

# Learning Review Report

LEARNINGS OF 4 DAPP PARTNERS IN  
THE MIDDLE EAST DURING CORONA

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## DISCLAIMER

It is important to note that the respondent examples and statements not only represents their work supported by Danmission via DAPP, but rather needs to be understood and viewed more broadly in connection to how it is to be a FBO and CSO supported by multiple international organisations during this point of time and how they are able to navigate and handle challenges both organisationally and programmatically.

## PHOTO CREDITS

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACPD</b>	Amman Center for Peace and Development
<b>CEOSS</b>	Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services
<b>CIDT</b>	Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DAPP</b>	Danish-Arab Partnership Programme
<b>DEDI</b>	the Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FBO</b>	Faith Based Organisation
<b>FDOD</b>	Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>HRBA</b>	Human Rights Based Approach
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IFD</b>	Interfaith Dialogue
<b>IRD</b>	Interreligious Dialogue
<b>IYDA</b>	Intercultural Youth Dialogue Association
<b>JICRC</b>	Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>PVE</b>	Preventing Violent Extremism
<b>RIIFS</b>	Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Learning Review Background

The purpose of this learning review is to assess how partners have adapted their work to the restrictions and difficulties resulting from the coronavirus pandemic in their respective countries. By conducting this review, Danmission hopes to “explore and present how dialogue work in the future might be shaped and enhanced by learnings from this extraordinary time period of the coronavirus pandemic.”<sup>1</sup> The consultancy was conducted in November 2020 over 14 days. Two overall questions guided this learning review:

1. What can be learned from the adaptations to the coronavirus-related restrictions for the future?
2. What new topics and discourses have been emerging from the coronavirus pandemic that might inform future programmatic work among civil society actors?

### Summary of Findings

This learning review assessed how partners in their respective countries have adapted their work to the restrictions and difficulties resulting from the coronavirus pandemic in their respective countries. With regards to the learnings about **adaptations and challenges** in the three Middle Eastern countries to the coronavirus pandemic, this review found that positive and negative adaptations.

**Positive Adaptations.** The most notable change was the shift from office and field to remote work. The positive adaptations to this shift included the reconceptualization of fieldwork, increase in online meetings, shift from face-to-face to online training, increase in online research projects, strengthening of communication with partners and networks, and incorporation of Covid-19 awareness and prevention campaigns into their work. Organisations adopted a hybrid model, where activities were mostly online with limited fieldwork, where possible and appropriate. While no organisation changed its strategic plans as a result of the pandemic, they stated that they were more aware and critical of their strategic priorities within this adaptation. With this shift of activities online, this review highlighted the importance of organisational ICT capacity before the pandemic in supporting the move to increased remote activities. This review found that the originations are confident in the sustainability of this shift to more online activities and the associated adaptations. Respondents argued that their organisations are more resilient as a result of this shift and the adaptations. It is still too early to assess the impact of these adaptations.

**Negative Adaptations.** The regional economic crises in the region that followed Covid-19 were central to the negative adaptations. Moreover, in Lebanon, there was the additional crisis of the blast in Beirut in August 2020. The economic crisis has resulted in negative adaptations to staffing, for example, the use of more part-time staff and less work for full-time staff. This has potentially significant consequences for organisational capacity, development, and sustainability. Negative programmatic effects were noted. For example, activities were paused, including workshops, dialogue gatherings, and training. Moreover, non-emergency assistance programmes (e.g. IRD and peacebuilding) were paused in favour of emergency responses related to Covid-19. Respondents highlighted the increased health risks to staff engaged in such activities. Respondents also noted that they had, as a result of Covid-19, applied for fewer grants, less access to beneficiaries, and struggled to establish personal

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<sup>1</sup> Danmission, Terms of Reference, Consultant for Learning Review: Learnings of 4 DAPP partners in ME during Corona, 8 July 2020



links through the remote technology. These negative adaptations might have an adverse effect on programme and project impact and sustainability.

**Challenges.** Respondents emphasized that adaptation has been difficult mainly because there had to be a reorganisation of activities that favoured remote work and not fieldwork. They argued that these hybrid systems are less successful and more difficult to manage. Linked to this was the difficulties of re-evaluating strategies and priorities while urgent work had to be done. Respondents stated that the quality of learning was lower before because of the reduced human interaction and limited beneficiary access to the internet and smartphones. The lack of government support also made these adaptations more difficult. There were also the challenges of measuring the impact of remote work and the uncertainty surrounding the future impact of the pandemic on their organisations and beneficiaries. Significantly, a large part of the discussion of challenges centred on the notable increase in staff stress. Staff is working longer hours due to the increased demands and more fluid boundaries around working hours. They are experiencing more psychological symptoms due to the general uncertainty of the virus and safety concerns for themselves, families, and colleagues.

**Learning and Sharing.** Respondents noted that there have been challenges and learnings regarding monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The challenges relate to the limited access to beneficiary communities to do in-person monitoring and the difficulties in being able to assess the project and programme effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability remotely. There were mixed findings in terms of learning and sharing with partners and other stakeholders. The review found evidence of sharing their experiences with partners, sharing informally, and not sharing at all.

**Capacity.** Two organisations stated that there had been no noticeable change in capacity, while two organisations noted significant changes in capacity needs and responses. The main changes were described as the (1) need for more staff without being able to increase staff number because of financial constraints, (2) need for more staff capacity building is required, (3) lack of capacity to apply for as many new grants as before, and (4) negative impact of stress and adaptation on staff capacity. The increased reliance on administrative staff was also highlighted.

This review also explored the **emergence of new discourses and themes** as a result of Covid-19. One, the new emphasis on human rights, particularly beneficiary discussions about their human rights, particularly in response to Covid-19 restrictions and their freedom of movement, freedom of belief, and freedom to worship. Two, the role of faith and humanitarian aid and the shift from predominantly development work to more humanitarian preventions and response work. Linked to the above theme of human rights, the roles of religious leaders and FBOs were raised. Three, education is being more closely scrutinised and discussed in terms of the relevance of education models, as well as their impact and sustainability. Four, the increase in SGBV emerged as an important theme during the coronavirus pandemic. Respondents highlighted the role of the movement restrictions, increased isolation, and limited social support in the reported increase in SGBV. Five, another emerging discourse was the increased discussion of the role of women in families and society. Respondents spoke about the increased number of women working during the pandemic and how this is creating further discussions on gender roles and the new family dynamics. There was also reports of the negative impacts on gender equality. Six, discussions about science, beliefs and truth have increased as a result of the pandemic. In the MENA region, like the rest of the world, there are many conspiracy theories relating to Covid-19's origin, transmission, prevention and government management. Respondents emphasized how the surrounding rhetoric had posed a major obstacle to their work. These beliefs make it more difficult to adapt programmes to the urgency of Covid-19.

**Responses to the Emerging Discourses.** Two organisations highlighted how they were discussing the emerging discourses in open sessions and training. One organisation uses its Steering Committee to discuss themes discourses. Interestingly, these emerging discourses are strengthening sensitivity and

responses to other crises, for example, in Lebanon with the Beirut blast. Two organisations stated that it was still too early to observe organisational responses to the new themes as they are still in the crisis. **Effects of the Discourses on Organisations.** While the new discourses have not changed any organisational vision and mission, there is a greater focus on organisational priorities. Respondents also noted that there had been a shift in target populations and stakeholders, a greater focus on the emerging themes, listening more to beneficiaries, and feeling an increased responsibility towards their target populations. **Effect of Discourses on IRD.** There were mixed views regarding the effect of the new discourses on IRD. Two organisations stated there were noticeable effects of the new discourses on IRD, while two stated that there were none. Where there had been an effect, the organisations highlighted the renewed interest in and importance of IRD narratives, as well as the positive shift in how IRD work and activities are understood. The new roles for religious leaders in Beirut. While some religious leaders have argued their religious authority and freedom is on the decline, they have found new roles in the post-Beirut blast period. They are now actively engaged in discussions concerning social justice, humanitarian aid, human rights, and a collective conscience. **Adaptations and the UN Plan of Action.** All four organisations stated that the adaptations had not affected their ongoing engagement with the Plan of Action and SDGs.

## Recommendations

1. **Covid-19:** Continue responding to Covid-19 in proactive ways that do not assume it is temporary. These organisations have highlighted the profound organisational changes resulting from the pandemic as well as the wider political, social, and economic issues that will continue to have an impact on the organisations and sectors in which they work.
2. **Strategy:** Review and adapt organisational strategy according to the current and projected needs and priorities. It is pivotal to the strategic plan to align activities with the updated objectives and outcomes.
3. **Remote Work Modalities:** Continue reviewing remote work modalities in order to assess which activities can be continued remotely, in the field or through a hybrid model. This review should be based on beneficiary need, capacity, impact, and sustainability.
4. **Capacity:** Review and develop financial and staff capacity to ensure that organisational responses are effective and efficient.
5. **Working Hours:** Establish work hours that respect the normal working day. The online and hybrid models have posed a major strain on staff and it is essential that staff do not work beyond their contracted hours and that their home and private lives are respected.
6. **Psychosocial Support:** There were reports of significant psychological symptoms in staff during Covid-19. Review staff needs and develop appropriate psychosocial support mechanisms.
7. **Emerging Discourses and Themes:** Respondents highlighted significant emerging discourses and themes. These should be discussed, shared, and incorporated into organisational adaptive learning.
8. **Urgent Discourses and Themes:** Urgent discourses and themes, for example, violence against women and girls, require more immediate organisational consideration and response.
9. **Partnerships:** These adaptations and emerging and urgent discourses and themes highlight the need to continue developing partnerships and collaboration.
10. **Intersectionality:** There is the opportunity to view Covid-19 through its various intersections, thus strengthening programmatic responses, impact, and sustainability.
11. **Nexus Approach:** The coronavirus pandemic has emphasized the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding Nexus' relevance. Covid-19 has presented important opportunities for learning and responding in new and strengthened ways.
12. **UN Plan of Action:** Continue reflecting on and discussing the adaptations and emerging discourses within the framework of the Plan of Action and its nine groups of thematic recommendations organised into the three main clusters (Prevent, Strengthen, Build).

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

The purpose of this learning review is to assess how partners have adapted their work to the restrictions and difficulties resulting from the coronavirus pandemic in their respective countries. Danmission hopes to “explore and present how dialogue work in the future might be shaped and enhanced by learnings from this extraordinary time period of the coronavirus pandemic.”<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, the objectives of the review are to enable Danmission, the four partners and their networks, as well as the wider regional DAPP network and civil society at large in MENA to:

1. **Learn about proven adaptations of dialogue and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) work** to the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic in three Middle Eastern countries and receive inspiration for good practices and innovative (specific methods and approaches) responses that can be effectively applied as the pandemic continues
2. **Learn about new challenges and discourses** among religiously engaged<sup>3</sup> actors and other actors, as well as shifts in existing ones due to the pandemic and be enabled to recognise them in their current and future work
3. **Establish or deepen networking relationships between organisations** dealing with the coronavirus challenges in the same region and/or as they work in the same thematic field.<sup>4</sup>

## Organisational Background

Danmission is an independent organisation linked to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (Folkekirken).<sup>5</sup> Danmission works with churches and faith and value-based partners and networks in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Denmark. Danmission works within the thematic areas of poverty reduction, dialogue, and church development.

Danmission’s vision is “a world that is open to God’s lifegiving, lifesaving and constructive activity, as seen in Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Its mission is to participate in God’s mission through (1) strengthening the Church’s service so that the Gospel is heard, and people are rooted in the Christian faith, and (2) serving fellow man and society so that everyone can live a dignified life in peace, in a just society.

Danmission’s activities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are aimed at “enhancing the role of interfaith dialogue as an integral factor in promoting mutual understanding, social cohesion and peace-building within and between Arab and Danish societies.”<sup>7</sup> The specific programme initiatives cover a wide range of activities, including leadership training in interreligious understanding, interfaith education for intercultural citizenship, conferences for religious leaders, youth encounters and youth training, and the empowerment of women in religious institutions. Danmission works primarily in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union (EU) and private donations fund their MENA projects.

<sup>2</sup> Danmission, Terms of Reference, Consultant for Learning Review: Learnings of 4 DAPP partners in ME during Corona, 8 July 2020

<sup>3</sup> Danmission uses “faith based” more widely in the organisation. “Religiously engaged” was used specifically in this project.

<sup>4</sup> Danmission, Terms of Reference, Consultant for Learning Review: Learnings of 4 DAPP partners in ME during Corona, 8 July 2020

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Danmission, Vision and Mission, <https://english.danmission.dk/about/missionvision/>

<sup>7</sup> Danmission, Introduction Sheet, October 2020



## 2 INTERVENTION AND CONTEXT

### Programme Background

Since its inception in 2003, the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) has combined country-level and regional interventions and been key building relations between Denmark and MENA partners.<sup>8</sup> DAPP's vision is to promote a democratic, prosperous and stable Middle East and North Africa. DAPP is aligned with regional interests, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the priorities of the European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU.

The current programme phase covers 2017-2022. This phase builds on the best practices of previous phases, especially partnerships, the learner and refocused design reflects (1) Demand from local partners, (2) Danish foreign policy interests in the MENA region, (3) Challenges and opportunities of the regional context, and (4) Lessons learned and comparative DAPP advantages.

An overview of DAPP 2017-2022 is provided in the table below.

<b>Programme Title</b>	Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) 2017-2022
<b>Duration</b>	1 July 2017 – 31 June 2022
<b>Coverage</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>Responsible Unit</b>	MENA
<b>Sector</b>	Governance, human rights, media, and economic opportunities
<b>Funding</b>	Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and private donations
<b>Budget (DKK Million)</b>	Total: 1,000. Governance Thematic Programme: 476; Thematic Programme on Economic Opportunities: 351; Support Initiatives: 84; and Programme Support: 89.
<b>SDG Alignment</b>	   

The strategic and thematic objectives are as follows:

Strategic Objective	Thematic Objectives	List of Engagement/Partners
Public institutions, civil society and businesses advance governance standards and provide economic opportunities	Governance standards enhanced by right-holders and duty-bearers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human Rights <b>Dignity led consortium</b></li> <li>Gender Equality <b>KVINFO led consortium</b></li> <li>Free Media <b>International Media Support</b></li> </ul>
	Economic opportunities for young men and women improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labour Market and Social Dialogue <b>LO/FTF led consortium</b></li> <li>Youth Participation and Employment <b>Oxfam-IBIS</b></li> <li>Engagement Entrepreneurship and Access to Finance <b>AfDB</b></li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Danmission, Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) 2017-2022, 13 March 2017

## Programme Partners

Danmission has four partners within the framework of DAPP who conduct activities related to Preventing Violent Extremism, Interreligious Dialogue (within the Middle East as well as between the region and Denmark), Freedom of Religion and Belief, and Citizenship. These partners are the:

1. Adyan Foundation (Lebanon)
2. Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS, Egypt)
3. Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue (FDCD, Lebanon and Syria)
4. Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS, Jordan).

Summaries of these partners can be found in Annex 3. Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020, these partners have been adapting their in-country work to the associated restrictions and difficulties. A brief overview of the context and regional background to Covid-19 is now provided.

## Context and Regional Background

### Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Interreligious Dialogue in the MENA Region

Nowhere are the stakes of sectarian conflict as high as in the Middle East, and nowhere is the practice of interfaith dialogue (IFD) more fraught with difficulty. The prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity is primarily the responsibility of States. In the MENA region, efforts in the areas of preventing violent extremism and interreligious dialogue are faced with multi-layered and intersectional obstacles to which different societal and cultural actors contribute. In this regard, religious leaders across the region have an essential role to play, given their spiritual leadership and influence over so many different and important communities. Growing violent extremism has threatened centuries of peaceful coexistence in the MENA Region, and while cross-country and regional efforts are scarce, states in the region have worked towards the promotion of these values within their borders.

A series of consultations conducted by the United Nations with religious leaders from different faiths, as well as faith-based organisations, experts, and other intergovernmental organisations between 2015 and 2016, aimed at developing a strategy for religious leaders from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to prevent and counter incitement to violence that could lead to violent extremism and crimes against humanity.<sup>9</sup> The regional consultation revealed that incitement to hatred, hostility and violence is prevalent in the MENA region,<sup>10</sup> with instances of incitement preceding and/or accompanying violence and crimes against humanity in countries affected by conflict and/or violent extremism as well as in countries considered to be relatively peaceful or where different religious denominations ‘coexist’.<sup>11</sup> The meeting additionally revealed that the targets of incitement include religious communities, in particular religious minorities as well as women. Though this UN Plan of Action intended to serve as a stepping stone for religious leaders and religious actors to become more committed to preventing, responding to and halting incitement speech, the recommendations to religious leaders, States, inter-governmental and civil society organisations remain non-binding and suggestive. This meeting did not yield tangible results in the areas of policy amendments, or in the areas of preventing ongoing conflicts in the region. A number of stakeholders active in dialogue efforts

<sup>9</sup> UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (2017), UN.org, Retrieved at: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

in the MENA region participated in these consultations, including the KAICIID Dialogue Center, Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, World Council of Churches, UN Population Fund and OHCHR.<sup>12</sup>

From an Islamic perspective, various declarations are relevant to IRD in the region. These include the four Al-Azhar declarations (1) on the future of Egypt and the refusal of the concept of Islamic state (2011), (2) the Liberties including freedoms of religion, expression and arts (2102), (3) countering extremism that also stresses on the refusal of the concept of an Islamic state (2014), and (4) citizenship and coexistence that stresses the full equality between Christians and Muslims as citizens, and says they are one community (umma) (2017). Besides these documents, the Marrakesh declaration on the status of minorities in Muslim majority countries (2016) stresses citizenship as a core concept in Islam and the documents issued from Jordan, namely the “Amman Message” (2004) and “A Common Word” (2007) highlight the authentic Islamic values and the importance of dialogue.

Moving from the aforementioned reality, civil society has served as the focal point for interreligious dialogue efforts as well as violent extremism prevention efforts in the region – and in Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan more specifically. In Lebanon, organisations such as Adyan,<sup>13</sup> the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue,<sup>14</sup> the Lebanon Dialogue Initiative,<sup>15</sup> and Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation,<sup>16</sup> all lead discussions and provide platforms for efforts in this capacity. In Jordan, the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC),<sup>17</sup> The Dialogue Center,<sup>18</sup> the Amman Center for Peace and Development (ACPD),<sup>19</sup> Shams Community,<sup>20</sup> and the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies<sup>21</sup> promote peaceful religious coexistence across Jordan, and focuses on fostering interfaith dialogue on a grassroots level and creating interreligious harmony. Civil society in Egypt is vibrant in these areas as well, with grassroots organisations, non-governmental organisations and civil society movements leading on the matters of inter-faith dialogue efforts and combatting violence. Organisations such as Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services,<sup>22</sup> the Intercultural Youth Dialogue Association (IYDA),<sup>23</sup> Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation (CIDT),<sup>24</sup> the Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI)<sup>25</sup> and the Arab Organization for Dialogue and International Cooperation,<sup>26</sup> work with international donors and partners to push the inter-faith, interreligious and intercultural dialogue agenda forward.

## The Impact of COVID-19 on the Work of Civil Society and NGOs

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated difficulties for non-governmental (NGO) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the MENA region exponentially. Organisations have reduced face-to-face meetings, fieldwork, and field presence, cancelled events, and have asked their employees to work from home and their offices and HQs are closed down for quarantine. This has forced the majority of organisations operating in the region to reduce their productivity and even their staff retention. Organisations in the region currently face a major hit to their mission, vision, and impact as their

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <https://adyanfoundation.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.fgcd.org/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.lebanondialogue.org/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/lebanon/peacebuilding-organisations/dlr/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.coexistencejordan.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://arab.org/directory/the-dialogue-center/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/58811/amman-center-for-peace-and-development-acpd>

<sup>20</sup> <https://shamscommunity.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.riifs.org/en/home>

<sup>22</sup> <https://en.ceoss-eg.org/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/154495/intercultural-youth-dialogue-association-iyda>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/members/center-intercultural-dialogue-and-translation-cidt>

<sup>25</sup> [www.dedi.org.eg](http://www.dedi.org.eg)

<sup>26</sup> <https://arab.org/directory/arab-organization-for-dialogue-and-international-cooperation/>

current activities gradually and quite indefinitely move into an online space. The challenging times, coupled with the region's already weak healthcare systems, have forced NGOs to resort to innovative management approaches and project adaptation; and this is still a learning curve.

According to the World Bank, M&E has an essential role to play during COVID in assessing the continued appropriateness of an organisation's response to the pandemic.<sup>27</sup> However, with travel restrictions, lockdown, and health concerns, M&E cannot be carried out properly. Many organisations internationally have acknowledged the need for a restructured and adaptive M&E, safe data gathering practices, and methods of verification and evidence that can be submitted and stored virtually. The experience in the MENA region has yet to be assessed to this extent.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

A desk review and key informant interviews (KIIs) were used to collect data, all of which were participatory, inclusive and target group sensitive. Danmission shared the relevant programme documentation (Danmission and DAPP documents) and partner reports (concept notes, activity plans, bi-annual narrative reports, other relevant organisational reports) for the desk review. The desk review also included a brief contextual overview and two other COVID-19 studies done by Danish organisations working within the DAPP modality (International Media Support and KVINFO). The stakeholders were purposively selected to ensure that the information from the four partners was collected systematically. The KIIs were conducted remotely via various secure online platforms.

The consultants facilitated a webinar on 26 November 2020 after the data collection and analysis in which the draft findings were presented, discussed, and validated. Following the report, Danmission and the consultants will discuss the dissemination plan for online communication that targets a broad segment of civil society actors in the MENA including faith-based organisations (FBOs), human rights activists, policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners. The consultants will discuss this further with Danmission according to the review findings. The consultancy was conducted in November 2020 over a period of 14 days.

#### Guiding Questions

Two overall questions guided this learning review. These are presented below, including the basic assumption behind each question. The full questions can be found in Annex 2.

<b>1</b>	<b>What can be learned from the adaptations to the coronavirus-related restrictions for the future?</b> <i>Main assumption: Partners have developed and increased capacity to work remotely and reach rights holders through high-, low- or no-tech innovation.</i>
<b>2</b>	<b>What new topics and discourses have been emerging from the coronavirus pandemic that might inform future programmatic work among civil society actors?</b> <i>Main assumption: Partners have been attentive to these new and unfolding discourses and can benefit from each other's experience and insights going forward into the post-coronavirus time.</i>

<sup>27</sup> Toladata (2020), How are NGOs coping with the impacts of COVID-19, Retrieved at: <https://www.toladata.com/blog/how-are-ngos-coping-with-the-impacts-of-covid19/>

## 4 FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two main headings, according to the interview questions: (1) adaptations, and (2) emerging discourses.

### Adaptations

The first area looked at what could be learned from the adaptations to the coronavirus-related restrictions for future programming. This section is divided into (1) positive adaptations, (2) negative adaptations, (3) challenges, (4) learning and sharing, and (5) impact on capacity.

**Positive Adaptations.** This review found that the most significant and positive adaptation was the **shift from office and field to remote work**. These adaptations have taken various forms in the different organisations. For example, face-to-face **training** was moved online. A respondent stated, “In training projects, we started to redevelop one of our projects to be completely online. This has generally been successful. We provided more material to support it digitally.” Another organisation described how **fieldwork** had to be reconceptualised, “For our fieldwork, we conducted a public opinion survey online and we adjusted the methodology.” Some respondents highlighted that their shift of training and fieldwork to online platforms was just as, if not more, effective and efficient than previous methods. For example, RIIFS has increased the number of sessions and participants in each session. Participants also described the new **hybrid model** which operates predominantly remotely with some limited fieldwork, where possible. Respondents noted how the positive adaptations of remote work in terms of how it has highlighted and refocused their vision, mission, and priorities, that is, the **strategic direction** of the organisations.

Another adaptation was the **increase in the number of meetings**. Respondents noted remote meetings were easier to set up. For example, one respondent stated, “It is something very interesting. When we moved online, it was much easier to set meetings. It was much easier to fit in more meetings during your day and more discussions during the week. When it is online, commuting is not an issue. They are ready on shorter notice. They do not need to be physically present from one location.” There were also reports of most of the **research projects** going online. A respondent said, “Many of our research programmes are now either completely remote or have adopted successful hybrid models that we would otherwise have not resorted to. We have found that these research programmes were “unharmful” and just as effective through this new approach.” There were also reports that **proposal writing** continued under Covid-19 restrictions and more attention could be given to **administrative tasks** because there was less distraction at home in comparison to the office.

Respondents also noted that working online **improved communication with partners and NGO networks**. One respondent argued, “The online and hybrid models of communicating with partners, as well as the flexibility in scheduling with no need for the commute, actually had a very positive impact on our projects.” Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of partner networks and collaborations in responding to issues “especially when the government is absent.” Respondents also spoke about how they had incorporated **Covid-19 awareness and prevention campaigns** into their work.

This review found that one of the significant factors in the success of these adapted online activities was the **importance of existing digital platforms and capabilities**. This review noted that the ease and effectiveness of remote working were facilitated by the already existing and well-established information and communications technology (ICT). For example, AF had a well-established ICT system and they found that “moving online was more positive for our communication with each other and easier to set up meetings that way because there was no commute.” That is, some organisations were



better adapted and more comfortable working online before the pandemic. All four organisations highlighted their positive ICT adaptations as a result of the pandemic, for example, strengthening internet connectivity, installing a new system for video calls, upgrading related technology and systems, and enhancing an online learning platform. The partners highlighted Danmission's important support in strengthening their ICT systems.

An assessment of the **sustainability** of the adaptive activities showed that the respondents believe that the shift online is organisationally sustainable. One respondent noted, "We will largely still adopt it as we move forward, even after Covid-19. Virtual meetings and contacting others virtually are very good channels for communication that can be maintained." It was noted that a number of things can be successfully and efficiently done over Zoom and other online platforms and that the webinar format will be maintained even after Covid-19.

Linked to sustainability, it was interesting to note that there were also reports that the teams' ability to successfully adapt to Covid-19 had resulted in **more resilient organisations**. FDCC stated that this resilience was evident in the organisation's ability to adapt to other issues and emergencies, for example, the Beirut blast on 4 August 2020. RIIFS also emphasized the importance of these Covid-19 adaptations in making the team more adaptable and resilient. A respondent stated, "If we are going into a school for training, and then suddenly this training is cancelled at the last minute, this would otherwise devastate the staff. In these times, staff better understand our mission and vision and better understand the collective human condition. This has helped our work." While it is too early to assess the medium and long term **impact** of these Covid-19 adaptations, it would be interesting to do a follow-up study or evaluation on these activities after another year or two.

**Negative Adaptations.** There were negative adaptations to Covid-19, most notably in the ensuing **economic crises** that impacted the organisations and their staff. **Staff maintenance has been a challenge.** Organisations have resorted to part-time staff in order to keep most people employed, albeit at lower salaries. The benefits and challenges of this adaptation were outlined. For example, a respondent stated, "I see a need to have more part-timers at the moment, as opposed to full-time staff. Packages for full-time staff are costly. We cannot pay anymore but need more help and adaptable staff. The economic crisis plays in. We hired more part-time staff for remote research. For the future, it would be wonderful to maintain them, because they cost less and are just as effective – but, of course, they need more solid career choices as well." The ability to recruit, maintain and develop skilled staff is essential to organisational survival and development, and while it might still be too early to see what the long term effects of this particular issue might be, the messages of difficulty and concern for the future are clear.

The interviews highlighted various examples of **negative programmatic effects**. Despite what was noted in the above section on Positive Adaptations, it was outlined how **activities were paused**. These activities include workshops, dialogue gatherings, and training. For example, in one organisation these activities were initially paused for two months and after eight months many of these activities remain paused, or at best, not where they were before. It is important to note that these organisations have different starting points especially in terms of existing technology and communication systems before the Covid-19. Linked to this point, this review found that **non-emergency assistance programmes (e.g. IRD and peacebuilding) had been paused** in favour of emergency responses related to Covid-19. That is, more established and planned activities were paused in order to distribute masks and hygiene kits, deliver humanitarian assistance, and food security programmes. This was done via different modalities and back donor support other than DAPP since the DAPP not allows the organisations to transforming their DAPP work into humanitarian assistance. A respondent said, "Although these programmes have been difficult to implement on the ground, we could not stop them because of our priorities and our mission as an organization." It should be noted that respondents highlighted the increased **health risks**

**to staff** engaged in such activities despite the fact that staff maintains and upholds all Covid-19 precautionary measures.

Another negative programmatic effect was that organisations **applied for fewer grants**. This was largely due to the reduction in grants and the uncertainty of what was possible to take on organisationally. Despite some of the positive adaptations to remote work listed above, it was reported that the pandemic has negatively affected **beneficiary accessibility**. As one respondent stated, “The pandemic has made a substantial fraction of our target population unreachable. In some of the poorer areas, access to technology, the internet, and smartphones are not part of their everyday reality. We have not been able to provide these communities with the necessary tools they need in the virtual space.” This review found that some respondents reported that the **remote technology is less personal**. They found that “breaking the ice” is more difficult in virtual meetings because “true connections” are more difficult to establish and the “human factor is missing.” One respondent said, “There is no true connection and not truly getting to know each other in virtual meetings. No real lasting professional relationships can be formed. Networks are also more difficult to establish.” One respondent stated that it was also more difficult to get documents together for government.

One respondent also observed that there were **negative effects on impact**. That is, although a number of their programmes have moved online, and while virtual meetings have made many things possible, they are not always as successful as face-to-face meetings and interactions. The respondent noted, “There is still the need to be there “in the field” to ensure deeper impact.” Another respondent stated that while they found that moving things online was faster in the areas of planning, when it came to project results, it was more difficult to get a real sense of whether or not the people involved were being influenced in the positive way the project intended. This point goes back to the associated difficulties in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

**Challenges.** Following the discussion of the positive and negative adaptations, respondents were asked to highlight the **main challenges** that they faced organisationally as a result of Covid-19. One, it was stated **that adaptation was difficult** because the organisation’s projects are diverse, that is research and fieldwork. While they found that most of the research work could be done from home, fieldwork generally needed to be postponed or moved into hybrid programmes that were less successful and more difficult to manage. A respondent stated, “At the moment, adapting already existing programmes that have already been in development for years, is proving to be a challenge, especially when the integrity of the project and its outcomes need to be maintained.” Two, there was **reduced learning** because of reduced human interaction. One respondent said, “We saw this clearly, as most of our learning programmes and activities where people typically meet were switched online, and we felt the learning experience was not as rich.” The reasons for this were cited as the reduced interest and shorter attention span. A respondent also noted, “A lack of interaction also feeds into more of a top-down approach to learning rather than a smoother and interactive one.”

Three, Covid-19 has forced organisations to **re-evaluate their strategies and priorities**, especially whether or not these are still relevant and sustainable. These re-evaluations were around the question of humanitarian activities and other activities linked to changing activities online. Four, the **absence of government support**, especially in the early phases of the pandemic and the associated preventative measures (for example, in Egypt where the government's support and collaboration with NGOs and International organizations throughout this process was largely absent), posed a major challenge to NGOs. Governments did not provide organisations with any substantive support in both the adaptations that they had to make and for the Covid-19 related work that they were doing on the ground. Five, the **limited beneficiary access to the internet and smartphones**, especially in impoverished areas, was described as “extremely challenging” as a significant fraction of their target population became less accessible. Organisations had to resort to smaller, local initiatives which are not as “successful and impactful as when we are physically there on the ground in full capacity.” Six,

organisations emphasized the challenges with **measuring impact**. They are finding it more difficult to assess impact consistently and tangibly. This challenge speaks to the issues of data collection, and the reduced ability to measure impact directly from face-to-face interviews and based on observations and feedback in face-to-face training.

Seven, respondents highlighted the **uncertainty surrounding the future impact of the pandemic** is an important challenge. A respondent stated, “Challenges are currently the uncertainty of the phase of the pandemic, what comes after, as well as the new agenda of donors in the future.” Eight, **increased staff stress** is significant. As one respondent noted, “Things remain quite unclear and Covid-19 restrictions limit our legroom in the areas of how much we can take on. Our staff is strained at the moment. They are mentally and physically overwhelmed.” Staff is working longer hours due to the increased needs and the “grey zone” of when to begin and end a workday during these times of remote work. As a result, staff is generally working much longer hours. A respondent stated, “Due to the psychological and mental burdens this poses, a number of staff members have expressed their feelings of strain and being pushed beyond their mental and physical capacities.” Respondent highlighted the faster work pace and the strain on the staff of different levels of lockdown. A respondent noted, “We are moving at a faster pace just because of the reality of the situation, and I do think that has a strain on staff’s mental health. Obviously, self-care is encouraged in the office, but just the amount of work in the past three months has been intense. We are not fully locked down anymore; we are working between home and the office. During the lockdown, we got into a rhythm, and now that we are half and half, it is a whole a new layer of adaptation.”

**Learning and Sharing.** The Covid-19 adaptations have highlighted the importance of **monitoring and evaluation**. Respondents noted that there have been challenges and learnings regarding M&E. The challenges relate to the limited access to beneficiary communities to do in-person monitoring and the difficulties in being able to assess the project and programme effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability remotely. One respondent noted, “Having previous robust record-keeping did assist in maintaining the maintaining the same M&E tools they always employed without needing to adapt them,” but insisted that this was still a learning curve in the middle of the pandemic. There are emerging and useful guidelines regarding M&E during the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

There were mixed findings in terms of **learning and sharing** with partners and other stakeholders. One organisation claimed that due to the urgency of the adapted work and the other unplanned challenges, **learning and sharing were not taking place**. The respondent stated, “I wish we had more time to discuss these matters. Sadly, we cannot always do this due to the urgency of our work. Some partners have had budget cuts, and other obstacles they prefer to discuss with us. I do wish we had more communication from (peer) partners in general.” Another organisation stated that while learning was taking place, the **sharing was not on a formal level**. There is sharing with partners on an informal level and the need for more formal sharing was recognised. Two organisations claimed that they were **sharing their experiences with partners**. This includes the adaptations and challenges as well the cross-cutting learning on issues like youth, women, gender, human rights based approach. A respondent said, “We have shared a number of experiences with our partners and engaged with them on a number of levels on the rhetoric and themes that have emerged since Covid-19.” The other organisation stated, “Every single step of adaptation has been in collaboration with partners on the project. We have shared insights, risks and experiences as well as discussed new emerging themes and whether anything needs to be adapted. Partnership and dialogue go hand in hand and are

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example (1) USAID, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic, <https://usaidlearninglab.org/monitoring%2C-evaluation-and-learning-during-covid-19-pandemic>, (2) fhi360, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning During COVID-19 (webinar), April 2020, <https://www.fhi360.org/resource/monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-during-covid-19-webinar>, and (3) INEE, Monitoring and Evaluation during Covid-19 Resources, <https://inee.org/covid-19/resources/monitoring-evaluation>

pivotal.” This organisation emphasized the importance of designing projects, including the adapted ones, in a way that makes them open to ongoing and formal discussions and adaptations. Projects are designed in a way that would make it open to discussion. As one respondent insists, “The project document is a working document, and this allows us to adjust as we go along. So far, however, we have not needed to resort to that.”

**Capacity.** In assessing the **impact on capacity**, a range of responses were documented. Two organisations stated that there had been **no noticeable change in capacity**. One of these organisations noted, “The capacity needs within our organization have not changed. We are still operating smoothly and have not experienced anything at the moment that would make us question our capacity.” The reason cited for this was the successful adoption of the hybrid model with its combination of remote and fieldwork. The other organisation noted that while there was no noticeable impact on organisational capacity, as noted above, “staff is mentally fatigued at the moment.” The third organisation stated that there were **significant changes in capacity**. These changes were categorised as the (1) need for more staff without being able to increase staff number because of financial constraints, (2) need for more staff capacity building is required, (3) lack of capacity to apply for as many new grants as before, and (4) negative impact of stress and adaptation on staff capacity. The respondent stated, “We have found the need for heavier reliance on psycho-social support in the areas of the mental, psychological and physical well-being of our staff members.” The other organisation also noted changes in capacity and emphasized the **reliance on administrative staff** to support the adapted work of the technical teams. In terms of training, “We train our staff on new portals and devices.”

## Emerging Discourses

The second area looked at what new topics and discourses have been emerging from the coronavirus pandemic that might inform future programmatic work among civil society actors. This section is divided into (1) new discourses and themes, (2) responses to these discourses, (3) effects of the discourses on organisations, (4) effects of discourses on IRD, and (5) adaptations and the UN Plan of Action.

**New Discourses and Themes.** This review found new discourses and themes had emerged as a result of the pandemic. One, respondents discussed the new emphasis on **human rights**. Organisations had to respond to beneficiary discussions about their human rights, particularly in response to Covid-19 restrictions and their freedom of movement, freedom of belief and freedom to worship. Human rights issues have also been raised in response to the increased reports of domestic violence. Two, the **role of faith and humanitarian aid** emerged during the pandemic. Respondents highlighted the shift in their largely development work to more humanitarian preventions and response work. Linked to the above theme of human rights, the roles of religious leaders and FBOs were raised. A respondent stated, “These themes have been research topics that are heavily discussed. What is the role of religious leaders? Have they helped people in civil society? Where does faith fit into the response and the implemented humanitarian aid and its distribution?” Three, **education** is being more closely scrutinised and discussed. People are discussing the relevance of education models, as well as their impact and sustainability. Moreover, familial, institutional, and societal roles in education are being discussed. A respondent said, “Educational models in schools and universities are being discussed. Are the institutions doing a good job? Are parents doing a good job? Are professors?”

Four, **sexual and gender based violence (SGBV)** has emerged as an important theme during the coronavirus pandemic. This follows the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) findings that SGBV is

“increasingly reported in situations of complex emergencies (e.g. involving political instability and armed conflict).”<sup>29</sup> The rise of SGBV during Covid-19 is well documented:

“GBV exists in every society worldwide and is exacerbated in emergencies. There is already an unsettling amount of information on GBV occurring against the backdrop of the Covid-19 outbreak. It is also becoming increasingly clear that many of the measures deemed necessary to control the spread of the disease (e.g. restriction of movement, reduction in community interaction, closure of businesses and services, etc.) are not only increasing GBV-related risks and violence against women and girls, but also limiting survivors’ ability to distance themselves from their abusers as well as reducing their ability to access external support.”<sup>30</sup>

In this review, respondents highlighted the role of the movement restrictions, increased isolation, and limited social support in the reported increase in SGBV. Five, another emerging discourse was the increased discussion of the **role of women** in families and society. A respondent stated, “One of the major things discussed, and particularly in the MENA region, was the role of the man as the provider, and how in many situations this is no longer the case.” Respondents spoke about the increased number of women working during the pandemic and how this is creating discussion on gender roles and the new family dynamics. There was also reports of **negative impacts on gender equality**. This mirrors international research that states that the pandemic could erase the many years of increasing gender equality as women’s employment, education as women’s education and employment opportunities are being challenged and their ability to maintain their physical and mental health.<sup>31</sup>

Six, discussions about **science, beliefs and truth** have increased as a result of the pandemic. In the MENA region, like the rest of the world, there are many conspiracy theories relating to Covid-19’s origin, transmission, prevention and government management. Respondents emphasized the how the surrounding rhetoric had posed a major obstacle to their work. For example, a respondent noted, “In Jordan, many people are still under the impression that Covid-19 is a conspiracy theory and untrue.” Respondents noted that such beliefs make it more difficult to adapt programs to the urgency of Covid-19. Respondents also highlighted the importance of community responses to what is perceived as unequal restrictions on movement. A respondent stated, “Our communities ask: Why has religious worship being stopped, when people can go to restaurants, bars and gyms?”

These examples show how because of Covid-19, sensitive and relevant social and cultural issues have been placed under the spotlight. As one respondent summarised, “Towards the beginning of the pandemic, while we worked on a psychosocial support project with churches and faith-based organizations, it was most fascinating to hear their perspectives on women, family dynamics and other issues that were otherwise undiscussed.”

**Responses to the Emerging Discourses.** In the four partner organisations, it was noted that they were responding to these new discourses and themes in **discussions in open sessions and training**. One organisation uses its Steering Committee to “discuss emerging themes, their importance, how to work with them and how to overcome challenges if any.” Interestingly, these emerging discourses are **strengthening sensitivity and responses** to other crises. FDCD observed, “We have found that the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the Beirut Blast this year, that understandings around new

<sup>29</sup> WHO, Humanitarian Health Action, Sexual and other forms of gender-based violence in crises, <https://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/pht/SGBV/en/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22sexual%20and%20other,trafficking%20and%20female%20genital%20mutilation>

<sup>30</sup> IASC, Global Protection Cluster, Identifying & Mitigating Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response, Last updated: 6 April 2020, <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> UN Women, Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19, 25 Nov 2020, <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/whose-time-care-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-during-covid-19>



concepts have changed ... New discourses and more open discussions on a number of topics amid people's sensitivity, did motivate people to get more involved in assistance and the conversation around social justice and "humanity" as a whole." Two organisations stated that it might **still be too early to observe organisational responses** to the new themes as they are "still in the crisis. And focusing on people on the ground."

**Effects of the Discourses on Organisations.** While the new discourses have not changed any organisational vision and mission, they have created a **greater awareness of the associated issues**. The individual organisational responses were slightly different from each other. One organisation noted that a **shift in their target populations and stakeholders**. The second organisation stated that the "organisation **listens more and is more focused** on newly emerging themes in the discourse." The third organisation claimed to have a **greater responsibility towards their target populations** in light of the government's absence. The fourth organisation stated that it was unlikely that the new discourses "would not change our organisation drastically. About this, we are very clear."

**Effect of Discourses on IRD.** There were mixed views regarding the effect of the new discourses on IRD. Two organisations stated there were noticeable effects of the new discourses on IRD, while two stated that there were none. It was argued that there is **renewed interest in IRD** and IRD narratives are now **more relevant**. That is, IRD has laid the foundation for more intersectional approaches to the new discourses, thus creating new audiences and platforms for discussion. Moreover, there has been a **positive shift in how IRD work and activities are understood**. A respondent stated, "Prior to the pandemic and these talks, people thought our work was more theoretical, but now they have begun to understand the real impact of our work."

One organisation also spoke about the **new roles for religious leaders** in Beirut. While some religious leaders have argued their religious authority and freedom is on the decline (in light of a more scientific approach to understanding COVID-19), they have found new roles in the post-Beirut blast period – as they continue to use their leadership and constituency's trust to serve as a liaison amid the multi-layered crisis Lebanon continues to face in the areas of political stagnation, an ongoing economic crisis and a widespread pandemic. They are now **actively engaged in discussions concerning social justice, humanitarian aid, human rights, and a collective conscience**. A respondent stated, "Most of the rebuilding we have been involved in has been through religious or church partners. They did slow down during Covid-19, but we did see a shift after the blast because the needs were exacerbated, and this made them really step up. They understood Covid-19 in a new light and understood their role within the social collective." Furthermore, it is argued that FBOs were more effective than NGOs in these responses, "The response from faith-based communities surpassed the response of NGOs after this realization. They are more on the ground." It would be interesting to better understand the links between the effects of Covid-19 on religious actors and their subsequent responses to the blast in Beirut. Religious leaders recognised **the need to continue spiritual activities online**. This has attracted much support from communities who are now able to participate in religious services, prayers, and share interreligious views and their support of other religious communities. Overall, the respondents recognised the **vital role of religious leaders in supporting individual and community well-being**, especially in times of crises like the current pandemic.

**Adaptations and the UN Plan of Action.** Following on from the discussions concerning the emerging discourses and themes, this review also examined how the organisations' continued to be engaged in the international frameworks like the UN Plan of Action and SDGs. All four organisations stated that the adaptations had **not affected their ongoing engagement with the Plan of Action and SDGs**. One organisation cautioned that it is important to be sensitive to the needs and level of understanding that religious actors have of the SDGs and UN Plan of Action in order for them not to feel "bulldozed by the UN agenda." There is thus no evidence that there was a shift in how the organisations responded to the SDGs and the Plan of Action as a result of Covid-19.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This learning review assessed how partners in their respective countries have adapted their work to the restrictions and difficulties resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. The most significant adaptation is the shift from office and field to remote work. There are positive adaptations associated with this shift, most notably in the way that the organisations have had to review their priorities and respond remotely to the new demands. Respondents highlighted the positive adaptations in online meetings, training, and research. The success of these adaptations is largely influenced by organisational ICT capacity and skills before the pandemic. Organisations noted the increased resilience resulting from these adaptations, the fact that it is still too early to assess their impact, and their confidence that the positive adaptations are sustainable.

Respondents emphasized that the negative adaptations especially with regards to staff who are now responding to new priorities, managing activities remotely, working longer hours, and struggling to access beneficiaries. Certain activities like workshops, dialogue gatherings, and training have been paused. There is also evidence of organisations using more part-time work while reducing the hours of full-time staff. Staff involved in non-emergency assistance are at greater health and psychological risk. Following from this, these adaptations have raised important challenges linked to this staff stress. Staff is exhibiting more psychological symptoms due to the new ways of working, the longer and more undefined working hours, the general uncertainty of the virus's future impact, and their safety concerns for themselves and those around them. This is a vital issue that needs to be addressed urgently by Danmission and the organisations. There are also the organisational challenges related to their observations about the difficulties in managing the hybrid systems and decreased programmatic impact. While this learning review found that now strategies had been changed during this time, a review of strategic plans is essential especially during times of protracted crises. Danmission's role in supporting a review and response to existing strategic plans is imperative.

New approaches and themes have emerged, but this review did not find any evidence of a well-articulated and consistent plan. For example, the increase in SGBV, the role of religious actors, the role of women in families and society, the renewed focus on human rights, education, and the relationships between belief and science are important. These topics would benefit from the support and strategic discussion to assist organisations to learn and adapt to these new discourses and themes. Moreover, securing sustainable funding and ensuring adequate staff and organisational capacity have become even more relevant during the pandemic.

These are difficult, even fearful, times for FBOs, NGOs, and CSOs as they adapt to the new ways of working within existing strategies and with beneficiaries who are less accessible than before for many activities. Given the adaptations and challenges highlighted by the four partners, that, with the support of Danmission, are well placed to learn adaptively and continue making relevant and useful contributions to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This is a time for strategic reflection and innovative, creative, and flexible adaptation.

## Recommendations

1. **Covid-19:** Continue responding to Covid-19 in proactive ways that do not assume it is temporary. These organisations have highlighted the profound organisational changes resulting from the pandemic as well as the wider political, social, and economic issues that will continue to have an impact on the organisations and sectors in which they work.
2. **Strategy:** Review and adapt organisational strategy according to the current and projected needs and priorities. It is pivotal to the strategic plan to align activities with the updated objectives and outcomes.
3. **Remote Work Modalities:** Continue reviewing remote work modalities in order to assess which activities can be continued remotely, in the field or through a hybrid model. This review should be based on beneficiary need, capacity, impact, and sustainability.
4. **Capacity:** Review and develop financial and staff capacity to ensure that organisational responses are effective and efficient.
5. **Working Hours:** Establish work hours that respect the normal working day. The online and hybrid models have posed a major strain on staff and it is essential that staff do not work beyond their contracted hours and that their home and private lives are respected.
6. **Psychosocial Support:** There were reports of significant psychological symptoms in staff during Covid-19. Review staff needs and develop appropriate psychosocial support mechanisms.
7. **Emerging Discourses and Themes:** Respondents highlighted significant emerging discourses and themes. These should be discussed, shared, and incorporated into organisational adaptive learning.
8. **Urgent Discourses and Themes:** Urgent discourses and themes, for example, violence against women and girls, require more immediate organisational consideration and response.
9. **Partnerships:** These adaptations and emerging and urgent discourses and themes highlight the need to continue developing partnerships and collaboration.
10. **Intersectionality:** There is the opportunity to view Covid-19 through its various intersections, thus strengthening programmatic responses, impact, and sustainability.
11. **Nexus Approach:** The coronavirus pandemic has emphasized the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding Nexus' relevance. Covid-19 has presented important opportunities for learning and responding in new and strengthened ways.
12. **UN Pan of Action:** Continue reflecting on and discussing the adaptations and emerging discourses within the framework of the Plan of Action and its nine groups of thematic recommendations organised into the three main clusters (Prevent, Strengthen, Build).

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: List of Documents Reviewed and Consulted

Adyan, Partnership Project – Project description format DAPP 2017-2021, 2020

Adyan, RSRC Online Plan, 2020

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CEOSS, Proposal, Cairo Initiative, The Future is Better

CEOSS, Proposal, Cairo Initiative, We are All One Family

CEOSS, Proposal, Minia, I am Human

CEOSS, Proposal, Minia, Nurses are not Replaceable

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CEOSS, Report, Protect Yourself... Protect your Country, April 2020

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EU, Humanitarian Principles, last updated: 12 July 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/humanitarian-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/humanitarian-principles_en)

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<https://www.fhi360.org/resource/monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-during-covid-19-webinar>

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Perspectives from the case of Jordan

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<https://usaidlearninglab.org/monitoring%2C-evaluation-and-learning-during-covid-19-pandemic>

WHO, Humanitarian Health Action, Sexual and other forms of gender-based violence in crises,  
<https://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/pht/SGBV/en/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22sexual%20and%20other,trafficking%20and%20female%20genital%20mutilation>



## Annex 2: Questionnaire

The questions in the table below will be used to guide the data collection. This will be based on the prior assessment of the four organisation's activities and engagement. During the interviews, questions will be included and adapted according to respondent responses. The consultants have discussed the questions in the ToR and believe that they form a solid basis for the interviews.

In all KIIs and FGDs, the following three broad areas will be covered:

1. What were the main **achievements**?
2. What were the main **challenges**?
3. What are your main **recommendations**?

This will be followed up with detailed questions from the table below to ensure a thorough assessment is done and that data is continually triangulated.

1	<p><b>What can be learned from the adaptations to the coronavirus-related restrictions for the future?</b></p> <p><i>Main assumption: Partners have developed and increased capacity to work remotely and reach rights holders through high-, low- or no-tech innovation.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can this capacity be used in the future to increase reach and sustainability of projects, and if so, how?</li> <li>2. What activities cannot be replaced with virtual measures?</li> <li>3. What can the partners learn from each other, especially on cross-cutting issues (e.g. youth, women, gender, and HRBA).</li> </ol> <p><b>Other Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did your organisation have to adapt and innovate to Covid-19?</li> <li>2. What specific faith based activities did you engage in?</li> <li>3. How did your capacity needs change?</li> <li>4. What was the impact of these activities on faith based actors?</li> <li>5. Were there any unintended impacts (positive and negative)?</li> <li>6. How do these activities for into the UN Plan of Action?</li> </ol>
2	<p><b>What new topics and discourses have been emerging from the coronavirus pandemic that might inform future programmatic work among civil society actors?</b></p> <p><i>Main assumption: Partners have been attentive to these new and unfolding discourses and can benefit from each other's experience and insights going forward into the post-coronavirus time.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What other issues for faith based actors at the local, national and regional levels (e.g. GBV during prolonged curfews, food security in the absence of school meals, deforestation and virus transmission from animals to humans) that have been highlighted during the coronavirus pandemic lend themselves to interfaith dialogue?</li> <li>2. Is there evidence of initiatives that indicate that it is possible not to go back the way it was before corona?</li> <li>3. What are the main challenges in developing new responses?</li> </ol> <p><b>Other Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How are you documenting these new activities (M&amp;E)?</li> <li>2. How are you learning from these new activities? (evidence of adaptive learning)</li> <li>3. How are you sharing these findings with other partners and stakeholders?</li> <li>4. How is your organisation now different as a result of Covid-19?</li> <li>5. How has the IRD narrative been affected by these activities?</li> </ol>

## Annex 3: MENA Partners

*Updated: October 2020*

### Adyan Foundation



**Country:** Lebanon

**About:** Adyan is a Foundation for diversity, solidarity, and human dignity. Registered as an NGO in Lebanon, Adyan works locally, regionally, and internationally for pluralism, inclusive citizenship, community resilience, and spiritual solidarity, through home grown solutions in Education, Media, Policy, and intercultural and interreligious relations. Adyan has an academic branch: The Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management, which focuses on the development of thought and skills through courses, training, research, and conferences and is organized in several different networks.

**Mission statement:** Adyan works on valuing cultural and religious diversity in its conceptual and practical dimensions, and on promoting coexistence and diversity management among individuals and communities, on the social, political, educational, and spiritual levels.

**Head of organisation:** President and CEO Fadi Daou and Dr. Nayla Tabbara, Director of the Institute of citizenship and diversity management.

**Cooperation projects:** (1) Religious Social Responsibilities for Citizenship and Coexistence (RSRC), Regional Women, (2) Religion and Human Rights in Lebanon (WRL) Lebanon, & (3) Volunteering youth network Lebanon

**Website:** <https://adyanfoundation.org/>

### Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS)



**Country:** Egypt

**About:** CEOSS is an Egyptian NGO headquartered in Cairo, founded in 1950. Danmission and CEOSS has been cooperating since 1990. Throughout CEOSS's history, it has played an essential role in supporting good governance and institutional capacity building in addition to the empowerment of marginalized groups using Rights Based Approaches to development. It has tackled many vital issues concerning freedom, religious freedom, dignity, social justice, and pluralism. Moreover, it has contributed to intercultural dialogue and peace building.

**Mission statement:** The mission of CEOSS is to promote the sanctity, equity, and harmony of life. It seeks to contribute to the transformation of society by nurturing moral and spiritual awareness, enhancing a sense of belonging, promoting respect for diversity, addressing conflict, and advancing social justice for individuals and communities.

**Head of organisation:** Dr. Rev. Andrea Zaki

**Cooperation projects:** (1) Forum for Intercultural Dialogue (FID), Egypt, (2) Leaders for Building Egyptian Societies (LBES), Egypt, & (3) Towards Resilient Egyptian Communities and Civil Society, Egypt

**Website:** <https://en.ceoss-eg.org/>

## Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FD CD)

**Country:** Lebanon and Syria



منتدى التنمية والثقافة والحوار  
Forum for Development, Culture & Dialogue  
(FD CD)

**About:** FD CD is an NGO based in Beirut and headed by Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour. It has a long history of work in interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, citizenship, and emergency response. It has an extensive network within Syria and Lebanon including other NGOs, religious leaders, government authorities, civil society and community-based organisations, and scholars. FD CD offers workshops, conferences, and dialogue sessions to enable society to approach conflicts in a non-violent way.

**Mission statement:** FD CD promote peace building, equal citizenship, and human rights in the Arab World by creating common spaces for dialogue and building the capacity of community and civil society groups to be catalysts for peace.

**Head of organisation:** Dr. Rev. Riad Jarjour

**Cooperation projects:** (1) Hiwarouna (Our dialogue), Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, (2) Child Friendly Spaces, Syria, (3) Intercultural Dialogue for Peace and Development (IDPD), Syria, & (4) Danish-Arab Interfaith Dialogue & SDG Alliance (DAID), Regional

**Website:** <http://www.fgcd.org/>

## Royal Institute of Interfaith Studies (RIIFS)

**Country:** Jordan



**About:** The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) was established in 1994 in Amman, Jordan, under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal. RIIFS is a non-profit NGO that provides a venue for the interdisciplinary study of intercultural and interreligious issues with the aim of defusing tensions and promoting peace, regionally and globally. RIIFS focuses on promoting common human and ethical values that contribute to strengthening cooperation and interfaith relations, eliminating mutual misconceptions about the 'other' and ultimately expanding these shared commonalities in the hope of promoting peaceful coexistence.

**Mission:** To foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an effective tool for countering intolerance, extremism, and radicalism and for forging a culture of mutual respect and understanding. To encourage regional networking on religious and cultural issues through effective communications and interaction within academic and religious environments.

**Head of organisation:** To be determined

**Cooperation projects:** Teachers of Tomorrow (ToT)

**Website:** <http://www.riifs.org/en/home>





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