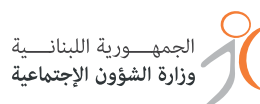


GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL POVERTY TARGETING PROGRAMME IN LEBANON



INTRODUCTION

This document presents the key findings of the Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis of the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP). The NPTP is the largest regular poverty-targeted social safety net cash assistance programme in Lebanon for the poorest and most marginalized Lebanese families. The analysis was undertaken by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women between April and June 2022.

OBJECTIVE

Examine how the NPTP has impacted the lives of women, girls and other marginalized people of concern. Recommend how the programme can improve its processes to ensure safe and accessible assistance to women and girls.

METHOD

The study used a qualitative approach where 101 purposively selected NPTP beneficiaries were interviewed (18 men, and 83 women). Of these, 41 participated in in-depth interviews while the rest were interviewed on-site at Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) after withdrawing their assistance. On-site data collection consisted of short exit interviews with a random selection of ATM users while in-depth interviewees were selected at random from a list of NPTP beneficiaries with profiles of interest to this study. People were asked about family dynamics, gender-based violence, risk of exploitation and abuse, and coping strategies for food insecurity – as well as logistics questions on how to use the ATMs.

FINDINGS

EMPOWERMENT, AGENCY, AND DECISION-MAKING

Women were highly satisfied with the newly dollarized cash assistance because it is more flexible and gives them more control. The assistance gave them agency and autonomy, especially when they did not have a husband or adult male in the household. When there was a man in the house, they often put the card in his name. Women and men's spending priorities were largely aligned – most spent on food and medicine, as well as the needs of people with disabilities or illnesses.

There were only small impacts on gender roles and responsibilities. Women take an active role in applying for and managing the cash assistance. All beneficiaries could benefit from improved case management and referrals and by having updated information on services of all kinds and to be supported in referrals. There was little awareness of who to reach out to for assistance and a sense of dissatisfaction with existing services. The NPTP system needs to better accommodate specific bureaucratic issues that affect women's access to assistance in cases such as divorce, separation, and adding newborn children.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND INTRA-FAMILY DYNAMICS

There was no clear link between NPTP assistance and an increase in any specific form of GBV. On the contrary, beneficiaries reported that the NPTP assistance eased family tensions because it provided the security of a monthly income. However, among a few of cases where family tensions already existed, the NPTP could become a tool within conflicts between married couples or siblings. At times this led to deceit or violence, especially in cases of divorces or deaths.

RISK OF EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

The study did not identify any incidents of exploitation in the beneficiary selection process or at the ATM assistance withdrawal sites. No specific structural discrimination or exploitation risks were reported by female-headed beneficiary households. However, crowding at certain ATMs where there was a high volume of beneficiaries withdrawing assistance made the process uncomfortable for women, and some felt the process was humiliating. MOSA and WFP were aware of these issues and had taken mitigation measures such as hiring security.



Many men and women, especially elders and people with disabilities, did not know how to withdraw assistance or were not confident in the process. Numerous respondents reported they feared their cards would be swallowed by the ATM, and this was especially true among older and/or less literate people. This led to increased reliance on having someone else, usually family members, relatives or someone at the ATM, to withdraw money for them.

Long trips to distant ATMs and crowding were the main concerns for beneficiaries, especially women with children, persons with disability and the elderly. This has led to the emergence of informal service providers who withdraw money on behalf of beneficiaries, usually for a fee. Sometimes, men, either random men or informal service providers step in and “control” the withdrawal process at an ATM. Beneficiaries’ opinions on this were mixed. While many beneficiaries considered this a helpful service it could also create potential for exploitation, though this was not observed. Researchers witnessed a few violent incidents at the ATMs and were informed of a few more, suggesting they occur somewhat regularly.

FOOD SECURITY

Beneficiary households, especially women, resorted to negative coping strategies because of the exponential increase in food prices. They cut meat consumption and relied instead on starch and grains. Women rationed and reallocated food in the family to ensure that children and PwDs were prioritized. They often reduced their own intake to prioritize children.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS (SDCs) AND SOCIAL WORKERS

Almost all women NPTP beneficiaries reported positive perceptions of SDC and MOSA social workers, who were considered highly trusted focal points. Social workers themselves reported deteriorating working conditions and low-paying contracts that did not cover transportation costs to and from SDCs and limited their abilities to address issues arising with NPTP. Social workers reported lacking basic working necessities such as vests, identification tags, transportation to and from home visits, and fuel, among other items. The mostly female social workers reported incidents of harassment and GBV during their work, from which they had little protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the programme develop coordination mechanisms with the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) protection sector working group to ensure gender sensitization activities are mainstreamed across the different responses. When possible, unify channels and mechanisms between the NPTP and LCRP.

In addition, several measures can be taken to enhance gender sensitivity and improve the delivery overall of the NPTP programme, and reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse, including:

Advocacy & resource mobilization

- **Continue funding the NPTP and consider adding top-ups for specific needs** such as older people, disabilities and pregnant women, as it is providing critical assistance to extremely vulnerable women and PwD.

Targeting and assessment

- **Create accessible processes for households to declare changes in family situation**, especially divorce, separations, births and deaths, as the lack of these processes negatively affects women.

Process

- **Expand the Money Transfer Organization modality**, as this alleviates transportation costs as well as security and safety risks.
- **Continue to increase peoples' safety and comfort in the withdrawal process**, including by ensuring small change is available and putting shade at ATMs, as well as hiring women security guards.

Monitoring

- **Update WFP's field monitoring tools** (quantitative and qualitative) for gender and social inclusion sensitivities, and enhance gender sensitivity in the quantitative post-distribution monitoring (PDM) process.
- **Conduct similar gender-sensitive qualitative PDM bi-annually or annually** to complement quantitative data, and also consider conducting a rapid gender and protection analysis of the Money Transfer Organization redemption modality.

Communications

- **Ensure communications and information session for current and new beneficiaries**, especially to clear up misconceptions about the card being swallowed or whose name the card needs to be in. Provide better information on available referral services to NPTP beneficiaries, specific to their locality. Ensure communication addresses the issue of third party involvement in withdrawal.

- **Consider stationing communications staff at popular ATMs and money transfer redemption points to relay information in person**. Continue organizing information dissemination sessions on ATM days around services available in each area outside of the NPTP.
- **Sensitize MOSA staff on gender and social inclusion issues**, including issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) related to the NPTP. Improve pathways to report SEA or exploitation.

Protection, grievance, referrals, and cash +

- **Ensure the upcoming Grievance Response Information System (GRIS)¹ includes SOPs** in response to cases of harassment, exploitation and intimate partner or family violence.
- **Develop referral mechanisms between NPTP and gender-based violence cases**, child protection cases, and "cash-plus" services to meet the needs of vulnerable groups.
- **Ensure MOSA social workers are well informed about available NGO services provided in their target areas**. Train and consult with social workers on ways of responding to challenging cases.
- **Support improved job conditions for social workers**, including transport and insurance. Develop a policy and response mechanism for harassment and violence social workers may encounter on the job.
- **Consider funding SGBV service providers and expanding this capacity into underserved areas**.

1. A centralized GRIS meant to service all of MOSA's programs, including the NPTP, was being piloted as of September 2022 and was intended to be fully rolled out in 2023. Importantly, this GRIS is meant to serve as a GBV-response mechanism in addition to its role as a mechanism for receiving complaints more generally.