

# 1.1. MEAL AND FAITH IN HIGHLY SECTARIANIZED CONTEXTS

## ADYAN FOUNDATION LEBANON



How this story represents an international-local faith partnership in MEAL



### International element

International secular donor



### Local faith element

Partnerships with local Muslim, Christian, and Druze faith leaders



### Project country

Lebanon



### Website

<https://adyanfoundation.org/>



### The organisation and project

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 envisions a world where diversity between individuals and communities is lived as a source of enrichment, generating mutual understanding, creative development, and sustainable peace. The organisation

conducts research and training and is invested in policy work and community engagement. A group of Lebanese individuals from different religious denominations established Adyan in August 2006 against the backdrop of the Israeli war on Lebanon and the historically rooted, internal sectarian conflicts in the country.

Adyan launched the Forum for Religious Social Responsibility (FRSR) in March 2019. The Forum, which is funded by the British Embassy in Lebanon, creates a platform for over 100 influential religious leaders and activists from Sunni, Shia, Christian, and Druze backgrounds.

These actors have been trained in order to increase their skills in promoting messages of diversity and coexistence and against violent extremism. It focuses on capacity-building by empowering its members to assume their role as change-makers in their local communities through the support of community-based initiatives, especially in under-served areas such as Beirut's southern suburbs, Tripoli, the South, and the Beqaa Valley. Members of the Forum also coordinated and ran community service projects to support those in need.

A key element of the project's outreach tools are short film campaigns, which promote positive existential narratives and encourage inter-religious understanding and critical thinking. Other tools and platforms used as part of the project include an online media platform (Taadudiya), articles, trainings, and lectures. To empower religious and influential leaders in the Forum further, and give them greater reach, the members are featured on Taadudiya through films and opinion articles.

## MEAL approach and rationale

### Development of a MEAL plan

MEAL activities were embedded into the project's design from the very beginning. The MEAL plan incorporates multiple qualitative and quantitative monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools, including quarterly surveys, focus groups, stories of change, and an impact study of the Taadudiya online platform. This variety of MEAL tools allowed the organisation to measure the impact of the project deeply and understand its level of contribution to shifting attitudes towards religious social responsibility and social

cohesion. The MEAL plan was designed by the FRSR Project Manager and supported by the Adyan Development and International Relations (DIR) Department. Following this, the plan was shared with the donor, which provided valuable feedback and suggestions, leading to a finalized plan.

### Data collection

Adyan employs different quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data. Data triangulation allows the Adyan team to form an inclusive and reliable understanding of the communities it works with. Quarterly e-surveys measure change in participants' knowledge as a result of an activity, and change in attitude towards current political, religious, and social issues in the Lebanese context. Another tool is focus group discussions, which were recently completed for the current phase of the project. These examined the impact of the Forum and its activities on communities and individuals. The process began with a survey in order to design two sets of focus groups each in six areas of Lebanon: an engaged focus group (with members reached by the Forum's activities) and a control group. Discussions in the focus groups follow the screening of films from Adyan's media campaign, 'We Can Talk About Religion,' and of a video clip depicting a sectarian incident that happened in Lebanon and went viral. Adyan uses this approach to measure the participants' understanding of hate speech and their reaction to negative messages online. The focus groups also aimed to capture changes in attitudes and behaviours.

The design and implementation of the focus groups was informed by Adyan's Guide to Focus Groups, which was further developed using

input from the FRSR project. The document will continue to be updated and is a valuable reference for Adyan's team, partners, and other local NGOs to benefit from.

Adyan also measures change in attitudes and behaviour through community-focused stories of change collected from Forum members during the implementation of community service initiatives, feedback homilies and sermons, and through reactions of community members to social media posts. This element of the data collection process was key in building the capacity of Forum members who showed particular promise (in addition to the

Adyan team itself). The participatory process of collecting stories of change made social change tangible for Forum members (and the Adyan team). This kind of emotional reward is direly needed when working with local faith actors in a highly sectarian country like Lebanon to further inspire social cohesion and religious social responsibility. Lastly, Adyan will measure the offline impact of their online work through an impact study of Taadudiya using both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The data and information will be provided by an external analysis company, and will be analysed by the Adyan team, including the Media Department.



### Data analysis

To ensure objectivity and depth, all gathered MEAL data is analysed by more than one team member. Data analysis is based on an interdisciplinary approach that considers all collected data, in addition to findings from other relevant projects run by Adyan. Data is also disaggregated by gender, age, and geographical region in Lebanon wherever possible to ascertain that the project a thorough and inclusive impact of the project. Focus group data is analysed by both the Project Manager and DIR Department.

### Accountability and learning

The FRSR Project Manager shares MEAL data with Adyan's CEO, the Development and International Relations (DIR) Department, and the donor to measure the current impact of the project and inform future steps. Because of the fundamental role played by Forum members, findings are also shared with them occasionally to help inform their future activities. The results are not communicated with the project's target communities beyond the Forum members. In 2020, MEAL activities were mainly designed to enhance the project design for the next year in innovative and adaptive ways that respond to the most urgent and direct needs on the ground. This will continue in 2021.

For example, insights from the first focus group informed new strategies and activities in the areas of policy, education, and media (such as collaborations with famous personalities and the use of TV content), which can help enhance the reach of the project. The expansion of Taadudiya's social media campaigns to other countries in the MENA region has also been suggested.

As part of their expanded MEAL plan, Adyan is developing a monitoring and evaluation network of peacebuilding and social cohesion NGOs to share knowledge and identify opportunities for project synergies for the benefit of communities across Lebanon and beyond. Thus, by the end of this phase of the FRSR project in March 2021, lessons will be shared with wider networks of organisations.

### Lessons learned

#### Working on sensitive issues

The FRSR project aims to empower religious leaders from different religious, cultural, and demographic backgrounds rather than only engaging members of a similar background. Forum members are religious leaders, educators, and influencers from the different sects in Lebanon, including Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, and Druze. The wide diversity of Forum members has helped the project reach an increased number of communities from all over Lebanon. Community members who take part in activities, trainings, and lectures organized by Forum members are diverse as well, which makes it challenging to build on their feedback to customize the project's MEAL strategy. For example, when preparing focus groups, the group's perception of the moderator and, particularly whether or not he/she will be perceived as unbiased, and the sensitivities of topics covered needs to be taken into account. This includes taking care to design questions that invite everyone to participate without making anyone feel like their identity is under

attack. Since the organisation wanted people to feel included, the team decided to avoid any particularly sensitive political topics that might deviate focus groups from their main purpose and trigger participants to defend their sects or political affiliations.

### Recommended resources

Victoria Canavor (2006): From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. <https://jliflc.com/resources/focus-group-process-ndi/>