

Community Facilitators in the Pursuit of Justice: Lessons from Jordan on Recruitment, Training, & Data



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النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
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Introduction

The Community Empowerment Project, initiated by the Open Society Foundations in Jordan, builds on and complements existing refugee response efforts through legal empowerment and community-based justice services. The project supports both Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan to understand and use legal and administrative systems to find concrete solutions to justice problems. In the pilot phase of the project, three Jordanian organizations coordinated to incorporate a community facilitator approach into their existing legal aid programs.

Community facilitators (CFs) are frontline justice workers recruited from within the communities where they work and supported by a team of project staff and lawyers. Community facilitators use basic knowledge of the law and administrative procedures and a range of skills to take on many roles that help beneficiaries gain access to justice, including conducting community outreach, providing information, accompanying beneficiaries to certain government offices, referring cases to lawyers and other service providers, and collecting information on beneficiaries and their grievances to support evidence-based advocacy efforts. CFs can address justice issues in various thematic areas.

In this project, each partner chose to focus on justice issues that were urgent needs of the target communities and that fit within the mandate of the organization (see box 1). Partners recruited both Jordanians and Syrians as community facilitators.

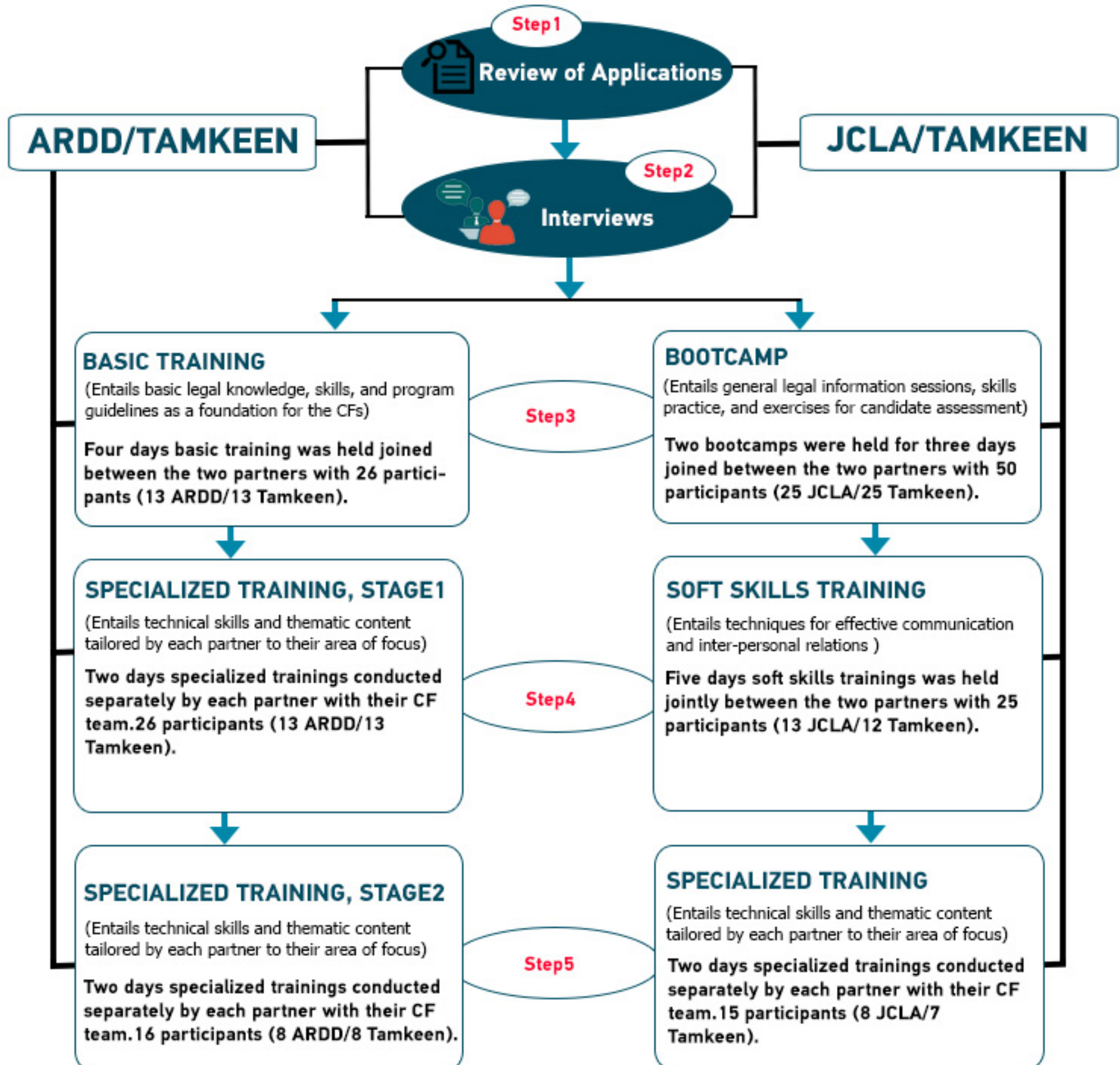
During the pilot, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA), and Tamkeen developed their community facilitator projects around some agreed commonalities, such as the role of the CF and basic training modules, while also leaving room for experimentation and adjustments based on their thematic areas of focus and organizational structures. Namati played a support role through sharing experiences and tools from the legal empowerment field, informing the planning process, and facilitating cross-partner learning.

The following sections offer reflections on the recruitment, training, and data collection methods that these partner organizations used during the pilot phase of the community facilitator project.

Implementing Partners & Thematic Areas of Focus

- ✓ Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA): civil documentation, family law, and tenancy issues, among others
- ✓ Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD): the right to wellbeing through education
- ✓ Tamkeen: labor law and the right to work

Recruitment & training structure for pilot period



Structure

For the pilot project, each of the three implementing partners incorporated training events in the recruitment process to assess the candidates' skills and capacities. The first step of the recruitment process was the review of written application materials, such as an application form and/or resume, in order to create a shortlist of candidates for face-to-face interviews.

The individuals who passed the interview then progressed to the next stage of the recruitment process: interactive training sessions. Evaluators watched and assessed the candidates during the training activities and after each session determined who would move forward in the training/recruitment process.

Evaluation of Candidates

All partners agreed on a basic set of common recruitment criteria which they could refine or expand as needed (see box 2). Partners assessed candidates against some criteria through the review of written materials and an interview, then evaluated other criteria during the bootcamp and basic training sessions. All partners used an evaluation grid or matrix to conduct these assessments. JCLA, for example, chose to create an evaluation matrix that defined and assigned a maximum number of potential points to each assessment criterion. The project team met to discuss these definitions and design exercises that would elicit the attitudes and skills in candidates that the team wanted to evaluate.

At the bootcamp, trainers split CF candidates among different tables with one evaluator per table. The trainers ensured that each candidate group consisted of men and women and different nationalities so that the evaluators could observe how candidates responded to group dynamics and if they displayed socio-political opinions related to the CF role.

To assess reasoning and analytical skills, the JCLA trainers first conducted a session on basic legal information in some of the thematic areas that the potential CFs would be working. They then provided a simple legal case and posed several questions to the candidates, such as "is this trafficking?" or "is this exploitation?" and "what can be done to resolve the case?" The candidate-trainees at each table discussed the case together while the evaluator observed and confidentially awarded points to each candidate. Beyond how each candidate applied their new legal knowledge to the case, evaluators were also watching to see whether anyone helped their fellow group members, versus someone who might prioritize showing off.

In another exercise, candidates had to present a challenge they had faced, how they dealt with it, and whether they felt satisfaction or regret for handling it in that way.



This session gave each person a chance to demonstrate their presentation skills and provided the evaluators with insight into the potential CFs' thinking process: What did they choose as a challenge? How did they approach it? Were they able to create empathy in the listener? In some groups, after the first CF candidate presented, say on the challenge of their high school exam, the majority of others chose to talk about the same challenge. The project team felt the candidates who spoke on a different type of challenge showed independent and creative thinking.

Discussion prompts helped uncover political and social views of the CF candidates that could affect their work. The trainer might pose a question such as "whose responsibility is it to take care of Syrian people affected by war?" The discussions at each table highlighted a range of opinions, from "their government, why should we [Jordan] respond?" to "the international community" to "all of us; the whole world." A candidate's statements could suggest whether s/he was suitable for the role, which requires openness and the ability to interact with diverse groups within the community. Flexibility of the training team was important in the bootcamp training.

When an evaluator was unable to tell the intent behind one candidate's gender-based comments, for example, she privately requested the trainer to use a story with a more explicit gender element. In the following discussion, it became clear the candidate did have a negative gender bias, which was incorporated into his evaluation.

Lessons on Integrated Recruitment & Training

The partners found the positive aspects of the combined recruitment and training process far outweighed the potential downsides. Unlike a traditional hiring process, which mainly relies on written materials and interview performance, conducting recruitment and training together meant project teams could develop a deeper understanding of each CF candidate through observing them "in action". The teams saw how CF candidates approached problems, put skills into practice, and interacted with diverse people in a group setting. Attitudes or biases were more readily detected through this approach than in an interview setting alone. Participating in a training event as part of the recruitment process also allowed potential community facilitators to determine how well they would fit into the team, and whether it aligned with their interests. For example, in one case a candidate pulled out after a disagreement with another participant. In addition, training a larger number of potential CFs to have basic legal knowledge and skills could ease recruitment in case of high turnover or the need to scale up quickly.

Though the disadvantages were few, there are two considerations to keep in mind for similar combined recruitment and training processes. First, the process takes time and requires resources—project teams must plan at least two training events: one with basic sessions to evaluate the candidates and another to deepen the knowledge and skills of those who were hired as community facilitators. Second, some CF candidates were confused as to whether they were attending an interview or a training. ARDD tried to avoid the confusion by making it clear to their candidates from the start that the initial selection was for the training only, and that an evaluation would inform the final selection of CFs. Project teams must find a way of managing expectations and balancing the training and recruitment aspects of the process.

Effective Training Methods

After several months in their new roles, community facilitators reported that the training program, which included the training they received both during and after recruitment, was effective in providing the knowledge and skills they needed on the job.

From the CF perspective, the most impactful training methods were interactive and required them to practice skills or apply their new legal and thematic knowledge. A few of the most notable exercises and methods are shared below.

Simplifying Legal Content (law-based)

The Tamkeen team ran an effective training exercise on simplifying legal content. After the CFs became familiar with some general legal concepts and specific laws related to Tamkeen's thematic area of focus, they were asked to explain a law using simple terms that anyone could understand. If in the presentation a CF used even one legal term, s/he would have to start the process again from the beginning. This method forced the CFs to learn the law thoroughly, examine their language closely, and build the ability to share their knowledge effectively with the target communities.

The CFs created a shared document during the exercise with their best simplified language to promote consistency in their awareness raising activities. As the CFs began their work, they continued to collaborate on understanding and simplifying the law through a shared Google Document where they could list questions they encountered in the field. These questions formed the basis of discussions in the regular CF meetings.

Scenarios and Playing "Devil's Advocate" (skill-based)

Once CFs attained a solid basis of legal knowledge, the Tamkeen training team introduced their CFs to additional challenges. In scenario-based sessions, the training team asked each community facilitator to prepare a presentation on a certain legal issue. The CF then presented to the rest of the group as if the audience were part of the target community.

The training team and other CFs assumed different roles as part of the audience. For example, during one presentation a trainer might be rowdy, interrupting the CF, asking irrelevant questions, or distracting other participants. In another session, a trainer might challenge or reject the information included in the CF's presentation or question how it was relevant to their life. Another CF might play with their phone during the presentation.

In each scenario, the presenting CF had to figure out how to respond in the group setting, giving them concrete practice in facilitation techniques, including dealing with different types of participants, questions, and obstacles they might encounter in the field.

Community Facilitator's Perspectives

- ✔ Community facilitators, when reflecting on the pilot period, said they encountered situations in the field that mirrored the scenarios in their training; they felt the intensive practice prepared them to respond.
- ✔ One community facilitator noted that during a training session each CF had to talk about themselves for no less than 15 minutes. At the time, he did not see the relevance to the CF role, but later he realized this type of exercise pushed him to rapidly improve his communication skills.
- ✔ CFs also thought their training in “soft skills” or “people skills,” such as understanding personality types and reading a person’s emotions, was essential preparation for their community-based work.

Observation-based Orientation (Shadowing)

After the classroom-based training sessions concluded, the JCLA community facilitators spent one week in the JCLA legal clinics for an observation-based orientation. The CFs served in the clinics in groups of two or three to watch how intake officers conducted their work, how awareness trainers handled information sessions, and how staff across roles interacted with beneficiaries in the field.

The observations were essential in familiarizing the new CFs with the range of legal services that JCLA provides and in promoting learning from experienced staff that had responsibilities similar to what the CFs would soon cover. For example, time with the intake officers meant the new CFs got exposure to the types of problems that beneficiaries would bring to the clinic, as well as advice on how to deal with various emotions that may come up during the intake process.

Ongoing capacity building

The formal training sessions were only the initial step in enhancing the knowledge and skills of the community facilitators. All partners incorporated ongoing and on-the-job training into their projects. Methods included:

- Regular (weekly or monthly) CF group meetings during which CFs could share successes and challenges, brainstorm new solutions, receive further updates on the law, and ensure communication, referral, and reporting processes were working for the team.
- Observing the CF at work, such as when s/he is interacting with a beneficiary or participating in an awareness session, and providing specific feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

- Providing opportunities for CFs to attend events and training sessions organized by other departments within the organization.
- Reviewing and providing feedback on the CFs’ data collection and written reports.

Partners tailored the ongoing training and support according to questions coming up in the field, requests from community facilitators, and areas for improvement noted while observing CFs at work.

Data Collection & Data Systems

Importance of Data

Data collection was an integral part of the community facilitator pilot project for all partners. The partners supported their community facilitators to gather information on participants at awareness sessions, assistance provided to beneficiaries (such as information provision or accompaniment), and referrals to lawyers or other service providers. Partners used this data to help them monitor progress, such as comparing the actual level of activities in the field with targets set at the start of the project. When early data on awareness sessions showed the CFs were reaching far more women than men, partner teams brainstormed ideas for how CFs could improve outreach to men in their communities.

Data on the types of justice issues community members brought to CFs, the number of referrals, and how much community members reported learning during awareness also helped partners to make adjustments that will improve project implementation and impact. For example, some partners plan to increase the number of lawyers involved in the project due to data showing a high level of legal referrals from CFs in the field.

In future phases of the project, data from the CF work may also support evidence-based advocacy for policy reform.

Developing new systems

All partners developed new tools to collect data during the community facilitator pilot project. ARDD sought to learn about the impact of the project, test assumptions (such as what kinds of beneficiaries CFs would reach), and experiment with a new data collection tool to discover and fix possible problems with the system before the project expands.

In particular, ARDD wanted to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the CF-led awareness sessions by understanding the beneficiary demographics (age, gender, nationality, etc.) and any improvement in knowledge between the start and end of the session. The team designed a questionnaire to capture demographic information and perceptions about current level of knowledge at the start of the session and a shorter set of questions for after the session to ask whether beneficiaries felt their knowledge increased.

ARDD chose to use KoBo Toolbox, an online survey platform, to collect data during the CF pilot. Their criteria for selection of a data collection tool included cost, previous use by non-governmental organizations, a user-friendly interface, and the option for offline data entry. ARDD also liked KoBo because it was an open source tool, allowing for modifications in both content and the underlying design, and because the data stored online could be exported to Excel for analysis. Given that the CFs would use the tool to conduct pre and post-surveys at awareness sessions, not as a system to track cases over time, the survey-focused tool fit their needs.

After the recruitment and training process, the ARDD team had a strong understanding of the CFs' knowledge and skills which enabled them to create a tailored, one-day training on data collection. The CFs learned about the content of the pre and post-surveys and the referrals forms in order to ensure everyone had a shared understanding of the procedures and definitions. The CFs also practiced completing the forms on the tablets that they would use in the field so that any technical challenges could be addressed right away. The hands-on practice was particularly important because the CFs would be supporting beneficiaries to use the tablets to fill out the forms. ARDD expected a mobile platform would ease the collection and compilation of large amounts of data and also reduce the human error that can occur when transferring paper-based information to an electronic system.

JCLA and Tamkeen similarly experimented with data collection options during the pilot. CFs tested out various templates— using a mix of paper-based forms and Excel spreadsheets to capture information on participants at awareness sessions, services provided directly to beneficiaries, and referrals made within the organization or to external service providers. Project teams made adjustments to these templates as needed to better track the information necessary to gauge impact and learn from the CF activities.

Adjustments & Challenges

During the pilot, the project teams monitored data quality to give guidance to CFs, and CFs provided feedback from the field to inform adjustments to the data system. At monthly meetings, for example, ARDD CFs raised an issue with the way a survey question was structured. They suggested the question on nationality should not use a text box for typing in the response but rather a multiple-choice question that would save time in selecting the answer.

The project teams similarly found data structure mattered for analysis: an open-ended question, even if asking for beneficiary gender or nationality, could be hard to analyze when CFs used different variations for the answer, such as "Jordan" and "Jordanian". Using a dropdown or multiple-choice menu of limited options in a database would ensure more consistency in the data and ease analysis.

Challenges with ARDD's data collection system included the time required for all beneficiaries to fill out the pre and post-evaluations at each awareness session, and a lack of familiarity with tablets or illiteracy among some beneficiaries, resulting in the need for additional assistance to complete the form. ARDD is now considering sending pairs of CFs to each awareness session so that one CF can focus on facilitating the session while the other collects data. Choosing to sample only some beneficiaries or some awareness sessions for the pre and post-evaluation is another option to mitigate these drawbacks.

CF Impact & Looking Forward

The above approaches to recruitment, training, and data collection are some of the methods that supported the community facilitators in achieving strong impacts in the short pilot project. A selection of achievements of the community facilitators include:

- ✔ Encouraging new beneficiaries both Jordanian and Syrian to overcome fear of authorities to seek solutions to justice problems
- ✔ Reaching some of the most vulnerable people in their communities, whom partners were unable to reach in prior projects
- ✔ Rapidly gaining the trust of community members who have long been skeptical of NGOs
- ✔ Supporting beneficiaries to interact effectively with administrative institutions and other authorities to solve challenges
- ✔ Conducting hundreds of community awareness sessions that reached thousands of people
- ✔ Referring hundreds of beneficiaries to lawyers and other service providers for further assistance

CF Specialization: Thematic and Functional

- ✓ During the pilot, JCLA realized that assigning multiple tasks to CFs may prevent them from efficiently fulfilling their role. At the start, all CFs were expected to provide beneficiaries with basic legal information, accompaniment services, and problem-analysis services within JCLA legal clinics, as well as assist in delivering awareness sessions. JCLA now believes CFs may be more effective if assigned specialized tasks. JCLA plans to capitalize on the strengths of each CF to support growth in one functional area, such as awareness raising or case intake, until they reach mastery
- ✓ ARDD and Tamkeen both expect to continue assigning their CFs varied roles but will do so within specific thematic areas where the CFs can deepen their knowledge and ability to provide effective services. Through this approach during the pilot, ARDD felt their CF team was able to engage with vulnerable communities, including refugees and women, and to encourage beneficiaries to effectively

Finally, experimenting with these methods and the community facilitator approach has generated new insights that will inform plans for the next phase of the Community Empowerment Project.