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ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
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معهد عصام فارس للسياسات العامة
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CASE STUDY

BASMEH & ZEITONEH RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

A refugee-led
organization in Lebanon's
knowledge ecosystem on
forced displacement



As part of an initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in collaboration with the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) at Carleton University and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut conducted this research project seeking to generate a more nuanced understanding of how localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement can be effective, policy impactful and sustainable. This project builds on earlier research undertaken in 2019 and 2020 which aimed to support an evidence-based understanding on how to localize research on refugee and forced migration issues in key regions of the Global South. The aim of this phase is to transition from anecdotal to evidence-based insights on how localized “ecosystems” of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge on displacement issues that have an impact on policy and practice.

Project researchers set out to understand how localized knowledge ecosystems in Kenya and Ethiopia in East Africa and Jordan and Lebanon in the Middle East produce, translate, and use knowledge to effect change. This was achieved through in-depth case studies of knowledge ecosystems, sub-ecosystems, and entities that make up knowledge ecosystems in each of the four included countries. For the purpose of this study, and in the context of forced migration, the study adopted the following definition of knowledge ecosystem:

Localized knowledge ecosystems include actors with lived experience, research actors, practitioners who produce and use knowledge on forced migration (including, but not limited to, NGOs/INGOs, research centers, institutes, networks and universities and academics) who coordinate with each other to advance new knowledge production within this system and translate and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, action and discourses, and narratives to advance the well-being of refugees.

For the definitions used in this project and an overview of the research conducted in East Africa and the Middle East, read our working paper [here](#).

The research team for this project included Nasser Yassin (Co-Principal Investigator), Kassem Kassak (Co-Principal Investigator), Yara Mourad (Program Manager), Nadia Nameh (Project Coordinator), Maysa Baroud (Lead Consultant and Author - Lebanon Case Studies), and Zein Soufan (Lead Consultant and Author - Jordan Case Studies).

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INTRODUCTION

Over 6.8 million Syrian refugees have fled their country since the onset of the Syrian war in 2011—resulting in the greatest refugee crisis in recent history (UNHCR, 2022a). The majority of refugees have settled in neighboring countries, including Lebanon. Today, Lebanon hosts almost 830,000 registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2022b). The influx of large numbers of refugees into Lebanon was facilitated by the government's initial “de-facto ‘open border’ policy” at the onset of the crisis due to their keeping the pre-crisis border entry requirements for Syrians in place (Mourad, 2017, p. 49). The government also did not set up refugee camps for incoming Syrians (Yassin et al., 2015). As such, most Syrian refugees live in cities and villages across the country (UNHCR et al., 2022a). Overall, the government's lack of a formal policy to the crisis resulted in a “decentralized” and “ambiguous” response (Mourad, 2017, p. 49).

At the onset of the crisis, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) failed to come up with a comprehensive national-level response plan and strategy (Yassin et al., 2015), in part because it lacked the institutional capacity and resources to do so (Boustani et al., 2016; Nassar & Stel, 2019). Governance of the refugee crisis was distinguished by its “institutional ambiguity: an unpredictable, hybrid form of governance that emerges at the continuously shifting interface between formal and informal forms of regulation” (Nassar & Stel, 2019, p. 44). Despite the GoL's later attempts to formalize their response through a policy paper in 2014, and the subsequent Lebanon Crisis Response Plan in 2015 (Nassar & Stel, 2019; Mourad, 2017), this governance approach resulted in an overall “informality” across all aspects of Syrian refugees' lives, including with regards to their legal residency status (Nassar & Stel, 2019; Lebanon Support, 2016; Janmyr, 2016). In turn, the GoL's approach increased the vulnerability and marginalization of Syrian refugees (Nassar & Stel, 2019).

Despite lacking the proper coordination mechanisms to do so, and in the face of growing needs among refugee and host community populations, the UNHCR and other international organizations took over the response to Lebanon's Syrian refugee crisis (Boustani et al., 2016). For the most part, non-state actors have taken on the greater responsibility in responding to the refugee crisis in Lebanon, filling in the gaps in the GoL's response (Boustani et al., 2016). Other actors involved in the response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon include local-level authorities such as municipalities, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and NGOs, such as grassroots and Syrian refugee-led organizations, as well as local and international foundations, international finance institutions, think tanks, research centers, academic institutions, media, and the private sector (Boustani et al., 2016; Nassar & Stel, 2019; Mourad, 2016).

It is within this context that Basmeh & Zeitooneh - Relief & Development (B&Z), a Syrian refugee-led non-governmental organization in Lebanon, was established in 2012. B&Z conducts various activities, from in-kind support to providing business and other types of trainings and small grants to providing protection and psychosocial services to refugees. Though knowledge products are not necessarily a primary output for B&Z, it conducts research on various topics, including collecting data for monitoring and evaluation purposes for ongoing programs and projects, as well as research for advocacy purposes, for example, on the issue of return. Advocacy is one of B&Z's core functions, and the knowledge the organization produces informs its advocacy work. As such, this case study¹ aims to understand how B&Z, an example of a local refugee-led organization with members with lived experience and members from affected communities, contributes to knowledge production on forced displacement in Lebanon to enhance refugee well-being and protection. The case study will also highlight the range and reach of this knowledge through relationships established with external actors.

¹ This case study was commissioned by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut as part of a joint IDRC/LERNN research study aiming to understand how localized knowledge ecosystems of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge that have an impact on policy and practice. The case studies are meant to provide an in-depth look at the nature and function of localized knowledge ecosystems in the Middle East and North Africa region.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the selection of B&Z as a case study, a mapping exercise of various knowledge ecosystems on refugee and forced displacement in Lebanon was conducted. Entities identified through the mapping were then validated. The validation exercise entailed conducting a telephone survey with identified entities to ensure with the organization's eligibility as a member within the greater knowledge ecosystem in the country or as a knowledge sub-ecosystem. As a refugee-led organization that includes refugees, asylum seekers, and persons affected by the refugee crisis in Lebanon, B&Z is a key local actor within Lebanon's greater knowledge ecosystem on forced displacement. The organization is both a *producer* and *sharer* of knowledge (Alexander et al., 2022), which it uses to inform its programming as well as policy and practice to benefit the refugee communities it serves. B&Z is also a member of various knowledge sub-ecosystems in Lebanon, such as the Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement (LPRND) and the Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis Network (PASC).

This case study employed a qualitative research approach. Between December 2021 and February 2022, key informant, semi-structured interviews were conducted with B&Z team members and representatives from among the organization's partners and donors. Interviewees were purposively selected based on their roles and relationships with B&Z and on the recommendation of B&Z staff. Interviews with donors and partners demonstrated how other actors use the knowledge produced by B&Z to shed light on the reach and influence of this knowledge. The research team then contacted potential participants via email, which explained the aim of the research and their rights as a participant in the study. In total, six key informant interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted online via a secure video-conferencing application. A desk review of relevant documents, such as B&Z annual and published research reports, was also conducted. In addition, a short online communications questionnaire was shared with B&Z's Communications Manager to gather information on the types and frequency of knowledge produced by B&Z, the dissemination mechanisms used by B&Z, and its online presence and reach. Analysis of qualitative data was conducted using a thematic approach. All data collected was triangulated to highlight emerging and common themes.

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the American University of Beirut Institutional Review Board (Protocol #SBS-2021-0296). Consent to participate was obtained from participants.

Limitations

Although the case study provides some insight into how a refugee-led organization sets its research agenda and disseminates and uses the knowledge it produces for advocacy purposes to enhance refugee protection, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to other similar organizations in Lebanon. This is due, in part, to the purposive, non-random sampling approach used. Nevertheless, conducting interviews with both B&Z staff and representatives from among the organization's donors and partners served the purpose of this case study to shed light on the nature and function of entities contributing to the knowledge ecosystem in Lebanon by highlighting how knowledge is used to enhance refugee protection by a local refugee-led organization. Furthermore, the case study provided insight into how a refugee-led organization with members with lived experience and affected by the refugee crisis in Lebanon engage in discussions around forced migration in the country.

ABOUT BASMEH & ZEITONEH

In September 2012, almost a year after the onset of the conflict in Syria, a group of Syrian friends and volunteers set out to visit localities across Lebanon, hosting some of the most marginalized Syrian refugees in order to assess their needs and identify the gaps in the support reaching them. The group's first initiative was to distribute food parcels in Lebanon's Shatila Camp (a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut), which they had identified as one of the most underserved areas in Lebanon, along with other Palestinian refugees' camps, and other localities in Tripoli, Aarsal, and the Bekaa. In 2014, the group registered as an official non-governmental organization in Lebanon under the name Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z) (decree #145/2014). It established its first community center in Shatila Camp that same year. Since then, B&Z has expanded its work to cover other underserved areas across the country through the establishment of community centers in Naba'a (Beirut), Al-Qibbeh (North Lebanon), and Bar Elias (Bekaa) in Lebanon, as well as through community centers in Gaziantep, Turkey, and Irbil, Iraq. B&Z runs all of its projects and operations through these local community centers, which also helps them to maintain close contact with the surrounding communities and to build strong relationships with them. As noted by its international partners, the latter, along with being a refugee-led organization and having refugees among its staff, have contributed to B&Z's "legitimacy" among them and other actors, such as policy-makers (Participant D, Participant F). B&Z's international partners acknowledge the trust it has established among the communities it serves and its partners and donors (Participant D, Participant F).

In addition to being a Syrian refugee-led organization started by Syrian refugees and which employs Syrian refugees, B&Z also hires local staff from the surrounding communities where it operates its centers. While B&Z's main target community is Syrian refugees, the organization also supports other communities who live in the localities where its centers are based, such as Palestinian refugees and members from the host community. The organization provides direct aid and relief to these communities and supports them through four main programs: Peacebuilding & Social Cohesion, Food Security & Livelihoods, Education, and Protection. B&Z's Advocacy & Research Unit, established in 2018, works towards translating the organization's knowledge of the local context into products usable for advocacy purposes, such as policy notes.

LOCALIZATION

As an organization, B&Z has a solid commitment to localization, as evidenced by its working mechanisms, its strategy and programming, and the partnerships it seeks. In addition to being a refugee-led organization, B&Z employs refugees and members from the communities where it works. Indeed, B&Z's strengths include its close connection to the communities it serves and its community-center approach. The importance of such a close connection to communities was reiterated by B&Z's international partners, who shared that they "...have witnessed it [themselves] many times. How well rooted [B&Z] is in local communities, particularly in Lebanon" (Participant D), and that B&Z team "clearly have very well established and trusted relationships with the people who...they work with and serve" (Participant F). This close connection to the communities they serve has allowed the team at B&Z to identify and respond to community needs through ongoing assessments and information they collect through their centers and from key community persons.

B&Z also has strong connections with community leaders and grassroots groups in each area where it works. For example, in Shatila, B&Z works with a focal point, a well-respected person within the community, who helps spread the word about the organization's ongoing programs and projects. In Shatila also, B&Z shares information about ongoing interventions with the local community through a popular online page, *Akhbar al Mookhayam* (News of the Camp).

Despite this, and due to being a Syrian refugee-led organization, B&Z is, to a certain extent, not considered a “local organization” by all actors in Lebanon. B&Z also faces challenges that hinder its work at multiple levels—cross-cutting across all levels is discrimination against Syrian refugees. At the community level, B&Z is seen by host community members as denying Lebanese people aid and resources due to its primary target being Syrian refugees. At the local governance level, B&Z sometimes faces resistance from municipalities to implement projects which target refugees. At the national level, and noting that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol, Syrians in Lebanon are not considered refugees but rather displaced persons, which has legal and political implications (Mourad, 2017) for the work that B&Z can undertake. Another challenge faced by B&Z is the Government of Lebanon’s hesitancy and lack of political will to respond to the ongoing refugee crisis. These challenges have made it difficult for B&Z to undertake policy-level or advocacy work that could enhance refugees’ protection locally. Still, B&Z works through its programs to enhance the well-being and protection of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Agenda setting

Several factors influence B&Z’s research agenda, closely linked to its strategy and programs. Firstly, based on the organization’s commitment to working for its communities, B&Z looks internally to set its agenda, which entails assessing how its programs can benefit from a research component. Furthermore, in line with B&Z’s community-center approach, the organization’s agenda-setting is primarily informed by community needs. Staff conducts brainstorming sessions to identify and understand issues emerging within the communities and discuss how ongoing programs and projects can benefit from research. As a B&Z staff member shared, these brainstorming sessions serve to identify “...what the current needs are at the moment to be addressed, what are current conflicts that are happening on the ground, what are current issues that need to be solved or that need specific data collection to be addressed, for example, monitoring returns to Syria” (Participant A).

As an organization, B&Z fosters a participatory approach and views the communities it supports as project partners. As such, staff conduct community consultations throughout the year and large-scale surveys to identify community needs, inform programming and the organization’s advocacy agenda, and help identify gaps in humanitarian assistance. This knowledge is also shared with donor partners, who advocate for increased funding and localization based on data that B&Z has gathered, lessons learned from B&Z’s programs, and evidence from successful programming. B&Z also checks with their international partners to see if there are any themes that the partners are interested in addressing, and sometimes apply for grants together with their international partners. Ultimately, whether working alone or with partners, the grants that the team at B&Z applies for are aligned with the organization’s vision and mission. The importance of ensuring that B&Z’s mission and values are represented through all of the organization’s work was reiterated by one participant who shared that B&Z opts to apply to calls or projects that are aligned with the organization’s areas of interest and core values and that even when the team applies to pre-set calls, they make sure to incorporate B&Z’s “knowledge and resources and history” into the proposal they submit (Participant A).

Due to their commitment and dedication to the communities they serve, as well as being part of the community themselves, the team at B&Z has some power to negotiate with donors and partners when it comes to setting their research agenda. This power that the team at B&Z has to set their research agenda is a critical component of localization, as highlighted by Shivakoti and Milner (2021). Particularly, B&Z has received core funding to research issues that the team deems important based on experience and knowledge gained as an organization, which is based on data from the ground and representing the voices of the communities that B&Z serves.

For example, based on exploratory research that the B&Z team conducted and on research conducted by other CSOs and think tanks in Lebanon, the team found that mandatory conscription was an important factor influencing the lives of Syrian refugees, particularly their prospects for returning to Syria. Within this context, they conducted a research project aiming to understand the impact of mandatory conscription on men with lived experiences (either through having served in the Syrian Arab Army or who were of military age but did not serve in the army), the findings of which resulted in recommendations to various actors, particularly on ensuring durable solutions for refugees (Basmeh & Zeitooneh, 2020). More examples of agenda setting (whether for programming or research) are included in the section below on activities, influence, and reach.

Partnerships and funding

In line with its commitment to localization, B&Z seeks out partnerships with organizations and donors with similar values and who “have an understanding of how localization works...even if they are [an] international organization, [and who know] how to conduct work horizontally together, that really helps balance out the power imbalance that usually occurs between local and international partners” (Participant A). These partners usually value the knowledge and expertise of local actors and advocate for localization, as they acknowledge that local organizations are in a better position to know what the key issues and priorities are on the ground—the latter was reiterated by B&Z’s international partners (Participant D, Participant F). For example, among those interviewed, one of B&Z’s international partners noted consulting with B&Z when developing a methodology or a tool for conducting research among Syrian refugees, especially when developing questions and the language they should use due to B&Z’s familiarity with the context (Participant E). This input is used in jointly conducted projects and in projects undertaken by the international partner. Furthermore, in these partnerships, and as explained by both a representative from B&Z (Partner A) and a representative from an international partner organization (Participant D), either one of the partners may take the initiative to propose a project. From there, proposals are “co-created” to contribute to a more equal partnership between them.

B&Z has garnered an extensive network of partners and colleagues at the local level, contributing to its localization and reach. One of its international partners shared how B&Z’s extensive network has helped them in their advocacy efforts, “...[B&Z] has a big network in Lebanon [...] a network of stakeholders and actors, its well-known name that helps us kind of reach more, you know, like when we say, we’re working with B&Z and most of the people know who B&Z is, it helps reach more people, especially stakeholders, embassies, these kinds of places that [the organization] is well known and then this gives a broader area for us to advocate [...] I feel that B&Z’s position as a very active, active entity on the ground gives us access to a lot of areas...” (Participant E).

In terms of funding, B&Z relies on multiple funding sources to ensure the continuity of its programming. Nevertheless, and similar to other local organizations, funding remains a significant challenge to the organization’s sustainability and launching of some of its programs and projects. As a result, the team advocates for the localization of funding and core funding from partners and donors, and this effort has been successful in some cases. For example, through establishing a solid relationship and fostering trust with partners who value localization, B&Z has received core funding for specific programs, with few restrictions regarding budget distribution to staff and across projects, giving the organization some degree of freedom in setting its agenda. These partners also use the knowledge produced by B&Z’s Advocacy & Research Unit for their advocacy purposes and facilitate B&Z’s access to the international decision-making arena for advocacy purposes, where B&Z can represent itself and its work during webinars, meetings, and presentations.

B&Z ACTIVITIES, INFLUENCE, AND REACH

B&Z produces knowledge through its ongoing programs and Monitoring & Evaluation Unit, and also through its Advocacy & Research Unit, which aims to “[study and analyze] gaps and inequalities resulting from unjust policies and practices, and advocates for better policies and practices within and towards communities affected by the Syrian Crisis” (Basmeh & Zeitooneh, 2018, p. 55). B&Z produces several types of publications in English and Arabic to ensure a wider reach at the international and regional levels. Knowledge products produced by the Advocacy & Research Unit include research reports and policy notes. Other publications produced by B&Z include a newsletter, infographics, news articles, media articles, blogs, and informational videos. B&Z also hosts workshops, stakeholder dialogues, and launch events, which local, regional, and international actors attend. Staff members also participate in regional and global conferences, such as the Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region,’ where for two years, B&Z served as the representative for Lebanon CSOs working with Syrian refugees at the event.

B&Z’s newsletter is shared through the organization’s mailing list, reaching almost 2,000 persons, including donors, partners, journalists, and B&Z supporters and friends. Where possible, the knowledge produced is shared with community members, including refugees. This knowledge is shared through various social media platforms, where most followers are members of the communities B&Z serves. Social media platforms, such as B&Z’s Facebook page (with almost 40,000 followers), are also used to share information about new and ongoing projects with previous, current, and potential program participants. Social media platforms serve for two-way communication, whereby B&Z shares knowledge and gathers community knowledge and feedback. This feedback is then used to improve programs and projects and advocate with donors for more context-sensitive projects.

Through its Monitoring & Evaluation Unit, B&Z collects data from participants pre- and post-project implementation and throughout the project period. Though this knowledge is not knowledge in the sense that we understand it academically, it fits into a broader definition of knowledge in all its forms (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020) and which is used for this project, “including oral history, artwork, media articles, and radio shows, NGO reports, government statistics, works of art, and academic publications” (Alexander et al., 2022, p. 9). It, too, “increases or deepens an understanding of refugees and forced migration” issues (Alexander et al., 2022, p. 10). Indeed, this form of knowledge ensures that programs (and projects and initiatives) are implemented as intended to benefit participants, whether displaced populations or host community members, and measure program impact. This data is also shared with donors and partners to improve programs to ensure that they are meeting the needs of displaced communities and to inform the design of future programs.

Through the knowledge that it produces, B&Z is able to influence donor programs and projects. For example, based on data collected from participants in its Small Grants program, B&Z advocated for and received additional funding from donors to ensure that all those participating in the training component of the program would also receive a small grant to establish a business, as when the project was first implemented, only select participants received grants. The project was also redesigned to include a business coaching component to ensure that participants would continue receiving the support they needed for their businesses even after the program’s training component had ended. As mentioned, data collected from the field through projects and ongoing engagement with communities also feeds into B&Z’s advocacy work.

At the local level, B&Z supports refugee and host community members to produce and use knowledge through capacity building projects to influence the wider local community and local governance entities. One such capacity-building initiative, the Future Together Now project, brought together refugees and host community members of various age groups in Bar Elias, Bekaa Valley and provided them with

capacity building sessions to advocate for themselves at the local governance level (e.g., municipality level) on social issues that affect them all. Through needs assessments and data collected for this project, various community-level projects were implemented, led by refugees and host community members, aiming to improve the quality of life for those living in the Bar Elias area. For example, a joint water fountain was installed in the town center to provide clean water to the community. These programs also have a practical influence, aiming to improve social cohesion between the two communities, the impact of which requires further research.

A B&Z team member shared that the organization faces difficulties influencing policy on refugee issues at the national level in Lebanon due, in part, to the lack of political will (Participant A). Based on their experience, it has been easier to effect some social change to ensure the protection of refugees at the international level. Indeed, B&Z is a member of several networks and coalitions working towards ensuring refugee protection and durable solutions. Through its work in these groups, B&Z can reach international-level policy- and decision-makers. For example, as a member of the Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) coalition, B&Z contributes to research and advocacy on Syrian refugees' protection issues as well as "on the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria" (Refugee Protection Watch, 2022). Within this coalition, B&Z is involved in fundraising, contributes to setting the agenda, co-leads some of the projects, supports the development of context-specific data collection tools, collects data from the ground on refugee returns in Syria, and also contributes to the RPW's knowledge outputs. The influence of B&Z's knowledge on the RPW is stressed by one of B&Z's international partners, who shared that in addition to collecting data for the RPW, B&Z also "[shapes the RPW's] joint policy and advocacy strategy [...] that is another way that [B&Z's] knowledge contributed to the project" (Participant F).

Data collected by B&Z and other coalition members for the RPW is published in an annual report and other joint RPW publications. The coalition members then use these publications in joint advocacy efforts to enhance the protection space for refugees in Lebanon, including in bilateral discussions with, for example, EU policy-makers, the European Commission, individual EU member states, the UNHCR, the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group, and the UN Human Rights Council. These publications are also used during key moments, such as at the annual Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria in the Region. B&Z's influence has extended internationally through its work with the RPW, whereby the organization's international partners invite the team to international decision-making tables, giving them the space to talk to diplomats, politicians, ambassadors, and others "to really get the voices of [the Syrian] community across" (Participant A). B&Z has also, through its contributions to the RPW, influenced the 5-year strategy on the localized durable solutions agenda of one of its international partners, as shared during an interview. Specifically, the B&Z team has "played a key role in moving [the partner's] position on it and [on their] strategic vision, [...] they have also directly contributed to the concrete development of that strategy [...] there was also quite close interaction throughout that process in which [B&Z] provided comments and feedback on the draft strategy" (Participant D).

B&Z's influence and reach are very much linked to the team having established themselves as experts on and working for refugees and host communities in Lebanon and the region. Beyond the RPW, and facilitated by the partnerships it has established, data published by B&Z has been used in a legal resolution to increase funding for Syrian refugees in Lebanon by partners and diplomats in the EU. Furthermore, data produced, lessons learned from projects, and evidence from successful programs are used by B&Z's international partners to advocate for increased funding and localization for local organizations in Lebanon.

Also, at the international level, B&Z is a member of the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Coalition, convened by Asylum Access. As a member of this coalition, B&Z provides mentorship and funding to emerging refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in Lebanon. Through this program, B&Z supports other emerging RLOs to build their identity, propose a project or program, and then implement it. In this way, B&Z amplifies the voices of other organizations led by those with lived experiences or members from affected communities. Asylum Access also involves B&Z in several international-level working

groups, where the team is able to reach stakeholders such as the UNHCR, diplomats in North America, decision-makers, and EU foreign affairs ministries, where they influence the agenda for sustainable and localized funding for the RRL Coalition, as well as advocate for the needs of the refugee communities they represent.

Factors that explain B&Z's influence and reach

In addition to the factors highlighted above, several other factors contribute to B&Z's influence and reach. Firstly, B&Z ensures that its programs and projects are timely and that they address specific needs or respond to a research gap—this is guaranteed through ongoing needs assessments and open communication with the communities it serves. One of B&Z's team members reiterated that “there is always open communication between us and the community, between us and stakeholders within the community, and between us and our beneficiaries” (Participant C). B&Z acknowledges the importance of proposal innovation and flexibility, and the team is “willing to learn and adapt and grow” (Participant A). B&Z's programs are inclusive and non-discriminatory. The team also makes sure to incorporate the voices of the communities they serve in all their work, hire from within the community itself, and are very much a part of the community, a factor facilitated by B&Z's community center approach. They also consider feedback and critique and incorporate feedback into future programming and projects where possible. Altogether, these factors have contributed to B&Z's legitimacy, especially as seen by international partners and decision-makers, which benefits both the organization's reach and influence.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study presented the various forms of knowledge produced by B&Z, an example of an RLO within the greater knowledge ecosystem on forced displacement in Lebanon. The case study discussed the various factors which contribute to B&Z's localization, including the organization's nature as an RLO, B&Z's strong relationship and open communication with the communities it serves, and its community-center approach. These factors have enhanced B&Z's credibility and legitimacy, giving the team some power to set the organization's programs and research agenda. B&Z's reliance on multiple funding sources, including its ability to secure core funding, also facilitates agenda setting. Where possible, B&Z aims to partner with donors who value localization and whose missions align with B&Z's mission, in this way ensuring that the organization's work continues to respond to refugees' actual needs.

Furthermore, the case study showcased B&Z's influence and reach through the knowledge it produces. Whether data collected from needs assessments, for M&E purposes, or research purposes, the knowledge produced by B&Z often informs the organization's advocacy work at the local, national, and international levels. Relatedly, B&Z has established strong local and international networks and gained the trust of the communities it serves, as well as that of local and international actors. Its partnerships have facilitated the organization's access to various policy-making arenas, where B&Z has managed to inform the discussion around pertinent topics, such as a safe and voluntary return for Syrian refugees. Within these spaces, B&Z amplifies the voices of the refugee communities it serves by advocating for their well-being and protection in Lebanon.

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About the Refugee Research and Policy Program

Lebanon and the Arab region are facing one of the largest refugee crises spawning serious public policy challenges. Given this context, the Refugee Research and Policy program generates refugee related/policy-oriented research that addresses an existing knowledge gap in the field of refugee studies. Moreover, the program seeks to enrich the quality of debate among scholars, officials, international organizations, and civil society actors, with the aim to inform policymaking relating to refugees in the Middle East and beyond.

About the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs

Inaugurated in 2006, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab world. The Institute aims at bridging the gap between academia and policymaking by conducting high quality research on the complex issues and challenges faced by Lebanese and Arab societies within shifting international and global contexts, by generating evidence-based policy recommendations and solutions for Lebanon and the Arab world, and by creating an intellectual space for an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, scholars, civil society actors, media, and policymakers.

ABOUT LERRN

LERRN is the Local Engagement Refugee Response Network bringing together global researcher and practitioners committed to promoting protection and solutions with and for refugees. The aim is to reshape the discourse and politics of the global refugee regime by enhancing the role of civil society in all stages of the development and functioning of the regime. This is done through partnered and collaborative research, various capacity building activities, knowledge mobilization tools, and promoting the value of refugee participation.



Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs
American University of Beirut
P.O. Box 11-0236 Riad El Solh / Beirut 1107 2020 Lebanon



www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/



961-1-350000 ext. 4150



[Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs](#)
[IFI](#)



+961-1-737627



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ifi.comms@aub.edu.lb



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