



# **Volunteerism and the state in the Arab world: Towards building an inclusive society**

Case Study for the 2022 State of the World's  
Volunteerism Report

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Towards building an inclusive society  
Draft Chapter on the Arab world  
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## Introduction

The main aim of this research was to explore new and emerging trends in volunteer-state relationship in the Arab World through a case study approach involving three organisations. Using comparative qualitative analysis, the study analyzes the developing relationship between volunteers, the state and society in the light of recent social, economic and cultural changes in the region. Based on data from three case studies, two models are identified: co-production of services and social innovation. The study focused on the following research questions:

- What are new and emerging models of volunteer-state relationships in the region?
- In what ways can these models lead to more sustainable and inclusive societies?

The report is divided into four sections: section one presents the methodology; section two focuses on the cultural, social and economic context of the region; section three presents the case studies; section four concludes by identifying key factors for successful volunteer initiatives and presents policy recommendations.

## Section I. Methodology

Three volunteer organisations were chosen as case studies. The maxi case study -**Amel Organization International** - was selected because it has direct contact with the state through its projects. Amel's mission is to improve the quality of life of residents who have been affected by repeated humanitarian crises. It does so through its health and development programs, using a participatory approach and in a positive spirit of humanity. The organization provides services in health, psychosocial, human rights and child protection. It particularly supports migrant domestic workers and victims of trafficking. The other two organisations, based in Bahrain and Tunisia, are **Bahrain Foundation for Reconciliation and Civil Discourse** and **Nebhana Water Forum**.

For the maxi study, qualitative data was generated through conducting five in-depth semi-structured interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and two focus groups with volunteers, staff and board members at Amel. Gender balance was taken into consideration when selecting participants and ethical guidelines were followed. The interview data was analyzed based on emerging concepts and themes (Pratt et al., 2020) linking the research question and the data collected (Pratt, 2009). Data was gathered during the month of June in Beirut, Lebanon. Most of the interviews were conducted at Amel. Some were conducted via zoom due to the security situation in Lebanon. Interviews were recorded and transcribed but if the interviewee was not

comfortable with being recorded, notes were used. Before every interview, the consent form was orally read out to the participant and they gave consent. The two focus groups were conducted with volunteers; the interviews were conducted with three members of staff, one volunteer and one board member and project director (Table 1). For the mini case studies, the main source were secondary data.

Table 1: list of interviews and codes

| Interview   | code                        | Gender | Nationality | Status    |
|---|-----------------------------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| focus group: volunteers responsible for the vaccination project   | Respondent 1                | F      | Lebanese    | volunteer |
|   | respondent 2                | F      | Lebanese    | volunteer |
|   | respondent 3                | F      | Lebanese    | volunteer |
|   | Respondent 4                | F      | Lebanese    | volunteer |
| Focus group 2: International volunteers; Communication department | Respondent 1, focus group 2 | M      | USA         | volunteer |
|   | Respondent 2, focus group 2 | F      | France      | volunteer |
| Board Member/responsible for migrant workers programs             | Interviewee 1, 2021         | F      | Lebanese    | Staff     |
| Employee/ responsible for direct communication with the gov       | Interviewee 2, 2021         | F      | Lebanese    | Staff     |
| Volunteer Migrant worker school                                   | Interviewee 5,2021          | F      | Lebanese    | Volunteer |
| employee at AMEL  | Interviewee 3, 2021         | F      | Lebanese    | staff     |
| employee at AMEL  | Interviewee 4,2021          | F      | Lebanese    | staff     |

Additional data for both the maxi and mini case studies were derived from a careful and thorough review of sources, including policy papers, research reports, conference briefs, newspapers articles or editorials, institutional publications and media sources and digital platforms such as blogs and websites. The analysis of this data allowed us to map all policy initiatives and activities taken by these volunteers.

## Section II. Cultural and Socio-economic context

Volunteering is strongly rooted in the religious traditions of the Arab world and specifically, on Islamic belief (Sakr, 2003). Islamic practices are based on social responsibility and on giving back to society (Arab information center, 1999). Hence, volunteering is a natural phenomena in the region. Most volunteering is informal, mainly associated with religious and cultural traditions of supporting one another and the community (UNV, 2019 ; Haddad 2015). A study conducted by UNV in 2018 found that in the 18 countries surveyed in the region, there were 8.9 million full time equivalent volunteers, of which 17% were formal volunteers (UNV,2019). Women made up

56.6% of the total number of formal volunteers and 55.7% of those engaging in informal volunteering. The current economic situation in the Arab world has directly affected volunteering. The increase in poverty has led to young people being less likely to engage in volunteering opportunities. At the same time, wealthier Arab countries in the Gulf area are encouraging the idea of volunteering and developing policies to encourage this philosophy.

While the philosophy of volunteering is embedded in the history of the Arab world, governments have only recently begun to recognize the importance of volunteering and its positive effect on society. As a result, states have started including volunteering in their national policies (Haddad, 2015; 2020). The ideas of civic engagement and volunteering have been introduced into the school curriculum. International and regional organizations have also started to promote volunteering, recognizing that it can help them in achieving their mission.

The positive role of the state in promoting volunteering is being expressed in two different ways : (1) states are providing legal and political environments that support and encourage volunteering. Countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are developing new laws and policies to support volunteering, embedding them in their national policies. (2) States in different countries are also transforming the attitudes of the public through policies, as they raise awareness of the positive impact volunteering can have on society (Haddad, 2015).

In the Arab region, volunteers have contributed to addressing a range of developmental challenges. In a crisis, they are often the first to repond. Their contribution to SDGs varies, with volunteers making a large contribution in the Gulf states but a limited contribution in other Arab states. The SDGs that volunteers address include gender equity, women's empowerment, healthcare and the eradication of poverty and illiteracy (UNV, 2019). However, volunteering networks in the region are short term and entirely dependent on external funding; moreover, there are limited volunteering opportunities for experienced and skilled professionals as well as for young students between the ages of 7 and 12.

### Section III. Maxi and Mini Case Studies

## 1. Maxi Case Study: Amel Association International

### Background to Amel

Amel <sup>1</sup>Lebanon is a non-governmental association based in Beirut that has more than 25 centers all over Lebanon and around 800 employees and volunteers. To understand Amel as an organization, one needs to know the current status of volunteering in Lebanon. The Lebanese government has not institutionalized a framework for volunteering but many of its policies stress the value of volunteering and its importance in youth development. For instance, Lebanon's National Social Development Strategy refers to volunteering as a means to strengthen communities (Haddad, 2015). Its website provides a directory of volunteering opportunities but very little else. Thus, volunteering opportunities have relied mainly on the capacity of the different organizations in Lebanon to manage and retain volunteers (Hart, 2016).

Other issues hinder the development and inclusion of volunteerism in Lebanon. Firstly, there has been an influx of untrained international volunteers who are not provided with the right supervision. Many international volunteers face cultural and linguistic difficulties. They also have to manage the high expectations from beneficiaries and organizations: especially that International volunteers They are often viewed as a source of insuring funding. Organizations too have high expectations but at the same time fail to provide the right training and induction to intergrate them into their projects. These factors limit the contribution that these volunteers are able to make (Hart, 2016).

Secondly, organizations lack clear structures for volunteers. Volunteering opportunities are limited in Lebanon and they are not paid so most national/local volunteers struggle to balance their work, volunteering activities and in the case of students, their studies. In addition, some organizations treat volunteers as if they were paid staff in terms of responsibilities and expectations.

Thirdly, the high level of professionalization of the NGO sector in Lebanon is limiting opportunities for volunteering. Donors increasingly expect proper reporting, monitoring and evaluation as conditions of funding. This requires staff members personel with particular expertise and skills sets, making unskilled volunteers redundant. KAmel Mohanna, founder of Amel, has stated that "such developments within the sector are shifting the focus away from the "daily human

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<sup>1</sup> It is an Arabic term that means "the worker"; "the person who is productive" the believe in doing not just saying

interactions at the grassroots level”and moving it towards “compliance-orientated” approaches (Mohanna, 2015). This in return is reducing the importance of volunteer input on the ground (Hart, 2016).

Amel projects target a number of populations residing in Lebanon. Its first project launched in 2011 supported migrant domestic workers and victims of human trafficking (calendar 2021, Amel). When the economic crisis in 2019 increased vulnerability across the population as a whole, the focus of the project was widened to include all domestic workers. Amel’s migrant domestic workers program is the focus of this case study. It currently includes several projects aiming to enhance the social and labor rights of migrant workers in Lebanon. Interviewee 1 explained:

“ Amel has 27 centres, all over Lebanon, we are located in the most deprived areas of course. We are talking of Beqaa, south, Beirut suburbs and lately we opened a new centre in Ashrafiyeh Karm el Zeitoun, which is in the area that was bombed. We opened one in Berj Hammoud and we took over the management of a center in Arkoub which is in Kfarhamam at the borders. It serves fourteen villages that require a lot of services”.

Amel’s staff members are always open to learning and becoming more aware and an opportunity to learn about social issues:

“I would probably say Amel made me more conscious about some of the legal aspects to do with the service. I wasn’t aware of the migrant rights. Much of them are also not aware you know. I feel like if most Lebanese people knew then they would legally change their attitude. They made me more aware of the legal aspect and I think it’s the most important part” (Interviewee 4).

### Role of volunteers

Volunteers are at the core of Amel’s work. Amel does not differentiate between staff, interns and volunteers; all three work together to ensure that the best services are provided to the most vulnerable. Volunteers are distributed among all the different programs and have major roles in helping with the design of activities and participation in those activities. The success of the

program can be attributed in large part to the volunteers. According to Interviewee 1, Amel has 1000 workers of whom 187 are pure volunteers (in that they do not get any financial benefits in return). Most of the other 813 are paid the minimum wage but referred to by Amel as volunteers. Board member and interviewee 1 reflected:

“Volunteerism is hugely important to Amel. For us, volunteerism is something really at the core because for us, as a humanitarian organization, it’s not like you know how to write a project, you get the funding, you implement it. If we don’t have the drive for volunteerism believing that people sacrifice their lives for others, we believe that this is not the core of humanitarian work “.

Amel opens its doors to anyone who wants to volunteer and partners with universities who provide students with volunteering and internships opportunities:

“In terms of purely volunteering who come without getting paid or getting only transport, we have a programme, so we have volunteers and we have interns. We have contracts with universities, for example Science Po in France and Lebanese University “ (Interviewee 1).

For the past few years, foreigners have come to volunteer at Amel during the summer as part of exchange programs. Most of these volunteers come from Europe and the USA. During the pandemic, international volunteers who were already in Lebanon stayed and assisted but there were no new volunteers.

Amel usually establishes contact with foreign universities and signs a memorandum of understanding (MOU):

“So already we have contracts with universities who send people to volunteer or as interns. We also receive a lot of direct requests from people wanting to offer their time” (Interviewee 1).

As an organization, Amel sees one of its aims as creating a culture of volunteerism. One way in which it pursues this aim is through signing MOUs with universities and research centres. Another is by providing many opportunities to individuals:



“Volunteerism is a culture, and we need to nurture it and organize it. Lots come only for the summer and I have to say that many are foreigners” (Interviewee 1).

Volunteers are viewed as crucial for achieving the mission of Amel and for addressing social justice:

“For us [volunteers] are vital and we appreciate youth a lot because we believe if we don't encourage them, the spirit of giving and supporting each other could fade. Because it's all about social justice” (Interviewee 1).

Practically, Amel relies on its volunteers and each project team will be composed of volunteers, interns and employees. In this sense, the volunteering role is not so different to the role of an employee at Amel:

“The work of volunteers is needed so that we can expand our activities and reach many more migrants. It is thanks to the volunteers that we can provide a much better service. Because as I said, we are a small team and sometimes it's not easy to provide all the services and all the follow up that we would like to, and volunteers fill this gap and help us provide a much better service” (Interviewee 3).

A board member pointed out that given the low salary Amel employees receive, they too should be considered volunteers:

“[...] but of course, all the people are underpaid and we believe that everybody is volunteering at Amel.” (Interviewee 1, 2021).

Volunteers at Amel come from different backgrounds and age groups:

“The great thing is that we receive a wide range of volunteers, not only youth and fresh graduates but sometimes older people, women who want to give support in any way they can. Really, we value this a lot, we embrace it” (Interviewee 1).

According to the volunteer participants, the main reason they volunteer is that they see it as a contribution to their community:

“The sense of giving back to the community and the feeling that you are making a difference is very important for us. We were able to learn more about the struggle of the migrant worker” (Respondent 2, focus group 1)”.

For some it was a mixture of timing and opportunity and an awareness of privileged position own:

“I’m going to be here the whole summer. Because I’m back with my family who live here. And you know, I have time. And I would love just to help in any way. And I think for me, volunteering, I guess I have a little bit of a philosophy of about like NGO worker volunteering, and I don’t know, it’s just especially coming from a place of privilege [...] the best thing to do is just to help people wherever possible, like just to be a helping hand, and whatever someone else may need” (Respondent 1, focus group 2).

Some see it as an opportunity to find out about the sector:

“And it has been kind of a coincidence to come here in Beirut because I came for an exchange semester here and it was very coherent to propose my leisure time to be here at the association. I wanted also to see what an NGO is like as a work environment, as a sector I might like to work in it later on” (Respondent 2, focus group 2).

Amel and the state:

Amel is an organization with a strong presence and connection with the state of the one hand and communities on the other. It represents a new trend in linking volunteers and the state via a strong based organization. Amel collaborates with the state on different projects and also pressures the state through advocacy and through presenting its projects. Over time, Amel has built a good relationship with the state and this then makes it easier to push ahead with the reform process that Amel engages in, in different partnership programmes. For example, the vaccination programme started as a small classroom project that was implemented in coordination with school staff:

“When we started the project, it was like okay giving back to the community but then, the project coordinator told us that they had involved the Ministry of Health

in the project. We started seeing the project growing. I think it is also based on the NGO capabilities” (Respondent 1, focus group 1).

Indeed, Amel has always worked on building a good relationship with the government. In every project they undertake, they make sure to cooperate with the state. Moreover, Amel not only delivers services but also propose new ideas to the government.

Volunteers are not directly involved in communications between Amel and the state. Instead, the project coordinator is the one who communicates with the state. In this sense, the relationship is hierarchical and only specific full time staff liaise with the government. On the other hand, Amel is an inclusive association and volunteers can present project ideas and can get involved in designing projects. For instance, the project aimed at the vaccination of domestic migrant workers project is a volunteer-led project, implemented by Amel. Amel connects volunteers with their target population, migrant workers in this case, and supports the volunteers to implement the project. Furthermore, volunteers have indirect communication with the state in that their ideas can be taken up by Amel and proposed to the state:

“Maybe we are not as volunteers directly able to reach the government but the organization has a solid relation with the government, so the organization transfers our ideas to the government” (Interviewee 5).

Amel as a volunteering organization has a high reputation and this means that volunteers can have an impact and are even invited to cooperate with the government:

“When you have good reputation and you are not aggressive, this makes your work much easier. For example, regarding the voluntary return, because of the reputation, we were able to enter the public security forces and facilitate everything. They also started sending us files and cases because they trust us. Even the embassies because of this coordination they call us, refer cases to us” (Interviewee 2).

Migrant domestic workers (MDWs) programme and the Kafala system:

To understand Amel International's MDW programme in Lebanon, it is necessary to understand the Kafala system, an employment framework that exists in Lebanon and in other Middle-Eastern countries. The basis of this system is that every migrant worker must be sponsored by a citizen of the host country. They are then responsible for the legal status and official papers of the worker. This system means that migrant workers are excluded from the Lebanese Labour laws that regulate the minimum wage, working hours and vacation, among other rights. They are not protected from abuse and can be deported at any time. They are not allowed to change employer without their consent (Rak, 2020). These workers struggle to survive in an exploitative power dynamic that gives the employer complete control (Rak, 2020) and which subjects workers to many human rights abuses.

The first wave of migrant workers arrived in Lebanon during the 1970s from Africa and Asia and this predominantly female workforce still persists till today. It is estimated that around 250,000 workers are under the Kafala system in Lebanon. Most of them are unskilled and most are women from Africa and South Asia. Multiple international organizations such as Amnesty International have drawn attention to the abuses of human rights within this system but the Lebanese government has largely ignored the issue (Rak, 2020). Migrant domestic workers have been directly affected by the economic and social crisis in Lebanon. Recently, the Lebanese pound lost over 90% of its value. Poverty rates increased and most of the middle class has become poorer. With employers now unable to pay the 150 to 200 dollars required to hire a migrant domestic worker, these workers have been fired and left on the streets on their own or on the doors of their embassies, thus triggering another crisis. Amel has been working in partnership with other local and international partners to manage the crisis.

Amel's support program for migrant domestic workers has included a number of initiatives such as empowerment training, research and advocacy. As well as local and international partners, all these projects have been run with the direct coordination and collaboration of the Lebanese government. For example, Amel cooperated with the International Organization for Migration and the Lebanese government to identify and support victims of human trafficking through protection, livelihood development, capacity building, economic empowerment and referral; moreover, Amel collaborated with other NGOs to empower migrant domestic workers by providing legal consultation services and classes that teach them a range of skills. These are held at various centers at weekends.

## Domestic Migrant Worker Support: a case study of cooperation between an NGO and the state

Amel's program supporting domestic migrant workers is underpinned by the organization's three broad aims:

- 1) To promote people's empowerment and autonomy;
- 2) To foster adaptability and be responsive to emerging needs;
- 3) To boost people's capacities and capabilities, thus ensuring resilience.

In their migrant worker program, these aims are pursued through the following initiatives :

- a. Vaccination project (volunteer-led initiative: i.e. the volunteers are the ones who came up with the idea; presented it to Amel and implemented it);
- b. Cash for rent project (cooperation between volunteers and staff);
- c. Sunday classes project (cooperation between volunteer and staff);
- d. Hygiene kits/ PPEs distribution (cooperation between volunteer and staff);
- e. Taking care of domestic migrant workers who were left in front of embassies (cooperation between volunteer and staff);
- f. Sending migrant workers, following their release from prison, back to their home country (cooperation between volunteer and staff)

In all these projects, Amel works in direct collaboration with the state. It presents the projects to government officials and these are then being adopted by the state.

An important part of Amel's work is not just to support target groups but to use its reputation and relationship with the state to advocate for change. For example, Amel puts a lot of human resources into spreading awareness among migrant workers about their human rights. It organizes information sessions where migrant workers can exchange experiences and advice. These are also social occasions where migrants can show each other how to braid hair, for example, or just spend some quality time together:

"I believe that Amel is helping migrant workers a lot actually because when we went to visit, we were only there for the information session. But before the information session, they had a workshop where they were teaching each other to do their hair and after the information session, a lunch was prepared for all of them. So I think that we are helping to create a

community for all of them. I think that without Amel, we wouldn't be able to reach the migrant workers. The organization is responsible for linking us to migrant workers at every session" (Respondent 5, Focus group 1).

With these sessions, Amel is incorporating social justice and inclusion in their mission.

The economic crisis that is occurring in Lebanon is leading to increased levels of human rights violations. Domestic migrant workers who were sacked from their jobs were left by their employers in front of embassies, with nothing more than the clothes they wore. Amel is one of many organizations that sought to intervene. First, Amel gave migrant workers hygiene kits and PPEs and provided them with PCR tests:

"There was a need to cover the emergency needs of the migrants which were mainly food, security hygiene products, and especially PPEs as most of the migrants were not able to afford the masks. They were not able to afford the gel or the coronavirus preventive items" (Interviewee 3).

Amel also opened some of its buildings to migrant workers because they did not have anywhere to sleep:

"There was a crisis of domestic workers because of the economic crisis. So, they were just left at the doors of the embassies. So Amel went and did PCRs to those who wanted to go back to their country" (Interviewee 5).

At the same time, Amel is trying to reform the Kafala system. Along with other stakeholders, it has been lobbying the government to find a substitute for the Kafala system, speaking with officials at the Ministry of Work, the Labor Union and the syndicate of offices who bring the migrant workers to Lebanon:

"We are also working with the Syndicate of the offices that bring the migrant workers to Lebanon..... It is not an official syndicate, but I believe that each office should be under this syndicate to control and to blacklist the ones

who are not working under the criteria. Of course, in Lebanon, the blacklisted will know how to get out of it but at least some control is better than none” (Interviewee 2).

This syndicate organizes and standardizes the work of the offices that bring migrant workers in to Lebanon; however, some offices are choosing not to be part of this syndicate, thus no one is regulating their work. This in turn means that they can continue to exploit migrant workers. In this situation, Amel as an organization provides the more long-term strategy:

“Regarding the relationship between Amel and the state in this project, Amel is considered to be the lead as it is now 11 years since the migrant worker program was launched. Amel works and thinks more long term [about these issues] while the state does not have the roots to think long term” (Respondent 3 Focus group 1).

Among its lobbying activities, Amel has put pressure on the Ministry to make translations of contracts between the employer and migrant worker mandatory:

“We put pressure on the Ministry of Labour to translate the Arab contracts into the language of the worker so they know what they are signing” (Interviewee 2).

In the next sections, the following initiatives under the umbrella of the migrant worker program, are discussed: a) vaccination; b) weekend school; c) cash for rent; d) domestic worker prisoners initiative; e) human trafficking.

#### *a.vaccination programme:*

This project is a volunteer-led project. It was started by four civic engagement students. Amel then approached the Ministry of Health and obtained official endorsement to implement it through volunteers. Domestic migrant workers were informed about their right to be vaccinated:

“Some migrant workers, they didn't even know that they can get vaccinated. That's why the main aim of our campaign was also to raise awareness” (Respondent 3 Focus group 1).

The vaccination programme includes vaccination information and help with the process of getting vaccinated. The volunteers involved are university students who have chosen to volunteer for Amel. Alongside them are volunteers from the domestic workers' own community who provide skills-based trainings for the migrant domestic workers, using the same centers. The volunteers organize information sessions in which they can address some of the fears and misinformation among migrant workers who relied solely on informal networks for their information:

“we organized awareness sessions for migrant workers because some of them are scared of taking medication and refuse to take the vaccine because of what they heard of before coming from their countries” (Interviewee 2).

Participation in the project gave volunteers the feeling that they had made a difference, even if on a small scale:

“So even it was partial, we managed to make a difference through these 15 migrant workers registered” (Respondent 4, Focus group 1).

It was also a humbling and sobering experience:

“We have this racism and mentality that they come and work for us. Some don't give them their basic rights. The fact that we were able to help such a community gave us a good feeling” (Respondent 1, Focus group 1).

Volunteers have played a key role in outreach and in the development of the program. IDs, phone numbers or emails are required information to register for the vaccine. As many domestic migrant workers do not have IDs, volunteers collect information, send it to Amel and Amel then transfers the information to the Ministry of Health:

“We are trying to encourage migrants to access vaccination for covid because a lot of them don't have IDs, so they are scared to go. So, you need to walk the walk with them. This is where volunteers play a huge role, sometimes doing outreach to communities. and always in the field. This is where they gain the most. And they make contact with people and come into contact with the real experience” (Interviewee 1).



The number of volunteers supporting migrants enabled Amel to make the case to the government for the need for vaccination and to work around the problem of the ID requirement:

“Volunteers helped us to really put pressure on the ministry, to make them understand how many migrant workers wanted to get the vaccine. Without this close connection between the state and Amel though, we wouldn't have been able to make a difference really” (Respondent 4, Focus group 1).

Volunteers in the focus groups strongly expressed the benefits for them of participating in these projects:

“So basically, I was thinking of it now, as Respondent 3 said, we weren't volunteering. The sense of giving back to the community and being able to make a difference is very important for us. We were also able to learn more about the struggle of the migrant worker. We knew about the Kafala system but it is way more than that. We are able to address some of their struggles. We are also trying to engage many stakeholder which are the different NGOs and also engage the migrant worker with the state. This is also very complicated because we don't have a direct link with the state” (Respondent 5, Focus group).

Amel staff provided that link because it is highly trusted by the government. One of the volunteers reflected on how such projects lead to more and higher level collaboration between Amel and the state:

“I think now the question is how do we get the migrant workers to register [for the vaccination]. Because the more migrant workers they have, the more pressure there is on the government. And one of the things the government representative knew he wanted to do was to have a separate platform for the migrant workers to register on

because a lot of them don't have mail or phone number. When you don't have one of these elements on the website, you can't complete your application. So they wanted to create another platform for people who don't have all the documentation. So they're trying to find a solution. The Ministry of Health in collaboration with Amel want to build a separate platform" (Respondent 5, Focus group).

*b. Weekend classes:*

Amel is working on empowering domestic migrant workers by giving them the tools that are required to be included in society. The courses it provides **are** mainly run by volunteers teachers:

"Every Sunday we provide classes in our center near Tayyouneh. These classes are designed to give them tools that they can use to become empowered. These classes also give them the possibility to meet other migrant workers and have their own network here"- (Interviewee 3).

"We offer classes with certificates that help the girl to then find work in her country (hair, languages, computer skills)" – (Interviewee 2).

In its programs, Amel adopts both a top down and bottom up approach. For example, as a marginalized community, migrant domestic workers tend not to know their rights, especially when it comes to health and legal issues in Lebanon. But in other cases, the domestic workers themselves identify the help they need and even initiate projects. This is particularly true for the weekend education program:

"We also offer like awareness sessions on their rights as a worker, on their rights as tenants or sometimes Martha would come and do like a reproductive health, different things that we think that are useful for them to know and that we can offer awareness sessions about those topics" (Interviewee 3).

### *c. Cash for Rent*

Many migrant workers have been unable to pay their rents. Amel produced assessment sheets which the volunteers use as case workers with the migrants. The volunteers ask the questions and fill in the sheets and make the decision as to whether or not the migrant has a case. Amel then pays the migrant worker's rent to the volunteer. This is the cash for rent programme.

“what I will be doing, is 1 on 1 interview with migrant workers who have come previously to Amel asking for help regarding their rent. I have like a survey I need to fill in and questions to ask them in order to really know if they need help or not. Then I fill out something regarding the decision. So, if they qualify, Amel pays their rent. So far we started, we reached out to many and we will start on Tuesday distributing the rent. That's something else Amel is working on” (Respondent 1, Focus group 1).

### *d. Domestic workers in prison:*

Amel is also involved in ensuring the return home of migrant workers who have been incarcerated in Lebanon. The legal system in Lebanon is highly bureaucratic and there are many delays before a charge comes to court. Many people in jail in Lebanon are still waiting to attend their first hearing; so even if the government wants to repatriate them, this will take years:

“I believe that it is also communication with the state. We were able to repatriate the migrants that are currently in jail. There is the effort from Amel to repatriate migrant workers who are currently in jail. And this of course in its communication with the government because we cannot access information easily” (Interviewee 3).

### *e. Human trafficking:*

In collaboration with the state and other non-governmental organizations, Amel is working on the issue of human trafficking. The project mainly focuses on raising awareness about this issue, training the entities responsible for tackling this issue in terms of the legal framework and preparing the state to address it as a “crime”:

“Amel works with Abaad<sup>2</sup> to see what the gaps in the human trafficking law are. The good thing is that we have such a law while other countries don’t. But it is not effective. It lacks a part that relates to the protection of the victims. We also collaborate with organizations to push trainings to all the concerned actors so now we can say that they are all trained. There are specific people for these tasks now. There is also the office for human trafficking and courts and judges are trained here too” (Interviewee 2).

Migrant workers and especially migrant domestic workers can often also be victims of human trafficking. Another collaborating partner in the case of these migrant workers is the International Organization for Migration:

“IOM and Amel do joint case referrals to the state. First, we screen the potential victims. If they are potential victims, we refer them to the concerned state actors and if the those actors need assistance from NGOs, we can help in the referral” (Interviewee 2).

The efforts of Amel regarding this project go beyond those of the state since the state doesn’t have the means and resources to ensure implementation:

“We all know that the state’s capabilities are very small they are not prepared for such things. This is why Amel works more than the state. They don’t have shelters (you can’t put a victim of human trafficking in prison). So Amel helps with referrals since we don’t have shelters. So, in general what we do is we collaborate with other (NGOs) in order to lobby the state” (Interviewee 2).

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<sup>2</sup> An organization that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable social and economic development in the MENA region

## Concluding remarks about Amel

Amel is collaborating with the the state in designing and implementing projects that address the issues of human and worker rights, particularly among marginalized groups.

“It’s very collaborative. We can see the pressure that Amel is putting on the ministry. For example, the person leading the DMW projects has met with the head of the steering committee for fighting the coronavirus, assigned by the government and has pressured him that we want to help and to reach a tangible result. So I think they’re trying to pressure them but also collaborate with them” (Respondent 2 Focus group 1).

Reforms take time but steps have been made towards the reform or even abolishment of the Kafala system in Lebanon:

“Amel is working with the ministry of public work on developing a substitute to the Kafala system. The Minister of Work is making great efforts and is collaborating with us, helping with the hotline, following up with the offices that bring the girls to Lebanon and blacklisting the ones who do not respect the guidelines” (Interviewee 2).

Through advocacy, Amel puts pressure on the state in different sectors to respond to a range of humanitarian issues. The good relationship that Amel has with the state, its reputation and respect for its humanitarian work, helps with the effective implementation of projects. In this sense, Amel fulfills two key roles. It is filling a gap which would usually be filled by the state, by responding to the needs of the vulnerable, distributing food, hygiene kits and PPEs, for example, and addressing the housing crisis by paying rents. Aside from these direct impacts, by assisting the state with matters such as reforming the Kafala system and the development of the vaccination programme for migrant workers, it is also indirectly working towards its aims outlined at the beginning of this chapter:

“Amel is involved in advocacy efforts with the government and with other NGOs, to lobby and to be able to propose changes to the Kafala system or its abolishment at a later stage” (Interviewee 3).

Through its different projects, Amel has gained expertise in working with vulnerable communities on the ground. Moreover, they have worked on establishing a positive relationship with the government so they are trusted by the government. The relationship between Amel and the state can be viewed as ensuring that the target population's needs are met. At the same time, migrant workers are more likely to trust an NGO such as Amel:

“A lot of them are undocumented and because they don't want to be identified by the government or their countries, they feel safer resorting to NGOs because they consider it as a safe space. Amel's philosophy is based on a dignified approach. We respect the dignity of people because they are marginalized. So they feel they are valued, and they feel at ease to come and we are able to work on raising awareness with them” (Interviewee 1).

Migrant workers don't trust the state and are even afraid of what the state might do. Amel, by contrast, has secured the trust and respect of the government, it has also built trust with migrant workers through its projects. It could be argued that they are also bridging the distance between the state and the population through building trust. In this sense their role can be seen as that of a mediator, as one of the participants suggested:

“So judging from their work (only on migrants because I don't know for the rest), I would say they are like a mediator [...]. So, I would say in one short word a mediator between a migrant's need and getting it to actually happen” (Interviewee 4).

## Part Two: The Nebhana Water Forum in Tunisia: mini case study

Water scarcity is a major issue in Tunisia, particularly in central and southern Tunisia (Kuehn, n.d). This problem has consequences for farmers who are not able to access irrigation for their lands and for people in general who do not have access to drinking water (Kuhlmann, 2014/2016). The main problem in in these areas is water management. In this case, and due to the lack of communication between the different parties, two main actors are in conflict. The administration

responsible for resource management in Tunisia is the Ministry of Agriculture (Kuehn, n.d) and the regional representative in Kairoub, the CRDA- Commissariat Regional du Development Agricole (Kuhlmann, 2014/2016). 80% of water in Tunisia is used for irrigation, thus farmers are the main actors representing water users (Kuhlmann, 2014/2016). Before the revolution, farmers had no experience of political participation and were not organized to join a structured dialogue. After the revolution of Tunisia, there has been a huge increase in the distrust between these two actors. Farmers have accused the government as failing and have stated that there is no point in engaging in discussion with them. The government has maintained that if farmers abide by the law, there is no need to discuss the issue (Kuehn, n.d).

In May 2016, the Nebhana Water Forum was launched in Tunisia. It is part of the AGIRE project (support for the integrated management of water resources). It is supported by the Collective Leadership Institute a globally active NGO, and implemented by the German Development Cooperation in the governorate of Kairouba. The CLI targets seven SDG goals (Kühn, 2017):

- SDG 2: Zero Hunger
- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth.
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production.
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 15: Life on land
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice and strong institution.
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

The forum was set up to address SDG 6: Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water (Kühn, 2017). The aim of this forum is to come up with sustainable solutions for water management in Tunisia (Kuehn, n.d). This is to be achieved by creating a space for dialogue between water users (mostly peasant farmers), the private sector, the non-governmental sector and the public sector represented by the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the participation of the private and non-governmental sector has been minimal. The two main stakeholders have been the farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture, each with a different perspective of the problem of water management in Tunisia (Kuehn, n.d).

The Nebhana Water Forum has provided a place of dialogue, of co-producing sustainable solutions and transforming conflicts between the public sector and water users - mainly farmers - into constructive strategies (Kuhlmann, 2014/2016). The Nebhana Water Forum in Tunisia is unique in creating a common ground between the government and a part of the population and coming up together with solutions for their common problem.

### Part Three: The Bahrain Dialogue Foundation : Mini Case Study

The Bahrain Foundation for Dialogue [formerly the Bahrain Foundation for Reconciliation and Civil Dialogue] was launched in May 2012, with strong support from the then Prime Minister of Bahrain, Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. It was created after the 2011 Bahrain crisis that created a massive social and sectarian rift in society (Citizens for Bahrain 2014; Bahrain Foundation for Dialogue 2016). The divide between various sectors and groups within Bahraini society increased following the 2011 uprisings (Email correspondence with Suhail Ghazi Alghosaibi, chairman of the board of trustees, BFD, 5th October). State-led dialogues were criticised for tending to be biased towards the state (Kinnimont and Sirri 2014). This highlighted the importance of grassroots and community-based efforts for reconciliation through dialogue such as BFD (Moritz 2020, p. 144). The growing frustration that was observed in Bahrain in this phase and the fear of passing from political separation to social separation, was the main motivation to work immediately on building a platform of reconciliation (Citizens for Bahrain, 2014).

The main goal of the foundation is to promote a culture of reconciliation and social unity between all the different segments of Bahrain's communities by creating a space where they can exchange ideas (Al-Farhan 2014). These activities highlight the importance of constructive cooperation and positive coexistence and facilitate the exchange of ideas throughout society. The foundation has a particular objective to engage young people. The foundation has supported events such as public conferences, social events and/ or comprehensive social media campaigns. Participants at these events evaluated them as successful (Citizens for Bahrain, 2014) and the Bahrain Dialogue Foundation has been able to gain the trust of Bahraini society. While BFD was founded with the strong support of Bahraini crown prince, the foundation has been able to maintain agency and independence, as evidenced by their programmes and public statements that often set different priorities from those of the government ( Kinnimont and Sirri 2014).



The Bahrain Dialogue foundation was registered by the Ministry of Social Development in June 2012 (Al-Farhan, 2017) and had the support of the HRH Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the crown prince and deputy supreme commander of Bahrain (Bahrain Foundation for Dialogue, 2016). In 2016, there was a shift in the name of the organization from the Bahrain Foundation for Reconciliation and Civil Discourse to the Bahrain Dialogue Foundation because the name was too long and because the situation in Bahrain had changed. Also, the word 'dialogue' was considered to move forward while the word 'reconciliation' reminded people of the past. Since its inception, the foundation has set up a wide range of activities from workshops, lectures, community outreach initiatives, visits to different Sunni-Shia communities in Bahrain, leadership courses and dialogue dinners (Al-Farhan 2014). All together, it has been responsible for 117 events and engaged with over 1200 participants (in 2017) across all areas.

The foundation is innovative in that while having the trust and approval of the prince, it is also an independent association. Second, the Bahrain Dialogue Foundation proposes a new type of relationship with the state. Its remit of national reconciliation is pursued without any intervention from the state (Citizens for Bahrain, 2014) but fully endorsed by it. The main focus of the foundation has been Bahrain's young people who are considered as the most vulnerable population (Al-Farhan, 2017).

## Section IV. Analysis and conclusion

### *Amel: an organization that empower its volunteers*

The organization's capacity to manage the volunteers and provide them with the proper infrastructure plays a crucial role in the success of Amel's volunteer projects. Amel empowers its volunteers through listening to them and facilitating their ideas, mediating between them and the state. As a result, they become more engaged to assist the targeted community and work for social justice. Amel as an organization has a strong belief in the potential of youth in society. It believes in the talents, ideas, energy and leader potential of its young volunteers. This feeds into its two roles: immediate humanitarian assistance on the one hand and advocates of social change on the other. Thus Amel strives to develop strong and productive citizens in Lebanon through empowering its young people. Amel encourages volunteers to participate in every activity they undertake. This has in turn led to the success of projects undertaken by the volunteers.

### *The presence of a solid framework*

This case study also illustrates the influence a well established organization with a strong reputation can have. Amel has a strong foundation in the humanitarian field. It has cultivated strong relationships with both the community and the government. It also has an understanding of the needs of the different communities in Lebanon. Amel has worked on building a positive relationship with the government via its leadership, projects and networking. Its reputation and track-record have provided strong foundations for developing lasting volunteer-state relationships. Volunteers can work within this infrastructure towards social justice.

The study shows that, to succeed, an organization needs to have a reliable presence and an understanding of the context and culture of the society and the targeted community. It should be able to gather the relevant information from the field and reach the targeted community. Gaining the trust of the wider community and the targeted community is built over time, through actions. In turn, it becomes easier to gain access to the vulnerable community so that their needs can be identified. Projects have more chance of being efficient and successful as a result, thereby further building the reputation of the organization. In this specific case study, volunteers have been able to make a difference in ensuring justice for migrant workers and particularly, domestic migrant workers. They have even been able to initiate an important campaign to provide vaccination for this vulnerable group. This would not have been possible without the backing of Amel: these

volunteers are functioning within an institution that has the know how, the positive relationship with the government and the willingness to invest in its volunteers.

### *Commitment of the volunteers*

Volunteers work with the most marginalized and vulnerable in their society. The commitment of the volunteers is an essential element. This commitment is strengthened because the volunteers themselves have been able to design projects and even propose projects that empower the targeted community. Volunteers are able to witness the immediate positive impact of these interventions. This strengthens their commitment as it meets an important driver of volunteering – that of making a difference.

- a. The study has shown that through an organization that values, supports and empowers volunteers, it is able to reach vulnerable communities and build mutual trust.
- b. These volunteers take on the role of brokers between the state and those who are most marginalized and most suspicious of the state. The volunteers build strong ties with these communities. They act as mediators in the complex bureaucratic processes that exclude these communities from exercising their human rights. Volunteers help individuals to access the services that communities need and are entitled to, through their activities. This narrows the divide between the state and marginalized sectors,.
- c. Through their activities with the most vulnerable and marginalized group , these volunteers are essentially working towards more social inclusion. By volunteering outside of their own communities, they are encouraging cross community dialogue, building a better society as a result.
- d. Including these volunteers on the ground ensures that the vulnerable communities get the information they need. Indeed, volunteers are often able to convey the ideas and the projects to the community in a way that is accessible to them.

### *Leadership role*

The maxi case study also shows that success comes when volunteers and organizations are the leaders in the initiative, in coordination with the state. Volunteers often have the know how, the will and the means to serve the community.

Both the mini and the maxi studies have shown that volunteers should be leading initiatives and working directly with the beneficiaries in coordination with the state. Volunteers bring their

commitment and expertise to targeted interventions. Amel at the same time recognizes the limitations of the state and finds ways of co-producing projects that draw on its strengths, building its reputation and its advocacy role in pushing for social justice.

### *Preserving Dignity*

Upholding the dignity of the vulnerable and marginalized is an important principle in Amel's mission statement. To succeed, volunteers too have to respect the dignity of the people they want to help. People need to feel both valued and safe. In this sense, volunteers are the organization's ambassadors and marginalized populations will be more likely to accept the services being offered and engage in initiatives if they trust the volunteers.

### *Working in a holistic way*

Amel's work shows the positive impact that can be achieved if people and state work together more holistically – i.e. addressing various aspects of a single issue rather than piecemeal/discrete. Amel's projects take one issue and address it from different angles: social, economic and legal. By adopting such an approach, Amel has succeeded in changing state priorities, pushing them to address issues that are not usually on the agenda of the different administrations and departments. This is why long term planning is needed: the NGO and the government need to address the immediate situation but also keep in sight the roots of the problem. Amel's success can also be attributed to its commitment to long term planning while the government tends to engage in short term planning. This is particularly so because the state is weak and there is a general lack of long term planning. This can be seen in the way that Amel has tackled the problem of migrant domestic workers. While it has engaged with their immediate needs, it is also pushing the government to change or abolish the Kafala system.

### *Lobbying from inside*

Amel volunteers are working on projects that are important to the marginalized community in Lebanon but often disregarded by the state. Through their strong relationship with different stakeholders, volunteer organizations are able to lobby from the inside; they are able to push and influence the state. In the example of the migrant domestic workers, through their positive relationship, they sit at the table with the government to discuss ways that can improve their lives. Rather than advocating from the outside, projects are created and presented to the government directly.

### *Communication*

The case study also illustrates that communication between different stakeholders and the government is key to the success of any volunteer project. It is important to approach any problem in a constructive way, to gain everyone's cooperation to achieve the goals. Both the volunteering organization and the state need to sit together, discuss and think together about the steps that need to be taken. These partnerships need to be nurtured. They can take time but they will make collaboration smoother and more impactful.

### *Working for social justice*

Both the mini case study of Bahrain and the maxi study of Lebanon focus on the most vulnerable populations in the society. Social cohesion for the next generation in Bahrain is the main aim of the project and ultimately, the main overall aim of Amel's various projects and programs.

### *Common ground*

The mini and maxi case studies illustrate the importance of creating a common ground between government and stakeholders, working together to find solutions for their common problems. The volunteers have an important role to play in that they are able to communicate at different levels and contribute to the creation of this common ground.

### *Constructive dialogue*

The maxi and mini studies have illustrated the importance of engaging in constructive dialogue between the target community and the state. Volunteers can bridge the gap of suspicion and mistrust between people and state to provide long term solutions.

### *Strategizing together*

To succeed, both the organization and the government need to be open to changing their strategies to reach the final goal. Organizations need to design projects in a way that can be accepted by the state. The state needs to be willing to change its policies with regards to vulnerable populations in order to achieve the aims of the project.

### *Funding is important*

To succeed, the organization needs its own funding and be in a position to help the state with resources. Volunteers should not rely on funding from the state.

### Future recommendations

To further the success of volunteering projects, the ministry needs to work on reforms. First, it needs to build a long-term strategy that does not change with each change in government or personnel. Specifically, it needs to put in place an organizational plan for reform. Second, it needs expertise within the ministries that focuses solely on the study of files and cases. Finally, there needs to be coordination between ministries, different state bodies, associations and civil society. This coordination will facilitate outreach activities, will further the development of the project and will bring different stakeholders together:

“Ministries and government entities should coordinate with and make use of civil society. Everything should be related to the long term. It is about project management and will not be achieved in one day. It is a process that needs to move. And we consider volunteerism at the core of everything, because if we don’t have the drive at the core of the causes and the social impact, it will not be solved” (Interviewee 1).

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