

RESULTS SUMMARY

Female leadership in Churches can increase gender equality in Lebanon

Author: Danmission (2024)



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PROJECT	Title:	<i>Forum for Contextual Theology for Faith and Social Action - Sub-project name:</i> Synod on Women, their Presence and Mission in the Church and Society
	Partner:	Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)
	Country:	Lebanon
	Period:	March 2024 – March 2025

CHANGE	<p>Through support from USEK and Danmission, the Maronite Church of Lebanon, spanning across eight regions with a total of one million members, has significantly increased the participation of women in Church committees and decision-making processes on the daily management and political direction of the Church. Due to the influential role of the church and faith institutions in a deeply sectarian society, it is essential that churches involve and give formal leadership to women, as it will not only influence women's role in churches and faith communities but also in the broader society.</p>
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CONTEXT	<p>Since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1991, and in recent years with consecutive crises, women's participation in church life has decreased. Norms, opinions, and actions of religious institutions hold a lot of power over the development of Lebanese society, as these are closely intertwined with social institutions and laws. Increasing gender equality and women's influence and representation within religious institutions is therefore closely linked to increased gender equality in broader society. Despite Lebanon having a diverse religious identity, the Maronite Church holds a crucial role, but evaluations of the Church's organisation and structures from 2017 highlighted a noticeable scarcity of women in leadership and decision-making roles.</p>
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CONTRIBUTION	<p>Danmission and USEK supported the Women's Office of the Maronite Church in developing a multi-level approach on how to include women in more areas of the Church bodies. The advocacy was based on women's testimonies included training of female Church members on women's empowerment, fostering communication and leadership skills in areas which helped the women identify how and where they could influence Church structures. This collected effort has increased women's participation, and the number of women holding leadership positions, in their churches. This resulted in women's needs and voices increasingly shaping the decisions and actions of their churches.</p>
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IMAGES	 <p>Data gathering and discussion workshop for female members</p>	 <p>Workshop in leadership and communication</p>
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

The project held eight focus group discussions that gathered the perspectives of local women on their involvement in church and social life. Based on this, 12 workshops on empowerment and leadership were conducted and reflected on best practices for raising women's voices through the study of case readings and literature reviews. The project established two committees, which developed guidelines on gender-equal responsibilities and supported different advocacy efforts for women's roles in decision-making. Furthermore, the committees have promoted more inclusive liturgical practices and started the discussion to facilitate opportunities for women to take on pastoral roles.

LESSONS

Despite the project's good results, creating sustainable structural change requires persistent advocacy. Furthermore, when aiming at changing old traditional gendered patterns, training women for leadership is necessary, but it also requires strong role models and mentorships, for more women to see that the change can happen and become a reality. To ensure a sustainable change process, the project included the Women's Office from the beginning.

EVIDENCE

Comparing monitoring reports with data from the baseline carried out before the project started shows clear evidence of the effect and success of the project. Looking at, for example, churches in the diocese of Antelias, in 2023, only 85 women were active in the parish, whereas in 2024, it increased to 200 women. Furthermore, the monitoring data shows that in 2023, there was one central diocesan committee; now, at the beginning of 2025, there are 10 committees in the parishes and many others in the process of being formed. Likewise, data for the diocese of Tripoli shows six parish committees in 2022 with 55 active women. Now, at the beginning of 2025, these numbers have increased to 66 parish committees and 470 active women.

DOMAINS

Development strategy priorities:

Democracy and Human Rights

Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

X

Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights

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Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights

X

Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights

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Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

X

Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work

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