to support their work. Two of the Syrian-led NGOs we interviewed were established following the Syria crisis, while one of them had existed in Syria, was registered as an international organization abroad, and worked informally in Lebanon.

Partnership formation

Partnerships between organizations in Lebanon often formed when large international organizations and UN agencies approached local NGOs – particularly larger ones that operated in more than one location and had gained a good reputation – to help them implement their programs. Other NGOs which received funding from international donors had applied to calls where the donor specified the focus of the project. Other partnerships were established following discussions and networking between organizations; however, these were fewer and tended to happen between local NGOs. These partnerships were more likely to be focused on capacity building or implementing a new joint intervention aimed at responding to a local need identified by the partners. Many of the partnerships we examined focused exclusively on Syrian refugees, while others included Lebanese children. Table 5.1 provides an overview of

the surveyed partnerships.

Table 5.1: Overview of partnerships identified by 16 organizations in Tier 1 of Lebanon Country Study

Who initiated the partnership		Support provided			Type of Intervention		
Donor initiated	Applied to a call	Financial	Training & technical	Equipment	Nonformal Education	Formal Educa-tion	Other
8	7	10	4	3	13	4	3

The majority of finance-related partnerships were carried out with international organizations, whereas a few involved the private sector. Most partnerships focused on nonformal education, as formal education in Lebanon is primarily managed by the public sector and funded by international organizations (such as UN agencies, multilateral banks) and bilateral aid agencies. One of the organizations we interviewed, which had offered formal private subsidised schooling to Syria refugees, reported that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) had pressured them to close.

Role of partners

The majority of interviewed organizations described their partnerships in terms of donor-implementer arrangements, i.e. partnerships established in return for providing a service such as formal, or more commonly, nonformal education. The donor was often an international organization while the implementing partner was either a local NGO or an INGO. However, there were partnerships that were not financial in nature. Rather, they focused on capacity building and networking.

Most of the educational activities provided by NGOs related to nonformal education, linked to, or independent of, public or private sector schools. Other organizations provided formal education through private schools or supported an aspect of public education within public schools.

In two cases, although the partnership was largely financial, there was a dialogic process between the donor and the service provider concerning needs and how to design the response. As such, their educational programs were co-designed and created: “We and [our partner] are friends. There are family relations between us. We came up with the idea together. We gave it a try, and it worked” (interview, Lebanese and US-based organization). In contrast to this co-creation, other service partnerships were more hierarchical, where the role of the local partner was to implement a program or services, and the role of the funding partner was to monitor and evaluate the work. These partnerships were characterized by reporting and pressure to meet targets: “You send [the funding partner] reports” (interview, Lebanese NGO).

One local organization compared its experience with two different partnerships in which they served as service provider. The first appeared to be focused on delivering targeted outcomes without paying much attention to the organization, the learning process required, or the future prospects of the local NGO. The organization felt that they were treated as a means to an end, where their own welfare was sidelined. In contrast, another partner, who also served as a donor, demonstrated concern for the partnership process and the partners, and not only the outcomes. The local organization felt that their donor was genuinely interested in them as local partner and saw them beyond the role of implementer. This was highly appreciated by the local partner as the nature and scale of the Syria refugee crisis and the challenge of providing education on such a scale required a lot of learning, reflection, and adaptation, and it was important to them that their partner was supportive of this learning process.

How local organizations experience partnerships

Our interview data suggests two primary ways in which local organizations experience partnerships: 1) in terms of service provision, and 2) in terms of co-construction (Figure 5.1). The majority of partnerships in our broader analysis exhibited the service provision model, a donor-implementer type of partnership. The donor either initiated the partnership, or the partnerships was formed in response to a call for funding proposals. The donor's agenda drove the service provision model, where the role of the implementing partner (international or local) was primarily to deliver a pre-specified service. These partnerships often ended with the project. The power dynamics in the service provision partnerships were often in favor of the donor, who decided the parameters of implementation. The unequal power dynamics often caused frustration for the service provider, particularly when it pressured or prevented organizations from working with particular communities: "In the end, you're not equal. They plan and you execute. [There's no equality], because they're the ones [funding] and they can stop [funding] anytime also. You can't be equal" (interview, head of local NGO).

In such service provision partnerships, some funding partners extended their support to strengthening local organizations in order to implement and report on deliverables. Capacity building and the growth of the local implementing organization were thus defined and restricted to the objectives of the projects as specified by the funding partner. For example, in one case the funding partner invested in developing a large monitoring and evaluation system for their partnering organization to help them assess the impact of the intervention. Organizations in these types of partnerships experienced limited opportunities for mutual learning. In contrast, other partners provided learning opportunities, capacity building, and networking opportunities for their local partners. Importantly, the relationships were established with growth and mutual learning in mind.

Interview participants were critical of what they viewed as unequal power dynamics within partnerships that were experienced as service provision to a distant donor. According to participants, these partnerships exhibited limited flexibility to change or

amend the partnership objectives within an evolving situation. In such partnerships, organizations felt that funding partners had minimal concern for the agenda of the implementing organizations, and instead were primarily concerned with their targets. A senior officer of a local NGO commented on the fixed-term and target-focused partnership relationship, saying:

> There is no continuity in education programs, but usually projects are "hit and go." The same group of children will not receive continuous support. There is no long-term vision. Donors' priorities keep changing, in the regions, target groups, topics, etc. (interview, local NGO)

This excerpt suggests a donor-driven agenda in which there is limited space and time for developing a shared vision and longer-term objectives. Participants talked about this in terms of inequitable relationships within these types of partnerships.

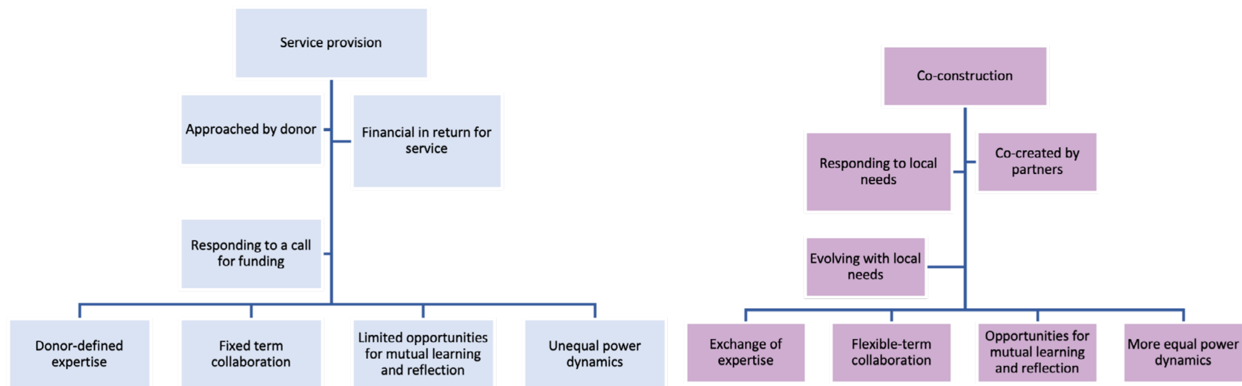
Not all local organizations were critical of uneven power dynamics and appeared more occupied with mastering the skills needed to secure funding. Some local organizations expressed as their primary concern how they, as small NGOs, could meet all of the criteria of the big donors, in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, due diligence, and human resources. One of the interviewees commented:

> You can't deal with a partner if you don't know how to report things properly or write good proposals. Some technical expertise is essential. Being able to multi-task is important. Like I said, we didn't have our separate HR, finance, or M&E teams. I was playing several roles before we were able to hire for these roles. (Interview, local NGO)

One interview respondent justified the unequal power dynamics due to the size and resources of each partner, saying: "They can't think of me as their equal because, while they may have a whole HR department, I only have one person, and while they have a finance department, I only have a part-time finance assistant" (interview, local NGO). .

In contrast, the broader analysis reveal what we refer to as "co-construction" partnerships; a different way in which local organizations experienced partnerships. This type of partnership experience appeared to grow from local networks, often formed from the experiences of organizations which identified a shared interest in addressing a locally-identified challenge or gap. Such co-constructed partnerships were formed often to develop each other's capacity or to support one another with implementation. Some of these partnerships were based on in-kind contributions or funded by an existing NGO budget.

Figure 5.1: How local organizations experience partnerships



Partnership outcomes

The organizations studied at the Tier 1 level all focused on Syria refugee students and their communities as beneficiaries and assessed outcomes in terms of enrolment, retention, and attendance. Most organizations commented that, overall, the projects and interventions resulted in positive outcomes, in terms of increased retention, higher completion rates, improved success rates in the official Brevet examinations, or positive feedback from parents, students, and the local community.

A few NGOs carried out or included systematic monitoring and evaluation programs. One NGO stated that they looked for short, medium, and potentially long-term impact:

> We established an M&E system so we know what our outputs and outcomes are, and we evaluate ourselves based on our indicators. What distinguishes us from others is that we don't only look at the outcomes of the activities we do within our organization, but we also go to public schools to see whether the children who work with us are passing or not. (Interview, local NGO)

Respondents mentioned several barriers to assessing outcomes, such as the short time period of projects and interventions: "We cannot tell you we have a success story. We did not reach this point yet, because of the short duration of the project" (interview, local NGO). Respondents also cited weak M&E systems and lack of research skills to capture such information. Assessing outcomes amid COVID-19 created additional challenges. Many of the interviewed NGOs noted that they lost reach with at least 40% of their students. The quality of teaching and learning was severely affected. One respondent noted:

> Usually, every year, to measure the impact of our projects, we observe lessons of teachers, and so we usually observe lessons at the start of the year, in the middle of the year, and towards the end of the year [...] This is how were able to measure

> impact on students. Unfortunately, this academic year, due to the Corona virus, we haven't yet been able to observe the lessons. (Interview, international NGO)

Partnerships amid multiple compounding crises

While Lebanon experienced a series of crises over the past decade, including ongoing economic hardship, protests, and the influx of over a million Syria refugees post-2012, multiple compounding crises marked the period of study. Starting October 2019, a series of major anti-government demonstrations and road blockades put the country on hold for months. The economic crisis worsened dramatically as the central bank applied capital control and the Lebanese currency devalued dramatically. This has resulted in one of the worst economic crises in history and has pushed poverty rates to over 70 percent (ESCWA, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a lockdown beginning March 2020. These compounding crises had a devastating effect on all sectors, particularly on education, as most schools and educational centers faced a series of disruptions and closures, and ultimately did not offer in person learning for over a year. While many moved to online learning, the most vulnerable children whose families could not afford the cost of technology struggled to join virtual classes A head of an NGO commented on the quality of virtual learning, saying: "I would say that the student who learned through distant learning for sure exerted an effort…distant learning wasn't effective in my opinion […] To be realistic maybe it was 5% fruitful in its best case" (interview, head of local NGO). In the midst of these political, economic, and health crises, the Beirut Port blast of August 2020 destroyed lives and livelihoods and diverted funds to emergency use. The economic situation further deteriorated, and at the time of this writing it, it is unclear whether and how current conditions will improve.

To further understand the impact of these compounding crises on the 16 organizations, we interviewed them at the beginning of the study and conducted follow-up interviews towards the end of the research timeline. Respondents identified impacts in four major areas: logistical, financial, educational, and partnership-related (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Summary of impacts of compounding crises on partnership activities

Area of Impact	Examples of Issues
Logistical	transportation challenges due to road blocks (political crisis) security concerns due to protests, road blocks (political crisis) distribution of technology and other resources in pandemic conditions (COVID-19 crisis)

Financial	payment of teacher salaries (economic crisis) contracts with service providers (e.g. bus drivers) who demanded payment even though they were not operating due to school closures (COVID-19 crisis) decrease in donor funding due to diverted funding streams (Covid-19 crisis; Beirut Blast) diminished personal donations (economic crisis)
Educational	education delivery to students, including curriculum, structure, hours, technology platform and related training for teachers (COVID-19 crisis) education delivery to teachers due to road closures (political crisis) and school closures (COVID-19 crisis), requiring shift to virtual training assessment related issues due to disruption and new modalities of teaching and learning (political, economic, and COVID-19 crises) barriers to teaching and learning due to decline in material conditions of students and teachers; access to technology (economic and COVID-19 crises)
Partnership-related	disruption to partnership-based activities due to other partner ending work (COVID-19 crisis) disruption in communication with partners, municipality, and MEHE (COVID-19 crisis)

The compounding crises over the course of this study resulted in a significant setback to children's education. Both the economic crisis and COVID-19 resulted in several organizations ending their education services and programs, due to lack of funding or the unfeasibility of online learning due to a low response from parents, particularly where the majority did not have the needed technology or could not afford the cost of the internet. Two of the organizations we interviewed simply shut down their face-to-face services and did not attempt to provide a distance learning alternative. Others tried to adapt but had a low response rate from parents who did not have mobile devices for their children.

According to the interviewees, some parents felt that distance learning required too much support that they were unable to provide due to illiteracy. Parents were also anxious about the effect of the lockdown on their children's wellbeing. The head of one NGO commented,

> We heard that many parents couldn't deal with their children and many were afraid that their children would become "autistic." They were afraid to the extent that they were breaking the health restrictions imposed by the Lebanese authorities just to have a bit of fun. The parents were calling us to check if the centers opened. This is regarding the psychological impact. (Interview, head of local NGO)

As the lockdown continued, organizations realized that they had to create a distanced learning option to maintain their partnership activities. However, this required support from parents, which was not always feasible, as parents lacked resources or the ability to support their children. The director of one local NGO commented:

> We started with the online learning, mainly WhatsApp because the parents have access to it, and many parents lack the knowledge of using other programs. There

> is a struggle because of the pressure that is exerted on some parents, and some students, psychologically, they weren't able to receive the lessons online. Some parents tell you it's hard for us to teach our son this way. we have illiterate parents, and the student would understand 10% of the lesson. Honestly, it's not just about Covid, it's an accumulation of crises; mainly the accumulations of the financial crises. (Interview, director of local NGO)

NGOs faced the challenge of attempting to convince the parents to use their limited resources for their children's distance learning. One respondent noted: "There is only one phone in the household. At the beginning we had the problem the parents would say I can't give, let's say there are three children in one family, how can I give them the phone and I need it [...] Some families even don't have a smart phone, so we couldn't reach out" (interview, local NGO). COVID-19 magnified equity issues for the organizations in our study.

NGOs working with universities and research partners were more prepared and technologically equipped to offer distance learning. Previous to the crisis, they had received training on the use of technology, and more generally, they had access to continuous professional development. These NGOs were quick to move to different types of distance learning. Some of them surveyed the parents' living conditions and access to technology. They developed either a distance learning program on WhatsApp or printed material and distributed it to parents and then collected it back. Despite the bumpy start, many of the NGOs working in higher education reported that they managed to keep many their students. While they did acknowledge that the quality of learning was negatively affected, they were satisfied that students were still engaged.

Other NGOs built on existing partnerships with NGOs offering technological support and worked with them to develop their distance learning capacities. The head of one NGO explained that they contacted technology-focused organizations for support, creating new partnerships. Those organizations in turn donated laptops and tablets, provided online tutorials and training, and assisted with moving content online.

While the pandemic affected access to quality education for most children, compounding issues affected the job opportunities and salaries of teachers. A few of the interviewed NGOs had to terminate contracts with teachers or reduce their load and salary. One interviewee said: "teachers lost their jobs, which means many children lost their education" (interview, local NGO). The devaluation of the Lebanese pound and capital control imposed by the banks was another challenge facing NGOs: "There is a big problem with everything related to money, cash, because they don't want to receive dollars based on the official exchange rate, and the bank asks them to put it as a cheque and get paid after a long period" (interview, local NGO).

While the pandemic and economic crises in Lebanon had a stark effect on the education programs offered by the NGOs in our study, partnerships appeared to play a significant role in supporting these NGOs in their ability to respond to the crisis. While several

ended, most of the partnerships in our broader country study persisted and evolved to address the new challenges. Most of the interviewed NGOs reported that their partners showed great support and flexibility during the crisis, included time flexibility by extending project timelines or changing the focus of funding to respond to arising needs, such as distance learning.

Some donors consulted with their partners concerning their needs and revised their work plans accordingly. Other donors wanted to shift more to medical and health care. Some NGOs were able to make this shift, while a few could not. In three cases of partnerships, we saw partners terminating the work due to lack of funding or without offering a clear explanation. However, most of these partnerships were of a funding nature.

Partnerships between local NGOs and companies engaged in social enterprises were particularly affected by the compounding crises. The curfews and roadblocks followed by the pandemic lockdown resulted in the collapse of many of these partnerships. Staff were laid off, and programs ceased. One social entrepreneur noted:

> It's more risky, because as a business, bankruptcy is always more of a risk than for an NGO that can stop activity for a while [...] because you know the project cycle movement, [while] the business is more linear and it needs a constant flow of money, otherwise it collapses (Interview, social entrepreneur)

In forming new partnerships, the personal networks of the head of the organization appeared to be significant. The social capital of this crucial individual helped or, in some cases, broke down partnerships and brought them to a halt.

During the pandemic, the diverse expertise of some partnerships helped them respond more readily and tap into different types of support besides funding. For example, university partnerships with local NGOs seemed to offer a source of knowledge, capacity strengthening, and innovative work in the field of education, including technology. This made the transition to online learning more feasible. Partnerships, including universities, also provided social capital and access to local NGOs to big donors such as UN agencies. These NGOs developed a solid and direct partnership with these donors, which proved pivotal during the crisis.

Promising partnership practices: Broader country study

Interviewees shared what they saw as key features of effective partnerships, including flexibility and trust, localization, communication, equitable relationships, and respect and care.

Flexibility and the ability to respond to local needs were among the most widely mentioned principles of an effective partnership. Flexibility required trust amongst partners, especially for those implementing partners who know the context and

evolving needs well. Local NGOs in particular highlighted this point as they noted that some of the international partners have unrealistic expectations that are focused on numbers without acknowledging the different and complex issues on the ground. Trust in turn engendered flexibility. From the perspective of local NGOs, convincing international partners about the need to be flexible and trust local NGO assessments was essential for successful implementation:

> Donors have to be flexible and let the implementing partners design the project goals, objectives, activities, target group, and budget, knowing that we have a better understanding of the field. We don't overlap our activities with those of other NGOs, we don't target the same group of beneficiaries in the same area, etc. (interview, local NGO)

One interviewee commented that trust allows space for feedback: "The partnership [...] is successful because there is a lot of feedback between us and them" (interview, local NGO).

Trust was also linked to equitable relationships:

> Another problem that can occur is when there is a condescending relationship, or when partners come to a center without announcing their visit, while [we] never go to a center without informing beforehand teachers in the field. There were partners who often did so, with criticism, because there was not a relationship of trust. (Interview, local NGO)

When discussing trust and flexibility, interviewees touched on the importance of localization. Local NGOs highlighted the challenges they face in what they considered rigid and irrelevant regulations imposed by donors. A few local NGOs noted that their international partners are often geographically distant and cannot fully understand local needs and challenges. For this reason, international donor requirements and objectives seem decontextualized and inappropriate. One respondent commented: "We're not living in a utopia. They should spend one day in the school to see what's happening" (interview, local NGO).

According to our interviewees, localization ought to entail adapting the tools and the processes to suit the context and the partners, including the proposal writing formats and monitoring and evaluation requirements. One interviewee commented,

> Some of the donors even have rules about whether signatures should be written in English or in Arabic. These are not major issues, but they could be more flexible. Some of the interventions are designed as a package and you have to implement them as is. If the donor who is holding you accountable is not aware of the challenges you are facing, they will have unrealistic expectations. (Interview, director of local NGO)

Hiring staff from the local community who speak the community language would greatly improve localization of programs and activities. An interviewee commented:

> One successful thing with [our partner] is that the people in charge are Arabs. In my opinion that is very important because they understand the culture [...] They understand more what is going on. (Interview, education director, Syrian-led NGO)

Respondents spoke about the importance of communication between partners through direct contact and regular exchanges that made planning and implementation smoother. Bureaucracy and intermediaries were seen as two qualities that can make the partnership difficult for the local party. Yet, participants noted that large agencies and donors are increasingly functioning through intermediary INGOs, thus adding to the bureaucracy and complication of implementation. One respondent commented:

> There are too many intermediaries, to get approvals, coordinate meetings. These tasks take a lot of time. You get lost in trying to figure out who to talk to, who to get the approval from, who you should address a complaint to. There are so many parties involved, and the division of tasks is not clear. This situation causes delays, interruptions, and beneficiaries start to lose interest. At the end, the final value that reaches beneficiaries is very low, due to the high number of intermediaries. (Interview, local NGO)

Direct communication also created potential for mutual learning and reflection. Several respondents stressed that creating space for mutual organizational learning has been the most valuable aspect of their partnership. Knowledge-sharing and reflection were critical for the local organizations to develop their skills and respond to challenges also important for international partners to improve their contextual knowledge and supports to partners. As highlighted by one respondent, learning and exchange of expertise between successful partners goes both ways, for example:

> Once we need a technical input, we work with other specialized organizations [...]. We are lucky because most of our partners trust us for our work on the ground as well, and refer to us for advice. If we give them feedback and ask for some adaptations, they take it into consideration and accept. (Interview, local NGO)

However, most partnerships focused on providing financial support and did not consider a two-way exchange of expertise or staff or organizational growth amongst their goals. In contrast, in citing a promising practice, one NGO commented how their partner organization provided them with opportunities to display their work, reflect on it, and conduct their own research to learn about their processes, needs, and challenges.

According to some interviewees, continuity of projects and initiatives indicates a successful partnership. A representative of a local NGO commented:

> Not all the partnerships were successful. There have been many positive projects. But there were some partnerships without sustainability, where the partnership was established only to answer a call for proposals. (Interview, local NGO)

To some respondents, issues arise due to the way donors develop their call for proposals and how they understand, or misunderstand, local needs, as well as their inability to create long-term relationships with local partners. Respondents said they felt that donors see them, as local actors, as mere technical implementers of targets to reach a particular number of beneficiaries. Another interviewee commented that the "hit-and-run" projects where there is no long-term vision or long-term coordinated strategy frequently arise from the donors' detached humanitarian/development work.

In contrast to the hit-and-run projects, some NGOs were embedded in local communities for years and continuously evolved and adapted their programs to respond to community needs. These NGOs also gained the trust of the local community. A representative of one local NGO exclaimed:

> The donors have to understand that [we] do not do "hit-and-run" short term projects. [Our] image is involved. Because we are here to stay. This is not how INGOs do it. It is not the same mentality. We want to support development in this country. We are trying to adopt a development approach, which means sustainable, which means more than one year [to support the] target group. If we keep changing the target group just to increase numbers, it is pointless. The same group of children will not receive continuous support. There is no long-term vision. Donors' priorities keep changing, in the regions, target groups, topics, etc. (Interview, local NGO)

In some cases, large international partners may prevent local NGOs from implementing a program in a certain area, while asking a different NGO to work in that location instead. According to a local NGO, while partners may have their reasons and interests for doing so, such strategies are damaging to the local NGOs and the continuity of their work and relationships in those communities.

Respondents talked about the importance of equitable relationships in partnerships. According to one interviewee:

> It can be South-North or South-South, but in any case, the relation should be equal. There must be a reflection on the equality of wages, equality in relations. One cannot be rude under the pretext that there is one who gives the money and the other who receives it. (Interview, local NGO)

In reflecting on power dynamics between partners, one respondent stated: "In the end, you're not equal. They plan and you execute. […] And they can stop it anytime" (interview, local NGO).

Local NGOs, in particular, highlighted that sometimes equal power dynamics in partnerships can be difficult to establish, especially with large international organizations or government agencies such as, yet trust could help to foster a meaningful partnership:

> When you're working with MEHE, it's impossible to be on equal terms. I mean you're not the government, right? So, I think from the beginning it's understood that [...] you cannot be on equal terms. However, there could be [...], because of your years together, trust if you will. Trust helps. (Interview, local NGO)

One key element in mitigating power dynamics emerged from the personal relationships NGOs had with other organizations. Some local NGOs understood the importance of these "brokers" who could open doors for them, and thus appointed to their boards prominent public figures who have a strong personal network to help facilitate collaboration and partnerships. Such individuals had prominent contacts through which they could help build partnerships and amplify the work of a local organization.

As a necessary condition for a successful partnerships, respondents stressed that all partnership must share the values of respect and care for the communities they seek to serve When partners do not adequately respect affected communities, tension arise for the local organization. For example, the principal of one organization commented:

> We usually say "no" if [partners] ask for pictures of people. When we first started distributing food boxes for the [international donor], I took pictures of some of the families, but I did not like it. Now, I would refuse doing so. If I'm asked to take pictures of people receiving aid, I would say no. [...] If I were a refugee, I wouldn't want people taking pictures of me receiving aid. They've already lost their dignity. It's not right. (Interview, local NGO)

The issue of photographing beneficiaries was a running theme for several NGOs who viewed this practice as disrespectful and even denigrating:

> Donors generally prefer to have pictures. You know the importance of media nowadays. Some children cry when they are photographed; they think that their pictures are being used for begging. But the partners, [...] want pictures of each sponsored student. They want pictures of them along with all of the items that they have donated, the bags, stationery, etc. This is not very nice, but this is what the donor wants. (Interview, local NGO)

The issue of photography raised tensions for NGOs who had to meet donor expectations as a condition of their partnership, while also trying to uphold the principles of respect and care for the communities they served. While respondents talked about photography in terms of respect and care, this issue also signalled many of the other principles that were lacking in partnerships, such as flexibility and trust, localization, communication,

and equitable relationships.

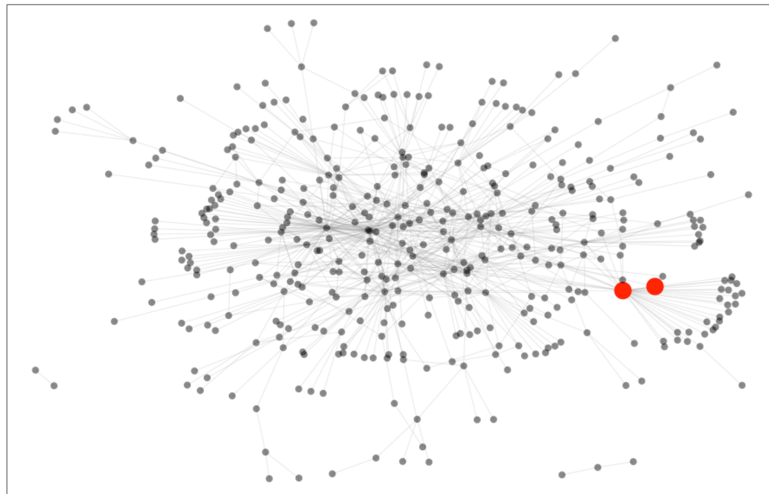
From this broader analysis, we selected three case studies that appeared to embody positive characteristics, in terms of the relationships between partners and the partnerships' educational outcomes for Syria refugee beneficiaries. As will be shown, these promising partnership case studies predominantly exhibited the co-construction type of experience for local partners.

5.2 Partnership Case Study A

Partnership, initiation, and activities

Partnership Case Study A involved a Syrian-founded and locally led organization, which we refer to here as Sharaka, in partnership with an organization based in the Global North, which we call Education Partners (EP). Both organizations are non-profit, non-governmental organizations with explicit non-political goals. A network visualization of the two organizations, indicated by red dots, demonstrates their position within the network structure and ties to other organizations working on Syria refugee education within Lebanon (Figure 5.2). At the start of the study, Sharaka's centrality measure was among the top quarter of organizations, and its ties to other organizations increased notably over the course of the study. On the other hand, EP had among the lowest centrality measures within the network database, with ties to fewer than a handful of organizations over the course of the study.

Figure 5.2: Network sociogram of Sharaka and Education Partners



Sharaka operated nonformal learning centers in Bekaa and Beirut – non-credentialed schools that educate Syrian students and support their integration into formal public schools. The organization had been involved in multiple concrete, short- and longer-term partnerships and identified its work with Education Partners for the case study analysis because of its direct involvement with the teaching and learning of Syria refugees; the "success" of the partnership; and its ongoing nature.

Education Partners provided professional development for teachers in Sharaka's nonformal learning centers. The partnership-based initiative focused on English education to support refugee students' transition to public schools, where English is

required to follow the Lebanese official curriculum. Education Partners' consultants and trainers worked directly with Sharaka's teachers and nonformal school administrators to develop tailored language training for Sharaka's teachers, 98% of whom were Syrian. They also co-produced curriculum with Sharaka's teachers and administrators to use with their students in English, with the goal of supporting Syrian student integration into Lebanon's public schools. In this sense, Syria refugee teachers were the direct beneficiaries of this partnership activity, with observable impact on student learning.

The partnership was jointly initiated in October 2017. At the time, Sharaka had already been working with Syria refugees in Lebanon for four years and had identified English language development as a significant area requiring attention. "We were saying around three years ago that not all teachers have good English language skills, so we were telling [the education director] that we wanted English courses" (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019). At the same time Education Partners, who had not worked in Lebanon prior to the Syria crisis, were looking to contribute to Syria refugee education in Lebanon:

> I reached out to [Sharaka]. Our organization wanted to contribute to improving education for Syrian refugees, so went to look for organizations to work with. We know that education in Lebanon is a big thing and many different NGOs and civil society organizations are delivering these services. [Sharaka] was recommended by [a mutual connection]. We worked with [Sharaka] for one academic year and then [Sharaka] suggested that they can help us work with new NGOs, so they put us in touch with two other NGOs. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

The Education Partners project lead, though based in the Global North, knew Sharaka's education director from personal connections that dated many years back in Lebanon. Both were Lebanese. They reconnected through a "personal contact" who knew about Sharaka's work and recommended them as a resource to EP and as a potential partner. The EP project lead and Sharaka's education director met to brainstorm possible ways to work together; "The teachers, though, were the ones who specifically asked for English classes, so the central goal of the partnership was determined by the [beneficiaries]" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019).

In interviews, EP and Sharaka administrators and teachers described how they came together to decide on activities and goals and to co-design the curriculum through a collaborative, multi-year process. For example, the principal of one of the nonformal learning centers described how she was involved "in negotiating the plan with [EP]" from the start:

> I was in the first meeting that was with [EP]… They communicated with [the education director] at the beginning. When they first came, [the education director] brought a team from [EP] to my school and we sat and agreed about what their role would be. (Interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019]

During that first meeting, the principal told EP that the teachers first needed support in learning English, particularly to enable them to teach the official science curriculum in English. For three weeks, "they visited our schools and observed our classrooms" (interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019). EP assessed the teachers' knowledge of English and discussed plans with Sharaka administrators and teachers.

During the first year of the partnership, activities focused on teaching English to Syrian teachers, "because they need [English lessons], and that's what the teachers requested" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019). EP offered lessons once a week. According to a Sharaka teacher, the education director told them about the lessons and "offered us the opportunity to register. Almost everyone registered" (interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019).

During the second year, "I asked them if we could add something, and they said yes, please, whatever you need us to do, just ask" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019). EP sent two language and curriculum specialists to Lebanon to meet with Sharaka within two weeks of the request. The Sharaka education director recalled:

> I sent [the curriculum specialist] the Lebanese English curriculum, we had a very long Skype meeting, she came to Lebanon, we did a meeting in September about the challenges that our students face with the curriculum here. She designed materials that are tailor made for our students in English. (Interview, January 2019)

EP then returned to Lebanon to train teachers to work with students with the English curriculum. The training on pedagogy complemented the teachers' English language courses and ongoing development of the English curriculum, such that teachers were learning, teaching, and assessing the curriculum concurrently, with the ongoing support of EP trainers based in Lebanon. According to a Sharaka principal, "Teachers are expected to let go of the traditional teaching method and to do whatever it takes to reach all children in the classroom by actively engaging them" (interview, August 2019). EP also provided training for school leaders.

According to the EP project lead,

> Our ultimate goal is to get refugee students with a better level of English proficiency so that then they can enroll in Lebanese schools that are English medium. We want to expose the children to a base level of English that will help them enroll and stay in school. So we do that working with NGOs, like [Sharaka] and helping their teachers teach more and teach better in the medium of English. (Interview, September 2019)

Partnership activities continued to evolve beyond the second year, through a dynamic process of organizational learning, observation, and assessment. As one EP trainer explained, teaching English to teachers does not mean that there is de facto change in the classroom, in terms of student experience or learning (interview, August 2019).

For this reason, EP trainers began observing Sharaka teachers in class to identify areas where they might improve pedagogy or increase English usage in teaching "because you can't tell them to use the language and not tell them how" (interview, EP trainer, August 2019). Through this process they began to see what areas of the curriculum also needed further development.

Partnership activities also included facilitating a professional development approach involving "teacher-learning communities" in which teachers filmed themselves teaching and then met with colleagues to discuss a short excerpt of their teaching. The EP project lead described the approach in the following way:

> They're not criticizing the teacher. They're watching the clip and they're describing what happens. They're looking at what the teachers are doing and what the students are doing, so being very perceptive in their skills of noticing. And then they, again without any criticism, they talk about what else the teacher could have done in this situation, and then they discuss what the students may have done in reaction to what the teacher would have done. (Interview, September 2019)

EP and Sharaka interviewees all talked about the ongoing and collaborative development of partnership activities.

> First, we were focused on English language teaching [for teachers], then we got to classroom observations, then curriculum, then professional development. So, all areas saw developments because there was a big need and if we really wanted to have impact – to see students speaking more English – we needed to work on different areas. (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019)

Thus partnership activities developed to include English courses for teachers, a focus on classroom pedagogy, modifications to the curriculum, teacher professional development through "teacher-learning communities," and training for school leaders "to offer more support for the teachers" (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019).

In consultation with EP, Sharaka also planned a six-week family learning program with Syria refugee parents. The program involved teaching parents the curriculum for Grades 2 and 3, "This way, when the kids go home, the parents know what they are studying. I got this idea from the family learning program they do in England. I read about it and really liked the concept" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019). EP invited Sharaka's education director to England to learn more:

> There, I met up with the teachers that are doing family learning programs at schools. I watched the sessions that they are giving. I interviewed the parents and teachers who were involved in this program. I took the idea and adapted it a bit so it would accommodate the parents of [Sharaka]. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

Sharaka helped EP's work to grow in Lebanon, introducing them to other NGOs. Teachers from those NGOs began to attend the English classes during the second year of partnership. By 2020, they were expecting to reach 400 teachers.

Coordination

According to interviewees, coordination occurred at all levels of the partnership, between EP and Sharaka, and also between Sharaka teachers and parents. According to the Sharaka education director: "We meet a lot with [EP] because they are directly working with us and with our teachers. So we are always in contact with them" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019). Sharaka teachers also had regular meetings with the principal of their learning center in addition to one-on-one meetings with the education director at least three times a year. In this way, they worked consultatively with their learning community. "Before launching a new initiative, we ask the teachers and sometimes we ask the teachers to ask the parents…We send the teachers [to ask] mostly because the parents are more comfortable with them since they are [also] Syrian" (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019). Sharaka also organized meetings with parents at least three times a year, first at the start of the year, to learn about the program and approach to education, and then to keep them informed and receive input on their children's education.

Similarly, EP consulted with Sharaka regularly:

> Every few months, we meet to evaluate different things we're working on, and we take actions and decisions accordingly. We share these decisions with [Sharaka] and get their approval before proceeding. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

Through regular meetings and communication between various members of the partnership, coordination emerged as a central feature of the partnership.

> We keep them updated on what happens in the English language course and again, whatever deliverables we have on the other areas of the project, whether it's training or curriculum, we always make sure to communicate it clearly, get their approval, then proceed. So it's all documented by e-mails and documents. We make sure to meet their needs and expectations. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

> I can say we work as one organization. We communicate a lot, we reflect a lot, we discuss a lot of things. As if we're working together in one team somehow. Because it's very, very important that the partnership has good communication, this much… we think alike, to have this success from year to year. (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019)

In an interview, a Sharaka principal emphasized the importance of coordination, saying:

> Coordination between the two partners should be done collaboratively and not unilaterally. We should have clear understanding of each one's roles. Nobody should impose anything on anyone. Decisions should be based on ongoing assessment of on-the-ground work. If there is no benefit or results, it's better not to have the partnership. We want our students to benefit and if they don't benefit, then we would rather not have the partnership. (Interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019)

Communication through various channels and mechanisms led to strong coordination. Different actors on each side of the partnership communicated regularly through both formal mechanisms, such as MOUs, meetings, and written documentation, as well as informal channels, such as everyday conversations. The partners also maintained a WhatsApp group between the Sharaka teachers and the EP trainers, in case they had questions and "where we communicate, send homework, send feedback" (interview, EP project lead, January 2019). As one EP trainer remarked, "That's their preferred way of communication, so we have to be flexible and adapt to that" (interview, EP trainer, September 2019). In this way, Sharaka teachers were also in direct communication with EP.

Relationships between partners

Interviews with various actors from Sharaka and EP suggest that a strong non-hierarchical relationship existed between the two partners, characterized by mutual learning, collaboration, openness, transparency, trust, and respect.

Individuals from both organizations talked about how they learned from the other organization as well as from the Syrian teachers. This learning occurred through continuous feedback, both solicited and unsolicited. In describing the first year of the partnership, for example, the EP project lead said:

> It was a bit of a learning experience and [Sharaka] were very helpful and very supportive of that. And I think that the project was able to adapt and improve itself based on some of the feedback from [Sharaka] and based on feedback from teachers. We conducted a lot of surveys just to get a lot of feedback from the teachers to refine our offering and make sure it's having the best impact. [...] And we don't design a training course in isolation. It is always based on the conversations that we had with the [Sharaka] leadership, with the teachers, just to make sure it's very contextualized because they're working in a very different context, are seeing the teachers on a weekly basis, and they're very connected to them and these teachers are Syrian refugees... in a similar context to the students they work with. (Interview, EP project lead, September 2019)

EP solicited feedback from Sharaka teachers after every training session and twice a year for the ongoing English course through surveys and focus groups. In addition, the EP trainers received weekly feedback from teachers during class. An EP trainer

described the relationship with Sharaka teachers as open and transparent:

> They [teachers] were very transparent… The frustration and the, if you will, complaints, were transparently communicated. (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019)

The EP project lead described the relationship between partners as being "close" and noted that Sharaka included EP in planning processes and provided them with a lot of information about "what's happening." She remarked: "It's a very open, a very trusting partnership [...] We collaborate quite well together" (Interview, EP project lead, September 2019).

While EP described learning from Sharaka's experience and position in the community, Sharaka also characterized their learning from EP as open and non-hierarchical. One Sharaka teacher put it this way:

> [EP trainers] never made us feel like they're from another planet. They were really nice. They never made us feel that they were coming from "above" and watching us. It was joyful to attend their sessions. They are like sisters. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

Another teacher stated: "They [EP trainers] don't patronize us by playing the teacher's role with us. On the contrary" (interview, September 2019). This sentiment was echoed by other EP and Sharaka administrators and teachers, who felt mutually supported and supportive. In interviews, Sharaka teachers described their relationships with the EP trainers using terms such as "besties"; "like sisters;" and "no patronizing."

These non-hierarchical relationships appeared to mirror the general culture at Sharaka, which one teacher described in this way: "I don't feel that we are in an environment reflecting a school, a principal, and whatnot. No, thank God, our relations are like brothers" (interview, teacher, September 2019). An EP trainer recognized this, saying:

> [The Sharaka education director] is very flexible; she is very cooperative; she is very open; she is very helpful; she is very passionate, she's… she's… you know? And this reflects on everyone. It reflects on her partnership with us, it reflects on the team, it reflects on the school leaders. (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019)

In a related vein, a Sharaka principal described her relationship with EP in this way:

> There's no dominance; [Sharaka] is the main organization, since we're working in the field. They [EP] are supporting us indeed, but at the end of the day we are the ones working with the beneficiaries. They are very cooperative in the sense that they always tell us that we know best what we need for our organization. They have been very accepting of everything [we've requested]. For example, I sent them the topics that I wanted in the curriculum [they designed for us] and they were happy to do so. Another example is when we started the curriculum, I asked to reduce the

> number of vocabulary terms and they were happy to do that. (Interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019)

In their own words, the EP trainers were "full-timers in Lebanon, working in the field" in contrast to trainers who parachute in from abroad (interview, EP trainer, August 2019). This may have contributed to the strength of partner relationships, which EP trainers described in terms of commitment:

> There is no limit to what we might do to help or support them. Only at the beginning there were challenges for me working in a different environment, [but now], however harsh the conditions and the weather, you still want to go [to Bekaa], because despite everything, [the teachers] are coming and joining us at this time, and they are taking from their time and lives, and they want to learn. So you have this responsibility […] Sometimes we go up there in conditions with very poor visibility, only because we gave them that time in the classroom. (Interview, EP trainer, August 2019)

This responsibility to one another was echoed by Sharaka teachers who described the challenges of attending trainings:

> The working hours were really long, as we have two shifts and I teach in both [8:00-11:30 AM and 11:30-3:00 PM], and the training was either after work or during the last class period. They just told us that the training will now be from 3:00 to 4:30 or 5:00 PM, which is horrible for me. I'll spend my entire day at the school, and I have a young baby whom I need to breastfeed, and I should also cook at home. (Interview, teacher, September 2019)

Despite these difficulties, strong relationships characterized by mutual learning, trust, and care appeared to buoy the partnership. As the teacher who described some of these challenges aptly put it:

> With everybody, generally speaking, there is comfort, there is trust, and there is love. Whenever these factors co-exist, you can just keep going. I've been here for five years – a lifetime – it is not just a year or two. (Interview, September 2019)

Community participation

Sharaka's community included Syrian refugee teachers, students, and parents in their nonformal learning centers, as well as a wider community of Syrian refugees, Lebanese residents, and community leaders. Interviews and observations indicated that Sharaka had strong relationships with the community and actively sought their participation and input. As a result, Sharaka community members felt welcome at the nonformal learning centers and participated in meetings and events, contributed their feedback, openly communicated with teachers, and advocated for their children.

The “open-door” culture of the learning centers was apparent during site visits in which teachers, parents, and students were frequently observed entering and leaving the principal’s office to discuss concerns or just chat. For example, in a drop-in conversation with the Sharaka education director and principal of one of the learning centers, a mother was observed advocating for her daughter to return to Sharaka after attending public school (observation, January 2019). The education director asked the mother about the family and children before discussing the matter and advising her to return to public school and offering the daughter support in the transition. In an interview, the education director recalled how this relationship with the community began:

> When we first started in [the informal tented settlement] it was very hard to get students to attend the school. We had a hard time convincing the parents that it would be better to have their children somewhere that is safe, where they have friends, where they are learning and playing and having a good time, than for them to be at home or on the streets. They would say: “I was not educated, so why does my child need to be educated?”, or “I need my daughter to help me at home, so I can’t send her to school.” Now, this is the 5th year that every child in [the settlement] aged five to twelve is in school. The parents say they prefer their children to be in school with us because we taught them the importance of education. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

A Sharaka teacher described the relationship with parents by saying:

> Parents of students like our school and prefer to keep their children at our schools. They call me a lot at home just to ask for us to keep their children at our schools. They do not want to send their children to public schools. I tell them that we don’t give out degrees or certificates, and they are absolutely fine with this. They don’t care about the degree; they just want to keep their children here. One mother told us if we don’t keep her children, she will not send them to any school. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

As described earlier, Sharaka worked consultatively with their learning community, conferring with teachers and parents before launching a new initiative. Teachers visited student homes regularly and used this time to also solicit feedback from parents. In addition, Sharaka organized meetings with parents at least three times a year to keep parents informed and receive input on current and planned activities and future directions.

Sharaka served as the primary link between EP and the wider community; and EP’s contact with parents and the wider community was through Sharaka. As the EP project lead explained:

> We don’t quite have much interaction with [students or parents] apart from when we visit schools and observe lessons. We don’t quite have an open dialogue with

> the community because [Sharaka] does that. (Interview, EP project lead, September 2019)

EP worked directly with Sharaka teachers and principals and recognized Sharaka's strong standing in the community and trusted their role in engaging parents.

> We had an event where we organized a public show in English. This was a direct result of our [partnership]. We invited the local community. Our interaction with the local community and the stakeholders is through the NGOs. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

EP had a strong relationship with Sharaka's community of Syrian teachers and principals, based on a culture of mutual learning, commitment, and participation at all levels of the partnership. For example, the Syrian principals were fully involved in the training, leadership, and curriculum development aspects of the partnership.

> The school leaders are fully involved in the training cycle and the development cycle, and they have their own leadership training cycle as well. We are delivering to them separate training for leadership that consists of how to do classroom observations, how to give feedback, how to support teachers, time management and trainings like that. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

Furthermore, Sharaka teachers were integral to the partnership and were consulted by, and consulted with, EP and Sharaka administrators as colleagues. As described earlier, they were involved in decision making and feedback, such as around curriculum development and pedagogy. They were also involved in professional learning communities and liaised with parents.

We also trained teachers to lead the learning community of practice. The teachers come together and form groups and discuss something very specific relating to their professional development. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

As described earlier, teachers were actively involved in various facets of the partnership. As such, they were not viewed as passive "recipients" or "beneficiaries" of the project. Rather, they were integral to the initiation and goal-setting of the partnership, its feedback loops and development, and its outcomes. The EP project lead described this participation in terms of their hopes that the partnership would enable the community to "continue to develop themselves" beyond the partnership (interview, EP project lead, January 2019).

Community participation emerged as a central feature of the partnership. This helped to mitigate negative experiences for Sharaka parents, teachers, and leaders within society at large. The Sharaka education director provided the following example of these tensions:

> Twice a year I go and meet up with the mayor. He knows me and they always welcome me. However, once I sent the principal of the school on my behalf, because I wasn't able to go, and the mayor was very rude to her because she is Syrian. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

Such xenophobic encounters were common for the Sharaka community who spoke with Sharaka leaders openly about their concerns. Such conversations were facilitated through their participation in the learning community. In this sense, the partnership played an active role in buffering these tensions and providing a supportive space for community development.

Outcomes

While the impact of the partnership on student outcomes was "quite challenging to measure" (interview, EP project lead, January 2019), qualitative observations by Sharaka leaders, teachers, and parents suggested that the partnership had a positive impact on students in terms of progression, retention, and integration into public schools. As the EP project lead explained:

> The context of these schools can be a bit challenging. The students may change, join, leave, disappear for potato seasons. They disappear for a few weeks or months and then come back. So, to measure the direct impact on students that do not follow the frame of regular attendance is very challenging. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

Despite these limitations, a Sharaka principal described the student "success rates" within the English curriculum as being higher than success rates in other subject areas (interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019). Furthermore, according to the Sharaka education director:

> Two years ago, the success rate at the Brevet [Lebanese official examination at Grade 9] was around 18%. Last year it was 30%; and hopefully this year it will be higher because now the teachers have more experience in correctly teaching this program. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

Parents also described how their children could now interact with strangers in basic English. According to the EP project lead:

> The main objective of the project was to allow teachers to use English more in their classrooms. The impact on students is less clear. Obviously, we want the students to learn more English and to have better English proficiency, but this was something we weren't able to measure accurately. We were able to measure it through classroom observation. So, this is how we were able to see that impact. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

Referring to both curricular and pedagogical developments through the partnership, a Sharaka teacher described the impact on students this way:

> Now the student is able to read the whole question in English and extract the key terms that are in the text or the question. In previous years, the child was not asked to know all of this. They were required to know how to read numbers in English, to know how to name geometric shapes and simple tasks like these in English. But that is not the case now; more is expected of them. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

According to the teacher, children were benefiting from a tailored curriculum that allowed them to also make up lost time, receive a "strong foundation at [Sharaka]," and "proceed in public school at his proportional age" (interview, September 2019).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that teachers' increased use of English led to an increase in student use:

> I am telling you, for me and for my class, the results were very positive. At first I had trouble, but afterwards, when I worked hard on myself [...] I felt that the results were really good. [The EP trainers and Sharaka education director] evaluated [my classroom] at the beginning and ending of the year, and they saw the difference. At the beginning of the year, the children knew about one or two words from the question. At the end of the year, around 60% to 70% of the children could read the whole question. They could even explain it and describe what the question involves. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

While there was qualitative evidence to suggest that students were learning more English as a direct result of the partnership and that this learning was supporting their achievement in other content areas, thereby promoting retention, and later integration into public schools, the impact on teachers was clear and measurable. One teacher described the impact on her teaching of science and mathematics by saying, "Because I got better at English, I could help my students, by teaching them in English" (interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019).

EP conducted pre- and post-tests using a standardized English language assessment and observations of classrooms to gauge the impact of the partnership on teachers. However, according to EP and Sharaka, the impact went beyond teacher English proficiency and classroom usage to larger areas of professional learning.

> I videotaped myself and I observed it and tried to understand what happened, what could have happened, what aspects I could work on. [...] I benefited and learned from them. In Syria, we never learned how to deal with different learning difficulties or disability in the classroom. At [Sharaka], we had to take into account the various accents, contexts, disabilities, etc. [of students]. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

According to EP trainers, the partnership had observable impacts on classroom English usage and pedagogy, as well as teacher confidence.

> It's great that we're really able to observe lessons and to see teachers using the language that we've trained them in and implementing activities that we've trained them in. [...] So that's [the impact] in terms of classroom observation and the impact [of the partnership] in the classroom. [The other] area of impact is seen in terms of the teachers' general confidence. They feel better now speaking in English. Just being able to practice regularly has helped them to build some confidence. That's something the teachers have told us in focus groups. (Interview, EP trainer, September 2019)

Teachers spoke positively about the impact of the program on their English proficiency and pedagogy and saw this reflected in student learning. In evaluating the program, the EP project lead said:

> We found that all of the teachers were saying that this was a great program, and they were really able to learn from their peers. They felt supported by their peers, and that was the first time that they were coming together as colleagues to talk about learning and supporting each other. So, I think that was a very successful area of the program. (Interview, EP project lead, September 2019)

Observations

Our site visits to Sharaka's nonformal learning centers and observations of partnership activities, classroom teaching, and everyday interactions between 2018 and 2019 confirmed many of the themes that emerged from our interviews.

Sharaka operated nonformal learning centers, or schools, that were noticeably child-friendly and community centered and valued teacher professional development. This was apparent in the ways the schools were organized, with brightly colored classrooms, play spaces, dedicated library areas, and shared work spaces for teachers to convene with each other, with the school counselor, and with their principal and the education director. The physical organization of the centers, despite limitations on space and resources, signaled the value given to a variety of learning modalities for both students and educators. Student work and art projects lined the halls and classroom walls, and photographs of student activities and teacher professional development and events were on display for teachers and students. The schools were bustling with activity.

Within the corrugated metal walls of one Kindergarten classroom, students were actively engaged in an English lesson behind tightly packed desks.

> There is barely any space for the children to move from their desks. Each desk seats two children, and the teaching area is spacious enough for the teacher to move

> around. The classroom is equipped with resources such as colouring pencils and crafts. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

The teacher began the morning routine with a series of commands and questions in English to which the children responded:

> Stand up! (children responded by standing up)
> Sit down! (children responded by sitting down)
> Sleep! (children responded by putting their heads against their desks)
> Good afternoon (children responded by saying "good afternoon")
> How are you? (children responded by saying they are fine)
> What is your name? (children responded by saying their names)
> How old are you? (children responded by saying their age)
> Where are you from? (children responded by saying "Suriyya" [Syria])
> Do you live in Syria? (children responded by saying "no")
> Where do you live now? (children responded by saying "Lubnan" [Lebanon])
> Jump! (children responded by jumping)
> Dance! (children responded by dancing)
> Eat an apple! (children responded by pretending to eat an apple)
> Drink juice! (children responded by pretending to drink from a juice box)
> Antonyms! Are you ready? (children responded "big and small, happy and sad, clean and dirty, slow and fast")
> Body parts! (children responded "head, face, neck, shoulders, arms, hand, fingers, leg, knees, foot, toes")
> What are the days of the week? (children recited the days of the week)
> What is today? (the teacher used cut-outs with which he wrote the date)
> Is the weather cloudy? Rainy? Snowy? Windy? Sunny? (children responded by saying "yes" to sunny and "no" to all other options. The teacher used cut-outs with drawings of the different weather conditions to match a visual representing each type of weather)
> Do you feel angry? Scared? Tired? Sleepy? Surprised? Happy? (children responded by saying "yes" to happy and "no" to all other options. The teacher used facial expressions to act out the meanings of the words) (fieldnotes, December 2019)

The teacher led a participatory lesson in which students engaged both verbally and physically in their response to the commands and questions to demonstrate their comprehension. While the teacher interacted in English with the boisterous students, he also noticed a disengaged boy at the back of the classroom. The teacher invited the boy to sit at a desk in the first row, between two girls.

Student disengagement from lessons was common. Students faced a number of challenges at home, related to material and psychosocial conditions, which the teachers and school counsellor knew well from frequently visiting their homes and speaking with parents. Teachers watched for these students in class and used different strategies to encourage their engagement, including inviting them to change seats, asking them

to serve as teachers' assistant, and providing them with alternative activities.

Sharaka's child-friendly and community-centered approach was also apparent in their curriculum, which they had developed to include learning about "where I come from," Syria's geography, its people, and natural resources. This curricular component was in response to a realization that many children could not identify their place of origin and "they would say, I come from [the informal tented settlement]. We wanted to help them develop a sense of pride regarding their origins" (interview, Sharaka education director, December 2019).

Sharaka also recognized its community's needs through a dedicated counsellor who worked with teachers, students, and parents, and a school feeding program. In the morning session at the Kindergarten classroom, we observed:

> It was snack time for the children. A teacher came in with a bag of sandwiches and another bag of apples, which [the classroom teacher] passed out to the children. They started to eat in the classroom. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

The principal's door was open to teachers and students who entered for consultation and updates, and to parents who were observed advocating for their children to re-enroll in the school. From the observed interactions of teachers, students, parents, the principals, school counsellor, and the education director, it was apparent that Sharaka's learning community felt at home at their schools.

One meeting between the education director, a principal, and school counsellor began with the education director updating the principal about an issue related to electricity:

> [The education director] was upset about how the Lebanese man who's supposed to be providing them with electricity is ripping them off. Next, she told [the principal] about two teachers who were complaining about the afternoon timing of the [EP] training sessions. They want the sessions to be on a Saturday morning instead. [The education director] said: "[EP] cannot come all the way here just for two teachers." The principal agreed. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

This excerpt is illustrative of the open communication, described earlier in interviews, between teachers, the education director, and principals. It also hints at some of the logistical issues around operating the schools and partnership activities.

The education director had been making her rounds to different classrooms as part of her ongoing support and evaluation of teaching and learning. In her meeting with the school principal, we noted:

> She said she felt certain that the moment she entered the classroom, the observed teacher changed her lesson plan. She thinks that the teacher was intimidated by her presence in the classroom. [The education director] was also critical of how

> one of the students participated in the lesson, whereby the student appeared to be memorizing without understanding what she memorized. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

As this observational excerpt illustrates, the education director was deeply involved in monitoring the professional development of teachers in collaboration with the principal. In particular, she sought to encourage active modes of teaching and learning that supported student understanding and growth—methods that were also advanced through the EP partnership.

An English lesson for teachers led by EP trainers began at 1:30 PM sharp with ten teachers in attendance. As they arrived in class, the trainer asked them about their homework. They did a quick review of the previous week's learning.

> After taking attendance, [the trainer] asked the teachers: "What did you say to your students today?" One Arabic teacher responded (in English): "Hello everyone! How are you today?" [The trainer] distributed a printed copy of her PowerPoint presentation that has a few introductory lines that teachers could use when introducing themselves to their classrooms. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

Later, the trainer asked the teachers to pair up and speak to each other for a few minutes in English.

> After they do so for a few minutes, she asks them to begin recording conversations in their classrooms when they use English. The purpose of this activity, she explains, is to improve the use of English in the classroom. Then, she teaches them how to pronounce the word "pronunciation." Later on, she asks them to list the different family members by raising their hands. In response, the teachers mention the following: mother, father, husband, children, son. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

The trainer paused a reading exercise to complement them for improving from last year: "Remember how you used to read a few lines last year and now you are reading passages?"

After finishing their reading exercise, [the trainer] now introduces the short and long "A" sounds. Again, they worked in groups and then read a list of words with the letter A in them out loud. Later on, she had sticky notes with words on them for the teachers to make up complete sentences using the sticky notes they are given. [...] It was now 3 PM, so [the trainer] gave the teachers homework for next time, thanked them for coming, and distributed a chocolate biscuit snack to them. (fieldnotes, December 2019)

Our observations suggest that the EP trainer maintained a lively and participatory classroom with a variety of activities and pedagogical strategies that teachers could then use in their own classrooms. Indeed we observed teachers using some of these techniques during our visits and teachers and EP trainers talked about these in

interviews, suggesting positive outcomes of the partnership.

Furthermore, Sharaka supported student and teacher learning through the partnership by maintaining established routines, encouraging active participation through a variety of learning activities, and promoting group work. The principal, education director, and EP trainers supported this work by observing classrooms and establishing spaces to regularly discuss teaching and learning through formal meetings, informal conversations, and training sessions, which included discussion of classroom recordings.

Impact of compounding crises on partnership

Lebanon's compounding crises had severe impacts on the day-to-day operation of Sharaka and EP's partnership activities. Similar to other organizations in our broader country analysis, these challenges may be grouped into four broad areas: logistical, financial, educational, and partnership-based (see Table 5.1). Here we provide some examples of ways that Sharaka and EP worked around each of these challenges to sustain partnership activities, including teacher and student learning.

In interviews, Sharaka's education director and EP's project lead and trainers described the various challenges to partnership activities from 2019 to 2021 due to the political, economic, and COVID-19 crises and how they worked to mitigate these. In particular, Sharaka and EP had anticipated the COVID-19 crisis in Lebanon and began to prepare for the possibility of school closures.

> Because we have shorter days on Wednesdays, because that's when we do the English course with [EP], our partners, we were able to also meet [at that time] and discuss what we were going to do if this happens. (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020)

They considered moving classes online for both students and teachers and conducted a survey of parents to help them to understand potential barriers (Interview, education director, January 2021). The survey suggested that WhatsApp would be the most likely way to keep students engaged. This required changes to curriculum and teacher training, new technology-based partnerships to support the new modality of teaching and learning, and solicitation of tech-based donations:

> We did our research […] [Two tech-based organizations] donated laptops to our schools and the laptops have some downloaded activities [on them for the teachers to use]. [One organization] also sent us some online tutorials that we watched together and practiced, and we started the WhatsApp groups [for teaching] because this was the best solution. (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020)

Within weeks, the EP teacher training also moved online via Zoom and WhatsApp. EP trainers were also able to

> share some tricks and tips with the teachers; how you could run an online class effectively or how you can send students' individual activities via WhatsApp, or some other messaging service. This was quite effective. (Interview, EP project lead, July 2020)

Still, students and teachers faced formidable challenges, including lack of access to a smart phone or sufficient data to engage in lessons. Where smartphones existed, they had to be shared among several siblings and parents. Parents also told Sharaka leaders that they were overwhelmed by messaging from UNICEF, WHO, and the school. In response to this feedback, Sharaka began to limit communication with parents and students to school-related information. They reduced the expectation for engagement to limited hours so that students could use the family phone at that time. And they modified the curriculum to focus on languages, mathematics, and crafts to promote eye-hand coordination—areas that they felt they could continue to teach through participatory methods that promoted active learning but did not tax the parents.

> We are not teaching them science because science requires hands-on learning, and how are we going to do the experiments and show them? It's not difficult to do, but the problem is the data usage [that it's going to require]. That's one of the challenges, the data usage for the parents; we can't overload them with images and videos. (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020)

They also sent materials home to support the learning activities.

> We have given all the students who are working with us a stationery kit, because they said we need to color, so we've given them a kit that has a copybook, pencil, eraser, sharpener, coloring pencils and glue. So that the children do some activities that we send them, and this has encouraged other students who were not involved. (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020)

The stationery kit served as an incentive for some students to return to learning. Sharaka followed this with another delivery that included food and hygiene-related items, such as

> lentils, pasta, oil, rice, soap, Clorox, hand gel, stationery, and for those who don't have a smartphone or WhatsApp, we have printed booklets for them, and we're going to give them a booklet so that they can work at home on the booklet. (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020)

Parents communicated positively to these efforts, calling Sharaka teachers and principals to say "Thank you for what you're doing. It's good that our children are learning" (interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020).

Open communication between partners helped support efforts to overcome barriers to

teaching and learning.

> It’s very important before you make any move to ask your partner. For example, before we moved online, we talked to the [education director]. Then we asked the teachers, then we made a survey to check who will be able to go online; then, when we found that there is no other option but moving online, we sent an apology because we didn’t have any other option but being online. Communication is very important, to involve them in the process, so that they don’t think that we left them behind. (Interview, EP trainer, July 2020)

In another example, teacher attendance to EP training sessions had declined considerably at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. An EP trainer contacted a Sharaka principal to discuss her concerns:

> The principal immediately spoke to the teachers just to understand what the issue was. She then arranged for the teachers to come together within the school where they could connect to Zoom, and they could connect to the trainer. She removed the barrier of technology in the home, creating the space for them in the school. So, that’s one example. We communicate regularly with the principals, and they are much involved. (interview, EP project lead, July 2020)

Despite these efforts, retention and progression was severely impeded for Sharaka students, as well as teachers in the EP classes. An EP trainer described the issue this way:

> Many of the teachers couldn’t continue with us online due mainly to the network bundles, so some don’t have internet, and others didn’t want to consume their bundles on an additional language course. We can say 30-40% continued with us. […] We were able to finish all the classes; we gave 20 lessons – one lesson per week, but I can’t say it was with the same impact and results that we wanted. There were for sure many people who weren’t able to finish the course with us. […] The whole thing wasn’t clicking anymore as it wasn’t the priority. (Interview, EP trainer, July 2020)

Furthermore, it was difficult to monitor the engagement and progress of students and teachers, given various obstacles to assessment. By 2021, Sharaka had identified ways to monitor WhatsApp teaching as an extension of teachers’ professional development. This included formal evaluation of teachers, followed by training, and additional support and evaluation (interview, Sharaka education director, January 2021).

Despite the numerous challenges, EP observed positive outcomes among teachers who remained engaged in the English classes:

> We saw benefits such as in the conversational lessons. We did [activities such as] show and tell, debate, and reading circles. We, as teachers, really enjoyed it and

> the students (teachers) loved it, because you're totally focusing on the screen and see the faces clearly; you can hear the words very clearly. Also, you have the breakout room option on Zoom; it was amazing and when we had debates, we used to divide them into groups in the breakout rooms and then they meet all together and continue the debate. I was able as a teacher to be available in each breakout room and check what they are saying; I was able to correct; it was a very positive experience. (Interview, EP trainer, July 2020)

The EP project lead noted that because of their ongoing partnership with Sharaka, "I've realized just how resilient the partners are despite all of the challenges that they're facing, they're still so committed to their missions of improving education" (interview, EP project lead, July 2020). An EP trainer echoed this sentiment, saying she had "admiration for" Sharaka:

> Their commitment, hard work, and their passion to try their best to give something to these students was really remarkable. [Teachers] were delivering kits for their students because the students were not able to connect with them online. Teachers were recording videos for the first time and repeating them several times and then having their videos quality checked. I have real admiration for the quick adaptation. This shows how much they stretched themselves to deliver to let the refugee students continue their education. (Interview, EP trainer, July 2020)

The admiration was reciprocal; the Sharaka education director also noted the tremendous commitment on the part of EP, saying, "I am very impressed and humbled by how much they are thinking of us, and how, really, they are trying as much as possible to help us to continue" (Interview, Sharaka education director, June 2020). While the compounding crises had created seemingly insurmountable challenges to partnership activities, the strong relationship among partners described earlier, characterized by mutual learning, open communication, trust, and respect appeared to sustain the partnership through multiple crises.

Observations of virtual classes

Our observations of Sharaka's virtual classes via WhatsApp highlighted a variety of activities that teachers used to engage students in learning during the COVID-19 school closure, including use of images, text, videos, and assignments. In turn, the student response rates confirmed concerns from Sharaka teachers and principals regarding challenges to student participation, retention, and progression.

Table 5.3 represents a summary of the routine observed for one primary level class in the morning shift. It includes the days, subjects taught, number of students who participated, the methods the teachers used to send their lessons and assignments, and the methods the students used to participate. Additionally, the duration of the lesson and the duration of interaction between the students and the teachers are included.

Table 5.3: Partnership A – Virtual learning routine Via WhatsApp, Lower Primary

Date (2020)	Subject	Number of participating students	Method of teacher explanation	Method of student participation	Duration of lesson (min:sec)	Duration of interaction
May 11	Arabic	6/11	Video	Photos	2:40	1:11pm–4:25pm
May 12	Math	7/11	Video	Photos	2:47	1:47pm–7:19pm
May 13	English	6/11	Video	Photos; video	NA	12:01pm–8:17pm
May 14		3/11		1 S sends request to send the video again because it was deleted; 1S sends a photo; 1S sends a selfie		
May 18	Arabic	6/11	Video (program)	Photos	2:48	12:25pm–9:44pm
May 19	NA	1/11	NA	Sent the same assignment again but wrote the letter with its long and short sounds	NA	NA
May 20	English	6/11	Video	Photos	3:11	11:58am–6:38pm
May 21		2/11		1S sends an assignment		
June 2	Math	6/11	Video (program)	Photos	2:03	10:09am–9:59pm
June 3	English	5/11	Video	Photos	2:56	9:07am–8:50pm
June 4		1/11		A student (other than the 5S above) sends his English assignment as a photo		
June 8	NA		NA		NA	
June 9	Math	2/11	Video (program)	Photos	2:23	3:03pm; 9:13pm & 10:27pm S sent assignment
June 10	English	5/11	Video	Photos/screenshots	3:40	8:08am–9:32pm

June 11		3/11	Reminder to submit an assignment	2 S send photos for English assignment; 2 S (1 of whom sent English) send Arabic assignment		
	Arabic	4/11	Video (program); text message to inform S of the deadline to submit an assignment	Photos; 1video; 1Voice note	1:44	10:31am–10:16pm
June 15	Arabic	5/11	Video (program)	Video; photos	2:02	10:08am–10:55pm
June 16	Math	6/11	Video (program)	Photos	1:45	10:25am–9:58pm
June 17	English	7/11	Video	Photos; 1 Voice note	3:54	8:10am– 10:21pm

Based on the group info, between May 8 and June 17, 2020, 128 photos and 12 videos were posted to the group.

The morning shift classes included Arabic, Math and English three days per week, generally Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. Students usually sent their assignments on the same day after the teacher explained the lesson, although assignments continued to come in on Thursdays and Fridays as well. The lessons were delivered as videos along with worksheets (in the form of images) for students to solve and send back. Students generally sent these back to teachers in the form of photos and sometimes as voice notes and videos. The teachers then corrected them, using emojis, text messages, or voice notes to inform the student whether the assignment was correctly done or not. The duration of teacher videos was between 1:44 and 3:54 minutes.

While there appears to be a routine to the days in which the teaching activities took place, the timing of the communications varied from day to day; teachers sent their lessons at different times and students sent their assignments and corrections at all times of day and night. This flexibility reflects consideration of the range of times in which students might have had access to a device.

The assignments were graded, and one of the teachers reminded the students to submit their assignments because they are graded. Teachers also encouraged their students in a variety of ways, through positive reinforcement, including texts and voice notes. Figure 5.2 presents a screenshot of one teacher's certificates of appreciation to students who

had completed their work. At the top the certificates read: “Thanks and Appreciation” (“ريدقتو ركش”) in Arabic calligraphy, with the students’ names in boldface at the center.

Figure 5.3. Partnership A – Screenshot of teacher certificates of appreciation

The video lessons were delivered in an interactive format and included the assignment. For example, on May 12, 2020, the mathematics video showed the teacher explaining the lesson in Arabic, using the key operational terms in English (e.g. “subtract,” “minus”). The teacher explained an example provided in a Google form (survey). He then gave instructions for an assignment. The instructions were written in Arabic. He described the procedure for submitting the assignment via the Google form. The point value of each math exercise was displayed next to each question. In the Google form, students were expected to choose the correct answer under each question. The teacher also gave them the option to do the exercise on a copybook and send a photo of their responses on the WhatsApp group. In this way, the teacher provided a number of different ways that students could engage in the assignment.

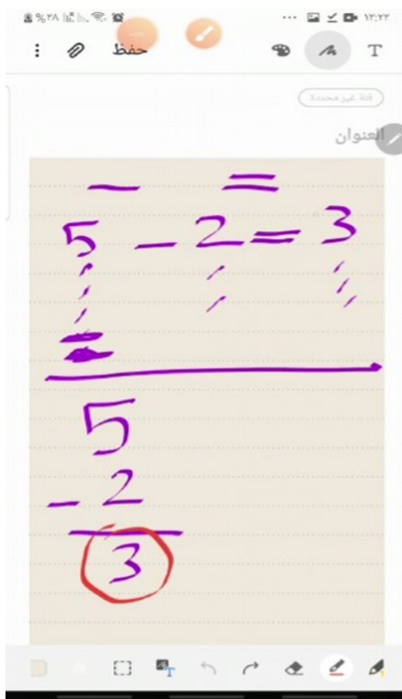


Figure 5.4:. Partnership A – Screenshot of mathematics lesson

In another mathematics lesson, a teacher sent a video (2:03) explaining subtraction. He reminded the students of the main ideas using formal Arabic and wrote the content in English (numbers). He then explained another method of subtraction (Figure 5.4). He said key terms, such as subtraction, equals, minus, and numbers, in English. At the end of the video, four worksheets appeared in which he asked the students to solve and send the assignment on the WhatsApp group (Figure 5.5). He informed them that they would correct the assignment together. Six students replied by sending screenshots of their assignments done on their copybooks.

In an English lesson, a teacher sent a video (2:56) and two images of exercises which students were expected to work on. The focus was on the culture/s of Lebanon. She explained in English, then she translated each sentence into informal Arabic. Five students sent their assignments as photos. However, they all responded to just one of

the two exercises. Also, two students sent the same picture, but the second added a heart, and the teacher praised both saying “good job” via a voice note. She replied to the students who sent their assignments and commented via text message “correct” in Arabic, “good job,” along with the “thumb up” emoji. She then sent a voice note, greeting the students and informing them that there was still time for those who had not sent their assignments to do so for a grade.

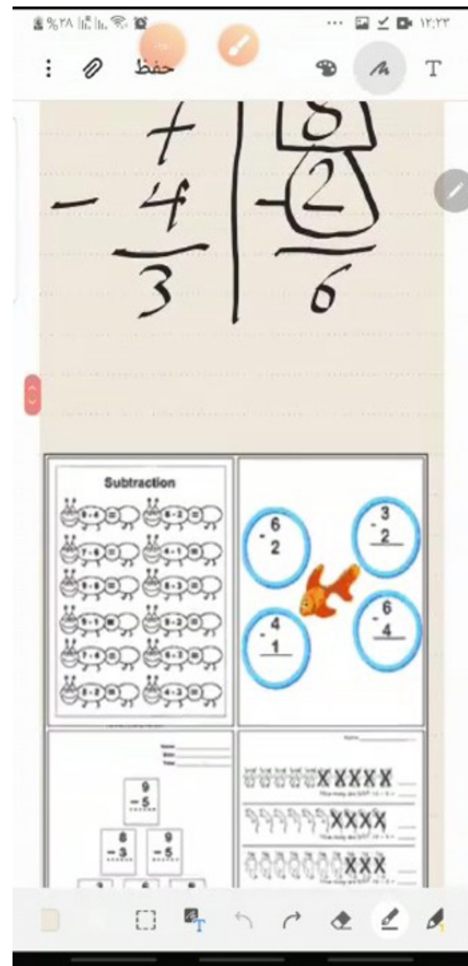


Figure 5.5: Partnership A – Screenshot of mathematics assignment worksheets

In another WhatsApp learning group, the English teacher demonstrated a variety of teaching tools to engage both students and parents. The teacher explained the entire lesson in English throughout the video.

> Then after sending the video, she sends a voice note in Arabic to explain the procedure for students to do the assignment, and she addresses the parents and guides them how to help their children do the assignment. [She] uses a variety of materials such as cardboard and raw pasta to explain the lesson activity. She also varies her voice tone and produces sound effects to engage the students. For example, when she is explaining the fruits and vegetables lesson she says, “Yum, yum, yummy!” while holding a pear. Similarly, she interacts with the students in the video by asking them to repeat the words after her. (fieldnotes, May 2020)

Many of the lessons observed in both the morning and afternoon sessions in May and June 2020 followed a similar pattern, with teachers sending videos or voicenotes and assignments via WhatsApp and students responding through photos or videos. Teachers replied with encouragement. According to the Sharaka education director, teachers developed activities that students could undertake within the limitations of their resources at home. This included activities such as tracing letters in a tray of rice or photographing themselves doing a particular craft or activity.

Despite these efforts, student engagement in lessons was markedly diminished, according to teachers and the education director. This was confirmed by our online observations which showed that only a handful of students submitted assignments for each lesson, and fewer still did so regularly. One teacher explained:

> A lot of students can’t download the videos, so we send them a photo of the lesson

> followed by a voice note to explain to them what they should do to be able to send their assignment privately. (WhatsApp communication, June 2020)

As an example, the teacher forwarded a recording of a student who shared this challenge: "Hello teacher, how are you? The internet connection is very weak… it can't handle the videos" (WhatsApp communication, June 2020). To address this concern, teachers used multiple strategies and made themselves available to support students. Sharaka also delivered printed activity booklets and stationery to homes.

Our observations of online classes in May and June 2020 provided evidence of teachers creating opportunities for active learning and engagement through a variety of activities and modalities in both Arabic and English, encouraging the use of English where appropriate. They provided language support by translating or repeating instructions in Arabic, and they offered incentives and praise for work completed. The lessons also demonstrate a general routine and structure to the lessons, involving instruction on particular days. That instruction included explanation, examples, and guidance on how to submit assignments and tasks related to the lesson. Teachers used multiple strategies to get around barriers by providing instruction in multiple forms; accepting completed assignments through various means and at various times; and providing guidance to parents. Their approach to teaching via WhatsApp suggested deep knowledge of the students' learning context and barriers to learning, as evidenced in multiple strategies described earlier and flexibility around assignments.

Promising Partnership A practices

Despite multiple challenges over the course of this study, the partnership between Sharaka and Education Partners persisted through multiple compounding crises to deliver English education and professional support to Syrian refugee teachers, with promising outcomes in terms of their English proficiency, classroom usage, pedagogy, and reported confidence. The partnership also had observable impact on student learning. In this concluding section we outline the principles behind partnership practices that led to their success prior to the onset of these crises, and that also sustained the partnership and its activities through political, economic, and pandemic crises.

Trust and respect

The partnership between Sharaka and EP was characterized by strong, non-heirarchical relationships across the partnering organizations, which partners described using terms like "definitely on equal terms" (interview, EP project lead, September 2019); "no patronizing" (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019); and "no dominance" (interview, Sharaka principal, August 2019). This dynamic promoted community participation at various levels of the partnership. In interviews, both Sharaka and EP partners talked about this in terms of trust and respect being central features of a

strong partnership and described their own relationships in those terms:

> The success of any relationship is bound to trust and respect between the two parties. Once these two things are true, you can proceed. There shouldn't be any patronizing like, "I am the boss; I am the leader." As long as this thing doesn't exist, you shall have respect and trust and good treatment between the two parties. I think this will result in the success of this relationship. From my position, I saw the trust and I saw the respect and good treatment from the supervisors [of this partnership], so it is a good thing for this partnership to continue. (Interview, Sharaka teacher, September 2019)

> The higher thing is trust. Because after having that, everything else can be surpassed. When trust and transparency are established, you can then create a successful partnership. (Interview, EP trainer2, August 2019)

> There should be a great deal of flexibility, and there should also be trust. [...] They trust that what we are advising them is good, and we also trust [their feedback]. [...] It's about respect. (Interview, EP trainer1, August 2019)

> In my opinion the most important thing is trust. Then communication between the implementing partners and the funding partners, because it is important for us to know what issues or feedback they have, and it is important for us to be able give them our feedback so they can improve their program. [...] Both trust and feedback to each other are very important. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

> It should be trust between the two partners. Everything needs to be open. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

When asked to reflect on what makes a good partnership, partners with various roles at both organizations talked about trust and respect as important principles guiding their practices. This was frequently linked to transparency and open, ongoing forms of communication.

Communication

Open, ongoing and organic forms of communication appeared to characterize the partnership between Sharaka and EP, and partners linked this communication to trust, respect, and transparency. Partners at both organizations spoke about communication being a hallmark of a strong partnership:

> [...] The partnership needs to speak collaboratively. There needs to be good communication [...] Frequent communication shows that we're working closely together; it shows that we're working in collaboration together. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

> The partnership with [EP] is successful because there is a lot of feedback between us and them. Like, every once in a while, we Skype with them, if we can't meet up in real life, to see how everything is going and functioning. Besides, they have a monitoring and evaluation system that they share with us. They ask for our opinion before proceeding. That's how it's successful. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

> And this open communication should come and go multiple times [...] There should be transparency. When there is something not going well, we should address it [directly with the person responsible] out of respect, meaning if today, I am responsible for these deliverables, I should be addressed not someone else, because it is out of respect for instance. (Interview, EP trainer1, August 2019)

Across the case study data, open and ongoing communication emerged as a central partnership practice linked to coordination, trust and respect. In an interview, an EP trainer described communicating "clear strategies and clear vision" as being part and parcel of supporting and respecting various partners:

> So we know where we are heading [...] and what are the intended outcomes [...] There should be a set calendar and set deliverables that are very clear and communicated with everyone – so that the road is clear. (Interview, EP trainer1, August 2019).

> It needs to be clear who is doing what and who is responsible for what. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

> We all have our roles and this should be openly communicated. (Interview, Sharaka principal, January 2019)

Frequent, organic communication was also linked to transparency and feedback that enabled mutual organizational learning, knowledge-sharing, and self-reflection.

Mutual learning and self-reflection

Both Sharaka and EP talked about their ongoing learning, knowledge-sharing, and self-reflection through the partnership. This mutual and internal learning was linked to open and organic communication between the partners and within each organization.

> Learning is really important, especially in this context. (Interview, EP trainer1, August 2019)

> We've done lots of follow ups, and we've been very interested in finding out the impact that we're having, and how we can improve. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

> One time [one of our other partners] took a picture of the principal, and posted the picture without telling us. We directly contacted them, and they apologized and said we were right. […]. Both trust and feedback to each other are very important. (Interview, Sharaka education director, January 2019)

> Flexibility to modify to the context and to the needs and expectations of [partners] is important because we come from different backgrounds and expectations. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

EP learned from Sharaka's feedback and Sharaka openly offered it.

> Just last week I received an email from [their education director] saying, "Thank you so much for the training you've delivered. It was very well-received, and [the trainers] are doing a great job." We quite often receive emails like that. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

The EP project lead described these informal communications as supportive and critical to their learning what was going well and what needed modification in real time. Constant feedback and communication allowed for learning "based on conversations" with various actors across the two organizations (Interview, EP project lead, September 2019). This was particularly critical with the onset of the political, economic, and COVID-19 crises which required modifications to curriculum, pedagogy, modes of delivery, and a myriad of logistical issues. They learned together, and through strong communication linked to trust and respect were able to communicate this knowledge and self-reflection to each other.

Care

Importantly, our case study suggests that the partnership between Sharaka and EP was characterized by the principle of care—the sometimes intangible ways in which they interacted, communicated, and approached their activities. Care manifested in partners' commitment to each other, to the project, and to teacher, students, and the wider community.

> It is a very successful partnership because we have commitment from both sides and seriousness, and we're working from our heart. (Interview, EP project lead, January 2019)

> There should be commitment, especially in this [challenging] context. (Interview, EP trainer1, August 2019)

Care and commitment were also described in terms of "passion": "The most important thing is passion. […] As a partner, in anything that you are doing, if you don't have [passion], you won't be able to succeed" (interview, EP trainer2, August 2019).

Care, commitment, and passion were evident among members on both sides of the partnership. EP trainers described the Sharaka education director as "contagious in her motivation," as they felt their own commitment and enthusiasm for the partnership grow from year to year (interview, EP trainer1, August 2019).

Care also manifested in spaces to allow for mutual learning and growth, including frequent communication, solicited and unsolicited forms of feedback, and flexibility. An EP trainer described it in terms of "So much support, honestly [...] and you can see that it reflects on all of us as trainers, consultants, teachers" (interview, EP trainer1, August 2019). Sharaka supported EP in establishing themselves in Lebanon by connecting them to other NGOs, providing regular feedback on activities, supporting logistical and other challenges. And EP reciprocated through acts of "professionalism, commitment, passion." To partners, it was clear that both partners cared deeply for the project and the people involved: "[The EP project lead] wants this project to succeed, and she wants to give it her best" (interview, EP trainer1, August 2019).

Through interviews, site visits, and observations, the principles of trust, respect, communication, mutual learning, and care emerged as central features of this partnership. Sharaka and EP spoke about these features explicitly, and we observed these principles in action through personal interactions across the partnership. For Sharaka and EP, trust, respect, communication, mutual learning, and care also appeared to be interconnected. These features manifested in how they spoke about their partnership with mutual admiration across the period of study, through the success of their partnership activities, and through the extreme difficulties of multiple crises. Despite these challenges, the partnership persisted.

5.3 Partnership Case Study B

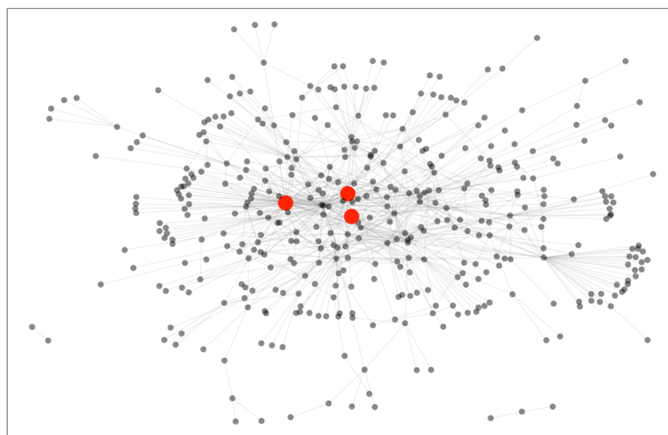
Partnership, initiation, and activities

Partnership Case Study B offers a comparative analysis of how one local organization worked with two different international partners – a large international organization and a smaller private foundation based in the Global North. The case study involved one Lebanon-based non-profit, non-governmental organization (non-sectarian, non-politically aligned), which we call here Taalim, with two of their sustained partners, which we refer to as International Funders Agency (IFA) and Foundation for Education (FfE). International Funders Agency was a large international organization with a long-term presence in Lebanon, whereas Foundation for Education was a small private foundation based in the Global North that had begun working in Lebanon about five years ago. Taalim had been working in Lebanon for over 25 years in diverse areas, including Akkar, Bekaa, Beirut, South and Mount Lebanon.

A network visualization of the three organizations demonstrates their position indicated by red dots within the network structure and ties to other organizations

working on Syria refugee education within Lebanon (Figure 5.6). Taalim and IFA are seen to be connected to numerous other organizations. Their centrality measures were both among the top quarter of organizations in the network, reflecting numerous ties to other organizations resulting in part from a long-term presence within Lebanon. While their ties decreased over the course of the study, they both remained in the top quarter of organizations in terms of centrality. Foundation for Education had a low centrality measure, within the bottom quarter of organizations, reflecting fewer connections. And while their ties to other organizations increased over the course of the study, they remained in the bottom quarter in terms of centrality.

Figure 5.6: **Network sociogram of Taalim, IFA, and FfE**



Taalim's activities were supported separately by IFA and FfE. The partnership activities of the three organizations focused on basic literacy and numeracy and support for student retention. Taalim selected the two partnerships for the case study because they viewed them as successful in terms of outcomes. Our comparative analysis of Taalim's two partnerships found differences in their relationships, practices, and expectations.

Taalim worked on improving educational outcomes in public schools, focusing primarily on the primary and elementary grades.

> Even before the Syrian crisis, [Taalim] had been looking for approaches and programs that would improve the quality of teaching and learning inside of the public schools to reduce the repetition and early dropout rates and to improve literacy skills for children. (Interview, Taalim program director, January 2019)

As two program directors of Taalim explained, when the Syria crisis began in 2011, they were working in public schools with "children, regardless of who they are – Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian" (interview, Taalim program director, January 2019). For this reason, they had a clear vision for their work to serve all children in public schools: "Because of our vision and mission, we want to make sure the learning stays in the public school" (interview, Taalim program manager, September 2019). The executive director of Taalim put it this way:

> Because our goal is to make the public school a school of choice. It's really about making people understand that the public school is accessible and encouraging communities to join. (Interview, Taalim executive director, July 2019)

When the Syria crisis began, IFA reached out to Taalim. They were concerned about the integration of Syrian children into summer and afternoon nonformal education programs that aim to integrate refugee students into public schools. According to Taalim's program director,

> [IFA] asked us to integrate Syrian children into [our existing] summer program and to see if they do will do well and be able to join the scholastic year in 2012-2013. (Interview, Taalim program director, January 2019)

IFA had heard about Taalim through a mutual colleague who was an education consultant for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and later for IFA:

> Before 2010 and 2011, we had small funds, from friends to test what we're trying to do. [IFA] said, "Ah, okay… Who is out there who could help us to integrate children into public schools?" (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

The consultant who knew the work of both parties recommended Taalim: "This consultant recommended us as she had heard about our approach" (Interview, Taalim program director, January 2019). IFA and Taalim found that their mandates to "serve any child in need" and "no differentiation between Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi or [other children]" were well aligned (interview, Taalim program director, December 2019). As well, IFA could provide funding:

> We were very close in what we wanted for children, and they had funds, right? So, they had funds; and they needed to use [the funds]. So, we met their needs. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

[IFA] "used what [Taalim] was doing as a base to start" (interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019). A summer pilot program began to scale up with the support of IFA and approval from MEHE, because of its focus on public schools. According to the executive director:

> [IFA] helped us to start scaling up, with funds and capacity building, because the funds came and started increasing to basically make it more systematic, measurable, and scalable in the nonformal setting. In the meantime, the Ministry gave approval to enter the schools and do the work in the afternoon. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

The partnership with IFA was formalized concurrent with an influx of international funding to support Syria refugees.

Taalim's partnership with the Foundation for Education (FfE) came a few years later. Taalim submitted a proposal for funding to FfE (Interview, Taalim program manager,

September 2019). The partnership "was initiated to [...] mainly help in transitioning learners into public school." Learners transitioned into Grade 1 and enrolled in a homework support program. According to a program manager, "We didn't just enroll them in public school, but we also followed up with them" (Interview, Taalim program manager, September 2019).

From the perspective of FfE, a systematic process led to the partnership with Taalim:

> we had an internal system where we rated different organizations and we asked them to submit pieces of evidence about their approaches. So, whether it's external aberration research or whatever. And that information piece, positive evaluations, or research that fed also into our decision-making. So we had a complex matrix with a number of criteria and that was then filled by two people independently and all arrived at the same conclusion about who we wanted to fund. And [Taalim], luckily, ended up in this matrix as well. (Interview, FfE education lead, February 2020)

A component of FfE's selection criteria included partners that can support change at a systems level in-county: "we are really focusing on partners who work systematically to have a systematic change" (interview, FfE education officer, February 2020). And Taalim fit this profile.

With funding and support in place, Taalim grew from a volunteer organization to an established provider of education programs that supported the academic integration of Syrian students into public schools.

Coordination

According to interviews, IFA and FfE differed in their approach to coordination with Taalim. IFA held formal monthly meetings and regular coordination meetings:

> We have approximately four coordination meetings per month in different regions because we work across different regions. So, coordination, not just one-to-one, but with all the NGOs who are there, and we coordinate [our work with them]. (Interview, IFA program managers, September 2019)

In contrast, coordination with FfE appeared to take on a more organic nature, and Taalim's staff spoke about this in terms of communication. FfE visited Lebanon twice a year and other conversations were held online, via Skype and other platforms (interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019).

Taalim staff described their communication with FfE as taking place on a more personal level:

> All they care about is the children. We [sometimes receive an] email [from FfE] to

> ask about just [how] one specific child [is doing]. This is how much they care, and they follow up a lot. On the quality of the implementation, [they might inquire]: How is the teaching going? Do you have enough resources? Do you have enough materials? How is the hygiene of the center? Do you have all the materials needed to be able to implement correctly and to respect a minimum standard of quality? (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

According to Taalim, coordination with FfE entailed ongoing communication and follow up. And it felt personal.

> Yes, they are funding [our work], but not just funding. They care a lot about the quality of implementation, so that is why they have their own monitoring visits and they follow up on the recommendations [in conversation with us]. (Interview, program manager2, September 2019)

Relationships between partners

Differences in approach to coordination were indicative of differences in relationships between the partners.

Taalim described its relationship with IFA as being characterized by conditions, reporting, evaluation, and a focus on targets. The program directors cited examples of IFA's conditions, such as:

> One of their conditions was to have an external evaluator to accompany us from the time we recruit teachers, train them and coach them, to the time we recruit the children and put them in classes and engage their parents. (Interview, program director, January 2019)

IFA also required a lot of visibility in partnership activities with Taalim:

> Unlike [FfE], they require a lot of visibility within the centers within [...] in each center [...] because [IFA] receives funds from different donors, so we have to show every single donor within every single classroom and in the hallways. (Interview, program manager, September 2019)

According to program directors and managers at Taalim, IFA took a more top-down approach to the partnership than FfE and did not communicate their broader strategy: "[IFA] does not think with you in terms of strategy for what makes sense for Lebanon." This issue of a top-down approach and limited communication was compounded as the relationship grew: "As we work more and more closely with them [they are] not sharing their thinking" (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019). The executive director of Taalim described this challenge at length in two separate interviews:

> When you start a partnership, you should have an exit strategy so that you don't leave everyone in the cold. You have to start with a clear plan of how it will end, otherwise it will be a vulnerable partnership. The ending of a partnership shouldn't end with a dollar sign. With [IFA], we've grown a lot with them, but there's no clear exit strategy. I used to take initiative to visit and meet with [IFA] to create something transferable, but they're not cooperative. They understand aid and support as instantaneous. (Interview, Taalim executive director, July 2019)

> If you ask me what was one of the main challenges with [IFA], I would say, not sharing their plans and timeline, which is different you know? When we don't understand, we don't have exposure to the strategy that comes their way. What is their exit strategy? What is their forward strategy? (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019]

This lack of transparency regarding the timeline for the Taalim-IFA partnership created an unequal power dynamic between the two partners and a sense of vulnerability for Taalim, whose directors were unclear about when and how the partnership might end. IFA had the power to dictate these terms: "Of course, they are a larger organization, they have multiple donors; we're just one of the partners" (interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019). The unequal power dynamic was also felt in how IFA dictated where Taalim would work:

> One day they told us: "You can't work in the South anymore". We used to work all over Lebanon. […] They said "No, we have another partner who's going to work in the South." […] So here they stand, and you're a local NGO who needs to be working all over Lebanon; your mandate says, "all over Lebanon," and now your funding says "areas [of Lebanon]." […] I brought it to their attention, but it fell on deaf ears. (Interview, executive director, August 2019)

In reflecting on equity in their partnership with IFA, Taalim's executive director said: "It seems to be an opportunity-based relationship with [IFA], okay? Opportunity is a normal thing, but it should not be felt all the time, "Now the opportunity is here, now we can drop and go, drop and go, drop and go" (interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019).

An unequal power dynamic was also evident in IFA's focus on data, numbers, and targets through a demand for regular reporting that put Taalim under pressure to meet externally-defined goals. The pressures of reporting and meeting targets was felt across the organization's leadership.

> With [IFA], […] they also focus a lot on numbers and targets because they have certain targets that they have to meet. So we are pressured to meet their targets. For [IFA], we have monthly reports. We used to have weekly also, but now we've […] they go for monthly and quarterly, and every detail of all the implementation is mentioned within the reports. (Interview, Taalim program manager, September

> 2019)

> You have to work in a very tight system. [IFA] supported the purchase of, for example, a system that's allowed us to track whatever we're purchasing, to the time that we are paying, so all the information system tracking, all of that. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

Over the course of the partnership, Taalim's work was both scaled up and adapted to meet IFA's evolving requirements and goals. This growth involved risk:

> I understand we're a local partner. But, with all the risks that [Taalim] took, from managing a million dollars to suddenly managing four million on one project with [IFA] and whatever they would sell us we'd say, "Okay we're going to go and do it." (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

The partnership gave Taalim a tremendous opportunity to broaden the scope of their work and reach more children. However, Taalim did not feel adequately supported in this growth.

> I think they were too over-burdened themselves to be able to be partners, in the sense that is needed when you have somebody implementing something of the scale of four million, for example. It was like, "Okay, what supports this?" Is it just sending a few people to be trained on finance or procurement? Is that barely enough? No. You cannot do that. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

Taalim contrasted IFA's approach to the partnership with FfE:

> You send [IFA] reports and the reports are not followed, which means, "Okay, only the financials are checked," but actually to say, "Okay, how far are we?" [FfE] actually receives, studies, assesses, "Let's look at the way forward." This is not done with [IFA]. They don't have it as part of their practice. [...] So, we're learning these practices by working with others, to say, "Okay, we need to have this without..." The way we're working to make sure that, yes, now we finished let's say the first quarter; how well will we do in the second quarter?" and so on. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

In contrast, interviews suggested that FfE had a much more collaborative relationship with Taalim, characterized by flexibility, commitment, and mutual learning. According to a program director:

> [FfE] were really keen in understanding what is the need there, and they were flexible, if we told them, "They need this here." And they would be identifying with you, to make sure [...]. They were not working, just to work. So there was this kind of collaboration and understanding. Some [partners] have some fixed idea [of what]

> is to be done. [FfE] would not say that; they would say, "Okay, this is what we can do; tell me how we can support you," for example. [...] They were together with us, assessing the need. So this helps, this makes us more at ease, because this is real partnership. When we work really collaboratively, they benefit from what we give them; they learn from our experience; and [we learn] from their capacity, because they have experience as well. (Interview, Taalim program director, December 2019]

> For example when they said, "Typically our way is that, in the last four months of the project, you pay, and then we reimburse you," and we told them, "We don't work this way; we don't have funds to work this way," and really, there was no question about it. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

As these excerpts illustrates, for Taalim, working collaboratively entailed flexibility, mutual learning, and support. The program managers and executive director of Taalim described this aspect of their partnership with FfE at length, and also noted that this collaboration, support, and mutual learning involved listening and trust:

> From the start it was a collaborative approach. True, [FfE] do give recommendations, but at the end, they give us the choice, given the context, if these recommendations can be applied or not. There is trust. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

> They listen very well. They come as a supporting partner. From day one, they are there to see what's lacking and make sure you get it. They think with you. They want to see quality, which means that they ensure that you get the right training for it. What's the latest out there; they link you to the latest; they link you to partners. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

> Since the start we had clear criteria, benchmarks for implementation of [the program] and we could improve a lot through this partnership, through their monitoring and evaluation process. During the first year, they sent an external monitoring and evaluator, and they gave us recommendations based on which we could improve our safety, for example, the safety in the schools. They provided us with opportunities for trainings, for capacity building, for networking with other partners that they are also collaborating with. [...] We learned a lot through this partnership. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019)

> After we present interim reports, for example, we rarely receive comments or questions or inquiries for more details, because the trust is there. (Interview, Taalim program director, September 2019)

Taalim described FfE as providing a "system of support" in which evaluation was about organizational learning towards a shared vision of quality provision:

> It's an entire system of support. They fund the project with all the details that are

> required [in terms of design and planning]. They think with you, they help you see if this is going to be doable. […] So they accommodate the partner and they always are there for support. (Interview, executive director, August 2019)

> The effort there is really to provide the quality of implementation needed, rather than to provide, really, numbers and targets. It is more convenient to work like this because we know that the focus is about quality and not about targets, nor about numbers. (Interview, program manager1, September 2019)

> So, this is a unique partner, they not only had evaluators to see how well we were doing, but to help them really use [the evaluation], not just for the process of documentation. It was actually evaluation to learn how to serve better. (Interview, executive director, August 2019)

Collaboration also meant joint planning, which was important to Taalim: "And the vision forward, that, I think, is the most important" (interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019):

> They are the only partner to ever think strategy-wise [with us]. As they define the strategy for the next three years, they are working with [Taalim] on it, and not only [Taalim], but other partners [as well]. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

> We are planning together how to transfer all the lessons learned from the [program] to feed into the system, to feed into the public schools. So, together we plan for the future. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019)

There was a shared sense among Taalim's leadership that FfE's partnership was equity driven, and this was evident to them in the ways they worked together, as well as their vision for the work with Syrian refugee children.

> [FfE] are a very strong partner for education, for equity. I would say they are a unique institution, that all of the people who work there are there because they're driven towards this equity, towards ensuring that children get the rights that they deserve. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

And FfE views their role as funders as a way to empower in their local partners: "when funding is there, and a partner is getting funding from multiple resources, you feel their power is there… you feel them more powerful" (interview, FfE education officer, February 2020).

In contrast to IFA, it was apparent to partners at Taalim that FfE did not value visibility:

> They don't like visibility at all. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

> And, they don't want to be known, they don't want visibility, not like other partners. Other partners they want to be visible and you're not visible, that's the tendency. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

FfE committed multiyear funds from the outset, and then extended these: "So, they start [their commitment] from the beginning; you sign an agreement over three years. This [level of commitment], we never had from anybody" (interview, executive director, August 2019). There was a sense that Taalim's work with FfE was characterized by longterm commitment, beyond funding, with an eye to sustainability. Taalim also noted that the work was evidence-based to ensure this sustainability:

> When you involve the partners in the field in your thinking, [it is clear] that when you exit [...] the partnership, [FfE] will remain a partner for [Taalim]. So [the partnership] is not tied to money. It's tied with the mission and vision of what can be out there as a solution. (Interview, executive director, August 2019)

> [FfE] is all based on research, so they're connected to universities. Their interventions are evidence-based and sustainable, and they're extremely committed. (Interview, executive director, July 2019)

FfE's perspective echoed Taalim's experiences in their partnership. According to a FfE education director, partnership has a deeper meaning than simply funding an organization: "partnership has a different meaning. So it's not a funder and a grantee, no, it goes really beyond" (interview, FfE education director, February 2020).

FfE prioritized a sense of ownership for their partners, such as Taalim. Through "ownership... with the partners [...] it's not something that is imposed from the outside... Collaboration is not just something artificial, but that it's really... it has a special purpose" (interview, FfE education director, February 2020).

While the nature of the relationship between Taalim and IFA, and Taalim and FfE differed, Taalim valued both partnerships for helping them to grow and learn, albeit in different ways:

> The organization that helped our growth in terms of availability of opportunities, it's [IFA]. But the organization that helped us grow in thinking is [FfE]. [...] They grew the abilities of the implementing team generously. They understood the growth process, and they knew what to focus on. (Interview, Taalim executive director, July 2019)

In addition, "They expose your thinking. They allow you to advocate the work." Taalim's executive director reflected: "The mix of partnerships empowered us" (Interview, Taalim executive director, July 2019)

Community participation

Regardless of with whom Taalim partnered, they prioritized community participation. Taalim described community participation in terms of their work with teachers and parents of the Syria refugee children they served in their programs. While they did not hire Syrian teachers, "Syrian parents can join as volunteers" (interview, Taalim program director1, January 2019). They worked with teachers who conducted the program through:

> Capacity building for the teachers, which includes teacher training and then the coaching sessions throughout the implementation process, and also to cover the activities that are related to parental sessions. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

They also met regularly with parents in order to maintain strong communication:

> Every two weeks, we bring parents into a meeting. We need to know who the children in our organization are, where this child is coming from, his background, social environment, and parents. We need to assess the community. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, January 2019)

> We need to have strong communication with them. (Interview, Taalim program director2, January 2019)

In biweekly meetings with parents, Taalim provided guidance to parents on how they might support their children's learning:

> Every program has a parental component. We give parents tangible skills on how to prepare their children academically. (Interview, Taalim program director1, January 2019)

> We also tell […] the parents that they are the teachers at home, because we want the child to start school at ease, be able to work with a group of students. (Interview, Taalim program director2, January 2019)

Their work with parents integrated other areas of well-being as well:

> Although we are not an organization that is specialized in health or protection, we integrate them […] We include the parents always, which is very good. We always raise awareness on protection issues, and do referrals to other organizations [who are specialized in child protection]. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, January 2019)

In order to ensure community participation, they addressed potential barriers to participation:

> We provide the parents with transportation. We provide them with snacks so that accessibility to the centers is not an obstacle for them, so that they can come and attend these sessions. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, January 2019)

Through their work with parents and teachers, Taalim, served as the entry point for community participation in their partnerships with both IFA and FfE.

Outcomes

Taalim maintained careful assessment of student academic outcomes, in terms of measurable progress, retention, and integration into public schools. They also evaluated their teachers and surveyed parents: "Observations, reporting, focus group discussions with children and parents, with the school staff, or teachers. These were the kinds of evaluations we were doing" (interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019). They also made use of both internal and external outcomes evaluations. Through these various inputs, they identified positive outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative, for teachers, learners, and their parents: "The benefits are a lot, not just on the level of learners" (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019).

For example, in pre- and post-assessments of their partnership activities with IFA and FfE, there was clear academic progression:

> The differences were significant on a statistical level so the progress on the level of learners is there. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019).

> We have statistical data of when we intervene, the pre- and post- for each child and each teacher. I mean, the teacher before she gets trained and after she gets trained, even the public school teachers. And the children, before they start with the intervention and after, and you can see significant change. And you can compare it to other schools, and we did that, those schools who did not receive any intervention. And you can see the difference between the results. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019).

> For example, the grade 1 learners, who transition from [Taalim] to grade 1 [in public schools], we collected their results from the public schools, and we compare their results to other learners who didn't benefit [from our program] or who were in other centers or with other NGOs and the results came back better. The public school results for learners who transitioned from Taalim are better than the national grade level for grade 1. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

Taalim also tracked qualitative progress of students, which gave evidence of improved retention and integration through IFA partnership activities:

> We have principals who are sharing with us that their students' attendance is

> improved, their behavior is improved. [...] And lately, with the retention support [work], the principals can share the grades so we can know who are the children that are still in need of remedial and homework support programs. (Interview, Taalim program director1, January 2019)

> We just did research in 12 schools [...] showing that students now say, "I feel that I belong in this school," "I am less fearful than before." What makes children drop out is that they feel all the time that they are wrong. [...] An external evaluation showed that those who had went through our approach were rated excellent in reading and in math. So far, everywhere we refer children [in public schools], they tell us that they are the most engaged in their education, they have better attendance, and they are doing much better in school. (Interview, Taalim program director2, January 2019)

Partnership activities demonstrated positive outcomes for teachers and parents as well:

> On the level of teachers, because we also have evaluation polls for teachers' performance, [we found that the] teachers also evolve, because one of the main components is to build capacities of the teachers. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019).

> We follow up on the quality of teaching and learning, lesson planning, classroom management and structure. And you will notice that a lot of the teachers had no idea, or actually didn't bother setting a lesson plan for children. Yet, although the quality and the knowledge that the teacher has within the classroom is very low, you notice that these two components mostly lesson planning and quality of teaching has improved. Of course, in addition to classroom management because they go hand in hand. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

> On the level of parents, there are focus group discussions and surveys. Parents also expressed how they changed their relations with their children, how they benefit from the parenting sessions that we are conducting. How they are now aware of the importance of education or the importance of following up with their children. So we are really noticing and we are really seeing and observing all this progress not just on the level of learners but on all these levels. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2019)

Impact of compounding crises on partnership

Lebanon's compounding crises had severe impacts on the day-to-day operation of Taalim's partnership activities with IFA and FfE, as well as Taalim's staff. For this reason, we were not able to observe their partnership activities in person or online. Similar to other organizations in our country analysis, operational challenges manifested in logistical, financial, educational, and partnership-related ways. Taalim also spoke to us at length about the impact of crisis on their personal well-being as

staff members. Here we provide some examples of these impacts and how Taalim and its partners worked around some of these challenges to sustain partnership activities, where possible.

By late 2019, the political and economic crises in Lebanon had already begun to take their toll on Taalim staff, impacting their personal well-being and ability to plan, in turn affecting program operations at all levels: "Because the community depends on us and the staff depends on the management also, so everybody is connected. The child and his family depend on how much we can cope with the situation as well" (interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019). A program director openly described the impact on staff well-being:

> When things become even more uncertain and complicated, […] deep inside nobody is stable. Even as we speak now, there are many things happening in my head right now. [Loses her train of thought.] What is it that I wanted to tell you? Oh yes, I was in a meeting in [another country] and I was talking about a project and at the end, I was like, "Listen to me, whatever I'm telling you now, don't even register it, because tomorrow I might tell you something else." Can you imagine how huge this is? That whatever we say now might not be real tomorrow? […]You can't plan anything. You can't expect anything. How does your mind work [in this situation]? At the level of staff and employee, [the crisis] is already huge. (Interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019)

For the Taalim program director, uncertainty, the inability to plan, and staff well-being were interconnected. Further, she described the related stress of decision-making within the context of school closures and disruption, asking:

> How do you cope with that? How do you take good decisions?
>
> The schools were interrupted […] We open [email] to see whether HR sent anything. Every minute, the TV, every minute, checking: Do we go to work or do we not go to work? Do we stay, are the roads closed or not? How do you immediately close a center? We have people implementing there. How do we follow up on the staff? How can I tell them, "Okay send children home or don't send them? Maybe they go home by bus and something happens? It was very stressful. […] One minute the Ministry would say there is school, and the next, no school. How can you live like that? How? What measurements can you take, and children are sometimes in the school. Sometimes they are not. Okay keep them; how do you send the message, then tell the parents, do I tell the parents, so they panic? Do we take this responsibility on us or not? (Interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019)

In addition to stress related to the responsibility for others' well-being, Taalim staff coped with the uncertainty and stress of a deepening economic crisis that left them unable to access their money:

> People don't have money to take out of their bank account. How can I ask somebody to be ready for work, be at ease, and do what they have to do [when they can't access their money]? No. I don't know if I can cash my money, if I will have gas tomorrow, or if I will have food to eat. Sometimes [colleagues] would say, let's all go to the supermarket; we don't know if there will be food tomorrow. Then we'd all run to the supermarket. This is not life. (Interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019)

Parents kept children home due to uncertainty in the security situation. Conditions declined rapidly, requiring revisiting contingency plans:

> There were delays in deliverables. There was an impact on the quality of the continuation of the program, an increase in child absenteeism, even when the roads were open and even before the lockdown because of COVID-19. Parents were aware of the risks that they were exposing their children to. This is before we had the option to go online, or to go distance learning. As an organization we had to review our contingency plans, and include measures that we never experienced before; we had measures that relate to health outbreaks, but not like this pandemic. So, the crises also impacted the HR requirement for staff; there were implications including training that we had to provide our staff to improve their skills. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

When the reality of the pandemic set in towards the end of March 2020, Taalim participated in developing and implementing a large-scale rapid needs assessment for all families engaged in their nonformal education programs and public schools participating in their programs. The purpose was to "assess the environment to see if it enables us to continue engaging children in learning," so that they could "decide how to continue providing the teaching and learning services [specific to] each program" (interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020).

> This assessment allowed us to know who has what, from technology to connectivity, and who is willing to continue receiving tips [on] wellbeing and health programs on a WhatsApp or messaging group through social media. Based on the findings, we prepared our intervention for remote learning, and so far we are reaching approximately 800 children remotely. And by next week, we hope to reach 1100 children, providing continuous support for the children and their parents in the programs they were enrolled in before COVID. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

Like other organizations in the country analysis, the compounding crises had financial impacts:

> The economic restrain had us reduce some posts or positions. The [services] that were most affected were at the operational level in the field. For example, we used to use a lot of drivers to transport the children; we used to use a lot of food

> providers to make snacks for children; so these are services that stopped [with the closure of schools]. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for education delivery, including "content provision, pedagogical preparation, professional development" in order to provide services remotely (interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020). Teachers were trained to use online tools, such as converting PowerPoint into videos. Taalim teachers moved their work to WhatsApp groups "because most of our beneficiaries are families that depend of WhatsApp as a bundle or as social media that is more affordable to them." Teachers with pre-existing knowledge of technology stayed on; whereas others "who didn't have any knowledge and were not willing to learn left." Teachers told Taalim staff: "I just can't do this at the moment, but when you come back face-to-face, we are willing to continue working" (interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020). Thus the crises impacted teacher retention.

The challenges of distanced education delivery required expanding community participation to include parent engagement in areas that were expected of teachers prior to the pandemic:

> We prepared a 12 week focus on the most essential competencies or objectives that we see lend themselves to distance learning. For example, the things which required teachers to observe are being passed on parents to participate, and we are giving them some tips [and telling them] that you need to observe your child bounce a ball, you need to observe your child saying "please," and all of these things. The instructions are more in the cognitive and psychomotor domains. But we request parents to use materials available to them at home, as we don't want to put additional burden on them, since the students are not in the classroom. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

Parents were also asked to observe their conversations with younger children and to be able to "reflect back" when called upon during weekly feedback sessions.

Parents who had dropped out of programs at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic began to return to the programs once they "started receiving feedback from their neighbors or their relatives on how [online learning] is being done." Yet challenges to service delivery persisted:

> We found that most of the families depend on one device, which is the smart phone. Few used computers, laptops or tablets: 90%-99% use smart phones; and smart phone availability was limited to three hours per day and these are the late afternoon hours when the household head like the mother or father comes back from outside to have the cell phone or smart phone available for the children to reach or access the content. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

Despite this limitation, many parents continued to engage their children, because:

> We respected their suggestion to receive only up to three lessons per week and each lesson not to exceed 3-4 minutes of loading time to save their data. So what we did is that we amended all our lessons for instruction to be sent verbally or through a video to avoid the illiteracy struggle for some parents or for children who are not yet reading fluently to understand what's requested from them to be doing. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

Furthermore, Taalim reached out to parents every week by phone or WhatsApp to request feedback on the quality of the educational material:

> Was it needed, was it appropriate for their children, was it engaging? And we are asking them, whenever possible, to share evidence of engaging the children in the activities, and we are receiving from parents either videos of their children working on the activity or photos of their children working on the activities. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

In this way, through engaging community members, Taalim persisted in many of their activities. One program director questioned: "How much do our partners, who might not be here, how much do they understand what is really happening here?" (interview, Taalim program director1, December 2019).

Yet, they found that FfE were:

> Reassuring and emotionally supportive. They do understand the struggle we are facing in Lebanon since the October uprising, and they do understand the struggle during COVID-19, because it was internationally impacting everyone. Their understanding and support were so encouraging; it boosted our spirit and gave us hope in thinking [about how] to be more effective in [what] we need to do. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

The partnership with IFA persisted as well, and Taalim saw this as an outcome of the longevity of the partnership and a signal of their success in meeting targets:

> It has been a very long partnership, and we've seen other NGOs, [IFA] especially, stopped a lot of their partnerships. [But] it is still continuing with [Taalim]. So this is a big sign of success for [Taalim]. (Interview, Taalim program manager2, September 2020)

According to a program director, FfE in particular, understood the implications of the crises on various areas, including:

> on the budget, on the activities, and on the modalities, the new modalities. They were back and forth just as you are asking me now: Why you are doing this, how you are doing this? And they were open minded. (Interview, Taalim program

> director2, June 2020)

In particular, FfE were attentive to the needs of Taalim staff, as well as the beneficiaries of their programs:

> "We want you as an organization and as a staff, and as well as the beneficiaries, to be well and to do the best for you and for the beneficiaries, not only the beneficiaries." They minded our program, our team, our operations, as well as their beneficiaries; so, there wasn't a focus on targets only. It was more a combination of care, understanding, and technical support. (Interview, Taalim program director2, June 2020)

FfE recognized the challenges crises posed for their partners, especially the pandemic: "it has distracted the partners. So the partners had to focus on different things. How to help children during the crisis, either in any location or setting up some kind of distance learning now with whatever means or focusing on the health aspect" (interview, FfE education director, December 2020).

In order to support partners such as Taalim, FfE adjusted expectations and offered flexibility regarding time and focus:

> We gave partners more time, so our investments are less geared towards imminent service delivery with exceptions on the regions where they are geared towards strategic change. We understand that some of these priorities had to be put on hold […] We did not put pressure on the partner because I mean, wouldn't make any sense to pressure the partner and if priorities have shifted due to circumstances that are beyond their control. (Interview, FfE education director, December 2020)

FfE cites ongoing communication, which they were able to sustain virtually during the pandemic, as a critical component to partnership sustainability:

> [FfE] was still able to be in contact with partners and closely listen to them and I think this was very important […] we have built up relationships of trust […] And I think that has helped us and helped partners to adapt to this situation and make decisions that are in the interests of both sides. (Interview, FfE education director, December 2020)

Through care, understanding, communication, trust, flexibility, and concrete measures of support to amend budgets and operations, partnerships were sustained with Taalim's staff and programs.

Promising Partnership B practices

Taalim's partnership with a large international organization, IFA, differed in nature from its partnership with a smaller private foundation, FfE. Although both partnerships

served the goal of preparing young Syrian learners for successful entry into Lebanon's public schools over many years and did so with measurable success, their partnership practices differed, and these differences were magnified as Taalim persisted through Lebanon's multiple compounding crises. When Taalim reflected on what partnership practices sustained them as an organization and as individuals, they referred to FfE as an exemplar, citing trust and respect between the two partners; open, ongoing, and transparent communication; space for mutual learning and self-reflection; and care. Independently, FfE identified similar features in their partnership with Taalim, and through their concern for the well-being of their partners.

Both Taalim and FfE referred to trust and respect as important features of effective partnerships. Trust and respect manifested in a variety of collaborative practices, such as "thinking through" challenges and plans, and transparency in communication.

> For example, when [FfE was undergoing internal change], and we were requesting an additional year of implementation, they were very transparent. They asked us to wait until they figured out their internal strategies. They were also very transparent in their monitoring visits and recommendations, all the time. Collaboration with FfE was always based on transparency. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

> I would say [FfE] was the one who's the most transparent. And also, the ones we've never had a major challenge with. I mean this is already into our fourth year and I would say the fact that they were so transparent from day one made the communication easy. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

The practice of transparency and open communication with FfE, in contrast to lack of transparency and strict reporting measures with IFA, allowed for more collaborative planning and problem-solving, in turn reinforcing equitable relationships among partners.

As described earlier, these dynamics further opened up spaces for mutual learning.

> [FfE] take our opinion and feedback. They request our feedback about other NGOs and any kind of training that took place. They are with us; they include us in their thinking about the future of [education]. (Interview, Taalim program manager1, September 2019)

> So for example, a year ago as they were re-thinking the strategy of their association. […] Before they made any changes, they sent evaluators to get feedback to understand how best to change and then, after that, before setting the plan, they came to Lebanon, we met, we spoke over the phone, we went with them to the Ministry […]. Total openness. […] So, their strategy setting is based… is bottom up, is really seeing what's out there, is considering the beneficiaries, is considering sustainability, is considering… you know? (Interview, Taalim executive director,

> August 2019)

According to Taalim's executive director, strong partnerships involve partners "thinking through solutions" together and communicating plans:

> For example, [FfE] share exactly what challenges they're seeing, and they think through with us about possible solutions [...] they discuss very openly also what they think could be happening at their institution, so they don't hide what's going on in the thinking. (Interview, Taalim executive director August 2019)

Taalim also felt that their partnership with FfE was characterized by care. FfE supported them in their growth and attended to their needs as people during crisis. They demonstrated care through commitment that was apparent to Taalim:

> They are after the common good. That's why for example, if you tell them "visibility," they say, "We don't want visibility, you are doing good job, you need to come out. (Interview, Taalim executive director, August 2019)

In our interviews with Taalim and FfE, the principles of trust, respect, communication, mutual learning, and care emerged as promising practices, supporting Taalim through extreme personal and operational difficulties through multiple crises, and sustaining partnership activities in the service of Syrian refugee education in Lebanon.

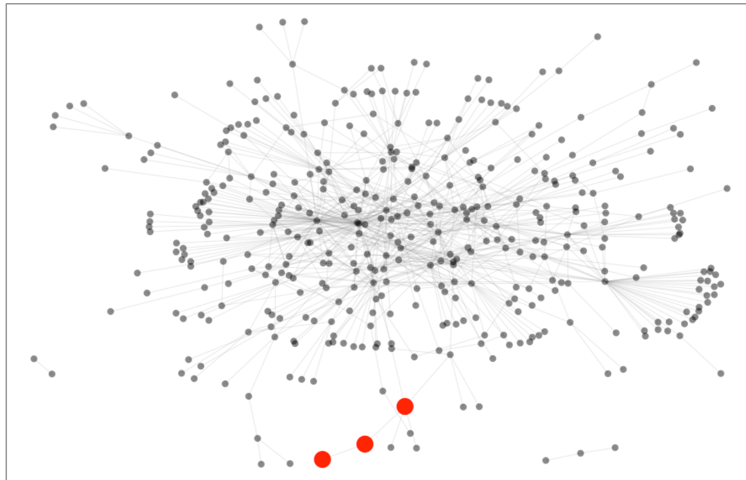
5.4 Partnership Case Study C

Partnership, initiation, and activities

Partnership Case Study C involved a non-profit, faith-based private school, which we refer to as Our Faith School (OFS), in partnership with two other faith-based organizations: a Lebanese faith-based NGO, which we call Iman Lebanon, and a faith-based international NGO headquartered in the Global North, which we call International Faith Ministry (IFM). Both Iman Lebanon and International Faith Ministry supported Old Faith School's educational activities. The Principal of OFS identified the two organizations as their main partners. The partnerships were based on shared faith and personal relationships.

A network visualization of the three organizations demonstrates their position within the network structure, shown as red dots, and ties to other organizations working on Syria refugee education within Lebanon (Figure 5.7). All three organizations had low centrality measures, among the bottom quarter of organizations throughout the study. The partnership with Iman Lebanon ended in 2020, following Lebanon's compounding crises.

Figure 5.7: Network sociogram of Our Faith School, Iman Lebanon, and International Faith Ministry



Our Faith School was a small faith-based private school in Beirut with a diverse population of learners in Grades K-9, including Syrian refugee students, integrated into one shift.

> If you look at our numbers, 45% are Syrian, 5% are other nationalities, 50% are Lebanese. 50% Muslim, 50% Christian. […] You have Kurds, Armenians, Arabs, so it's a healthy reflection I think of the neighborhood, which means we are managing to serve the neighborhood. […] So we are happy with that. I think if we ever lose that then we should ring the alarm or something. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Despite being a faith-based school, the student population included those belonging to other religions and sects. Among students of other nationalities were Iraqi students. The school also welcomed as students the children of domestic workers. This level of integration of diverse religions, nationalities, and socio-economic groups is atypical for a Lebanese private school (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019). The school had been in operation for over 50 years. It was founded and governed by Our Faith Church. As a neighborhood school in an impoverished area, the school had always enrolled "economically vulnerable" students, with most students paying partial tuition, and some paying none: "We don't send kids home; we try to keep them" (interview, OFS Dean, December 2019). The school was registered with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and taught the official Lebanese curriculum in Arabic and English.

After 2012, the population of school-aged Syrian children increased dramatically.

> We live in an area of Beirut where hundreds of thousands of refugees were coming in. Many of the kids could not find a school. They might go to public schools, but it is hard for them to succeed if they don't speak English or French. In private schools like ours, while we can give students more care, but the tuition might be too high for them. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

> In 2012 many Syrians who came started to live beside us in these buildings. Some came to church, some didn't. [Two members of the Church said]: Why don't you visit the Syrian refugees? Because part of the ministry involves home visits, obviously, just taking care of people, seeing what they need. So, […] we visited a

> Syrian family. We took some food with us, etcetera. And then slowly we started to serve Syrian refugees, visiting them. It started out very simple, you take some food with you, visit them, spend time with them and then leave. And then slowly NGOs started to call, [Iman Lebanon and] others, saying we're giving out food coupons, stuff… I think it started with a few families from the church, who were Syrians. Who came to church who were of the same faith, and they didn't have a school for their kids, so the church spoke with the school saying: Can you accept them? We said yes, if the church can pay a bit, we will accept them. […] And then we contacted [IFM] saying this is happening, we signed an agreement saying they will sponsor… I think the first number was 25 kids. So we opened the door, then [Iman Lebanon] started to send kids. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

International Faith Ministry helped to fund the school by supporting the tuition fees of students: "They would pay part of the tuition, we would pay a part, and the parents would pay a part" (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019). The sponsorship program was in place prior to the Syrian crisis (interview, OFS Dean, December 2018). However, when the refugee crisis began, Our Faith School reached out to IFM to request additional support for Syrian students in order to enroll them alongside the general student population of the school. IFM initially agreed to pay full tuition for 25 Syrian students attending the school. "That's how it started […] They've been helping us ever since" (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019).

> With [IFM], it did not start with the refugees at all; we had that partnership before. The [IFM], wherever they find a need for people to work with, especially that we had a civil war and a lot of things happened. So, it started during the civil war and did not stop after it. After the Syrian war, a lot of refugee students started coming to the school and asking for help. We, as a school, were not able to help so we asked if we could have scholarships for refugees. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

The integration of Syrian students into Our Faith School occurred organically, in response to a need of the community.

> And then slowly, it was a flood. So, we didn't sit down and say we are going to register Syrian kids, but also no one said we shouldn't. There was never anyone saying we don't want Syrians in this school. We were worried about the finances, because even before the crisis, we've never been a wealthy school. We've always struggled to survive year to year. […] So, no one said no, but no one said yes, it just happened, really. So I think in this case it moved from the [local] church to the school, not the other way around, which is healthy I think. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

According to IFM's Global Program Coordinator,

> [IFM] had been supporting through a child sponsorship program, which has been

> happening for many years, but from around 2011 onward, I'd say there was an increase of support specifically for refugees coming from Syria. That has grown over time, and we have been committed to providing a grant each year to help refugee families who cannot afford to pay tuition or who can only pay a small amount of tuition. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

A year later, Iman Lebanon initiated a nonformal education program to support Syrian students: "We felt obliged to get involved in helping the Syrian families who came to Lebanon. [...] We wanted to build a good relationship with them, to accompany them on their journey" (interview, Iman Lebanon director, Feb 2019). The director of that program had a personal connection with Our Faith School's principal and Our Faith School "already had ties with that program because many people who work there also attend [Our Faith] church" (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019). The two organizations had worked on common projects in the past. For example, Iman Lebanon provided food aid to OFS students and conducted children's programs using OFS buildings on Saturdays.

> [Iman Lebanon] started a non-official school and when they started teaching, they found some of their students to be brilliant and needed to be registered in certified schools. We started with them by adding some of the students that needed to be registered in official schools. The number started with seven to eight children, then it increased to 10, then to 20... and last year, it was 50. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

> They approached us and said that they have students in their nonformal program that they would like to put in school. [...] We agreed to cover half of [the tuition] but advised that they should still follow up with their students in the afternoon, especially since we teach in English here. Students cannot make it without some external help in English. So that's how it all started. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Iman Lebanon ran an afterschool program to support the integration of Syrian students into formal schools, they referred those students to OFS, and provided partial tuition funding to support their integration directly into Our Faith School, alongside other students.

> They would enroll them in our regular school and then take care of them in the afternoon and help them with their homework, in the English language especially, since we teach in English. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

A teacher described the partnership as "more than about education; moral support also [...]. You want to teach them. They are refugees and there are people here who care about them" (interview, Science teacher, November 2020).

Coordination

Coordination between Our Faith School and Iman Lebanon, and Our Faith School and International Faith Ministry took place through communication between designated point people at each organization.

> We have one designated person at the school, and they have one [at IFM], and the coordination normally goes through these two personnel. They coordinate through emails and phone calls. There is one person at [Iman Lebanon] who is in charge of taking care of their students who study here. When there are meetings with the parents, she accompanies them. If we have any issues with students, we talk to her too. We talk to the parents too, but she is usually our first point of contact. She is in charge of the students, and she coordinates with me and with the principal. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

> We had a coordinator for the Middle East who was responsible for all the Middle East programmes. They were the people in charge of monitoring the projects, visiting the school, meeting with the school board. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

Coordination took place as a form of ongoing communication and focused largely on student referral and support, rather than operational matters:

> [Iman Lebanon] refers the students to us. […] They choose them and then refer them to us. On the other hand, we refer students to [IFM]. We choose them and then tell IFM we need funds for this number of students. It's all on us. [IFM] mostly coordinates with our principal. If there's a need, I help with reports and stories. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

> We coordinate with [Iman Lebanon] in return. […] If a student is misbehaving we tell the parents, and we tell [Iman Lebanon] that this certain student that they enrolled with us is not doing well. They're spending thousands of dollars a year on this [paying student tuition], so they deserve to know what is going on. We coordinate with the parents and [Iman Lebanon] at the same time. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Our Faith School also coordinated through communicating with the local church on "big decisions, so that what happens in the church tends to happen in school and vice versa." The school was governed by a board made up of pastors from the church, but the church was largely hands-off: "They leave us be. They don't tell us anything" (interview, OFS Dean, December 2019).

While Our Faith School had brought IFM and Iman Lebanon together, and the organizations had met at Our Faith School "a number of times," they did not work directly with each other. Rather, IFM and Iman Lebanon each coordinated directly

with Our Faith School to support Syrian students at the school (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019).

Iman Lebanon also communicated with other organizations to avoid duplication in the support they provided:

> We don't work with families who are receiving support from another organization. We coordinate with others in order to avoid duplication. (Interview, Iman Lebanon director, February 2019)

Our Faith School also coordinated regularly with the municipality. This coordination focused on participation in public programs:

> We coordinate a lot with the municipality. We send our teachers and students to the training programs that the municipality runs. They always have programs. They coordinate as well with the American University of Beirut and with the Lebanese University. The municipality hosts social workers who are doing their internships, so they send these social workers to us, and they give workshops on sexual health, women's rights, violence, etc. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Relationships between partners

Our Faith Schools' partnerships were grounded in strong personal relationships between members of the school, Iman Lebanon, and IFM. Members of the school and Iman Lebanon were also members of the local church, which was an extension of a wider faith community which IFM supported worldwide.

> The way that [IFM] works is that we work with local [Our Faith] groups in different countries to support them in their work. In some countries [Our Faith] churches or [Our Faith] schools are serving refugee populations [...] Wherever there are churches that are helping refugees, there are many cases where we are supporting their efforts. (Interview, IFM Global Program Manager, December 2020)

IFM's relationship with the school mainly revolved around providing funds to support students.

> In Lebanon, through [Our Faith School], it's primarily through funding. So, we did provide some different trainings over the years for people within [Our Faith] church, where we are doing [work on] child development or educational projects – different trainings in child protection and things like that, but I would say that the main way that we've been supporting this school is through funding. (Interview, IFM Global Program Manager, December 2020)

> [IFM] just provides the funds. They conduct visits just to see that we are implementing the program. They might ask for reports on our numbers. They ask

> for testimonies and success stories. They don't interfere in daily work because they are not in Lebanon. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

IFM trusted Our Faith School to run its own programs and did not interfere with operations. According to IFM's Global Program Manager,

> We mainly just fund [Our Faith] programs, but these programs are for everybody, not just for Christians, but also for people from all faiths and national backgrounds. We want to serve everybody equally. In terms of criteria, we support [Our Faith] partners, but we need to understand from them that they have the capacity to deliver a good program, and that they have the ability to provide quality education [...] and to manage finances, to run a program that will have positive outcomes. (Interview, IFM Global Program Manager, December 2020)

Various members of Our Faith School described relationships within Our Faith School and with Iman Lebanon as being "like a family" (Interviews, OFS Dean, Principal, December 2019). One teacher described relationships in this way:

> I know each one of them [teachers and staff] cares about the students. In my first year [at OFS], I noticed that even in teacher room, there was this sense of closeness to each other, like a family. Even with the students, to be honest, because I teach in another school; in the other school, there isn't this closeness between the teaching staff and the administration and students. [...] Teachers play sports and games with students and run activities outside the school for them. And the way they give importance to each student. Other schools, they don't have it. I work in a lot of schools, only one of them was like this [but they didn't] have activities like [OFS]. (Interview, OFS Science teacher, November 2020)

These relationships were observable in our site visit to the school in the ways in which school staff greeted one another, dropped in on the Dean to discuss issues, and spoke with students in the school yard. Students high-fived the Dean who addressed every student by name and asked how they were doing. It was also evident in the way the Dean managed a pair of rowdy boys who were misbehaving in one class. The Dean's office itself was central and had an open door, so that anyone—teachers, staff, students—could pop their head in, and they did.

The school Dean reflected on these relationships, saying:

> The school is happy and the church is happy. The students who are enrolled are happy and so are their parents. We have students who have finished 9th grade and either moved on to other schools or travelled abroad. They all look back with fondness on the school. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Community participation

Our Faith School's community included the parents of enrolled students, including Lebanese, Syrian, and other children, and the local church community. The school met with parents regularly, and as needed, to discuss student issues:

> We work just like any other school, and the Syrian parents are considered part of that. We have a school psychologist who works here part-time; if she sees a problem she speaks with the students and the parents. We have this system in place, and it can be used by the Syrians and the Lebanese. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

The Dean described their mechanisms for community participation as applying to everyone at the school: "We've never devised a system for the Syrian parents. The school system applies to everyone" (interview, OFS Dean, February 2019). The school had a parents' council – a group of parents who met to address concerns or provide input on decisions at and in conversation with the school. They also supported school activities. The officers were elected and included both Lebanese and Syrian parents. The Dean observed that this was a positive sign of Syrian families being integrated into the school:

> Recently, like this year's parents' committee which was elected two weeks ago. It is elected from the parents, and three of them are Syrian this year, which I think is great. It's healthy, it shouldn't be all Lebanese because half the parents are Syrian. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

However, the integration of Syrian students and families was not without its difficulties. Parents complained about the inclusion of Syrian refugees, citing political, economic, and sectarian reasons:

> We faced some resistance from different groups. One group was Lebanese parents. Because of [Lebanon's] history with Syria, some parents, especially the Christian ones, did not want to put their children in class with Syrian students. We did lose some families. Some Lebanese families just removed their kids from our school. Some kept their children here but always tell us that we should be helping Lebanese families instead of Syrian ones. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)
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> Most Lebanese parents are not too happy that their child is studying with Syrians who are also Muslim, who are also Kurds. For them, as Lebanese Christians – (I don't mean to offend)… Even some Muslim parents are not very happy […] We lost a few families over the years because of this. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Most families received tuition support, but Syrian students received more through Old Faith School's partnerships with Iman Lebanon and IFM. This created tension with Lebanese families who felt they should receive more support:

> They think it's not fair. […] They always tell us, "We are also poor, and you should be helping us." There are some disgruntled Lebanese parents from the host community. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

There were some disgruntled Syrian families as well, namely those on the school's waiting list:

> Some are not happy because we have a long waiting list. Even with the help of [Iman Lebanon] and [IFM], we still can't afford to accept everyone. There are tens of thousands of families in [the area], and we cannot support all of them. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Old Faith School was aware of discrimination against their Syrian students and actively sought to mitigate this through equitable tuition practices and integration into all facets of school life, including addressing issues with students and parents within the school community:

> Now, how do we go about doing that, solving that challenge [of community discrimination against Syrian students]? On the level of the students, we try to do team building activities. We do chapels. Of course, we talk about being a loving community. We phrase our rules in terms of being a loving community, being a respectful community to each other. I keep telling them, let's be a reflection of what it means to be a loving community, regardless of what's happening outside. And kids tend to bond easily. They bond over a basketball game. And parents, we do sometimes sessions for them, we do [joint activities], such as on Mothers Day, we get all the mothers together for a breakfast. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Iman Lebanon also provided spaces for community participation in their work with the school, and the school organized parent workshops and information sessions geared towards all parents to support their engagement in their children's education.

> [Iman Lebanon] helps the parents out. They conduct programs and trainings with the parents. […] We try to organize lectures and workshops for parents that are also geared towards everyone. Our Lebanese parents are also in need of help in raising their children. I don't remember doing anything specific with Syrian parents. They are generally cooperative in meetings. We talk about their kids, we talk about money issues, we talk about cultural issues. We meet with them sometimes. They are generally cooperative. They are happy to be here [in Lebanon] and to be here at the school. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

In reflecting on wider political tensions affecting the community and the school's approach to mitigating them and keeping families engaged, the OFS Dean stated:

> Every time something like this happens, this crisis, you have some parties like the

> FPN, the Aounis, they want to throw it on the Syrians, and the Christians think, "Oh this is happening because the Syrians are taking all the money." Which is not remotely true, because they're bringing money to the country, but… so yeah. Again, we don't have a big strategy, we just try to encourage people to accept each other. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Outcomes

Old Faith School's partnerships appeared to have a positive impact on Syrian student outcomes in terms of progression, retention, and integration into the school community. Though not directly involved in student matters, IFM's partnership ensured that Syrian students would enroll and remain supported financially, removing a significant barrier to integration. The partnership with Iman Lebanon also supported the enrollment of students through referral and tuition contributions, and provided academic support and follow up through the afternoon program. Iman Lebanon also kept track of how their students were doing at OFS and communicated concerns with parents. Together with measures of support taken at the school, in communication with parents, school support staff, and Iman Lebanon, Syrian students remained in school:

> I can't think of anyone who has dropped out, except for students who have resettled to the US or Australia. In general, most of the Syrian students in our sponsorship program take it very seriously. We don't tell them, we don't hang it over their heads, but some kids feel that if someone is helping them, then they should do well. We don't tell them that they should do well because someone is helping them. That's not right. But generally, we don't have a drop-out rate. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Furthermore, Old Faith School's partnerships and attention to issues of integration appeared to have a positive impact on Syrian student integration into the school community:

> The kids are very much integrated in the school. We've only had, in the past 6 years, maybe, I remember one fight which was related to… not ethnicity, because "We're all Muslim Arabs," but related to Syrian-Lebanese. Only one fight between two teens, hitting each other in six years. So, they're very much integrated in the school. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

However the Dean cautioned that this should not be taken as a sign that the students were accepted or integrated into the wider community:

> I wouldn't say they're integrated in society, the larger host community. We still get parents who come in and say you shouldn't serve the Syrians; you should serve the Lebanese only. Or they walk in and say [that] it's not fair, you're giving scholarships to Syrians and not to Lebanese, which is true, unfortunately. So, the host community is still very angry with us, the church and the school, for doing

> this. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Regarding academic achievement and progression from grade to grade, Syrian students were generally doing well too. Old Faith School had a part-time school psychologist and a speech and language therapist to support students, in addition to the supports provided by Iman Lebanon. The Dean approximated the rate of progression at 95%. Decisions about grade promotion were taken in conversation between the Dean, all of the teachers, and the specialists, who discussed the case of each student:

> At the end of the year we have a promotion meeting, where all the teachers are there, I'm there, and the therapists are there. And we go over the names of every kid, and then everyone speaks. So, we look at [the student's] grades, and their behavior, and the challenges. [...] So different factors are in place, not just the grades. But generally, most kids move up, a few kids repeat, and kids who are repeating and they have bad behavior, we say sorry we cannot keep them. But generally I think 95% from my experience. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

Academic outcomes for Syrian students appeared to be improving over time:

> In the first few years Syrians performed worse than others. This year, it's the same [for all groups of students], even many of the high achievers, if you might call them that, are Syrians. So, I think it's balancing out over time, there's less difference now. (Interview, OFS Dean, December 2019)

A Social Studies teacher, who taught his subject area in Arabic, remarked that "Some [Syrian] students became the top of their classes" (interview, December, 2020). A Science teacher similarly stated that some students made remarkable strides because the school supported motivated students and also made concerted efforts to understand the situation of each student by "meeting the families so that they learn more about their situation in general, not just their economic situation":

> Some of the students do not have parents. Maybe loss of something made a certain impact, moral or psychological. (Interview, Science teacher, November 2020)

> Some students showed significant improvement in just some months. Whatever we do as [OFS] or [Iman Lebanon], in the end [the impact] depends on the student. If the student is willing to study the language or s/he is in the mood to study the language or not. However, how we meet this willingness is up to us. (Interview, Science teacher, November 2020)

The director at Iman Lebanon described an outcome of the partnership in terms of hope:

> To describe the impact of our partnership on the children, we use the word "hope". [...] Giving a child hope is on its own a good achievement. We help the children

> see this hope, but we have to walk with them along the way in order to help them see it. We try to help them advance in life and get enrolled in formal education. (Interview, Iman Lebanon director, February 2019)

Observations

Old Faith School was a cheerful place amid a dreary urban jungle. The dingy concrete façade belied a child-friendly school with an open-air courtyard that served as the school's main sports and play area. On an upper level, the school also had a covered open-air playground for younger children, who clamored up the stairs joyfully for playtime. As they made their way, they counted the steps, following their teacher. The Dean pointed out two Syrian students, who, like the other children smiled and greeted the Dean along their way. On entering the faux-grass covered space, they scrambled to take turns on the small slides at the far end of the play area.

In the meantime, the older students were still in class and their voices could be heard over closed doors, responding to teachers. The school walls were painted in bright colors and the sunlit hallway and classroom doors were lined with student work. From the ceiling hung decorations in celebration of the upcoming winter holidays. Backpacks hung on hooks and in cubbies, and posters reminded students of the values of kindness and care.

On a Kindergarten classroom door, it read "Welcome to KG1" and a snow scene with cotton balls glued to blue paper greeted the students alongside green pine trees decorated with red pom poms. Inside the classroom, children sat around a rectangular table, busy in a learning activity with their teacher, who sat at the table with them, interacting with each child. All of the children appeared to be engaged in the activity, animated, moving in their seats, laughing and talking with each other and with the teacher. A huge white bear sat with "Barney," a character from a popular children's television show, atop a bookshelf that held colorful classroom manipulatives, such as blocks, counters, shapes, and stacking rings.

A room served as a library with red, green, and yellow tables and a modest collection of books. The school also had a chapel and several multipurpose spaces for congregation, their walls painted in bright murals of animals or plants.

The Dean's office was centrally located, with a large glass sliding door, making him visible and accessible to all members of the school community. Several times during our visit with him, teachers, administrative staff, and a member of the custodial staff popped their heads in to say "hello," or dropped in to discuss a student or other concern. The atmosphere appeared collegial and non-hierarchical, supporting what people told us in interviews about "family-like" relationships within the school community. In particular, the respectful relationships between the Dean and the custodial staff member who cracked a joke while extending herself to offer a cup of coffee signified an atmosphere of kindness and care and an attitude of

nondiscrimination.

Our conversation was interrupted by a teacher accompanying two teen-aged boys out of class: “I will not have them back until they learn their manners,” she said firmly. The Dean excused himself and stepped out. The boys had been misbehaving in class. The Dean spoke to them in the hallway in a manner that evoked kindness, asking for their perspective on what happened in class. They claimed that the lesson was “boring” and that the teacher expected memorization. The Dean asked them to consider the effort that the teacher was making to teach them and that they might express their feedback politely to the teacher. He accompanied them back to classroom where they apologized to the teacher. Before she could accept, the school bell rang for lunch!

Students streamed out of their classrooms and made their way down the stairs to the courtyard. As they passed the Dean on the stairs, they greeted and high-fived him. He spoke to each of them by name, asking how they were doing. They skipped down the stairs and sat or stood in groups in the courtyard, eating their sandwiches. The Dean remarked: “See how they are [in the courtyard]? There is no child standing alone or left out. You cannot tell who is Syrian or who is Lebanese. They are just together as children” (personal communication, December 2019).

The school population was visibly diverse, with Black, South Asian, and Southeast Asian students. Like other students, they interacted with the Dean on the stairs and with other children in the courtyard.

Impact of compounding crises on partnership

Lebanon’s compounding crises deeply impacted the operation and community of Old Faith School and its partnerships. These challenges included logistical, financial, educational, and partnership-based issues. In this section, we provide some examples of these impacts; the ways that Our Faith School attempted to overcome difficulties to sustain the school; and the response of the partners.

By December 2019, the school’s financial vulnerability had already been magnified by a deepening economic crisis: “People struggled with finances, and they were unable to pay their tuition fees. Some of them wanted to withdraw from school because they were not able to continue” (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020).

> We had financial problems as families are not paying the tuition fees. In such situations, most parents at least are not able to pay the tuition fees, and this meant that we are facing financial challenges also. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Despite being tuition dependent, OFS did not ask students to leave because of unpaid fees. In August 2020, the explosion in Beirut Port damaged the school and directly impacted families who “lost their homes, their jobs, their shops that were in the downtown area or somewhere in Ashrafieh” (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020). As a result, many families were struggling severely. Still, the school called up parents

at the beginning of the 2020 school year to ask them to bring their children to school "even if they could not pay. We did not want any child to stay at home because of money reasons" (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020).

OFS reached out to IFM for financial support. Until this point IFM had only given donations in the form of student scholarships or sponsorships: "This was the first time we asked for straight up fund donations, saying we don't want scholarships, we want you to give us money to survive" (interview, OFS Dean, June 2020).

> After the explosion happened, we provided additional resources to repair the school, to provide tablets, and back-to-school packs and things like that. But in terms of the actual annual support we provide to the school, this amount did not change. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

The situation continued to decline, but OFS continued to serve students, both Syrian and Lebanese.

> What differed after the economic crisis and the explosion, is that at the beginning we only gave help to Syrian or Iraqi refugees, but now help has been extended to the Lebanese people. We have a lot of people who are in need now and the main difference is that there are more Lebanese students in need of scholarships and help. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

In Spring 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Lebanon, OFS reduced the salaries of teachers:

> We were giving full salaries to teachers until the last two months, [when we began to give] 75% of salaries. Already our salaries are not that good, and the Lebanese Lira has lost its value. But technically we are better than others; we are still paying 75% of salaries. Now arguably teachers have less to do; they weren't teaching from 7:30 till 3:00 every day [since the onset of the pandemic]. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Referring to the economic crisis, the Dean said: "We do have some money in the bank but as you know, banks are not giving us our money." This issue was compounded by travel restrictions due to the pandemic:

> Before the airport closed and we relied on donations, we would travel, and keep them [donations] in our pockets. With Corona, it became harder to get money in from supporting churches and NGOs outside who are friends with us. We are relying on donations just to keep our teachers. [...] But it looks like we might have to kill programs and we might have to let go of some people. We are definitely tightening our belts, if I may say it that way. We want our school to survive. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

The school expected the compounding crises to have an impact on student demographics.

> Next year, it seems that we will have more Lebanese [students], because we will have a downward movement in terms of tuition, so students will leave the richer schools or more well to do, and they will choose us because our tuition is less than theirs. We also have some school closures around us – schools that just couldn't make it – I heard of one just today. So their kids might migrate to us, Lebanese families. Add to that that next year we might lose NGO support towards Syrian refugees as things get harder and harder. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Despite these challenges, OFS was persisting in supporting students through various means:

> We're continuing with [students] through [IFM] and other organisations. We also have some sponsors in [a European country], in the US, and people who want to help on a personal basis. We organize fundraising events, because we want to help our families. Sometimes people contact us after they see our Facebook page. Recently, [an East Asian] organisation asked what we needed. [...] We always get new people who want to help. It's not a kind of partnership, sometimes it's a one-time thing and sometimes it's personal help. Sometimes we are contacted by one person in the US who says, "I want to help with this amount/number of students." (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

Still there was a sense that OFM needed to diversify its partners to offset it financial vulnerability and the vulnerability of its students:

> We need to be more self-sufficient in the future; and we need to branch out more; so if we can find a way to have 20 partners [...] and each partner is sponsoring two to three kids, that way if we lose one partner or this happens again, we don't lose our base [...] We need to diversify our partners and have more connections, more NGOs, more churches, not just churches, more friends basically around the world who can believe in this [...] Our education is good [...]and this needs money. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

The political crisis and COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures, creating challenges to teaching and learning, attendance, and assessment.

> Teaching became harder, we closed for many consecutive days [due to protests] and with Corona, we closed for more days. We had to go online completely especially that many of our students are refugees with no access to WIFI or they don't have smart pad or laptop; so, at times, one family has one phone, so this makes online teaching more challenging. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Like other schools and nonformal programs, the school had to transition to online

learning in a context where few students and teachers had the required technology, connectivity, or know-how.

> Teachers had to cope with the new reality whether explain things online, film themselves talking, send pictures and worksheets and search for things online. It was not part of the things that we used to do before. It was good for some teachers; some teachers showed creativity especially teachers who used to struggle with classroom [management]; that was gone now; and you have some teachers who have conversations and build relations, found themselves like a fish outside water; they couldn't cope very well. It's a change of dynamics; imagine you're a teacher for 20 years; you've been teaching in a certain way; and suddenly you have to teach online and not over zoom, online as in sending weekly work to students and you have to explain everything online, on [...] over a sharing platform. We didn't have time to train our teachers. We didn't get someone to train them on how to do a successful online lesson; we didn't have time; school closed; we weren't ready, we didn't have a platform running. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

A Science teacher explained that the move to online learning created a "gap" in the teaching and learning process: "It's different without discussion, because at the end, this is about science. It is about discussions, asking questions, taking their point of view and opinion then explaining something else or doing some research and stuff like that" (interview, Science teacher, November 2020). The gap he described related to teaching and learning, and he clarified that it was not a change in relationships per se.

> They still joke and I would talk to them individually because sometimes the jokes were used to tease each other. Like all of a sudden a student would make a joke about another student and of course that other student would reply and it goes on like that. (Interview, Science teacher, November 2020)

Not all students engaged in online learning: "Some students decided that they don't want to attend school online" (interview, OFS Dean, June 2020). Still others:

> Used to only sign into class just to register their attendance, but not really attend. I would address a specific student with a question and receive no reply whatsoever. (Interview, Science teacher, November 2020)

A Social Studies teacher lamented the lack of student engagement once classes went online:

> We tried many ways to get them interested in our subjects but they don't want to study. For me, the student who wants to study, can do so and s/he can watch my video one year from now if s/he wants to study this lesson. S/he can understand even if s/he was sick, tired, or wasn't in the mood. Interaction in school is another thing. We are forced to teach online. So, we have to integrate, involve, and adapt to online classes. (Interview, Social Studies teacher, December 2020)

Moving online created assessment challenges as well.

> I believe we did the best we could with the bad situation. It's not ideal. More or less, we're running with 20% of our capacity. I don't know how much learning was in class with the Lebanese curriculum […], but I think we managed to keep running. Some schools stopped completely; others managed to find some system after a few weeks of tweaking. We have some success stories; different parents would call and say, "Thank you, our students are enjoying it."
>
> We're assessing effort; we don't think it's fair to assess content we took a decision early on that we will assess effort, because it's not fair if I have 20 students and 15 are coming, it's unfair for the 15 not to get anything for this. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Because they could not run final examinations, OFS decided to base their student evaluations on "participation, attendance, and whether or not they were doing homework" (interview, OFS Dean, June 2020).

OFS delivered teaching via WhatsApp.

> We started to send weekly work there to every subject from Tuesday to Friday via videos, explanations, maybe some YouTube videos and recorded videos, worksheets for kids to work out […] All classes were via WhatsApp; they told me that it worked. […] Teachers send voice notes, and students would reply and they do their work over WhatsApp. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

A Social Studies teacher explained: "I send a video of the explanation. I convert my PowerPoint to a video, and I send it to the students. All my PowerPoint [presentations] include photos, videos, etc." (interview, Social Studies teacher, December 2020).

OFS students faced access issues due to lack of devices at home or Internet issues (interviews, OFS Dean, June 2020; Science teacher, November 2020).

> I know most of them have Wi-Fi, but not all of them have their own mobiles, they use their parents' mobiles and maybe Wi-Fi from associations or their neighbours or from somewhere. As far as I know, they all have Wi-Fi. So, if they cannot attend my live classes, I'm sending a video of the explanation later. (Interview, Social Studies teacher, December 2020)
>
> Sometimes the best students who are attending all the time might have internet connectivity issues. I know many students are sharing only one mobile phone. (Interview, Social Studies teacher, December 2020)

IFM provided the school with tablets for every student (OFS Principal, November 2020).

> I would say since the explosion and since COVID-19, we have been trying to provide additional support for online learning. So, all of the children in the program received a tablet for them to be able to do online learning from home and all of the classes are being taught that way because we realised that in our commitment to the children, we have to provide consistency and stability for them and if they are stuck at home for months and months, this is a really difficult time for them and it's really important for the school to continue to provide the program. So, it was a big investment but all of the children have received a tablet so that they can continue to participate in the learning, but that is more to do with COVID-19 than the crisis. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

The school also initiated use of an "e-school" app "which made our communication with students and parents a bit better" (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020).

> At the beginning it was on WhatsApp. Afterwards, the school started using e-school, which we are still using, so that students can send their homework and such. It's much better than WhatsApp. Every programme has its advantages and disadvantages. With e-school, you can upload your own videos, your own explanation (recording it and uploading it), you can use the agenda, you can test, etc. (Interview, Science teacher, November 2020)

The school expanded the technological support it provided for students for the 2020-2021 school year. In addition to providing tablets, it launched a full e-school app and trained teachers on how to use it to support the teaching and learning process.

> Because we started the year with COVID-19, we met with representatives of e-school and discussed with them what services they provided. They do not charge a lot per student, so we decided to go for the full package: live classes, downloading videos and agendas, and we're working on sending grades and notes. They trained our teachers on how to use it. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

The compounding crises impacted Our Faith School's partnerships. The partnership with Iman Lebanon ended, IFM expanded its support, and OFS found new donors to sustain their programs.

> So, this year, we do not have any scholarship from [Iman Lebanon], but we had around 30 kids with whom we wanted to continue, because they are studying and they were good students so we started raising funds for these 30 kids. We got them all sponsored, and they received scholarships because of a lot of people who wanted them to continue their education. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

Although Iman Lebanon could not sustain their partnership, they made a final

contribution to “help 40 Lebanese kids with a small amount, for those who were directly affected by the Beirut explosion” (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020). They had been supporting refugees for eight years. The Principal attributed the end of the partnership to a global economic downturn due to the pandemic and a shift in funding for Lebanon since the Beirut Port explosion, which diverted attention away from Syrians to the Lebanese who were devastated by the blast. In reflecting on the end of the partnership, the school Principal said optimistically: “Everything has an end. […] But we know that there will always be something that will help these kids” (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020).

The director at Iman Lebanon suggested other reasons for the end to the partnership with OFS:

> We had to stop for economic and strategic reasons. We had a partnership that was based on a 50-50 deal [in terms of tuition support], but they were not able to contribute their half, so [Iman Lebanon] was overwhelmed with the payments for this year. […] The decision was really hard to take. (Interview, Iman Lebanon Director, June 2020)

Furthermore, by June 2020, MEHE was not certifying students who had completed their program of study, making it impossible for Syrian students to sit for official exams and receive academic credentials:

> It was a privilege [to work with OFS], but until now this private school is not able to register these students in the Ministry. The students are learning with the Lebanese [students] in the morning shift in which the Lebanese curriculum is used, but it seems that the Ministry didn’t consider them as registered students yet. […] It is very irritating. I understand my government’s decision, but it would have been better if we had known before, as some students paid the fees, and we paid some fees, and the private school covered part of the fees, then we got the surprise that the students’ names are not on the list [of registered students]. […] It’s hard. The certificate is not approved from the Ministry, but to bebfair, it’s not only because of the Ministry, it’s due to the current chaotic situation. (Interview, Iman Lebanon director, June 2020)

The partnership with IFM persisted, however, and IFM demonstrated their responsiveness by expanding their support to OFS, as well as their communication with them.

> I think as things got more difficult, we have had even more communication. When the explosion happened, when we’ve had the financial crisis and the devaluing of the Lebanese pound, we worked even more closely to understand the situation and to try and support. I think we have adapted, there’s a lot of adaptability. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

> We communicated with [IFM] every day for a while, then once per two weeks. It depends on what's happening and what conversations are happening. [...] With corona it's been mainly over zoom and email. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

The OFS Principal attributed the persistence of the partnership to their relationship as a community of faith: "We are one church; we are part of each other" (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020). The nature of the partnership appeared to stand in stark contrast with traditional humanitarian practices of larger international organizations:

> For sure there's a policy, but the policy does not have a starting point and an ending point. It depends on the need. We don't start it in a certain year, and we don't close it in another. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

The OFS Principal noted that the partnership was "continuing and even better." She cited the open communication that allowed the relationship to change to meet needs and that contributed to the sense that OFS was supported, as individuals, as a school, and as a community.

> They follow up to know everything that's happening. We write reports, hold Zoom meetings every month. We have WhatsApp calls if there's any need. It's open all the time. The meetings are open for any small thing that may happen. Things can change in a minute, especially with the explosion, etc. We received calls from all over the world on the same night. They wanted to be with us; they were praying for us and checking how they can help. The communication is open with [IFM]. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

While the crises affected the school's longstanding partnerships, it also brought new donors, including faith-based and civil society organizations and individuals. Groups in Europe raised funds on social media: "They did a jogathon few weeks ago with a number of people who ran and walked individually and they raised money for us" (interview, OFS Dean, June 2020). The Principal reflected on these shifts, noting that, "In a miraculous way, things will be done through churches, through people whose heart God touches so that they help" (interview, OFS Principal, November 2020).

The crises also brought the school community together:

> It was really great to be able to communicate with the broader community. After the explosion, we asked the parents who had suffered damages if they needed any help. There were a lot of groups that started helping and cleaning. Some families were unable to repair glass or aluminum, so we contacted people who helped with that and carpentering. We helped around 25 of our families and [in the area], we helped around 10 houses.

OFS also hosted a 5-day mobile clinic in collaboration with two faith-based charities: "There were doctors distributing free medicine and food. Then we started visiting

all the houses that are near the school and met a lot of people that are in real need" (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020).

The OFS Principal noted that the devastating impact of Lebanon's crises helped to expand their work to place greater attention on the needs of their Lebanese students. The crises also brought new funds to support the school community and created a new sense of empathy for their Syrian members.

> The crises that hit us affected a lot the work with the refugees because Lebanese students are currently also in need. Lebanese parents tell us, "Please just think of us as refugees and help us as you are helping the refugees." The crisis affected working with the refugees in a negative way. But although the explosion was really destructive and negative, it contributed to the international community helping everybody and not just the refugees. […] With the current crises, [the Lebanese school community] knows what it feels like to have a need, and this has helped them to empathize with the refugees. (Interview, OFS Principal, November 2020)

Observation of virtual classes

Our observations of Our Faith School's virtual classes via WhatsApp during May and June 2020, and interviews with teachers and administrators, provide insights into the types of activities that teachers used to engage students in learning during the COVID-19 school closure. The Grade 7 and 8 mathematics, sciences, and English language classes we observed were held "live" via WhatsApp, with teachers and students communicating through images, texts, voice notes, videos, and assignments in real time. Our observations demonstrate the ways in which teachers delivered instruction through structured lessons that encouraged active participation. Lessons allowed for social interaction with students and among students, underscoring what teachers told us in interviews: That, while something was lost in terms of pedagogy, this did not impact the caring relationships between teachers and students.

The OFS Dean also noted that some teachers adapted well to online learning, particularly as they were "free" of some of the issues that come with classroom management. Others produced creative lessons that uplifted the class community. He described the following Arabic language class as a "success":

> They were learning about imperative verbs, for example, and [the Arabic teacher] would have them film themselves using [the verbs] in daily life and send her the video. And then she put them in one video and sent them back to the kids just for fun. We have some successful stories like this, with kids enjoying their time. (Interview, OFS Dean, June 2020)

Table 5.4 represents a summary of the routine observed in a Grade 7 Science class. It includes the days, subject, number of students who participated, the methods the

teachers used to send their lessons and assignments, and the methods the students used to participate. Additionally, the duration of the lesson and the duration of the interaction between the students and the teacher are included.

Table 5.4: Partnership B – Virtual learning routine via WhatsApp, Grade 7 Science

Date (2020)	Subject	Number of participating students	Method of teacher explanation	Method of student participation	Duration of lesson/ interaction (min:sec)
May 12	Biology	14/16	Voice notes– images– Solving exercises	Text message	11:07 am–11:57 am
May 14	Chemistry	15/16	Voice notes	Text message	10:59 am–11:52 am
May 19	Biology	9/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	11:00 am– 11:52 am
May 21	Chemistry	13/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	10:55 am–11:51 am
May 28	Chemistry	12/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	11:30 am– 12:22pm
June 2	Physics	12/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	11:00 am– 11:50 am
June 4	Chemistry	13/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	10:56 am– 11:52 am
June 9	Chemistry– Physics	11/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	10:59 am–11:30; 11:31 am –11:50 am
June 11	Biology	13/16	Voice notes– images	Text message	10:56 am– 11:44 am

The Science teacher taught Biology, Chemistry, and Physics to Grade 7 students on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The session duration was usually less than one hour and started around 11:00 am.

The lessons started with the Science teacher greeting the students and telling them what subject they have. For example, the teacher sent a voice note saying: "Good morning Grade 7; we'll start Biology." Then he asked them to check in. Students checked in at the beginning of the session and check out by the end of it by typing their names upon the teacher's request.

The Science teacher used voice notes and images to explain his lesson; he sent several short voice notes to elicit answers from the students then to explain fully the concepts. The students shared their thoughts and answers via text messages. When solving exercises, the teacher sent images of the exercises for the students who didn't have their books. He called students by name to answer questions, then he elicited more answers. He also mentioned the names of the students who were not participating. At the end of each session, he asked the students if they had any questions. Usually, the

students replied with "no." In one of the sessions, the Science teacher mentioned that he already sent a PowerPoint presentation but didn't specify where, and in another voice note he mentioned that he sent the homework on e-school.

Figure 5.8. Screenshot of student and teacher interaction in a Grade 7 virtual Science class

The teacher assigned specific students provide the first answer the assigned part of an exercise. The teacher clarified his question when one of the students answered incorrectly. Then three students answered with, "I don't know," and one, said: "I forgot," with a laughing face. One student answered correctly, and the teacher replied with "yes." The student who stated that he doesn't know, replied with "Ugh," when his friend answered correctly and sent an emoji (happy face wearing sunglasses). Her friend replied to her emoji with an "expressionless" emoji. The teacher didn't comment on the exchange of emojis; he sent a voice note explaining the answer further.

The Science teacher sent a figure and explained it via a voice note, and he added that they reached the final exercise. In one of his voice notes, he mentioned a keyword that is used in Physics and he emphasized that they learned it previously. Then he related Math to the concept: "...think about doing comparison of numbers the way you do it in mathematics."

As with in-person learning, teachers had to manage student behavior in the virtual classroom. For example, when the teacher asked the definition of "chemical reaction," many students sent their definitions in text messages. When one of the students commented on his friend's answer saying, "Nice Google answer," the teacher targeted that student's action by commenting in a voice note: "George, no comments on others, really. Maybe your answer was a Google one, so no comments." Then four students sent laughing emojis. The teacher stated in a follow up text message: "It's not funny," followed by a voice note: "It's not funny whatever happened between [the students]; even if it's funny, if you think it's funny, you don't have to type it here, right, yes? Just laugh or smile, whatever you're doing." Then he continued explaining the lesson.

On the last day of science class, the teacher greeted the students, and the students greeted the teacher back. One student texted: "Bye mr we gonna miss u. I don't no how I'm going to spend my summer without sciences😂😂😂😂👋👋❤️"

Our observations of the science class present an interactive learning space in which teachers and students engage in the teaching and learning process in real time through structured lessons that keep students accountable by asking them to respond to

questions when called. As documented in Table 5.4 above, the majority of students participate in each lesson. The teacher also manages the class, allowing students to comment on each other at times, and curtailing this behavior at others. In doing so, the teacher provides an engaging environment in which students appear to be at ease with the teacher, as demonstrated in the final comment to the teacher, which was likely stated with a playful hint of sarcasm.

Similarly, a Grade 7 virtual mathematics class was observed to have high student participation in real time (see Table 5.5 for a summary of lessons observed). Mathematics classes were held on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for less than one hour, usually starting just before 10 am.

Table 5.5: Partnership B – Virtual learning routine via WhatsApp, Grade 7 Mathematics

Date (2020)	Number of participating students	Method of teacher explanation	Method of student participation	Duration of lesson/ interaction
May 12	14/16	Voice notes- images-videos- Solving exercises	Text message- images	9:55 am- 10:58 am
May 14	15/16	Voice notes-images- videos	Text message-images	9:52 am- 10:59 am
May 15	14/16	Voice notes- images-pdfs (exercises and course)	Text message	9:54 am- 11:00am
May 19	14/16	Voice notes- images-pdf	Text message-images	9: 56 am- 10:53 am
May 21	13/16	Voice notes- images-pdf	Text message-images	9:52 am- 10:55 am
May 22	13/16	Voice notes- images-pdf-video	Text message- images	9:55am- 11:02 am
May 28	13/16	Voice notes- images-pdf	Text message-images	10:28 am- 10:54 am
May 29	12/16	Voice notes - images	Text message- images	9:52 am- 10:42 am
June 2	14/16	Voice notes - images- video	Text message- images	9:58 am – 10:44 am
June 9	13/16	Voice notes-images	Text message	9:58 am- 10:38am

One lesson started with the teacher greeting the students in a text message – "Good morning, everybody" – then informing the students that he would take attendance: "If you are online just write down your name." The students replied back by saying, "good morning" and typing their names to check in. He also took attendance at the end of the session.

The teacher used voice notes, images, videos, and pdfs to present the lesson, explain it, and solve the exercises. The students shared their thoughts and answers via text messages and images. The language of instruction, as well as in student replies, was a mix between English and informal Arabic.

Figure 5.9: WhatsApp group logo for a Grade 7 mathematics class

The teacher reminded the students that they can't just comment haphazardly as they are not in class, and he stressed on the idea that when he speaks, everyone should focus, so that they all can understand, and he ended his voice note by saying, "Give me a break." Many students replied to the teacher's message with a laughing emoji, and one girl sent a text message "Tyb tyb oki oki😂😂😂".

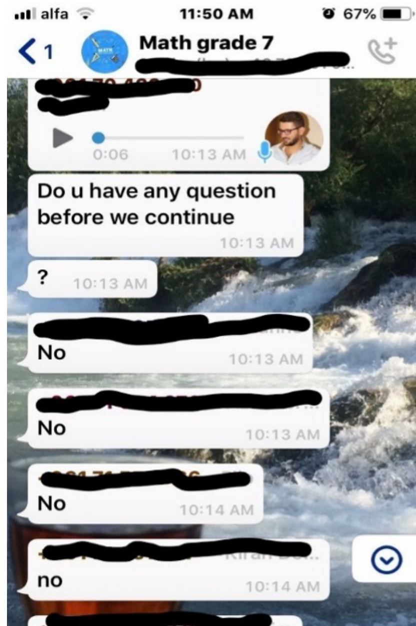

Figure 5.10: Screenshot illustrating teacher-student interaction in a mathematics class

Then he assigned another student to do another part and communicated specific instructions. The student answered correctly, and then he asked her, "On what scale?" She replied with, "I don't know." The teacher replied in a voice note asking her in a higher tone, "What scale would you use, 2 squares, 3 squares what?" Then the student answered correctly, and he sent another voice note commenting in informal Arabic: "May God grant me patience," and the student replied in informal Arabic: "May God grant you…". Several students showed that they were laughing by sending text messages with emojis or "hahaha."

Then the teacher sent a voice note to tell the students that they are just having some fun and informs the girl that he was joking and that she is a lighthearted person. Then he asked her not to take things personally, and justified that he was joking to lighten the mood and that the students should not say that they never get to joke and have fun in mathematics class

Then a student replied, "Hayde ma btz3al," meaning, that girl doesn't get offended (Figures 5.11 – 5.13). The girl also replied with "hahahahahahah" and a string of laughing emojis.

The excerpt from a mathemetics classroom above demonstrates how teachers engaged students in class, through lighthearted exchanges. The teacher also kept them accountable by checking attendance and encouraging their engagement in the lesson by calling on students and prodding them to provide solutions to problems. The students respond with laughter and commentary.

Our observations also illustrated some of the technical issues that emerged in the live sessions. For example, in one session, the mathematics teacher sent two videos, and one student asked for clarification regarding to which part of the lesson they belonged. The teacher replied with a text message, and then he sent two additional videos. A student asked a question regarding the information pertaining to a part of the lesson, and the teacher replied by asking him to watch the videos, and he sent an

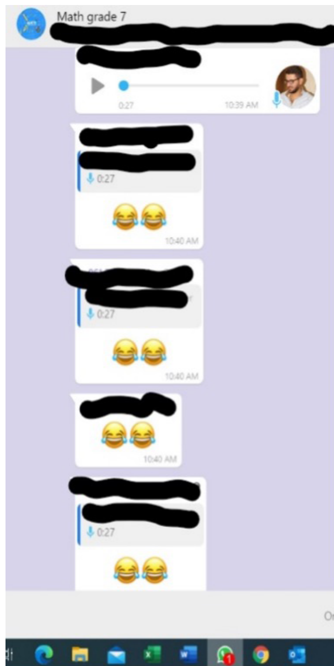

Figure 5.11: A screenshot showing students' reaction to a teacher's voice note

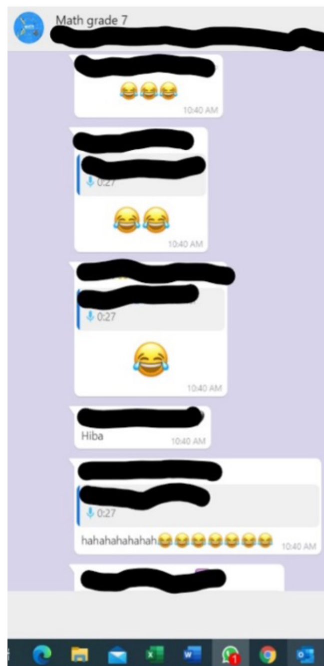

Figure 5.12: A screenshot showing girl's reaction to teacher

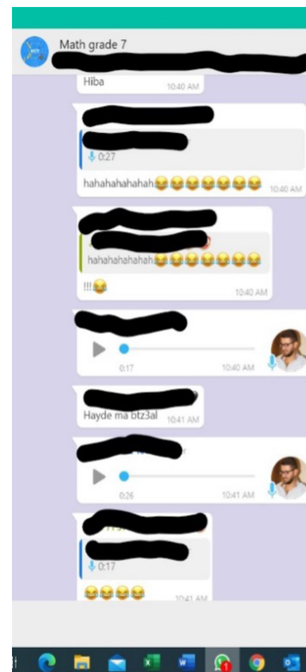

Figure 5.13: A screenshot showing a student's reply

additional one. The student replied stating that the teacher sent a lot of videos and he can't follow up with all of them. The teacher responded by sending seven more videos, and he asked the students to watch all of the videos and asked them if they had any questions before he explained another part.

Two students commented via a text message: "Wait still watching." In informal Arabic: "Teacher, I still have 7 videos which are still loading wait." The teacher replied via a text message, "ok," to these students. He also sent an "ok" to a student who apologized that the electricity went off and he got disconnected. After four minutes, the teacher sent three more videos and one of the students commented: "Not opening," "wait," "please," and another one sent a text message expressing that he understood nothing. The teacher proceeded to send six more videos and one of the students who was asking the teacher to wait for the videos to open, shared (in English): "My phone full of space," "Not opening."

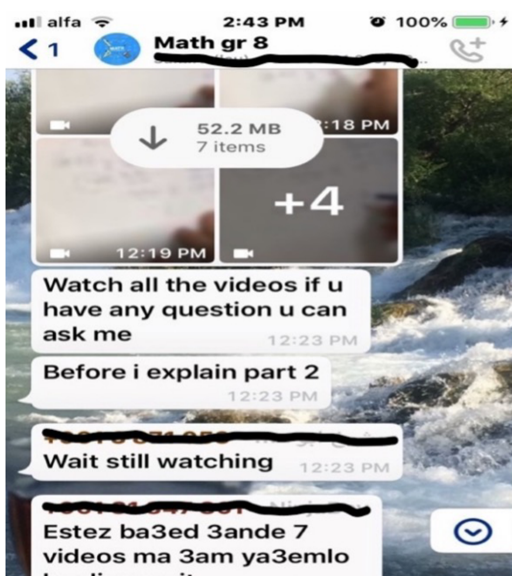

Figure 5.14: – A Screenshot showing challenges faced by students in downloading videos

In a Grade 8 English class, a similar routine of teacher and student interaction emerges over a weekly class session, generally held for less than

one hour around 11 AM on Wednesdays. Our observations in May and June 2020 documented a high participation rate (Table 5.6).

Figure 5.15. WhatsApp group logo for Grade 8 English

Table 5.6: Partnership B – Virtual learning routine via WhatsApp, Grade 8 English

Date (2020)	Number of participating students	Method of teacher explanation	Method of student participation	Duration of Lesson/ Interaction (min: sec)
May 13	13/14	Voice notes- images	Text message- voice note	…11:20am–11:55 am
May 20	12/14	Voice notes-images- text message	Text message-images	11:01am- 11:51 am
May 27	12/14	Voice notes-text message	Text message-images	11:00 am- 11:48 am
June 3	13/14	Voice notes- images	Text message	9:49am- 11:57 am
June 10	/14	Voice notes- images	Text message	9:58 am- 11:13 am

The lessons generally started with the English teacher greeting the students in a text message “Good morning 😊”. The students greeted her via text messages and some just typed their name to check in. She also took attendance at the end of the session, where students typed their names to check out: “If you’re here, type your names please.”

Like the Mathematics and Science teachers, the English teacher used voice notes, images, and text messages to explain the lesson and to correct the exercises or students’ answers. She explained the lesson and communicated with the students in English and the students shared their thoughts and answers mostly via text messages, at times via images, and rarely via a voice note. They communicated their answers using the English language. The teacher praised the students using words like, “Excellent,” and triggered students’ thinking by asking questions, such as, “What do you think is responsible for this change?” and “How do you think researchers are able to study language learning in babies who are still too young to speak?”

Our virtual observations showed Our Faith School teachers engaging their students in interactive class sessions in real time, using a variety of tools. They provided accountability and positive reinforcement for student participation. And despite technical difficulties, a large majority of students participated in every session, showing an ability to retain students even in challenging circumstances. Observations supported what teachers and administrators told us in interviews about the positive nature of teacher-student relationships and the ways that teachers engaged all students, regardless of their background. In the face of extreme difficulties posed by multiple compounding crises, teachers at OFS persisted in their teaching and upheld the

partnerships to support Syrian student learning in an integrated environment.

Promising Partnership C practices

Our Faith School's partnerships with Iman Lebanon and International Faith Ministry tell different stories. While both were strong partnerships characterized by shared values, commitment, and equitable relationships that led to positive outcomes for Syrian students, the long-term partnership with Iman Lebanon could not sustain the devastation of the economic crisis, the Beirut port explosion, and COVID-19 pandemic. We posit that the combined peripheral status of Our Faith School and Iman Lebanon in the network structure may have contributed to the vulnerability of their partnership. Yet, the eight-year partnership had been successful in the eyes of OFS. Together with IFM, Iman Lebanon had helped to sustain a school with a diverse population of learners that integrated Syrian and Lebanese students, alongside students of various nationalities, religions, and ethnicities. OFS clearly prioritized the integration of Syrian students; even when Lebanese fee-paying parents complained and even left the school due to the new population of refugee students, OFS continued to support the Syrians.

The partnerships also had a positive impact on Syrian student enrollment, retention, and grade progression. In this concluding section we outline the principles that partners identified as critical to strong partnerships. These principles buoyed the partnerships prior to the onset of the crises and supported the school's mission "to be a loving community."

Like other partnerships in this country study, OFS and partners identified trust and respect through equitable relationships, as being important features of successful partnerships.

> Trust is important. I can't have [a partner] behind my back all the time asking for reports and numbers. If they don't trust me, I don't want to work with them. Some organizations don't trust you and keep asking you to take pictures. This is not a zoo! I don't want to keep taking pictures of our students. It's not right. I prefer that they know us and trust us. That's when a partnership can be successful. A partnership that is based on mutual sharing of knowledge, expectations, and trust. And it's good if they have funds! (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

> I think the other part of a healthy partnership is selecting the right people to work with from the beginning, so people who are transparent and have integrity and who have a shared vision for what you want to achieve, which in this case, is helping provide a stable education to children who really need it. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

OFS had trusting relationships with its partners: "It's an issue of trust. We've struggled [in the past] with other NGOs who didn't trust us" (interview, OFS Dean, December 2019). Because of this trust, the partnerships had developed organically to support

Syrian students, as an extension of existing work with vulnerable populations in an impoverished area of Beirut. It was never planned, “It just happened, really” (interview, OFS Dean, December 2019). Through existing relationships, OFS partnered with IFM and Iman Lebanon to support Syrians in their school and through an afternoon support program run by Iman Lebanon.

They described equitable relationships within OFS and with partners as being “like family,” having a “sense of closeness,” “giving importance to each student,” and care. Equitable relationships among students; between staff, teachers, and parents; and across partnerships sustained the work in difficult circumstances and made strides in addressing discrimination faced by Syrian students and parents within the school.

When discussing promising practices, partners referred to coordination in terms of open communication and knowledge-sharing, and linked these to mutual learning:

> In terms of a partnership functioning well, I think communication is one of the most important things to understand how a partner works and what their values are, and to have regular and clear communication so that each party understands what is happening and has up-to-date information all the time. I think communication is extremely important. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

> I think the first factor is sharing knowledge so that we can both manage expectations. The NGO tells us upfront what they expect from us, and we tell them what we intend to give and take from them. (Interview, OFS Dean, February 2019)

Open communication was also linked to transparency and integrity.

> I talked about the need for transparency, and I think it should be made clear who else is supporting a particular program and for sure, the school [staff] is very open with us about who is supporting them. (Interview, IFM Global Program Coordinator, December 2020)

> We should always be transparent and give reports and tell things as they are, to be faithful in our work, to love the work that we’re doing and not compromise, and not take things for granted. We work with the truth and that will keep our sustainability. (Interview, OFS Dean, November 2020)

> It is important to be transparent, honest, and avoid any misappropriation of money. (Interview, Iman Lebanon director, February 2019)

OFS also described the commitment of partners, and teachers and administrators described their commitment to the students, in terms of care and respect: “just taking care of people, seeing what they need”; “people here who care about them,” “accompanying them on their journey,” “respect we shared with beneficiaries.”

Care required flexibility, not having fixed project start and end dates, but ongoing responsiveness to needs among partners and within the community. Care also required strong principles of nondiscrimination:

> We should not have limits such as working with only certain groups of people, it should be open to everybody. (Interview, OFS Dean, November 2020)

Care guided the work of OFS and partners and provided accountability for the work. There was no "big strategy;" "we just try to encourage people to accept each other," and "provide a good education."

5.5 Discussion

Our country-level analysis of partnerships in EiE, focusing on the Syria refugee response within Lebanon, revealed several salient and cross-cutting themes, offering deeper and contextual insights to our global analysis and network analysis.

The broader analysis provided ample insights into what factors contribute to a positive partnership, as well as what factors might hinder effective partnerships. From this broader analysis, we arrived as three "promising partnerships" on which we conducted separate case studies to gain a deeper understanding of what principles guide such partnerships.

The three case studies offered different stories of how partnerships come to be and how they sustain, yet each stressed the importance of individuals and relationships between partners. Our findings reveal that regardless of who might be the partner, when people are treated with care, trust, and respect, partnerships function more fluidly and sometimes even "like a family." Such relationships tend to expand out into the communities, where partnerships also care for and respect the end beneficiaries, seeking out their participation. Partnerships appear to thrive when partners communicate regularly, in an organic way, and all those involved are open to learning from one another. Although partnerships might experience inequities and witness discrimination, both within their partnerships and in their activities, when partners openly discuss and reflect on these issues, sometimes even sacrificing funds or external relationships in order to object to xenophobia, they move towards more equitable partnerships and practices.

Our network analysis findings suggest some insights for understanding the nature of partnerships in EiE based on the positionality of our case studies within the wider partnership network. In all three case studies, we noted that those organizations situated in the Global North with lower centrality measures—IFM, Education Partners, FfE—had more communicative, collaborative, flexible, and overall positive relationships with local partners than did the partner with very high centrality—IFA. This might be

attributable to the fact that IFM, Education Partners, and FfE, with fewer partners in Lebanon, could dedicate time and attention to their local partners, thinking through decisions collaboratively, rather than focusing on efficiency and outputs.

As well, IFM, Education Partners, and FfE represent what would be described as "non-traditional" funders in EiE—a religious body, a charity, and a foundation, respectively. These organizational types, with less history in the humanitarian space, might entail less bureaucratic processes and therefore more flexibility in how they operate.
We found that those partnerships located in the network on the periphery (non-central) had more positive relationships and practices. Again, this might be attributable to paying stronger attention to one another given fewer other partners to work with. It may also be attributable to their independence; both Sharaka and Our Faith School were intentionally selective about whom they partnered with. Being peripheral might, however, also present risks. Some partners with very low centrality, and thus fewer sources of funds, could either not maintain their partnerships through crisis (i.e. OFS and Iman Lebanon, as well as other organizations in the broader country analysis), or saw a need to expand their partnerships in the future to become more financially stable (i.e. OFS).

The country-level findings echo many of the issues raised in the global level analysis, including the importance of trust, respect, and transparency. Although across our analysis we saw issues relating to coordination arise, in the country cases studies this was re-framed as communication; in discussing coordination, country-level respondents referenced ongoing communication through informal conversations and unscheduled check-ins, rather than coordination of activities in order to gain efficiency in the sector. In fact, the partnership we viewed as least effective among our case studies involved an international funder that appeared far more concerned with efficiency—outputs, data, meeting targets within a predefined timeframe—than did other partners. As well, global level respondents discussed limited attention paid to directly tackling issues of North-South inequities and racism within global organizations and partnerships; yet the findings of case studies we selected as "promising" revealed ways of addressing such imbalances through reflection and action based on principles that led to more equitable practices.

6. VERTICAL ANALYSIS

In order to arrive at conclusions that incorporate findings from each dataset—global actor interviews; organizational documents; database and network; country case interviews, documents, site visits, and observations—we conducted a vertical analysis. The vertical analysis allowed us to grasp macro-phenomena as well as micro-level processes, situating local action and experiences within global social and political arenas. Through this analysis we uncovered and cross-referenced themes that emerged from each independent set of data to understand how such themes interplay across levels, including global, regional, and local. As well, a longitudinal analysis revealed changes over time and how shifts and responses played out at each level. Below we offer thematic conceptualizations of findings based on this vertical study.

Partnerships in EiE have grown, diversified, and been shaped by crisis

Our vertical analysis uncovered a recent and rapid uptick in partnerships established in response to education in emergencies, both globally and within Lebanon, with the Syria crisis acting as a key catalyst.

Interviews with global actors indicated a widespread embrace of partnerships. Respondents expressed an impetus to partner for several reasons: by joining forces, organizations can complement one another, pool resources and knowledge, amplify one another's voices in advocacy, and thereby allow all organizations to better reach children in need. In such ways, partnership leads to greater impact in EiE. On a global level, respondents pointed to donors in particular as pushing a partnership agenda. As well, we noted a clear advocacy for expansion of partnerships within global organizational documents, with rhetoric echoing comments made in global actor interviews, recognizing the importance of partnerships while encouraging organizations to seek out partners of various types in order to address urgent crises in education.

In addition to a clear consensus in the global community on the need for partnership, interviews and documents suggested a notable rise in partnerships in EiE in recent years. This rise was corroborated by our database and network analysis, looking specifically within Lebanon, showing that over a three-year span, 440 organizations in a single country were involved in partnerships in the EiE sector.

Beyond an expansion of partnerships, the types of organizations which partner have diversified. A range of different types of organizations, representing the state and non-state sectors, headquartered in various locations, now partner to support EiE. Global actors noted this diversity, and in particular explained that organizations have more recently begun to embrace partnering with private sector actors, including companies and foundations. Organizational documents furthermore indicated a push for increased private sector participation in EiE partnerships.

Our network analysis further uncovered the variety of partners, where non-traditional actors—namely, businesses and foundations—now frequently work alongside traditional humanitarian aid organizations. Within the country case studies, interviews elicited details on various new types of EiE actors emerging within Lebanon over recent years, and particularly since the onset of the Syria crisis. For instance, foundations and companies have increasingly sought out local partners to implement various projects. These newer partnerships come alongside many ongoing established partnership with various traditional humanitarian agencies, such as bilateral donors and international organizations. The partnership network within Lebanon is not only vast in terms of numbers of partnerships, but complex in terms of types of organizations involved and their relationships to one another.

The impact of the various crises that occurred over the course of our study further exposed the expansion of diverse partnerships in response to EiE. For instance, new global partnerships were established to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on education. New technology-orientated partnerships were established both globally and locally. For instance, international organizations partnered with software companies to support EdTech initiatives for sudden out-of-school populations. Within Lebanon, NGOs and individual schools partnered with companies to gain access to better educational technologies in order to sustain learning.

The economic crisis in Lebanon reinforced a need for local organizations to attract new partners in order to diversify their resource base. For instance, some local organizations lost partners during the crisis and required new ones to gain needed support, in particular to address insufficient funding. This financial instability exposed how wider partnership networks serve to support schools and education during times of crisis.

Our network analysis quantitatively showed a shift in partnerships in EiE within Lebanon post the onset of compounding crises, with an expansion in the numbers of organizations; changes in the types of organizations and the activities they engage in; and how many organizations left while other joined partnerships. Again, technology surfaced as a key type of activity and form of relationship among country-level partners during these crises, and organizations increased their SES activities to support students' mental health.

Each facet to our vertical analysis, deriving from varied data at the global and local levels, point to a shift in humanitarianism and education characterized by increased partnership as well as the necessity of partnering, for a range of reasons. Partnerships have increasingly diversified as well embraced a range of actors who might support many different kinds of educational activities. And the crises that occurred over the course of our study appear to have accelerated the establishment of partnerships in EiE, driven by urgent needs for technology and resources.

Intersections between coordination, communication, and care

Our research sought to understand issues and responses relating to coordination in EiE, and findings suggest that many partnerships would benefit from improved coordination. According to global interview responses and organizational document rhetoric, coordination acts as a means to elicit greater efficiency, less duplication, gap identification, streamlining and standardizing approaches, and collaborative action. Coordination allows actors to complement one another's expertise, to understand each other's organizational structures, and better serve mutual interests.

Challenges to coordination in EiE partnerships remain prevalent at both the global and country-levels. A key contributor to effective coordination is transparency, and our evidence indicated that certain organizations are less transparent than others. For instance, we found through our country-level research that some larger international organizations do not readily share long-term goals or strategies with local partners, making coordination of planning difficult.

According to our global analysis, although respondents widely agreed that coordination must be prioritized, several lamented how competition in fact characterizes the EiE sector. Even when partnering, organizations feel they must compete for resources, which are scarce in the EiE sector. This competitive environment counters efforts at coordination, where transparency might give others an edge. This finding relates to the theme of marketization of EiE detailed below.

Our network analysis showed the challenges faced in the Lebanese EiE sector in terms of coordination. 440 separate organizations have partnered in this space, including many with more than one partner, especially large funders such as international organizations, which are most central in the network. Our longitudinal analysis also showed that an in-country network can change rapidly, with new partners joining and others exiting. This analysis reveals the complexity and extensiveness of relationships composing this network, which ideally would be well-coordinated.

Through our analysis we found that a related concept—communication—was frequently raised when we asked respondents about issues of coordination, especially within Lebanon. Within Lebanon, we found that effective coordination often takes place through peer-to-peer organizational activities and support, facilitated through strong and well-established lines of communication.

Communication, which helps to enable coordination, promotes—and is promoted by—transparency, trust, and care. For example, at the onset of the economic and political crisis in Lebanon, financial and mobility challenges plagued local actors, along with emotional stress and anxieties about their personal security and that of their families. According to our case study interviews, when partners outside of the country had well-established relationships with local partners, resulting from regular and ongoing communication, they were able to offer support and understand roadblocks

to completing day-to-day work, as well a capacity to express empathy for their local colleagues experiencing the crisis. Similarly, when the pandemic hit and local educators in Lebanon were forced to pivot rapidly to virtual learning, well-established communication with partners both inside and outside of the country—for instance through regular meetings or WhatsApp groups with teachers and students—meant smoother transitions in terms of coordinating responses remotely.

Our analysis suggests that effective coordination is inseparable from ongoing and organic communication. However, a narrative around coordination—which emphasizes efficiency—appears to drive global policies rather than stressing the significance of communication—which emphasizes care, respect, and mutual learning. Our analysis of organizational documents noted that global organizations more frequently referenced issues of coordination in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in meeting goals than did regional-focused organizations, which more often conceptualized coordination as collaboration.

We posit, based on findings from country case studies in particular, that partnerships which prioritize organic communication tend to be more successful and better coordinated, in particular because they have the capacity to adapt to crises more readily. Communicative partnerships can potentially withstand obstacles and sustain over time, thus serving end beneficiaries, such as educators, families, and students, better. Ongoing, open, and transparent communication between partners, whether local or international, in turn helps enable participation at the country level, with all organizations contributing to a back and forth on planning.

Such communicative practices moreover focus not only on the end beneficiaries' wellbeing, but also that of the local partners. Local partners, on many occasions, become part of the affected population, and strong communication lines allow for expressions of empathy, care, but also recognition that local actors are resilient, and oftentimes, ingenious. Through observations, our findings suggest that partnerships can better function, sustain, and support refugees through prioritizing caring communicative practices.

While coordinated action indeed presents a concern, our research exposes the intersections between coordination and communication, particularly when organizations communicate frequently and in an organic, ongoing, and empathetic manner.

Marketization of the humanitarian response in education

Our vertical analysis of all data exposed an environmental shift in EiE that reflects increased marketization of the humanitarian response, in education and more generally. This shift is evidenced in two general ways; first, through increased private sector participation in EiE partnerships, where companies in particular have become more engaged; and second, through a more business-like approach to EiE, in terms of a competitive, outcomes-based and data-driven environment that focuses on outputs. In

light of our research, partnerships that reflect this marketized environment—including an increase in business actors in conjunction with embracing more business-like ways of working—spur several critiques.

Global-level evidence points to a rise in private actor participation in education funding, policy-making, planning and design, advocacy, and implementation in EiE. Private actors, in particular representing businesses and foundations, have been widely embraced as EiE partners. Organizational documents frequently point to a need for increased engagement of the private sector as a non-traditional funding source and to spur new innovation in EiE. Interviews corroborate this rhetoric. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the roles of private actors have expanded in the EiE space and that they have become key partners for many other state and non-state actors. Most respondents explained how organizations have been attempting to diversify their funding portfolios and that the EiE community often views business actors as a relatively untapped source. Our database and network analysis lends further evidence to the rise in private participation in EiE, where in a single country over 100 businesses and foundations have participated over the course of 3 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated private actor engagement. For instance, global actors described how some partnerships with private actors were established specifically to respond to the COVID-19 emergency in education, in particular to rapidly spearhead EdTech innovations that could enable learning during mass school closures. Within Lebanon, several respondents described how they had to establish new relationships with businesses to support virtual platforms for out-of-school refugee children, in particular those easily accessible on smartphones, oftentimes the only device available to students. As our case study observations showed, although WhatsApp lessons filled a significant gap, they were challenging to navigate in some ways, given the app was not designed an education focus. Although our network analysis did not note a significant uptick in private partners within Lebanon after the onset of crises, our qualitative research points to changing needs on the part of educational providers for refugees that warranted seeking out business support.

In addition to a rise in private sector participation, respondents spoke more generally and conceptually about the growth and entrenchment of business-like ways of working in the EiE space. Both global and country-level interviews described a model of working that aligned with corporate mechanisms, and reveals how the humanitarian space had changed in recent years due to these new models.

For example, the EiE space has become increasingly competitive. A few respondents attributed this to a broader reduction in funding for aid to education, which means each organization has had to compete harder for scarce funding. Within Lebanon as well, our interviews pointed to this competitive environment between organizations and even schools, which compete for students. Humanitarian organizations have grown accustomed to this environment, underpinned by an assumption that due to scarce resources, certain behaviors—bidding, lack of transparency, competition—are necessary

for organizational survival.

As well, local EiE actors which have secured funding from larger organizations, such as IOs or INGOs, described their work in-country as increasingly more output-driven, where quantitative data must be delivered on a strict schedule in order to maintain funding. Local actors also pointed to certain organizations requiring that their involvement in EiE be marketed through visibility, such as logo placement.

Critiques of the market humanitarian environment in EiE were revealed through interviews at both the global and local levels. For instance, the participation of business actors was critiqued given the tensions involved in profit-oriented mandates compared to humanitarian goals. As discussed earlier, a competitive environment has led to reduced transparency and coordination. The output-oriented projects, which require steady responsiveness to funders, counters participation, and entrenches further power dynamics. Based on our analysis, we found no evidence that this competitive, marketized environment positively impacts EiE programming—in fact, we posit that it hinders effective partnership practices—and therefore does not contribute to the academic success nor well-being of students. Our findings suggest that this market-like, output-driven environment appears to hinder more personal and human approaches to EiE partnerships, prioritizing efficiency over human relationships.

The intangible impact of individual connections and personal relationships

Our findings brought to light the sometimes intangible and difficult to quantify, but significant impact that personal relationships and the roles of particular pivotal individuals have on the success of EiE partnerships.

The significance of personal relationships was made most clear through our analysis of the country-level case studies. Respondents often replied to interview questions with stories and longer narratives that depicted, in a very personal sense, how individual people served to initiate, support, and bring others together in order to educate Syria refugees in Lebanon. The social capital of individual actors often dovetailed with personal characteristics—entrepreneurship, energy, patience, kindness—that enabled them to bring about change.

Respondents also spoke with much candor about personal relationships between various actors within partnerships. Meaningful personal relationships derive from something deeper than formalized partnerships. When actors work together for long periods of time, this history builds trust. This trust allows for expansion of networks as individuals are more likely to work with those recommended by trusted colleagues. This trust also allows for greater transparency in goals, activities, and decision-making processes.

Effective partnerships are moreover enabled through ongoing communication, care and empathy, which characterize positive personal relationships. For instance, when the

economic and political crisis hit Lebanon, partners with strong personal relationships provided immediate support, be it through enabling the projects to continue or through simply remaining in regular contact to listen and understand what was transpiring and how it was affecting those involved.

Our research uncovered the significance of personal relationships between all stakeholders involved in partnerships, including not merely those working within organizations, but also end beneficiaries including teachers, families, and students. Our interviews and analysis of interactions—both in-person and virtual—reveal the care with which individuals treated one another during crisis moments. These caring interactions moreover showed that beneficiaries hold agency which is supported through strong personal relationships.

The crises within Lebanon had enormous impact on the safety, mental and physical health, and overall well-being of local partners. Respondents from within the country expressed that when international partners truly knew them, as a result of ongoing regular communication which built trust before the crisis hit, this made their offers of support more meaningful.

Although the global level of data collection did not speak to this theme quite as deeply as the in-country analysis, several global policy actors did discuss the roles of individuals as pivotal to establishing, building, and sustaining partnerships.

We posit that the roles of individual actors and personal relationships were pivotal to the success and sustainability of programs, particularly throughout crises. Those partnerships that, despite ongoing crises, managed to sustain their activities and retain students, often relied on the dedication of individuals and the strong relationships between partners, who knew one another, cared for one another, and understood each other's needs.

The challenges and possibilities of participation and localization

Through a vertical analysis of all data, we found that the two concepts of participation and localization overlapped in many ways. Although defined differently—where participation relates to the engagement of local community members in EiE activities, and localization refers to local actors and organizations taking the lead in EiE programing at country-level—at times these concepts were applied interchangeably with one another or similar obstacles were presented in achieving them. Despite widespread agreement that participation of beneficiaries and localization of EiE efforts would contribute to the success of partnerships, each level of our analysis exposed the limited nature of both participation and localization.

Global level interviews revealed widespread agreement that participation of local actors or members of affected communities in global partnerships remains very low. When local participants do engage at the global level, they are often tokenized and

their voices hold little power. As well, most respondents lamented localization efforts as nascent or ineffective. Documents produced by international organizations, in discussions of partnerships, rarely discussed participation or localization. In fact, these themes were the least prevalent among those coded, and when discussed, suggested that local partners ought to align with global organizations' values in order to mitigate operational risks.

When examining participation issues globally, Global North and South dynamics are at the forefront. Those who participate easily and actively are generally understood to represent Northern organizations and countries, while those with lowest participation represent the Global South. This dynamic with participation in EiE partnerships holds true to a degree in Lebanon as well. In some partnerships, respondents described relationships with international organizations' staff as somewhat one-directional and not participatory, also lacking clear localization efforts where local partners take the lead. The network analysis of partnerships within Lebanon also displayed the widespread participation and high centrality of international actors, including international organizations, bilateral agencies, foundations, and companies headquartered in the Global North.

But in some partnerships, localization was more firmly established, where local actors were trusted and directed projects, and in which strategic decisions resulted from collaborative processes. We found that effective localization most often occurs when certain are factors at play, including mutual trust, which results in relatively hands-off involvement—in some cases of international funders—and allows for flexibility; ongoing and consistent collaborative practices and communication, based on transparency and care; and mutual learning where all partners respect the knowledge, skills, and capacities of one another.

We also found that participation at country-levels takes on a different perspective when viewed through a micro lens, which assesses the involvement of end beneficiaries of projects, including communities, school administrators, teachers, families, and students. Our case study respondents clearly prioritized participation of all stakeholders. And community participation was not presented as an add-on to the projects, but integrated as an organic and ongoing component of the partnership's activities. Participatory practices allowed, at times, beneficiaries to be critical of the implementing agencies or other partners, showing that they felt agency to critique and that their views were respected and taken into consideration.

The crises which hit during our data collection had notable impacts on both participation and localization. At the global level, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the cease of travel for international actors, who could no longer "parachute" into countries with EiE programs. Instead, local partners took the helm and maintained projects during exceptionally challenging moments. International actors expressed new-found appreciation for local partners—in fact many appeared amazed at the ingenuity and resilience of their local partners. In this way, several respondents viewed

COVID-19 as potentially accelerating localization. Our second round database and longitudinal network analysis showed that local NGOs grew in number after the onset of the pandemic. From these findings, we posit that COVID-19 led to a necessity in working with local actors.

The country-level analysis during crises further showed the importance of regular participation of beneficiaries, especially families and students. When crises hit and schools closed, local partners with ongoing and active communication already in place were able to more easily reach out and assess how students were coping and also record any technological needs, for instance through inventories of devices at home, time that students could spend online, plausible data usage, etc. Education had to be adapted to these challenges and could only be adequately addressed through effective communication lines.

The country-level data exposed the resilience and creativity of local stakeholders and beneficiaries, especially teachers and students. The pivot to virtual learning, while challenging and not without problems, was done quickly and flexibly, with care, kindness, and humor. Our findings brought to light the vital work of local actors, how they embraced beneficiary participation, and how this helped to sustain education through a series of emergencies. We posit that participatory practices, including end beneficiary participation, helped to sustain partnership activities and in turn supported student retention in virtual school and their attendance in classes.

Discrimination, marginalization, and racism

An unfortunate finding that we uncovered from both the global and country analyses relates to discrimination, marginalization, and racism, both direct and systemic, within partnerships.

Global partnerships that address EiE appear to be dominated by actors from the Global North who speak English fluently. Those not from dominant groups may be present, but their participation is limited. The participation of affected communities is very low in global spaces, and when they are involved, they are often tokenized. Global partnerships, according to many respondents, lack diversity and active participation of non-dominant groups. In turn, this environment means actors from the Global South, local organizations, and beneficiaries, are excluded from major decision making.

The BLM movement spurred much discussion within the global education community on inequities and white supremacy within the development and humanitarianism arenas, including how colonial practices and assumptions pervade these spaces and activities. Within some organizations, dialogue and self-reflection has begun about lack of diversity and how to address racism. At the same time, some respondents expressed skepticism and lamented that the structural change needed to address white supremacy remained out of reach.

In terms of support to Syria refugees in Lebanon on the part of international actors, some respondents noted that this focus may have derived from a strategic interest for refugees to remain outside of Europe. As well, others noted that the Syria crisis elicited greater support than large-scale refugee crises throughout Sub-Saharan Africa because Syrians have lighter skin and look more similar to people from the Global North.

Within Lebanon, discrimination was felt by both Lebanese and Syrians as the end beneficiaries, such as educators, parents, and students. For example, respondents told stories of disrespect for a Syrian school principal and Lebanese parents voicing anger over including Syrian children in classrooms or receiving additional supports. Xenophobia against refugees appeared to be pervasive in educational spaces across the country. And the multi-crises that occurred only further exposed and amplified systemic inequities among the student populations, where refugees particularly struggled to maintain their education in the face of fiscal crisis and school closures.

However, we found that some partners attempt to work through discrimination. We interviewed representatives of global-level organizations which are enacting major structural changes to address white supremacy and colonial legacies in their work. Others have begun to hold dialogue circles and book clubs within departments through which they can reflect on their practices. In local-level organizations, activities that bring together Lebanese and Syrian families have helped to break down some of the assumptions about one another, such as Syrian parents joining school committees. Local respondents explained that participatory activities helped to ameliorate discrimination, where people began to know one another as humans. Local partners also took vocal stances against discrimination through policies and actions to promote integration and address xenophobia. In terms of academic achievement, our findings suggest that working against discrimination will contribute to a key factor in student success: integration of refugees into schools and wider communities.

Although manifesting differently, discrimination, marginalization, and racism infiltrates EiE partnerships both global and local. Sometimes these inequities relate to North vs South participation, and sometimes between host and refugees. We posit that if acknowledged and addressed, including self-reflection and openness to change, partnership could see positive changes. This global moment, when organizations and actors across the world have begun authentic conversations about colonialism and racism, might present an opportunity to improve EiE partnerships.

Power asymmetries

A key overarching theme that emerged from the vertical analysis, intersecting with several of the other above-described themes, is that of power asymmetries within EiE partnerships, and how some partnerships manage to address power imbalances and create more meaningful partnerships. Issues such as discrimination, lack of participation and localization, increased marketization, and poor coordination all contribute to and are shaped by particular power dynamics in EiE. On the other

hand, those partnerships that sought to address discriminatory practices, prioritized participation, took on a humanitarian rather than market-based approach, and coordinated through effective communication and care, appeared to ameliorate such asymmetries.

At the global level, power imbalances appear to be clear and longstanding, and penetrate not only global organizations and partnerships, but the wider humanitarian landscape including policy development, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Limited participation and localization reflects these power asymmetries, where actors and organizations from the Global North, those with resources and other forms of capital, drive policy decision-making, agenda-setting, and determining of outcomes. Despite widespread acknowledgement that the humanitarian sector needs to change to embrace more participatory practices, according to global interview respondents, these inequities persist. As described above, with the BLM movement and growing calls to decolonize global development and humanitarianism, many organization have acknowledged the need for structural changes to address such power imbalances. Yet these power structures, for now, remain deeply entrenched.

Our network analysis further lent evidence to power asymmetries between organizations. The degree centrality and brokerage measures found that international organizations in particular hold central positions in the network, with more ties and brokering more relationships than any other group. The visualizations of this network further expose the most central types of organizations, with clusters around well-connected and thereby influential entities. As well, the geographic distribution of organizations shows that ties flow from the MENA region to places that are organizational headquarters of large international organizations as well as international NGOs. An organization's location in the network, its centrality, may reflect more opportunities, stronger ties to more actors, able to determine (or distort) flows of information, and therefore wield influence and power. We acknowledge that determining power based on centrality is suggestive, yet based on our triangulations of findings, we posit that most central actors hold influence in the network.

Our in-country research added nuance to the theme of power asymmetries. Partnership B appeared to reflect similar power dynamics to those uncovered at the global level. A partnership with an international organization revealed how a local NGO had to abide by particular outcome-based practices, deliver specific data on a timeline, and that the international organization did not communicate in a transparent manner about goals. Our analysis suggested a clear imbalance in this partnership, in which the IO largely drove mandates and practices and the local NGO had to respond to the international funders' needs. Yet most of the partnerships we examined at the country level did not fall prey to such power asymmetries.

Given that our research sought to examine promising partnership practices, we intentionally selected as case studies, from a wider sample, those partnerships that appeared from our initial survey to function positive ways and with strong outcomes.

And, interestingly, these partnerships overall did not seem to suffer from overt power imbalances, at least not to the same degree as suggested by other aspects of our data.

For example, some of the in-country partnerships recognized, were troubled by, and sought to address discrimination against beneficiaries (refugees and their families) within their projects. Although certainly challenging, it appeared their efforts had positive impacts on reducing xenophobia.

Additionally, all the local organizations in our case studies prioritized participation from local educational and refugee communities, including teachers and families. According to educators, they felt as though they were trusted collaborators on the projects, and that international partners respected them. In turn, international respondents voiced how much they learned from their local partners and that they trusted local actors, affording them the flexibility to make appropriate decisions through a hands-off approach. This mutual trust, respect, and ongoing participation appeared to counter power imbalances that might have emerged in other partnerships.

We found through our case studies that few participants of promising partnerships viewed their activities through a market-based lens. Only the partnership between a local NGO and an IO referenced such business practices as logo placement and outcomes-driven project design. Competition, however, appeared to surface in other partnerships as well, particularly because the EiE space within Lebanon remains resource scarce and all organizations are vying for funds. For smaller, local partners, this competitive environment can impact their survival and the sustainability of a partnership. Of our case studies, the one organization that left a partnership did so during an economic crisis and due to funding constraints. Our findings suggest that a competitive, marketized environment contributes to power imbalances, particularly between those who have resources and those who do not.

We found that those partnerships we deemed promising did not reveal glaring power inequities. Their more equitable practices resulted in positive beneficiary outcomes which were able to sustain through crisis, characterized by a caring approach in which the partners truly knew, appreciated, empathized, and supported one another (and not merely through financing). This care overlapped with a communicative and transparent approach to the partnership, nurtured and sustained through collaborative and participatory practices, with two-directional learning taking place. Partnerships that included a culture of trust, respect, mutual learning, and care appeared to counter power dynamics that pervade other aspects of humanitarian response.

Our vertical analysis points to the potential for significant power asymmetries, in particular due to structures that promote inequitable participation in EiE activities and decision-making. However, even in the face of these power imbalances, we see the potential for meaningful partnerships. Inequities emerge at all levels, but this may be due to how partners operate and the wider structures in which they work, including organizational cultures and constraints, rather than who they are as people or the types

of organizations they represent. Behaviors that appear to reduce power asymmetries include self-reflection, openness to change, trust and respect for partners. Through acknowledging one's own position of power and engaging in efforts to alter power dynamics, we argue that anyone and any organization has the potential to be a good partner.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude this report, we revisit our initial research questions and respond to each, drawing from three years of data collection and a vertical and longitudinal analyses of all.

The extent and nature of partnerships

Research Question 1: What is the extent and nature of the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon? (Who is involved? In what ways? In partnership with whom?)

Partnerships supporting education in emergencies have grown in number and in diversity, as evidenced by the response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon. The Syria crisis acted as a catalyst to EiE engagement for many organizations, and in particular new international actors which had not yet participated in refugee education.

Organizations have increasingly embraced the notion of partnership as a response to EiE, and a clear consensus has emerged that partnerships are a key mechanism to improve education for crisis-affected communities. Partnering with other organizations is now understood as a necessity in EiE and imperative to ensure adequate resources, expertise, and implementation.

International actors dominate the EiE space as prominent organizations within Lebanon. In global partnerships as well, representatives of international organizations and bilateral donors participate to a greater degree than national government agencies, local NGOs, or affected communities.

Both globally and at the country level within Lebanon our data point to a growing participation of nontraditional actors, such as family and corporate foundations and private businesses. Private actors now participate in EiE advocacy, policy-making, design of educational programming, and funding.

The nature of involvement includes a wide array of activities. Some actors and organizations appear to embrace a market-like way of working within EiE partnerships, characterized by competition and a focus on efficiency and outputs. A growing engagement of business actors in conjunction with embracing more business-like ways of working have, on the main, not improved the EiE sector. In light of our research, partnerships that reflect this marketized environment, whether global or local, raise concerns relating to process, outcomes, and how partners relate to one another and collaborate.

Organizations based in the Global North often drive the mandates and activities of partnerships, including global partnerships and those operating in-country. Nationally,

local partners are viewed as those responsible for handling implementation of projects. Local actors often aim to align their work with larger, international organization in order to capture funding.

However, when particular practices are at play, the nature of partnerships shift. Our research analyzing what we view as promising partnerships reveal that certain factors mitigate the above-described problematic features of partnerships. We outline these promising partnership practices in response to Research Question 4 below.

Changes in partnerships during and following crises

Research Question 2: To what degree has the global educational response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon shifted over time? (2018-2021)

Several unanticipated events marked pivotal moments over the course of our study. Each played a role in longitudinal changes as revealed through our analysis.

The fall 2019 political and economic crisis within Lebanon changed needs and access to funding for local organizations and how international actors routed funding towards local partners, as well as how individuals and organizations communicated with one another and supported ongoing programs or temporary ceasing of activities, particularly within schools that closed during mass protests.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 spurred drastic changes in how partnerships function, including how partners communicate, which actors performed particular roles, and the need to adapt rapidly to pandemic-related restrictions. Our research suggests that COVID-19 may have accelerated localization efforts, given that local actors had to take the helm of projects because international partners could no longer travel to participate directly in activities. This change in functioning led, in some cases, to new-found respect for local partners as well as end beneficiaries, who showed ingenuity, flexibility, and perseverance in order to sustain EiE projects. Educators in particular were able to rapidly pivot their instruction online. As well, COVID-19 appears to have accelerated the participation of private actors, in particular at the global level, given their expertise and capacity to deliver EdTech solutions that were desperately needed to ensure virtual schooling could take place. Although common prior to the pandemic, educational technology became a key activity area for EiE partnerships.

A global reckoning on racism, spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States which began in earnest in May 2020, accelerated conversations on white supremacy and the legacies of colonialism in humanitarianism, including in EiE. This new reckoning took place predominantly within organizations in the Global North, and included self-reflection of the roles of Northern actors in perpetuating colonial practices through their organizations. Discussions on race were most common among actors working at organizations headquartered in the United States, including IOs, INGOs, and foundations, and often focused on how they approach work with local

partners.

The August 2020 explosion in Beirut Port damaged hundreds of schools—including many that serve refugee populations—as well as offices of local organizations working on EiE, creating additional hardships for maintaining partnership activities, widespread school closures, and taking an additional financial and emotional toll on local partners within Lebanon.

The combined political, economic, and health crises impacted local organizations in terms of their financial sustainability and capacity to operate. Our network analysis showed that several organizations ceased their partnership activities during this time. However, many new organizations began working to support EiE in Lebanon, including several local NGOs that partnered with international actors who could not travel. The multiple crises moreover affected the individuals working at partner organizations within Lebanon, including grappling with economic stressors, and their own physical and mental health as well as that of their families. In this way, over the course of the study, local partners in some cases became members of affected communities, altering partnership dynamics, for instance exposing the importance of empathy, flexibility, respect, and care.

Although unexpected and resulting in much pain and devastation both within Lebanon and worldwide, these events allowed this study to uncover aspects of partnerships we hadn't anticipated analyzing, including how relationships are maintained while facing uncertainty, how partners respond to each other's immediate needs and struggles, and what factors allow partnerships in EiE to sustain during and after crises.

The impacts of partnerships

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of these partnerships on (a) how coordination and community participation is experienced at the local level, and (b) with what effects, including on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education?

The in-country case study partnerships we deem promising prioritized certain practices, including ongoing and transparent communication as well as participation embedded in trust, respect, and openness to learn from one another.

Our study found that partnerships function effectively at the country-level when coordination is interpreted and enacted as a form of ongoing and transparent communication between all partners, including end beneficiaries. This communication goes beyond sharing information, data and outputs, and updates on the projects, but includes checking in and supporting one another as human beings, expressing concern for partners' daily lives and personal stressors. Prioritizing communication often simultaneously prioritizes expressions of care.

Our findings suggest that those partnerships in which actors clearly respect and trust one another often engage in active participatory practices. When organizations—in particular those which fund or direct projects—allow for partners to offer regular input and collaboration on decision-making, mutual learning, transparency (which include openness to criticism), and flexibility, effective participation follows. A hands-off approach that is not dictated by early-identified outputs appears to engender more engaged participation on the part of local actors and end beneficiaries.

Partnership impacts on students were observed in several areas. Refugee student integration and retention in school improved through recognizing and addressing xenophobia against Syrians and not tolerating discrimination in schools and virtual spaces.

Through effective and ongoing communication with parents, students, and community members, partnerships were able to effectively pivot and respond to crises. Such communicative practices, which began prior to school closures, helped refugee students to remain engaged in learning when forced to attend virtually. The commitment, patience, and ingenuity of educators played a pivotal role in engaging and retaining students, as did schools regularly reaching out to families to better understand any roadblocks they encountered with attendance. Although we were not able to collect data on student progression due to the complexities caused by school closures, we feel confident claiming, based on qualitative findings, that refugee student integration was helped through ongoing communication, respect, and flexibility.

Student retention appeared to improve in cases where communication was stronger, but class attendance unfortunately was not consistent for refugees as we found through our virtual observations. Challenges, including regular access to technology and data, emotional struggles, and at-home learning environments impacted student retention. Even when virtual learning was organized and instruction communicated clearly, with input of families, challenges remained, given the extreme economic struggles, structural inequities, and xenophobia faced by refugee students. As well, in the context of each of these crises, local partners and their families faced very difficult circumstances themselves. Although all partners often did as much as possible in the face of catastrophic events to sustain education to reach Syrian students, structural inequities remained salient.

Promising partnership practices

Research Question 4: What are some of the "promising practices" of partnerships that promote the foundational tenets of coordination and community participation?

From our vertical analysis that triangulated global, national, and longitudinal data—including interviews, documents, a network database, and observations—we arrived at five guiding principles for promising partnership practices. Although many humanitarian organizations have developed effective practices and standards, these five

principles differ in terms of targeting partnerships in EiE.

These principles do not merely provide guidance, but demand a shift in orientation away from traditional or more commonplace thinking and action in education in emergencies. We describe them as “promising” because they emerge from the practices of successful partnerships that withstood multiple compounding crises. Yet each partnership develops and operates in a different context, and their outcomes, including how partnerships are experienced, depend on a range of factors. However, based on our wide breadth and depth of data collection, we offer this guidance.

Although other practices based on different principles might improve outcomes in education in emergencies, we view these five as critical for partnerships to function effectively and ethically, as each relates to how people interact and collaborate with one another. These principles intersect with one another and are equally important. And while drawn from EiE partnerships focusing on Syria refugee education, we propose these as applicable to other EiE contexts, as foundational for approaching partnerships in an array of settings and responding to various crises.

We posit that anyone and any organization can be a good partner. Positive partnerships rest on how people and organizations approach their work and their partners, how they operate, and their openness to embrace change. Anyone can adopt the five practices we outline here and improve their partnerships.

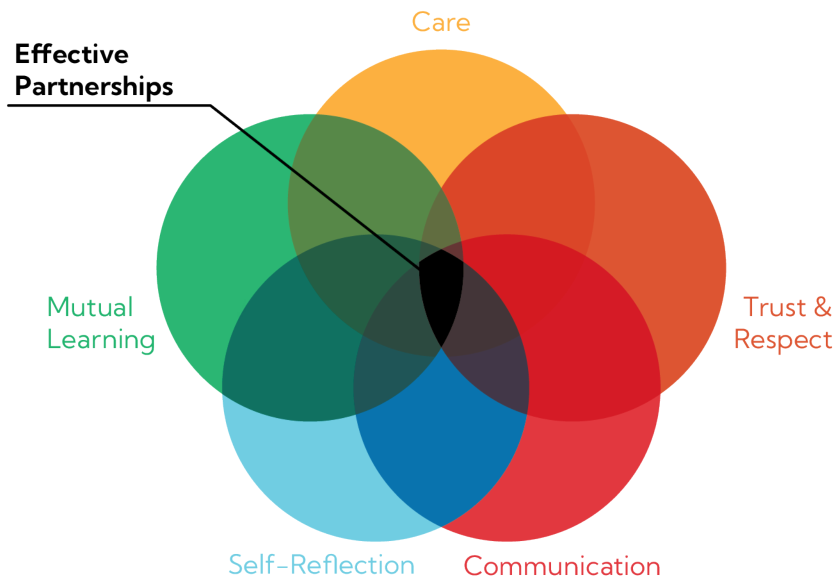

Figure 7.1: Guiding principles for promising partnership practices

Care

Our findings suggest that the principle of care contributes to positive, productive partnerships in EiE. By care we refer to the sometimes intangible ways in which partners interact and approach their activities while collaborating with one another as fellow humans rather than merely fellow humanitarians and/or educational professionals. Care includes basic human behavior such as kindness and thoughtfulness, as well as empathy for one another's circumstances. Care also derives from a degree of vulnerability, through which partners come to know one another's struggles and desires, both professionally and personally. Care allows partners to truly grasp one another's needs, including for flexibility and understanding.

When partners care for one another, they more regularly and organically communicate, which in turn allows for greater understanding of challenges and enables coordinated activity. Care often leads partnerships to embrace participatory practices through which all partners contribute to project activities and outcomes—because partners who care for one another desire each other's input and participation. Care, which fosters empathy, reduces the risk of discrimination among partners and spurs self-reflection on the part of all. Finally, our analysis shows that care helps to sustain partnerships through crises.

More traditional or commonplace approaches to EiE appear to derive from a place of benevolence or charity. While these might be considered positive attitudes, they risk embodying saviorism, where partners who perceive themselves to be in a more privileged position act as though the other partner requires rescuing. Such motivations and positionalities focus more on those providing aid and assistance (often from privileged communities and the Global North), in a one-directional sense, rather than a focus on local partners as people, with challenges and struggles, but also agency, knowledge, ingenuity, and capabilities. Care is multi-directional; all partners must care about the wellbeing of all others.

Based on our study, we suggest a *shift from saviorism to care*.

Trust and Respect

The related principles of trust and respect together contribute to partnership success in EiE. The two, we view, as going hand-in-hand; each depends on the other. Respect includes recognition that all partners hold strengths and capacities to conduct their work, and although these capacities may differ from partner to partner, each must be considered valuable and necessary.

Trust allows partners to take a hands-off approach to one another's work, allowing the other the flexibility and adaptability they might need. Respect recognizes that partners will make the good choices based on their own experiences, skills, and knowledge of contexts. Respect also leads partners to recognize each other as creative, capable, and

resilient, able to cope under pressure. Trust and respect align closely with practice #4, as they lead to genuine mutual learning.

Although shared goals and values were mentioned in some of our interviews, in practice these do not appear to be a pivotal factors in successful partnerships. In fact, assuming that partners ought to share values and goals may be problematic. For instance, in those partnerships characterized by historic power asymmetries, dominant actors tend to dictate what values and goals are important. Instead, our findings suggest that partners ought to respect one another's values and goals, even in the case that they differ.

When partners trust and respect one another, they communicate well, embrace full and active participation of one another, recognize inequities and act to remedy these, and avoid the market-like approach of dictating top-down, output-driven projects, via reductive micro-management and constant monitoring of data.

Our findings suggest that EiE partnerships *shift from a culture of outputs and monitoring to one of trust and respect*.

Ongoing, organic communication

Our study aimed to understand the relationship between partnership practices and coordination—one of the foundational INEE Minimum Standards and a widely agreed-upon factor in effective EiE programming. However, through our analysis, we uncovered how different partners interpret and enact coordination in different ways depending on context. In global level documents and interviews, coordination is presented as a means to achieving efficiency in partnerships, leading to less duplication, more complementarity, and effective practices.

Yet many respondents within Lebanon, when asked about coordination, discussed instead how partners communicate, and how ongoing and organic communication led to stronger partnerships. Through genuine, oftentimes unscheduled communication—be it virtual, over phone, email, or in-person—partners come to better know one another, understand each other's goals and ways of working, and trust one another. Our analysis suggests that coordination in fact depends upon communication, and that communication leads to additional positive outcomes, such as knowledge sharing, transparency, care, trust and respect. Through ongoing and organic communication, other valuable practices naturally follow. In this way, we posit that communication can foster more meaningful relationships, while reducing a competitive environment.

Partnerships are evolving and dynamic, and as our study showed, often must withstand unexpected obstacles. With strong communication lines, already in place, partnerships are more likely to sustain over longer periods. This continuity in communication plays a key role in helping partnerships withstand crises.

Our analysis suggests that the concept of "coordination" aligns primarily with a Northern-based discourse, one that dovetails with market-like practices focusing on outputs and data. Our study does not counter the importance of coordination and its contributions to effectively delivering aid and other services to those affected by crises. However, in considering how partnerships operate, we posit that ongoing and communication is key.

Based on our study, we recommend that partnership practices in EiE *shift from a focus on coordination to communication.*

Mutual learning and multi-directional knowledge sharing

Our study highlighted several partnership activities, at global and local levels, that demonstrated the ways in which partners effectively share knowledge and learn from one another. This sharing and learning is multi-directional—in particular, between different types of organizations which occupy different roles, and regardless of resources, size, and location. For instance, partnerships that embrace mutual learning occur when those from the Global North position themselves as learners as opposed to those who "build capacity" in the Global South.

When mutual learning takes place, local knowledge is deemed as significant—if not more so due to deep contextual understanding—as knowledge produced in the Global North. No individual is an expert and partnership spaces are open to new ways of thinking and operating, allowing for greater participatory practices. As well, partnerships benefit from internal organizational learning, where each organization has the space and time to share knowledge with and learn from their colleagues.

Mutual learning and knowledge sharing is sometimes scheduled and structured, but more often appears to be organic, fostered through communication, on the basis of trust and respect for one another's intelligence, experience, and capacities. This form of organic and multi-directional learning may not fit cleanly into the more commonplace output-driven and efficiency-oriented culture of the humanitarian industry.

The term "capacity building" has pervaded the development and humanitarian sectors, but our study suggests that this one-directional (and paternalistic) concept does not capture how effective partnerships operate.

Instead, we posit a *shift from capacity building to mutual learning.*

Consistent self-reflection and interrogation of power dynamics

Our vertical analysis, at each level and through each set of data, revealed that power imbalances pervade partnerships in EiE. In particular, most respondents recognized that actors from the Global North and organizations with resources hold positions

of power. Power dynamics reflect structural, systemic, and direct forms of inequities, sometimes economic, often racialized, and colonial. Power asymmetries also emerge between racial and ethnic groups, for instance as xenophobia against refugee communities.

We found a common discourse of aiming towards "equitable partnerships" in our interviews and document analysis. We acknowledge this aim as attainable in the long-term. But gaining true equity would require massive structural changes and a widespread anti-colonial shift in the international development and humanitarian industries.

Our analysis suggests that a first step towards ameliorating power imbalances involves acknowledging who embodies positions of power and why, and how this power relates to colonialism, capitalism, and racism. Interrogating power dynamics can be structured, through workshops, readings, and other scheduled measures, but more importantly involves sometimes uncomfortable self-reflection on the part of individuals. Only when some individuals become open to relinquishing positions of power can asymmetries shift. And as we uncovered, the long process of addressing power dynamics must be ongoing, embedded into everyday approaches to activities and interactions, and this process will likely go unfinished even after a partnership has completed its work.

Our study suggests that some partnership in EiE might never achieve true equity—in particular, when resources, race, and funding come into play, inequities might remain entrenched. But meaningful partnerships which result in positive outcomes, based on care, trust, respect, communication, and mutual learning—can be achieved when everyone involved moves toward awareness of structural power asymmetries.

And so we posit that EiE partnerships should aim to *shift from ignoring power imbalances to self-reflection through awareness and interrogation.*

Ways forward for partnerships in EiE

This three year study shed light on so many varied facets to humanitarian and EiE environments and helped us to better understand the incredible actors and organizations that partner to support education for refugees. As discussed throughout the conclusion to this report, our findings suggest particular responses to our research questions relating to EiE partnership characteristics, changes over time, and impacts. And we have arrived at five separate yet intersecting guiding principles we suggest will improve partnerships in EiE.

Each of the five guiding principles involve a shift, which suggests the need for a more overarching transformation in traditional ways of operating in humanitarian sector. Not only must actors change practices, self-perceptions, and approaches, but humanitarians must be open to dismantling ways of operating, including but not limited to partnerships. In order to achieve permanent, structural change in humanitarian action,

the industry—including aid mechanisms, policy development, advocacy, program development, and project implementation—must adopt an explicit anti-colonial and participatory mandate.

Although structural change must occur in order to facilitate and make permanent major shifts in humanitarianism, we propose that individuals and organizations can begin to spur such transformation through changing their own practices and beliefs.

Through pursuing the five partnership principles—care; trust and respect; ongoing, organic communication; mutual learning and multi-directional knowledge sharing; and consistent self-reflection and interrogation of power dynamics—meaningful and positive partnerships can result. And in turn will better support education in emergencies.

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