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Work package 3: Support of local initiatives on service delivery, transparency and social cohesion

تطوير ودعم مشاريع محلية لتأمين خدمات، باعتماد الشفافية والمحافظة على الوثام المجتمعي

UPDATE 3

North Lebanon

In most regions the Neighborhood Committees (NCs) are active in, local initiatives bridging gaps in social service provision to strengthen social cohesion in their communities have been selected. Only in the Mankoubeen / Baddawi / Jabal Mohsen region that is close to Tripoli in the North governorate, the process is still pending. There are two reasons for this, both are closely related to the political and economic crisis in the country:

- The Tripoli district and surrounding areas have become a more or less “lawless zone”, in which violence goes rampant and shootings and kidnappings as well as robberies happen on a daily basis. The flagrant day-light killing of a group of young men on a busy street over a traffic accident in November provoked a huge outcry. As a response, the Lebanese army and the internal security forces imposed a special security plan on the area.
- Due to the horrible economic situation in the area, the local NC received the largest number of proposals for funding (around 20), which made the selection and decision making process even more tedious. The dire situation in the region even created tensions amongst the NC members who started to compete and to push for their preferred projects to be selected as winners of the four designated grants. We had to engage the group in discussions to ease the tensions, so they could focus on the project goals again and try to ensure a transparent and mutually beneficial outcome.



In late December, we could reconvene the NC and they successfully selected the following projects:

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| ▪ Paving neighborhood roads (previously battle-lines) connecting different areas |
| ▪ Equipping a neighborhood kitchen that will provide hot meals to people in need |
| ▪ Purchasing a mobile solar-energy power panel allocated for community needs |
| ▪ Technology Hub for Robotics training for impoverished areas school students |
| ▪ Providing filtration equipment and bottling capacity for potable water for the community |

South Lebanon

With the project selection phase behind us, we decided to move into community outreach. We chose to organise a public hearing: a dialogue forum that is open to the public and conducted in a rather informal manner. Community members are invited to learn more about the selected projects and to give their opinions about the initiatives.



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It was a conscious decision to halt this step until after the well-publicized call-for-proposals to ensure that when we reach out to the target communities we would could present them with a selection of projects that really fit their needs. After a careful and successful selection process, it was time to highlight the projects that are soon to be implemented because of the following reasons:

- To demonstrate to the communities that working together towards shared goals in the interest of the communities, the way the selected NCs did, does in fact produce very tangible results and does help to solve local problems and dare for the communities needs.
- To show maximum transparency in which amount was awarded and to whom. This would also encourage community-wide involvement – to act as “watchdogs” and control authority to ensure accountability in the projects’ implementation and to ensure their sustainability.
- To allow any issues or concerns of community stakeholders to be addressed openly at an early stage, forestalling any problems.



The concept is new to Lebanon and it demonstrates the values we are trying to instill, as we try to nurture a culture of integrity based on transparency, promotion of consensus building and public participation among the main stakeholders. Some attendees labelled the event “an unprecedented social gathering since the Civil War” between the communities of Kham, Marjayoun and Qolai’a. The community meetings was well attended. The mayors of the three municipalities, some leaders of

NGOs, school principals, local representatives of political party, and community activists were present. The projects were presented by the groups who had proposed them and they were discussed in detail. Some issues were raised by the audience, for example on which kind of solar-power equipment would be to be installed, on the selection process for schools to be involved in the Technology Hub or on the safe-guarding of the equipment that is to be purchased and where to be install it. These open questions will be followed-up on during the project implementation phase.

The four areas we work in were selected to present various types of simmering conflicts within the bigger Lebanese crisis context. It was a stark reminder of how exemplary this region is of the nation-wide crisis, when – not too far from where we work – a conflict over land rights and tree logging escalated in the village of Rmeish recently. Sharing the same population composition and religious as well as political divisions as our Kham/Marjayou/Qolei’a region, the Rmeish incident threatened to flare-up into a major national crises, recalling greivances over the festering wound of Lebanese collaborators with Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, who were transferred to south of the border after the liberation of the region in 2000.

Next step will be to bank on the goodwill amongst the community members that was generated by the activities we implemented so far, to emphasise the social dialogue angle through future followup activities that are being planned with our local coordinators to take place in all four regions across Lebanon. The intent is to try to catalyse broad societal discussions which foster an environment of dialogue that would reverbate to the national level. This will also feed into the work being done by the group of experts and opinion leaders in Work package 1, who are working on reform suggestions, common values and future vision for the country.