

Evaluation Summary

Mid-term Project Evaluation

Improving mental health and well-being of all people living in Lebanon Community Mental Health and Substance Use Center in Tripoli

Country: **Lebanon**

Sector: **Mental Health & Substance Use**

Evaluator: **Sandra Hajal & Patricia Haddad**

Date of the evaluation: **June - September 2023**

Key data on AFD's support

Project number: CLB1143

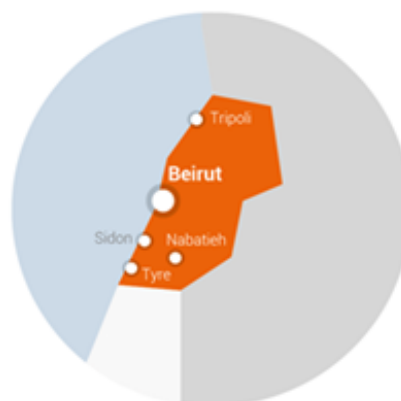
Amount: 925 287 € (total amount for Tripoli's activities)

Disbursement rate: 44 %

Signature of financing: November 2021

Completion date: December 2024

Total duration: 38 months



Context

Since 2019, Lebanon has been affected by a severe economic crisis accompanied by a subsequent devaluation of the Lebanese currency against the US dollar, coupled with the impact of COVID-19 and the August 2020 explosion. This led to devastating consequences on the social, economic and medical systems, among others. The burden of mental health and substance use is very high especially in highly deprived areas such as Tripoli. Many assessments conducted in this area showed high levels of distress among the general population and high needs for service provision.

Actors and operating method

In November 2021, Médecins du Monde, Skoun and Embrace in collaboration with the National Mental Health Program joined efforts and implemented the project "Improving Mental Health and well-being of people living in Lebanon" funded by Agence française de développement (AFD) over a period of 38 months. MdM and Skoun opened a joint Community Mental Health and Substance Use Center in Tripoli as of September 2022. The center, through its multidisciplinary team composed of psychologists, social workers, a psychiatrist, and nurses, provides specialized mental health and substance use services. In addition, MdM supports 3 PHCCs in Tripoli in integrating mental health in the staff practices, and providing mental health services for low cases. MdM and Skoun aim to increase awareness in the community on mental health and substance use through outreach volunteers.

Objectives

The project's main goal is to support the establishment of a community-based mental health and substance use system in line with the national strategy and model of care, while tackling gender bias and barriers in service access and provision.

Expected outputs

- Creating an integrated and gender-sensitive mental health and substance use service system in the Beirut, Baalbek and Tripoli areas
- Offering quality, gender-specific and focused care to individuals dealing with mental health and substance use issues, in accordance with the care model defined by the National Mental Health Program strategy.
- Strengthening the capacities and knowledge of community members on rights to treatment and different services
- Capacity building and on-the-field supervision of mental health CSOs, through a gender approach that aims to tackle gender-inequalities and barriers to access mental health and substance use services

Performance assessment

Relevance & Coherence

The components of this project were found to be relevant to local needs and coherent with national strategies and local actors. Nationally, the establishment of the CMH-SUC, the integration of mental health into 3 PHCCs and the community awareness in the region are in accordance with an integration process and meet the objectives of the national Lebanese strategies related to mental health and substance use.

The establishment of a CMH-SUC in Tripoli and the continued integration interventions in the PHCCs are perceived to be contributing to the overall improvement of the MHPSS and SU services system in Lebanon. The centers are perceived to be filling in a gap as there is a growing need for MH and SU services in Lebanon in general, and in Tripoli and its surrounding areas more specifically due to the current economic situation.

Effectiveness & Impact

The opening of a well-equipped CMH-SUC in Tripoli providing integrated MH and SU services has been successfully achieved. The spectrum of services provided by multidisciplinary teams of the CMH-SUC and the PHCCs have improved availability, accessibility, and affordability of services for service users according to specific needs. Work at the PHCC level has increased the identification, management, and referral of MH and SU cases as a result of continued training and increased capacities of general medical staff. Outreach has been effective in raising awareness and knowledge regarding services. Trainings are thought to contribute to increased effectiveness of activity implementation, and can be expanded by additional topics, such as child specific interventions and care, and emotional crisis management. Perceived improvements were also noted at the beneficiary level who reported major improvement within their personal, family, professional and social life. A possible negative unintended impact has been noted : increased awareness may also increase the demand for services that are unavailable to date.

Efficiency

A number of strategic and operational decisions have been taken to efficiently utilize project resources for activity implementation. This included unifying salary scales and reviewing workloads of staff members in order to ensure that beneficiary needs are met in an efficient manner. This was possible thanks to successful coordination among consortium partners, which facilitated continuous monitoring, coordination, and decision-making processes. The burn rate is tracking at an acceptable pace.

Sustainability

The integration services into community centers and health facilities that are already in place and familiar to the community increases the possibility that these services can persist beyond the project's timeline. However, due to the extremely unstable financial and political situation of the country, the sustainability of this model of service provision is uncertain even though all partners, including the national authorities, are exerting efforts towards improving integration.

Added value of AFD's contribution

The progressive and systematic development of Mental health and Substance use service system in Lebanon is an important contribution made to the sector at a time when the country is lacking resources and priorities to support growing needs in this area.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

The increased access to integrated community mental health and substance use services has successfully helped identify and manage health issues at an early stage, therefore decreasing burden on health costs, and offer focused services and quality care. These services are inclusive and are being delivered to the most vulnerable groups and people at risk. These services are being delivered by teams that are trained, committed to their work, and multidisciplinary.

The partnership between MdM and Skoun is proving to be a successful model in all three CMH-SUCs, of which the most recent is Tripoli. It is important to ensure that these good practices are not only documented, as was achieved by the lessons learnt and toolkit document, but that they are applied and standardized.

Some recommendations to improve the project include:

More proactive reach-out to the underfunded ministry of health, to ensure coordination with the National Mental Health Programme.

Improve and better define partnership between Tripoli CMH-SUC and Al Rahma Hospital management in order to ensure sustainability of services.

Increased outreach efforts in Tripoli should be pursued through getting in touch with more local stakeholders, such as universities and municipalities, and contributing to decrease the stigma around mental health and substance use services.