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Expanding Economic Opportunities in Lebanon

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Expanding Economic Opportunities in Lebanon

Following years of devastation from war, the infrastructure of the district of Jizzine in southern Lebanon was in shambles, and the residents were left without employment and dependent on agricultural products from outside the region. In February 2002, in an effort to re-establish self-sufficiency in the district, the World Rehabilitation Fund with support from the United States Agency for International Development and the Leahy War Victims Fund, formed The Development Cooperative in Jizzine (or the Co-op). By providing technical and material assistance to war/landmine victims, the Co-op has proven increasingly capable of addressing multiple socioeconomic needs of landmine survivors and other war victims.

by WRF/Lebanon Team
edited by Toufic Rizkallah [WRF/Lebanon]

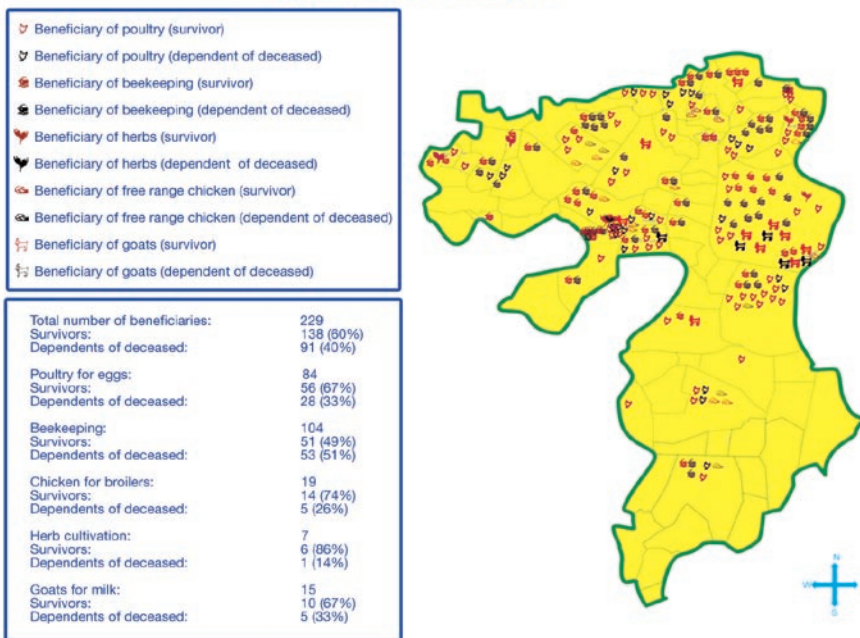
Lebanon has suffered for decades from the burden of explosive remnants of war. Fifteen years of war and many more of occupation and military conflicts have left the country with a terrifying number of landmines, cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance. Most of these weapons are found in the regions of southern Lebanon and West Bekaa. The resulting socioeconomic impact on the residents of these regions has been significant, particularly in that landmines, cluster bombs and other UXO were laid and scattered in agricultural areas that form the major source of income to local communities.

Involvement of the World Rehabilitation Fund in Lebanon

In its efforts to prevent and alleviate the burden of various forms of disability in Lebanon, the World Rehabilitation Fund has been working in Lebanon since the early 1970s. The WRF is active in planning and implementing programs and projects aimed at preventing disability, as well as the rehabilitation and socioeconomic reintegration of disabled individuals.¹

Within this context, and with funding from the United States Agency for International Development and the Leahy War Victims Fund, in June 1998, the WRF launched its Humanitarian Mine Action Program. This program was developed to prevent injuries and disabilities and mitigate the socioeconomic burden of landmines in Lebanon through mine awareness and mine-

Geographic Distribution of Beneficiaries of the WRF Mine Victims Assistance Project by Type of Activity & Place of Residence in Jizzine (Updated 31 December 2007)



Geographic Distribution of Project Beneficiaries (December 2007).
ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF TOUFIC RIZKALLAH

risk education, the establishment of a National Landmines Resource Center, capacity building of concerned national entities and creation of needed entities, providing support to demining activities, advocacy and mine-victim assistance.

The WRF Victims-assistance Project

As part of WRF's Humanitarian Mine Action Program for Lebanon, and following the 1999 withdrawal of the Israeli Armed Forces from the district (Qaza) of Jizzine in the province (Mohafazat) of South Lebanon, WRF invested time, effort and resources that, in October 2001, led to launching a pioneering project entitled "Expanding Economic Opportunities for Survivors of Landmines in the District of Jizzine, South Lebanon" (the WRF Victims Assistance Project) with funding from the United States Agency for International Development and the Leahy War Victims Fund.

While the main goal of the project was to create and expand economic opportunities for landmine survivors residing in the Jizzine district (and later expanded to target all war victims), objectives primarily focused on the following:

1. Directly empowering victims of war and/or dependents of victims of war (mainly landmine survivors) to become self-reliant and promoting their socio-economic reintegration
2. Creating a learning/resource center
3. Fostering a spirit of partnership and cooperation among individuals and groups in the region
4. Reflecting and building optimism about the region in order to encourage further investment
5. Providing a local organizational and operational framework to address the needs of landmine survivors and other victims of war in the district
6. Presenting a model and related experiences that would be beneficial to addressing related needs in other regions of Lebanon and elsewhere as needed



A war victim cares for his goat and her newborns.

Background. Just as several other administrative districts of southern Lebanon have suffered from occupation and military conflicts for 22 years, the district of Jizzine was left facing dire socioeconomic problems. The most severely affected in the district were war victims (mainly survivors of landmines), their dependents, and the surviving dependents of individuals killed by landmines or war accidents.

Since the withdrawal of the Israeli Armed Forces from the district of Jizzine in June 1999, the population has reverted to heavy economic and financial dependence on local agricultural output and/or remittances from

family members outside the region. While agricultural output in the region reportedly exceeded local consumption, inadequate infrastructure, variable product quality, poor market access, and competition in agricultural production from less expensive foreign and out-of-the-district imports hampered the ability of individuals in the region to earn sufficient income from such production. The continuing presence of explosive remnants of war—particularly cluster munitions following the war of July 2006—in agricultural and pastoral lands and forests further complicated the situation. Few other economic opportunities or readily exploitable resources existed in the region; these resources were particularly inaccessible for those living in the smaller villages or more rural areas and for those constrained by mobility or transportation requirements or childcare needs.

Organizational and legal framework.

With technical and material support from WRF, USAID and Leahy War Victims Fund, war/landmine victims joined to form The Development Cooperative in Jizzine, or the Co-op (which was officially registered on 7 February 2002), as their legal and organizational framework of operation. With and through the Co-op, the Victim Assistance project has been making a difference for hundreds who were left devastated by landmine explosions and other war accidents by expanding economic opportunities and creating jobs in the administrative district of Jizzine. These opportunities have been provided through technical and material assistance to war/landmine victims to launch their own home-based, income-generating agricultural production activities, and through assistance to the Co-op to build capacity and increase economic activities.

Main income-generating programs and activities.

The income-generating programs of the WRF Victims Assistance Project aim to make use of native resources, opportunities and potential. In view of this goal, as well as the profile and limited skills of targeted individuals, programs are planned to achieve decentralized (home-based) production of agricultural products determined to be in need in the district and at the national level. Parallel to and in conjunction with this activity, the proposed project implements centralized agricultural and food processing along with marketing programs at the Cooperative Center, which also houses other income-generating programs and activities.

From the initiation of the project in October 2001 through 31 December 2007, five viable income-generating agricultural and food-production programs have been launched. They include poultry-raising for egg production, poultry-raising to produce chickens, beekeeping, herb cultivation and goat-raising. The main products of these income-generating programs include free-range eggs, naturally-raised broiler chickens, natural honey, beeswax products, fresh and dried medicinal herbs, essential oils and waters, and goat's milk and its byproducts (to be introduced in summer of 2008). These products are marketed by the Co-op under the Co-op-owned B. Balady® brand. As of 31 December 2007, 229 war/landmine victims have been enrolled within the context of the five production programs as primary beneficiaries (heads of households) with direct benefit to more than 1,600 war/landmine survivors including primary beneficiaries and their dependents.

Additionally, funding from USAID/LWVF allowed WRF to assist the Co-op in launching processing and testing facilities accessible to all its members (project beneficiaries) and nonmembers including dependents. Among these are the egg-processing unit, honey and beeswax processing unit, honey testing laboratory, essential oils extraction unit, cold-storage room and feed mill. In addition to these facilities, a dairy factory is expected to be launched in Fall 2008.

The Co-op as a Sustainable Entity

To ensure the Co-op provides a long-term, sustainable benefit to war/landmine survivors, it has been essential to build and expand the needed technical (skill-based) and income capacity of individual members as well as the technical, financial and physical capacity of the Co-op as a business/economic entity. This issue has been addressed through the WRF Victims Assistance Project by:

- Designing and implementing an extensive, formal and informal capacity-building/training/mentoring/follow-up program targeting all concerned at the managerial, technical and operational levels
- Installing and customizing an appropriate accounting/financial system
- Identifying and expanding financial resources for the Co-op
- Ensuring the needed financial resources to build a Co-op-owned Cooperative Center that will house all Co-op activities and would limit the financial burden of the currently rented location. The new Cooperative Center was completed in mid-July, 2008.



A landmine survivor (center) checks his beehives with the help of his son as beekeeping experts watch.

WRF has also been investing efforts and resources in management and marketing activities essential to project efficiency, efficacy and viability, and to sustainability of impact. Particular emphasis has been placed on the marketing component of the project, which addresses the marketing and sales of all products of the Co-op members (project beneficiaries) and ensures financial returns to individual beneficiaries as well as to the Co-op. Significant to note here is that Co-op product availability is not limited to the district of Jizzine; rather, Co-op products are available in all major outlets in Beirut, Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon.

Furthermore, in addition to the centralized processing units mentioned above, WRF has provided the Co-op with material and technical assistance to launch and sustain several income-generating programs. They are expected to generate enough income for the Co-op to sustain operations beyond WRF support. Some examples are:

- The Co-op's own shop—the B. Balady Retail Shop—which was established by the Co-op in 2003. This shop has added value to the Co-op in terms of
- Marketing the project, the Co-op, and related programs and activities within the local community
- Advertising and marketing the Co-op's products
- Marketing homemade natural products produced by members of the Co-op
- Generating additional income to the Co-op
- The Co-op's Internet café, launched in 2003, which targets all interested community members, particularly Co-op members and their families

- The Co-op's animal-feed mill and a feed-selling unit
- The Co-op's honey-testing laboratory

Expanding Financing and Support

In an effort to increase the capacity of the Co-op to develop its programs and activities and to expand membership and income-generating opportunities, in 2007 WRF and the Co-op launched a loan program that is expected to facilitate access to credit for individual war/landmine survivors, and to contribute to the success and sustainability of the Co-op.

Adequate and active community and sectoral support has been a major asset for the establishment and success of the Co-op. It is believed that successful implementation of the VA project's activities and the achievements of the Co-op so far would not have been possible without the support of all concerned at the national as well as the district and community levels. WRF has been building on its long-term relationship and credibility with all concerned, particularly with its extensive network of concerned public officials, community leaders, professional groups and survivors. Of particular significance is the support of the General Directorate of Cooperatives in Lebanon, the Lebanese Mine Action Center–Lebanese Army, and the Landmines Resource Center–University of Balamand, as well as concerned local political and community leaders and the local communities.

Conclusion

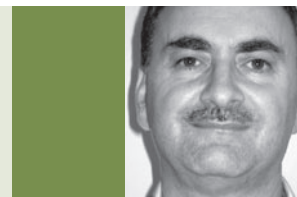
Since its establishment, the Co-op, as an organizational framework and a legal entity, has proven to be increasingly capable of addressing income generation and other socioeconomic needs of landmine survivors and other war victims. It continues to have a

positive impact on the lives of people in the district of Jizzine as well as in other communities of South Lebanon.

The support of the USAID and LWVF enables WRF to build the capacity of the Co-op as an entity and its members to provide them with the knowledge and skills that are essential to effectively take charge of all operations when the input of WRF stops. It is believed that the ongoing capacity-building process is positioning the Co-op as a viable self-reliant business entity. The WRF Victims Assistance Project could therefore present itself as a successful model of community development that addresses the needs of disadvantaged landmine and war victims, turning them into assets for themselves, their families and their communities. ♦

See Endnotes, page 111

This article was developed by WRF–Lebanon team and edited by Toufic Rizkallah, Assistant Director for WRF–Lebanon Programs.



Toufic Rizkallah joined the World Rehabilitation Fund in Lebanon in 1987. He is currently the Assistant Director for WRF–Lebanon Programs. He has also been the Coordinator of the WRF Mine Action Program in Lebanon since 1998. He holds a Master of Public Health from the American University of Beirut and a Master of Public Administration from Harvard University.

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