



CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

Tripoli, Lebanon
2018



Lebanon
Humanitarian
Fund

UTOPIA
a challenging step toward social justice



international
alert

Lebanon Humanitarian Fund

The Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF), managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), was established in December 2014 following the decentralization of the Regional Syria Fund. It has played a key role in funding urgent humanitarian needs in Lebanon by injecting funding into prioritized and underfunded sectors. Aligned with the programmatic focus of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), the fund functions as a predictable and complementary source of humanitarian financing, making timely and flexible funding available for life-saving humanitarian and critical stabilization activities targeting the most vulnerable populations affected by the crisis.

UTOPIA Organization

UTOPIA is a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to abolishing all types of social discrepancies through specialized projects and programs that rely heavily on voluntary work, in the hopes of acquiring social justice among people within the same society regardless of their political or religious beliefs. The purpose of UTOPIA is to inspire a culture of civic awareness and equal citizenship in the Lebanese society and in Tripoli in particular to make the change it aims to achieve.

www.utopialebanon.org

International Alert

International Alert (Alert) works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. Together, we believe peace is within our power. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict, bringing together people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we come together to build everyday peace.

www.international-alert.org

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Cover image: Citizens for Change volunteers after mapping parts of Tripoli, June 2017.

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Overview

The Citizens for Change project aims to reduce tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities in deprived parts of the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli by setting up local committees and Youth Citizen Action Groups in 6 deprived areas of Tripoli: Bab Al Tabbaneh, Jabal Mohsen, Kobbeh, Abi Samra, Zahrieh and Bab Al Ramel, and set up a further Youth Citizen Action Group in the relatively more privileged area of New Tripoli. These groups support local community projects and activities aimed at tackling tensions between Lebanese and Syrians, including easing pressure on resources. They also encourage greater social inclusion and enable marginalized youth in Tripoli to be more engaged in their communities by getting them involved in volunteering and local activities.

Context

Dubbed Lebanon's "second capital," the northern city of Tripoli is located 85 km north of Beirut, Lebanon's capital city. The city covers an area of 20 km² and has a population of approximately 300,000 Lebanese citizens¹. Following the crisis in Syria, nearly 70,000 Syrian refugees have sought shelter in this city according to data collected by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in November 2015², with an additional 30,000 Palestinian refugees coming from Syria that are currently residing inside the city as well as in the nearby Palestinian camp of Baddawi³.



View of Tripoli from above, April 2017. © Ali Hamouch/International Alert.

1 Official website of Tripoli municipality, www.tripoli.gov.lb

2 UN-Habitat, Tripoli City Profile, 2016

3 Ibid.

4 L. Kabalan, Urban inequalities and poverty in Lebanon: What can be learned from the social market economy?, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung/AUB Policy Institute, 2016

Currently, 57% of Tripoli's population is considered poor or deprived according to the United Nations⁴ – something that is being exacerbated by the protracted Syrian conflict, due to the city's geographical, cultural and socioeconomic proximity to Syria. Moreover, Tripoli's developmental, economic and social problems are commonly associated with the growing atmosphere of despair and hopelessness among the city's population.

In general, conflict dynamics in the city seem to reflect an intensified and accumulated version of the national dynamics that have emerged within Lebanon in recent years. Still, the city distinguishes itself from other parts of the country through the density and prevalence of conflict and the general neglect it undergoes from state institutions, politicians, economic entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations. "Tripoli has no place on the Lebanese economic, developmental, and tourist map as its name 'has become synonymous with poverty, misery, and deprivation'."⁵

The project

The Citizens for Change project, funded by the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF) managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), has directly benefited 195 citizens aged 18 – 45 from the underserved areas of Bab Al Tabbaneh, Jabal Mohsen, Kobbah, Abi Samra, Zahrieh and Bab Al Ramel, and the relatively more privileged New Tripoli. This was done through a series of trainings on civic participation and peacebuilding, improving linkages with the Municipality of Tripoli, as well as citizen-led community support projects and community service activities. Through these interventions, this project has achieved a three-fold objective:

- 1) Supporting the Municipality of Tripoli in mitigating tensions arising from Syrian refugee – host community relations and from inter-community relations, and alleviating resource pressures through basic services and community support projects.

⁵ H. Khashan, Lebanon's Islamist stronghold, Middle East Quarterly, 2011. (3)18, quoting T. Khuja, Tarablus bayna al-Qal'a al-Mughlaqa wa-l-Madina al-Maftuha, Middle East Transparent, 27 October 2010

- 2) Improving the civic engagement of Tripoli's youth in their communities and promoting social inclusion of marginalized youth through igniting volunteerism and community service activities.
- 3) Improving monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms of activities implemented under this project.

Activities

The project supported both the community and the staff working on this project.

Alert's main role was to build the capacity of UTOPIA staff by providing trainings on conflict resolution, monitoring and evaluation, gender sensitivity and facilitation skills. On the community level, Alert conducted a training for youth volunteers on neighbourhood mapping using GPS technology in the old souks, Bab Al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. In addition, Alert supported UTOPIA in the monitoring and evaluation of the activities throughout the project implementation.

UTOPIA led on the various activities that focused on the relationship between the citizens and the municipality through establishing seven Youth Citizen Action Groups, one in each of the mentioned underserved highly marginalized areas in Tripoli and the relatively more privileged New Tripoli, and has also established six local committees, one in each of the marginalized areas. The groups received extensive training sessions on political skills, civic participation and peacebuilding. Following this, the local committees led and implemented two community support projects, and the youth groups implemented seven public events and seven small-scale community service activities. Among the achievements were:

- Establishing a complaint mechanism to allow communities to submit complaints to the municipality
- Rehabilitating a school building managed by UTOPIA
- Organizing 'food trails' (walking tours to local restaurants) for tourists and visitors
- Organizing a 'photo action marathon' to capture the different faces of the city



Staff and volunteers from UTOPIA during a walking food trail for tourists and visitors to discover Tripoli, May 2017.

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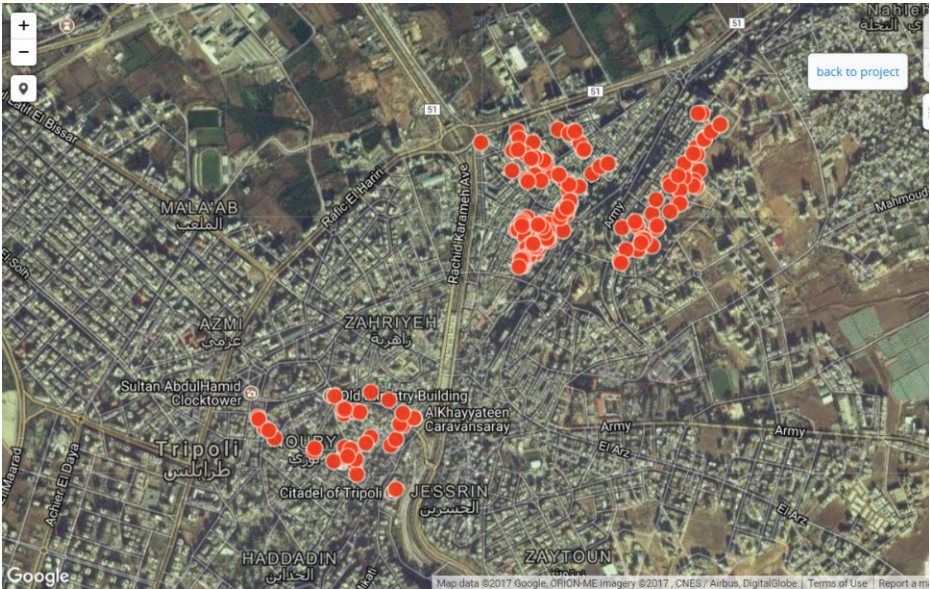
Mapping activity

International Alert took the lead on the neighbourhood mapping activity, following its experience in the Tunisian capital of Tunis, where it used mapping as a means of improving the involvement of young people in local decision-making processes.

The Tripoli mapping took place in three locations: the old souks, Bab Al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, which are among the most marginalized localities in the city.

Prior to the neighbourhood mapping, 30 youth from the action groups received training from Alert on the history of mapping and the current technologies used, as well as the technique to be utilized in this project.

The youth then went out to the streets of Tripoli, mapping schools, pharmacies, restaurants, shops, religious monuments, etc. to finally come up with 100 new locations, which were later added to Google Maps.



Sites of the food trail restaurants and new locations marked during the mapping activity by the Citizens for Change volunteers and added to Google Maps, 2017. © Google Maps.



One of the volunteers mapping streets in Tripoli, May 2017. © Ali Hamouch/International Alert.

Impact stories

Ibrahim

“I have a moto in my life: volunteers are the backbone of the community, without them the world would become a more difficult place to survive.”

Currently living in Tripoli, Ibrahim is a university nursing student who volunteers with several local organizations in deprived and marginalized areas.

“We wanted to help Tripoli get back up on its feet and attract people to visit, but we knew that if someone discovered Tripoli all by themselves, they wouldn’t be able to find the souks, hamams, or any other place easily!”

When the participants finished their mapping, they went through what they added to the map. “It was great to see how the map was and how it changed afterwards, I could even locate the small hamam my grandfather told me about,” Ibrahim tells us.

By mapping out their community, young people are reclaiming and regaining pride in their own city.

“When we started the project I saw something very different in Tripoli: problems do exist and they need to be addressed, but there’s kindness and love in this city. I saw the other face of Tripoli.”



Nursing student and volunteer Ibrahim taking part in the mapping activity in Tripoli, May 2017.

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Ildal

“I have the conviction that all streets and landmarks should be systematically numbered so that everyone can access it on GPS – people from inside and outside Tripoli,” Ildal explains.

When Ildal, an architecture student, found out about Citizens for Change city mapping activities, it quickly drew her attention. She wanted to be part of identifying and mapping out key locations in her city, to help change perceptions of it and those who live in it.

“It’s very important for me to help my city, to try as Tripoli’s daughter to shed light on it. Our city possesses a lot of landmarks. Yes, it is deprived, but from this point onwards we should take the lead, as Tripoli’s youth, to make our city more visible. It is not only a simple mark-up, but we want to make it more accessible to visitors.”

“I know from my architecture work that any region which is not put on the map could become deprived, as no one can access it, know about it, nor support it,” lfdal tells us.

Therefore, lfdal feels this mapping gives young people of Tripoli the opportunity to highlight the more deprived areas of the city so that they can access the support they need, creating a long and lasting positive impact on the city’s community.

“Mapping all services – hospitals, churches, mosques, monuments, schools – shows everyone that Tripoli has everything, that it’s a very beautiful city and you won’t be lacking any services here . . . It’s true that we started in one or two regions, but I hope we can expand the scope of mapping to more areas. I think this is the first step to take for people to get to know Tripoli better,” added lfdal.



Architecture student and volunteer Afdal in Tripoli, May 2017. © Ali Hamouch/International Alert.

Aya

20-year-old Aya, a university student, who also took part in the mapping activities, tells us, “This is what we want: we want people to invest in our energy and to help us in changing people’s perception of the youth of Tripoli.”



University student and volunteer Aya mapping the streets of Tripoli during a food trail, May 2017.

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