

A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Caza Zgharta, North Governorate



الجمهورية اللبنانية
وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية

In partnership with the
Ministry of Social Affairs



UN-HABITAT



Ambasciata d'Italia
Beirut

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A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Caza Zgharta, North Governorate

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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 A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Caza Zgharta of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Caza Zgharta, 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.

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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

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.

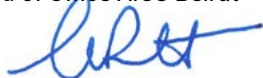
In this context, the socio-economic focus given in developing the road map of the 10 Unions of Municipalities is really relevant. The adopted approach has enhanced the dialogue among the Unions of Municipalities, the Municipalities, the Social Development Centres of the Ministry Social of Affairs, the 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 |
| CNRS-L | National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon |
| DEM | Digital elevation model |
| EDL | Électricité du Liban |
| GIS | Geographic information system |
| MoEW | Ministry of Energy and Water |
| MoSA | Ministry of Social Affairs |
| 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 |
| UoM | Union of municipalities |

Executive summary

The preparation of this booklet, which outlines strategic directions of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Caza Zgharta in North 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 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 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 Caza Zgharta, 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 Caza Zgharta, local stakeholders recommended to focus on the agriculture and tourism 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.

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.

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)
- Local community

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 developed as part of the system-strengthening process of the project for UoMs to start the

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.

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.

² 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.

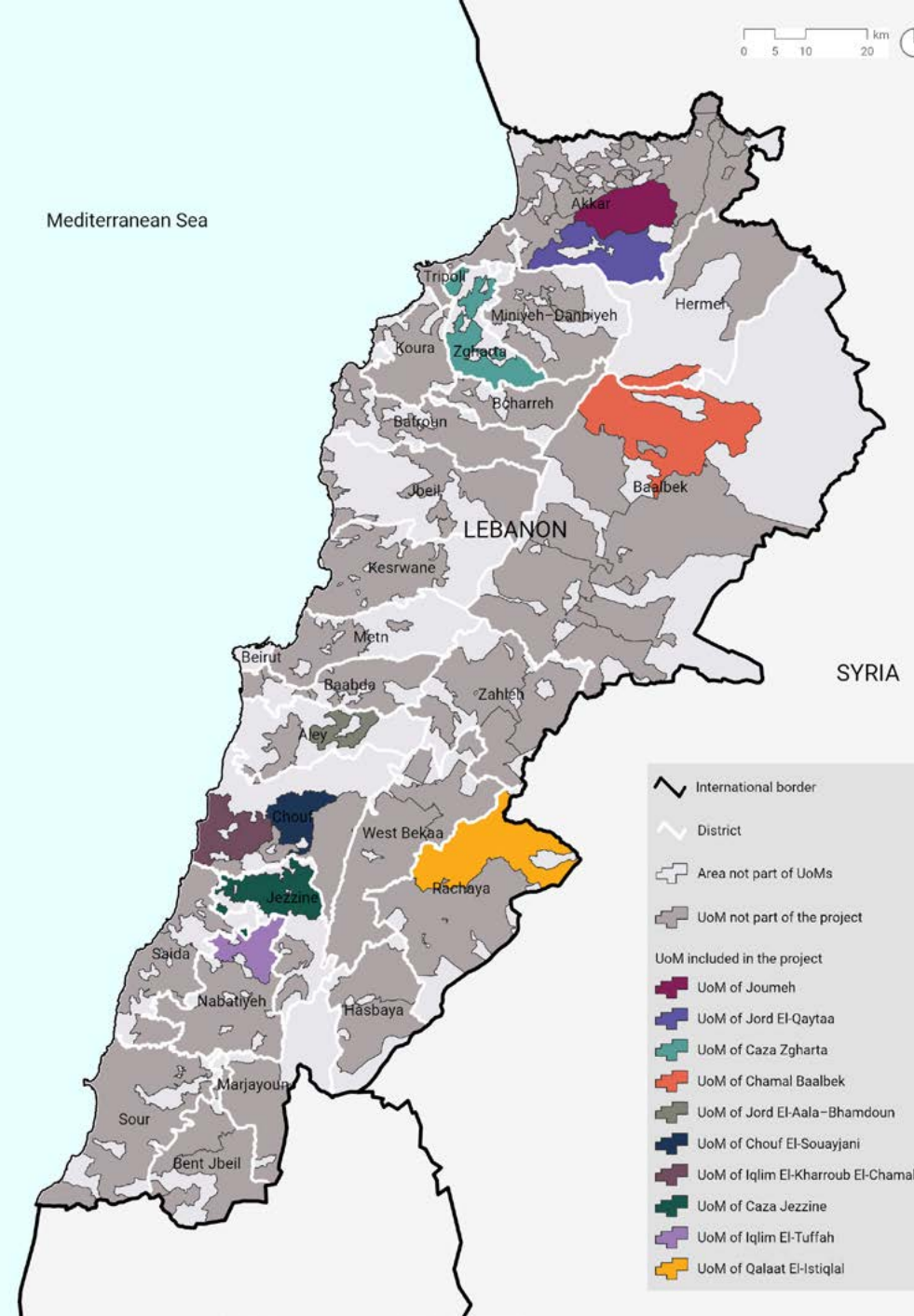
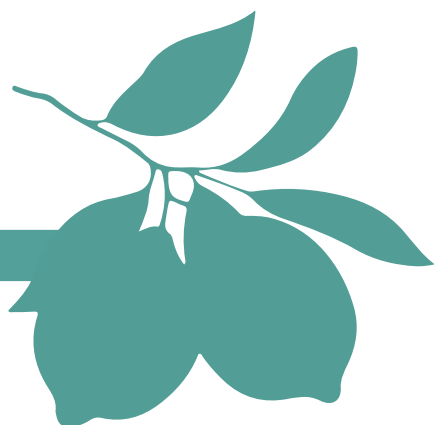


Figure 1. Location of 10 UoMs selected under this project. Source: UN-Habitat (2023).

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.

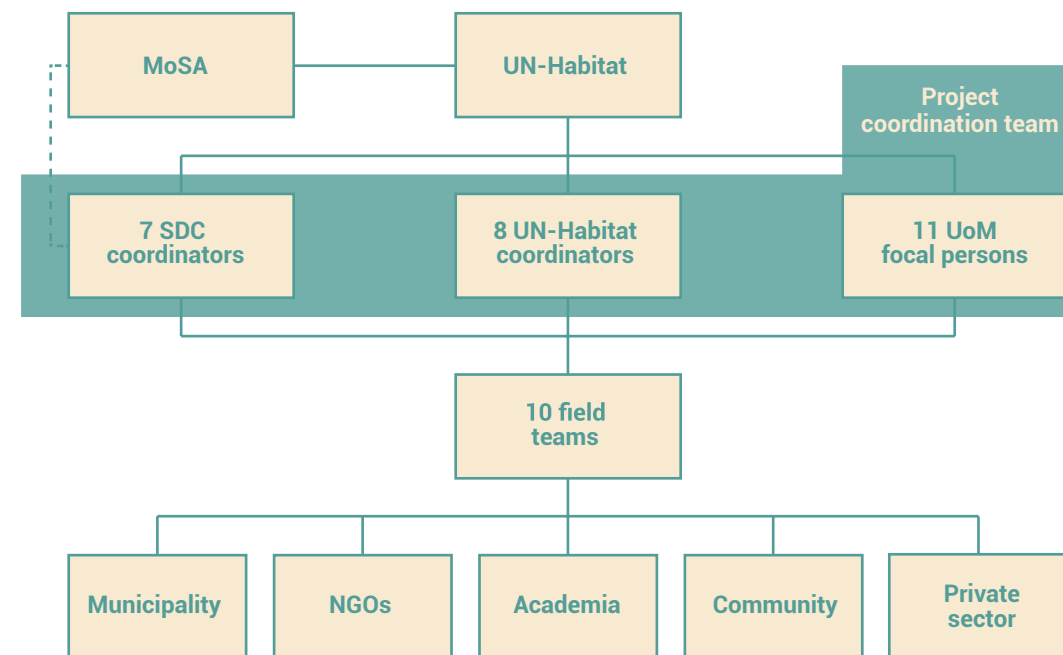


Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the development of booklets as part of the project.

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.

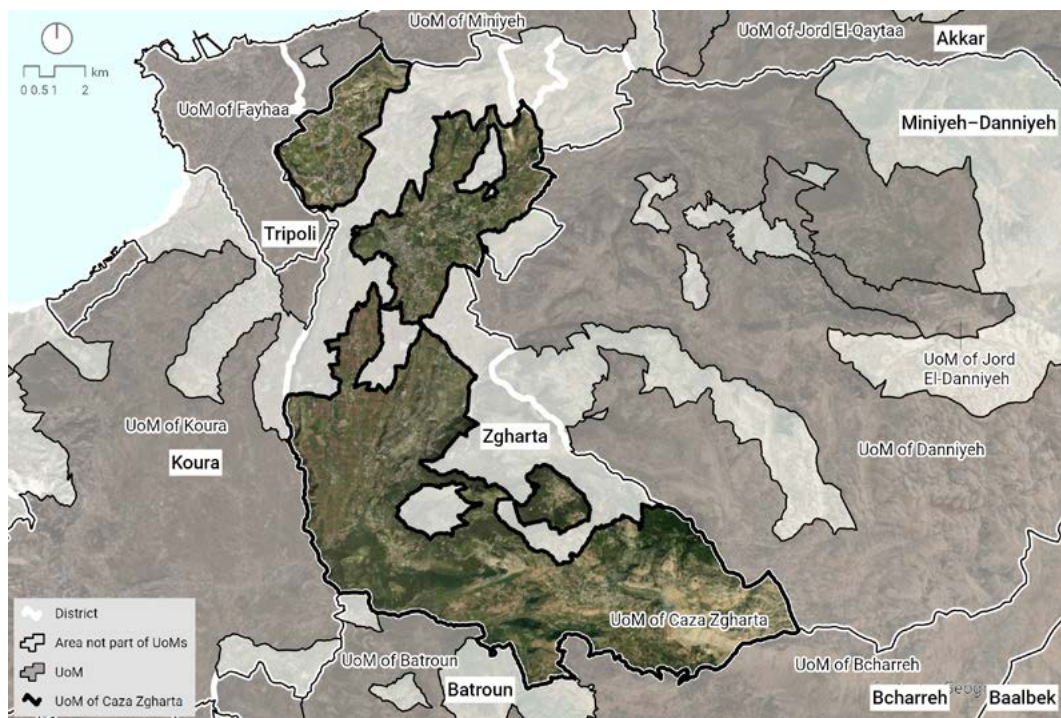


Figure 5. Satellite image of the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

Source: UN-Habitat (2023). The high-resolution satellite image displayed in this map was extracted from Esri online World Imagery.

The UoM of Caza Zgharta is renowned for the quality of its fruit-bearing trees, such as citrus fruits, apples, pears, cherries, olives, almonds, grapes, apricots, and others.

Agricultural areas span 44.58 per cent (51.16 km²) of the UoM's total area. Wooded lands within the UoM account for 29.24 per cent (33.55 km²) of the total area, while artificial areas cover

13.25 per cent (15.2 km²). Unproductive areas (unused plots) make up 11.42 per cent (13.10 km²), rivers 0.02 per cent (0.02 km²), grassland 1.49 per cent (1.71 km²), and water bodies 0.01 per cent (0.02 km²) of the UoM's area (Figures 6 and 7).⁶

⁶ The figures are based on the land cover/land use classification system level 1, calculated by the National Centre 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.

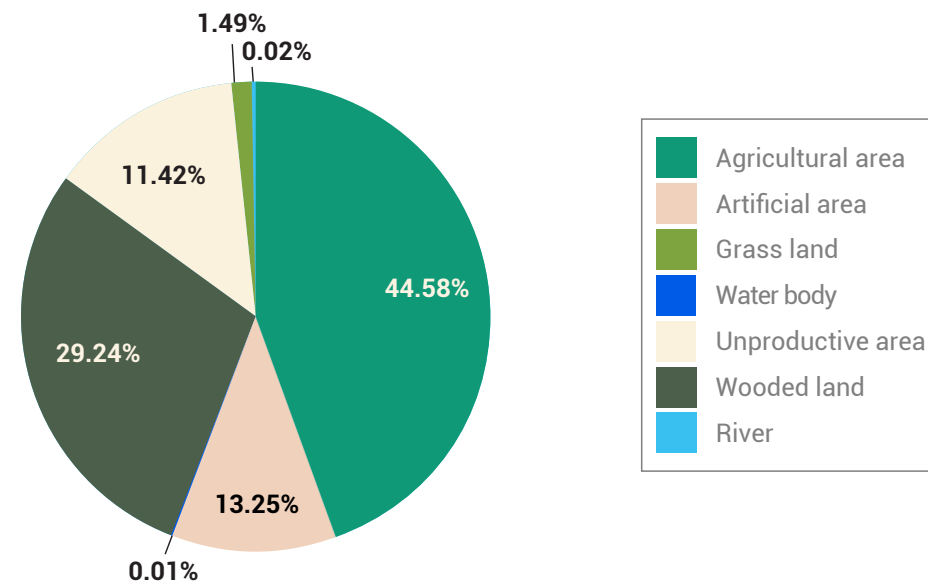


Figure 6. Land cover/land use as a percentage of the total area of the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

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 Centre for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).

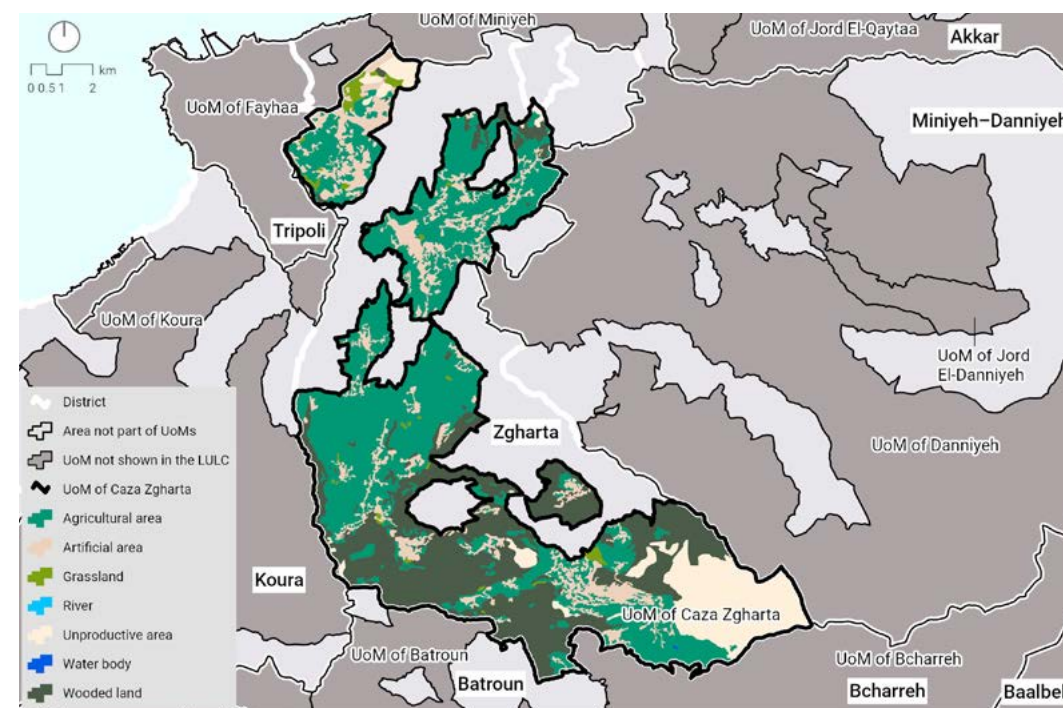


Figure 7. Land cover/land use within the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

Source: UN-Habitat (2023), adapted from Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Centre for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).

Population overview

The total population of the UoM of Caza Zgharta is approximately 141,000, with non-Lebanese (mostly Syrian refugees) constituting around 17 per cent, according to surveys conducted with the 25 municipalities of union. Palestinian and Iraqi families also live within the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

The population of the UoM of Caza Zgharta is characterized by a relatively high percentage of children and youth, together accounting for over 40 per cent of the total population, according to the survey filled by the municipalities' mayors (Figure 8).

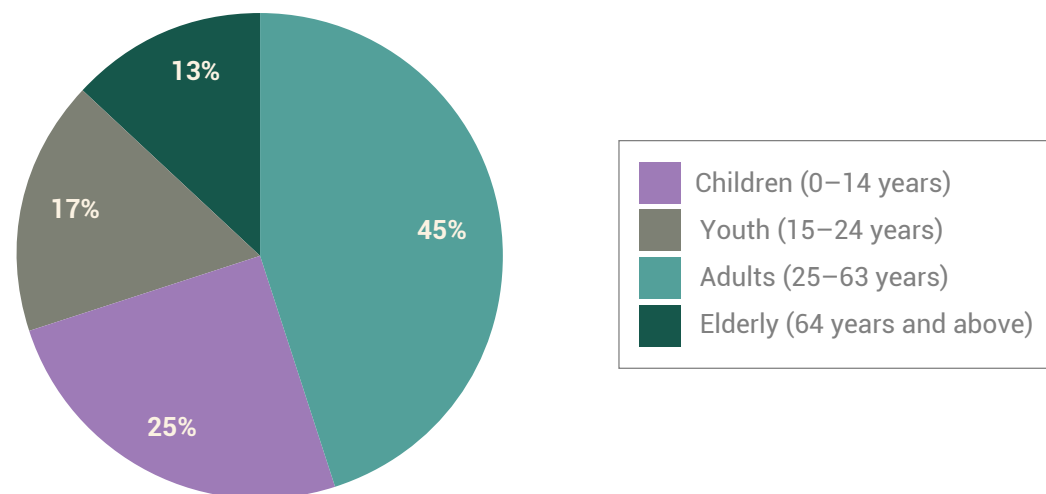


Figure 8. Distribution of the UoM of Caza Zgharta's population by age.
Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

Expatriates from the UoM of Caza Zgharta are estimated to form around 20 per cent of the registered population, according to the survey conducted with the 25 municipalities of the union. They reside in different countries, such as Australia, Canada, France, the United States, Germany, the Gulf countries, etc.

Emigration mainly began around four decades ago but has increased in recent years, particularly

after 2019, due to the ongoing economic crisis. Some expatriates contribute to financially supporting their families and relatives residing in the UoM of Caza Zgharta by sending regular remittances. According to the surveys filled by the municipalities' mayors these remittances amount to around USD 1.5 million, helping these families face, at least to a certain degree, the challenges brought about by the economic and financial crisis in the country.

Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

The state of basic services in the UoM of Caza Zgharta is considered acceptable, as these services are available, although to varying degrees among sectors and municipalities. However, like in the rest of Lebanon, the quality and quantity of basic services in the union 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

All households in the UoM of Caza Zgharta are connected to water networks that are fed from springs and artesian wells. The union has several important sources that provide water to its residents. They include the Rachaaine spring, the Qadi spring, the Mar Sarkis spring in Ehden, the Jouait spring, the Ardeh spring, the Achach springs, and the Mar Sarkis spring in Baslouqit, in addition to artesian wells. The water networks are managed and maintained by the North Lebanon Water Establishment under the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW). As for private artesian wells, they are managed by their owners.

Despite the availability of water sources, the water sector faces multiple challenges, with the condition of the water distribution networks below the required standards.

Moreover, like other areas of Lebanon, there is a rationing system for water distribution due to frequent power outages, and the lack of alternative energy sources forces the use of costly fuels for water pumping, placing a significant financial burden on the population. Therefore, the local stakeholders who were engaged in the assessment and analysis process that informed the production of this booklet argued that it is necessary to enhance preventive measures to maintain the cleanliness and purity of water sources, develop and maintain the water network infrastructure, address water pollution, and improve water quality by taking strict measures to control the discharge of pollutants into water sources and waterways. It was considered important to enhance monitoring and inspection efforts to ensure compliance with environmental and public health standards.

Roads and transportation

The main roads connecting towns and major areas in the UoM of Caza Zgharta are generally good, providing ease of travel and access to and from them. Moreover, road safety conditions are usually met, with road planning, directional signage, speed limits, and mirrors at bends in place. The street lighting network is also in good condition, according to mayors, Halba SDC coordinator, and other stakeholders who were consulted with as part of the project.

However, the secondary roads, especially within towns, tend to be narrow, leading to traffic congestion in some cases.

In addition, there is a pressing need to rehabilitate many of the retaining walls on public roads, as they have become a safety hazard.

Moreover, public transportation options are limited in the UoM of Caza Zgharta, except for the festivals available during the summer from Ehden to Zgharta. The lack of public transportation is a significant issue due to the general economic challenges, resulting in residents, especially students and employees, incurring high transportation costs.

Therefore, local stakeholders engaged in this project emphasized that more attention and efforts is needed from the relevant authorities to rehabilitate retaining walls for ensuring the safety of pedestrians. They also considered it essential to improve the few existing and provide additional public transportation services. This is especially important for the more vulnerable segments of society to alleviate their financial burden and facilitate their movement between towns and different areas within the union.

Buildings and facilities

Residential buildings in the UoM of Caza Zgharta vary in their structure. Buildings located on main streets typically consist of three floors (and some four to five floors), while those in the inner neighbourhoods of towns are generally composed of a ground floor and an upper floor, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union.

In small villages, the majority of residential buildings are owner-occupied. In larger towns, the ratio of owned to rented buildings is 60 to 40. Among these structures, primarily designated for residential use, there are a total of 18,500 housing units, making up 90 percent of the total building stock. The remaining 10 per cent includes non-residential buildings, such as commercial buildings (approximately 1,000 buildings, as well as public and private facilities like schools, hospitals and other health-care centres, governmental offices, restaurants, hotels, entertainment centres, etc.)

Like in many Lebanese areas, the UoM of Caza Zgharta experiences numerous violations related to construction, non-compliance with zoning regulations, and encroachments on public properties, such as encroachment on public sidewalks and unauthorized construction.

To enhance residential conditions and address violations in the UoM of Caza Zgharta, local stakeholders who participated in the project recommended focusing on enforcing relevant existing regulations, protecting public spaces, raising awareness among residents, and fostering collaboration among municipalities.

Electricity

All the towns in the UoM of Caza Zgharta are connected to the public electricity network. However, the network infrastructure is old and has not undergone rehabilitation and maintenance for a long time. It requires upgrades and renovation, based on data collected from municipalities in the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

Electricity in the union is primarily supplied by the state-owned company Electricité du Liban (EDL). Due to very frequent power outages, residents often rely on alternative energy sources, such as private generators and solar power systems, if they have the means to do so.

Regarding management and maintenance, the MoEW is responsible for managing and maintaining the public electricity network, while alternative generators are typically managed by their owners. Some generators are operated by municipalities or charitable organizations. In all cases, consumers pay regular connection and consumption fees.

Besides the frequent power outages mentioned above, the electricity sector faces significant other challenges, including cable theft and encroachments on the public network. These issues can disrupt the reliability of electricity services and pose security and maintenance concerns.

To address these issues, one of the recommendations highlighted by local stakeholders who participated in the project was to take measures to protect the public electricity network from theft and encroachments. Improving service quality, providing consistent electricity supply, upgrading the infrastructure, and conducting regular maintenance were mentioned as essential steps to meet the needs of the residents in the union. Collectively, these measures would not only enhance the reliability of electricity services but also contribute to the safety and overall well-being of the communities in the union.

Sanitation

Regarding the sewage system in the union, the percentage of buildings connected to sewage networks does not exceed 60 per cent. Approximately 40 per cent of the houses rely on septic tanks for their sewage disposal, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union. This situation has resulted in the seepage of wastewater into groundwater and waterways, leading to pollution of the water used in homes and for irrigation.

Furthermore, many sewage treatment plants are struggling to function properly due to technical issues and other challenges. There is a wastewater treatment plant shared between Arjes, Bnechaai and Bnechaai Lake, which operates continuously. As for the treatment plants in Ijbaa and Ain Tourine, they are operated by the North Lebanon Water Establishment (in the MoEW) only during the summer season. There are some other treatment plants in certain towns, but they may not operate effectively due to technical issues. Sewage water is discharged in the rivers.

To address these issues, local stakeholders who participated in the project recommended activating the National Strategy for the Wastewater sector. This plan includes the establishment of a central wastewater treatment plant in Tripoli to serve the regions of Zgharta, Koura, Tripoli and Danniye. Additionally, there emphasized the need to address the low number of treatment plants, maintain the existing ones, secure the necessary fuels for their operation, and minimize the discharge and seepage of untreated wastewater and the accumulation of waste into groundwater, drinking water networks, and irrigation water.

Solid waste management

Solid waste collected from different areas of the UoM of Caza Zgharta is disposed of in an informal landfill in the Bchannine area. Each municipality contracts private companies to collect and transport waste to the landfill. This situation places a high financial burden on municipalities in terms of the costs associated with waste collection and disposal. Additionally, the lack of a sanitary landfill exacerbates the challenges related to managing waste in a healthy and safe manner.

A private company is responsible for sorting solid waste at the Bchannine landfill to recycle some materials and dispose of the remaining waste. This company used to collect recyclables from households, but due to the high transportation and operation costs, its recycling activities in the union have decreased.

Therefore, the union needs comprehensive solutions for solid waste management, including

measures to improve waste collection and provide facilities for its sanitary and sustainable processing. Local stakeholders who were consulted as part of the project recommended that these solutions could include establishing advanced sanitary landfills; promoting the use of waste-to-resource conversion technologies; and enhancing the management of waste collection, transportation and disposal processes in efficient and cost-effective ways.

It was also emphasized that improving waste management requires collaboration among different entities, including municipalities, private companies, and other relevant authorities, to ensure the implementation of sustainable waste disposal strategies and reduce associated negative environmental and health impacts.

Telecommunications

All the towns in the UoM of Caza Zgharta have access to both landline and cellular phone networks. However, the state of the networks can be described as average to poor, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union. Despite relatively good transmission quality, the networks face some challenges, primarily related to power outages and the need for maintenance and rehabilitation.

Some transmission stations have faced periodic disruptions, due to the recent fuel crisis and technical issues, impacting the service quality and network coverage. Maintenance teams encounter challenges in meeting the regular maintenance needs and promptly addressing faults, leading to service instability issues for users in the union.

Therefore, according to a consultation with relevant stakeholders, it is essential to enhance the management and maintenance of the telecommunications networks in the union. This necessitates cooperation and coordination among all relevant parties to improve network quality, ensure its stability, and sustain service availability for users. 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

There are 16 health centres in the UoM of Caza Zgharta, including public health-care centres affiliated with the Ministry of Public Health or MoSA, as well as others that are privately owned or affiliated with religious organizations. In addition, there are four hospitals, one of which is owned by the government, while the remaining three are private, based on the survey filled by the municipalities of the union. Primary health-care services are provided either through public health-care centres or private clinics. In cases requiring advanced medical treatment, the population turns to public or private hospitals, or clinics. Public health-care centres provide partially subsidized services and are managed and maintained by their respective ministries. These centres are easily accessible to all segments of the population in the union.

However, the health-care sector faces several challenges, the most significant of which is the lack of health-care services in the central and sparsely populated areas (starting from Raskifa to Kfarsghab). In addition, there are high transportation and treatment costs associated with accessing and receiving services in the private health-care centres located in the city of Zgharta. Moreover, the government hospital in Ehdn suffers from a shortage of human resources and lack of logistical and financial support.

To address these issues, local stakeholders in the UoM of Caza Zgharta recommended the need to enhance the capacity of medical staff, provide incentives to attract health-care professionals, and support health-care centres to enhance their physical and human resources. Such support would secure the availability of necessary medical supplies and medications as well as enhance their capacity to cover operational costs, ensuring the sustainable operation of these centres. It would also entail providing them with specialized medical staff, focusing on infrastructure maintenance, and securing the necessary equipment.

Education

In the UoM of Caza Zgharta, there are 7 public and 14 private schools, in addition to 3 secondary schools, 8 complementary schools, 5 kindergartens, 5 technical institutes, and 1 Dar Al Moualimin, 1 private university (Antonine University in Mejdlayya) based on the survey filled by the municipalities of the union.

Educational services are readily available to all segments of the population in the union, ensuring access to education for everyone. Public schools are free, while the costs of private schools vary, depending on the school.

Private schools are independently managed and maintained, while public schools are managed by and receive maintenance support from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

However, the education sector faces some challenges, including a relatively high dropout rate, as well as issues related to the teaching staff, who are affected by the ongoing economic crisis. Teachers' salaries are no longer sufficient to cover their living expenses, and the high transportation costs further burden them. All of this has had negative repercussions on the educational process in public schools. Additionally, the lack of public transportation options puts a financial strain on students who have to commute to their schools.

As for vocational and technical education in the union, the available institutes do not align with the local jobmarket needs in terms of skills to support the available resources in the union, such as facilities, restaurants, laboratories, and other tourist facilities.

Given this context, local stakeholders engaged in the project argued that efforts are required to provide public transportation options to support students and teachers with their commutes to schools. Incentives should also be provided to teachers and educational staff to enhance

their performance and motivation. It was also recommended that vocational institutes should add new specializations that meet the local job market's needs, and the role of practical laboratories in these institutes should be strengthened. Furthermore, local stakeholders argued that accelerated vocational training

programmes should be organized to qualify individuals for specific fields needed in the union, such as the tourism industry. It was argued that these efforts could help create job opportunities, especially for young people; address the issue of school dropouts; and contribute to social stability in the union.

Local economy and livelihoods: Current state

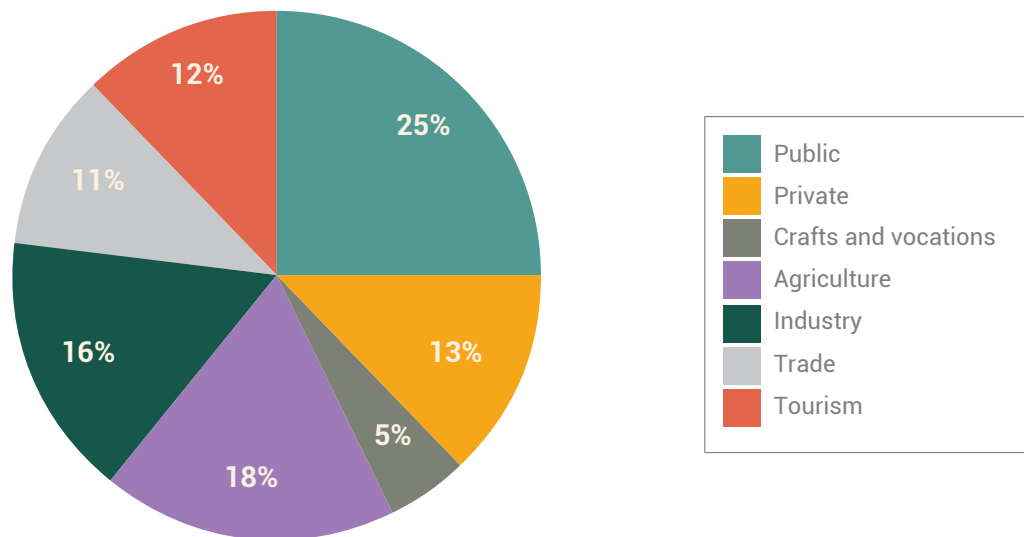


Figure 9. Distribution of employment by sector in the UoM of Caza Zgharta.
Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

This section provides an overview of the key local economy and livelihood challenges and needs in the UoM of Caza Zgharta, with a particular focus on the agriculture and tourism 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 UoM of Caza Zgharta. Recommendations to improve these two sectors will be presented separately in the next section.

Before delving into the state of the different local economy sectors, a general observation that applies to all, according to information collected from relevant stakeholders, is that they have all been significantly and directly affected by the compounding crises in the country. Many stores and enterprises have stopped operating, and a considerable number of employees have been

laid off or experienced a sharp decrease in the value of their salaries due to the huge devaluation of the Lebanese currency. The increased unemployment rates, especially among educated individuals, have led many to resort to – or consider – moving to main cities in other areas of the country or emigration abroad.

Public sector

The percentage of people employed in the public sector is estimated to be approximately 25 per cent of the total workforce in the UoM of Caza Zgharta, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9).

In terms of age distribution, 35 per cent of those employed in the public sector are young (under 35 years old) and 65 per cent are adults (35 years and older). As for gender distribution,

males constitute 65 per cent of the public sector employees, while females make up 35 per cent.

Regarding the fields of work in the public sector, based on the survey filled by the municipalities, the internal security sector absorbs the largest share of public sector employees, accounting for up to 45 per cent. Others are employed in ministries (estimated to be around 20 per cent) or in public schools (around 34 per cent). Those holding army positions represent a small percentage, not exceeding 1 per cent of the total number of public sector employees.

Private sector

The percentage of employees in the private sector is estimated to be around 13 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9). The age categories of private sector workers is as follows: around 40 per cent are young (16–24), 40 per cent are adults (25–54), and 20 per cent are elderly (55 and older). In terms of gender distribution, females constitute 80 per cent of the private sector workforce, while males make up 20 per cent.

The areas of work in the private sector are limited to banks, private schools, retail stores, companies, offices, private hospitals and clinics – located both within and outside the union.

Crafts and vocations

The percentage of individuals employed in the crafts and vocations sector is estimated to be approximately 5 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the UoM of Caza Zgharta (Figure 9). The majority (around 70 per cent) are adults (25–54), while the remaining approximately 30 per cent are young (16–24). In terms of gender distribution, males make up 80 per cent of the workforce in this sector, while females constitute 20 per cent.

This sector includes a variety of crafts and vocations, such as automotive mechanics, car body repair and painting, auto electrical work, tire repair, watch repair, household gas filling, tailoring and clothing alteration, automotive and household glass installation, electrical tools repair, bookbinding, shoe repair, furniture painting, woodwork, sculpture, etc.

Agriculture

The estimated area of agricultural lands is approximately 51 km² (around 45 per cent) of the union's total area (Figures 6 and 7). In terms of employment, about 18 per cent of the total workforce in the union is engaged in agriculture (Figure 9), with 10 per cent categorized as young workers (16–24), 70 per cent as adults (25–54), and 10 per cent as elderly (55 and older). Males make up 90 per cent of the agricultural workforce, while females constitute 10 per cent.

Agricultural practices in the UoM are diverse. They include the cultivation of various crops, such as olives, citrus fruits, apples, pears, grapes, peaches, almonds and vegetables. The coastal areas focus on the cultivation of olives, citrus fruits, grapes and peaches, while apple cultivation, along with that of pears and some vegetables, is prevalent in the mountainous regions.

In addition, the agriculture sector encompasses the production of olive oil, cheese and other dairy products, bulgur, wine, grape molasses, soap, fruit preserves, pickles, etc. However, this production is primarily home-based and serves local consumption, except for olive oil, which is marketed in the union's big towns and other Lebanese regions.

The UoM of Caza Zgharta has nine agricultural cooperatives involved in various fields, such as the cultivation of vegetables and fruits, beekeeping, and home-based food production. The UoM also has other agricultural institutions, including agricultural pharmacies, agricultural nurseries, an agricultural advisory centre, and a forestry centre. Additionally, there are plans to establish an agricultural vocational school, pending approval from relevant authorities.

Among the challenges faced in the agricultural sector are issues such as random pesticide use, improper fertilization, a lack of soil testing for crop suitability, inefficient distribution of agricultural products, and the absence of an agricultural calendar outlining various activities and tasks related to agriculture throughout the year. Other concerns include domestic and international market competition, ineffective agricultural cooperatives, and a shortage of skilled labour in the sector.

Industry

The percentage of individuals employed in the industry sector in the UoM of Caza Zgharta is approximately 16 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9). Around 15 per cent of the workers in this sector are classified as young (16-24), 80 per cent as adults (25-54), and 5 per cent as elderly (55 and above). In terms of gender distribution, males make up 80 per cent of the workforce in this sector, with the remaining 20 per cent constituting females.

The industry sector in the union relies on several small and medium-sized facilities, covering different industries, including the manufacturing of furniture, plastic bags and other plastic products, tiles, nails, shoes, clothing, sponges, brushes, lathes, concrete blocks, pipes, iron façades, cork animal feed, aluminium.; as well as woodwork, stone industry/quarries, and candle making. In addition, as mentioned above, food industries encompass the production of cheese and other dairy products, sweets, bulgur, wines, tahini, olive oil, chocolates, ice cream, bread and pastries, honey and grape molasses; as well as coffee roasting and grinding.

Trade

The percentage of individuals employed in the trade sector in the UoM of Caza Zgharta is approximately 11 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9). In terms of age distribution, workers in this sector are categorized as follows: 25 per cent are young (16-24), 60 per cent are adults (25-54), and 15 per cent are elderly (55 and above). Males make up the vast majority (90 per cent) of the workers in this sector, while females constitute the remaining 10 per cent.

Various commercial establishments exist in the union, differing in size and the types of products they sell. The sector includes the trade of meats, poultry, sweets, pastries, other food items, clothing, shoes, sanitary products, car shops, car parts and accessories, musical instruments, electrical appliances, fabrics, carpets, gifts, cosmetics, toys, books and stationery, mobile phones, jewellery, ceramic tiles, sewing supplies, mirrors, eyeglasses, home furnishings, electrical

tools, animal feed, agricultural materials, nylon bags, fishing supplies, and paint materials, among others.

Shops and other commercial establishments in the UoM of Caza Zgharta meet the general needs of the local market. However, most commercial activity is concentrated in the towns of Zgharta, Ehden, Majdlaiya and Mriyata El-Kardiyeh, depriving the central and mountain villages of commercial markets.

In addition, commercial establishment grapple with multiple challenges, including intense competition from foreign goods, a decrease in sales due to reduced purchasing power among customers, a noticeable decline in investment in this sector due to the recent economic crisis, and exchange rate instability, which hinders the process of pricing in a way that corresponds with the cost and the residents' purchasing power. Another challenge is the ongoing issue of frequent power cuts, which can lead to spoilage of certain food items and increase the energy costs of commercial establishments.

Tourism

The tourism sector in the UoM of Caza Zgharta encompasses a wide range of tourist and recreational activities and facilities. The latter include hotels, restaurants, cafes, computer and internet shops, billiards and paintball halls, sports clubs, karting clubs, etc.

The UoM of Caza Zgharta stands out for its geological terrain and its location between the coast and the mountains, making it rich in natural resources, including springs, forests, woodlands, caves, parks, and protected areas. These natural resources serve as prominent tourist attractions.

There are several natural springs, such as Rachaaïne Spring and Qadi Spring, which contribute to the union's touristic appeal and provide water to most coastal villages and some central villages within the union. Other springs of touristic significance that supply water to surrounding villages and municipalities include Abou Ghobsh Spring, Afqa Spring, Saqieh Spring, Wadi Habib Spring, Khoury Spring, and Moutaran Spring.

Most of these touristic resources are concentrated in cities, such as Zgharta and

Ehden, as well as in the areas of Bnechaai and Arjes. Lake Bnechaai Park and Zraiqa Park, located near Rachaaïne Spring, offer additional attractions. The availability of numerous guesthouses in this area further enhances the tourism experience. Various associations in this region organize recreational excursions and nature activities (e.g. hiking, biking and mountain climbing), which enable visitors to explore the beautiful mountains and landscapes. These associations also host workshops on traditional crafts, cooking and arts, providing visitors with opportunities for learning and participation. Furthermore, this region often hosts entertainment events, such as music concerts, poetry evenings, and artistic festivals to offer an enjoyable entertainment experience for visitors. Visits to historical landmarks and places of cultural significance are also arranged, with local guides and interpreters providing information and guidance.

More specifically, Lake Bnechaai in Zgharta is a natural gem located in the union, surrounded by towering mountains and breathtaking landscapes. The lake offers a charming atmosphere for visitors seeking natural beauty and tranquillity. Lake Bnechaai is distinguished by its calm, clear waters. This tranquil natural landscape creates an ideal setting for walking or sitting along its banks. The surrounding areas of the lake also provide picnic spots, where visitors can relax with family or friends while enjoying the panoramic view. Various restaurants, offering both Eastern and Western cuisine, are located in the vicinity. Lake Bnechaai attracts visitors from different regions of Lebanon.

The union's diverse forests, encompassing rare flora and fauna, are of particular significance. Among them, the Ehden Nature Reserve is a protected natural area known for its exceptional biodiversity and natural beauty. It hosts various ecosystems, including cedar forests, wetlands, and Mediterranean coastal habitats. The reserve is home to numerous rare and endemic plant and animal species, making it a vital location for biodiversity conservation. Visitors to the reserve can enjoy long hiking trails with stunning panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. In addition to their ecological value, the majestic cedar trees and other flora offer a serene environment. Furthermore, the Ehden Nature Reserve holds cultural and historical significance, with archaeological remains

indicating long-standing human presence in the region. The reserve plays a vital role in scientific research, as well as environmental awareness and education.

Despite the presence of various natural and tourism resources, this sector still lacks essential tourism infrastructure, while also facing challenges in terms of marketing and advertising, or tourism planning at large. Other challenges faced by the sector include rising fuel prices, a shortage of local labour, insufficient public transportation, inadequate public lighting in tourist areas, the absence of a comprehensive tourism map, and a lack of diverse cultural and artistic activities in all areas that appeal to tourists and locals.

Remittances from abroad

The value of external remittances from expatriates in the UoM of Caza Zgharta municipalities varies among different towns. This variation can be attributed to factors related to the number of expatriates in each town and their socioeconomic background or status. Some expatriates come from well-off families who emigrated long time ago, others are self-sufficient and capable of supporting their families residing in Lebanon, while others have more modest means.

Remittances from expatriates are considered vital, especially during challenging economic times in Lebanon. Expatriates have not only supported their families and relatives in the country but have also financed various critical development projects in the union, including electricity, water and other infrastructure. For instance, their contributions in the town of Seraal covered streetlighting and sanitation services. In Arjes Municipality, they funded a project for the construction of artesian wells, the restoration of the town's cemeteries, and the renovation of the church.

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 Caza Zgharta, there was consensus on adopting the following vision for local socioeconomic development:

“Caza Zgharta: an area with a shining coastline and mountain ranges, that is beautiful and boasts green natural reserves, is rich with diverse cultural, touristic, agricultural and heritage landmarks and blessed with its inhabitants and visitors.”

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

Working towards achieving agricultural and tourism development necessitates creating a road map for each sector (see the subsections “Proposed Agriculture Sector Road Map” and “Proposed Tourism 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 both the agriculture and tourism 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 within the UoM of Caza Zgharta, with a focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors, both of which present opportunities for sound local socioeconomic development. These directions have been identified and proposed based on the analysis of the existing situation of these sectors presented in the previous section, which relied

on information provided from different local stakeholders through a participatory approach.

As for other sectors (such as industry, trade, and crafts and vocations), they will certainly continue to play a role in the socioeconomic development of cities and towns of the UoM of Caza Zgharta. However, local stakeholders engaged in the project considered that these other sectors can also be developed in a manner that aligns with the vision and directions of the union with regard to agriculture and tourism. The industry sector, for example, can contribute to enhancing the agriculture and tourism sectors by playing a complementary role. Thus, local stakeholders involved in the project considered it crucial to work on safeguarding the small industries present in the union and developing certain manufacturing crafts through specialized training to enhance competencies and skills. This requires securing alternative and cost-effective sources of electricity, supporting industry owners, protecting local production from competition, and securing markets for both local and international distribution of the products.

To activate the trade sector, local stakeholders participating in the project argued that it is essential to encourage investment in the sector to attract young individuals and discourage their migration. They identified a need to protect small- and medium-sized commercial establishments in the union, urging them to benefit from the services offered by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry located within the Municipality Centre of Zgharta. Furthermore, they proposed promoting individual online-based trading initiatives; incentivizing youth and women to establish small commercial projects through networking and coordination

with organizations working in this context; and training traders in the union on the fundamentals of sales, purchasing, marketing, feasibility study for their projects, and development of income-generating ventures. They considered such steps as helpful to create and provide employment opportunities for the youth of the UoM of Caza Zgharta.

If the union and the relevant municipalities prioritize the development of the tourism and agriculture sectors, it is imperative that other essential social and basic services are also available. These services help retain

Lebanese citizens in their towns and villages and attract other population groups to work in the mentioned sectors. Moreover, if the union intends to attract investments from outside the region, it is essential that basic services like roads, water and electricity are available. Additionally, it is crucial to enhance health-care services in existing centres and clinics by supplying them with medical equipment and medications, in addition to supporting them with a complete emergency response plan. A sustainable plan should also be implemented for solid waste management throughout the UoM of Caza Zgharta.



Agriculture

As shown above in the presentation of the current state of sectors within the UoM of Caza Zgharta, including their available resources and potential opportunities, the agriculture sector presents a significant and real opportunity for the union's residents to improve their economic situation and increase employment opportunities for both the youth and families. While many families engage in agriculture as a non-professional activity, considering it a secondary and additional source of income, some interventions, programmes and projects can help achieve a qualitative leap in this sector. This requires the concerted efforts and resources 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.

Local stakeholders engaged in the project considered it important for the development of the agriculture sector to implement infrastructural interventions, such as constructing and rehabilitating agricultural roads to facilitate local residents' access to and cultivation of their lands. Water was also regarded as a fundamental element for agricultural development, including the need for municipalities and other relevant entities to focus on groundwater protection, enhancing water reserves, establishing modern irrigation systems, and promoting rainwater conservation. This involves recycling wastewater from homes and encouraging farmers to use treated wastewater for irrigation. Moreover, it was considered essential to work towards finding alternative means of obtaining irrigation water by capturing rains during the winter season through reservoirs or tanks, adopting drip irrigation, and creating ponds to collect rainwater in central pools for agricultural land, while organizing the distribution of irrigation water through independent water committees.

Local stakeholders also emphasized the need to focus on human resources, including the activation of existing agricultural cooperatives (such as for beekeeping and livestock) and the training of farmers, with the aim of enhancing agricultural guidance and empowering farmers through enhanced modern agricultural knowledge and technical expertise. Moreover, local stakeholders highlighted the importance of developing dryland and irrigated farming by leveraging agricultural research centres in the union or nearby areas, in addition to technical programmes offered by donor organizations and relevant official institutions like ministries and other entities.

To stimulate agriculture, local stakeholders argued that it is also important to conduct soil testing and promote alternative crops that are compatible with climate change impacts, such as kiwi, mango and avocado. Moreover, according to local stakeholders, it is essential to introduce food products that align with the union's nature and characteristics, while considering renewable energy sources that can mitigate the impacts of climate change. It was also recommended establishing electronic connectivity for monitoring with each farmer and activating the role of the agricultural guidance centre in the union, while also emphasizing the importance of collaboration with the agricultural research centre located in the union.

Furthermore, local stakeholders argued that it is beneficial to consider fish farming by establishing freshwater and saltwater ponds operating according to systems that prevent the deposition of fish food residues. They emphasized that agriculture can play a crucial role in boosting the tourism sector, where restaurants can benefit from the union's production of essential and renewable crops.

Local stakeholders also emphasized the importance of caring for the well-being of livestock by activating veterinary care, training farmers on administering appropriate medicines, conducting regular check-ups, as well as fostering beekeeping and ensuring honey is tested before marketing.

From the above recommendations, it is evident that opportunities for agriculture sector development are available within the UoM of Caza Zgharta. 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 connections with agricultural colleges within 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 official accountability to halt encroachments on public properties, forests and woodlands through stringent monitoring, legal measures, and imposing penalties

- 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 production and municipal hygiene standards, including for the production of traditional food products
- Activating agricultural guidance and training
- Preparing and implementing recurring 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

Long time to achieve

- Striving to establish centres for agricultural training and guidance
- Collaborating with ministries and municipalities to establish a sustainable plan for infrastructure maintenance
- Providing clean water for irrigation
- Treating sewage water and using it for irrigation of specific crops
- Integrating the use of modern technology in agriculture
- Establishing and relying on modern irrigation systems for agriculture
- Waste processing

- Working on establishing specialized agricultural and livestock cooperatives
- Establishing relationships with donor organizations to secure funding and resources for the implementation of projects, ensuring successful collaboration and project execution

- Preserving the Ehdn Forest Reserve and creating other reserves to protect natural resources
- Conserving the natural resources in the UoM of Caza Zgharta and leveraging their potential for sustainable development
- Protecting groundwater resources
- Preserving soil by establishing proper waste disposal sites
- Limiting urban expansion at the expense of agricultural lands
- Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas

- Encouraging youth to participate in agricultural cooperatives and enter the job market

Infrastructure

Institutional framework

Natural resources

Human resources

Tourism

The UoM of Caza Zgharta boasts abundant natural, cultural, religious and human resources, which constitute the essential components that can be built upon to revitalize the tourism sector in the union.

While the UoM of Caza Zgharta has the essential components to activate and enhance the tourism sector, local stakeholders involved in the project agreed that this will require significant efforts and resources to be invested in infrastructure. Additionally, it is important for both public and private local institutions to collaborate, each according to its capacities, in order to complement one another's roles. Furthermore, the development of this sector requires extensive efforts to work on protecting natural resources, including preserving the existing and creating new natural reserves, according to local stakeholders. This will help curb uncontrolled urban expansion. Building local capacities and enabling them to keep up with the process of revitalizing the tourism sector was also highlighted. This includes providing training for the local workforce, particularly the youth.

Based on the above, local stakeholders argued that as a first step, the union should seek, in collaboration with local civil associations, to secure funding. It is not necessary for the funding to be substantial, in order to develop a tourism plan that relies on the available components mentioned above. The plan should propose a realistic timeframe that considers the existing challenges in terms of infrastructure and the institutional framework, as well as the time required for capacity development. The plan should also include a fundamental aspect that focuses on establishing appropriate policies and legal frameworks to preserve natural, historical and heritage resources.

The plan should also include sufficient flexibility to allow for its implementation in multiple stages, based on priorities and the financial resources available for executing the projects and interventions at all levels. Additionally, the plan should take into account the economic and financial conditions currently prevailing in Lebanon.

Local stakeholders engaged in the project argued that while preparing the strategic tourism plan,

the UoM of Caza Zgharta, in collaboration with the public and private sectors in the union, can initiate some activities and interventions that can stimulate the tourism sector, such as:

- Establishing a tourism body that includes representatives from municipalities, the union, local civil society and youth associations, as well as other interested parties. This body's mission should be to coordinate and communicate with relevant tourism stakeholders. It can engage with expatriates and seek funding for small-scale projects. It can also create a committee to develop tourism plans; enhance tourism promotion; and identify and map natural, cultural, historical and heritage sites. The latter can be conducted with the support of university graduates with GIS expertise. This initiative aims to showcase tourist sites and facilities managed by the union and municipalities. It involves close coordination with tourism associations, hotel and restaurant owners, as well as graduates from the region with expertise in hotel management, cooking, and organizing tourism activities. These touristic activities may include guided tours for visitors to explore historical and natural landmarks in the union, as well as organizing various cultural events, such as art exhibitions, theatre performances, and traditional festivals.
- Working on marketing the UoM of Caza Zgharta through the media and positioning it on the national tourism map. University students and some commercial institutions can assist in creating a tourism media plan (posters, publications, TV ads, and social media).
- Encouraging municipalities and associations to establish and maintain walking trails within forests and woodlands.
- Establishing guesthouses, especially in homes with unused rooms.
- Activating cultural, recreational and sports activities in the union and organizing annual festivals to attract expatriates, encouraging them to invest in and support the local tourism sector.

Besides developing the tourism sector, the importance of integrating the tourism and agriculture sectors was also highlighted.

Finally, the development of the tourism sector can be enhanced by enhancing coordination among the UoMs of Caza Zgharta, Bnechaai and

Danniyeh, aiming to create joint tourism plans that consider the uniqueness of each region in terms of culture and resources, while fostering

cooperation regarding landmarks and natural and human resources.



Proposed tourism sector road map

Short time to achieve



Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Tourism and enhancing cooperation



Establishing a local committee within the UoM to communicate with stakeholders

Level of difficulty to implement

High

Moderate

Low

Budget to implement

High

Moderate

Low

Medium time to achieve



Maintaining roads leading to landmarks and tourist areas



Providing permanent lighting during the night within touristic areas and landmarks



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



Building relationships with existing universities to support tourism guidance for university students



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

Long 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 of of Caza Zgharta to enhance tourism



Ensuring human resources for the protection and preservation of tourist and archaeological sites



Working on increasing and incentivizing investments in tourism projects



Preserving the natural resources in the UoM of Joumeh and investing in them



Protecting and maintaining existing rivers and springs



Limiting urban sprawl at the expense of areas of natural and cultural value



Preserving and protecting the existing archaeological and heritage sites in the union



Establishing reserves to conserve natural resources and attract visitors and tourists



Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas



Training and empowering youth to provide tourism services



Creating walking trails for hiking enthusiasts



Training residents in food processing and local food production



Organizing regular tourist festivals



Preparing and implementing recurrent awareness campaigns to encourage locals to engage in the tourism development process



Creating and executing advertising and media campaigns about touristic sites and tourism activities in the union



Encouraging families to establish guesthouses and rooms to enhance local tourism



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

Infrastructure

Institutional framework

Natural resources

Human resources

Conclusion

The developed road maps 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.