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Environmental Justice in Lebanon

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Executive Summary

The report explores environmental movements and mobilizations that have taken place in Lebanon over the last two decades. The multiplicity of cases explored often reveal connections between claims for preserving the environment and claims for social justice. Many people's livelihoods are directly linked to their environment– for example, this is the case of the fishermen and farmers interviewed for this report.

Social injustice relates not only to the redistribution of wealth, but also to recognizing the voices of the less powerful and allowing them to take part in the decision-making process. Relationships between locals and their environment are not only an issue of access to resources for individual use, but also one of collective ownership in the area. In this sense, the community engages in a certain partnership with the environment which is rooted in a history of collective practices. Decision makers are not able to perceive this dimension considering the consistent exclusion of these people from the decision-making process.

When these different groups organize against an oppressive power, there is often a certain degree of informality– including the active involvement of informal leaders. These dynamics of informality and openness can often encourage different initiatives to join a cause in many cases, while in others, may actually be an inhibiting factor which makes newcomers too disconnected from the core of the movement. In many cases, activists outside the local community join a struggle and their involvement can have a number of positive implications such as highlighting the national relevance of the cause and providing access to a larger network of organizations and activists for visibility.

When the struggle possesses a historic dimension and/or is connected to other struggles, existing structures are often activated to support the cause. The way the cause is framed (for example, as an issue of corruption) as well as the narrative and rhetoric used, may attract media attention or allow a larger number of individuals to relate to it. As far as challenges, some groups face organizational difficulties and lack the ability to mobilize a big number of people though the biggest challenges highlighted were those connected to the deeply entrenched sectarian system. These political and sectarian affiliations are occasionally challenged when the struggle directly affects people's livelihoods.

These findings help inform Jibal's work in Lebanon and offer a contextualized recount of environmental justice initiatives in the country.

1997 — 1998 — 2009 — 2012 — 2013 — 2015 — 2017 — 2019 — 2020

01 Introduction and Context in Lebanon

Despite being historically known in the region for its high levels of biodiversity, rich water resources, and ancient cedar forests, Lebanon has faced a number of pressing environmental challenges in its recent history – mostly originating from the post-civil war reconstruction period. Some of the main challenges include water pollution (i.e. rivers, groundwater, and coastal waters), air pollution (i.e. inefficient and pollutive energy sector), as well as an overall mismanagement of natural resources (i.e. deforestation and quarrying). A general lack of urban planning policies in the densely built country has been one of the main reasons for the intensification of these issues, if not the cause itself. The State and Trends of the Lebanese Environment Report (2010) discusses how the high building density, for example, has directly threatened the country's land resources. Rampant urban development has impacted both the quality of water and the hydrologic processes, most notably groundwater recharge. The Lebanese public is also faced with intermittent domestic water supply. For example, in Beirut and Mount Lebanon the domestic water supply drops from thirteen hours per day during the wet season to only three hours during the dry season (July to October). Industrial effluence, agricultural run-off, and wastewater are also significant culprits. In fact, unregulated discharge of raw sewage into the sea and waterways is one of the major causes of water pollution in the country[1]. Beyond this, large ad hoc solid waste landfills further pollute several seafront areas such as Tripoli, Bourj Hammoud, and Saida.

These trends have not gone unnoticed. Since the 2015 garbage crisis, Lebanon has become notorious for contributing one of the main sources of trash pollution into the Mediterranean Sea. On another front, air pollution – caused primarily by unregulated industry, energy production using heavy fuel, and transport activities based primarily on passenger vehicles – poses environmental health risks. For example, inefficiencies in electricity provision have led to the widespread use of diesel generators which release toxic air contaminants. Finally, the unregulated quarrying industry also poses a large threat to Lebanon's natural resources and landscapes. Quarry sites exist in forests, fertile lands, shrublands, and grasslands and have had direct impacts on surrounding areas as well as citizen's health[2]. Between 1996 and 2005 their number rose from 711 to 1278[3], an excessive number for the country's size.

1. *MOE/UNDP/ECODIT. (2011). State and Trends of the Lebanese Environment.*
2. *Public Works Studio. (2019). Reading the Quarries' Map in Lebanon. Jadaliyya.*
3. *Darwish, T. M., Stehouwer, R., Miller, D., J., S., Jomaa, I., Shaban, A., Khater, C., & Hamzé, M. (2008). Assessment of Abandoned Quarries for Revegetation and Water Harvesting in Lebanon, East Mediterranean. Journal American Society of Mining and Reclamation, 2008(1), 271–284.*

When it comes to approaching these deeply entrenched environmental challenges , Karim Makdisi explains that they are often perceived and dealt with as technical issues separate from the social and political context[4]. In the 1990s, during the post-civil war period, many NGOs began placing a focus on these issues. Caroline Ngel and Lynn Staheli explain that in addition to promoting the protection of nature, their activities would focus on citizenship-building through environment-related activities[5]. The commonly held perception was that nature was a depoliticized and neutral space shared by everyone and could serve as a forum for bridge-building and reconciliation between communities. Despite this notion, today it is clear that a number of national environmental issues– such as quarrying, water management, solid waste management, and energy provision – are deeply politicized[6]. Looking back at the inception of the first environmental movements in Lebanon in the 1960s, Makdisi described two main types. The first was a result of the coalescence of liberal civil society in the 60s which grew primarily to represent concerns of Lebanon's elite regarding the loss of nature. The approach was disconnected from the political context and focused primarily on technical problem-solving. On the other hand, the second emerged as much an environmental movement as a social one, deeply situated in the sectarian periphery of the post-colonial state[7]. Rooted in the realities of Lebanon's disenfranchised communities, the movement called for more egalitarian distributions of natural resources and state services. It was in this context that two religious figures, Gregoire Haddad – a leader in the Greek Catholic community– and Moussa El Sadr– a leader in the Shia community– would join forces to promote environmental justice or what Makdisi calls "environmentalism of the poor".

4. *Makdisi, K. (2012). The rise and decline of environmentalism in Lebanon. Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa, 207–30. (p.3)*
5. *Nagel, C., & Staeheli, L. (2016). Nature, environmentalism, and the politics of citizenship in post-civil war Lebanon. Cultural Geographies, 23(2), 247–263. (p. 7)*
6. *Makdisi, K. (2012). The rise and decline of environmentalism in Lebanon. Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa, 207–30. (p.3)*
7. *idem (p.8)*

To this day, the politicization of environmentalism remains. High levels of state corruption, the absence of public infrastructure and mechanisms of redistribution, structural racism against migrant communities, and other forms of oppression are reflected in environmental policies and practices such as:

1- ***The location of landfills near poor neighbourhoods (e.g. Bourj Hammoud);***
2- ***the privatization of coastal areas which limits accessibility to clean beaches;***
3- ***the non-access of Palestinian refugees (and many other nationalities) to civic rights which support pro-environmental behavior (e.g. many do not possess the right to own an apartment which leads to densification in refugee camps and with it the environmental consequences).***

In light of these trends, this report will utilize an environmental justice lens to analyze environment-related movements and mobilizations in Lebanon.

02 Conceptual Framework

The discussions in this report adopt an environmental justice lens to examine the movements that organize around environmental struggles. The concept of environmental justice emerged from the United States in the 1980s in an effort to separate from "mainstream environmentalism"– which often disconnected environmental work from the socio-economic realities of communities being affected by environmental challenges. In addition, it distanced itself from the elitist often exclusionary form of environmentalism which focused primarily on preservation of scenery as opposed to how humans and nature interact. It was spearheaded by already existing community structures involved in the civil rights movement and was founded on addressing both environmental and social justice issues together. The movement's central claim is that everyone possesses the right to live in a "healthy" environment– where natural resources are fairly distributed. It was established that the poorest and least powerful individuals and communities tend not to realize the benefits of their natural surroundings as compared with more privileged classes. Environmental justice aims to redress this imbalance and establish fair participation in decision-making processes for all.

The report also utilizes a concept which was posed by the Ecofeminist movement. While the movement in general linked the oppression of women to exploitation of nature, in that they both featured dynamics of domination, it also proposed a way of understanding humanity's relationship to nature[8]. While earlier environmentalist movements often disconnected humans from the natural world and saw our role in it as separate, the Ecofeminist movement re-asserted a relationship of partnership with nature, similar to ones we build with other humans[9]. Both the environmental justice and Ecofeminist movements frame our interactions with nature from a collective dimension– where all parts contribute to the whole.

8. *Larrère, C. (2017). L'écoféminisme ou comment faire de la politique autrement. Multitudes, 67(2), 29.*
9. *idem*

The concept of environmental justice emerged from the United States in the 1980s in an effort to separate from "mainstream environmentalism"– which often disconnected environmental work from the socio-economic realities of communities being affected by environmental challenges.

These conceptualizations in Ecofeminist and environmental justice movements become important when returning back to look at the Lebanese context. It is with this conceptualization of holistically taking into consideration social factors, environmental challenges, and participation that we adopt the term environmental justice for this report. Many of the environmental justice issues in Lebanon are in part a result of a neglect of these principles posed above. One being the element of collectivity, partnership, and holism (as it relates to Ecofeminism) and the other being the facilitation of true participation in the decision making process (as it relates to environmental justice). These are utilized to examine how or how not environmental movements in Lebanon fit within this framework.

03 Methodology

This study attempts to understand how the concept of environmental justice translates in the Lebanese context. To do so, it aims to answer the following main questions:

1

To what extent are environmental movements in Lebanon incorporating principles of environmental justice?

What motivates the communities to mobilize for environmental action and what are the socio-political aspects of these environmental struggles?

2

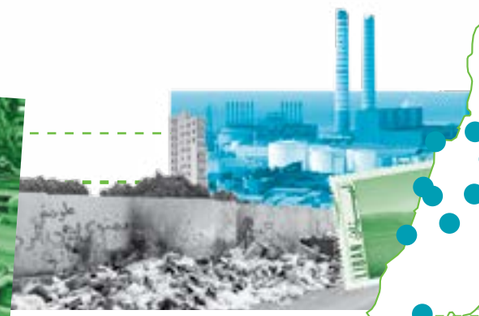
What does the organizational structure of environmental movements in Lebanon over the past decade look like?

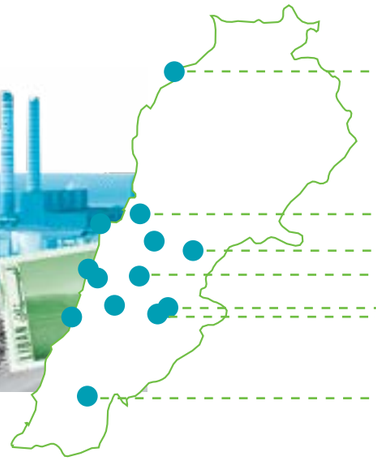
How inclusive are these movements and what are their main challenges related to this?

3

Who are the main actors that impact these struggles?

Are actors primarily local or do external actors join the cause?





Primary desk research was conducted to identify the various environmental issues communities have been organizing for or against in Lebanon. As a result of this initial research, seven case studies were selected to cover the diversity of types of existing causes. A main criteria for the selection of case studies was the involvement of local communities of affected people in the mobilizations. From each case study, one active member was selected to be interviewed, ensuring a range of profiles: individuals who identify as activists, individuals who belong to the affected communities, individuals who were involved in initiating projects, and individuals who were part of a public institution.

Following the case study selection, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Based on these interviews and additional desk research on the case studies selected, initial trends and patterns were identified and utilized as overarching themes to explore further. It is important to note that while we use the term environmental justice in this report, we did not use the term when conducting interviews with participants. This was to avoid skewing interviewee data.

While the purpose of this paper is not to provide an in-depth study of environmental justice in Lebanon, it does fill a previous knowledge gap and provide preliminary research on the topic. The findings will also inform the design of Jibal's education initiatives. Field work for this study was conducted over the period of the two months in June and July of 2020, with COVID-19's social distancing rules restricting the types of field work possible. In light of the situation, some interviews were conducted via phone or video calls.

The hope is that this study will inform and support the ongoing work of the communities involved in environmental struggles.

04 Mobilizations in Lebanon

Returning to the Lebanese context, the nationwide movements that happened in the last decade– including the protest movement during the garbage crisis in 2015, "You Stink", and the October 17 popular uprising– exposed the Lebanese public to the fact that environmental issues are intimately linked to the larger socio-economic and political systems under which they exist. During the October 17 protest movement, a number of the discussions, encounters, and demonstrations relating to environmental issues made the link between the environment and key topics such as health, corruption, sectarianism, and inequality. For example, the Save Bisri campaign– mobilizing against the construction of a dam in the Bisri Valley– organized talks and discussions in different public spaces such as Martyr Square in Beirut, Eliya Square in Saida, and on the Bisri construction site itself. These discussions were closely linked to the people's demands for more transparency in the decision making process.

Roland Nassour,
coordinator of the Bisri Campaign explains:

"We were present in the revolution squares in Lebanon, and we felt that we were a main part of the movement from the first day. I was personally there with a colleague marching on October 17 with some other 30 to 40 people, we went to Riad El Solh, and then to the Ring, and then Saifi. This was a spontaneous move, where the campaign was part of the revolution. We had this feeling inside that we would never be able to save Bisri if the same government and system remains in place. And if we save Bisri, what will happen to the other valleys. There is the project of the 40 dams. So if we want to be coherent with our beliefs, we should be joining hand-in-in with the frontlines of the protests."

The nationwide movements that happened in the last decade– including the protest movement during the garbage crisis in 2015, "You Stink", and the October 17 popular uprising– exposed the Lebanese public to the fact that environmental issues are intimately linked to the larger socio-economic and political systems under which they exist.

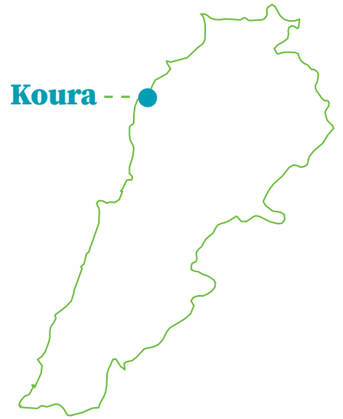
Other discussions related to the air quality surrounding the Zouk power plant, the Litani River's pollution, and general waste management strategies also took place in public spaces associated with protests. Finally, discussions around the reduction of imports and the demand for policies that support local production (especially agriculture) were also prominent during the 2019 popular uprising. These recent events are key in situating the report's discussions in the current realities of the country. To understand further the context of environmental struggles in Lebanon, this section highlights some of the most relevant examples of mobilizations taking place in the last decade.

04.1

Mobilizations Against Quarries and Cement Industry

One of the oldest environmental movements in modern-day Lebanon includes mobilizations against quarrying and the cement industry in Koura. Prior to the flourishing of the cement industry– established in 1931 under the French Mandate– residents in the coast of Koura lived off of agriculture (i.e. olives & tobacco), fishing, and salterns (in Anfeh and Chekka). After initial establishment, operations to extract raw materials from neighboring towns quickly followed. It was in the interest of companies to place their quarries near factories to reduce the transportation time and cost. Consequently, unauthorized quarries spread in the towns of Koura. In Badbhoun, the quarry takes up a quarter of the town's territory[10] and some parts of the land are now below sea level, altering the wind and water flow.

10. Public Works Studio. (2019). Koura's Land: From Fertile Resource to Raw Material for Cement Factories. Jadaliyya.



One of the oldest environmental movements in modern-day Lebanon includes mobilizations against quarrying and the cement industry in Koura.

The same company bought soil from landowners, causing major damages to the neighborhood's properties. This led to land prices being greatly reduced and consequently appearing attractive for purchase by none other than the cement company itself.

On different occasions, inhabitants of the area mobilized to demand access to a healthier environment. These movements in the Koura region– which can be traced back to the post-civil war 1990s[11]– would take different forms including demonstrations, road blocks, and calls for public opinion through the publishing of political statements. The environmental committee of Kfarhazir would call for the mobilization of young people in a number of different villages, where they organized themselves into sub-environmental committees. The demonstrations and other actions also served to raise awareness among people living in the area regarding the health risks associated with the cement industry. They also tried reaching out to different public authorities, such as municipalities at the local level and ministries at the national level to inform them about the environmental degradation taking place and its consequences on the health of local people. Coalitions among municipalities and other movements began forming, all with the aim of amplifying voices and acting collectively. In support of the cause, various studies documented the consequences of quarrying and its role in environmental degradation. In addition, lawsuits were filed in 2018 aiming to not only pursue the two cement companies, but also to hold the state accountable for its negligence in protecting its citizens and the region.

11. رانيا حمزة, & نزار صاغية. (2019). حراكات أهل الكورة دفاعا عنها وعنهم. المفكرة القانونية

04.2

Mobilization Against the Privatization of Public Spaces

Lebanon suffers from a lack of urban planning, specifically the kind that responds to citizens' needs. Instead, cities are built mainly with political and economic interests in mind[12]. This absence of sound planning policies which tend to the public good results in built cities that lack public spaces and public access to coastal areas due to illegal privatization. While the World Health Organization recommends a minimum of 9m² of green space per capita (Nazzal & Chinder, Samer, 2018)[13] Beirut has only 0.8m².

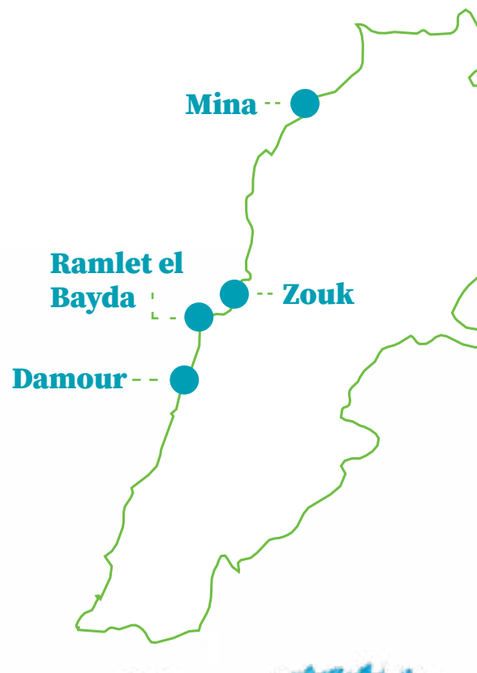
Horsh Beirut is the largest park in Beirut. The park covers an area of 300,000 m2. Until 2015, the park was closed to the public, although the inhabitants of the city suffer severely from a lack of public space. The reasons behind the park's closure according to the municipality was the fear of littering and antisocial behavior. It should be noted that during this long period of closure, only foreigners (mainly Western) could use the park freely and the municipality occasionally granted a special permit to some Lebanese older than 35. After several years of campaigning by local civil society, a reopening took place. Though the reopening was a victory, in 2017, the municipality of Beirut took a series of decisions that would lead to the destruction of the park's remaining green space– the latest being the construction of a military field hospital inside Horsh Beirut. This sparked outrage among the park's surrounding neighbors and the civil society organizations that worked to defend public spaces. Different actions have since been taken in an attempt to protect the park including filing a lawsuit and campaigning.

12. *Public Works Brochure published in arabic on their website*

13. *Nazzal, M., & Chinder, S. (2018). View of Lebanon Cities' Public Spaces. Lebanon Cities' Public Spaces, 3*

In 2018, some environmental NGOs filed cases against the several illegal projects being implemented in coastal areas: Zouk, Damour, Mina, and Ramlet el Bayda[14]

When it comes to the coastal areas, there are many violations taking place which have increasingly worsened since the end of the civil war. Many areas are illegally privatized and restrict citizens' free access to what is meant to be public property. Several movements were organized to counter these illegal usages of public land. Two areas, Dalieh and the public sand beach of Ramlet el Bayda, were the only two sites that remain of Beirut's natural landscape heritage and were still accessible to the public. However, both sites were eventually threatened by the proliferation of privatization and campaigns for their protection were launched.
In 2018, some environmental NGOs filed cases against the several illegal projects being implemented in coastal areas: Zouk, Damour, Mina, and Ramlet el Bayda[14]. The multiplicity of cases related to the violation of the sea-shore, and the need to join forces on this issue, led the the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche to initiate a process of a formation of a sea-shore coalition back in 2017[15].



14. الهام برجس . (2019) . الحراك الحقوقي في لبنان، 2018 (1): حراكات البيئة والعمران . المفكرة القانونية.

15. حنان حمدان . (2017) . ائتلاف الشاطئ اللبناني : توحيد الجهود ومأسسة رفض المخالفات . المدن.

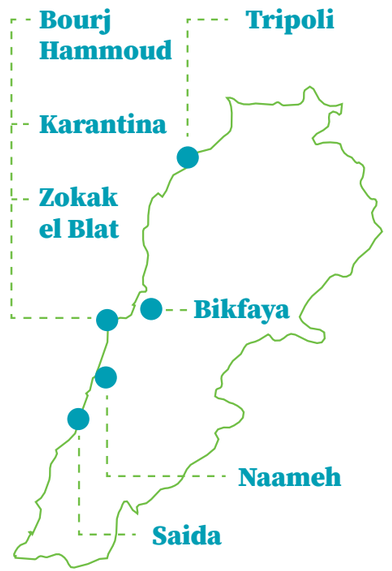
04.3 Mobilizations Against the Waste Management Policies

Residents of areas where landfills are established or waste is incinerated suffer from a number of health issues such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic coughing, skin conditions, asthma, and heart disease[16]. Even more, locals who live near these landfills suffer daily from rancid smells in the air.

When the Naameh landfill was inaugurated in 1997, it was only meant to be operational for six years. However, in 2015, it remained operational until around 40 inhabitants of the surrounding area decided to organize a sit-in which successfully led to the closure of the controversial landfill. With no alternatives being provided, the garbage began piling up in the streets and led to the first demonstrations which birthed the You Stink movement[17]. The movement grew to include several protests in public spaces and gathered a wide range of people beyond environmental activists and NGOs. In addition to pointing out the public health consequences of garbage in the streets, the movement addressed larger political issues such as the lack of transparency in the decision-making process and corruption of political leaders and parties. The movement also called for the dismissal of the current government. Different groups of citizens from different regions of the country have been organizing since then to counter harmful projects of the government including the creation of new landfills or the usage of incinerators.

In 2017, the government announced their aim to use incinerators as a solution to waste management. Many civil society actors raised voices against this idea for reasons including the fact that incinerators fail to offer a holistic solution to the waste crisis– where reducing and recycling could play a major role– and that they possess serious risks to public health– especially when taking into consideration the types of waste that would be incinerated. In 2018, a group of civil society organizations, independent experts, and environmental activists came together to establish the Waste Management Coalition, which was an attempt to coordinate pressure on the government to set an integrated sustainable waste management strategy[18]. The coalition led a movement called « No to Incinerators and to Dumping Sites » which asked for the Beirut Municipality to halt its call for incinerator tenders. Instead they called for the promotion of sorting, working more transparently, and engaging citizens in the decision making process. The movement also asked the Parliament to play a role in countering executive power. In July 2018, a movement called "محرقتكم مقبرتنا" ("your incinerator is our grave") was led by inhabitants from the Karantina area. They vehemently stood against the incinerator project seeing that the possible health risks for communities around the incinerator include cancer or heart diseases.

16. *Khawaja, B. (2017). "As If You're Inhaling Your Death": The Health Risks of Burning Waste in Lebanon. Human Rights Watch.*
17. *Civil Society Knowledge Center (2015). Social Movement responding to the Lebanese Garbage Crisis. Beirut*
18. *Waste Management coalition website https://wmclebanon.org/en/home-ar/en/home/*



In May 2018, fishermen from Borj Hammoud mobilized against the Bourj Hammoud landfill management and highlighted the consequences the landfill was having on sea wildlife. The landfill was destroying their livelihoods and 150 families were relying on the fishing sector[19]. Several other mobilizations against both the mismanagement of dumping sites and the opening of new ones happened in Tripoli, Saida, and other areas in Lebanon. In May 2020, after the cabinet approved the vertical expansion of the Bourj Hammoud dumping site for three more months, Human Rights Watch reported that residents were being denied their right to health and a healthy environment[20].

On the other hand, the waste crisis led people to organize alternative waste management solutions. In their neighborhood, the Zokak El Blat Working Group from Beirut Madinati (an independent campaign that ran for municipal elections in 2016) started a sorting project in collaboration with a group of residents of Batrakieh. An awareness campaign in the area would teach inhabitants how to sort their own garbage and then it would later be picked by the NGO, Arc En Ciel.

In 2015, in the heat of the waste crisis, locals from Bikfaya began volunteering to clean the streets. However, they quickly realized that their actions were not sustainable and that they needed to find a system to deal with the waste piling up in their town. Sorting and recycling was the only solution. Awareness campaigns with the inhabitants of the area on sorting began going around. In the beginning, they built partnerships with NGOs who would pick up a portion of the sorted waste, then they decided to build their own waste sorting facility, BiClean, and sell the sorted waste to companies that could recycle them. This project was built by bringing together resources from different companies from Bikfaya– for example, the owner of a cardboard recycling industry who trained them on sorting processes and helped fix machineries, other machinery was donated by the owner of a quarrying company, etc[21].

19. *الهام برجس . (2019) . الحراك الحقوقي في لبنان، 2018 (1) : حراكات البيئة والعمران . المفكرة القانونية*
20. *Human Rights Watch. (2020). Lebanon: Huge Cost of Inaction in Trash Crisis.*
21. *Interview of Lyna Gemayel, January, 2020, Bikfaya*

04.4 Mobilizations Against Dams

Dams have been repeatedly considered as a solution to water supply management by the Lebanese government. However, many experts argue that other strategies including effective usage of groundwater, the construction of small to medium-sized urban collective storage ponds, and the reduction of water loss in the distribution network are much more effective[22]. Furthermore, two-thirds of the country's geology is characterized by "karst" formations. This means that the surface is permeable, calcareous, and porous or in other words, will allow collected water to infiltrate into the ground. This makes building the dam technically more complicated, and thus more expensive. In addition to the economic burden that large infrastructural projects such as dams have, their environmental impact on local ecosystems and on Lebanon's seismic activity are high[23].

The World Bank is one of the key actors in the development of large scale water management policies. In 2015, the government approved the largest ever loan from them which would support the Water Supply Augmentation Project of Lebanon[24].

Inhabitants of different areas have mobilized to counter these projects like in Hammana's No Dam Campaign and the Bisri Valley's National Campaign to Protect the Bisri Valley.

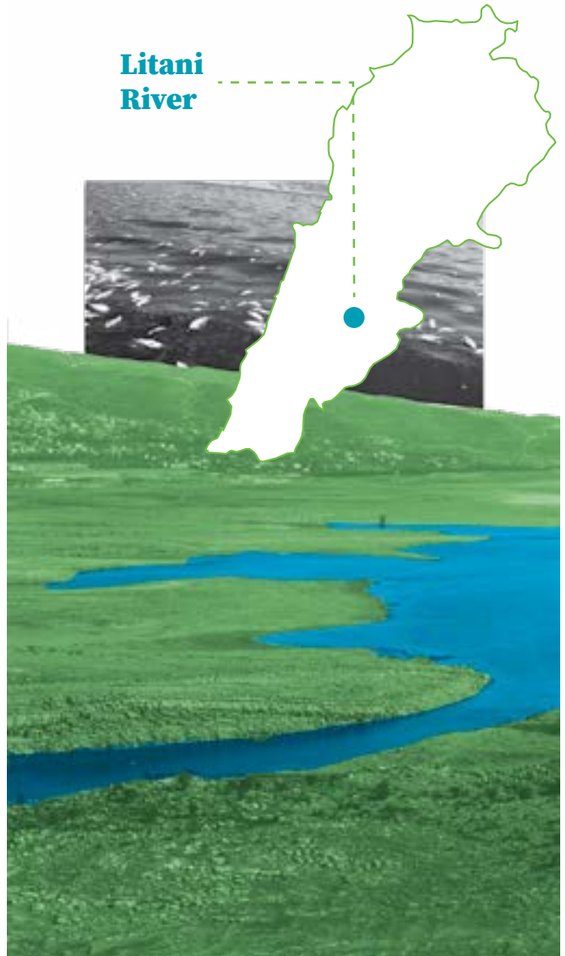
22. *Joey Ayoub, & Christophe Maroun. (2020). Stopping the Bisri Dam: From Local to National Contestation. Arab Reform Initiative.*

23. *Riachi, R. (2014). Beyond rehashed policies: Lebanon must tackle its water crisis head-on. The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.*

24. *World Bank. (2014). Water Supply Augmentation Project of Lebanon*

04.5 Mobilization Against the Pollution of the Litani River

In the 1960s, people in the river's surrounding villages used to drink and swim in it, but in the past several years, the river has been used as an open sewage and open dump site by different factories and sewage lines in the area.



The Litani river is the most important river in Lebanon and acts as a vital source of water for Southern Lebanon.

In the 1960s, people in the river's surrounding villages used to drink and swim in it[25], but in the past several years, the river has been used as an open sewage and open dump site by different factories and sewage lines in the area. Bad odors fill the air and the levels of cancer in the areas surrounding the river are significantly higher than the rest of the country[26].

According to the World Health Organization and the Global Cancer Observatory, Lebanon has by far the highest rate of cancer in the Arab world and one of the highest in the Eastern Mediterranean. Inhabitants from different villages surrounding the river such as Bar Elias, Jib Janine and Haouch El Rafqa have been mobilizing through different forms of activism in an attempt to push decision-makers to take action.

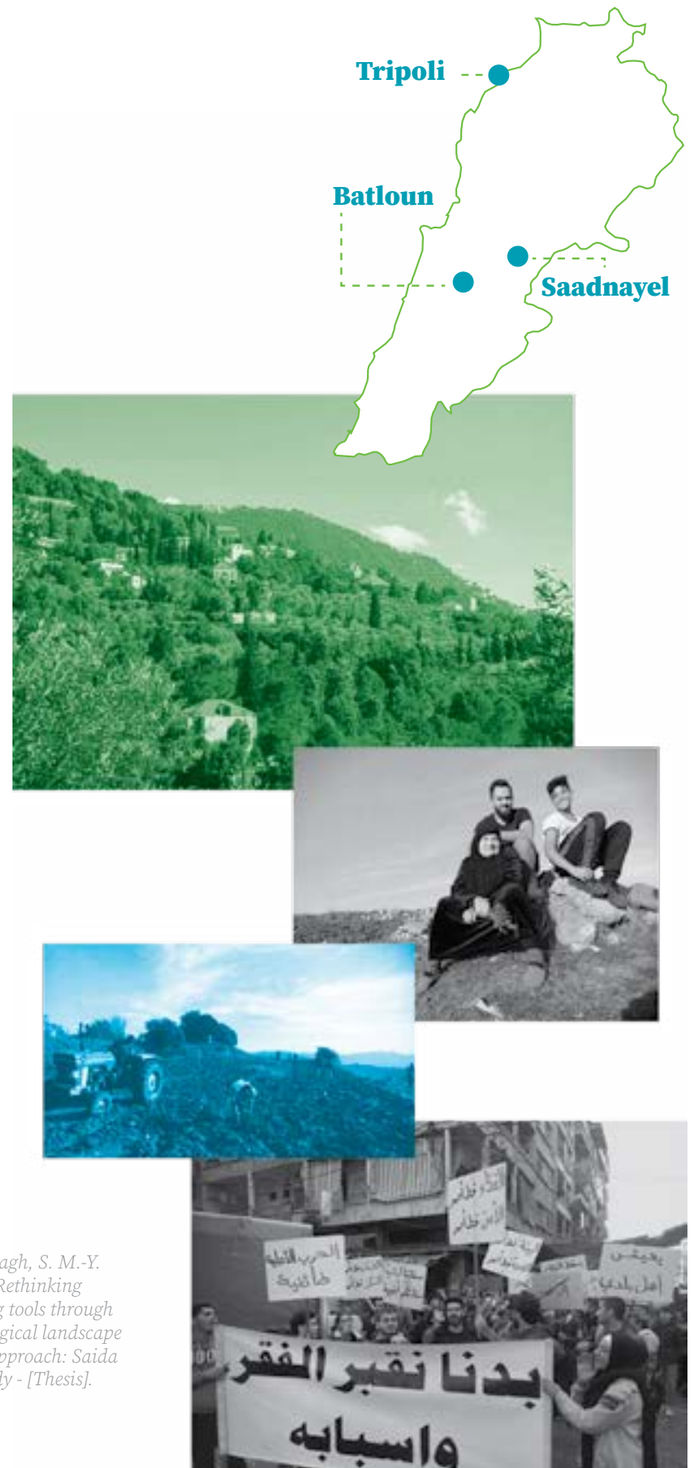
25. *Lazarini. (2018, December 9). We can still save the Litani River. L'Orient-Le Jour.*

26. *El Hage. (2019, September 10). Les taux alarmants de cancers chez les riverains d'un Litani super pollué suscitent l'inquiétude. L'Orient-Le Jour.*

04.6

Mobilizations Against Farmer's Impoverishment and Food Insecurity

The local production of wheat in Lebanon can supply 25% of the demand, and the dairy only 30%[27]. Most of the agriculture in the country is conventional and therefore relies on pesticides and fertilizers imported from abroad. The current economic crisis and the lack of dollars in the country is making it nearly impossible to import these products anymore. The economic situation is exacerbating already existing poverty among workers in the agriculture sector. In the North governorate, where the population rely mostly on this sector, one out of four farmers live below the poverty line[28]. In addition, many seasonal workers are overworked, spending hours in the field with little compensation. In light of the financial crisis, some farmers who purchased tons of seeds in the beginning of the season are now unable to pay them back seeing that the price of the dollar has now risen drastically[29]. Due to both a lack of fair subsidization policies and the nonexistent restrictions on real estate prices and development, agriculture is no longer economically viable and many former farmers end up selling their land instead of making a living out of it. For the many looking work on their own land to grow food, it has become increasingly impossible. Uncontrolled real estate development and ad-hoc urban sprawl has taken over fertile agricultural lands. This is especially the case for coastal cities such as Saida, in which the remaining agriculture and cultural heritage is being jeopardized by rapid growth and planning practices which are inconsiderate to the environment[30]. This situation has a direct consequence on the access to food, especially for the most vulnerable. With the severe financial crisis hitting the country, the question of food sovereignty has arisen in public discourse.



Agriculture cooperatives are a model typically used to enable farmers to pool their resources into a certain activity. By building a support system, farmers are better able to face hardships. In 2017, there were 1238 registered cooperatives in Lebanon[31], however, only 4.5 % of registered farmers are members of these cooperatives. This is partially due to the widely held perception in Lebanon that cooperatives are primarily formed to get funding and reduce taxes as opposed to being member-owned companies. While this is the case for many of the registered cooperatives, there are still several important examples of farmers organizing collectively. In the village of Batloun (Chouf area), a cooperative gathers more than 60 members. The farmers get access to lower prices for different operations that require specialized machinery. They also mutualize a certain number of services as well as give access to expert support on specific topics. The cooperative has been recently supporting farmers to shift from conventional to organic agriculture in order to reduce dependencies on imported pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers.

Several mobilizations and initiatives around food sovereignty began to emerge at the onset of the financial crisis. The Habaq Movement which started in Tripoli in collaboration with the Buzuruna Juzuruna farm, has organized talks around these topics and have supported people looking to start agriculture projects. They promote food sovereignty and shed light on the danger of growing food industry giants in the country. In March 2020, a seminar titled "The Agriculture Work in Lebanon Under the Financial and Environmental Crisis" was organized by Siac– another initiative born in Tripoli. The seminar involved different initiatives working on food sovereignty in Lebanon. In Bourj El Barajneh Palestinian camp, Jafra Foundation led an initiative in cooperation with a group of youth from the camp in order to plant more than 200 rooftops and produce food locally. Other small groups are also planting in their neighbourhoods, some NGOs are integrating these topics to their interventions, and many municipalities are distributing free seeds and seedlings to its inhabitants.

27. الشوفي, ف. (2020). لبنان والسيادة الغذائية: القمح والفاصولياء أبقى من اللحم والدولار. الأخبار.

28. *Jeanmougin, C. (2017). You reap what they sow, Understanding the issues linked to the agricultural sector in Lebanon. Heinrich Böll Foundation.*

29. الحاج حسن, ع., (2020). القطاع الزراعي ينهار ومزارعون يروون مآسيهم مع الدولار. *Beirut Today.*

30. *Al-Sabbagh, S. M.-Y. (2015). Rethinking planning tools through the ecological landscape design approach: Saida case study - [Thesis].*

31. *ILO. (2018). The Cooperative Sector in Lebanon, What role? What future? International Labor Organization, Regional Office for the Arab States.*

04.7

Mobilizations Against Inequalities in Energy Access

There exist clear inequalities in access to electricity in Lebanon. While in Beirut power cuts are usually only 3 hours a day, they can reach up to more than 12 hours outside of the capital, with the least developed and poorest regions being the most affected by the power cuts[32]. When a metering system exists, the cost of the kWh from private generators is 498 LBP/kWh compared to the 55 LBP/kWh[33] provided by EDL[34]. In 2017, 66% of Lebanon's households relied on diesel generators as a back-up power supply, with over 46% of households paying 8.4% of their income to secure electricity[35]. With the 2019 economic crisis, more and more households will most likely be unable to pay for these private generators. The government has also reduced subsidies for EDL in 2020, leading to increased power outages due to the severe financial crisis.

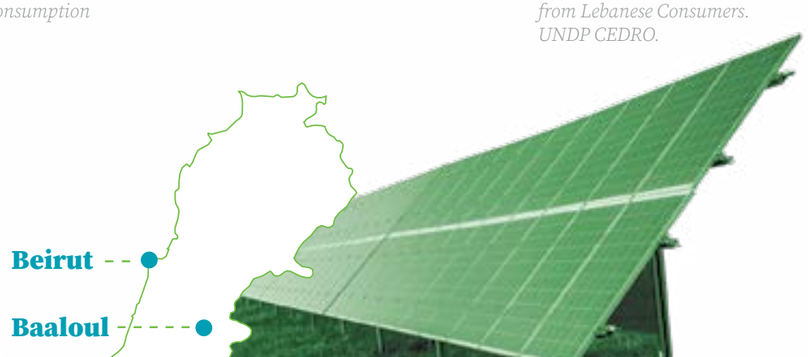
Several mobilizations in front of the EDL building occurred during the October 17 movements and later in 2020 as the reality of the financial crisis set in. Sit-ins, demonstrations, public discussions, and the infiltration of several EDL power management units have occurred. To bypass the electricity situation, some villages and towns are organizing to offer access to electricity to all of its inhabitants like in Baaloul village in the Bekaa Valley or Kabrikha village in the South where a communal solar photovoltaic system has been installed.

32. *Moore, H., & Collins, H. (2019). Decentralised renewable energy and prosperity for Lebanon. Energy Policy, 137,*

33. *For houses and commercial use, up to 300 kWh/month of consumption*

34. *Electricité du Liban webpage*

35. *UNDP. (2018). Energy Efficiency Home Appliances, Perspectives from Lebanese Consumers. UNDP CEDRO.*



05 Case Studies Presentation

The Hammana Campaign Against the Qaisamani Dam Project

The Bisri Dam Project

Mansion

The SEAC Cooperative

The Agricultural Cooperative of Batloun

The Bourj Hammoud Landfill

The Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raoucheh

The Habaq (Basil) Movement

1997 · 1998 · 2009 · 2012 · 2013 · 2015 · 2017 · 2019 · 2020

05.1 The Hammana Campaign Against the Qaisamani Dam Project

In Hammana, locals have organized for about four years to try and stop the project of the Qaisamani Dam which would be situated above the Hammana Chaghour spring. The project threatened the quality of the tap water in the village, which was at the time potable. The dam's location is in the protected area of the Chaghour watershed, meaning that any construction can directly affect the quality of the water in the aquifers as well as the flow of groundwater. In addition, the area is highly seismic, making the construction of the dam a direct threat to Hammana which is located under it.

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The "No Dam Campaign" started in 2013 and mobilized many people from the village, from different ages and political affiliations. During four years, they organized press conferences, produced short awareness videos, took part in several festivals and events, organized an exhibition, and reached out to a number of influential political leaders and decision-makers[36]. A Facebook page was started in October 2013 and remained active until 2017. On the day of the dam's opening ceremony, the inhabitants organized a roadblock to stop the event from happening. This led to a significant traffic jam on Damascus street, the main road connecting Beirut to the Bekaa. The municipality also filed lawsuits against the project. While a first judge was cooperative and requested that the project be stopped, he was replaced by another who signed off on it the day after he was appointed. Today, the Qaisamani Dam is built but there was never an official announcement of termination of works or results achieved. All that is known is that it is not providing drinking water[37].

36. *EJOLT. (2017, November 4). Qaysamani Dam, Lebanon | EJAtlas. Environmental Justice Atlas.*

37. *Interview with Pierre Abi Younes, May 27, 2020, Hammana*

05.2 The Bisri Dam Project

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The Bisri Valley is categorized as a protected regional environmental park by the National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory, and in 1988, was deemed a natural site to be protected by the Ministry of Environment. It is estimated that around 150,000 woodland trees would be cut for the Bisri Dam's construction, and that this number may go up to 500,000[38]. The Bisri Valley possesses large stretches of agricultural land. Around 570 hectares of land will be claimed and destroyed, including 150 hectares of agricultural land, 82 hectares of pine woodland, and 131 hectares of natural vegetation. The valley also contains around 50 archaeological sites that will be desecrated by the project. Even more, geological maps show that an active fault line, a prime source for earthquakes, runs under Bisri Valley. In this sense, the construction of the dam poses a direct threat to the safety of villagers living in areas below the dam.

While the campaign in Hammana has primarily mobilized the local community, the campaign to protect the Bisri Valley has taken on a national identity. During the protest movement that started in October 2019, people from different areas of Lebanon gathered at Bisri to raise their voices against the project. Discussions took place at the construction site itself along with a number of different public spaces in the country– including in front of the contested Council for Development and Reconstruction and the World Bank. Camping and hiking trips to reveal the cherished nature of the area were organized. A petition was also signed by over 78 000 people[39]. The campaign became a space to not only discuss the issue of nature conservation, but also corruption, public policy, sectarianism, and general water management practices in Lebanon. In September 2020, the word bank announced that the loan was cancelled. The plans to build the dam were partially suspended in June over World Bank concerns Lebanon's government had so far failed to implement the project. The concerns were related to the dam's operations, maintenance and impact on the surrounding environment. The Lebanese government was given a deadline of 4 September, to resolve the World Bank's concerns, and failed to do so. This cancellation is a victory for the activists who have for years fought against the project.

38. *Afif, H. (2019, July 16). The Bisri Dam Project in Lebanon is a "Ticking Atomic Bomb." Beirut Today.*

39. *Petition: Save the Bisri Valley انقذوا مرج بسري. Change.org*

05.3 The Bourj Hammoud Landfill

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Bourj Hammoud is a densely populated residential, industrial, and commercial area inhabited primarily by the Armenian community as well as working class Lebanese, migrant workers, and refugees. The Bourj Hammoud landfill is one of two main landfills serving Beirut and has been highly contested in recent years due to reaching capacity. It was established as an uncontrolled dumpsite during the civil war and since then the trash has been piling up on the seashore[40]. Following the war, the landfill was officially inaugurated by the Lebanese government and formally used. Since 1997, the site had largely exceeded its capacity and posed a direct threat to the health and well-being of residents in the area. In response to the growing waste crisis, protests and mobilizations happened in the late 1990s as trash began piling up in the streets of the area. Public action and uproar led to the closure of the landfill and the opening of another one in Naameh.

When another garbage crisis began in 2015, the government decided to re-open the Bourj Hammoud landfill along with the Costa Brava landfill–which was ironically enough named after a private beach resort. The Ministry of Environment justified government actions by claiming that the landfill did not have an official environmental impact assessment, and therefore it was not conclusive what the impact on health, wellbeing, and the environment was. At that time, there were clear videos showing garbage being thrown into the sea. Local fishermen started to protest that they were not able to fish anymore due to their nets being full of waste[41].

40. *EJOLT. (2016, February 11). Bourj Hammoud Garbage Mountain, Lebanon | EJAtlas. Environmental Justice Atlas.*

41. *Bassam Khawaja. (2017). Lebanon needs to clean up its act. Executive Magazine.*

05.4 Mansion

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Mansion is a shared space in the neighborhood of Zkak el Blat in Beirut. It is an early twentieth-century 800 square meter villa, which was formerly abandoned. In 2012, Ghassan Maasri– an architect, activist, and artist– was on a quest to find an abandoned building which could host a collective of artists. He approached the building owner and convinced him to hand over usage of the villa to a group of people who would rehabilitate, maintain, and later transform it into an open space for public use. Today, eight years after its acquisition, Mansion exists as a social center in the city of Beirut; it hosts a community of artists, researchers, architects, activists, curators, designers, etc. Many have their working space there and co-manage the building, making it available to a bigger community of visitors and users.

On their website, the community of Mansion defines the space as:

"first and foremost, an experiment in shared dwelling within a gated city of private car parks, abandoned and fenced spaces, and deteriorating or derelict buildings. In a word, it is a slow building, one that has avoided the dominant impulses of Beirut's postwar reconstruction, which typically demolished existing structures for speculation, or refurbished them into exclusive and lavish "heritage" spaces. In this way, Mansion is an attempt at creative reuse, the reclaiming of divested or "failed" spaces for new practices of habitation, public access, encounter, and production."

The significance of Mansion's experiment is not only the type of space it has created, but also the fact that it has challenged the concept of private ownership and provided the city with a space that is rent-free. It is disconnected from the increase of rent prices that a speculative real estate market causes and therefore does not suffer from them. For Ghassan, this was a key issue because it allowed the community of Mansion to focus on their work and projects instead of worrying about finding ways to pay rent. However, the agreement with the owner of Mansion was to use the building until the end of 2020, which means that the experience is currently threatened to end, and the community of Mansioners is considering its options for continuity[42].

42. *Interview with Ghassan Maasri, May 2020, by video conference*

05.5 The Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raoucheh

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Dalieh is a vast terrain on the northern seashore of Beirut. It is a natural extension to the famous Raoucheh rocks. Beside its invaluable ecological and geological significance, the site has been used for decades as a public space for a lot of the residents of the city. In addition, the space has hosted formal and informal economic activities. Several generations of fishermen from Ras Beirut and their families have used Dalieh as their own harbor. However in 2013, the economic and social life of Dalieh was threatened by rampant privatization; companies owned by the Hariri family began to dig up the foundations for a luxurious beach resort. The fishermen were threatened with eviction, many of their stalls were demolished, and so were the restaurants that occupied the space. Stacks of large cement blocks were placed on the site, and a fence was built to limit the access to the area.

As a reaction, the fishermen launched various forms of demonstrations, and following their movements, urban activists together with environmental NGOs, started to organize. Together they launched the "Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche" (CCPDR). As per its official website, the Dalieh campaign aims to:



"advocate for the preservation and enhancement of the role of Dalieh as an open-access shared space for all city dwellers and visitors. CCPDR is a coalition of individuals and non-governmental organizations who share a strong commitment to the preservation of Beirut's shared spaces, ecological and cultural diversity as the pillars of the city's livability[43]."

Mobilizations such as protests, online awareness efforts, petitions, meetings with local and central authorities, legal procedures, and public events were carried out by the campaign.

43. *Campaign | The Civil Campaign to Protect The Dalieh of Raouche. (n.d.). Retrieved July 24, 2020,*

05.6 The Agricultural Cooperative of Batloun

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The Batloun Agricultural Cooperative was founded in 2009 to support the agricultural sector in the village. Before 2009, there were already informal groups of farmers that would collaborate for a short duration. Growing from this legacy the aim of the cooperative was to support local agriculture. Although the cooperative is not restricted to a specific farming philosophy, there is a focus on organic farming– stemming from the fact that the current head of the cooperative deep experience with it.

They started mostly by facilitating networking and cooperation between different farmers in the area. On one hand, formalizing the cooperative allowed them to be a pillar in the village, and on the other hand made it possible to apply for and obtain funding from international donors[44].

Their main work in the current times are related to the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon. After obtaining a donation of tons of wheat seeds, some members lent land for free in order to produce wheat as well as harvest seeds for the future. Simultaneously, a project of theirs offers land donations to unemployed youth.

The project relies on the fact that large pieces of land often remain unused. They also organize training programs around local agriculture, with some sessions specifically dedicated to teaching organic and permaculture design principles (companion planting, crop rotation...) as well as some basics of agricultural economics. In 2019, they trained 24 youth on organic seasonal farming, giving to them each more than 1000 square meters of land for a short time. Today, seven youth are still cultivating land and producing crops.

44. Interview with Jamal Hassan, June 10, 2020, Batloun

05.7 The Habaq (Basil) Movement

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Habaq Movement started following the 17 October protest movements in Tripoli. It focuses on the topic of food sovereignty by linking the current situation in the food and agriculture sector to the overall Lebanese political situation[45].

In a country that imports 75-80% of its food needs, while local farmers are facing extreme difficulties, the food and agriculture issue becomes crucial. Especially since the onset of the financial crisis and the shortage of US dollars which are usually used to pay for import products.

Habaq is about regaining autonomy, sovereignty, and dignity through producing one's own food and seeds. In Tripoli's Nour Square where activists were camping day and night, a number of people amongst whom Mourad, a Lebanese-Palestinian activist from Tripoli (and one of the cofounders of SEAC, see below), started planting on the square, exactly where they were. Mourad says he had seeds from projects done in the past with SEAC, the cooperative he co-founded. He contacted Buzuruna Juzuruna – an NGO located in Saadnayel that advocates for, trains on, and participates in local organic agriculture as well as seed conservation – where he was in contact with a very active member from Tripoli (Serge Harfouche). They helped the Habaq movement reach a national level.

Seminars were organized all around the country promoting the idea that anyone can plant and take control over their own food.

45. Interview with Mourad, 8 June 2020, Tripoli

05.8 The SEAC Cooperative

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Socio-Economic Action Collective– or SEAC– was started three years ago in the Beddawi Palestinian refugee camp with a mission to create job opportunities for Palestinian and Lebanese youth. One of the key drivers of their mission was the fact that Palestinian youth cannot get jobs in Lebanon, mainly due to the fact that they are legally banned from an extremely long list of occupations (e.g. engineer, doctor, real estate owner, etc.). A group of engaged Palestinian and Lebanese youth from Beddawi camp and its surroundings realized that what they can actually do within the existing legal framework is microcredit/ microfinance – which SEAC used to do - fleet management, and agricultural work.

They have been working on food-related projects since their formation[46], but even more of a focus has been given to this topic since October 17[47]. They have recently received funding from UNDP to create a (mainly agri-related) startup incubator and co-working space in Tripoli, that will be inaugurated in August next to the main square of Tripoli (the Tall).

46. Mourad has a Fish Distribution company called Akka

47. Same interview of Mourad, June 8, 2020, Tripoli, as well as: https:// seaction.org/

06 Case Study Analysis

The main findings of the case study analysis are outlined below. The first section evaluates the socio-political aspects of the environmental struggles in the selected case studies by identifying the different factors that motivate individuals and communities to mobilize for the environment. The second section describes the different organizational structures utilized in these struggles. The third section looks at the connections that exist across struggles. The fourth section highlights the organizational challenges environmental struggles face which relate to the political dynamics in the Lebanese context. Finally, the last section identifies the main actors that have impacted these struggles.

06.1 People's Relationship with the Environment

People relate to their environment in different ways. One of the main drivers for mobilization which was common across most of the selected case studies, was the defense of a collective good or the resistance against threats affecting one's community. What is meant here by a "collective good", is the perceived defense of the interests of an identified group, who share a common land, culture, history, language, nationality or religion. In such cases, the aspect of belonging is heavily present.

What can be noted is that several interviewees defined their relationship to their environment in terms of practices, often embedded in a culture or in a community.

> "Until the 70s, people would go out to the sea– swimming, fishing, resting– and students from the surrounding schools would go there to do football matches. The seashore belonged to the city, it represented its lungs. (...). Armenians had a traditional celebration called Vardavar where they venerated water. The community would go to an area where water was flowing, to the river or to the sea, and would spend the day there. Water is very important."

In Bourj Hammoud, ***Arpi Mangassarian*** talks about the neighborhood's relation to the sea and the river.

> "If you farm and produce your food and trade food you are rooted and supported to stay where you are."

Jamal Hassan from the Batloun Cooperative explains that one of his main drivers to focus on agriculture is to strengthen the link people have with their land and the village they come from.

> We would go there, in groups or individually, for a hike, to have fun, we used to do water fights, watch the sunset…Later, when I was at the university, I would also often go there and would spend two hours on my own. It is a secret magic spot.

In Hammana, ***Pierre Abi Younes*** explains that a main reason why the villagers were against the Qaysamani Dam is that it threatened the Chaghour Source, which had a big importance to the village. He also describes how this has been done for many generations.

In Beirut, ***Ghassan Maasri*** describes that his fight for a shared space in the city was inspired by the abandoned spaces that were available during the war, where people used to gather in, and where kids would play football. According to him, such spaces.

> used to build connections and relations.

In Bisri valley, ***Marie-Dominique Farhat*** describes how she used to go swimming in the river until the start of the war in 1975, and she shares with us some of the practices in Bisri Valley which would be lost with the dam including the different hikes that can be done and the agricultural production. In addition to the communal value, for her the valley has a religious and historic value, and she describes it as being virgin and holy, mentioning a certain wildness that should be protected.

> Jesus came by this roman route, it is very exotic. All these memories…and it is heritage, it is a virgin area.

> We don't want an alternative port, we want to remain [in Dalieh]. Hariri had offered to pay us off for us to leave (80 or 100,000$ for each fishers). (…) but you can no longer buy a fisher off with a lie. Now the only way they would leave is if they get their rights.

In several of the testimonials, a sense of collective ownership over the land and the environment and a sense of injustice is invoked when an external, more powerful actor forces displacement from the space or a change to it. This was clear in ***Marwan Nabulsi's*** words– a local fisher from Dalieh.

This ownership, or perception that one has a right over the environment, is a general notion shared by people who are defending the right of a concrete group related to a specific territory (collective good), but who do not necessarily get an income from it. This is the case for the communities of Bourj Hammoud and Hammana for instance. Arpi describes a collective relation to the water, to a certain extent being a "property" of the community of Bourj hammoud.

> It was a place for all, they would all meet with happiness. They would all tell each other: let's go swimming, let's go fishing, we wanna have fun, let's go together. This is for us. That's why when you remove it from them, they would feel that it is a right that has been taken away: it is my right, my right to see the water, my right to touch it, my right to remember… Some people remember that when they were kids we used to go to the sea to pick up sand and come back to contribute to the building of the church.

> We drank tap water since we were kids (…) if you are from village X, you won't get drinkable water and what you are doing is not allowing those who used to have it to continue having it.

Pierre explains how one major problem of the Qaysamani Dam is that it will deprive the village of Hammana of the right to access free drinkable water, which they enjoyed because of the Chaghour water source that falls in its territory. When asked about the position of other villages that will supposedly benefit from the Dam, ***Pierre*** answers:

In Bourj Hammoud and in the village of Midan - located in the Bisri Valley- interviewees talk about the impact of displacement and demographic changes on the link people would have to their environment. ***Arpi*** tells how newcomers to Bourj Hammoud do not have this historical link to the area and therefore do not relate in the same way to the land. She is asked why the locals are not mobilizing much and answers by saying:

> Because many of the natives (Ahali) left the place. Plenty of people came with no link, no relation to this land, to this air, to this environment, to this nature. The last practice of the environment, or the last true picture of this environment, was Sanjac camp. It was a small city in the city, a city that was secured where kids could play outside, the neighbors would meet, it was all small streets and small squares.(...) It was clean, people would take care of the greenery, the plants, the women would meet in houses and pray all together for Lebanon. All this passed, these memories... These all left, and people came with no link to Bourj Hammoud

In this description of the environment, again she draws a picture which is embedded in everyday life practices and rooted in a collective history.

> The connection between the fishermen and the sea is a connection with the environment in which he's comfortable. The Dalieh Mina for a fisherman is like a basic life need that they cannot let go of

In these different cases, the people interviewed are not only seeing the practical or useful side to nature, they also describe their relation to the environment as a place where they can rest, where they belong, where they can share moments with others. It becomes something that has its own existence or its own history in a way, one that is even holy for ***Marie-Dominique***. For them, nature is not merely a tool to use through a unilateral possessive relation, but there is instead a kind of a continuity between them and their environment. This is not far from what some Ecofeminist movements describe as a relation of "partnership" between communities and nature. Along the same line, ***Marwan***, the fisherman from Dalieh states:

For reasons such as this one, when external decision makers change the fate of a space without the consent of the people, it alters an important part of their life.

In other cases, when an environmental struggle affects the livelihood of a specific community *(e.g. fishermen or farmers)*, interviewees identified the economic dimension as an additional key factor in their connection with the environment. When asked about the importance of Dalieh for the fishermen, ***Marwan*** shares:

> We are Bahri people, which means we live from what we fish. (...) 70% of the fishermen of Dalieh don't have another income source...but because of pollution and because of the neglect of the state, it's hard to survive only from the sea.

Similarly, ***Jamal Hassan*** explains that generating an income from the land is very difficult:

> Farming in Lebanon has been losing money and therefore, people have abandoned it. In the past Wadi Batloun would produce 100'000 boxes of apples, today 5'000, because it's not profitable. Farmers are selling their land instead.

In both cases, a concern over their profession– which is connected to their environment– is clear. Both interviewees mention the fact that their profession is threatened because it's not viable to sustain themselves through it, whether it is because of the lack of subsidies (in the case of farmers), because of pollution (in the case of fishermen), or because of general neglect from the state. This effect of the state's environmental policies on people's livelihoods can also be seen in the Bisri Dam case. One interviewee who is a former farm owner in the Bisri valley, explains how the expropriations for the construction of the Dam resulted in the loss of lands which generated income for many people.

> We used to produce 450 tons of strawberries from our lands in Bisri. Now they would give us $8/m2 to leave the place", says ***Marie Dominique.***

Many other farmers in the area have been affected since, as ***Roland*** mentions

> The valley is the biggest agriculture area in Mount Lebanon, the land is very fertile, and there are more than 15 villages directly connected to it.

With the same goal but a different link to the land, few of the individuals interviewed were very active and vocal actors about specific struggles but did not necessarily have a traditional link to the given environment and their own life resources were not directly threatened. This is often the case of vocal activists whose interest in the struggle is a principled defense of the public good (e.g. the right to the city, the right to water, the right to a clean environment, etc.) and in many cases connected to their professional interest . In these cases, the connection with the land is not necessarily present before their involvement in the struggle, yet it is often built later as they become more engaged. However, these cases need to be explored further as they were not the focus of this research.

06.2

Organizational Structures and Tools Used

The organizational structures adopted in environmental struggles often vary and depend on several intertwined variables which are often difficult to study separately from each other. While this report does not cover all organizational structures adopted in environmental movements in Lebanon, key patterns were identified through the case studies, and appear relevant for further exploration.

When a struggle involves a confrontation with the authorities, it is often seen taking the form of a campaign which involves a network of people who organize. It is usually a fluid, semi-formal structure with a small number of highly active members and a larger network of interested individuals who join in taking action or in the meetings occasionally. Some examples of this sort of structure include the campaigns which were organized to object state projects that damage the environment *(e.g. dams, uncontrolled dumpsites, and privatization of a public space)*. Trust also appears to play a big role when it comes to inclusion into the organization, especially when a confrontation with authorities is expected. For this reason, it is common for such networks to include people who have previously been involved or connected. One active member in the NoDam campaign in Hammana points out:

"In the beginning we didn't want to open the meetings up to everyone, but to go slowly and get things on track. Each person could tell one or two others to join. Also, we didn't want to have, for instance, someone bringing ten friends and then this person would have a lot of weight during the meeting. We wanted it to be open from multiple directions and for most of the people to know each other."

This degree of informality in the network's mode of organizing allows different people and organizations to be involved in various ways and to use the tools which are most accessible to them in order to be a part of the campaigns. Roland Nassour from the campaign against the Bisri Dam explains,

"many people were involved in one way or another in the campaign...some for short periods, others in a more continuous way."

In the case of Bisri, as Nassour explains, the lack of a rigid structure or a single leading organization added a level of flexibility which was able to accommodate a number of needs and provide space for diverse initiatives. However, the lack of a clear structure often makes it difficult for new people to join the campaign. An activist from the civil campaign for the protection of Dalieh states that

"in the first phase [they] were so organic that new people did not know how to get involved. So there were many people who came and left."

When the issue in question involves a confrontation with the authorities and also affects or targets a very concrete community, the local community itself often plays a major role in the mobilization. This was the case in Hammana, for instance. The NoDam campaign was primarily initiated and run by youth from the village, who later on received support from a bigger network of activists and environmental organizations. This is most likely because the issue at hand was something that was easily noticeable and could be argued for by the local community. The dam directly threatens the Chaghour Spring, which, besides its importance as the village's main water source, possesses considerable emotional and social value for many of the villagers. An additional key point which was noted by Pierre from the Hammana NoDam campaign, was that what considerably helped root the campaign was the fact that the community had a history of mobilizing for social and environmental issues.

The Dalieh mobilizations were another case where the local community played a pivotal role in initiating the movement. There, the fishermen and their families were the first ones to mobilize for the cause; they were at risk of eviction from their own harbour and therefore, their livelihood was threatened. According to one of the activists from the 'civil campaign to protect the Dalieh of Raoucheh' mobilization of the fishermen are what brought to light the cause of Dalieh. It was only then that it attracted a group of urban activists to mobilize for the area and to launch the campaign.

In both the Hammana and the Dalieh case, the existing formal and informal structures in the local community were activated for the cause. In Hammana, the municipality played a major role in confronting the Dam issue. They played a role in filing the lawsuit against the project, mobilizing available resources, and hosting events for the campaign. In Dalieh, both the existing family structures in the fishermen's community and their cooperative played a role in calling for protests and putting pressure on the fishermen's union in order to voice their objection to the side responsible for the damage threatening their Harbour. Other structures, such as the local branches of political parties have in some cases acted with caution in supporting their community. This, according to our interviewees, subtlety was due to a fear of losing political supporters during election times.

While local structures often play a major role in mobilizing on the ground, activists and organizations from outside the local community have also carried the causes as their own– especially those cases that have a larger or more central impact. This was the case for both the Bisri Dam and Dalieh Campaign.In both cases, there are two separate networks of active groups who often interact and sometimes overlap. The first group consists of locals (from the villages around the Bisri Dam, and the fishermen of Dalieh, respectively), and the second, a group of activists whose time is dedicated to the cause (who in many cases are individuals whose profession intersects with the issue in question). In cases like this, the activists outside the local community highlight the symbolism and national relevance of the cause. Their access to a bigger network of organizations and activists makes the cause more visible, and often consequently, attracts media attention to it. In both cases, the campaign led by the activists becomes the widely recognized reference to knowledge around the issue and they play an important role in networking with other activists or political groups, while the local network enriches the campaign with local knowledge and mobilizes on the ground. For instance, although the fishermen of Dalieh were the initiators of the on-the-ground mobilizations, they perceive that the activists' campaign is what brought awareness to the threat in Dalieh and shed light on the political dimension of the issue. Marwan Nabulsi, a fisherman at Dalieh says,

"through the connections with the campaign, we started raising awareness among fishermen regarding the political game happening in Dalieh."

Similar patterns were observed in the Bisri case.

When the struggle possesses a historic dimension and/or is connected to other struggles, existing structures (such as organizations working on the issue) are activated to support the cause. This was the case of initiatives which involved agriculture. The Batloun cooperative, which was founded in 2009, recently increased its activity to respond to the needs of Batloun residents during the current economic crisis. The crisis triggered a need to return to agriculture, so they supported fellow residents with resources and training. Similarly, the Habaq initiative was rooted in the work that a few of its founding members had previously done in their organizations (SEAC and Buzuruna Juzuruna). In such cases, initiatives are supported by a solid foundation and these spaces provide them the ability to be sustainable in the long term.

Common among most cases is the importance– or sometimes even the centrality– of the role played by one or several specific activists. The informal leadership role played by these activists often contributes to the struggle achieving some of its set goals. The beginning phase of Mansion is a good example of this; Ghassan's personal efforts dedicated to finding the space of Mansion and convincing its owner to hand over its usage to the community were key for the success of the project. In another example, Marie-Dominique from Bisri claims that many of the protests would happen solely because of her posted invitations on Facebook. However, this reliance on a set number of individuals or even one single one, comes with a different set of challenges. Mourad from Habaq explains how running the organization can be challenging because many matters depend on two to three individuals. He himself is one of the active members and many people come to him personally when they have questions or ideas related to the work of Habaq. This is a main reason why many struggles fade away when the individuals leading them burn out, get too busy, or leave the country. For example, Mansion still struggles with this despite the organization no longer being centralized around the founding individual. The fact that the initiator, who had also played the role of the connector with the owner of the building, no longer resides in the country, makes negotiations to keep the space harder (the owner only trusts and wants to speak to the person whom he first reached an agreement with).

Another major consequence of centralizing the organization around one individual relates to the issue of their safety; activists are often the targets of attacks from groups against the struggle or campaign. This was the case for Roland Nassour who, during one of the protests against the Dam, was heavily beaten by assailants. He was quoted in the Daily Star[48] saying that his attackers "were connected with the Council for Development and Reconstruction, the government-affiliated body that is overseeing the Bisri Dam project"

48. Mohammed Zaatari. (2019, June). Protesters rally to support attacked Bisri Valley activist. DAILY STAR.

06.3 Connections Across Struggles

The case studies proved that while there was usually support from the public across struggles, the persons who were consistent in their involvement were either from the communities directly affected or were activists devoted to the cause. Those cases that hold symbolic weight and which mobilize a group of well-connected environmental activists *(e.g. Roland in Bisri or Beirut's urban activists in Dalieh and Ramleh)*, tend to find larger support from other causes.

When the issue in question is a fight against a policy coming from the state *(or even the lack thereof)* and especially when this policy is replicated in different regions, support across struggles is present. This is the case in the fight against building dams; in both Hammana and Bisri, interviewees shared that they received prompt support from communities affected by other dam projects.

The way a case is framed also proved to affect its ability to find support from a wider network of people. According to Roland and in the case of Bisri, the narrative and rhetoric used by the campaign attracted different people from diverse backgrounds. Many people were able to see themselves in the struggle and began to relate with it. Roland continued by explaining that the Bisri campaign did not only highlight the risks and the damage that the dam would cause, but also focused on the environmental and social value of the Bisri Valley which would be threatened if the dam was constructed.

Moreover, when the environmental struggle is portrayed as an issue of corruption, or a card in a political game, it attracts more attention from the media. This makes it easier to become a national issue and receive more support. In such cases, the support received is not necessarily from other environmental struggles, but rather from political groups, syndicates, and social movements. This was the case for Bisri– which can be considered an environmental struggle which has attracted the largest number of supporters in the past few decades. The Bisri Dam became a symbol that materialized the corruption and mismanagement of the government. According to Nassour,

"there was a feeling that Bisri cannot be saved if we are not involved at a larger level, so when the revolution started on October 17, Bisri activists were part of it, bringing banners and chanting slogans in the streets related to the Bisri fight.** [Later on] **the demands of the campaign were being voiced by other groups. Some organized open discussions on the Bisri Dam project– linking it to the political system (corruption, clientelism, lack of public interest)."

Furthermore, Roland explains that the Bisri case relates the general claims of the revolution to a very specific reality, one that has the potential to achieve practical accomplishments at the local and national level.

Another strategy used by the activists to find support from other communties is using the site of the cause to support other struggles. This was a strategy used in both the Bisri and the Dalieh campaign; the dalieh activists collaborated with political and other urban activists groups to host events in Dalieh *(worker's day celebrations, or the heritage watch day festival),* and similarly, many political discussions around the situation in the country happened at the Bisri valley during the revolution. In the same line, Mansion was also used by a big amount of people *(activists, artists etc)* and groups for their political work, for the revolution, for environmental work, for elections like Beirut Madinati, while this was not initially a strategic decision by the core group of Mansion users but rather a way of putting the space at the use of the city, it did create a connection between many of the grassroots political groups and the space of Mansion.

06.4

Organizational challenges Resulting From Political Dynamics

The fact that many environmental struggles intersect with political and sectarian divides makes it harder for these movements to receive large support on the national level.

According to Roland, sectarian arguments are used by politicians to create a divide between communities around specific projects, and escaping the discussion around its actual environmental impact. This is done by portraying that the project/or the stopping of the project, benefits certain communities at the expense of others. In that sense, the state's strategy is to divide the people by portraying groups that object to the project as selfish or the groups who are for it as defending their own interests as opposed to a public one. In the case of the Qaysamani Dam, one of the anti-campaign arguments was that while Hammana has access to water, the surrounding region does not, and the dam would bring drinkable water to 30 villages. As pointed out in the EJAtlas article on the Qaysamani Dam,

"the country's complicated sectarian dynamic, has infiltrated this issue as well, with other surrounding villages with largely Druze constituencies supporting the project, suspecting that citizens of Hammana want to rob them of the promised water resource. (...) Government officials kept blaming Hammana residents for slowing down this project with their actions and complaints."[49]

This was one of the main reasons why the NoDam campaign in Hammana was not supported by the villages around it, and why when the local campaign decided to put banners in the village to make the issue seen, they were forced to remove them by the police and the local political parties with the excuse that they were *"threatening the civil peace,"* according to Pierre .

49. *EJOLT. (2017, November 4). Qaysamani Dam, Lebanon | EJAtlas. Environmental Justice Atlas. *

Most of the projects threatening the environment are connected to various political parties respectively, which silences a big part of the community who support those political parties. When asked about the connection between the fishermen of Dalieh and fishermen from other harbors, Marwan Nabulsi– a fisherman in Dalieh– shares that, for example, the fishermen in Manara support them in principle, but as they are mostly pro-Future movement and their situation is secure, they never took a clear stand or actions to support the Dalieh fishermen. Nonetheless, when the impact on the village/ community is direct *(e.g. Hammana and Dalieh),* even the supporters of the political parties which benefiting from the project, position themselves against it. In fact, in Hammana, positions on the Dam project were crucial in the election moment[50]. Similarly, in Dalieh, the fact that the head of the union and the majority of the community were supporters of Hariri did not stop them from turning against him when their interests and livelihoods were threatened. Marwan points out how the community of fishers in Dalieh who were previously supporters of Hariri, ended up voting for Beirut Madinati in the municipal elections.

In the case of Bisri, Marie-Dominique noted that sectarian wars and the displacement it caused contributed to the disconnection between communities and their environment. She continues that this is one reason why environmental struggles might not get the support needed– even when communities are affected by them.

50. منصور ضو. (2016). حمانا... سدّ القيسماني «الناخب» الأكبر!! الديار.

06.5 Actors Impacting These Struggles

The various struggles which were studied involved a number of players, besides the activists themselves. Among the actors identified there were: municipalities, ministries and other governmental institutions, political parties, the judicial system, unions, local and international NGOs, as well as donors. While we did not delve into all the roles played by the different actors, some key findings are highlighted below.

In many of the cases, the municipality is a central actor, aside from whether it was a positive or negative role. While municipalities in Lebanon are perceived as less politicized actors and more of technical ones, most remain highly dominated by political parties. The positions of the municipalities on the environmental struggles selected depended on several factors:

1- ***who was in power and whether the municipality had connections to the local political parties or not.***
2- ***whether the municipality has access to resources and knowledge.***
3- ***the position of the dominating political parties in the area where the struggle took place.***
4- ***whether the issue in question defies or poses a threat on the power structures in the area.***
5- ***the importance the struggle holds for the voters.***

When looking at the village of Batloun's case, the current municipality is formed by a team of independent and skilled council members who won the elections with a platform that had a clear environmental vision[51]. Because of this, the municipality has been a supportive partner to the cooperative. In the case of the village of Hammana, the municipality was a main player in the campaign. At the time of the campaign, the municipality was formed through a consensus between most of the local influential political parties and families in the village, which was of benefit to the struggle. The project's direct impact on the locals' drinking water was a main driver for the municipality to stand against the project and to take part actively in the campaign. They were the first to mobilize legally through filing lawsuits and later supported the local activists' campaign by providing necessary files and information, helping with logistics, and supporting them financially to cover the printing costs of posters and among others. Marie-Dominique explains that in Bisri, the municipality of Midan filed a complaint against the dam but later retracted it when the head of the municipality was removed from her position with the excuse of administrative irregularities. From her perspective, this was not a coincidence but linked to the larger politics of the dam's construction. She explains that the other municipalities were not supportive of the cause as they were politically affiliated to the parties supporting the dam. As for the fishermen in Dalieh, they were in conflict with the Beirut municipality in power at the time *(who was governed by the dominant political parties)*, but they believed that this actor could turn into an ally if other independent groups win the elections. They were hoping for the victory of Beirut Madinati, which supported the struggle. Mansion also had a negative experience with the municipality of Beirut. Ghassan, the founder of Mansion, mentions that they tried to obtain financial benefit from the project. He says,

"that's when we understood we didn't want anything to do with the government."

Finally, in Borj Hammoud, Arpi explained that in order to approve the project, the municipality would agree on common grounds with the Council for Development and Reconstruction *(CDR)* who was leading the development and implementation of the coastal master plan.

Ministries and their administrations are in some cases perceived as a major threat, and in others, are barely mentioned. Across the diverse situations studied, there was a general feeling of skepticism towards the central authorities' capacity or interest in serving the public good. Instead, they are seen as actors that serve the interests of the dominating political and economic powers. Arpi, for instance, explains how the Minister of Environment would totally dismiss her complaints as a citizen, telling her it was all already discussed with the Dashnak Party – the main Armenian political party. On the other hand, there is little trust in CDR's decision-making process and a general feeling that their decisions are imposed on the community. In Hammana, Pierre explains how the decision making process related to the Qaysamani Dam is corrupt and mainly benefits private interests, adding that

"there was no proper independent environmental impact assessment although it was legally requested."

51. فراس الشوفي . (2020) . بتلون الشوفية: نحو نموذج بيئي زراعي متكامل . الأخبار.

In the case of Dalieh, both the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture and the Ministry of Public Works were involved in the process ; the Dalieh Campaign collaborated with the instated Minister of Environment at the time, and succeeded in convincing him to announce a draft decree which would categorize Dalieh as a natural protected area. The Ministry of Public Works, however, was seen by the fishermen as an opponent who was exploiting Dalieh for political interests :

"They promised there was going to be a proper harbor built, and they laid the foundations for it, but it was actually just a political game between Hariri and Jounblat. Aridi [affiliated with Joumblat] was the Minister of Public Works. What they did was that they dumped rubble in front of the mina [harbor], and with time, this rubble infiltrated inside the mina, and we started fearing that we would lose it and we would be in the street."

In the case of Mansion, Ghassan mentions that despite one positive interaction they had with an employee at the Ministry of Culture, they were keen on staying off the list of projects that the ministry knew about because of this previously mentioned lack of trust. In the case of the initiatives involving agriculture, the interviewees either did not mention the ministry or stated clearly that they are not playing the role they should be playing; Jamal mentions that despite their attempts to reach out to the Minister of Agriculture, the ministry is not supporting the Batloun cooperative in any way.

When talking about the government, most interviewees do not see it as separate from the traditional political parties, as in the majority of the cases they are closely interlinked. One interviewee, about the Bisri dam, says:

"The environment here in Lebanon is like: I give you the dam of Janneh, you give me the dam of Bisri. It is not a water dam, it is a political dam (...) if Joumblat changed his mind, and is now against the Bisri dam, it is because he is not on good terms anymore with the Free Patriotic Movement. Is he seriously now a friend of nature?"

In Hammana, activists didn't skip out on contacting political parties and very often their local chapters; *"we spoke to everyone,"* says Pierre. He explains that their campaign tried contacting all local political parties, but that those contacts were not successful. In the case of Dalieh however, the Rayyess *(head of the Union)* and many of the fishermen were affiliated with the Future Movement– the same party that was a partner in the planned development of Dalieh. Eventually, Marwan explains that as the community became more and more aware of the fact that Hariri is no longer protecting their interest, most of them turned against the Future Movement, voting instead for Beirut Madinati in the municipal elections. In these two struggles, we see a medley of confrontations, negotiations, and collaborations with different authorities. In the case of Batloun, the work of the cooperative is not perceived as a direct threat to the authorities and the local dominating political party– theProgressive Socialist Party led by Joumblat– has supported the cooperative in some instances by donating resources such as wheat seeds.

In other cases, groups that are confronting an unjust policy consider a role that the judicial system can play to protect them. Lawsuits against the building of dams and the developments of Dalieh were filed by environmental NGOs at the high administrative court known as the Shura Council. This shows that despite skepticism in supporting the governmental apparatus and the system in general, there is still hope for possible change through some of its regulatory tools.

In Daliyeh, two additional actors contributed to the struggle – the fishermen's union *(mostly through the head of the union, Rayyess)*, and the fishermen's cooperative. Marwan explained that the Rayyess *(who was affiliated with Hariri and was in some ways appointed by the Future Movement)* was initially opposed to the community's mobilizations against the development of Dalieh. According to Marwan, two factors made him take a more supportive role at a later stage: first, the pressure from inside the community on the Rayyess was growing, and second, Hariri was no longer giving his constituency monetary support due to personal financial problems. As for the fishermen's cooperative, they contributed to the struggle by calling for a protest to condemn the degrading state of the Dalieh Harbor, and called instead for the continuation of its rehabilitation.

Finally, many groups reached out to local NGOs and experts for many types of support, from joining the campaigns and organizing to providing resources and connections. This was true for Hammana and Bisri, as well as for Dalieh. In Hammana, Pierre discusses how contact with external actors showed them that they are not alone in their fight:

"The force of bringing people from outside Hammana is showing us that we weren't the only ones facing such issues. They opened us to the outside world."

In Daliyeh, local NGOs' role was crucial when filing a lawsuit to the Shura Council was needed. In the case of the Batloun cooperative, it also received support from local organizations – one being the Farah organization and another is the organization responsible for the maintenance and protection of the Chouf Cedars Natural Reserve. They have also received funding from international donors. These types of connections with environmental NGOs had an impact on the strength of these movements' campaigns and struggles, making them reach in some cases a national level of support.

07 Conclusion

The many case studies explored in the report similarly point to the fact that there are often links between the claims for protecting the environment and claims for social justice. Many people's livelihoods are directly connected to the environment – such as fishermen and farmers.

Using the conception of environmental struggles established by Ecofeminism and environmental justice movements, this research attempted to look at the collective dimension of environmental struggles in Lebanon and their relation to the principles defined in the paper's conceptual framework. In order to understand the connection between socio-cultural aspects and the environmental struggles, our selection of interviewees and case studies consciously ensured the inclusion of people who are active in an environmental struggle that affects them in a direct way. Our findings have revealed that indeed social practices and the collective interest are important factors that motivate people's involvement in the mobilizations; relationships between locals and their environment is not only an issue of access to resources for individual use, but also one of collective ownership in the area. The community engages in a certain partnership with the environment, one that is rooted in a history of collective practices. The absence of local communities from the decision-making process have only produced policies that increase the gap between communities and their environment.

Integrating environmental issues with the social justice[52] aspect can change the way these issues are approached. Linking social justice principles with access to environmental benefits and understanding how oppression can affect people, animals and the environment the same way, brings a new perspective in understanding power dynamics.

52. *Although this report did not address the concept of Social Justice, our understanding of the concept relates not only to the redistribution of wealth, but also to recognizing the voices of the less powerful and allowing them to take part in the decision-making process*

When looking specifically to the education field, where many of these principles can be better integrated into curricula, this research supports Jibal's aim to adopt an approach where social, ecological, and climate justice are interrelated, centering especially the voices of those who are most impacted by current injustices. Therefore the stories told by the people interviewed, and later others, should serve as a starting point to reflect on our own society with the kids.

The findings support the idea that we must move beyond drawing false connections between nature and society in our pedagogies, where economic and social oppression are often made invisible. Even more importantly, the learning process must be built on the participation of the learner as well as their experiences, inspired by popular education methodologies.

The idea is to involve participants' stories and relation to nature in the learning experience, exchange these stories and build on them collective actions of change, be it at the school level or broader community. In the same way that environmental justice puts participation at its core, education should be approached in a way that participants are fully involved in the process. Adopting such an approach requires the educator to be in a learning attitude as well; he/she is no longer the one holding the power of knowledge.

This endeavor to modify our approach to environmental education is a process that we hope to continue building on through deep and meaningful reflections on our educational practices.

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