

A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Municipalities of Chouf El-Souayjani, Mount Lebanon Governorate



الجمهورية اللبنانية
وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية

In partnership with the
Ministry of Social Affairs



UN-HABITAT



Ambasciata d'Italia
Beirut

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The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. UN-Habitat's programmes are designed to help policymakers and local communities get to grips with human settlements and urban issues and find workable, lasting solutions.

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Credits and acknowledgements

This booklet, which outlines strategic directions for the local socioeconomic development of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Chouf El-Souayjani was made possible with the generous funding support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), within the scope of the project "Improving Planning Capacities for Social and Economic Local Development" implemented between 2018 and 2023 by the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

UN-Habitat extends its gratitude to all individuals who participated in and contributed to the preparation and development of this booklet.

UN-Habitat gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of the Minister of Social Affairs and his team, thanking them for their support and close coordination in the field with social development centres (SDCs).

Particular recognition goes to the President of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, representatives of the union, Aley SDC coordinators who supported in the facilitation of data collection, consultation sessions and analysis of the findings, and the members of a dedicated field team who supported in data collection.

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Foreword by the Ministry of Social Affairs

The continuous fluctuations in the economic landscape in Lebanon have necessitated governmental institutions to rethink the forgoing socioeconomic model, which is based on the philosophy of rapid and temporary crisis response. With the increased pressing needs for social protection, aid and development, this obligates us to work towards meeting the expectations and the needs of the community relying on clear and prudent strategic planning that is realistically aligned with the available resources.

The Ministry of Social Affairs holds the responsibility and commitment of conducting developmental activities at all levels through its social developmental centres (SDCs). The ministry works in close coordination with international organizations, the local community, and local authorities.

Consequently, we seek the engagement and the involvement of relevant parties in our plans and our implementation procedures with the aim to jointly measure, evaluate and report on the performance of the ministry. This confirms our commitment to social responsibility, which contributes to achieving social stability and development.

Hence, we hereby share this booklet with you to present the analysis of data collected – and subsequently validated – with the participation of local stakeholders through different tools, including a survey with municipalities and a series of interviews and focus group discussions. The expected outcome of this exercise is to improve the socioeconomic conditions of communities and those concerned within the specified economic sectors in targeted municipalities and unions of municipalities. This will contribute to securing employment, job opportunities, skills development, and an enabling environment for entrepreneurial activities. This shall be undertaken through proper municipal planning developed in partnership with the SDCs and through the pursuit of possible funding for the implementation of such projects, yet ensuring the collaboration between the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society organizations, and municipal councils.

Dr. Hector Al-Hajjar
Minister of Social Affairs

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and lines, positioned below the name and title of the Minister of Social Affairs.

Foreword by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation

Knowing and analysing the resources and the challenges of the territory, planning in a participatory manner among public and private sectors and civil society organizations, designing sectorial strategies at local level where local and national level stakeholders are involved and prioritizing the interventions are a milestone before any intervention.

While this booklet is produced, Lebanon is facing one of the most severe economic and social crises: responding to individual needs is crucial, yet introducing reforms based on shared and agreed strategies is fundamental to ensure sustainability avoiding continuous adaption to emergencies.

In this context, the socio-economic focus given in developing the road map of the 10 Unions of Municipalities is really relevant. The adopted approach has enhanced the dialogue among the Unions of Municipalities, the Municipalities, the Social Development Centres of the Ministry Social Affairs, the Lebanese Non-Governmental Organisations and stakeholders of the private sector.

The road map is the first step of a process towards interventions to be realised in the short-term and others bridging with long-terms strategies, whilst strengthening, orienting, and reforming the existing national systems.

The Italian Cooperation appreciates the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs in facilitating the process in collaboration with UN-Habitat. Italy has a longstanding cooperation with the Ministry in supporting the local development and welfare system for the provision of social services.

Italy looks forward to witnessing the continuity of the undertaken initiative through the concrete actions towards a local economic development.

Ms. Alessandra Piermattei
Head of Office AICS Beirut

Foreword by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in Lebanon

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is pleased to collaborate with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation to present a series of booklets that endeavours to capture the strategic directions of 10 unions of municipalities (UoMs) across Lebanon towards future socioeconomic development action planning. The directions, identified by the UoMs and local stakeholders themselves, through a bottom-up participatory approach, aim to point towards future potential socioeconomic action planning that can both mitigate and set a long-term vision for the response and recovery efforts to address the nationwide socioeconomic crisis at local levels.

At the time of writing, Lebanon continues to face numerous and deep protracted socioeconomic challenges; UoMs and municipalities are at the receiving end of their impact and equally at the forefront of a local response. These booklets compile an evidence base, as identified, and prioritized by UoMs, pointing towards the longer-term need to develop full-fledged socioeconomic action plans that target the needs of their communities across the sectors of health, education, agriculture, infrastructure, among others.

Each booklet provides findings and analyses undertaken by the local teams working at the level of each UoM related to the socioeconomic conditions of each UoM. The data and findings of the booklets were collected through a participatory approach, involving a variety of stakeholders, including the UoMs, municipalities, civil society organizations, academia, the private sector, and the Ministry of Social Affairs' social development centres (SDCs).

The booklets identify the socioeconomic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of each UoM, and provide a baseline that can be used to guide further resource investment by UoMs, municipalities and external stakeholders. Culminating with a series of recommendations for each UoM, the booklets provide insight into which specific sectors UoMs should focus on advancing, based on pre-existing efforts made, availability of natural resources, and feasibility. If adopted, these recommendations could help lead to enhanced basic and social service provision, increased livelihood opportunities, and ultimately promote local socioeconomic development and community well-being.

UN-Habitat hopes that these booklets will be a valuable resource for UoMs as they develop and implement future socioeconomic action plans to improve the lives of their communities.

Taina Christiansen
Head of UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
AUCE	American University of Culture & Education
CNRS-L	National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon
DEM	Digital elevation model
EDL	Électricité du Liban
GIS	Geographic information system
IMF	Independent Municipal Fund
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MUBS	Modern University for Business and Science
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SDC	Social development centre
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
ToT	Training of trainers
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UoM	Union of municipalities

Executive summary

The preparation of this booklet, which outlines strategic directions of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Chouf El-Souayjani in Mount Lebanon Governorate towards future socioeconomic development action planning, was undertaken as part of a series of booklets prepared within the scope of the project **“Improving Planning Capacities for Social and Economic Local Development.”** The project was implemented between 2018 and 2023 by the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

The analysis and recommendations included in this booklet are a result of several meetings, interviews, focus group discussions, and brainstorming sessions conducted by the project coordination team, which was composed of representatives of social development centres (SDCs) and UoMs, in addition to a UN-Habitat team.

With the support of a local field team – also composed of representatives of SDCs, UoMs and UN-Habitat – that was involved in data collection, the project coordination team collected and analysed data through fieldwork, which included consultative meetings and technical sessions with all relevant groups: stakeholders, experts, local activists, and individuals from various segments of the local community. The stages of data collection and validation at the local level involved collection of information about the municipalities; conducting consultative meetings, interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders and representatives of local communities; analysing the collected data through a participatory rapid appraisal approach that defined the status of different sectors; and finally, the representatives of SDCs and UoMs proposing recommendations for specific sectors to help improve the socioeconomic situation in each UoM.

In the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, the consultations showed that the basic and social services are becoming weak due to the ongoing socioeconomic and financial crisis, and most of the sectors have been impacted in a way that the local authorities are not able to operate or to maintain effectively. To be able to improve the socioeconomic situation in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, local stakeholders recommended to focus on the agriculture, tourism and industry sectors. This was translated into strategic directions and a proposed road map for each of these sectors aimed at providing a vision for future action planning and interventions.

Project overview

Project objectives

The AICS-funded project as part of which this booklet was developed aimed to enhance the socioeconomic development conditions of local communities through strengthening the planning capacities at the level of unions of municipalities (UoMs) and municipalities, and by promoting collaboration between social development centres (SDCs) (affiliated to the Ministry of Social Affairs [MoSA]), local authorities and civil society organizations.

The scope of the project was adapted to meet the emerging needs of the country, to respond to the evolving socioeconomic, financial, and political crises crippling the country since 2019. To this end, the project's focus shifted from the initial objective of developing full-fledged strategic plans covering all sectors for the targeted UoMs to highlighting mainly strategic directions in some key sectors that can contribute to future local socioeconomic development.

Geographical coverage

- Out of a total of 60 UoMs across all governorates of Lebanon that were invited to partake in the project, 38 responded and expressed initial interest in engaging in subsequent stages of the project to identify strategic directions for their future local socioeconomic development.
- Out of the 38 UoMs, 10 were eventually selected to identify strategic socioeconomic development directions, based on a number of criteria (See “Methodology” section below).

Beneficiaries

- Local communities, including men, women, elderly, youth, children, and people with disabilities
- UoMs
- SDCs
- Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Expected outcomes

- Identification of strategic socioeconomic needs and directions for local communities, led by their respective selected UoMs, SDCs and stakeholders active at the local level, to provide a bottom-up evidence base about their socioeconomic status and development opportunities.¹
- Dissemination of the produced evidence base to inform potential projects and secure further investment for their implementation by various internal and external stakeholders.

Timeframe

The project was implemented from 2018 to 2023, during which it was put on hold multiple times during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent socioeconomic crisis.

Methodology

The aim of the series of booklets produced for the 10 targeted UoMs, which this booklet is a part of, is to analyse the local conditions of these unions and study the sectors and services that are essential components within them. These booklets provide a practical framework for taking future steps towards achieving sustainable and balanced development. Thus, the booklet series is the compilation of data and analysis about needs, gaps and challenges identified by the UoMs and other relevant local stakeholders, as well as recommendations that they have outlined to inform strategic socioeconomic development directions for their respective unions. Therefore, the booklets can serve as tools for decision-makers at both the local and national levels, as well as for development agencies to build upon when preparing their national and local programmes and policies. They were hence

¹ As explained in the “Methodology” section below, the project did not aim to produce fully fledged socioeconomic action plans. The booklets developed to summarize the produced evidence base aim to lay the foundation for the future development of such detailed action plans by respective authorities or interested stakeholders.

developed as part of the system-strengthening process of the project for UoMs to start the journey of enhancing their local socioeconomic development planning. The booklets do not intend to present full-fledged strategic socioeconomic action plans; rather they outline the foundational elements and entry points upon which it is hoped that relevant stakeholders can continue building upon to support in future local socioeconomic development action planning efforts.

In consultation with AICS and MoSA coordinators, it was agreed to have the assessment of the UoMs focusing especially on the main productive sectors in each UoM. Hence, each of the booklets includes a general description of the state of basic and social services – the latter focusing on health, education and culture/public spaces – within the respective UoM, in addition to some recommendations for improvement of these services. For the productive sectors, each booklet includes a more detailed analysis of the state of the two sectors that were identified as key for the future local socioeconomic development of the respective UoM, in addition to more detailed recommendations and a proposed road map, based on the data collected and analysed during the field activities and in consultation with local stakeholders.

The assessment and analysis on socioeconomic development issues conducted to develop this booklet series adopted a participatory approach that focused on actively involving local stakeholders in the respective UoMs. Thus, most of the figures presented in the booklets were derived or estimated through data collected and analysed participatively with and by local stakeholders in the UoMs. This bottom-up evidence production process endeavoured to impart local knowledge for the purpose of obtaining an initial baseline regarding certain socioeconomic development matters for the respective UoM. More in-depth assessments will need to be undertaken in the future to further detail and elaborate on the data collected and analysed for the purposes of this booklet series.

In line with this participatory approach, the methodology that was used to develop these booklets included the following components and steps:

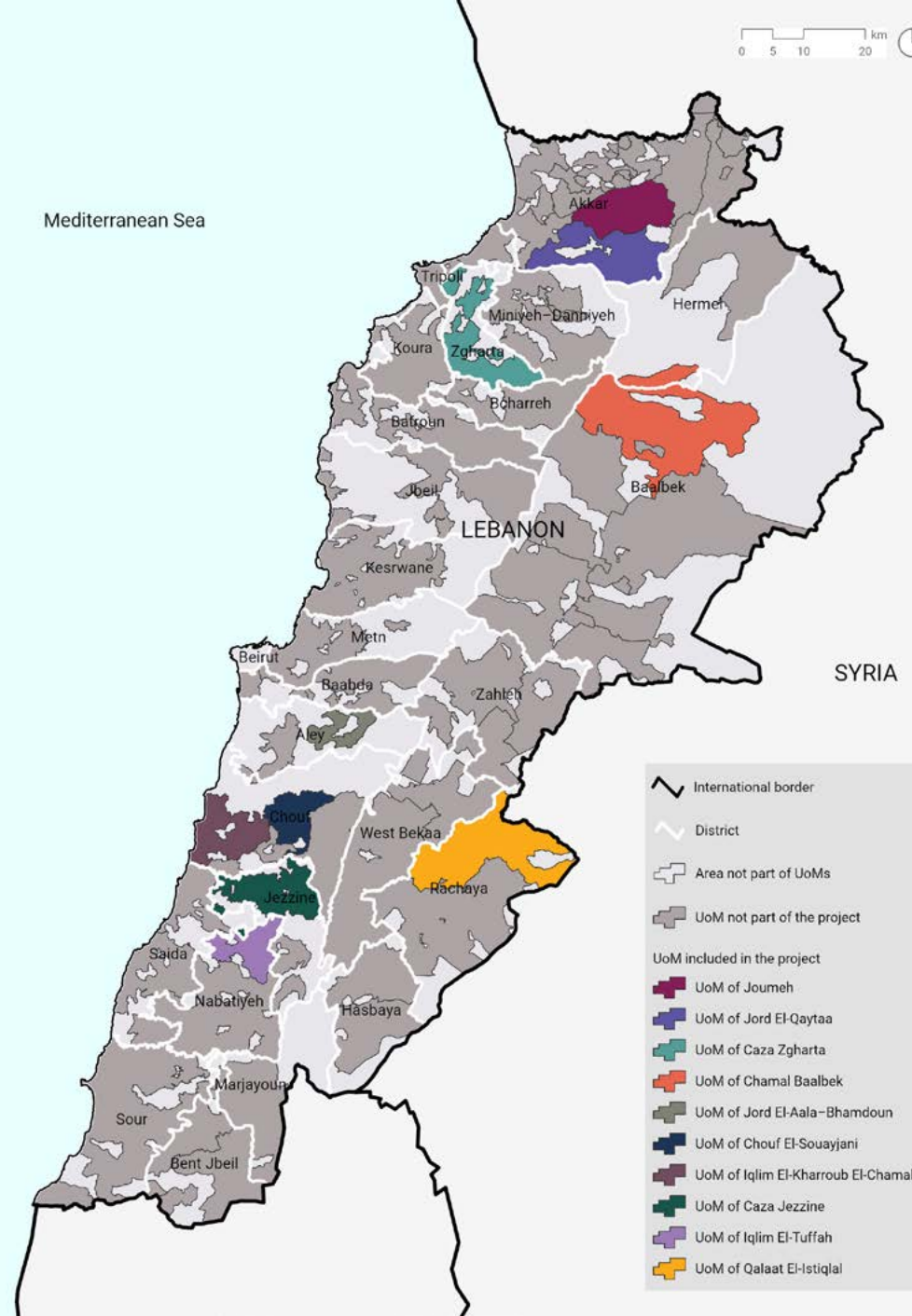
Selection of UoMs

1. Representatives of all 60 UoMs in Lebanon were invited to an initial project introductory meeting. Out of the 60, representatives from 54 UoMs attended this meeting, which was held remotely through Microsoft Teams, as initial project mobilization took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Out of these 54 UoMs, 38 submitted "Expressions of Interest" to participate in the subsequent steps of the project. These expressions included the submission of general information about the UoMs and a mapping of existing strategic and/or action plans.
3. Out of the 38 UoMs, 21 were excluded because they had existing relevant plans and programmes supported by various international entities and donors. Out of the remaining 17 UoMs, 10 were eventually selected to develop booklets outlining strategic directions for their future local socioeconomic development, based on a number of criteria, including population density, high number of Syrian refugees, high levels of poverty, low value of annual municipal budgets, and limited or no previous financial support from donors.² Having UoMs represented from across all Lebanese governorates was also a criterion of selection. The 10 targeted UoMs include:

Akkar Governorate	North Governorate	Mount Lebanon Governorate	Bekaa Governorate	Baalbek–Hermel Governorate	South Governorate	Nabatiyeh Governorate
Joumeih	Caza Zgharta	Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun	Qalaat El-Istiqlal	Chamal Baalbek	Caza Jezzine	Iqlim El-Tuffah
Jord El-Qaytaa		Chouf El-Souayjani				
		Iqlim El-Kharroub El-Chamali				

Table 1. 10 UoMs selected under this project.

Figure 1. Location of 10 UoMs selected under this project. This information was collected mainly through the information sheets that UoMs had previously submitted as part of the "Expression of Interest" phase explained above. Some information – mainly related to other financial support from donors – was also based on the knowledge of UN-Habitat area coordinators, as part of their regular work with UoMs.



Preparation and training

1. A project coordination team – consisting of 7 SDC coordinators designated by MoSA,³ 11 representatives⁴ from 10 UoMs, and 8 UN-Habitat staff members – was established to lead, implement and monitor project activities and progress (Figure 2).
2. Besides the project coordination team, 10 field teams were established for each of the 10 UoMs, consisting of 10–12 individuals representing municipalities, associations, organizations, cooperatives, clubs, and educational establishments active in their respective UoM (Figure 2). Their role was to assist in collecting information related to each municipality within their respective UoM, participate in extensive consultations, and in general guide and support field-based activities.
3. A detailed training curriculum on life and technical skills was developed by UN-Habitat to conduct workshops for the project coordination team at UoM level (representatives of participating UoMs/ municipalities, SDCs and UN-Habitat). In addition, survey questionnaires and templates were developed in Arabic for data collection.
4. Based on the developed training curriculum, the following workshops were conducted between 2019 and 2023:
 - One workshop was conducted to develop the soft skills of the members of the project coordination team, including on communication techniques, community mobilization approaches, meeting moderation techniques, and public speaking techniques. This included the use of a broad range of communication tools, tips and guidelines.
 - One workshop was conducted to develop the planning capacity of the members of the project coordination team, in terms of developing and rolling out the participatory field assessments, including on constituting a representative field team, undertaking stakeholder mapping exercises, etc. Participants were trained on the use of tools and templates, including different diagrams, to outline the criteria for the creation of field teams, and their respective roles.
 - Four workshops were conducted to develop the capacity of the members of the project coordination team through regular coaching and training of trainers (ToT). Topics included the following: initiating and maintaining contacts with local community stakeholders, undertaking primary and secondary data collection, documenting key gathered information and data, and carrying out data analysis. During these workshops, multiple tools were developed together with the field teams, including, among others: a municipal survey questionnaire; field assessment checklists; forms to record field observations and remarks; protocols and guidance for conducting focus group discussions and key informant interviews; problem tree analysis tool; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, etc.
 - Ten workshops were conducted to develop the capacity of field teams to use templates and tools to help facilitate the local stakeholders in their respective UoM to set the UoM's vision, identify its strategic directions, and prepare road maps for prioritized strategic directions and sectors for the UoM to focus on.



³ Representing each of the seven governorates covered by the project.

⁴ All UoMs nominated one representative for the project, except for the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, which nominated two representatives as focal points at the request of the union's president.

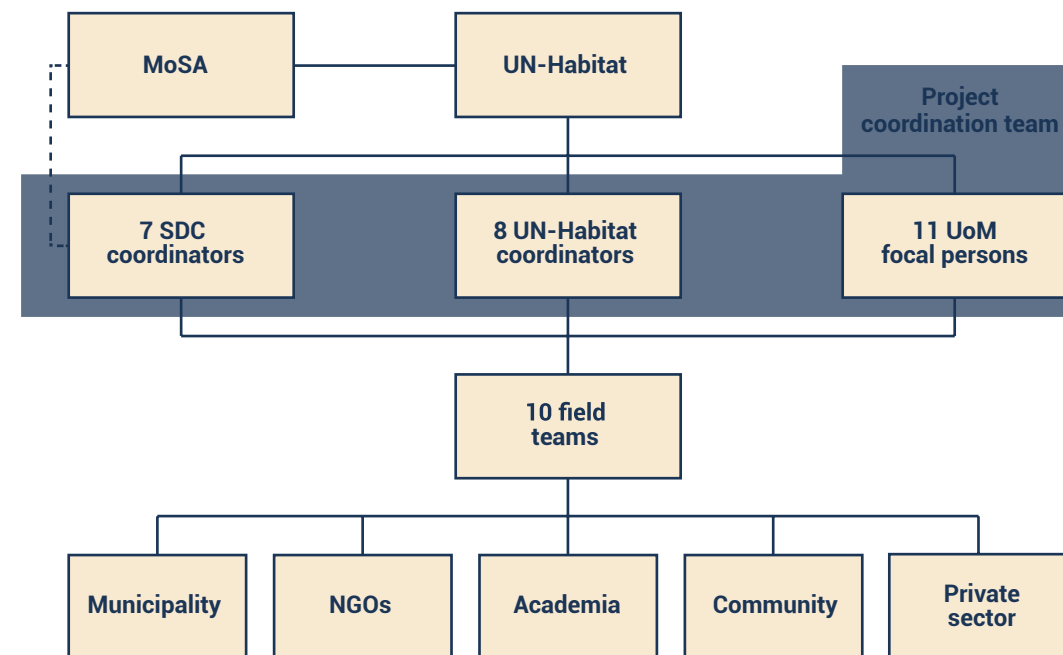


Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the development of booklets as part of the project.

Data collection, analysis, and validation

1. Following the workshops, survey questionnaires were filled with each of the 142 municipalities that are part of the 10 targeted UoMs. The surveys aimed to gather general information about municipalities under the 10 UoMs (e.g. population, resources, projects).
2. After filling the surveys, the project coordination team conducted 52 focus group discussions, 61 consultative sessions, and 20 individual meetings with UoM presidents. The purpose of these activities was to collect additional data from different relevant stakeholders and to discuss the situation and challenges of different sectors in the UoMs.
3. Following data collection, the project coordination team met several times to analyse the general local context as well as the services and sectors of each UoM, using the participatory rapid appraisal methodology.⁵ Strategic directions were thus formulated to support and enhance the socioeconomic status of each union. Additionally, strengths, weaknesses and available opportunities within all sectors were assessed. Depending on the existing resources and opportunities within each UoM, specific sectors were identified in each UoM, for which clear future directions were defined.
4. With regard to maps included in the booklets, the UN-Habitat Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team supported in the production of a set of general maps for each of the booklets to depict the context, topography and land cover/land use of each UoM. The GIS team also updated the boundaries of the UoMs based on their municipal composition. This was done based on available data from the survey with municipalities, open sources, and other relevant secondary data sources.

Based on the data collected and analysed, a booklet was produced for each of the 10 UoMs, including identified and proposed strategic directions and priority interventions. Thus, 10 UoMs successfully participated in the entire process, resulting in supporting and enhancing their capacities in setting strategic directions focused on socioeconomic needs, with a view to identify evidence-based entry points to enhance the socioeconomic conditions of mainly vulnerable areas affected by the multiple crises.

⁵ Participatory rapid appraisal is a learning process that empowers people to conduct their own analysis to create the information base they need for participatory planning and action.

Overview of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Chouf El-Souayjani

Geographical location and land cover/land use

The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is located in the centre of Chouf District in Mount Lebanon Governorate. It comprises 9 municipalities with municipal council sizes ranging from 9 members (amqaniyeh, Jdaidet El-Chouf, Ain Ouzain, Kahlouniyeh, Atrine) to 12 members (Ainbal) and 15 members (Baaqline, Mazraat El-Chouf, Gharifeh).

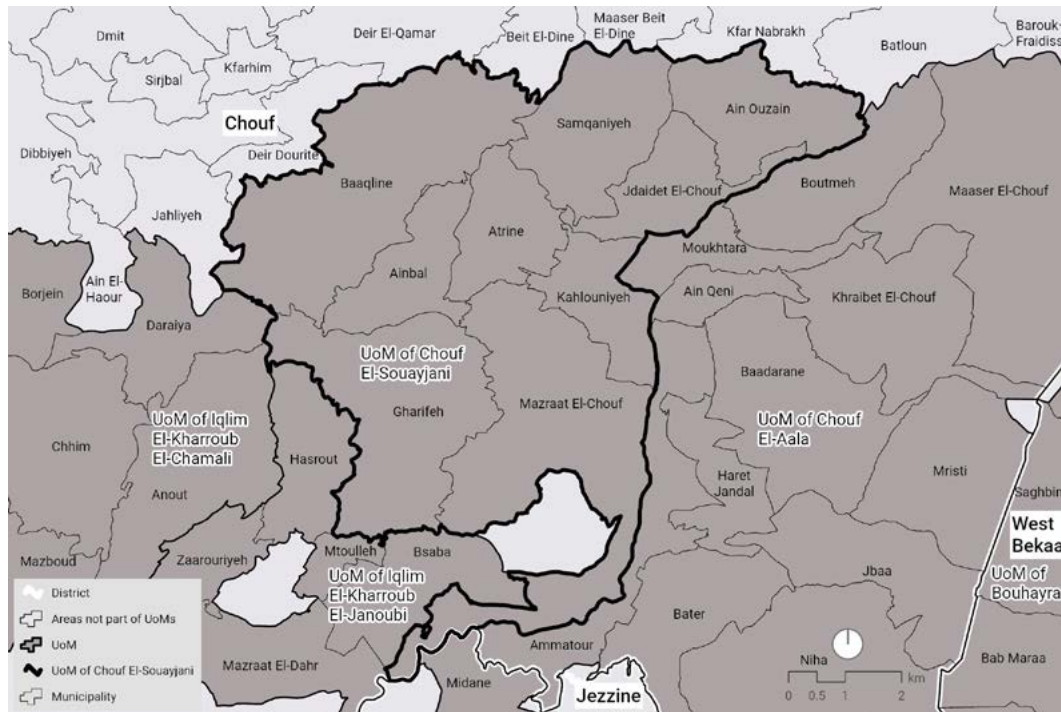


Figure 3. UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani with its municipalities.
 Source: UN-Habitat (2023). The boundaries of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani based on its municipal composition were updated by the UN-Habitat GIS team, based on available data from the survey with the municipalities, open sources, and other relevant secondary data sources.

The total area of the UoM is about 60.31 square kilometres. The elevation of its municipalities ranges from 393 metres above sea level in Baaqline to 1,098 metres at the highest point in Ain Ouzain. The municipalities of the UoM of

Chouf El-Souayjani are situated between Barouk River to the east and the tributaries of Damour River to the west, and they separated from the rest of the Chouf District by hills and valleys to the north and south.

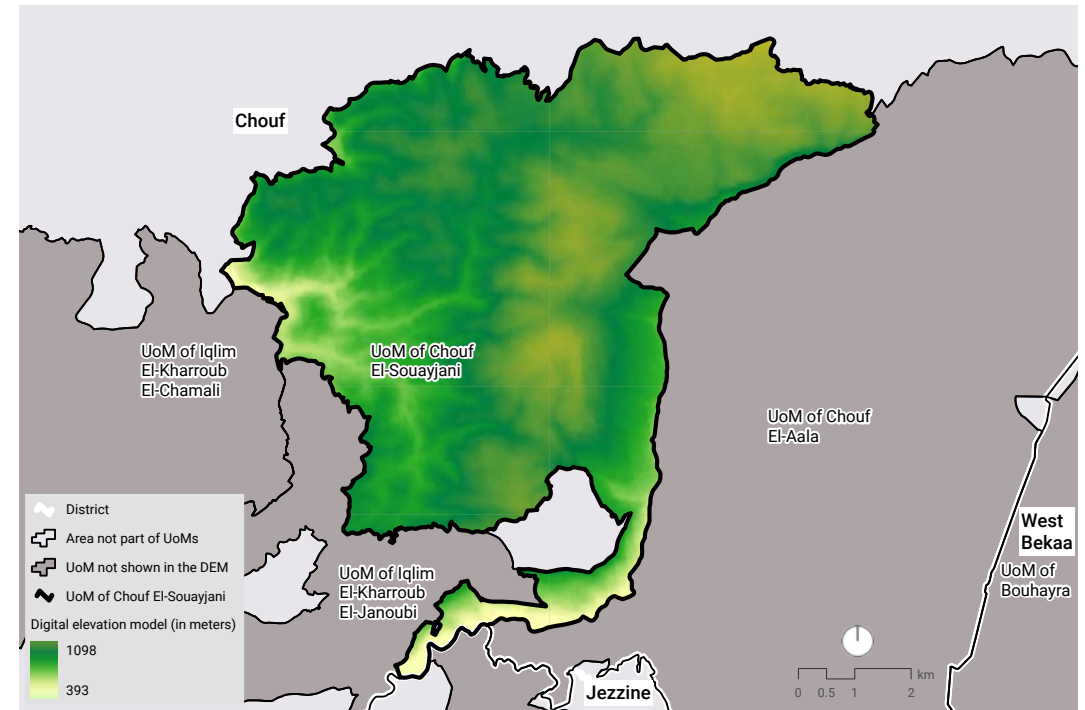


Figure 4. Digital elevation model (in metres) for the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani.
 Source: UN-Habitat (2023). Digital elevation model (DEM) taken from the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (ASTER) Global Digital Elevation Model Version 3 (GDEM V3), with a spatial resolution of 30 metres, downloaded from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) <https://lpdaac.usgs.gov/products/astgtmv003/>.

The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is distinguished by its central geographical location in Lebanon and its proximity to the capital, Beirut. The union connects other regions of Chouf District with the

towns of Minafeh, Iqlim El-Kharroub El-Chamali and El-Janoubi, Chouf El-Aala, and Arqoub, as well as the Aley and Jezzine Districts.



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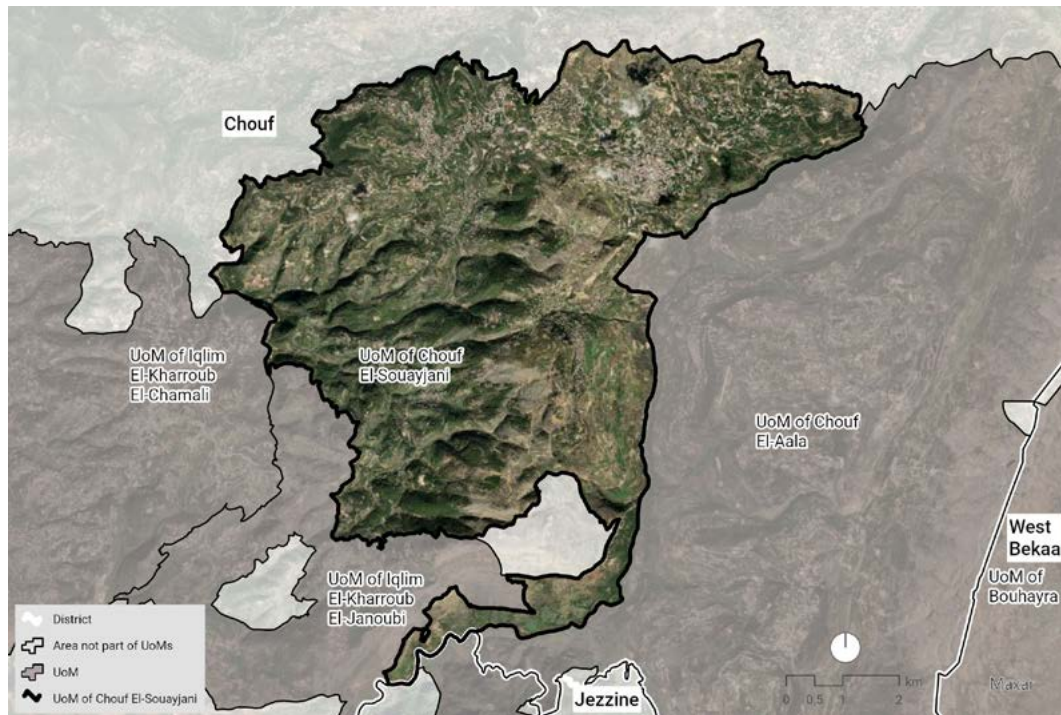


Figure 5. Satellite image of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani.
 Source: UN-Habitat (2023). The high-resolution satellite image displayed in this map was extracted from Esri online World Imagery.

The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is also known for its green environment, beautiful nature, and dense and rich forests, which cover most of its area (Figures 5, 6 and 7). Its forests and woodlands include those in Mazraat El-Chouf, Gharifeh, Baaqline, Atrine, Ainbal and Ain Ouzain. The union is extremely rich in biodiversity. It is also home to many distinctive rural and heritage landmarks serving as touristic attractions, in addition to active environmental and rural tourism centres.

Wooded lands cover 49 per cent (30 km²) of the total area of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, while agricultural areas span 24 per cent (14 km²) and artificial areas account for 16 per cent (10 km²). Unproductive areas (unused plots) make up 6 per cent (3.5 km²) of the union’s area. Grasslands cover 5 per cent (3 km²) and rivers 0.13 per cent (0.08 km²) (Figures 6 and 7).⁶

⁶ The figures are based on the land cover/land use classification system level 1, calculated by the National Center for Remote Sensing in the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon (CNRS-L) in 2017. According to that classification, the category “artificial areas” includes urban areas (urban fabric), activity areas (industrial or commercial area, port area, airport), non-built-up areas (dumpsites, landfills, urban extension and/or construction site, urban vacant land), and artificial, non-agricultural vegetated areas (green urban area, and sports and leisure facilities). “Agricultural areas” include field crops, permanent crops, intensive agriculture, and agricultural units. “Wooded land” includes dense wooded land, clear wooded land, scrubland, and burned wooded land. “Grassland” includes both dense and clear grassland. “Unproductive areas” include bare rocks, bare soils, beaches, and dunes.

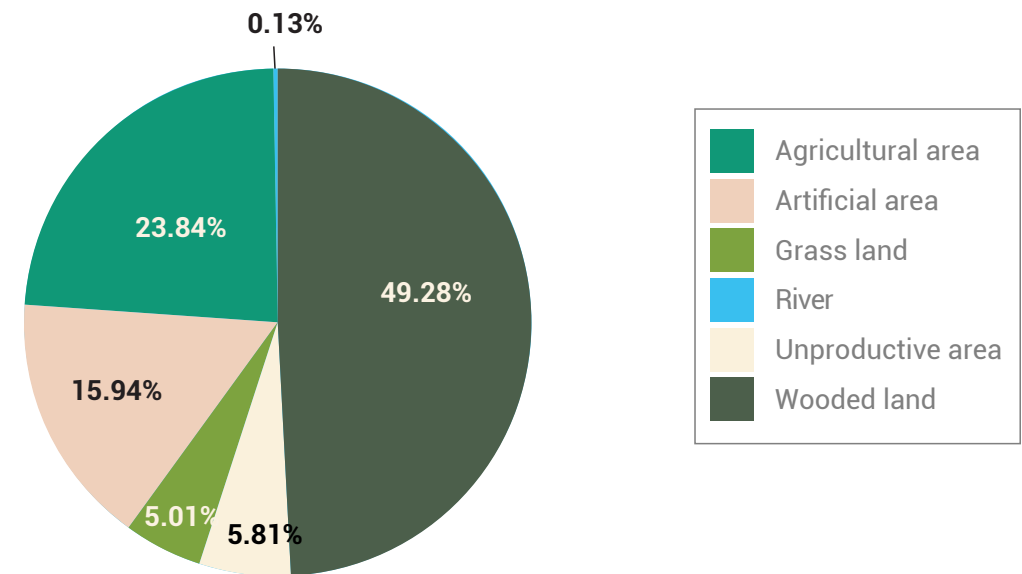


Figure 6. Land cover/land use as a percentage of the total area of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani.
 Source: Calculation made by UN-Habitat (2023) based on the Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Center for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).

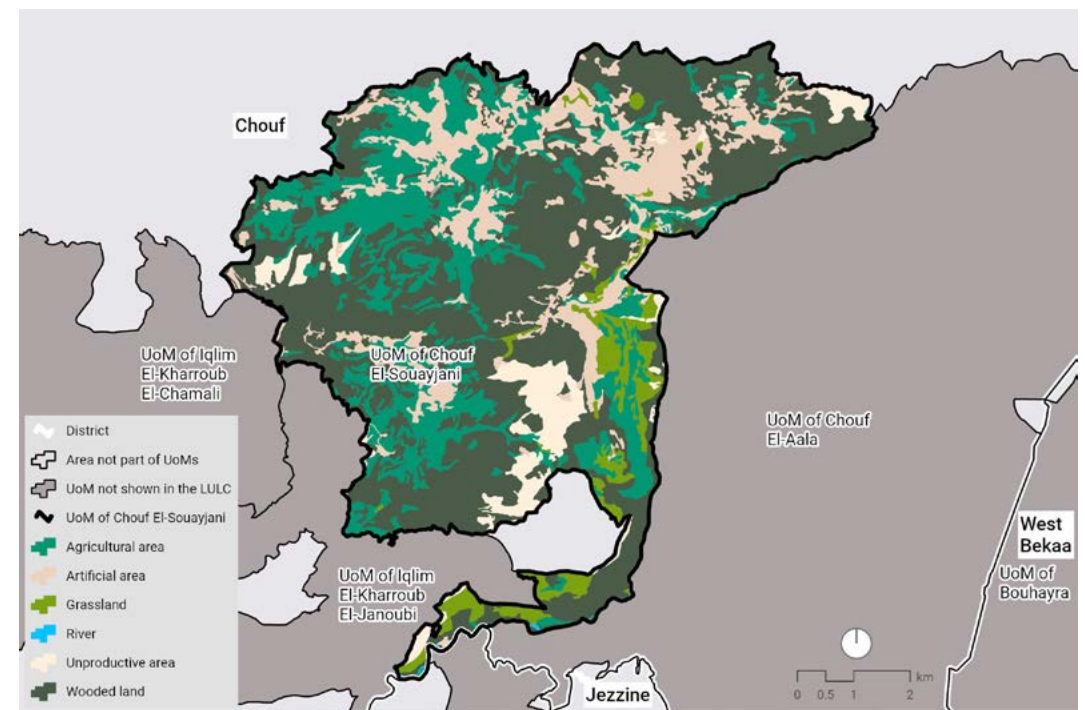


Figure 7. Land cover/land use within UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani.
 Source: UN-Habitat (2023), adapted from Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Center for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).

Population overview

The total population of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is approximately 70,000 with non-Lebanese (mostly Syrian refugees) constituting around 12 per cent, according to surveys conducted with the nine municipalities of the union. There are no refugee camps within the boundaries of the union.

The population of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is characterized by a relatively high percentage of youth and adults, collectively accounting for approximately 68 per cent of the total population, according to the survey filled by the municipalities' mayors (Figure 8).

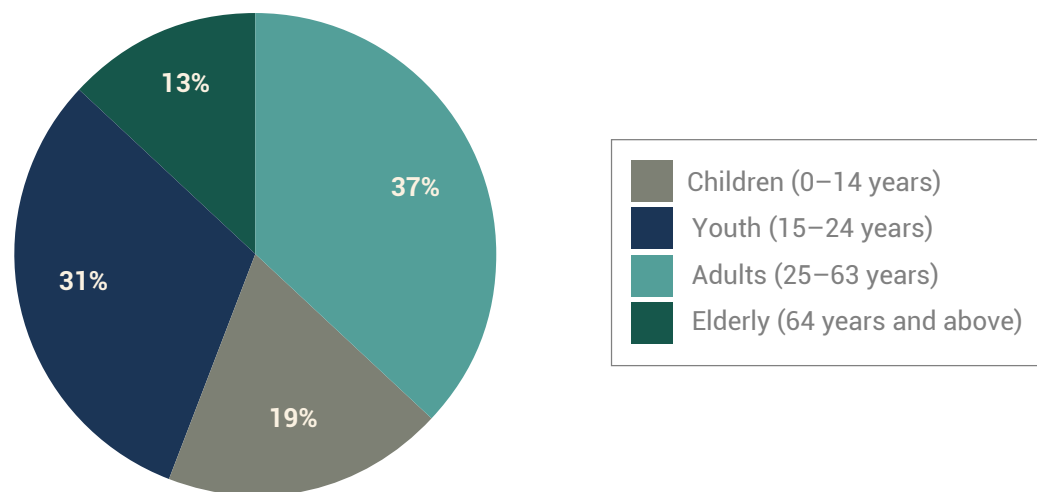


Figure 8. Distribution of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani's population by age.
Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

Approximately 28 per cent of the registered population in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani live outside of Lebanon – in the United States, Canada, Gulf countries, and some Sub-Saharan African countries (mainly oil-producing ones) – according to the survey conducted with the nine municipalities of the union. The process of

emigration started in the last few decades of the twentieth century, and it gained momentum in the 1970s during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). It continued to rise in the 1990s, and further increased after 2005, reaching its peak after 2019 due to the worsening economic crisis and the lack of job opportunities.



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Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

The state of basic services in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is considered acceptable, as all services are available, although to varying degrees among sectors and municipalities. Like the rest of Lebanon, the quality and quantity of basic services have deteriorated due to the ongoing socioeconomic and financial crisis, affecting service provision and maintenance, due to the lack of ability of local authorities to cover operational and maintenance costs.

Water

In the Chouf district, there are approximately 50 watercourses, most of them originating in the upper Chouf and some in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. These watercourses feed the two main rivers of the region, Damour and Barouk, which is referred to as the Awali river when it reaches the sea. The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is also blessed with multiple springs, such as the Dalafeh, Hamam and Wadi springs, which create abundant waterfalls in the winter and spring seasons. The waters from all these springs flow through canals and small rivers either into Barouk River (which passes through Barouk–Fraidess, Batloun, Ain Ouzain, Jdaidet El-Chouf, Kahlouniyeh, and Marj Bisri) or into Damour River, which passes through the north-western part of the union towards Kfar Nabrah or into the Gharifeh and Baaqline areas (where the same river is called Hamam River and then Baaqline River, respectively).

The Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Authority (formerly the Barouk Authority), which is under the Ministry of Energy and Water, has the exclusive distribution rights for the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani's water to its villages and towns. The water sources in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani are from the Barouk water and springs as well as artesian wells (in Baaqline, for example).

The water sector faces challenges that are generally linked to how water is utilized, managed and exposed to pollution, in addition to faults in the domestic water network due to its age and lack of regular maintenance. The canals that carry water from the Barouk springs to the union's villages have become old, dating back to the 1960s, leading to significant water leakage. Water from Barouk, which flows to Baaqline, also experiences

loss before reaching the town. Most towns in the union suffer from water shortages due to continuous electricity cuts and rising fuel prices. This problem worsens with the increasing number of residents, especially during the summer, along with the influx of Syrian refugees after 2010. Therefore, some municipalities and individuals resort to digging deep wells to extract water for household consumption or irrigation.

Based on the consultation meetings with different relevant stakeholders, one recommendation to help improve the water sector is to increase pumping hours and ensure a fair and continuous distribution of water. Local stakeholders emphasized that it is also necessary to complete the domestic water network to cover all neighbourhoods, in addition to digging suitable artesian wells for drinking water. Regular and continuous maintenance of the domestic water networks by the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Authority was considered as essential. Additionally, local stakeholders highlighted the need to install filters for water purification in tanks and to treat high levels of limestone and some minerals.

Roads and transportation

Due to its central geographical location in Chouf District, the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is distinguished by its proximity to the coastal highway (Beirut–Sidon Road) that extends from north to south, facilitating connections with the capital, Beirut, and other coastal cities. In addition, the union is connected to neighbouring districts and the coast through main roads ranging in width from 4.5 to 8 metres, which are generally in an acceptable to good condition. In the last three years, in light of the ongoing economic

crisis, the condition of many of these main roads has deteriorated due to the lack of regular maintenance.

As for some roads within neighbourhoods of certain villages, their condition is poor and in dire need of maintenance and paving.

Most of the roads are narrow and suffer from insufficient nighttime lighting due to a lack of maintenance and electricity, posing a traffic safety hazard at night. Even during the day, these roads lack the minimum safety standards, as they lack sidewalks, road markings, traffic safety signs, speed limit signs, rainwater drainage systems, etc. Transportation costs to and from the union are high, especially since public transportation is not readily available, leading residents to use their private vehicles.

To help improve the road infrastructure in the union, concerted efforts from municipalities and the union are required, in addition to follow up with the relevant ministry.

Buildings and facilities

The structure of buildings and establishments within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is more or less consistent, with most residential buildings consisting of one to four floors. Some towns, such as Baaqline and Ain Ouzain, are known for their terracotta-roofed houses. According to the union, approximately 80 per cent are residential, while the rest include industrial, commercial and governmental buildings (e.g. municipalities, public schools), as well as touristic establishments, such as restaurants and cafes.

Most families rely on their private properties to construct their homes; thus, the majority of the buildings within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani are owned by their residents, with approximately 10 per cent of them being rented, as mentioned by the union.

The towns in the union contain old heritage houses and buildings, as well as historical structures like churches (in Mazraat El-Chouf and Baaqline) and palaces (such as the Al Hamada Palace in Baaqline). There are also historical facilities, such as mills, presses, historical bridges, archaeological tombs, etc.

One general recommendation made by local stakeholders who participated in the project was that municipalities and the UoM should limit the unplanned urban sprawl through the development/update and implementation of a proper master plan that covers the whole UoM.

Electricity

Residents rely on the public electricity supplied by the Électricité du Liban (EDL) company. EDL has a dedicated department in Baaqline to manage distribution, network maintenance, and repairs. However, the existing public electricity networks are outdated and require regular maintenance. The significant shortage of transformers and encroachments on public networks result in frequent network failures and exacerbate conflicts among residents. Residents also rely on subscribing to private generators and setting up solar power systems due to the long periods of public electricity cuts.

Therefore, to empower municipalities to contribute to local economic and social development, local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it essential to improve the state of the electricity networks, along with other basic services, such as through the supply of additional transformers.

Sanitation and solid waste management

According to a consultation session with relevant local stakeholders, some municipalities within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani are not connected to sewage networks; they only have individual or communal septic tanks (for a building or a small neighbourhood). The contents of these tanks are emptied using water extraction tankers, with the expenses borne by individuals.

There are sewage networks with secondary treatment in some villages. The treatment process involves refining at stations, such as the Jdaidet El-Chouf Station, the Ainbal Station, and the Gharifeh Station. These stations operate intermittently due to constant electricity interruptions, high diesel costs, and the municipalities' inability to cover their operation and maintenance

expenses. This delay can harm the bacteria responsible for sewage treatment.

With regard to solid waste management, from 1996 until July 2015, the Lebanese government assigned this task to a private company (Sukleen) in exchange for payment of the relatively high costs from the Independent Municipal Fund (IMF). However, as a result of the waste crisis that has plagued the country since 17 July 2015, the municipalities in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani began directly collecting waste from households and establishments according to a weekly schedule. This waste is sent for treatment to a waste sorting plant, established and managed by the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani in Khalouniyeh municipality. This facility works on sorting, organic material composting and managing the waste juice. The operation of the plant is accompanied by awareness campaigns on waste sorting from the source, in cooperation with neighbourhood committees in most of the towns, along with the distribution of leaflets to the residents about the municipalities' and the union's waste sorting plan. Due to the ongoing economic crisis, the cost of repairing the equipment at the plant has become exorbitant and may exceed the entire budget of a municipality, due to the high exchange rate of the US Dollar relative to the Lebanese Pound. In addition to the high maintenance costs, the union faces difficulties in providing fuel to the plant due to its high cost.

According to a focus group discussion that was conducted with different local stakeholders, the fundamental demand remains the completion a public sewage network covering the entire union, with wastewater treatment plants to protect the land and communal areas.

Local stakeholders also argued that awareness of the importance of solid waste separation at its source should be enhanced, and the operation of recycling facilities should be facilitated.

Telecommunications

Cellular and internet services are generally acceptable in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. They are provided by the state-owned company Ogero and

some private companies. However, the telecommunications infrastructure requires constant maintenance, especially when disruptions occur and during frequent power outages at the transmission stations.

Therefore, local stakeholders who participated in the project argued that it is essential to work on improving the quality and coverage of services through the installation of transmission boosters, noting that many households in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani still use landline telephone networks, alongside the widespread use of mobile phones. The installation of fiber optics for the internet connection has begun in the union; once completed, this will undoubtedly contribute to providing fast and stable communication for residents and businesses. Overall, municipalities and UoMs have no control on this sector, which is run by the central government through the Ministry of Telecommunications.



Social services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

Health care

Medical services are adequately provided in three hospitals in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani: Baaqline Medical Centre, Ain Ouzain Hospital, and El-Irfan Hospital in Samqaniyeh. In addition, there are multiple outpatient clinics within the union that cover various specialties, and a Lebanese Red Cross centre is present in the town of Samqaniyeh.

These facilities have been instrumental in delivering high-quality health-care services, as acknowledged by residents who commended the quality of services, despite a decline in the number of medical professionals, both doctors and nurses, due to the ongoing economic crisis and emigration linked to it.

The existing six dispensaries in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani (distributed in the towns of Samqaniyeh, Mazraat El-Chouf, Ain Ouzain, Atrine, Gharifeh and Jdaidet El-Chouf) provide continuous medical services, first aid, laboratory tests, and medications. They also focus on preventive medicine through vaccination campaigns and guidance. As for the sources of funding for these dispensaries, they are either municipalities, MoSA, or the Ministry of Public Health. Dispensaries affiliated with charitable associations rely on donations and grants for their funding. Health-care services are also supported by expatriates and some political entities.

Specialized medical care provided by the hospitals and the dispensaries covers primary treatments and emergencies, including family medicine, paediatrics, and the treatment of most diseases, as well as specialized medical services, such as ophthalmology, dermatology, surgery, and internal medicine.

Local stakeholders engaged in the project emphasized the need to provide the necessary medical supplies and medications to dispensaries. They also recommended that health awareness campaigns can be organized to increase the knowledge of residents on different health topic and enhance disease prevention.

Education

There are 26 public and private schools across the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, 19 of which are primary and secondary schools. There are also seven vocational schools, including the Agricultural School, the Commercial Sciences and English Language Centre, the Teachers' House, the Chouf Technical Institute, the Irfan Institute, the Lycée Technique, and the Generations Institute. These institutions offer education on a range of specialties, including electricity, hospitality, early childhood education, accounting, computer programming, electromechanics, cosmetology, etc.

Additionally, the union hosts two branches of the Lebanese University, the Institute of Applied Sciences in Baaqline and the Nursing College in Ain Ouzain. There are also two branches of private universities: Modern University for Business and Science (MUBS) in Samqaniyeh and American University of Culture & Education (AUCE) in Baaqline. However, the available specialties at these universities are limited.

Approximately 95 per cent of the students residing in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani receive their education in schools within the union, while less than 5 per cent receive their education outside the union. Educational services are available to Syrian refugee students in several towns, including Jdaidet El-Chouf.

The level of educational services in the union is considered good, as reflected in consistently good official exam results. The cost of educational services in the union is generally acceptable, although it varies across facilities. Although there are enough school premises, most of them, especially public schools, require rehabilitation and equipment. For example, public schools often suffer from a lack of heating in the winter due to a severe shortage of equipment and fuel, as well as frequent power outages.

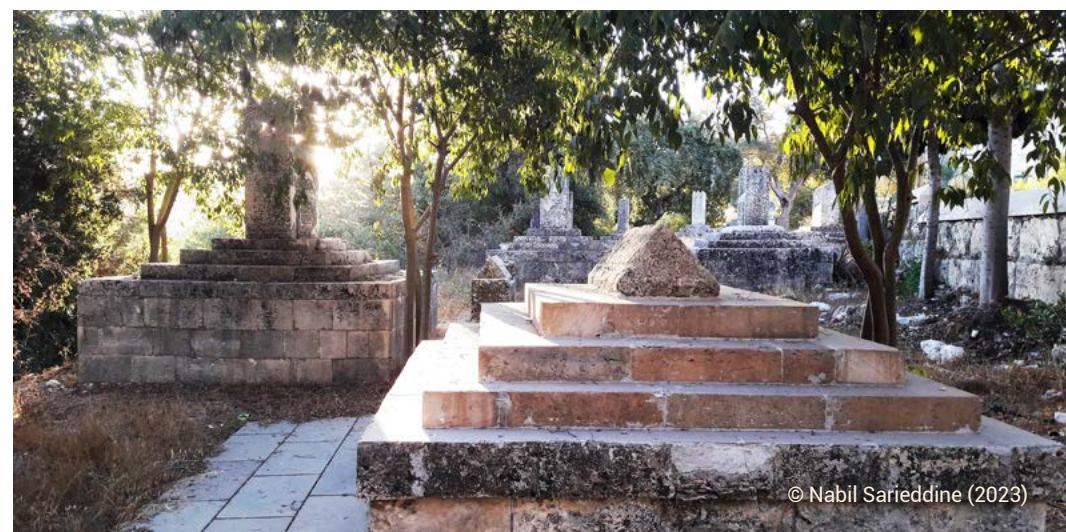
Maintenance of public school facilities is carried out through funding provided by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in collaboration with international organizations. These funds are transferred to the school's fund, which is managed under the supervision of designated teachers from the ministry. Private schools have their own management boards responsible for administration and maintenance.

Especially given the ongoing economic crisis, many families are burdened by the high tuition fees, particularly in private schools and technical institutes. They also face challenges due to the high cost of transportation for students who receive their education outside their towns.

Local stakeholders who participated in the project emphasized the need to support schools through maintenance of their facilities and the provision of necessary equipment. Additionally, they highlighted that there is a need to support the universities in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani with adding new specialties aligned with the local job market, such as establishing a branch of the Lebanese University or an official vocational school specializing in tourism, leveraging the region's existing potential.

Culture and public spaces

On the cultural front, the National Library in Baaqline serves as a key cultural institution,



offering diverse services, including cultural seminars and lectures spanning various fields, such as science and literature. In addition to the National Library, three public libraries in Ain Ouzain and Gharifeh contribute significantly to enhancing cultural activities and providing learning and educational opportunities in the union.

Furthermore, the union boasts sports clubs promoting physical activity, with a sports club in Gharifeh and two classified clubs in Mazraat El-Chouf and Baaqline. Additionally, there is a sports stadium with international specifications in Kahaleh, catering to various sports.

However, youth activities are not at the desired level, according to some stakeholders, as youth and sports clubs are largely inactive due to insufficient financial resources to fund projects.

The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani lacks public parks that could serve as spaces for relaxation, entertainment, walking, and sports activities for all age groups – with a noticeable absence of activities directed towards the elderly and individuals with special needs.

Local stakeholders emphasized that concerted efforts are required to provide such public spaces, aiming to alleviate the psychological and moral impact of ongoing crises on local communities.

This section provides an overview of the key local economy and livelihood challenges and needs in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, with a particular focus on the agriculture, tourism and industry sectors, which have been identified through fieldwork and the outcomes of meetings and discussions with relevant parties to provide real opportunities to drive the process of socioeconomic development forward in the union. Recommendations to improve these sectors will be presented separately in the next section.

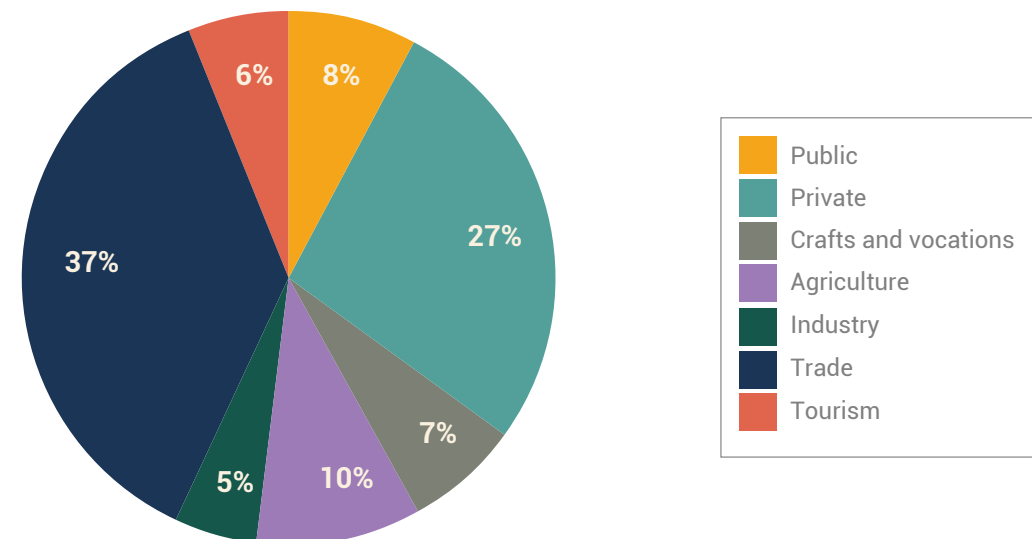


Figure 9. Distribution of employment by sector in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

Public sector

Approximately 8 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is employed in the public sector, according to the survey conducted with municipalities in the union (Figure 9). In terms of gender distribution, public sector employees are divided into 75 per cent males and 25 per cent females, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities.

The public sector employees work in a wide range of institutions, including the military, Internal Security Forces, general security, state security, as well as public schools and municipalities, in addition to various governmental institutions and departments, such as those present in the town of Baaqline the EDL, Ogero Center, Civil Court, Ecclesiastical Court, and Judicial Police Station, among others.

Private sector

Private sector employees represent around 27 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, according to the survey conducted with municipalities in the union (Figure 9). It includes employment in private schools, companies, banks, restaurants and other establishments located within or outside the union.

In terms of gender distribution, private sector employees are divided into 60 per cent males and 40 per cent females, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union.

The private sector in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani remains of moderate size, reflecting the medium-level investments in the union, primarily directed towards the commercial

sector. In recent years, especially following the onset of the ongoing economic crisis, there has been a noticeable shift towards investing in the agriculture sector (see below for more information about this sector).

Crafts and vocations

The percentage of workers in different crafts and vocations is estimated to be around 7 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani (Figure 9). In terms of gender distribution, males reportedly make up the majority (75 per cent), working in construction-related fields (painting, tiling, electrics, plumbing) as well as in crafts and industries like carpentry and blacksmithing. The remaining 25 per cent are reportedly females working in such fields as sewing, hairstyling, female adornment, and food manufacturing. In addition to the aforementioned areas, this sector also encompasses fields such as health care, education, social work, architecture and banking.

Agriculture

Agriculture does not constitute a major source of income for families in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, as about 10 per cent of the total workforce works in this sector (Figure 9), the vast majority (90 per cent) of whom are males (both youth and adults), according to information from the union president and the survey filled out by the municipalities.

The estimated area of agricultural lands in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is about 12 km² (20 per cent) of the union's total area (Figures 6 and 7). Various crops are cultivated, including olives, grapes, apples and pears, with olives being the primary and most important production. Other crops include such fruits as cherries, peaches, apricots and figs, as well as grains and 20 vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchinis, eggplants and beans.

Additionally, livestock farming (particularly cattle and poultry breeding, in addition to beekeeping) is practised, despite the overall scarcity of livestock wealth in the union, due to the high cost of animal feed, lack of financial support for its purchase, and insufficient

veterinary services. Baaqline is considered the largest centre for cattle breeding, followed by Gharifeh and Ainbal. Poultry farming is limited to families owning chicken for personal consumption (averaging 8–10 chicken). Industrial farms are scarce, mainly concentrated in Ain Ouzain, Gharifeh and Ainbal. Regarding beekeeping, the number of beehives remains low but might potentially be expanded.

Although agriculture is not a primary source of income for residents of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, there are nine agricultural cooperatives making significant efforts to encourage farmers. These cooperatives are located in Baaqline, Ain Ouzain, and Gharifeh. There is also a cooperative for olives and olive oil in Baaqline and a cold storage facility for agricultural products in Samqaniyeh. Many farmers who participated in consultative meetings conducted during the project mentioned that the main challenges in the agriculture sector include high costs of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides; expensive labour; water scarcity; lack of energy sources; challenges in marketing; small land holdings due to inheritance practices leading to the fragmentation of agricultural properties; absence of agricultural planning, and the lack of centralized storage facilities and refrigeration.

Industry

The percentage of workers in the industry sector within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani does not exceed 5 per cent of the total workforce (Figure 9), according to information from the union president and the survey filled out by the municipalities. The gender distribution is roughly equal between males and females.

Heavy industry prospects remain limited in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, as there are no large factories or facilities in this sector. The industry sector in the union is characterized by the presence of some small- to medium-sized industries that cater to local and national market needs. These include the production of agricultural, dairy and food products (e.g. jams, oil, orange blossom water, vinegar, molasses and other preserves), artisan workshops providing maintenance and repair services for used vehicles and agricultural machinery, aluminium factories, tile and stone-cutting factories, precast concrete production, soap manufacturing, clothing industry, and various

handicrafts production. Most of the production is consumed within the union's municipalities, and the surplus is exported to nearby towns.

The industry sector in the union faces various challenges, such as a lack of guidance and training for industrial production enhancement, inadequate promotion of handicraft products, high transportation costs, need for machinery development and upgrades, energy issues, and persistent power outages. Nonetheless, the industry sector plays a fundamental role in the economic development process, as it can contribute to enhancing other sectors by serving a complementary role and adding value within the economic cycle.

Trade

The trade sector is considered one of the most crucial sectors in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, with approximately 37 per cent of the total workforce engaged in this sector (Figure 9), according to information from the union president and the survey filled out by the municipalities. This sector predominantly employs young and adult males.

Commercial activities in the union are primarily concentrated in the markets of Baaqline and Jdaidet El-Chouf (Bkaatouta). However, there are also some shops and commercial establishments in the rest of the union, most of which are small- to medium-sized. Commerce within the union involves establishments selling various goods and food products, ranging from vegetables and fruits to meats and sweets. Additionally, there are stores selling clothing, accessories, building materials, furniture, and cellular devices. Fuel stations, restaurants, bakeries, as well as automobile trade and spare parts shops are also present within the union's municipalities.

The trade sector faces significant challenges, including power shortages due to frequent electricity outages and difficulties in finding affordable alternative sources. High rents for commercial spaces and the spontaneous and widespread establishment of commercial enterprises without proper planning or studies further contribute to the sector's challenges. Another challenge is related to meeting the growing needs of the local market. For instance, the sector is limited to the union, heavily relying

on existing businesses without prior studies to determine the population's needs.

Tourism

The UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani is characterized by vast green forest areas, beautiful scenic views, diverse natural resources (e.g. mountains, springs, caves, meadows, valleys and rivers) and historical landmarks. Despite the potential that these resources present, the percentage of the population working in the tourism sector does not exceed 6 per cent of the total workforce (Figure 9), according to information from the union president and the survey filled out by the municipalities. Most of them are young, distributed evenly between males and females.

The available touristic establishments are limited to some guesthouses, in addition to restaurants and cafes along the rivers in Baaqline and Gharifeh.

The tourism sector in the union faces multiple challenges, including the absence of tourism planning, the lack of an informational and marketing plan for the union at both the local and national levels, the shortage of human resources, and the lack of organized tourism interventions. The ongoing economic crisis, including the rising fuel prices, have negatively affected the sector, as other sectors, reducing the movement of visitors from other areas.

Remittances from abroad

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of emigration began in the union during the last decades of the twentieth century, with many residents leaving the area in search of a better life in other countries. This trend was exacerbated by various economic and social crises that plagued the country, leading to the loss of job opportunities, lack of security and stability, rising living costs, and other challenges.

The emigration rate within the municipalities of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani reaches around 28 per cent of the registered population, according to the survey with the municipalities of the union. There are two main types of emigrants:

- Those who left their hometowns and migrated with their families long time ago, seldom keeping in touch with relatives who stayed in Lebanon.

- Those who recently migrated mainly for employment, mostly young people, maintaining regular communication with their families in the union.

– as well as in real estate investment (property acquisition or construction), or financing small businesses and projects.

Some expatriates are financially supporting municipal services, due to the inability of the local authorities to afford them in light of the Lebanese currency devaluation. These services include supporting subscription electricity generators owned by municipalities by purchasing fuel for them; assisting the neediest families in different towns, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic; donating money or other resources to help municipalities implement infrastructure improvement projects like roads and hospitals; and purchasing chronic medications for patients facing shortages and rising prices.

Not all expatriates come from affluent backgrounds; some are well-off, while others are self-sufficient and able to support themselves and their families. The overwhelming majority of expatriates provide financial support to their families and relatives, especially considering the ongoing socioeconomic crisis. The money transferred yearly in the form of remittances is used to support the communities in meeting basic needs – such as food, rent, utility and other bills, emergency health assistance, purchasing essential goods and products, and education

Recommendations for sectors identified as key for future local socioeconomic development

Based on the consultative meetings and workshops held with representatives from municipalities within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, there was consensus on adopting the following vision for local socioeconomic development:

“ Chouf El-Souayjani: a wonderful area in the heart of a mountain, rich in its aromatic groves and forests, boasting landmarks and diverse cultures, flourishing with its agriculture and vibrant industries, and vivid with the spirit and vitality of its people. ”

To achieve this vision, it was recommended that municipalities, civil society organizations, and the private sector must come together, along with local communities, working collaboratively to foster local socioeconomic development, based on the UoM's assets and available opportunities. According to the results of the process followed during the project within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, it was suggested that there should be a focus on developing the agriculture, tourism and industry sectors due to the available human, natural and material resources that can be built upon and enhanced.

Working towards achieving agricultural, tourism and industrial development necessitates creating a road map for each sector (see the subsections “Proposed Agriculture Sector Road Map”, “Proposed Tourism Sector Road Map” and “Proposed Industry Sector Road Map” below) that includes multiple stages to

be implemented within a logical timeframe and according to the availability of funding. The road map for the agriculture, tourism and industry sectors was envisioned to encompass strategic interventions linked to four key factors or aspects:

1. Infrastructure
2. Existing institutional framework
3. Natural resources
4. Local human resources

The below section includes an overview of the identified strategic directions for the available productive sectors which are the agriculture, tourism and industry within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. However, local stakeholders engaged in the project considered that the other sectors such as trade and crafts and vocations can also be developed in a manner that aligns with the vision and directions of the union.

For instance, developing this sector requires directing efforts towards several aspects. Thus, local stakeholders involved in the project considered it crucial to focus on traders by offering educational courses on the fundamentals of buying, selling, promotion and marketing. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of encouraging new investments in this sector to address job shortages and contain youth emigration. Organizing trade fairs and markets can attract investors and increase financial inflows. Additionally, they argued that promoting individual online business initiatives enables traders to reach a broader customer base. The role of women and youth was also perceived as essential in developing the trade sector. Encouraging them to establish small projects in collaboration with local organizations through knowledge exchange and sustainable coordination is regarded as necessary. Moreover, stakeholders emphasized that efforts should be guided towards meeting the needs of the local population through prior studies determining the required patterns and sizes of enterprises. They also asked for putting efforts into launching projects related to alternative energy, promoting sustainability in the sector, and balancing economic development with environmental preservation.

To address these challenges, one of the proposed solutions for the trade sector is to rely on prior and targeted studies that determine the needs of residents and visitors in terms of the type and size of these establishments.

As for the basic and social services sectors, local stakeholders participating in the project highlighted the fundamental role that they play in supporting and enhancing other sectors. While focusing on developing the tourism, agriculture and industry sectors, providing essential social services becomes of utmost importance to maintain good living standards in the municipalities of the union. Thus, stakeholders emphasized on the importance of improving health-care services by enhancing the provision of necessary medical supplies and medications. They also suggested that health awareness campaigns should be organized to increase the residents' knowledge of the importance of health issues and disease prevention. Moreover, local stakeholders considered that supporting sports clubs and local associations to organize a variety of sports and social activities contributes to promoting recreation and a healthy lifestyle. In terms of basic urban services, local stakeholders argued that attention should be given to establishing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure for essential services, such as water, sanitation and roads. They also highlighted the necessity of increasing awareness on the importance of waste sorting at its source and facilitating the operation of the sorting facility located in Kahlouniyeh, specifically in the Al-Slailyeb area, as this could contribute to environmental preservation and pollution reduction. Finally, local stakeholders proposed the renovation of old public schools to improve educational services in the union.



Agriculture

As shown above in the presentation of the current state of sectors within the UoM of of Chouf El-Souayjani, including their available resources and potential opportunities, the agriculture sector presents a significant and real opportunity for the union's inhabitants to improve their economic situation and increase employment opportunities for both the youth and families. Despite the existence of unused lands, a valuable resource in the union, only a small percentage of the population derives their livelihood from agriculture. While many families engage in agriculture as a non-professional practice, considering it as a secondary and additional source of income, certain interventions, programmes and projects can lead to a qualitative leap in this sector. This requires the concerted efforts and capabilities of municipalities, civil society institutions, and the private sector, as well as funding from donor organizations, in order to enable the work towards achieving sustainable agricultural development.

According to local stakeholders engaged in the project, the process of developing the agriculture sector requires interventions at the level of human resources, such as the development of the workforce involved in the agriculture sector by providing them with modern farming techniques. Additionally, supporting agricultural cooperatives is considered a top priority, by providing them with the necessary agricultural machinery and establishing an organized mechanism for farmers to use these resources. Moreover, it was argued that, encouraging farmers to adopt animal production and beekeeping is an essential part of future development directions in the sector.

Furthermore, local stakeholders highlighted the importance of improving the irrigation system by establishing modern irrigation projects that contribute to preserving agricultural lands. It was suggested to research different ways and

conduct awareness campaigns to optimize the use of water sources, such as springs and groundwater, to avoid water wastage and ensure sustainability.

Local stakeholders also considered it important to establish a seed library, which contributes to providing local seeds to farmers and reducing dependence on imports. Additionally, they argued that agricultural production should not be limited only to traditional crops but should also include conducting scientific studies aimed at discovering new crops with added value, particularly medicinal plants that may find demand in foreign markets. Moreover, the promotion of organic farming, which residents show interest in due to concerns about the use of harmful agricultural pesticides, was regarded as necessary.

Local stakeholders argued that attention must also be directed towards transforming agricultural products from raw materials to finished products by establishing artisanal factories for drying fruits and packaging agricultural products.

An ongoing agricultural project, the Jabal Souk (Al-Hisbah) project, is aimed at enhancing economic activity in the entire union. The project's location is in Kahlouniyeh, specifically in the Al-Slaidyeh area. The project is funded by KFW Development Bank and implemented jointly by the UoM of of Chouf El-Souayjani, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the local associations, agricultural and environmental cooperatives, and farmers and agricultural producers. The project aims to play a central role in sustainable agricultural and environmental development and become a pivotal hub for commercial activities.

From the above recommendations, it is evident that opportunities for agriculture sector development are available within the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. Local stakeholders

engaged in the project argued that it is essential for all municipalities and relevant stakeholders in the union to work collectively and coordinate their efforts. To initiate this process, it was suggested to establish an entity or committee of agricultural stakeholders at the union level. This entity should include representatives from municipalities, agricultural cooperatives, civil society associations, farmers and the private sector. This entity was envisioned to be responsible for creating a road map for local agricultural development, built upon multiple

and progressive stages. Each stage would involve a set of programmes and interventions that address agricultural infrastructure and human skill development, considering a logical timeline. This entity should also engage with governmental, non-governmental and international supporting organizations to disseminate and promote the agreed-upon road map and priority projects. This entity could establish subcommittees to facilitate communication with a broader range of supporting entities.



Proposed agriculture sector road map

Level of difficulty to implement	Budget to implement
High	High
Moderate	Moderate
Low	Low

Short time to achieve

- Activating coordination and collaboration between relevant ministries and municipalities
- Establishing an agricultural committee within the UoM to engage with stakeholders

Medium time to achieve

Relying on solar energy as a source for operating wells for irrigation

- Enhancing the work of agricultural cooperatives and activating their role
- Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and enhancing collaboration
- Involving local development-oriented NGOs in the collaboration process
- Establishing relationships with universities to facilitate agricultural research initiatives
- Collaborating with civil defence and other relevant authorities to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for fire prevention and control
- Activating municipal and governmental accountability to halt encroachments on public properties, forests and woodlands

Collaborating with ministries and municipalities to establish a sustainable plan for infrastructure maintenance

Providing clean water for irrigation and marketing sustainable crops that do not require water

Constructing and maintaining agricultural roads

Reclaiming vast barren lands

Establishing modern irrigation systems for agriculture

Long time to achieve

Dealing with the disposal and burning of waste in the lands around towns

Working on establishing new specialized agricultural and livestock cooperatives

Establishing relationships with donor organizations to ensure project execution

Natural resources

- Preserving natural resources in the UoM and investing in them
- Protecting groundwater and springs
- Preserving soil by establishing proper waste disposal sites
- Creating reserves to preserve natural resources
- Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas

- Training youth and women on agricultural topics and modern techniques
- Guiding youth to reduce migration
- Activating the relationship with expatriates and involving them in financing and marketing projects
- Training residents on food processing and homemade food production
- Activating agricultural guidance and training
- Developing and implementing regular awareness campaigns to encourage residents to engage in agricultural activities
- Developing and implementing advertising and media campaigns to highlight the importance of agricultural products in the union
- Encouraging youth to participate in agricultural cooperatives and enter the job market

Infrastructure

Institutional framework

Natural resources

Human resources

Tourism

In the tourism sector, the natural and historical assets of the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani provide an opportunity for economic development. Existing touristic attractions and basic touristic infrastructure, such as guesthouses in Mazraat El-Chouf and Kahlouniyeh, contribute to the union's appeal. However, the challenging economic conditions affecting the general population, prevalent in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani as in other regions of Lebanon, necessitate concerted efforts to identify and provide alternative income sources that enable dignified living. While the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani has the essential elements to enhance the tourism sector, massive efforts and resources are required to develop the sector, in terms of infrastructure improvements as well as the joint work and commitment of governmental, civil and private local institutions, each according to its capabilities.

One of the key steps identified by local stakeholders involved the activation of touristic sites and the promotion of health tourism and ecotourism. This encompasses the development and maintenance of touristic landmarks and the provision of the necessary infrastructure to welcome visitors. Furthermore, developing a tourism map for the union, outlining key touristic sites, was considered crucial. These sites can be activated through the creation of trails and touristic paths connecting them to one another.

Industry

Despite the weaknesses of the industry sector in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani, there are avenues to strengthen it. This requires massive efforts and resources in terms of infrastructure improvements and the commitment of various governmental, civil and private local institutions that should work together, each according to its capabilities.

According to local stakeholders involved in this project, enhancing the sector can be achieved by preserving distinctive traditional crafts in towns, addressing their challenges, and supporting them with necessary supplies. Linking artisanal products, especially those with a heritage character (such as weaving, needlework and embroidery), to exhibitions is recommended to create more employment opportunities.

It was argued that effective online tourism promotion is necessary. Social media platforms and websites can be utilized to introduce the touristic attractions in the union and attract more tourists.

Regarding hospitality, training homeowners of small guesthouses on effective business management and marketing outside the union was identified as an important step to attract more guests.

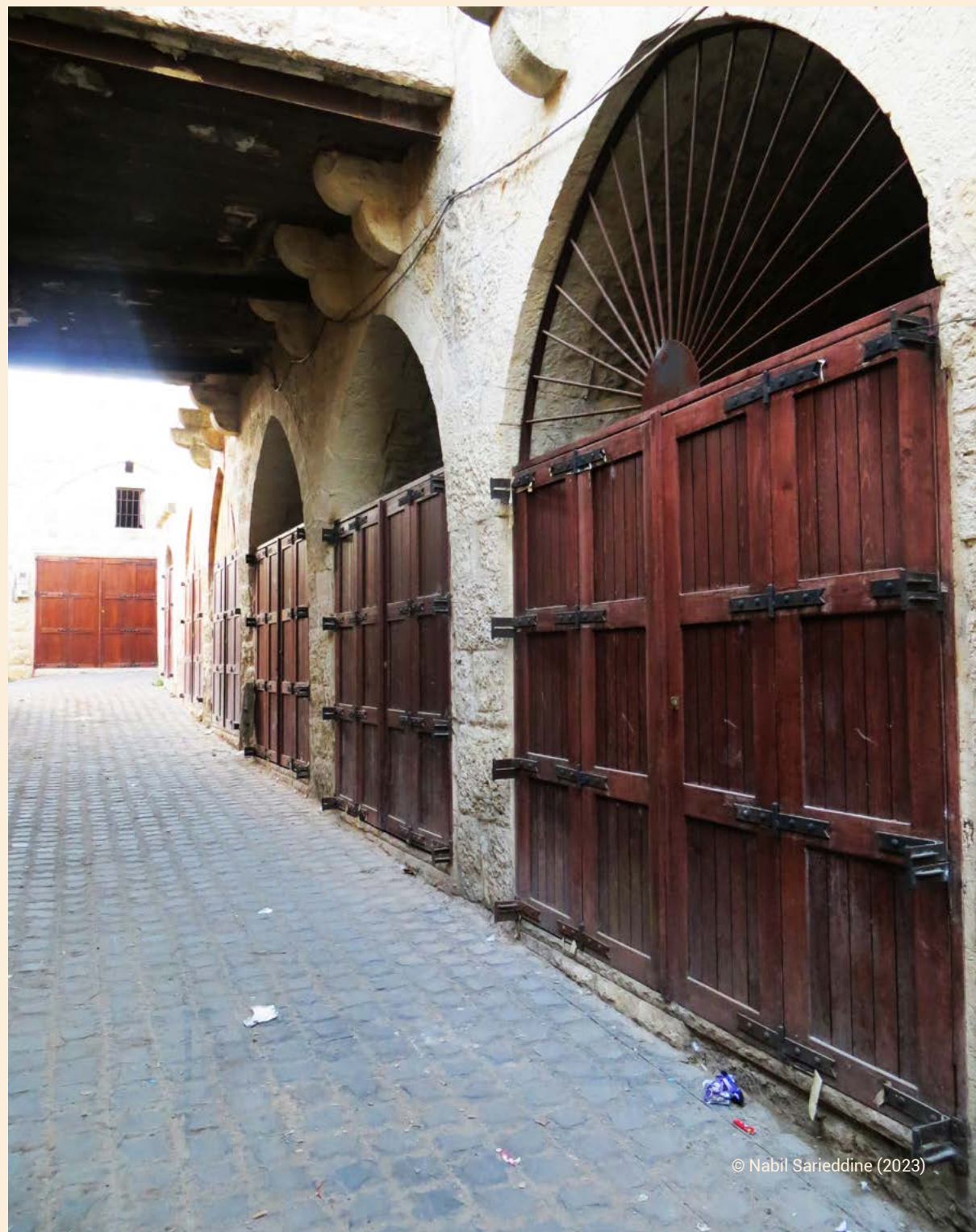
Local stakeholders highlighted the significant role that cultural, recreational and sports activities can play in attracting tourists. They argued that organizing annual festivals that bring together expatriates and encourage them to invest in the union can have a positive impact on the local economy.

Collaboration and coordination among various community members and organizations – including municipalities, associations, clubs, local leaders, and the private sector – were regarded as essential by local stakeholders for the activation of the tourism sector in the UoM of Chouf El-Souayjani. Finally, the integration between the tourism and agriculture sectors was considered important in terms of enhancing the provision of local products to tourists and increasing employment opportunities in the union.

Furthermore, local stakeholders emphasized the importance of protecting existing small industries and developing certain manufacturing crafts through specialized training courses that can help elevate competencies and skills. They expressed the necessity of establishing cooperatives for these crafts to help overcome the financial obstacles faced by artisans working individually.

Raising awareness of the importance of traditional crafts through the establishment of clubs and associations, as well as collaboration with municipalities was considered as necessary. It requires protecting local production from external competition and securing markets for product distribution both locally and internationally.

Local stakeholders also emphasized the importance of investing in alternative energy projects as a means to mitigate negative impacts on the environment and achieve sustainability in industrial production.



Proposed tourism sector road map

- Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant ministries
- Establishing a local committee within the UoM to communicate with stakeholders

Level of difficulty to implement	Budget to implement
High	High
Moderate	Moderate
Low	Low

Short time to achieve

- Maintaining roads leading to landmarks and touristic areas
- Maintaining road lighting and securing electricity through solar energy
- Relying on solar energy as a source to provide energy for touristic areas and facilities

- Enhancing collaboration between municipalities and the private sector
- Striving to develop a tourism plan for the union
- Involving local NGOs dedicated to local development in the tourism planning process

- Preserving the natural resources in the UoM and investing in them
- Protecting and maintaining existing rivers and springs

- Training and empowering youth to provide tourism services
- Training residents on food processing and local food production
- Organizing regular touristic festivals on a regular basis
- Preparing and implementing regular awareness campaigns to encourage residents to engage in the tourism development process
- Creating and executing advertising and media campaigns about touristic sites and tourism-related activities in the union

Medium time to achieve

- Providing basic services in the union (clean water, electricity, roads, sanitation, solid waste collection, etc.)
- Striving to establish a fixed transportation link from major cities to the UoM to promote tourism

- Activating municipal and official accountability to prevent encroachments on tourist landmarks, forests, woodlands, springs, rivers, etc.
- Building relationships with donor organizations to facilitate project implementation

- Limiting urban sprawl at the expense of wooded areas
- Preserving and protecting the existing archaeological and heritage sites in the union
- Establishing reserves to conserve natural resources and attract visitors and tourists

- Encouraging families to establish guesthouses and rooms to enhance local tourism

Long time to achieve

- Ensuring human resources for the protection and preservation of touristic and archaeological sites

- Working on increasing and incentivizing investments in tourism projects

- Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas

- Activating relations with expatriates and encouraging them to invest in tourism projects

Infrastructure

Institutional framework

Natural resources

Human resources

Conclusion

The developed roadmaps in the 10 booklets clearly show that advancing local socio-economic development in the 10 unions be it in the agriculture, industry, or tourism sectors is indeed a complex and lengthy process, yet not impossible. This path requires collective and proper local strategic visioning coupled with clear commitment by all stakeholders and serious efforts at different levels, in addition to significant financial resources and solid coordination local structures and mechanisms.

It is also evident from the roadmaps that UoMs, with the contribution from municipalities enrolled, could initiate primary steps that do not require significant funding but still support and contribute to the implementation of the overall vision on the long run.

It should also be clear to the unions and to the other local actors that the implementation of the roadmaps requires collective efforts from all. This includes local communities, municipalities, UoMs, SDCs, civil society organizations, and the private sector. To facilitate this collaboration, it's proposed to create a local advisory body (committee) for each identified sector. It is advised that the committee to be established by the UoM and include representatives of local public and private entities and institutions. The main role of these committees will be to lead and develop practical action plans to commence the implementation of the road map for each respective sector. Members of these committees must commit to providing the time and efforts necessary to achieve progress at the level of each sector.

The next step would entail that each committee individually contacts concerned ministries under each sector to learn more about the ministries' strategies and plans and their financial and human capacity to support and guide the union in the process of tourism, industry, and/or agricultural development, especially with regard to developing local strategies for the three sectors.

Based on outcomes of the meetings with relevant ministries, the designated committees would make the necessary contacts with relevant universities and donors to seek the potential financial and technical support aiming to developing a strategy and an executive plan for each sector.

Realistically speaking and with the commitment of local actors, the above-mentioned tasks from the creation of local committees to establishing partnerships to identifying entities supporting the development of the sector strategy, should not exceed a period of six months. The strategy to be prepared for each sector is expected to propose a detailed doable business plan with a reasonable timeline and a clear budget.