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Public Spaces: A Right, Not A Luxury

Advocacy Case Study Analysis

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Counterpart is the prime recipient of the USAID-funded Building Alliances for Local Advancement, Development and Investment – Capacity Building (BALADI CAP) activity. Management Systems International (MSI) is the lead technical partner implementing the BALADI CAP activity in Lebanon.

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CASE STUDIES IN LEBANESE CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

Within the BALADI CAP framework, Counterpart supported a research project on civil society advocacy in Lebanon with the goal of developing learning products that will afford USAID and future implementing and local partners insights into the pressing challenges and opportunities at the nexus of civil society and local governance in the Lebanese context.

The scope of the advocacy case studies aligns with BALADI CAP's Civic Engagement Initiative (CEI) component, which seeks to broaden the democratic space for citizen participation in public affairs by creating platforms for informed public debate and increased citizen engagement beyond sectarian and confessional lines. The CEI component includes three advocacy issue networks: Governance and Accountability; Human Rights; and Environment Preservation and Solid Waste Management. Drawing on the CEI of BALADI CAP, BRD and Counterpart mapped advocacy campaigns active in Lebanon between 2013 and 2018, specifically civil society efforts related to the use of public space, women's rights to nationality, solid waste management, the rights of people with disabilities, and answers for parents of individuals disappeared during Lebanon's civil war. Because the campaigns call for government action, transparency, and policy change, governance and accountability are common threads in the case studies. The resulting five studies highlight best practices and common factors contributing to civil society's advocacy successes or shortcomings and enhance an understanding of CSOs' needs while working on advocacy to further advance rights and reform in Lebanon. All final case studies will be posted on the BALADI CAP website (baladicap.com) and the Beyond Group website (beyondgroupconsulting.com).

CONTEXT: PUBLIC SPACE IN LEBANON

UNESCO defines public space as “an area or place that is open and accessible to all peoples, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level. These are public gathering spaces such as plazas, squares and parks... Well-designed and maintained public space is critical to the health of any city. Such gathering spaces allow for social mixing, civic participation, recreation, and a sense of belonging.”¹

Public spaces can take many forms depending on a city’s urban plan. They include roads, squares, and sidewalks; open areas such as public parks, gardens, and beaches; facilities such as public libraries, government buildings, markets and sport facilities.² Public spaces are a crucial component of a city’s make up and plan. They not only improve the overall visual character of the city, but also contribute to social connectivity and diversity, making neighborhoods more cohesive, lively, and attractive.

Due to the shortage of public spaces in Lebanon, social life, vital to society, relies largely on people meeting in homes, restaurants, malls, and private beach resorts. The shortage of public spaces can be attributed to several factors:

- The civil war divided the capital into several conflict zones which, although no longer in existence today, still influence how people use public spaces and who has access to them;
- An increase in urbanization and lack of proper planning and regulations to protect public spaces; and
- The high price of land, which makes investors more likely to use public spaces for profitable projects such as residential or commercial buildings.

The increased takeover of public space by private enterprises over the past 10 years in Lebanon has mobilized activists (private citizens, academics, community groups, NGOs, lawyers, among others) to fight for the right of community members to access public spaces, to preserve what is left of these public spaces, and to reclaim what has been taken. This case study looks at four advocacy interventions calling for the protection and preservation of public spaces as follows:

THEME	MEMBERS	CAMPAIGN	FUNDING	TIME FRAME
CITIZENS’ RIGHT TO ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC GREEN SPACES	Nahnoo	1. Reopening Horsh Beirut	International organizations and donor agencies	2010-2019
CITIZENS’ RIGHT TO ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC BEACHES	Activists and NGOs	2. Save Ramlet El Bayda and Dalieh	INGOs for the research component	2016 – 2019
		3. Save Kfaraabida	Not funded	2016
		4. Preserve and protect the Southern coastal line of Aadloun	Not funded	2012 – 2019

Disclaimer: The below analysis of the efforts is meant to provide input on the approaches and tactics used during the campaigns and is not meant to compare the initiatives. The information presented is based on qualitative data collected from campaign leads, coalition members, activists, and decision makers. While the data are being used for research purposes and to allow for the identification of lessons learned for future campaigns, please note that they might not reflect the points of views of all people who participated in these campaigns.

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/urban-development/migrants-inclusion-in-cities/good-practices/inclusion-through-access-to-public-space/>

² Nazzal, Maryam & Chinder, Samer. (2018). Lebanon Cities’ Public Spaces. The Journal of Public Space. 3. 119-152. 10.5204/jps.v3i1.323.

CASE I: CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO ACCESSIBLE GREEN PUBLIC SPACES

ADVOCACY ISSUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to protect and preserve public spaces as public spaces have become a scarcity in Lebanon as more and more privately-owned resorts, skyscrapers, and parking lots take over public gardens, open squares, public beaches, and public parks. Horsh Beirut is located at the intersection of a socially segregated neighborhood. The park closed after the Civil War due to violence and littering.
CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand that the Municipality of Beirut and the Governor issue a decree to open Horsh Beirut to the public. Reclaim public spaces and make them accessible to all. Raise public awareness of the importance of public spaces
ADVOCACY INTERVENTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build an evidence-based case for advocacy through in-depth research, data collection, interviews, focus groups, town hall meetings and direct meetings, as well as surveys and publications. Mobilize the community through various activities, such as urban picnics, eco-tourism events and activities (tours, rallies), protests, public discussions, neighborhood meetings and outreach to universities. Also, engage the general public through social media, visuals and videos, posters, websites, online media outlets and press releases. Build coalition members' capacities to use advocacy tools and techniques. Engage the media to cover events and highlight the issue as a public concern.
ADVOCACY RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horsh Beirut is now open to the public all week long. People are more aware of their right to have access to all public spaces.

HORSH BEIRUT CAMPAIGN

Nahnoo, a local Lebanese NGO, believes that *“providing equal access to neutral public spaces fosters unity and encourages positive dialogue between different communities within Lebanese society.”* Because Horsh Beirut is located at the intersection of socially segregated neighborhoods, Nahnoo saw an opportunity to revive social bonds, break barriers and encourage community dialogue. *“To its west lies Sunni Tarik el-Jdideh; to its north, Christian Badaro and Mathaf; and to its south, Shiite Chiyah. Sabra and Shatila refugee camps are a few minutes away”* explained a volunteer from Nahnoo.

The park was used as a demarcation indicator during the Civil War that split Beirut into conflicting zones; but before the war, Horsh Beirut was an area for people to gather and celebrate. *“We used to refer to it as Horsh Al Eid (the park of the holidays) as we used to go there on certain occasions to play, have picnics, and meet friends and family,”* explained one participant in a focus group discussion. After the Civil War ended in 1990, the park was closed over concerns of violence and littering, although access was given to Westerners. Soon after, Lebanese over the age of 35 were given access but had to request permission for entry from the Governor.

In 2005, the Cedar Revolution opened up the Lebanese civic space, especially after the withdrawal of the Syrian Arab Army. The period witnessed a rising interest among youth in civic and political activism. Many NGOs started working on human rights issues, regaining public spaces, and civic freedoms. Nahnoo launched a campaign in 2010 to regain public spaces, specifically Horsh Beirut, with the following objectives:

- Obtaining an official decision from the Municipality of Beirut to open the park to the public.
- Raising Lebanese citizens' awareness of the importance of their right to public spaces.

Activity Analysis

To achieve the objectives, Nahnoo defined an advocacy strategy that led to the re-opening of the park.



BUILDING AN EVIDENCE-BASED CASE FOR ADVOCACY

Nahnoo began by working with the Faculty of Social Studies to collect evidence of the social and psycho-social benefits of publicly accessible green space in a segregated city like Beirut. Through informal gatherings and focus group discussions (FGD) with residents of the area surrounding the park, Nahnoo confirmed that re-opening the park was of common interest among community members. They also learned that people did not perceive Horsh Beirut as a shared public space. *“People still use the term East and West Beirut in an indication to a Christian (East Beirut) area a Muslim (West Beirut) area in their discussion, it is true that the actual sand barriers which were placed during the war were removed, but mental barriers still exist”* explained one of the FGD participants.

Shortly after the first set of FGDs, Nahnoo created separate teams: one to focus on the research and another to plan activities to mobilize people and engage the community in the campaign. The research team sought to understand the context and develop arguments, as well as to propose alternative solutions to decision makers. Nahnoo then recruited volunteers to collect data to better understand: the history of the park; the relationship between the residents of the neighboring areas; the implications of the Civil War on the park and its visitors; the reasons behind the closure of the park after the Civil War; the legal framework which regulates the visits, decision making, and management of the park; stakeholders and decision makers to be targeted and involved in the process; and public perception towards public spaces – given that the public did not know that access to public spaces such as Horsh Beirut was their right and that they owned the space.

“The most important and delicate step in advocacy work is building your case’s file with the right amount and type of data to back up your arguments.”

- Campaign member

In addition, they researched international practices with regards to public park management and maintenance. The evidence, data, and suggestions developed during the research phase were subsequently used to raise awareness among community members, mobilize the media, and influence decision makers.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Since the beginning of the Horsh Beirut campaign in 2010, Nahnoo has invested ample time and effort to engage the local community in an innovative and creative manner. The NGO prioritized local ownership by creating the “Neighbors of Horsh Beirut” within the campaign and framing access to public spaces as a right.

The team analyzed target audiences and developed different messages and actions for each audience. They mobilized the media to document sentimental stories and anecdotes captured

during door-to-door visits to recruit the “Neighbors of Horsh Beirut” as campaign ambassadors. To raise awareness among community members, Nahnoo utilized direct actions such as workshops, neighborhood meetings (in 2011), and school tours to the park, as well as innovative and creative indirect actions such as the urban picnics (in 2012), which were planned and implemented with activists and other NGOs across Beirut to raise awareness about the need and importance of green public spaces. Moreover, Nahnoo launched a poster design competition for the campaign to target other groups of individuals who otherwise could not be reached.

In a 2013 press conference, the mayor declared that the municipality would re-open the park and outsource its management; a tendering process was initiated for the maintenance of the park. However, pressure from the community increased when he refused to set a specific date for the re-opening. Nahnoo organized protests and extensive media coverage, both traditional and social media. Under growing public pressure, the governor called for a meeting with Nahnoo to discuss a gradual opening of the park and agreed on a management plan including a role for Nahnoo’s volunteers.

Later in 2014, Nahnoo organized a town hall meeting with the governor during which he was pressured by the audience publicly to announce the reopening of Horsh Beirut on September 5, 2015, for one day a week. On June 6, 2016, the park was opened to the public all days of the week. Nahnoo continued its engagement with the local community and rebranded the campaign as “Horsh Beirut for all” as opposed to “Together to reopen and activate Horsh Beirut,” increasing the public’s sense of responsibility and ownership of the park.

“Some of the measures which were put on citizens were discriminatory, such as obtaining a permit from the governor to enter the park, or the guards discriminating against people by judging based on looks who would they allow in or not.”

- Volunteer with Nahnoo.

As of late 2019, Nahnoo and other NGOs and activists continue to call for the protection of the park against construction projects, the most recent of which was the construction of a field hospital inside Horsh Beirut, which would, once again, reduce the public green space available to the public.

ENGAGING DECISION-MAKERS

Nahnoo mapped key decision-makers involved in the closure of Horsh Beirut and those who could potentially contribute to its reopening, and then engaged with them in early meetings beginning in the research phase.

The team began by meeting on a regular basis with the mayors, providing them with the research and arguments for re-opening the park. However, when the Heads of the Municipalities were unresponsive or uncooperative, they took the time to dig further and better understand the role, jurisdiction and authority of each of the decision makers involved. Through its research, Nahnoo discovered that the authority to reopen the park was vested in the governor and not the head of the municipality, and, consequently, shifted their focus towards him. In 2014, Nahnoo capitalized on a high political moment to push forward their campaign when a new governor for Beirut was appointed and they successfully endeavored to put the re-opening of Horsh Beirut on his agenda.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND COALITION BUILDING

As a funded campaign, Nahnoo had access to training, capacity building, and coaching from various donor agencies throughout the campaign. This technical support also gave Nahnoo access to valuable lessons learned and best practices from other organizations.

CASE II: CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO PUBLIC BEACHES

ADVOCACY ISSUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private beach resorts were emerging after the Civil War and more private projects are being established along the coastline, closing the access to public beaches and impacting marine life. • Private resort built on Ramlet el Bayda beach. • Dalieh of Rawcheh threatened with closure to the public. • The Council of Ministers approved a decree threatening the preservation of Kfar Aabida and the public's access to it. • Real estate might build new projects on the Aadloun Coast.
COMMITTEES OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and preservation of public beaches. • Protect citizens' right to accessible public and clean beaches; protection and preservation of public beaches • Develop and implement a comprehensive design and maintenance plan for Ramlet el Bayda beach and its surrounding area. • Pressure the respective ministries and government bodies to issue the necessary decrees to stop illegal construction on the coastal line. • Stop the privatization of public beaches.
ADVOCACY INTERVENTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an evidence-based case for advocacy through in-depth research, data collection, interviews, focus groups, townhall meetings and direct meetings, as well as surveys and publications. • Mobilize the community through various activities, such as urban picnics, eco-tourism events and activities (tours, rallies), protests, public discussions, neighborhood meetings and outreach to universities. Also, engage the general public through social media, visuals and videos, posters, website, online media outlets, and press releases. • Advocate to and pressure local decision makers (municipalities) to take action to stop construction work on public beaches and public sea-fronts. • Build coalition members' capacity to use advocacy tools and techniques. • Engage the media to cover events and highlight the issue as a public concern.
ADVOCACY RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigns coming together and forming the Lebanese Coast Coalition. • Decree drafted and announced by the Minister of Environment to categorize Dalieh as a natural protected area. • Construction plans modified to protect biodiversity and secure public access (Aadloun). • Construction plans modified as per the recommendations of the environmental experts of the campaign (Kfar Aabida)

As land prices increased after the Lebanese Civil War, Lebanon witnessed the emergence of private beach resorts along its 220 Km coastline. Annex 1 presents a map³ highlighting public/private ownership along the Lebanese coastline. This trend continues to date as more and more private projects are established along the coastline, blocking what remains of public access to the beach. Several national and local campaigns have emerged calling for the protection and preservation of public beaches.

Below is a description of four campaigns that eventually came together with others to form the Lebanese Coast Coalition described later in this section.

³ Beirut Zone 10: Social Justice and the City Program, Issam Fares Institute and Beirut Madinati, Ownership Patterns 2017.

https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/docs/beirut_zone/20180921_beirut_zone_10_location_map_6.pdf

DALIEH & RAMLET EL BAYDA

Both Dalieh and Ramlet el Bayda are common places for locals and tourists alike to gather for recreation and relaxation. In 2013, activists, researchers and academics formed the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (CCPDR) with the purpose of preventing private development of the Dalieh and maintaining public access to the beach.

Like the Dalieh, real estate investors had their eye on Ramlet el Bayda for potential private projects. As the last sandy beach accessible to the public in Beirut, CCPDR felt it was critical to protect Ramlet el Bayda from further development. CCPDR aimed to protect the public's right to access both areas and provide a safe and clean environment for visitors of both Dalieh and Ramlet Al Bayda. Their campaign objectives were:

- Protect and preserve public beaches.
- Protect citizens' right to accessible public and clean beaches.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive design and maintenance plan for Ramlet el Bayda beach and its surrounding area.
- Stop the privatization of public beaches.
- Pressure the respective ministries and government bodies to issue the necessary decrees to stop illegal construction on the coastal line.

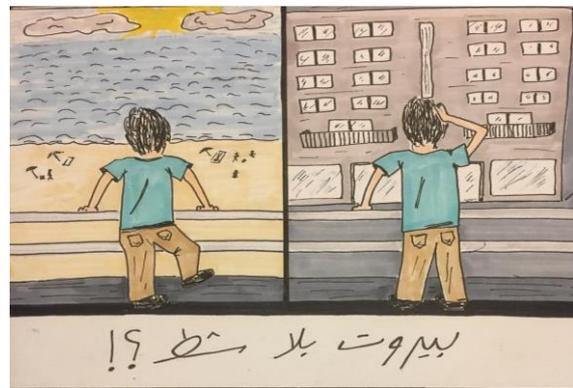


Image 3. "Beirut without a shoreline." Illustration by Omar Abdelsamad

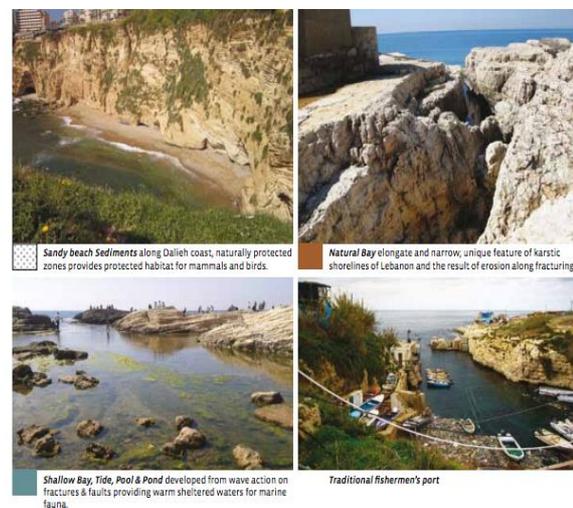


Image 2. Dalieh's Port and Shoreline Source: Dalieh Campaign Booklet.

SAVE KFAR AABIDA

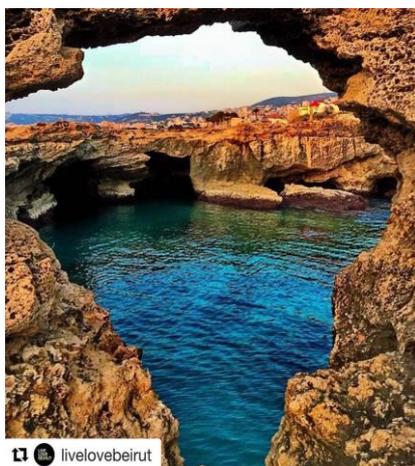


Image 1 Kfar Aabida caves. Source: Live Love Beirut

In August 2016 a small group of young men and women learned of a plan approved by the Council of Ministers to build a private resort on a public beach in Kfar Aabida, a village near Batroun, in the Governorate of North Lebanon. This group launched the "Save Kfar Aabida Campaign" to preserve Kfar Aabida and the public's access to it.

The beach was under threat because a real estate company had uncovered a previously forgotten decree issued in 2007 that would allow it to build a resort on its privately-owned land located above the shoreline. Furthermore, as part of the project, the company received approval from the Ministry of Public Works to build a tunnel that would provide direct access from the resort to the shoreline. The group wanted to preserve the public's access to the beach in Kfar Aabida and save the existing natural sea rocks from being overtaken with villas and bungalows. The campaign objectives were:

- Revamp the beach into a natural reserve as per the National Master Plan.

- Stop the privatization of the public coastal area.
- Pressure the respective ministries and government bodies to issue the necessary decrees to stop illegal construction on the coastal line.

PROTECTING AADLOUN COAST

Aadloun is a coastal town in Saida District, South Lebanon Governorate, famous for its Phoenician heritage as it is home of several historic sites in addition to natural caves, rocky beaches, and a diverse marine life. As was the case with the few remaining public access areas and beaches, real estate companies had been eyeing the Aadloun coast for potential new projects. The Green Southern Community, a local NGO at the forefront of environmental and cultural preservation efforts, led a campaign with the following objectives:



Image 2. Call to Declare Aadloun Coast as a Natural Protected Area, Blog Baladi

- To pressure the Ministry of Environment to issue a decree declaring the Aadloun coast as a natural protected area.
- To pressure the Ministry of Environment to complete an Environmental Impact Assessment of the new project and ask developers to incorporate the ministry’s recommendations in their plans.

Activity Analysis

Although the three campaigns took place in different locations and several months apart, the overall strategies of the three were similar and focused on:



BUILDING AN EVIDENCE-BASED CASE FOR ADVOCACY

Each of the campaigns started by conducting research and collecting data to understand the issue at hand and its implications. They all recognized that having the evidence needed early in the campaign strengthened their position when working with decision makers, the media, and fellow community members.

To build their cases, the campaigns used a human rights approach to highlight the public’s right to open public spaces. They aimed to show that the targeted areas were public property and not for private development by real estate companies or the municipalities.

Despite an access to information law passed by the parliament, it is still difficult to find accurate information in Lebanon. All the campaigns were blocked multiple times by municipalities, ministries, or private companies when asked for legal documents, maps, and plans. Their efforts to gather information were further hindered because most of the resorts on the

Lebanese coastline are owned by politicians or have politicians as private investors. Furthermore, the lack of monitoring and accountability during the real estate boom that happened after the Civil War made it difficult to obtain accurate records.

It is notable that some of the campaigns such as Nahnoo's and Dalieh's relied on partnering with legal experts, academics, and universities (AUB, Balamand, and the Lebanese University) to gather research data, create linkages and analyze the impact of each project on people's well-being, marine life, biodiversity, the ecosystem, as well as socio-economic considerations. Dalieh and Ramlet el Bayda campaign leaders worked with the AUB Urban studies department to develop urban plans and studies on the multiple uses of these public spaces as gathering spaces for people. The Green Southern Community worked with the University of Balamand to capitalize on their studies of the biodiversity and marine life of the Aadloun coast.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

While traditional activities such as press conferences, petition signing, and protests were used in each campaign, the Green Southern Community also implemented more innovated approaches. One of the volunteers in the Dalieh campaign explained that, "*We needed to come up with new ideas to re-energize the public*"; so, they held small festivals at Dalieh and Ramlet el Bayda to celebrate public spaces and encourage people to visit. They also held a competition inviting community members to put forward a vision for Dalieh. Furthermore, they targeted messages to influence fishermen to join the campaign as they spend most of their time in the seafront of Dalieh.

The Dalieh and Ramlet el Bayda campaign sought to actively engage university students by holding discussions at universities and encouraging the students to take action. They also worked closely with students from the departments of architecture and urban design who took part in the Dalieh design competition.

The campaigns to protect Aadloun coast and Kfar Aabida relied heavily on organizing ecotourism tours, water sports and events for people from all over Lebanon to introduce them to the wealth of heritage and biodiversity present in these two sites.

It is important to note that all campaigns relied heavily on social media to deliver their messages, promote their activities, and share updates with the community. Equally, traditional media was targeted and provided tremendous support to all campaigns in promoting activities, raising awareness about the issues and informing citizens about their rights.

ENGAGING DECISION-MAKERS

The campaigns used different approaches to engage decision-makers:

- Save Kfar Aabida engaged with them at a later stage due to the fact that the group was faced with construction work starting on the seaside, which required a direct action (an event was organized which is discussed in the next section).
- Campaigns on Horsh Beirut, Aadloun, Ramlet el Bayda, Dalieh initially targeted the mayors in their areas, requesting regular meetings. However, the pressure of construction starting required they shift their efforts quickly when the Heads of the Municipalities were unresponsive. Instead, they began mobilizing the media and the public to increase the pressure on decision makers.

- While meeting with key stakeholders and activists working on the case of Aadloun, campaign members learned that the mayor had changed the legal usage of the land from agricultural to fisheries and trade so it could be used for the proposed project. To counter that decision, they targeted the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment to push them to issue a decree to protect the coast.
- The Save Kfar Aabida campaign coincided with the municipal and parliamentary elections so they used it as an opportunity to push forward their campaign by appealing to the current head of the municipality's desire to maintain a positive image and his opponent's desire to uncover wrongdoings. In a similar way, they also took advantage of the negative political dynamics between the contractor's lawyer (a former MP and Minister) and the candidates from an opposing political party, who have a high number of voters in Kfar Aabida.

"We now know that if there is a new threat to any remaining public beach, that we as a coalition will act together. What we lack is a long-term strategy that would allow us to be proactive rather than reactive. We started with a plan for the coast; we need to mobilize and divide tasks to start the work," said one interviewee.

Whereas there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging stakeholders, Lebanese activists share a common understanding that engaging decision makers requires knowing their backgrounds, both familial and political. Understanding these aspects, along with an analysis of the political situation, alliances, and competition makes it easier to identify the linkages and determine key actors and windows of opportunities for action.

Most of the campaigns changed their approach to engaging decision makers once they learned more about them and the influence each had. For example, some thought the Ministry of Environment was responsible for protecting public beaches and parks, but campaigners came to realize that the Ministry of Public Works had more power than others as the Minister was stronger politically and was responsible for issuing permits, irrespective of the decisions of other ministries. Once they realized that, they changed targets and tactics, seeking allies within the Ministry of Environment to support them in their cause. Similarly, they realized that Heads of Municipalities and Governors have little power to defy decisions made by higher level officials.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND COALITION BUILDING: LEBANON COAST COALITION

In May 2017, the different campaigns working on the protection and preservation of public spaces, including activists, academics, researchers, and NGOs, came together to form the Lebanese Coast Coalition.⁴ The coalition's mission is to protect the Lebanese Coast by raising awareness of the importance of public maritime property and to create a national framework for managing Lebanon's coast.

Joining efforts allowed the groups to share resources (knowledge, material and human) and to capitalize on a wide network of volunteers. With an increased number of small and large campaigns, both local and national, activists came to realize that together they would be able to increase the pressure and unify their messages, as well as avoid duplication of efforts. Such a move proved extremely successful as local campaigns such as Aadloun (in the South) and Kfaraabida (in the North) received tremendous support from Beirut-based activists who joined their activities and protests and contributed to their ultimate successes.

⁴ The coalition includes over 15 members: The National Campaign to Protect Dalieh, Jal Al Bahr Port Fishermen Coop, Fishermen COOP of Ain Mrieseh, Fishermen COOP of Jnah, Beirut Madinati, Legal Agenda, Greenline NGO, Nahnoo, Big Blue, Dalieh Swimmers Group, Protection of Lebanon's Water, Fishermen Union of the North, Northern COOP for Fishermen, National Campaign to Protect Al Mina Port, Salt Revolution in Anfeh, Bahruna Barruna Campaign in Tripoli, Save Kfar Aabida, Green Community in the South, Protection of Byblos Heritage, Fishermen Union of Sidon, Friends of Saida Islands, Shajra w Bashar Committee, Secular Democratic group.

Advocacy in Lebanon is particularly challenging given the political system and the intertwined relationships between politicians and business leaders as well as the closed nature of most decision makers which makes it difficult to approach them. To break through these barriers, advocates need to be equipped with the right set of skills and techniques. Although capacity building workshops have been organized by NGOs, INGOs, and donor agencies for many years, the cases under study showed that the need for training persists.

A focus group with members of each of the three campaigns revealed common challenges, what each campaign did to mobilize and retain volunteers, and what tools they used to educate and prepare to run a successful advocacy campaign.

Most of the people interviewed agreed that their campaigns mobilized a diverse group of people from different backgrounds and with different skills to join their activities. A member of the Lebanon Coast Coalition commented that, *“People are the core driving force behind our interventions... When we could not find resources or certain skills within one group, we were sure we could find the needed set of skills within another group.”*

However, focus group participants said it was important to differentiate between funded campaigns and campaigns without funding. While they did not all believe funding is required to run a successful advocacy campaign, they all agreed that some activities would have more or faster success if there were full-time paid staff dedicated to work on the campaign and do the necessary follow-up. As one participant in a focus group indicated, retaining volunteers was challenging, especially as the economic situation in the country was deteriorating. Since most of the activists have full-time jobs in addition to volunteering with the campaigns, assigning tasks can be challenging. Moreover, many volunteers lack experience and, without funding, campaigns have limited access to training and capacity building.

To counter this challenge, the groups pooled their resources when they joined forces to form the Lebanese Coast Coalition. The formation of the coalition allowed them to not only share human resources to manage and run the different campaigns, but to also mobilize a larger number of volunteers, widen their network of supporters, and access a pool of experts to develop messages and support with research. When funding was available, training to carry out a successful advocacy campaign was provided.

Despite the challenges they faced, almost everyone agreed that coming together as a coalition positioned them as a strong voice of opposition to privatization of public spaces in Lebanon. With a little effort to organize, set a strategy and create a long-term plan, this coalition succeeded in setting the national framework for managing Lebanon’s coast; however, it is yet to be adopted by the Government of Lebanon.

REFLECTIONS

Based on the consultations with campaign and coalition members and an analysis of their campaigns, a consolidated review of successes, challenges and lessons learned for each campaign is outlined below. Similarities, where applicable, are included as well.

Campaign	Challenge	Solution	Success	Current Status
Reopening Horsh Beirut	Beirut's public park has been closed to the public for over 20 years.	Nahnoo launched a campaign in 2010 to reopen it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horsh Beirut is now open to the public all week long. • People are aware of their right to have public spaces accessible to all • Joined the Lebanon Coast Coalition 	Unfortunately, construction of the field hospital in Horsh Beirut is underway but the campaign continues to voice its concerns to the governor of Beirut specifically as the building of the hospital takes over a big space from the public park. The campaign continues to highlight both the environmental and social impact of decreasing the availability of green public spaces in the city.
Protecting Dalieh & Ramlet Al Bayda Public Beaches	The last two public access points to the beach in Beirut were being closed by private resorts.	The campaigns called for providing a safe and clean environment for the visitors of both Dalieh and Ramlet Al Bayda and the preservation and enhancement of the role of Dalieh as an open-access shared space for all city dwellers and visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After several meetings with the ministry, the Minister of Environment announced a draft decree in order to categorize Dalieh as a natural protected area. • Joined the Lebanon Coast Coalition 	Work in Dalieh is pending the political decision but the coalition is ready to mobilize against the continuation of the project.
Protecting Aadloun Coast	The Aadloun coast has been under the threat of being taken over by a private project.	The campaign called for the protection of the coast and its declaration as a natural reserve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction plans were modified to protect biodiversity and secure the access to the public • Joined the Lebanon Coast Coalition 	A decision is pending by the Ministry of Environment to declare what remains of the Aadloun coast as a natural reserve.
Save Kfar aabida	A luxury resort was planned to take place over Kfaraabida's public beach, blocking access to its residents.	The campaign advocated against the establishment of this resort and for the protection of the beach as a safe accessible space for all community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Kfar Aabida the plans were modified as per the recommendations of the environmental experts of the campaign • Joined the Lebanon Coast Coalition 	The project in Kfar Aabida is on hold due to political disagreements; the coalition is ready to mobilize again should the work resume.

Each faced similar challenges including lack of access to information; politicization; lack of public trust of civil society; retaining volunteers; and sharing a common strategy for action. Overall, the campaigns mitigated these risks and achieved varying levels of success.

CHALLENGES	HOW WERE THEY MITIGATED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Access to Information: Although the access to information law was passed in 2016, it was hard for activists and researchers to find legitimate and official information regarding the public spaces their campaigns were targeting. More specifically, it was hard to receive information on who owns land, what parts were privatized, which were under the municipality's mandate and which were public. 	<p>In an effort to find the right type and amount of information, all campaigns relied on partnerships with universities, academics and lawyers as well as relied on personal connections with people within municipalities and ministries to provide information.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicization: Activists and campaigns were accused of reporting to embassies and implementing foreign agendas to destabilize the country. 	<p>Publishing what they know and the research they conducted allowed community members to see the same picture activists were seeing and hence trusted that they were acting based on facts and not because they were told to do so. It was important for activists, NGOs, and coalitions to highlight successes without funding to counter these arguments. At the same time, credibility was key.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Public's Trust: As the social, economic, and political situation in the country deteriorates, community members' hopes for change declined as well. Thus, their trust that CSOs can achieve success was challenged because few success stories had been presented over the past years. 	<p>Policy change is a long process which sometimes pushes people away. Coming up with creative and fun activities allowed the campaigns to engage many people and attract volunteers with different skills and capacities. Furthermore, campaign teams engaged with people on a personal level, reviving memories of their times spent in these public spaces and drawing on dreams of their children having the same access that their parents had; this raised the sense of ownership and responsibility among the community.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Retainment: Policy change and advocacy often involves a long process during which people get tired or lose hope of possible change, or even lose focus due to changing priorities. Most volunteers get dragged away with life and work commitments. 	<p>Some funding to maintain day-to-day operations and follow up was essential to keep people going since activists also need to make a living while full-time volunteering is not sustainable. Pooling resources into the coalition helped to address these challenges.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Strategy for the Coalition: Despite the strong work and positioning of the Coalition, there was disagreement on the approaches and tactics used, on certain messages, and on the way forward. 	<p>Coalition building requires clear stand points and plans. The coalition members reached an agreement that it is alright for each to continue doing what they see is most suitable (direct action or indirect action) as long as they are all working towards the same goal, until they gather again to set a long-term strategy.</p>

LESSONS LEARNED

Developing an evidence-based advocacy case allows for better arguments and a stronger position. With the right network, advocates can get the information they need for their research and confirm what they know. Information allows campaigners to be proactive and equips them with the knowledge to develop alternative solutions. However, information alone is not enough; it needs to be coupled with creative and innovative activities to mobilize citizens to adopt the cause. Engaging decision makers from the beginning of the process gives a better understanding of the situation, their position, and manages expectations in terms of a possibility for cooperation, while engaging the media – mainstream and social media – allows for greater outreach, shaping public opinion and promoting community mobilization.

- **Building an evidence-based advocacy case:** Spending enough time on research and tapping into different resources and experts were essential. For example, partnering with universities to get an academic perspective of the data and working closely with lawyers to understand the legal environment and the responsibilities of decision makers allowed the campaign teams to have confidence in data to defend and support the arguments they were presenting. Being equipped with evidence and using quantitative data positioned them as credible advocates and strong campaigners in the eyes of community members, helped them build trust, and find alternative solutions. For example, being able to show the number of families in Dalieh who live off fishing or the behavioral changes people undergo if they get access to green spaces, coupled with infographics to depict how the green space

in Horsh Beirut shrunk over years, proved to be influential with community members and decision-makers alike. With the help of urban planners and architects, they were able to use the data to create solutions that would preserve the public space, while at the same time offer the economic benefit of a real estate project.

- **Having the right network of people:** Weak implementation of the Access to Information Law limited the ability of activists to gather reliable information. Instead, they relied on key individuals inside relevant public institutions (municipalities and ministries) to provide them with the needed information or to validate data. Befriending these employees, visiting and updating them regularly and incorporating their input into the process, allowed them to feel ownership and responsibility for the campaign.
- **Being proactive rather than reactive:** To avoid getting trapped in a reactive mode, long-term planning is essential. Interviewees suggested that for advocates to succeed, they need to first do a full political analysis of the issue they are interested in. For example, as the Lebanese Coast Coalition sets a strategy, they should consider how this strategy would be perceived by decision makers, putting themselves in their shoes, and prepare their counter arguments and suggestions. This will allow them to anticipate upcoming challenges, equip their teams with the needed knowledge, and mobilize community members on future plans. Furthermore, maintaining a relationship with decision makers, key people within institutions, other NGOs and civil society members, will keep them informed of developments as they arise.
- **Introducing creativity and innovation:** Using creative tools and innovative actions to engage people from different backgrounds allowed the campaigns to widen their base and expand their audience. For example, engaging graphic design and communications students to create materials and messaging; organizing flash-mobs to introduce people to the campaign; and incorporating infographics and short videos to deliver the message with the least amount of text possible helped campaigns reach a wider variety of people.
- **Speaking to people's hearts and minds:** Linking the cause to personal history and future prosperity speaks to people's hearts and emotions by creating sentimental connection between them and their public spaces and reinforces an increased sense of ownership and responsibility. Documenting individual stories and sharing them in small videos also proved successful and using data further strengthened their case.
- **Engaging decision-makers:** It is important to engage with decision makers from the beginning and throughout the process for both the campaigners and the decision makers to have clarity on the issue at hand; doing so will clarify and manage expectations and inform the approach to be followed. To maximize on engaging decision makers, it is important to conduct a full mapping of who they are, what their positions are and who among them could be allies. Once that is done, determining an intervention strategy for each helps determine the next steps. Would the advocates want to cooperate with decision makers and bring them as supporters to the campaign? Would they want to educate them, so they see eye to eye on the importance of the issue? Or should they confront and then pressure them to take action?
- **Engaging the media:** More often than not, the media not only shape the public's opinion on the issue, but also influences which issues decision makers prioritize on their agendas. While the media can sometimes work against a campaign, it is worthwhile to find ways to

Tactics and messaging varied between campaigns depending on:

- Their target audience
- Time of the activity in relation to the development of events
- Ability to include innovation & creativity
- Windows of opportunity opening
- Availability of funding
- At which stage the media was involved
- Door to door, townhall meetings, protests, arts and fun, public tours, etc.

While different engagement strategies were used based on:

- Availability of time
- Availability of resources
- Approachability of decision makers

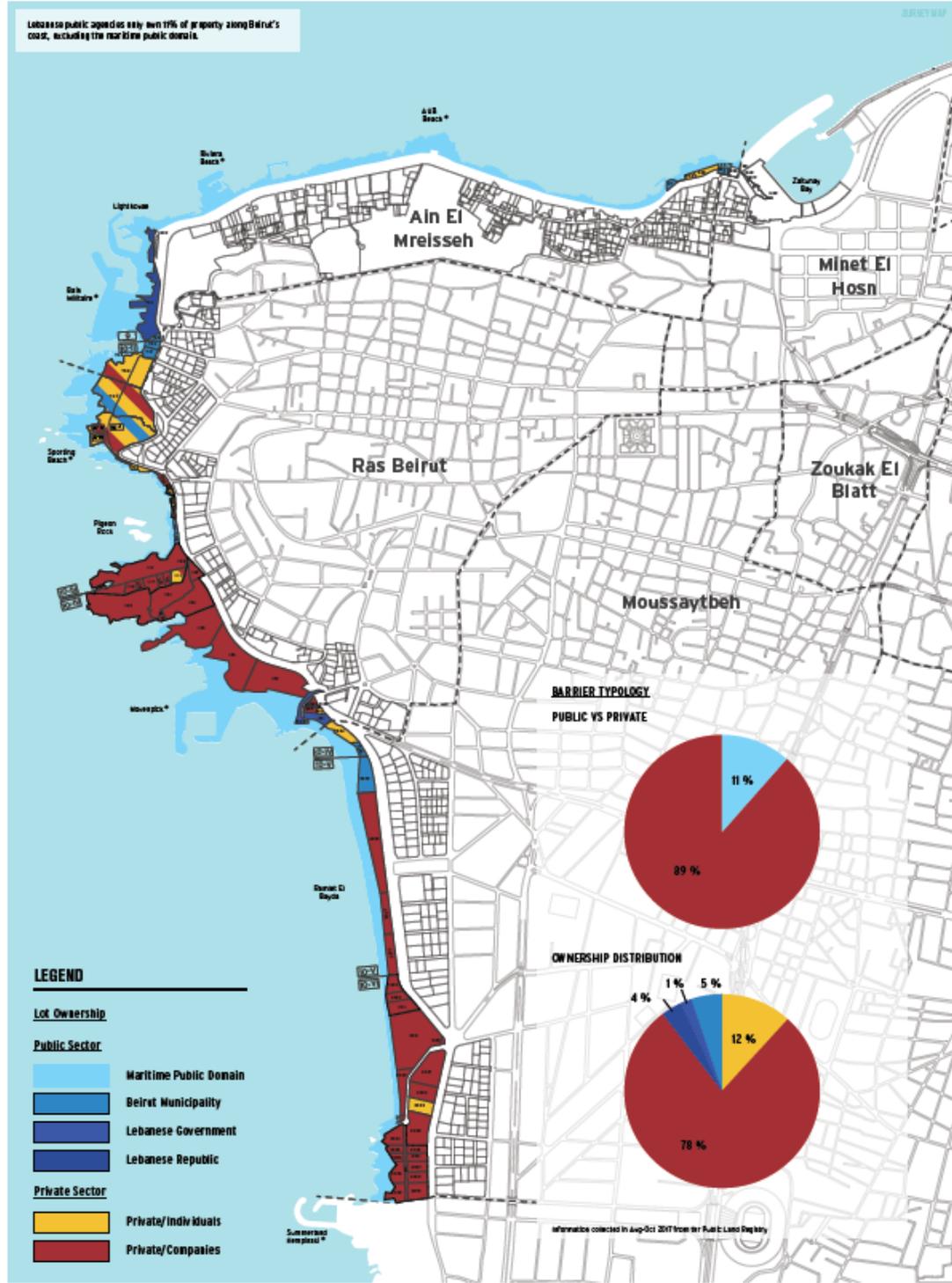
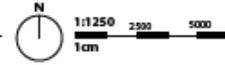
involve the media and ensure they understand the objectives of the campaign. Engaging them in meetings and planning sessions, seeking their insight or opinion, or asking a media anchor to provide communication and message design training are all examples of ways to engage them in a campaign. When Dalieh advocates met with the governor to discuss the plans for construction, they brought the media with them and went live on television with the governor to not only show their strength as a campaign, but also to hold the mayor publicly accountable. This could not have happened if the media were not engaged in the process from the beginning. Similar to mapping decision makers, the same exercise should be made when mapping and diagnosing media outlets to determine which could be supportive of the campaign.

THE WAY FORWARD

Efforts to protect and reclaim public spaces continue to date. Coalitions, NGOs, and initiatives continue to pressure municipalities at the local level and the parliament at the national level to take the necessary actions and decisions to protect or open public spaces. As many interviewees stated, in the absence of an independent and just judiciary system, calls against private projects abusing public spaces remain on paper without the proper actions taken against them. Advocacy efforts to appeal to the Governor of Beirut continue in relation to Horsh Beirut, Dalieh, Ramlet el Bayda, and the Eden Bay. Similarly, awareness-raising initiatives continue both online and offline to increase awareness among the Lebanese citizenry about their right to access free and open public spaces.

ANNEX I

6. OWNERSHIP PATTERNS I PUBLIC/PRIVATE (CORPORATE & INDIVIDUAL)



ANNEX II: CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO ACCESSIBLE GREEN PUBLIC SPACES TIMELINE

Nahnoo: Reopening Horsh Beirut

TIMELINE: CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO ACCESSIBLE GREEN PUBLIC SPACES

