We strengthen democracy and good governance at the local level

# Governing through crisis

## A model for resilience and adaptive local governance in Lebanon

SALAR International
A part of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

# Foreword

Over three decades, SALAR International has worked across the world, supporting partners to promote decentralisation and foster good local governance, effective service delivery and sustainable and inclusive local development.

As part of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), one of the oldest local government associations in the world, we come with in-depth and advance understanding of the realities and needs of local governments.

With this background, we see that it can be valuable to use and learn from, but not copy, Swedish experiences, models and approaches. A bottom-up and collaborative mindset serves to ensure fit for purpose responses that build on existing approaches, experiences and competences.

The broader Middle East region has always been part of our scope of operations and, since 2018, we have worked with local government partners in Türkiye and Lebanon in the Resilience in Local Governance (Reslog) project. The Lebanon part in particular has been a highly explorative endeavour where we together with partners have iteratively tested, evaluated and adjusted our activities and methods along the way, achieving substantial results.

This publication aims to capture core elements of Reslog's work in Lebanon and point to some main takeaways and learnings for future similar work in contexts of protracted multiple crises. I hope it serves as inspiring reading.

Ryan Knox, Managing Director
SALAR International

# Introduction: A local lens on resilience and governance

SALAR International is the development cooperation arm of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), a century-old institution representing every municipality and region in Sweden. SALAR plays a pivotal role in protecting the interests of local governments, providing services to its members, negotiating with central government, and serving as the main employer representative for Sweden's local and regional public sector.

This long-standing role has given SALAR and its members deep, hands-on experience in decentralization, local governance, and public service delivery, anchored in Sweden's democratic values and institutional know-how. Building on these foundations, SALAR International brings a strong track record of promoting decentralization reforms and inclusive local governance in a wide range of international contexts. For more than 25 years, it has worked with local counterparts across the world to tackle complex development challenges, from strengthening participatory planning to advancing gender equality and building resilience in fragile environments.

Since 2018, under Sweden's Regional Strategy for the Syria Crisis, SALAR International has led the Resilience in Local Governance (Reslog) project in Türkiye and Lebanon. The initiative supports local governments in responding to the long-term impacts of displacement, conflict, and structural fragility, helping them not just to cope, but to lead.

## From migration management to inclusive development and governance

In Türkiye and within the framework of Reslog, SALAR International worked since 2018 with the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT), two regional Unions, and several municipalities across the country. The focus began with improving local migration management, inclusive service delivery, and peaceful coexistence between Syrian refugees and host communities. Over time, the work grew to include local economic development, strategic planning, and green growth. The project has stayed flexible, adjusting to existing and emerging local needs while keeping a clear focus on long-term local development.

**In Lebanon**, SALAR International worked since 2018 in the northern governorate of Akkar, one of the country's most marginalized and underserved regions that often fell off the radar of the international development community. The Reslog project supported two Unions of Municipalities and their members in strengthening institutional capacity, improving basic service delivery, and creating space for local economic development opportunities. The experiences covered in this book took place during one of Lebanon's most critical periods marked by one of the most serious economic crises in contemporary history according to the World Bank, the biggest man-induced non-nuclear explosion in history, constant political paralysis and mass protests, persistent erosion of public services, and the list can go very long.

The Reslog project's approach in Lebanon was inspired by the principles of area-based development, coupled with David Cooperrider's "Appreciative Inquiry" that capitalizes on existing strengths and collective passion for resolving complex problems. The result was an area-focused development model that was rolled-out at scale for the first time in a local development context in the country, where the aim was not to pretend fixing Lebanon's wicked problems with anecdotic resources, but to catalyze positive transformation and build on its outcomes.

This meant working with local authorities not as passive recipients of aid, but as capable, responsive institutions able to lead their own development journeys, and accompanying them as this journey unfolds through adaptive, action-driven planning, grounded in lived realities, that gives room to flexible and creative problem-solving and paves-way for genuine local ownership on the longer term.

## Resilience: A concept under pressure?

Over the past two decades, resilience has become one of the most widely used (and frequently contested) concepts in international development cooperation and humanitarian discourse. Originally associated with climate change and environmental shocks, it was introduced to bridge the long-standing divide between humanitarian aid and long-term development. Today, its scope has expanded significantly. Resilience now frames responses to a wide range of overlapping risks such as conflict, displacement, pandemics, economic crises, and urban pressures, that expose societies and institutions to both sudden shocks and prolonged stress.

The appeal of the concept partly lies in its versatility. Resilience has been adopted across a wide range of disciplines, from ecology and economics to psychology, sociology, pedagogy, medicine, and urban planning. But its popularity also brings its own set of challenges. There is still little agreement on how resilience should be defined or operationalized. In development and humanitarian settings, this has sparked debate: is resilience too vague to be useful, or is its very ambiguity what makes it relevant in a world of increasing uncertainty?

Critics argue that resilience is sometimes used as a catch-all solution, a rhetorical tool that promises more than it delivers. Others contend that its fluidity is, in fact, a strength: it allows for flexible, cross-cutting responses in a world where crises are increasingly unpredictable and where traditional, siloed approaches often fall short. Despite these tensions, most resilience frameworks converge around three core dimensions:

- **Absorptive capacity:** the ability to absorb shocks and maintain core functions, preserving essential structures during disruption.

- **Adaptive capacity:** the ability to adjust, reorganize, and respond to changing conditions in ways that minimize harm and manage internal pressures.

- **Transformative capacity:** the ability to fundamentally reconfigure systems when existing structures are no longer viable, and hence opening pathways to long-term, sustainable change.

As explored later in this publication, the relevance of resilience takes on a specific meaning when applied to local governance. It is not just about surviving crisis, it is about reshaping institutions, decision-making, and service delivery so that communities can navigate uncertainty and emerge stronger over time.

## Evolving beyond crisis response

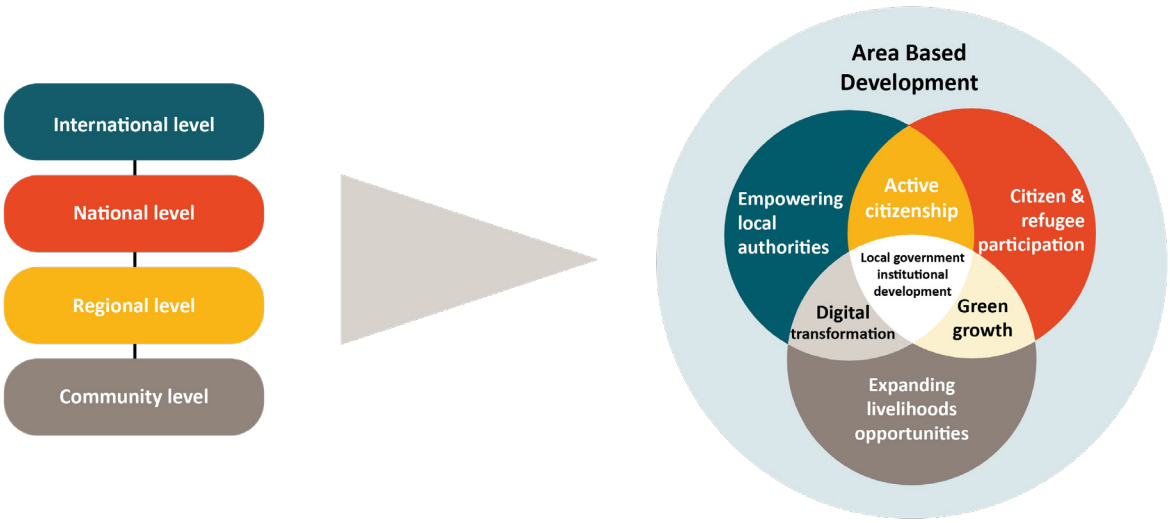
Although migration management was Reslog's initial entry point in Lebanon, the project quickly expanded into a broader, more systemic intervention. SALAR International drew on its global experience in decentralization, municipal governance, and inclusive planning to support deeper reforms, recognizing that in fragile contexts, local governments are not just service providers but key stabilizing forces.

From the outset, Reslog focused on a bottom-up, participatory approach. Instead of providing ready-made solutions, the project helped municipalities develop their own tools to plan, use data, and involve communities in setting priorities. SALAR International supported this process by offering guidance and making sure the work stayed aligned with international standards and good practice.

Between 2018 and 2020, Reslog followed a national–regional–local Theory of Change, aiming to link grassroots innovation with national reform. The idea was that national improvements would trickle down, while local experiences would feed into policy. But as political deadlock deepened, it became clear that a more flexible, locally driven approach was needed.

From 2021 to 2025, the project shifted its focus to the local level. This pivot to an area-based model made Reslog more agile and impactful, giving space for local actors to lead and respond directly to real-time challenges—even in the absence of national reform. Still, national influence wasn't abandoned. In the final years, tools and lessons from local pilots began gaining ground in other Unions of Municipalities and entering national discussions—laying the groundwork for broader adoption and longer-term change.

**A multi-level and multi-sector model for Area Based Development**



## Proof of concept and a growing circle of influence

The area-based model helped municipalities deal with connected challenges like migration, crisis response, public services, and local economic development in an integrated and adaptive manner. Working locally made it easier to test ideas, learn from what worked, and show that better governance is possible, even in fragile areas. These small wins gave local actors more confidence and created real momentum for change, not just on the ground but also creating momentum for policy reflection at the regional and national levels.

Over time, this work started to create a ripple effect and virtuous feedback loops. Municipal best- practices fed into broader policy conversations, while national tools and frameworks (when available) helped strengthen local capacity. In that sense, Reslog demonstrated how local-level action can gradually shape systemic change even in highly constrained environments.

**But the value of SALAR International's work in Lebanon cannot be measured solely in terms of project outputs. Its real impact lies in the institutional transformations it catalyzed, the capacity it helped build, and the space it opened for municipalities to lead.** By bridging the gap between humanitarian response and long-term development, Reslog has shown how local governance can become a cornerstone of resilience in fragile settings.

## About this publication

This publication summarizes the core elements of the Reslog Lebanon model as it has evolved over time. It serves a dual purpose:

- First, it presents tested and practical insights from Reslog's work in Akkar. As Lebanon continues its difficult journey toward decentralization and governance reform, the project offers **hands-on** examples **of how** municipalities can be empowered to lead development. The knowledge generated here is intended as a resource for policymakers, practitioners, and local leaders working toward more inclusive, resilient governance.
- Second, it aims to support replication and adaptation. By sharing a scalable governance model that has proven effective in a fragile and crisis-prone environment, the publication offers guidance for other contexts where localized, participatory strategies are needed to foster resilience and sustainable development.

This effort aligns closely with SALAR International's broader mission: to strengthen the role of local governments globally, promote peer learning and knowledge exchange, and reinforce **decentralization as a driver of resilience, inclusion, and long-term stability.**

The following three chapters will focus on building and rethinking resilience through localized governance in Lebanon. The chapters that follow examine how this framework took shape in practice. Chapter 4 explores the political and institutional landscape that influenced what could be done. Chapter 5 focuses on implementation, and highlights how strategies evolved, what progress was made, and where resistance emerged. Chapter 6 looks at impact, while Chapter 7 distills lessons for those working to build local resilience in other complex andfast-changingcontexts.

# Chapter 1:

# Building resilience through localized governance in Lebanon

Lebanon has long faced political instability and recurring crises. In recent years, things have only grown worse: the economy has collapsed, national politics are paralyzed, institutions are struggling, and the pressure of hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees continues to mount. These overlapping challenges have stretched the country's fragile governance system to its limits. Yet in many areas, it was local governments, municipalities and unions of municipalities (UoMs), that stepped up. Despite limited resources, they kept basic services going, responded to emergencies, and helped keep communities afloat. At times, when Lebanon had no president and only a caretaker cabinet, they became the closest thing to a functioning state.

In the face of these challenges, a key question emerged: how can local governance in Lebanon be strengthened to meet both immediate needs and long-term goals? To help find answers, SALAR International and its Lebanese partners joined forces to design and test new ways of working, models of local governance that are collaborative, adaptive, and grounded in local realities.


Lebanon's broken governance system is felt most clearly at the local level. Municipalities across the country grapple with daily challenges: weak institutional structures, chronic underfunding, and the absence of a clear national strategy for decentralization or local development. The Independent Municipal Fund (IMF), which constitutes the main channel for transferring tax revenues to municipalities has long been criticized for its lack of transparency and heavy-handed control by the central government.

When the Lebanese Pound collapsed during the 2019–2021 economic crisis, even the limited IMF funds that reached municipalities lost up to 95% of their value. This made it nearly impossible for local governments to plan or provide basic services.

Yet while any normal institution losing 95% of its revenue might shut down overnight, Lebanon's municipalities have continued to step up during crisis after crisis. Since 2011, when some 1.5 million Syrians sought refuge in the country, local authorities have been on the frontline, delivering services, preserving social stability in the absence of a national refugee policy, and keeping the crisis from spiraling further.

Their role became even more vital in 2015, when the collapse of the national waste management system forced municipalities to take over waste collection and disposal without additional funding or technical support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was again municipalities, often working together with civil society, that organized local public health efforts and emergency relief.

These overlapping emergencies have made one thing clear: **municipalities are at the heart of Lebanon's resilience**, but they cannot carry this responsibility alone without the right tools, authority, and sustained support. This is the gap the Reslog project set out to address, not as a short-term fix, but as a long-term investment in the capacity of local governments to manage migration, respond to crises, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

In Akkar—Reslog's primary area of intervention and one of Lebanon's most underserved regions —municipalities and unions of municipalities (UoMs) face a dual burden: decades of central government neglect and limited international engagement. When SALAR International conducted exploratory visits in 2017–2018, it found that Akkar had significantly fewer international actors present than other regions, even though UNHCR had already identified it as one of the most vulnerable areas in the country back in 2015.

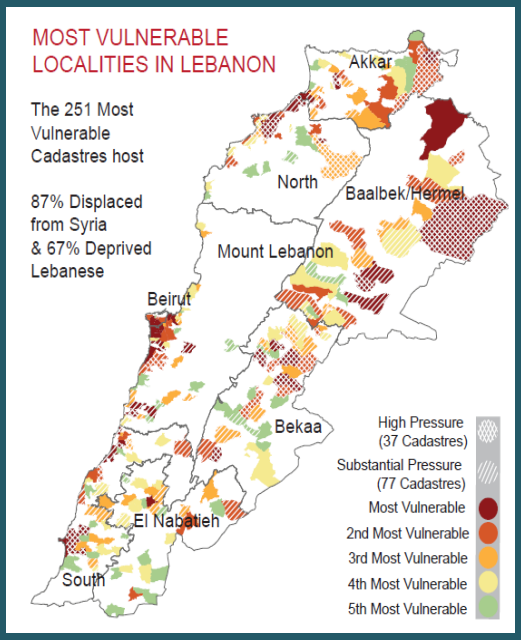



Figure 1 a - Lebanon's most vulnerable 251 cadasters (Source: UNHCR Lebanon's Crisis Response Plan – 2018 update)

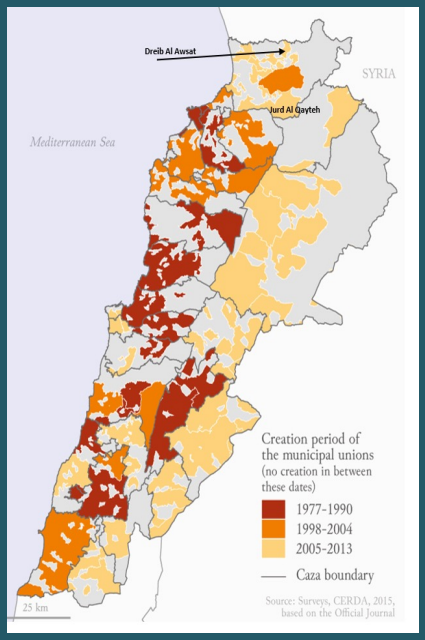



Figure 1 b- Lebanon's 58 UoMs clustered by year of establishment (Source: CERDA 2015)

The challenge was monumental, but so was the opportunity. The two Unions of Municipalities where SALAR International chose to work, Jurd El Qayteh (established in 2005) and Dreib El Awsat (in 2010), were still relatively young and in the process of defining their roles. This meant there was no need to retrofit outdated systems. Instead, there was a real chance to build local governance structures from the ground up, together with the UoMs and their member municipalities, in an inclusive and forward-looking way. By focusing on the right tools, frameworks, and partnerships, the goal wasn't just better crisis response, **but long-term profound transformations and build resilience that lasts.**

## 1.1. What we learned: Strengthening local governance in fragile settings

The challenge was monumental, but so was the opportunity. The two Unions of Municipalities where SALAR International chose to work, Jurd El Qayteh (established in 2005) and Dreib El Awsat (in 2010), were still relatively young and in the process of defining their roles. This meant there was no need to retrofit outdated systems. Instead, there was a real chance to build local governance structures from the ground up, together with the UoMs and their member municipalities, in an inclusive and forward-looking way. By focusing on the right tools, frameworks, and partnerships, the goal wasn't just better crisis response, but long-term profound transformations and build resilience that lasts.

### Setting realistic goals in a difficult environment

One of the clearest lessons from Reslog is the importance of being realistic. Municipalities in Lebanon are expected to do a lot, but often with very little. They face major financial, institutional, and staffing challenges. When donors or national agencies ask too much, it can lead to frustration, or worse, disengagement. Some municipalities may simply go along with donor demands, even when those don't match local needs, along the famous Lebanese proverb "if it doesn't help it won't hurt".
Reslog took a different path. It focused on practical, achievable steps, small changes that mattered. By setting modest but clear goals, municipalities could show real results. This helped rebuild trust with residents, created momentum, and laid a foundation for bigger future improvements.

### Building on strengths, not just fixing weaknesses

Many development efforts start by identifying what's broken. But this deficit-based approach can miss what already works. Reslog flipped the script. It began by identifying existing strengths (local knowledge, trusted relationships, institutional legitimacy, successful local models, etc...) and built from there. Municipalities were not treated as failing institutions, but as partners with potential. Communities were treated not as vulnerable population in need of whatever assistance possible, but as a reservoir of talent and a source of inspiration.
This mindset shift made a big difference. Project activities were better aligned with the local context, and results were more meaningful and more likely to last.

### Partnerships make local governance work

No municipality can succeed on its own. Local governance works best when municipalities collaborate with each other, but also with the civil society, the private sector, and with national institutions. Reslog actively encouraged and nurtured such collaborations by supporting spaces where different actors could meet, share ideas, and coordinate efforts. This helped break down silos and encouraged more collaborative solutions to every day's local problems and managed to achieve remarkable results along the way.
In fragmented systems like Lebanon (and elsewhere along the world), building bridges is essential to foster ownership across all levels, and only then we can start talking about sustainability.

### Inclusion makes projects smarter and stronger

Reslog's work in Akkar demonstrated clearly that inclusion, when integrated into everyday practice, leads to stronger outcomes. Involving women and men from different nationalities as mobilizers and data collectors provided deeper insights into community needs and improved crisis planning. Creating inclusive and women- friendly spaces in municipal buildings boosted participation in local consultations, helping shape services and development priorities that reflected broader voices.

Gender and inclusion were not treated as side agendas; they were built into Reslog's work from the start. This approach made interventions not only more equitable and inclusive, but also more effective and more trusted.

## Change takes time and flexibility

SALAR's long-standing experience shows that there are no quick fixes in governance reform. Reslog's goal wasn't just to deliver short-term outputs, but to build long-term capacity. It demonstrated that success is best achieved through an asymmetrical mix of patience, learning (from both success and failure), and adaptation.

Instead of following a rigid pre-set design and planning, the project used a flexible and adaptive approach; it started with pilot projects, tested them, adapted them, and scaled them up when they worked, but also was lucid enough to re-plan and/or discontinue those who did not. This gave municipalities space to learn and adapt, which was critical in Lebanon's volatile political and economic climate. Staying rigid would have meant failure. Being flexible meant staying relevant.

## Change needs to start from the ground up

At first, the project aimed to work within Lebanon's national governance system, linking reforms across national, regional, and local levels. But political deadlock made that impossible.

National reform efforts were stalled, and regional reforms depended on national-level momentum that never came. So the project shifted focus. It doubled down on the local level, working directly with municipalities and unions of municipalities to deliver real tangible results that made a difference.

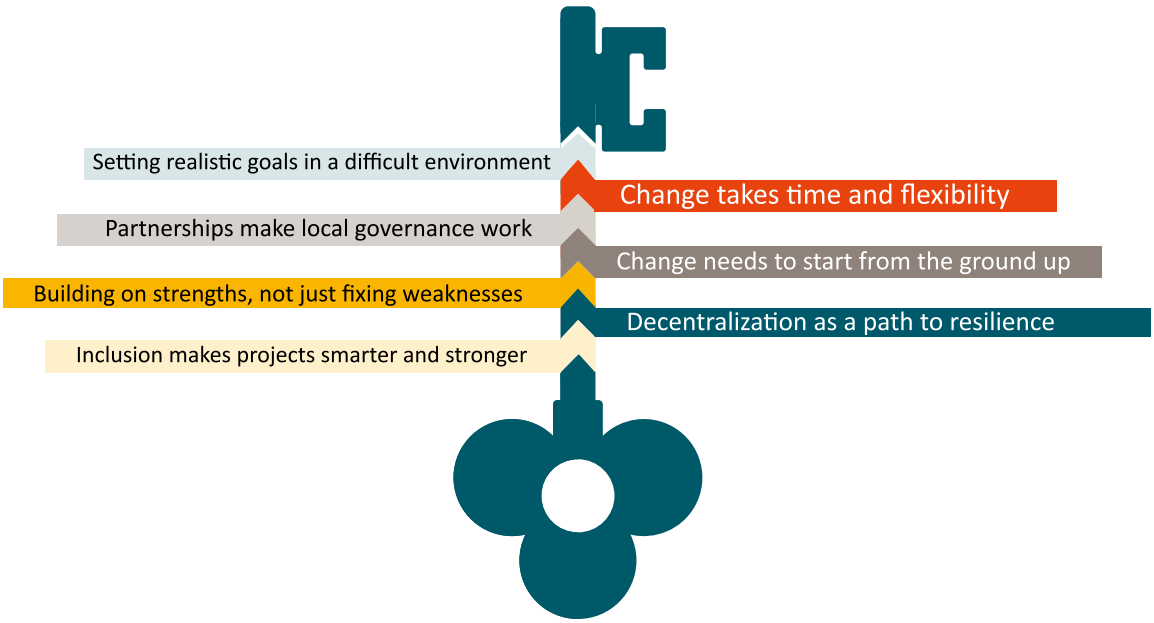
Once those results were visible, they became the basis for broader influence. Local successes fueled a (largely positive) narrative that helped make the case for scaling up what worked, which also fed into national policy discussions.

## Decentralization as a path to resilience

Local governance is not just about managing services. In Lebanon, municipalities often step in where national institutions fall short. This was true during the Syrian refugee crisis, the collapse of waste management, and the Covid-19 pandemic. But municipalities can only succeed if they have the right tools, decision-making authority, adequate resources, and consistent support.

Decentralization isn't just about administrative reform. It is a pathway to stronger, more resilient communities. When empowered, local leaders can respond faster, more fairly, and more effectively, especially in times of crisis.

Changing national policy in Lebanon is no easy task. But Reslog showed that influence doesn't have to start at the top. It can start locally with credible, grounded solutions that demonstrate what's possible. When municipalities succeed, they become proof that better governance is achievable. And in fragile contexts, that kind of evidence can be the most powerful driver of change.



# Chapter 2:

# Rethinking resilience in local governance

Resilience has become a buzzword in development and crisis response. But in places like rural Lebanon where the Reslog project stood the challenge, it meant something tangible and real. Resilience is not about bouncing back to the way things were. It is about adapting, learning, and moving forward, often with fewer resources and higher stakes. It's about navigating disruption and emerging stronger, not by chance, but through effort, experience, and local leadership.

True resilience is built in the everyday, through institutions that stay functional when systems falter, through communities that self-organize when others withdraw, and through local actors who understand their context and stand by their people. It is not abstract. It is practical. And it starts with local governance. This is where local governance becomes a central pillar, not just a support mechanism. In fragile settings, municipalities often "keep the lights on", both literally and figuratively. They mediate tension, deliver core services, and create stability in deeply unstable times.

Yet too often, national responses and humanitarian frameworks tend to overlook local actors. They focus on central plans and large organizations that master the jargon and mobilize resources quickly, but don't always deliver meaningful or sustainable results on the ground. The Reslog experience makes a compelling case for a different approach, one that recognizes local authorities not as peripheral implementers, but as central players. When they are equipped, trusted, and included, local actors do far more than survive; They LEAD. And this is when resilience stops being a buzzword and starts becoming a future.

## 2.1 Resilience in the context of local governance

When we talk about resilience in local governance, we are not just talking about absorbing shocks, but also about building the institutional backbone that allows a municipality or a UoM to anticipate risks, respond to crises, and learn from them, while continuing to serve its people. A resilient municipality doesn't simply survive disruption. It adapts, improves, and grows stronger with each challenge.

Resilience is not a fixed goal. It is an ongoing process shaped by learning, adaptation, and the willingness to do things differently. It requires local governments to rethink how they operate, how they engage with their communities, and how they prepare for the unknown. In fragile contexts like Lebanon, this is not a theoretical exercise, it is a day-to-day necessity. As such, resilient local governance depends on three interlinked dimensions:

- **Preparedness and risk anticipation:** Municipalities need the tools to spot vulnerabilities early and act before problems escalate. This means making risk assessments part of everyday governance, not just during emergencies. Risk mapping, early warning systems, and proactive crisis plans are essential. But just as important is the mindset that crisis preparedness is a permanent part of good governance, not a one-off task.
- **Adaptive and inclusive decision-making:** In unstable environments, rigid systems are the predicament to failure. Resilient municipalities are those that remain flexible and remain ready to adapt plans, adjust priorities, and listen. Inclusion is not an abstract value; it is a vital governance tool. When different voices are part of decision- making, policies are more grounded, legitimacy increases, and outcomes tend to be stronger and more accepted by the community.

- **Institutional learning and long-term capacity:** Municipality do not become resilient overnight. They undergo a gradual and often nonlinear process of building capacity, sharing knowledge, and learning from what works but also what doesn't. This includes improving technical skills, using data to inform planning, creating learning networks, and pushing for greater financial and operational autonomy. Over time, these investments allow municipalities to lead with more confidence and act with more foresight.

In Lebanon, where political gridlock and chronic crisis are the norm, resilience at the local level is not just about weathering the next shock. It is about building systems that can function and even improve in the face of ongoing instability (a concept that the Lebanese scholar Nassim Taleb describes as "anti-fragility). This means shifting from reactive responses to a governance model that is forward- looking, inclusive, and capable of adapting to change.

### 2.1.1 The underestimated role of local authorities in crisis response

When crisis hits, national governments and international agencies deploy quite swiftly. But in reality, the first to respond - and often the most effective - are local authorities. They are the closest to the ground and know their communities and are hence best positioned to act quickly when others are still mobilizing. Local governments play a lifeline role in three essential ways:

- **Keeping critical services going:** From waste collection to water provision, municipalities are responsible for the everyday services that become even more crucial during crisis. Even with limited resources, they often find ways to keep these systems running when everything else is under strain.

- **Holding the social fabric together:** Municipal leaders are the ones community members turn to in times of crisis. They are easier to reach (and could in fact live next door), they listen, mediate tensions, and help manage coexistence especially in places like Lebanon, where many towns host diverse populations and large numbers of refugees.

- **Coordinating local response efforts:** In the midst of chaos, municipalities often become coordination hubs. They convene NGOs, civil society groups, national actors, and the private sector to ensure that support efforts are coherent, targeted, and aligned with real needs on the ground.

Yet despite growing recognition of their importance, local authorities are too often sidelined in crisis response and development efforts. Funding rarely reaches them directly. Technical assistance is sporadic. Institutional support is limited. And rather than addressing governance issues like corruption, clientelism, or administrative inefficiency, these problems are frequently cited as reasons to exclude local actors rather than opportunities to build their capacity.

But this approach is short-sighted. Local governments are embedded within their communities. In many areas, they are the only public institutions people see and engage with on a regular basis. Strengthening their role is not just about responding more effectively to today's emergencies, it is a key step toward reducing vulnerability to the future shocks of tomorrow.

There is also a broader issue. The concept of resilience is sometimes applied narrowly, emphasizing stability over transformation. But in contexts marked by inequality, poor governance, or systemic corruption, institutions can be resilient in ways that preserve dysfunction. Building resilience, therefore, must go hand-in- hand with critical reflection, accountability, and a willingness to challenge entrenched structures that hinder progress.

### 2.1.2 Resilience beyond the municipality: The need for multi-stakeholder governance

Resilient governance cannot be built by local authorities alone. It depends on systems that connect all levels of government and all sectors of society. Crises do not abide by administrative boundaries, so the solutions must transcend these boundaries too. Reslog came to the conclusion that a resilient local governance system draws its strength from coordination, cooperation, and shared responsibility by multiple actors.

- National institutions set the legal and policy frameworks, allocate budgets, and shape overall priorities. But they also need to stay connected to local realities. Without clear links between national strategies and local conditions, responses risk being poorly targeted or ineffective.

- Regional and local governments are essential for putting plans into practice. They interpret national policies in ways that make sense locally, adapting them to meet specific needs. Their closeness to communities allows them to act quickly, deliver services effectively, and build trust on the ground.

- Civil society and community groups bring critical insights and social legitimacy. They understand local needs, help reach vulnerable populations, and can mobilize people in ways formal institutions often cannot. Their involvement helps ensure that responses are inclusive and grounded in lived experience.

- The private sector and academia contribute with tools, data, and new ways of thinking. Their resources and expertise—whether in technology, logistics, or research—can strengthen local systems and make responses more innovative and sustainable.

In short, resilience is not just a matter of local capacity, it is the product of a system that works together. When institutions, communities, and sectors coordinate effectively, local governance becomes not just a frontline of response, but a foundation for long-term strength.

## Sweden's collaborative public administration in times of crisis

Sweden has long embraced a decentralized approach to governance, where municipalities and regions enjoy a high degree of autonomy, even during times of national crisis. This model, grounded in strong local self-governance, brings both strengths and challenges. On the one hand, it fosters local ownership and responsiveness. On the other, it requires well-functioning coordination across multiple levels of government and sectors, especially during emergencies.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, Sweden's governance system was put to the test. The central government could not simply issue directives to local authorities, as health and medical services fall under the jurisdiction of self-governing regions and municipalities. Instead, navigating the pandemic required a concerted effort across a diverse set of actors—government agencies, private companies, and local governments alike. At the heart of this coordination stood **SALAR (the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions)**. As both a platform and a mediator, SALAR played a critical role in connecting local and regional authorities with national institutions. It helped align actions, clarify responsibilities, and ensure that Sweden's response reflected the realities of its decentralized governance system. The experience made visible many long-standing tensions in the system—gaps in communication, overlapping mandates, and under-resourced sectors—but it also reinforced the value of collaborative problem-solving.

In Sweden, there is a deeply embedded tradition of multi-level and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Most municipalities already work closely with civil society, the private sector, academia, and community organizations, sometimes through formal platforms and agreements, sometimes through more ad hoc arrangements. While sectorization remains strong - ensuring specialization and accountability - there is also a shared understanding that complex societal issues, especially in times of crisis, require integrated responses.

## Multi-stakeholder governance in action

The collaborative governance model is not only theoretical, it is woven into the daily operations of Swedish public administration. Take, for instance, the work of the Swedish Tax Authority, which engages with a wide range of partners to prevent tax evasion and fraud. These include:

- Other public agencies, such as the employment office and the police;
- Municipal departments handling social welfare, business permits, and registration;
- Private sector associations and business networks;
- Academic institutions contributing evidence, insight, and long-term trend analysis.

This type of collaboration ensures that decisions are both grounded in evidence and responsive to broader social dynamics. It reflects a core principle in Swedish crisis management: that no single institution can solve complex problems alone.

## Case study: The Västmanland forest fires (2014)

Perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of Sweden's evolving crisis preparedness is the Västmanland forest fire of 2014, the largest wildfire in modern Swedish history. Over 13,000 hectares of land were destroyed, with devastating effects on local communities, wildlife, and the environment. The scale of the disaster required a wide-ranging response: volunteers, local rescue services, affected municipalities, regional authorities, businesses, the armed forces, police, and numerous government agencies were all involved. Yet, despite the willingness to respond, the crisis revealed significant coordination challenges.

According to Sweden's model, municipalities are expected to handle emergencies as far as they are able, and to cooperate with others when needs exceed their capacities. When this is not enough, national-level reinforcement can be activated. However, as the fire spread across multiple municipalities, the lack of clear command structures and communication channels delayed the formation of a unified response. Only after considerable time was a coordinated operation established under the leadership of the Governor of Västmanland County.

Once the response gained momentum, more resources flowed in: helicopters, water-bombing aircraft, tracked vehicles, pumps, hoses, and personnel from across the country and beyond. The involvement of the Home Guard, civil society organizations, and European reinforcements demonstrated both the strengths of Sweden's system and its need for further refinement.

## A turning point for crisis management reform

The aftermath of the Västmanland fires triggered widespread reflection and reform. Investigations were launched to identify what had worked—and what had not. From these insights, Sweden began to transform its approach to forest fire preparedness and broader emergency response systems.
Key reforms included:

- Formalizing inter-municipal coordination among rescue services;
- Clarifying leadership responsibilities, with new requirements for municipalities to maintain overall command of local fire services;
- Introducing national satellite-based early detection systems, enabling quicker responses;
- Developing centralized support systems with clearly defined roles for helicopters, aircraft, and other reinforcement tools;
- Strengthening Sweden's integration with EU crisis systems, enhancing both its ability to receive and to provide assistance.

What began as a devastating environmental event became a catalyst for structural change. Today, Sweden's system for managing large-scale wildfires is more robust, responsive, and interconnected than it was a decade ago.

## Conclusion: A system built on trust, shared responsibility, and learning

Sweden's experience demonstrates that decentralized governance, while complex, can be a strength, if paired with strong coordination, a culture of cooperation, and mechanisms for institutional learning. The country's collaborative model is not perfect, but it is evolving. Crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Västmanland forest fires have pushed the system to grow, adapt, and improve.

Above all, the Swedish case reminds us that resilience is not only about capacity, it is about relationships. It is about building systems that enable diverse actors to work together, share responsibility, and learn from experience. In an era of uncertainty, this kind of collaborative public administration is not only desirable—it is essential.

# Chapter 3:

# Building resilience as a continuous process, not a blueprint

Resilience in local governance is not a fixed target or a one-time achievement. It is a continuous process shaped by adaptation, learning, and the capacity to respond to change. In fragile settings like Lebanon, where uncertainty is persistent and disruptions are frequent, resilience cannot be built through standardized frameworks or top-down directives. It must be developed from the ground up, drawing strength from local realities, informed by experience, and maintained through durable, trust-based institutional relationships.

Lebanon's municipalities had to navigate one crisis after another: the Syrian refugee influx, a global pandemic, widespread wildfires, a collapsing economy, and waves of displacement linked to regional instability. These overlapping shocks have tested the limits of local governance. But they have also highlighted that resilience depends strongly on the ability of local governments to stay flexible, make decisions under pressure, and remain responsive to changing needs.

The Reslog project's experience showed that when local governments are equipped with the tools and space to adapt, they do more than manage crises, they begin to transform how they govern. In many cases, emergency responses laid the groundwork for institutional learning, stronger planning systems, and more inclusive decision-making. **What started as a fight for survival became a stepping stone toward more resilient and accountable local governance.**

There is no universal formula for building resilience. In complex and often unpredictable environments, resilience cannot be introduced through a single-entry point or predefined model. Instead, local governance requires a strategy that balances structure with flexibility, and capable of meeting urgent needs while also supporting long-term institutional development.

Crises rarely follow a clear or predictable path. Events unfold on the ground in ways that are nonlinear, fragmented, and often beyond immediate control. Effective governance in such settings must therefore embrace complexity, remain open to learning, and be willing to revise course when needed. Avoiding repeated failures depends not on having the perfect plan, but on the ability to reflect, adapt, and act with clarity under pressure.

To sustain this kind of agility, **local governance systems must be designed with both resilience and reform in mind.** Emergency responses should be integrated into a broader institutional vision that can adjust in real time without losing sight of long-term goals. This requires not only flexible tools and processes, but also a culture of accountability, where trust is built through tangible results and responsive leadership, not abstract promises.

## 3.1 A step-by-step model for local resilience

The Reslog project's work in Lebanon led to the development of an area-based, phased approach to building resilience in post-crisis local governance. This framework was not designed as a pre-set sequence, but as a set of interlinked dimensions that could be applied flexibly, depending on context and urgency. In practice, these phases often overlapped, responding simultaneously to immediate challenges while laying the groundwork for longer-term institutional development. Together, they form a coherent model for strengthening local governance capacity in fragile environments.

### 3.1.1 Prevention and risk mitigation

The first step toward building resilience is to address vulnerabilities before they escalate into crises. This requires integrating risk reduction into the daily routines of local governance by making it a core function rather than an ad hoc activity. Integrating risk reduction into local governance begins with building a clear picture of existing vulnerabilities. This requires the capacity to gather and interpret local data, assess risks, and identify both institutional strengths and operational gaps. Internal assessments help municipalities understand where systems are fragile and where strategic improvements are needs, laying the groundwork for embedding risk mitigation directly into municipal plans and priorities.

However, insight alone is not enough. Acting on these assessments depends on financial sustainability. Without adequate resources and proper fiscal autonomy, municipalities are unable to shift from reactive spending to proactive investment. Moreover, resilience is not built in isolation. Municipalities must work together across jurisdictions and sectors through shared platforms that enable collaboration, resource pooling, and coordinated responses. In this way, risk reduction becomes not just a technical exercise, but a systemic function of resilient local governance.
Despite its importance, prevention remains one of the most underfunded aspects of local governance. Many municipalities lack the political leverage or fiscal latitude to make it a priority. For prevention to become a meaningful part of governance practice, it must be embedded into national strategies and connected to donor support frameworks in order to ensure that local action is backed by coordinated, long-term investment.

### 3.1.2 Response preparedness

The second phase focuses on building the capacity needed to respond swiftly and effectively when crises occur. Preparedness goes beyond conducting emergency drills; it requires embedding readiness into the fabric of municipal governance. This means assigning clear roles to emergency teams, establishing coordination mechanisms, and ensuring that both staff and community actors are trained to act under pressure. Readiness also depends on having the necessary resources in place, from essential supplies to timely access to data, as well as robust communication protocols that guide decision-making during periods of disruption.

By anticipating risks and planning ahead, municipalities shift from reactive crisis management to proactive preparedness. This change results in faster, more coordinated responses while reinforcing the internal systems that support effective governance. In such conditions, crises serve as stress tests that reveal the functionality of preparedness measures and highlight areas for institutional improvement.

### 3.1.3 Response in practice

When a crisis strikes, the strength of local governance systems is tested in real time. The response phase places immediate demands on municipalities to deliver under pressure, manage public expectations, and coordinate across actors. In these moments, the clarity of internal procedures, the availability of trained personnel, and the ability to mobilize local resources become critical.

Effective response depends on clear communication with residents and partners, rapid access to reliable data, and structured coordination between institutions at different levels. Municipalities must be able to make decisions quickly, assign responsibilities without ambiguity, and adjust operations as new information emerges. The speed and coherence of these actions often determines not only the direct outcomes of the crisis, but also public confidence in local institutions.

A well-managed response does more than meet urgent need, it reinforces institutional credibility and creates momentum for longer-term reform. Each crisis, when handled effectively, provides insights that can inform future planning, refine governance practices, and strengthen the social contract between municipalities and the communities they serve

### 3.1.4 Recovery, learning, and institutional development

Once the immediate crisis has passed, attention shifts to recovery. But recovery is rarely linear. It unfolds unevenly, often while new challenges are emerging. For municipalities, this phase is less about returning to the status quo and more about learning and improving while reflecting on what just happened. Recovery can also include more physical features like reconstruction of infrastructure after a natural disaster.

Recovery is where learning must become deliberate. Municipalities that take time to document their experiences, adjust internal procedures, and formalize new practices are better positioned for the next disruption or crisis. This includes updating strategic plans, reworking workflows, investing in staff development, and strengthening the mechanisms that proved effective during the crisis.

It is also the right moment to widen participation. Involving residents, civil society, and community actors in post-crisis planning brings new perspectives and helps build consensus around priorities. When people see their feedback shaping municipal responses, not just during emergencies, but in how services and systems evolve afterward, it reinforces legitimacy and fosters deeper public engagement.

Ultimately, recovery is not just a return to function. It is a bridge to institutional development and a chance to embed resilience into the everyday operations of local government, so that each shock leaves systems not weaker, but stronger.

### 3.1.5 Sustaining institutional resilience

The final phase of resilience-building focuses on ensuring that progress endures beyond individual projects or funding cycles. Institutional resilience must be embedded in the daily routines, systems, and structures of local governance, so that municipalities can continue to function, adapt, and improve even without ongoing external support.
This means formalizing what has been learned. Practices introduced during earlier phases, such as risk mapping, inclusive planning, or digital tools need to be integrated into official policies, procedures, and budgets. Long-term financial strategies become essential, not only to sustain core functions but also to maintain the flexibility to respond to future crises.

Equally important is the ability to share and scale. When municipalities collaborate across regions, exchange experiences, and build peer learning networks, they strengthen their collective capacity. These connections help prevent the isolation often felt in fragile settings and create new pathways for mutual support and shared innovation.
Finally, sustaining resilience at the local level requires alignment with national frameworks. Without legal authority, predictable and adequate fiscal transfers, or enabling policies, even the most capable municipalities remain constrained. Linking local reforms to broader decentralisation efforts ensures that progress is not just local, but systemic and that municipalities can govern with both legitimacy and autonomy. Without autonomy and resources, resilience remains fragile and donor-dependent. True resilience means that municipalities can stand on

# Localized governance through an area-based approach in post-war and crisis contexts

## Gender equality at the centre of local resilience

In a context like Akkar where conservative social norms, institutional constraints, and limited municipal capacity shape the governance landscape, the Reslog project made the deliberate choice of not treating gender as a standalone component, but as a cross-cutting priority, woven into every layer of the project. Led by a dedicated Gender Technical Expert, the approach was intentionally flexible, demand-driven, and grounded in the realities of the field. Rather than imposing a one-size- fits-all model, gender integration evolved through a phased methodology, starting with shared understanding and evidence-building, and culminating in institutional integration over time.

The process began with a practical induction session for the Lebanon team. This session introduced core gender concepts in language and examples relevant to Akkar's fragile and conservative context. The project committed at minimum to gender-sensitive programming, while keeping a long-term vision to advance gender-responsive practices where feasible.

To ground this effort in local context, a tailored Gender Analysis was conducted, aligned with the project's Theory of Change. Findings were presented to the team in a second reflective session, encouraging critical discussion on how gender dynamics shape municipal service delivery, participation, and access. This helped ensure that gender-related actions were not generic, but rooted in Akkar's socio-political landscape.

From this foundation, the team developed a Gender Action Plan based on identified needs and in close coordination with field staff and partners. The plan included gender-specific tracking of field activities, dedicated technical support to project management, integration of a gender lens into monitoring and evaluation and systematic inclusion of gender in quarterly and strategic planning.

Operationalization of the plan was embedded into all project management processes. Monthly field meetings included dedicated gender reflection segments to surface barriers and identify inclusive solutions. Ongoing technical support was provided to the Lebanon Country Manager and team, including review of concept notes, data dashboards, and communications to ensure consistency with gender equality principles. Gender-sensitive MEL reviews were conducted regularly to improve representation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in project narratives and indicators.

Over time, gender became integrated into the project's daily practice. This included the use of gender-disaggregated volunteer forms, creation of women-friendly spaces for consultation, and deliberate efforts to ensure balanced male and female mobilizer teams. These were not symbolic gestures, but operational decisions that improved the inclusivity, reach, and impact of the project's work.

**A key lesson from the Reslog project is that meaningful gender mainstreaming is most effective when approached with patience, flexibility, and respect for context.** In a region where social norms and institutional limitations influence women's civic engagement, change was made possible not through prescriptive checklists, but by embedding gender into the project's core operations. In this way, gender became not an add-on, but a practical catalyst for more responsive and equitable local governance.

## 3.2 Learning while acting: A necessary balancing act

The Reslog project's experience shows that building resilient local governance in fragile settings is not about applying standard solutions. It requires working through complexity, staying close to what is happening on the ground, and learning continuously. In places where disruption is common, resilience is not something to achieve once and for all, it is an ongoing way of working that must be flexible, inclusive, and rooted in the social, political and economic realities of the territories.

The phased framework developed in Akkar offers a practical way forward. It connects five key areas-prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and institutional development—into a structure that helps municipalities meet immediate needs while also building longer-term capacity. But for this to work, it needs more than local effort. Supportive national policies, sustained funding, and coordination across government and society are all essential.

# Chapter 4:

# Institutional assessments, data collection, and digitalisation

In fragile and crisis-prone areas like Akkar, good governance starts with self-awareness. Municipalities cannot plan effectively or respond to shocks unless they understand their own institutional landscape. In Lebanon's unstable environment, access to reliable data is not just a technical add-on, it is a critical foundation for building resilience.

This chapter looks at how SALAR International and its partners supported municipalities and unions of municipalities (UoMs) in Akkar to build that foundation. The work focused on three connected steps: carrying out tailored institutional assessments, developing systems to collect and use local data, and introducing digital tools that fit local needs and capacity.

## 4.1 Institutional capacity assessments: Mapping what exists before planning what's next

In many crisis-affected settings, local governments are expected to deliver services without the systems or support they need. What they often lack is not just funding or equipment, but the time and space to reflect on how their institutions function day to day. To address this, SALAR International began by facilitating institutional assessments, not to audit or evaluate but to help municipalities take stock of their internal systems and identify opportunities for improvement.

These assessments were designed to be collaborative. Mayors, municipal staff, and union leaders were invited into open discussions about their roles, structures, routines, and constraints. The approach was grounded in real-world conditions rather than theoretical models or benchmarks. The aim was not to highlight weaknesses for external critique, but to help municipalities build a baseline they could use themselves. One pattern emerged early on: formal capacity assessments tend to underestimate municipalities in Lebanon. Many operated without documented procedures or digital systems, yet continued to function using informal strategies, such as delegating tasks to volunteers, sharing knowledge through verbal instructions, and relying on a complex web of trusted relationships. By recognizing these coping mechanisms, the assessments revealed not only what was missing, but also what was working.

The methodology was intentionally flexible. The process was structured around key themes such as governance, human resources, financial management, service delivery, and coordination. Each municipality selected its own focus areas based on relevance and need. This allowed some overlooked issues to surface, such as for example the absence of written job descriptions, heavy reliance on a few individuals, lack of digital archives, and the risk of losing institutional knowledge when staff or leadership changed.

The assessments also revealed a deeper vulnerability: most municipalities were not prepared to manage crises. Few had formal crisis response units. Basic tools to manage budgets, track operations, or store data were often missing. These gaps limited not only daily performance but also the ability to plan, adjust, or target services effectively. Without reliable information, municipalities could not tailor responses to shifting local needs. Still, the purpose of the process was not to point out problems, but to turn them into entry points for action.

The table below summarizes how some common gaps were transformed into reform steps:

| Identified need | Action taken |
|---|---|
| Lack of crisis management units | Crisis response units established within municipal unions |
| Absence of digital financial tracking | Basic financial tools introduced for budgeting and reporting |
| Unstructured decision-making processes | Key procedures documented to ensure continuity |
| Lack of GIS tools for risk mapping | GIS introduced for planning and risk assessment |
| Limited funding for municipal operations | Support provided to develop funding strategies and proposals |

In both Jurd El Qayteh and Dreib Al Awsat unions, assessments showed a clear pattern. Formal systems were often weak, but the willingness to improve was strong. Municipalities were eager to serve their communities more effectively. Once their internal needs were mapped out, it became easier to shape capacity-building efforts around emerging priorities. Instead of relying on generic training modules, SALAR International offered targeted support such as coaching municipal teams through everyday tasks, promoting peer learning, and guiding staff through step-by-step planning.

These assessments also helped municipalities advocate for themselves. By presenting clear evidence of their strengths and constraints, they could make a stronger case for technical support and funding. Donors and national stakeholders, in turn, gained a more realistic view of local governance in Akkar that helped ground their expectations in actual conditions.

SALAR International's experience showed that meaningful change does not have to start with perfect systems. It can begin with honest conversations, a shared commitment to learning, and recognition of the informal practices that keep municipalities going, even when formal structures fall short.

## 4.2 Digitalisation and data: A practical revolution

*"Digital technologies should not just be used to digitise existing government processes and to offer public services online. Governments should prioritise using digital technologies and data to rethink the design and implementation processes of public services and policies in order to achieve more citizen-driven approaches."* (OECD, Strengthening Digital Government, 2019)

Experience from Sweden shows that digitalisation can help local governments deliver better services. By reducing paperwork and simplifying routines, Swedish municipalities were able to focus more on what really matters to people. But digitalisation is not only about tools or technology, it is about building systems that are more open, responsive, and shaped by the needs of the community.

In Akkar, the situation was very different. For years, municipalities worked with outdated systems and little access to accurate data. Many decisions were based on guesswork or incomplete information. This made it hard to plan, respond to crises, or even understand what residents needed most.

The Reslog project introduced change carefully, starting small and building steadily. In 2019, a learning visit to Sweden gave local leaders a glimpse of what was possible: digital dashboards, feedback platforms, and tools to support real-time planning. At the time, these systems felt completely out of reach.

Yet by 2024, municipalities in Jurd El Qayteh and Dreib Al Awsat were collecting, analyzing, and using their own data, including gender-sensitive information, to guide decisions. The shift did not come from importing a complex system from Sweden or elsewhere. It came from a gradual, locally driven process that matched technology to actual needs. Simple tools were introduced and staff were trained to use them. Over time, digitalization became part of everyday municipal and a way to work smarter, with and for the community.

### 4.2.1 Socio-economic and gender-sensitive data: Seeing who is left behind

Understanding a community takes more than knowing how many people live in it. It requires a closer look at everyday realities: who has access to clean water, healthcare, or education? which groups are excluded from public life? and where do economic pressures intersect with factors like gender, age, or legal status? To uncover these dynamics, the Reslog project worked with municipalities to collect gender-sensitive data that went beyond simple service coverage. The goal was to capture the barriers that prevented people from accessing services in the first place.

The surveys explored a range of local concerns. They looked at how women and girls encounter specific obstacles to health, education, and water access. They examined youth participation and employment challenges, documented economic vulnerabilities at the household level, and recorded the priorities communities themselves identified as most urgent. They also asked residents whether they were willing to engage in local initiatives. The aim was to reflect the lived experience of residents, not just to collect static indicators.

Municipalities were not only trained to gather this information; they also learned how to use it. The findings fed directly into annual planning cycles, shaped budget revisions, and helped staff prepare targeted proposals for donor support. For many municipalities, this marked the first time they had direct access to structured, relevant data about their own communities. Since the only national census was conducted back in 1932, most municipalities depended on external data sources such as national surveys like the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) or donor reports and assessments that often-missed local nuances and specificities.

The data collected through Reslog helped fill this gap. In Jurd El Qayteh and Dreib Al Awsat, for example, it highlighted vulnerable areas such as informal shelters hosting displaced families. This information became critical during seasonal hardships and public health crises and helped municipal officials and local organizations to coordinate and deliver aid more effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and again during the internal displacement in 2024, municipalities used this data to prepare faster and respond more precisely.

Beyond emergencies, the data supported long-term development efforts. In Jurd El Qayteh, it helped justify a proposal to install solar-powered water systems in underserved areas. In Dreib Al Awsat, it supported the launch of a hydroponics initiative aimed at food-insecure families. These examples show that locally owned data can do more than identify problems, it can help to direct resources where they are most needed and build credibility with donors and external partners. Residents also began to see the value. When they saw that the information they shared led to tangible projects, their willingness to participate grew. That, in turn, improved the quality of future data and strengthened trust between communities and their municipalities.

Perhaps most significantly, municipalities began using the data regularly. They brought it into planning meetings, shared it with civil society actors, and, in some cases, aligned local fundraising efforts around the most pressing needs it revealed. The experience led to a clear lesson: even in settings with limited resources, locally collected and locally used data can lead to better planning, more inclusive governance, and a stronger connection between institutions and the people they serve.

## Digital tools that fit the context

Digitalization in Akkar did not begin with large platforms or expensive systems. It started with small, practical tools that municipalities could actually use, and selected not for their sophistication, but for their relevance and ease of use. The goal was to build digital routines that matched local capacity, supported daily governance, and could grow over time. The Reslog project introduced **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** early on, training municipal engineers to map infrastructure, identify service gaps, and highlight vulnerable zones. With ArcGIS Online Subscriptions, local teams could layer different data sets, collaborate in real time, and visualize inequality across neighborhoods. For the first time, municipalities could shift from reacting to problems to anticipating them.

The COVID-19 pandemic and cholera outbreaks accelerated the demand for real-time data. In response, the **Salamati health management app** was introduced, allowing municipalities to track cases, assess risk, and coordinate public health responses. When linked to GIS tools, the app enabled faster, more informed decision-making in collaboration with union-level crisis units.

To support fieldwork, municipalities adopted **ArcGIS Survey123**, smart forms that allowed trained volunteers to collect geo-tagged household data during health emergencies. This information fed directly into GIS dashboards, improving not just emergency response, but also community planning. Survey123 was later used to gather resident feedback on infrastructure, service gaps, and local priorities. For day-to-day tracking, **customized Excel dashboards** became essential. Municipal staff used them to monitor water access, household needs, and infrastructure coverage. These simple tools required no advanced technical skills but gave municipalities a clearer, more organized view of their communities.

As data improved, municipalities needed better ways to make it visible. Esri ArcGIS dashboards helped technical teams transform raw information into interactive maps and indicators that were used to monitor service delivery, track environmental risks, or plan health responses.

Digital tools were also used to strengthen governance. Recruitment processes became more transparent through standardized **Google Forms**, which collected demographic and interest information from residents applying to participate in municipal initiatives or volunteer programs. This reduced bias and made civic engagement more inclusive.

To manage Lebanon's ongoing electricity crisis, 13 municipalities adopted **generator management software**. This system tracked fuel consumption, maintenance, billing, and revenue—helping reduce disputes and improve operational efficiency. Some municipalities, like those in the Jurd El Qayteh union, went a step further. They piloted digital **internal management systems** with modules for archiving, budgeting, HR, and complaints handling. With training and staff commitment, they began transitioning away from paper files toward more organized, searchable systems.

At the same time, municipalities engaged trained Lebanese and Syrian volunteers—women and men alike—to collect socio-economic data through **structured surveys**. These captured information on housing, education, employment, and access to services. The results were compiled at the union level, informing planning, guiding aid, and strengthening advocacy with national actors.
Basic but important changes included **street numbering and address mapping** in towns that had no previous system. Using GIS, buildings were assigned numbers and streets named, laying the foundation for future urban planning, even where physical signage was not yet possible.

To support more inclusive participation, municipalities used **digital templates** to track who attended meetings, trainings, and consultations. The data was disaggregated by gender, age, and nationality, helping municipalities identify who was missing from the conversation and adapt outreach accordingly. Municipalities also tested new ways of selecting community projects. Using a **Community Initiatives Selection Matrix,** they assessed resident proposals based on clear criteria such as social impact, inclusiveness, feasibility, and alignment with local goals. Staff and volunteers led the scoring process, replacing informal decisions with a more transparent system of review.

Efforts to improve communication also went digital. Both the Jurd El Qayteh and Dreib Al Awsat unions launched **official websites**. The Jurd El Qayteh site (jourdelkaytea.gov.lb) became a regular source of updates and engagement. In Dreib Al Awsat, capacity constraints made updates more difficult highlighting the need for staff and time to sustain such efforts. Social media platforms and messaging apps were also widely adopted to share council decisions, promote local events, and collect feedback, especially useful in remote rural areas where face-to-face engagement was limited.

**GIS was also used to promote local tourism**. Municipalities mapped historical sites, nature areas, and local services to support regional visibility. These maps were featured during events like "Nawwartou Akkar," helping build local pride and attract visitors.

**Each tool came with practical support.** Training, mentoring, and follow-up allowed municipalities to move beyond adoption and toward real integration into daily work. By 2024, this progress came full circle in a region-wide data update exercise, led entirely by partner municipalities with coaching from the Union's technical team. For the first time, local authorities managed the full cycle of data collection and use, which is a tangible outcome of ownership and maturity.
This shift was not driven by high-end systems or dramatic innovation. It was built through modest, meaningful tools, each chosen to meet a real need. What made the difference was not the technology itself, but how it was used by local teams, in their own way, to make governance more transparent, accountable, and responsive.

### 4.2.2 From tools to culture: A digital mindset

While the tools introduced through Reslog were important, the most lasting shift was not technological, it was cultural. Municipalities in Akkar began to change the way they approached their work. Staff started thinking beyond individual everyday tasks, focusing instead on systems, workflows, and institutional processes.

This transformation was supported through consistent peer learning and mentorship. Rather than offering one-off training sessions, Reslog invested in continuous engagement. Local engineers and administrative staff received hands-on support, were encouraged to take ownership of the tools they used, and were given space to adapt digital solutions to their working conditions on the ground. As they gradually gained confidence, they began sharing experiences with neighboring municipalities, creating a ripple effect of learning across the region.

The impact was visible. In one case, a junior municipal employee who started by populating Excel dashboards was recruited by a national NGO to support its data analysis work. In another, a municipal engineer introduced GIS into a regional planning meeting, impressing national stakeholders with her expertise. These examples underscore how digital tools, when properly integrated, don't just strengthen institutions, they also build human capital, create career opportunities, and increase the likelihood that skilled staff stay in the public sector.

## 4.3 Enabling evidence-based governance

Digital tools provided a new foundation for governance in Akkar, but collecting data was only the first step. What mattered more was how that data was used. In an environment where decisions often depend on assumptions, tacit knowledge or negotiations, the shift toward evidence-based governance meant that municipalities were better able to justify their choices, target their resources, and serve their communities more equitably.

Rather than treating data as a technical requirement or external deliverable, SALAR International worked with municipalities to embed it into everyday decision-making. The focus was on building the capacity to ask informed questions, assess options based on facts, and explain decisions transparently. With this shift, data became a working asset, used not only to support internal planning but also to communicate clearly with residents and stakeholders.

### 4.3.1 Bridging data and decision-making

One of the clearest impacts of the digital systems introduced was the shift in how municipalities conducted planning. With better access to information and tools to interpret it, municipalities moved from reactive, short-term decisions to longer-term, strategic approaches.

- Excel-based dashboards helped municipalities visualize service gaps, population density, and infrastructure coverage.
- Instead of balancing investments based on informal influence or geographical rotation, decisions were based on verifiable needs.
- This allowed municipalities to channel limited funding - often from external sources - into projects that would deliver the highest impact for residents.

Beyond technical planning, the use of data also improved internal governance. Municipal councils and technical teams began using dashboards and visualizations during meetings. This helped reduce subjective debate and provided a common, neutral reference point. As a result, discussions became more structured, and decisions were easier to justify, both internally and to the public.

### 4.3.2 Supporting donor engagement and advocacy

Having access to reliable data also changed how municipalities interacted with donors and national agencies. With clear dashboards, maps, and population-based indicators, municipalities could move beyond generalities and request more credible and focused interventions.

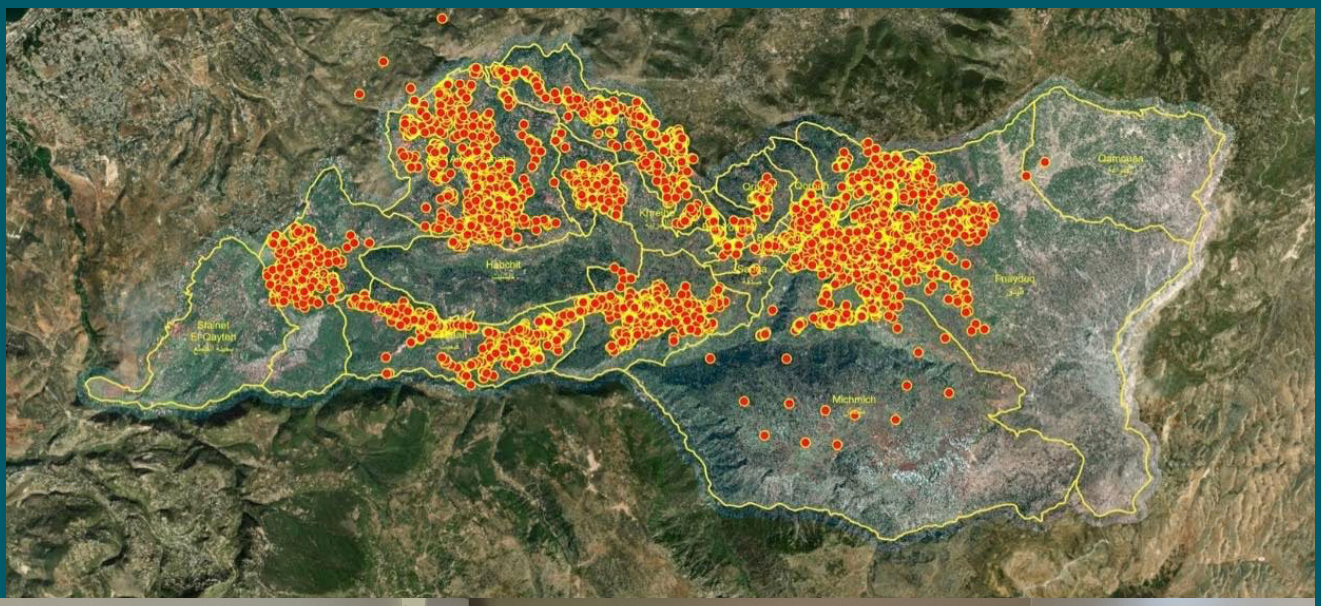
- They were able to explain why a certain intervention was needed, how it was identified, and who would benefit.
- Project plans were accompanied by measurable indicators and geographic data, making it easier for donors to evaluate and support.
- This improved mutual accountability and demonstrated municipalities' readiness to manage and monitor development initiatives.

In several instances, municipalities opened their laptops during donor field visits to walk partners through live dashboards and GIS maps, pointing to service gaps, infrastructure plans, or socio-economic data by neighborhood. This was an unmistakable sign that data had moved from paperwork to practice, and that planning was now rooted in local evidence, not external assumptions.

This chapter shows a gradual shift in how local governance is approached in fragile settings. Rather than treating institutions as broken systems to fix, the focus is on helping them learn, adapt, and take more ownership over time.

Three key principles emerged. First, progress starts with self-awareness; understanding how municipal institutions function internally is essential before planning improvements. Second, digital tools are useful only when they match local needs. They must be simple enough for regular use, but still strong enough to support decision-making. Third, lasting change happens when learning becomes part of the system and when staff are supported not just to deliver activities, but to reflect, adapt, and share what they learn.

The result is not just better data or improved planning. It is the steady development of more confident, capable municipalities that are playing a stronger role in advocating for the best interests of their communities.




# Chapter 5:

# Inclusive community engagement for collaborative resilience and local governance development

At the heart of resilient local governance lies a simple truth: governance works best when it's shaped with people, not just *for* them. In Lebanon, where many municipalities operate under severe resource constraints and face the complex needs of diverse communities, meaningful community engagement has proven to be one of the strongest drivers of trust, legitimacy, and local development. It is not just a democratic ideal; it is a practical necessity for mobilizing the full potential of local resources and knowledge a community has to offer.

The Reslog project always placed residents at the center of its work. From the outset, the project recognized that municipalities cannot operate in isolation. Whether delivering basic services, planning development initiatives, or navigating periods of instability, local authorities must collaborate closely with the communities they serve. Community engagement is not just about inclusion; it is about transformation.

When residents take part in municipal life, they help define priorities, monitor performance, and contribute with their lived experience in shaping the decisions that might affect them. In turn, they are more likely to support municipal policies, pay fees, and contribute to community wellbeing when they feel appreciated and their opinion taken into account This virtuous cycle strengthens both institutions and social bonds, enabling municipalities to adapt, respond, and grow alongside their communities.

This chapter explores how the Reslog project worked with municipalities and UoMs in Akkar to create inclusive collaboration platforms, encourage active citizenship, and embed community voices in local governance. It shows through practical examples and lessons learned that engagement is more than a method, it is primarily a mindset, and one of the most powerful tools for strengthening governance from the ground up.

## 5.1 Platforms and mechanisms for participation

In Lebanon, municipal governance operates under Decree-Law No. 118 (1977), which gives local governments a broad mandate but says little about citizen participation. In practice, involving citizens has largely depended on each municipality's initiative and political will. In some cases, donor or NGO-led "participation" efforts ignored local power dynamics and even reinforced inequalities.

Despite these limitations, various forms of citizen engagement have gradually emerged, especially in municipalities that recognize the value of community dialogue and co-production in improving local planning and service delivery.

### 5.1.1 Multipurpose rooms and community hubs: Inclusive spaces for local collaboration

Several Reslog-partner municipalities in Akkar established dedicated multipurpose room and community hubs, often within the municipal buildings, as neutral, welcoming venues for residents to share concerns, propose ideas, and shape local priorities. These new spaces opened up participation: residents discussed service needs, co-designed community projects, and brainstormed around volunteer initiatives. Municipal leaders made a point to involve young people and women, often reaching out to community members who had been active in prior civic initiatives or volunteer groups.

Even though Lebanon's crises severely limit the possibilities of developing formal forward-looking municipal plans, these community dialogues have built mutual understanding and trust. Local officials were able to explain the institutional constraints and service delivery challenges they face, while residents—including youth, women, refugees, and business owners—openly shared their priorities and concerns.

Though still evolving, these participatory spaces laid a foundation for more transparent, collaborative governance in unions like Jurd El Qayteh and some municipalities within the Jurd El Qayteh and Dreib El Awsat unions. They demonstrate that even in resource-constrained settings, inclusive dialogue can build community ownership and a shared responsibility for local development.

### 5.1.2 Youth engagement and volunteering platforms

> *"The Reslog-supported initiatives play an important role in reshaping the municipality's perspective on youth. We transformed from being a group perceived as having little to offer into a group on which the municipality could rely, especially during critical periods. Engaging in these activities also provided a chance to connect with Syrian immigrants in our area. This interaction brought mutual understanding of our respective dreams and challenges and enabled both groups to collaborate in the development of Akkar. We recognized a shared passion and capacity, bridging gaps and fostering a sense of unity among us. This connection with Syrians proved vital for our area. We all faced similar challenges and shared common problems. It became evident that all of us needed to be part of the solution rather than viewing each other through the lens of racism. By working together, we found strength in our shared experiences, promoting cohabitation and cooperation as essential tools in overcoming the challenges we collectively face."*
>
> (Jinane Saadeldine, activist and volunteer from Akkar)

One of the positive highlights of the Reslog experience was how youth engagement quietly became one of the project's most dynamic forces. In Akkar, where young people are often left out of formal decision- making, the project helped to establish tangible entry points through which youth to contribute, not just symbolically, but meaningfully.

It often started with a simple yet powerful entry point: data. Dozens of young volunteers, Lebanese and Syrian, were trained to conduct household surveys using digital tools. For many municipalities, this was the first time they had access to localized data on such a scale. The data collected by these young women and men shaped how decisions were made, from setting service priorities to improving the way aid was distributed. For the young people, the process was more than just technical training; it was a way to step into public life and be taken seriously.

The momentum didn't stop there. When COVID-19 hit, youth were among the first to step forward. They coordinated logistics, ran public awareness campaigns, and served as the connective tissue between overstretched municipalities and anxious communities. What began as spontaneous action soon evolved into something more structured, volunteer strategies that proved just as useful in times of calm as they were in crisis.

The community hubs took it one step further. These new inclusive spaces became places where youth not only contributed ideas but helped bring them to life. They volunteered their time, pitched projects, and were selected through transparent, merit-based processes managed by municipalities themselves. No use of personal connections and no back doors. Just open calls, simple online tools, and a belief that good ideas could come from anyone.

What emerged wasn't just a story of youth participation. It was a quiet but steady shift in power: young people moving from implementers to co-creators, from volunteers to partners in shaping what local governance could look like when it welcomes new fresh energy in. In a place like Akkar, that shift was no small thing. It showed what becomes possible when institutions open their doors—and their ears—to the next generation.

### 5.1.3 Youth consultative councils: A structured space for civic dialogue and influence

In Akkar youth are often excluded from public life. Two forward-thinking municipalities tried something new: they created Youth Consultative Councils as structured spaces where young people could step off the sidelines and into a sustained and formally recognized advisory role and a highly valued platform for civic engagement. Rather than starting from scratch, the councils built on earlier youth involvement in data collection, volunteer work, community hubs, yet brought continuity and structure to that momentum. Lebanese and Syrian youth alike came together regularly to set priorities, pitch ideas, and engage directly with municipal leaders. Held in accessible, youth-friendly spaces, the meetings tackled issues ranging from waste management and school access to cultural activities and public space design.

Inclusivity was at the heart of the model. Councils brought together young men and women from a range of backgrounds, and gave Syrian youth a seat at the table, a rare move in formal civic settings. What emerged was more than better dialogue; it was a space for trust-building and mutual understanding across community divides.

Although the councils had no formal decision-making power, their influence grew. Municipalities began consulting them on project design, public campaigns, and donor proposals. Their feedback shaped real plans and, more importantly, signaled a shift toward a culture of listening and shared ownership in local governance. Still, this model is just a starting point. For Youth Consultative Councils to take root more widely, two conditions are key: openness from municipal councils and leadership from young people themselves. The experience of the two pilot municipalities shows the enormous potential when both align, but scaling it up will require more than good intentions. It takes consistent effort to move from tokenistic participation to tangible impact, and from isolated pilots to a culture where youth engagement is embedded in how municipalities work. That journey is still unfolding.

## From Akkar to Homs: Replicating active citizenship across borders

*"What I learned in Akkar, I applied in my hometown in Syria."*
– Shuaib Awwad, Founder of the Sa3ed Team, Homs

Shuaib Awwad, a Syrian volunteer who took part in municipal engagement activities and community data projects in Al-Dreib Al-Awsat (Akkar), leveraged his experience with participatory governance and needs-based planning to launch a community initiative in his hometown of Homs, Syria.

After returning to Syria, Shuaib founded the Sa3ed Team just one week after the regime withdrew from his area. Inspired by the methods he had seen in Akkar, his first step was to conduct a digital census of the local population, engaging over 950 families. The data collected was used – just as he had observed in Lebanon – to identify local priorities and guide the team's initiatives. Within a short time, the Sa3ed Team implemented a wide range of actions, including:

- Cleaning and beautifying public spaces, even removing politically sensitive graffiti that marred the local environment.
- Providing school supplies and additional seating to improve conditions in local schools.
- Organizing public health awareness sessions for children, including education on the dangers of war remnants.
- Restoring the women's section of the local mosque to create a safe, inclusive space for community gatherings.
- Launching a monthly charitable medicine fund to help residents with chronic illnesses obtain necessary medications.
- Implementing a "Know Your Country" initiative, which promoted awareness of history and development needs among residents.

Shuaib credits his leadership skills, project design experience, and understanding of participatory planning to his time working in Lebanon – first as a team leader in the Salamati health awareness and social statistics projects, and later as a volunteer liaison officer with SALAR International. His ability to mobilize volunteers, manage local initiatives, and coordinate with donors and partners grew directly out of this cross-border learning experience.

*"Today, I use everything I learned – census tools, reporting, networking, project design – to help my community take the lead in its own development."* – Shuaib Awwad

Shuaib's story is a powerful reminder that local governance practices — when they are inclusive, practical, and human-centered — can inspire action far beyond their original setting. It also highlights a regional ripple effect of capacity-building work when community actors are supported not just as beneficiaries, but as future leaders.

### 5.1.4 First responder teams: A civic platform emerging from crisis

In Akkar, but also across the rest of Lebanon, First Responder Teams (FRTs) were born out of necessity. In late 2020, wildfires swept across large parts of Akkar including many areas covered by Reslog, exposing how unprepared the area was for large-scale emergencies. With no national emergency response system in place, the Union of Municipalities of Jurd El Qayteh, with support from SALAR International and local partners mobilized a spontaneous yet determined group of local Syrian and Lebanse volunteers. Though informal at first, their impact during the wildfires revealed the need for a structured, community-rooted mechanism that could be activated in times of crisis.

Coordination soon expanded to include the Lebanese Civil Defense, Red Cross, and nearby municipalities. Together, they set up communication channels and emergency protocols. This laid the foundation for transforming the volunteer group into a permanent civic asset. The FRT was eventually integrated into Jurd El Qayteh's Union-level Crisis Management Unit (CMU), with members receiving training and participating in operational planning.

Volunteers received training, coaching, and took part in planning for future emergencies. Over time, the teams stayed active not just for wildfires, but also to support cholera awareness campaigns, snow storm preparedness, and help for displaced families during waves of conflict. What makes the FRT unique is that it wasn't a one-time initiative. It evolved into a lasting part of the union's emergency coordination model.That consistency-built trust, especially in areas where civic participation had long been weak or politicized.

Today, many FRT members are more than responders, they are local connectors. They lead awareness campaigns, support development efforts, and join municipal consultations. Their journey from emergency volunteers to trusted civic actors shows how crisis, met with local initiative, can drive real institutional change.

## 5.2 Inclusion and gender equality

Inclusion doesn't begin with policy; it begins with people. The Reslog experience clearly shows that inclusion is not just a principle or a universal norm, it is one of the cornerstones of effective, responsive governance. In a place like Lebanon, where communities are diverse and inequalities run deep, municipalities can't afford to leave voices out. Yet in many rural areas like Akkar, large segments of the population—especially women, youth, and refugees—have historically been sidelined from local decision- making.

Reslog worked with partner municipalities to broaden inclusion, but challenges are real, deep and often systemic. Social norms, power dynamics, and perceptions of who leads public life still shape to a large extent who is entitled to speak, and who traditionally prefers to remain silent. Many women continue to carry the weight of unpaid care work, leaving them with little time or energy to attend public meetings. Others feel unwelcome in public spaces or fear being judged for speaking out. Refugees often hesitate to participate, worried that visibility could backfire. And for many young people, the political world feels closed off or irrelevant to their daily lives and their challenges.

These hidden barriers often decide whose voices are heard and whose are not. That's why real inclusion means more than just inviting people; it means creating spaces where they feel safe, respected, and able to take part in decisions that matter.

Lebanon's municipal law doesn't require public participation, let alone gender balance or refugee involvement. But in Reslog, many municipalities began to see inclusion not as a burden, but as a practical advantage. When more people got involved, ideas improved, decisions had more support, and plans were more likely to succeed.

In many cases, inclusion meant getting creative, going beyond formal procedures to meet people on their own terms. Some municipalities shifted meeting times and locations to be more accessible, set up safe spaces where women could speak freely, or partnered with trusted community members who could bridge gaps and bring more voices into the room.

One of the most effective steps was bringing men and women Syrian community mobilizers on board. The mobilizers helped refugee families understand what the municipality was doing and gave them a way to speak up without fear or pressure. For many refugee women, it was much easier to share concerns in a quiet chat with a woman mobilizer than in a big public meeting. And for the municipalities, these mobilizers became trusted go-betweens, clearing up confusion, easing tensions, and making sure voices that usually go unheard could finally be part of the conversation.

Inclusion, in this sense, wasn't just about expanding participation. It was about changing how participation happens, who gets invited in, how they are heard, and how their input shapes decisions. Bit by bit, these efforts helped make governance in the areas served by Reslog more reflective of the people it serves.

## 5.3. Active citizenship and local accountability

Local governance in Lebanon has long followed a familiar script. Citizens petition for services. They vote for relatives or acquaintances who might open doors. They lean on personal connections more than systems, and often expect little in return. In this landscape, the idea that residents have rights or a role to play in shaping decisions felt like wishful thinking, yet Reslog set out to challenge that inherited norm.

Across several municipalities in Akkar, Reslog encouraged community members to ask not just what their municipality could do for them, but how they themselves could help the municipality in moving things forward. The shift has been subtle, uneven, and hard-earned but real. And Reslog has worked patiently to nurture it. At the heart of this shift lies a more grounded understanding of citizenship. In many places, "citizen" has meant little more than voter or petitioner. Broader ideas of shared responsibility or civic participation have rarely taken root, not only because people are apathetic or have lost hope in change, but also because few opportunities existed to actively contribute to municipal decision-making.

But this is beginning to change. Some municipalities, with Reslog's support, have created simple, practical ways for residents to get involved: volunteering, joining needs assessments, taking part in clean-up campaigns, or attending small community forums. These are not grand gestures. But they are accessible entry points that build trust and open the door to deeper engagement.

Accountability is evolving, too. It is no longer about finger-pointing, but also about clarity and openness. When mayors explain what the municipality can or cannot do, how funds are allocated, or why some priorities take time, it helps manage expectations and makes room for honest conversations. A few municipalities now share easy-to-read budget summaries. Others use WhatsApp or Facebook to keep residents in the loop or to test ideas through informal consultations. These may be small steps, but they make governance feel visible and real.

In many areas served by Reslog, the presence of youth volunteers and Reslog-trained community mobilizers has helped close the distance between citizens and local authorities. These local connectors gather feedback, surface concerns, and help translate daily realities into actionable suggestions that officials can act on (or not).

Even where no formal complaint systems exist, this two-way flow of information builds a culture of responsiveness rooted in relationships, not paperwork.

Of course, deep-rooted barriers remain. Many people still don't know their rights, or see local governance as something distant from their lives. But according to the Reslog experience active citizenship is not about turning every resident into a policy expert, it is about creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and part of the community's direction. This kind of civic culture takes time to grow. But where it does, it plants the seeds for stronger institutions and the foundations for real reform.

### 5.3.1 Building trust in institutions

In Lebanon's fractured governance landscape, trust doesn't come easily. Years of political deadlock, economic hardship, and unreliable service delivery have left many residents doubtful of what their municipalities can deliver, or even if it cares to try changing things. And yet, Reslog's experience in Akkar showed that trust can be rebuilt. Not through grand reforms or sweeping promises, but through small, consistent acts of honesty, respect, and follow-through.

Municipalities are close to the ground. They repair roads, manage waste, help organize community life, and often serve as first responders in times of crisis. That day-to-day presence matters. It means that local authorities have a rare opportunity to reshape how public institutions are seen, not by pretending they can solve everything, but by being open about what they can do, and transparent about what they can't. In a country where national institutions often feel distant or abstract, this relational, grounded approach is also one of the strongest cases for advancing decentralization.

Reslog worked to support this shift. Some partner municipalities began publishing simplified budget summaries to show how funds were being allocated. Others started using Facebook and WhatsApp to share updates or respond to residents' questions. A few held informal meetings in community spaces to listen, explain, and manage expectations. These were not grand gestures, but they helped in clearing confusion, misinformation, and the distant silence that so often fuels distrust.

At the same time, the youth volunteers and community mobilizer trained and supported by Reslog became a vital bridge. They translated municipal plans into everyday language, brought residents' concerns to the table, and helped make local institutions feel more human and more accessible. In places where formal complaint systems didn't exist, this two-way flow of information created an informal but powerful form of accountability rooted in relationships rather than bureaucracy. Importantly, trust is not something one side can build alone. It is a mutual process that depends on clarity, consistency, and a willingness to engage. In municipalities that made space for this kind of dialogue through joint initiatives, regular communication, or just the habit of explaining decisions tensions eased, and people started to feel more invested in their local institutions. Even when disagreements arose, they were more often met with dialogue rather than confrontation.

Of course, trust doesn't grow overnight. But it does take root in small exchanges, in predictable behavior, and in the moments when people feel heard, even if the answer is not always positive. In Lebanon's ongoing crisis, municipalities that invest in this kind of trust-building won't be able to fix everything. But they will be far better placed to face challenges with their communities, not apart from them. That's what Reslog focused on, not through sweeping fixes that require resources no one had, but the quieter work of building relationships that make better governance possible.

# Chapter 6:

# Crisis response and management in the present and for the future

In Lebanon, local authorities are often left to handle emergencies with largely improvised systems and insufficient resources and this was not any different in in Akkar. Early responses by Reslog partner municipalities were hence largely improvised, but over time, and with support from SALAR International, partners began to develop more structured and effective ways of handling crises, setting an example that inspired others across the country.

Throughout Reslog's lifetime, they took important steps toward institutionalizing local emergency response. This process culminated in the creation of dedicated Crisis Management Units (CMUs), marking a major shift in how local actors plan for, coordinate, and respond to emergencies. The Reslog experience showed that with the right support, coordination, and access to data, municipalities can move from reactive relief efforts to proactive risk reduction, inclusive collaboration, and informed decision- making.

This chapter reflects on how Reslog Lebanon supported the development of these local crisis- response models—focusing in particular on the CMU established in the Union of Jurd El Qayteh. It traces how the model took shape, what it accomplished, and the lessons it offers for other localities in Lebanon and in similarly fragile settings elsewhere. In essence, it shows how immediate crisis response can lay the foundation for long-term resilience and stronger, more capable local governance.

## 6.1 The evolution of local crisis management mechanisms: From ad hoc to institutionalized approaches

Crisis response in Lebanon has rarely followed a plan. Local authorities have historically relied on the initiative of individual mayors, informal networks, and occasional NGO support to compensate the absence of structured guidance and/or emergency funding from the central government. Every new emergency, whether a fire, a pandemic, or a sudden influx of displaced families required an improvised mix of coordination, tools, and information management that would soon be forgotten... until the next crisis hits.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point in this long-standing dynamic. The long duration of the pandemic (around 18 months) and its complex impacts exposed the limits of improvisation and pushed local authorities to think beyond stopgap measures. In Jurd El Qayteh, this pressure catalyzed a shift. What began as ad hoc emergency task force to handle the pandemic gradually evolved into the region's first structured Crisis Management Unit (CMU) through steady support from SALAR International.

By 2023, the CMU in Jurd El Qayteh had developed into a fully functioning entity with a clear division of roles, basic Standard Operating Procedures and some hands-on tools. A staff member from the union was assigned to lead coordination in order to ensure continuity and sustained follow-up. Basic procedures were put in place to clarify responsibilities and steps during a crisis and periodically refined as the work progressed. The team also mapped key infrastructure and service coverage to identify gaps and plan better. These tools were put to test during the 2024 winter storms and cholera outbreak that hit the area in 2024.

The CMU was never meant to work in isolation. Coordination included Civil Defense, health centers, NGOs, and community volunteers. Planning meetings, WhatsApp alert groups, and simulation drills helped the different stakeholders to understand and appreciate each other and to strengthen the complementarity between their different roles, and establish clear communication pathways before emergencies happened. A crisis room was set up at the union's offices, with maps, communication equipment, and space for team coordination. A mobile CMU unit was also introduced, giving the team the ability to deploy to the field, track events in real time, and manage logistics on-site.

With time, the CMU evolved into more than an emergency tool, it became a platform for local governance, bringing together municipal staff, first responders, and civil society around a shared mission. This collaboration broke down silos and fostered a new, more integrated way of working. When the Union of Jurd El Qayteh adopted internal bylaws for the CMU and First Responder Team—the first in Lebanon to do so at a UoM level—it clearly signaled that crisis response was now a core municipal function. The union and its member municipalities embraced their role as conveners and leaders, recognizing that true resilience depends not just on plans, but on preparation, steady communication, and strong community ownership.

Although Crisis Management Units are still not formally recognized in national law, they now fill a critical gap in Lebanon's fragmented emergency response system. The experience in Jurd El Qayteh shows that even in places with limited resources, local authorities can lead. With the right tools and partnerships, they can move from reacting under pressure to managing crises with foresight, building stronger governance and deeper resilience along the way.

## National momentum: The 2023 conference on community first responders

A major step toward the institutionalization of local crisis response in Lebanon came in August 2023, with the **National Conference on Community First Responders for Forest Fires and Crisis Response.** Organized by SALAR International in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, the Lebanese Red Cross, and other national actors, the event brought together rescue services, unions of municipalities, donors, and civil society groups. It created a national platform to elevate local first responder models from field-based innovation to policy dialogue.

The conference was grounded in a comprehensive study of **45 First Responder Teams (FRTs)** across Lebanon. Through interviews, focus groups, and site visits, the study captured how local initiatives evolved into coordinated models of fire prevention, surveillance, and public awareness led by community volunteers. The findings revealed a dual reality: a chronic shortage of centralized crisis capacity, especially in remote areas, and a surge in local creativity and civic solidarity. In some regions, burned areas dropped by over 90% in just one year thanks to strong local engagement and the optimization of the modest support provided to FRTs through various initiatives.

The CMU of Jurd El Qayteh was featured prominently in the study, mostly as a **proof of concept** for the role of municipal leadership in fostering inclusive, context-specific crisis coordination systems where Lebanese and Syrian volunteers, including many women, now work side by side in fire prevention, surveillance, and community awareness efforts. The Jurd El Qayteh experience also challenges many assumptions about who holds legitimacy and responsibility for public safety during times of crisis.

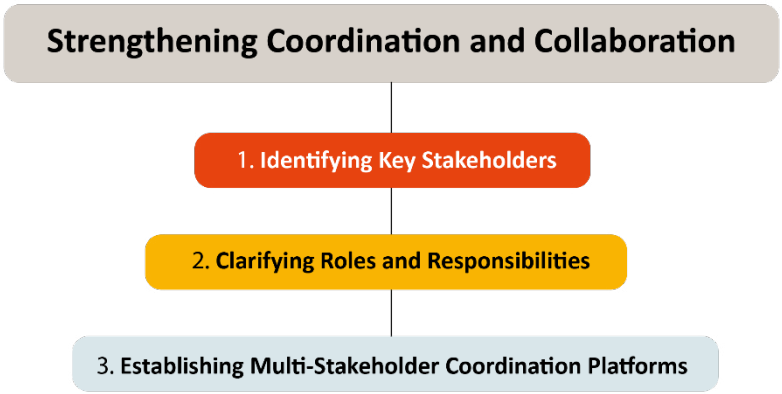
To translate this into policy, SALAR International produced a targeted brief. It called for the creation of a national registry of FRTs, integration of local-first protocols into Lebanon's disaster risk strategies, improved coordination between municipalities and national bodies, and formal recognition of community-based prevention units within Lebanon's crisis response system.
The conference also helped bridge local experience with national policy, moving the conversation from reactive community firefighting efforts to in stitutional fo resight. For SALAR International and its partners, it was both a validation of local models and an invitation to ministries, donors, and national actors to view municipalities not simply as aid recipients, but as full co-architects of Lebanon's crisis preparedness and resilience strategies.

## 6.2 Multi-stakeholder collaboration as a foundation

Effective crisis response isn't just about acting fast; it is about acting together. In Lebanon, where governance responsibilities are fragmented and resources are scarce, no single actor can shoulder the burden of emergencies alone. What Reslog helped foster in Akkar was a shift from isolated, ad hoc reactions to a more structured, cooperation-based approach that leverages proximity and shared purpose, while building on the synergies that multi-stakeholder collaboration can catalyze.

This shift followed a clear path: first identifying the full range of local actors already active in crises, then clarifying their roles and responsibilities, and finally creating platforms to help them coordinate in real time. These were not abstract organograms or "paper realities", they were practical steps that moved local response from improvisation to strategy.

The model drew inspiration from Sweden's experience in local crisis governance, where municipalities act as conveners rather than commanders. That same spirit shaped the CMU in Jurd El Qayteh which became a coordination hub; rescue service teams handled frontline operations; local health centers led triage and awareness; CSOs managed logistics and psychosocial support; community-based groups bridged any last gap and provided on-demand support; and trained First Responder Teams of Lebanese and Syrian volunteers monitored risk and responded early. The Lebanese Red Cross provided technical support and helped link local initiatives to the national system. Each actor brought its strength to the table, not in a hierarchy, but as part of a coordinated, complementary effort.




This collaborative approach proved its worth during the 2024 displacement wave, when thousands fled South Lebanon and arrived to Akkar overnight. The CMU quickly gathered municipal staff, NGOs, volunteers, and public institutions to prepare shelters, distribute aid, assess safety, and coordinate with national and regional authorities. And this was the "Aha! moment" where everyone recognized the importance of the time, effort and money that was invested in setting-up joint drills, entertaining never-ending conversations on WhatsApp groups, and the countless relationship-building and coordination meetings that all made this rapid response possible.

Beyond efficiency, collaboration strengthened legitimacy. Residents saw familiar faces such as municipal officials, local volunteers and community leaders working together. That visibility and proximity-built trust and made people more likely to engage, support, and cooperate. Previous crises like wildfires and COVID-19 had laid the groundwork, creating habits of coordination and mutual respect that paid off when pressure spiked. The result is a model that is both pragmatic and replicable. Akkar's experience shows that even in fragile settings, local actors—when connected, trusted, and supported— can lead crisis response in ways that are faster, fairer, and more grounded in the realities of their communities. The Swedish roots of the model may lie far from Akkar, but the core lesson holds: local resilience grows stronger when the response is shared and carefully planned and coordinated.

## Family specific ID-number

One practical innovation in Jurd El Qayteh was the use of unique family identification numbers to track and manage assistance during the internal wave of displacement in October-November 2024. For instance, the UoM assigned each family an ID number (e.g. 5500) that became the reference in all follow-up communications and case management.

If that family contacted the crisis management room via phone or WhatsApp, the CMU team would verify the caller's identity and fill out a basic incident form linked to their ID number. The team could then alert the relevant municipality and coordinate with the appropriate responders – whether the First Responder Team, Civil Defense, the Red Cross, or others – depending on the nature of the situation.

This simple tool greatly improved the efficiency, accuracy, and continuity of the emergency response. It also showed how low-tech, structured solutions (like assigning family-specific IDs) can enhance accountability and information flow at the local level.


صادر عن غرفة عمليات إتحاد جرد القيطع عكار

رقم الملف الخاص بعائلتكم: **5500**
**(هذا الرقم سيكون المرجع الاساسي للتواصل**
**يرجى منكم الاحتفاظ به و عرضه عند طلبه)**
الوافد لبلدة: فنيدق
وساكن عند:
عدد أفراد أسرتك: 4

بعد إجراء المسح لمعظم العائلات النازحة الموجودة ضمن نطاق الاتحاد، نضع بين أيديكم الرقم الساخن الخاص بالأمور الطارئة
+96181161386

إن استلام رسالة على هاتفكم يعني بأنكم مسجلون على اللوائح الرسمية.
رقمكم هذا سيعتمد للتواصل في المرحلة القادمة من أجل توزيع أي مساعدات.

في حال وجود أي خطأ في المعلومات المرسلة أعلاه يرجى إبلاغنا.
**ملاحظة: أي رقم لم تصله هذه الرسالة، من الضروري الاتصال على الخط الساخن المذكور أعلاه لتسجيل اسمه.**

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**وحدة ادارة الكوارث**
**غرفة العمليات**
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## 6.3 Peer exchange as a means of strengthening practice

As crisis-response systems began to take shape in Akkar, another factor proved transformative: peer learning. Whether among municipalities in Lebanon or with counterparts abroad, these exchanges offered something formal training often doesn't offer: real stories from real people navigating similar challenges. They allowed local actors to see what was possible, compare notes, and return home not just with new tools, but with renewed confidence.

### 6.3.1 National exchange visits and the Tyre partnership

In Lebanon, opportunities for structured exchange were limited, but when they happened, they mattered. CMU focal points, municipal staff, and volunteers traveled to other regions, getting a close look at how peers approached preparedness, digital mapping, volunteer coordination, and service delivery during emergencies.

A visit to Tyre Union of Municipalities, in south of Lebanon, was particularly impactful. When a delegation from Jurd El Qayteh traveled to Tyre, the exchange didn't end with a handshake. It led to a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the two UoMs that paved the way for ongoing collaboration. Tyre shared its experience dealing with displacement and complex emergencies, offering a set of tested practices and coordination tools that Jurd El Qayteh could adapt to its own setting. The two unions stayed in touch, exchanging lessons and strategies as they evolved. For a remote union like Jurd El Qayteh, this partnership brought more than technical advice. It broke the isolation many rural municipalities feel, replacing it with a sense of connection and shared purpose. It showed that local governance doesn't have to be a lonely effort, it can be a collective one that builds on mutual experiences and strengths.

### 6.3.2 International learning from Sweden and Türkiye

International peer learning gave local officials in Akkar a rare opportunity to step outside their daily challenges and see what crisis governance could look like elsewhere. Exchanges with municipal teams in Türkiye and Sweden offered two very different but equally valuable perspectives, one grounded in rapid operational response, the other in long-term preparedness and public awareness.

**In Türkiye**, the Lebanese participants were struck by how deeply embedded crisis response was in local government. Turkish municipalities, many of which host large Syrian refugee communities, had developed well-equipped, professional First Responder Teams that were part of the municipal workforce. That kind of institutional setup, with dedicated budgets and formal mandates, is still out of reach for most Lebanese municipalities. But the visit was less about copying and more about inspiration. Participants found ideas that could travel.

One of the most memorable lessons came from watching how Turkish teams engaged children. Through games, interactive activities, and creative storytelling, they taught basic preparedness in ways that stuck. "*It wasn't just about raising awareness,*" one Lebanese volunteer reflected. *"It was about making it part of the community's daily language."* The delegation also explored fire response logistics, visited equipment storage sites, and even took notes on how Turkish fire trucks were organized, small details that sparked practical ideas.

Back home, some of those ideas were adapted. Municipal teams reviewed how they store and deploy tools. They began thinking more creatively about how to communicate risk in communities with low literacy or limited media access. What Türkiye showed was that even without high-end infrastructure, smart design and inclusive outreach could go a long way.

**In Sweden,** the exchange took a different form. Swedish municipalities operate in a context of stability and strong public institutions, so the focus of the visit was on systems thinking and civic readiness. But what impressed the Lebanese team most was how crisis preparedness was built into everyday life.

One standout resource was *If Crisis or War Comes*, a simple household guide issued by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). The booklet gives families basic steps to prepare for emergencies from power outages to civil unrest, and encourages local-level action.The team from Akkar translated and adapted the guide to fit the Akkar context. They stripped it down to the essentials, focusing on what people could realistically do in a fragile context. The adapted version is now used in awareness campaigns and planning sessions across the Jurd El Qayteh union.

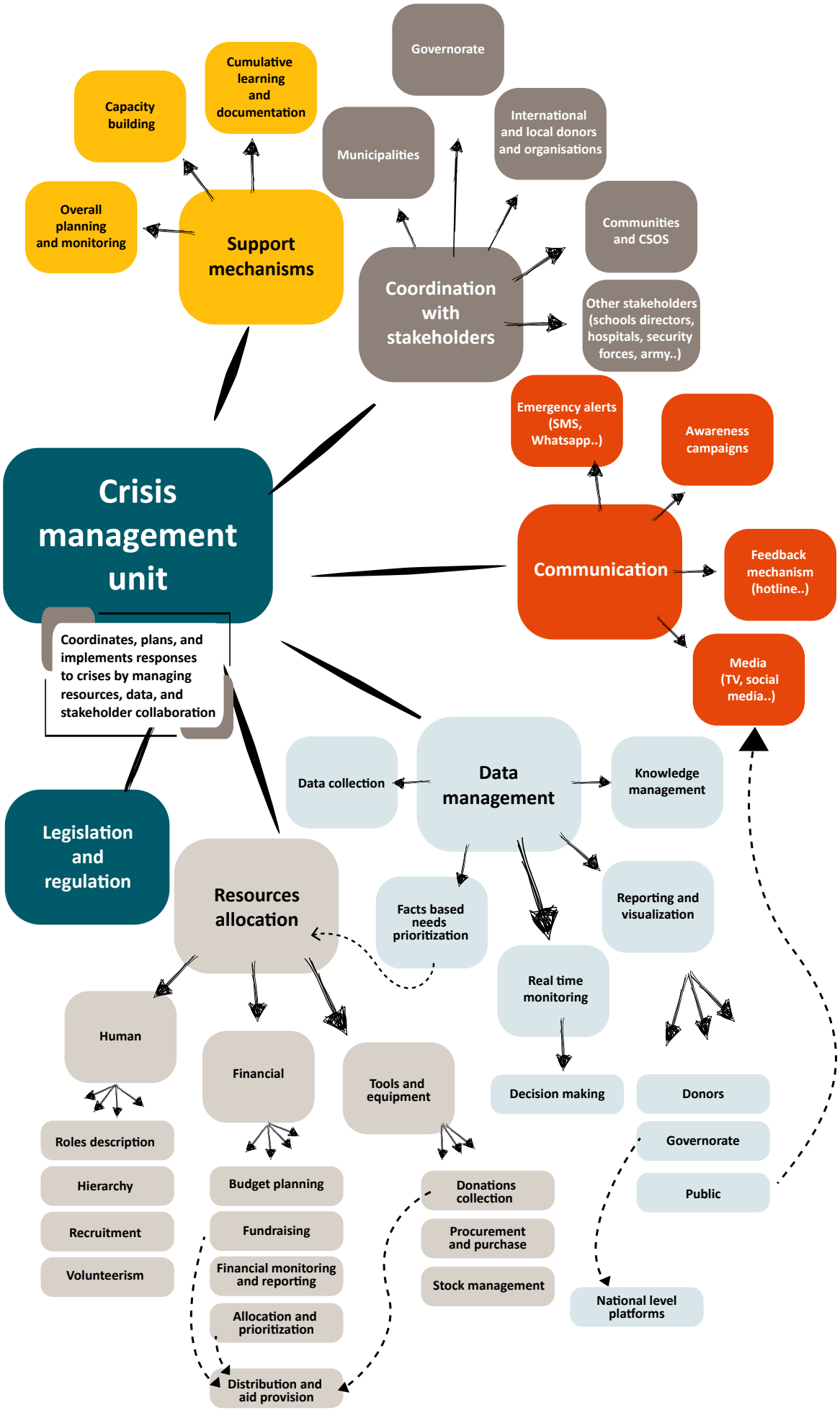
But the biggest shift was not technical, it was about confidence. As one CMU focal point said after returning from Sweden, *"At first it felt like they were 30 years ahead. But now, we've taken steps we never imagined possible, especially under crisis."* The exposure helped local teams see themselves not just as responders, but as planners and leaders capable of building resilient systems over time.

These exchanges did not require huge investments. What they needed was open dialogue, a willingness to learn, and partners who treated Lebanese municipalities as equals. The result was more than new tools or methods, it was a mindset shift. Officials began prioritizing things that once felt out of reach: clear bylaws for emergency roles, volunteer training systems, and routine scenario planning. Slowly but surely, they moved from reacting to crises to preparing for them.

## 6.4 Crisis Management Units: A functional model for evolving local governance

The establishment and evolution of Crisis Management Units at the local level in Lebanon – particularly within unions of municipalities – have shown that crisis response can be more than just emergency management; it can be an entry point for broader local governance transformation. What began as a pragmatic reaction to urgent threats has gradually matured into an institutional model that strengthens coordination, accountability, and inclusive decision-making across multiple municipal functions. Far from operating at the margins, these units are now becoming integral parts of a growing architecture of local resilience.

The next page presents a functional model for a local Crisis Management Unit, illustrating how it systematically integrates data, resources, coordination, and community engagement across municipalities to transform emergency response into sustained, accountable governance.


Governorate
Cumulative learning and documentation
Capacity building
Municipalities
International and local donors and organisations
Overall planning and monitoring
Support mechanisms
Communities and CSOS
Coordination with stakeholders
Other stakeholders (schools directors, hospitals, security forces, army..)
Emergency alerts (SMS, Whatsapp..)
Awareness campaigns
Crisis management unit
Communication
Feedback mechanism (hotline..)
Media (TV, social media..)
Coordinates, plans, and implements responses to crises by managing resources, data, and stakeholder collaboration
Data collection
Data management
Knowledge management
Legislation and regulation
Resources allocation
Facts based needs prioritization
Reporting and visualization
Real time monitoring
Human
Financial
Tools and equipment
Decision making
Donors
Roles description
Hierarchy
Recruitment
Volunteerism
Budget planning
Fundraising
Financial monitoring and reporting
Allocation and prioritization
Donations collection
Procurement and purchase
Stock management
Governorate
Public
National level platforms
Distribution and aid provision

In Jurd El Qayteh, the shift was particularly clear. The CMU there didn't limit itself to issuing alerts or distributing aid. Instead, it embedded itself across the daily functions of local government. It became a convener, bringing together municipalities, the governorate, civil society, and international partners into regular, purposeful dialogue. These relationships helped anchor the union as a legitimate and trusted coordination hub.

Resource management became more strategic too. Volunteers were organized, donations tracked, and spending prioritized. Even with limited means, the UoM began using simple planning tools to ensure that what resources they did have were used wisely and transparently. In turn, this opened the door for more community contribution and trust.

Data began playing a larger role as well. The CMU promoted the use of gender-sensitive data to guide local decisions, whether mapping vulnerable populations, tracking health risks, or reviewing service gaps. Digital tools and routine monitoring became part of how the union operated, not just during crises, but also in between them.

Communication also improved along the way. WhatsApp alerts, hotline feedback loops, and direct engagement helped bridge the long-standing disconnect between residents and their local government. People began to feel heard, and saw their municipalities respond in real time. That visibility, especially during difficult moments, strengthened social bonds and made it easier to mobilize the community when needed.

Importantly, these experiences were not lost once a crisis passed. Each shock left behind lessons. The CMU documented what worked, coached new staff, and refined routines. This growing internal knowledge base proved to be a vital resource in a setup where institutional memory is often fragile, Even without formal legal recognition, the CMU structure echoed key principles of Lebanon's decentralization and disaster management frameworks. Its continued relevance points to an important truth: when national systems lag, local innovation often leads. And if policy eventually catches up, these units will already have a solid foundation for integration.

The CMU also redefined the relationship between local government and the community. Volunteers, youth groups, and neighborhood mobilizers weren't just helpers, they became co-actors in managing crises and shaping solutions. These networks didn't fade once the emergencies passed. They stayed active, helping municipalities engage with their residents through planning, awareness, and collective problem-solving.

Women played a particularly central role in this shift. From hotline operators to field coordinators, they became visible actors in the daily operations of the CMU. Having women lead communication channels opened safer spaces for others to share concerns, especially around issues like overcrowded shelters or maternal health. Women also helped map specific vulnerabilities, ensuring responses addressed the needs of the whole community, not just the most visible parts of it. This was not about gender equity in theory. It made the system work better. And it sent a quiet but powerful message: women are not bystanders in crisis, they are also planners, decision-makers, and leaders.

Of course, the journey isn't over. Questions around sustainability, funding, and national policy alignment remain. But what has already been achieved is significant. Municipalities in Akkar have shown that meaningful governance reform can emerge from below—driven by urgency, shaped by experience, and anchored in community.

Lebanon's CMU story didn't start with a policy reform or a donor strategy. It started with wildfires, a pandemic, and displacement. In those moments of pressure, local teams didn't just react. They adapted, connected, and started building something stronger: one step, one crisis, one conversation at a time.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### 6.4.1 Tangible impacts

The crisis management approach that took shape in Akkar was more than just effective; it was also deeply human. During the 2024 displacement crisis, the Union of Jurd El Qayteh made a deliberate choice: to speak with dignity, act with care, and treat every displaced person not as a case, but as a neighbor. Clear, respectful messages reached families in shelters and informal sites. Volunteers and First Responder Team members played a key role in this, ensuring that accurate information reached all displaced groups, without favoritism or confusion.

Beyond communication, the CMU took on a hands-on coordination role, addressing service gaps and overlaps in real time. When two providers delivered hot meals to the same shelter while others received none, the CMU quickly intervened and redirected support. It also prevented duplicate hygiene kit distributions by flagging risks early, helping partners reallocate supplies where they were actually needed. And when public health centers announced the arrival of subsidized medicine that would cover just 30 to 40 percent of needs, the CMU pushed through coordination channels to bring in additional actors and fill the gap.

Within the first month of this response, the Union and its partners facilitated the delivery of over 18,800 hot meals, 6,572 bread rations, 6,000 blankets, 6,042 mattresses, 3,141 food packages, and 1,300 sleeping bags. They distributed 3,187 diapers, 2,729 clothing items, and more than 2,700 packs of children's milk. Essential items such as solar lamps, washing machines and kitchen kits reached displaced family's seamlessly alongside critical medical support. Seventy-four households were placed in temporary shelter. These numbers are not just outputs. They tell a story of coordination, care, and credibility in a system that too often lacks all three.

What made this possible wasn't just the urgency of need, it was also the depth of trust. The Union had spent years building relationships with donors, local organizations, and its own communities. These ties paid off when they mattered most. Collaboration with the governorate-level crisis unit ensured aligned messaging, shared data, and efficient division of tasks. The Union also stepped in as a verifier, issuing formal attestations of displacement that gave families faster access to hospital care and relief services, filling a vital role in the absence of national procedures.

This was not simply a local government doing its best. It was a local government redefining its place as a credible convener, a first responder, and a bridge between communities and the broader humanitarian system.

The Crisis Management Unit is just one part of a larger shift. It shows how, even in fragmented systems, local actors can turn disruption into renewal. The next chapter draws these lessons together and explores how Lebanon's municipalities can build on this foundation, scaling up a model of governance that is grounded, responsive, and resilient.


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COLUMBUS

# Chapter 7:

# Reflections, realities and ways forward

This publication aims to describe core elements of SALAR International's work and the Reslog journey in Akkar, Lebanon – an endeavor marked by small but significant steps toward stronger local governance and deeper community participation. Drawing on concrete experiences from Jurd El Qayteh Union and beyond, it shares what worked, what didn't, and what we learned about how real change takes root when it is led by local people and built on trust.

This closing chapter reflects on some of the important lessons that were learnt. Our approach has demonstrated that real impact does not always come from big budgets or complex systems. Some of the most meaningful changes we achieved were simple, well-matched to local needs, and driven by the people themselves.
For many years, municipalities in Akkar worked without reliable data or digital tools. The Reslog project introduced practical, easy-to-use resources: Excel dashboards, basic GIS maps, and structured community surveys. These small steps created a big shift. Municipal leaders were able to make better decisions, plan services more effectively, and speak to donors with more confidence and evidence.

Another important breakthrough was in community participation. In the past, residents were often only invited to give opinions in tokenistic and symbolic ways. Thanks to Reslog, participation gradually turned real and inclusive. Young people led data collection. Women's groups designed their own initiatives. Lebanese and Syrian youth volunteered side by side. Community dialogues opened up spaces for everyone to be heard.

Learning from others was also key. Local teams traveled to other Lebanese Unions of Municipalities and to municipalities in Türkiye and Sweden. They returned with fresh ideas: how to use digital tools creatively, how to link emergency response with long-term planning, and how to make sure services include everyone.

One achievement stands out. The Union of Jurd El Qayteh created a Crisis Management Unit, a local solution to an urgent need. The CMU helped coordinate municipal crisis work and made it more effective through data and teamwork. It did not follow a rigid model. Instead, it was built through trial, learning, and strong local commitment, and expanded well beyond its initial scope of community-led forest fire prevention. It is now a model that other Municipalities and Unions could adapt to their own local needs.

Of course, not everything worked the same in every place. Even when we applied the same approach and offered the same support, the results were different from village to village and from union to union. This brought a very important lesson: success depends heavily on the commitment and leadership at the local level. Sometimes, we thought we saw strong commitment at first, but over time, deeper challenges became visible, challenges that we had not seen from the outside.

This was an important moment of learning, that having clear goals and selection criteria is not enough. Real commitment is not something that cannot be measured only by formal agreements or early enthusiasm. Each local authority operates in its own unique environment, politically, socially, and organizationally.

Change is possible, and it is very much needed, but it cannot be forced from outside. It must grow from within, step by step, through trust, relevance, and shared ownership. And when change grows organically from within, it is far more likely to last. Working with both unions and individual municipalities proved essential. Even when progress at the union level slowed, continuing direct collaboration with municipalities helped keep the project moving.

The scale of the project decided what was possible. In Lebanon, the project created strong local results. But without a full-time presence in Beirut and stronger national ties, it was harder to build broader momentum or attract the attention of large donors. In contrast, the project's larger presence in Türkiye allowed for stronger national coordination and visibility.

Still, the approach used in Lebanon remains valuable and can be adapted to other contexts. But in this regard the word "adaptation" is key. One cannot simply copy and paste a model from one place to another. Success requires local design, local leadership, and local ownership from the very beginning. There is no single magical formula. Perhaps the clearest lesson of all is that change is not always quick, is never guaranteed and seldom happens in a straight line. It takes trust, time, and teamwork. But when it grows from the ground up and when communities lead the way, it can take root in ways that are lasting, sustainable and inspiring.

## 7.1 Conditions for meaningful replication

One of the strongest lessons from Reslog is that scaling and/or replicating this work is not about copying a project or delivering a ready-made solution. It is about creating the right environment, where local leadership, community trust, and flexible support can grow together. From our experience in Akkar, several conditions make this more likely:

**Local leadership that is open and engaged:** Let's put it straight; in Lebanon's complex local governance landscape, change depends to a large extent on municipal leadership. Without municipal leaders who are willing to engage, adapt, and commit (even in small ways), replication cannot take hold. Leaders do not need to be reformers or experts from the start. What matters is a basic openness, a willingness to try new approaches, to stay engaged when things get difficult, and to put the needs of the community first.

**Flexible funding and approach:** Even with the most honest and noble intentions, rigid project plans and short funding cycles can quickly undermine authentic local development. Donors and supporting organizations must give space for dialogue, learning from mistakes, and adapting plans as realities shift. Flexibility does not mean losing accountability. It means allowing the project to breathe and evolve. In Akkar, this ability to adapt was key, and it was only possible because the project was given the proper latitude to adjust based on what was happening on the ground.

**Trusted people on the ground:** Municipal leaders cannot drive change alone. For change to take root, there must be trusted individuals or groups in the community who can carry the work forward. These may be youth groups, women's associations, civil society organizations, or simply respected and trusted local figures. Without them, participation risks becoming shallow and vulnerable to any arising constraint or shock. Trusted community anchors help mobilize others, manage conflicts, and keep momentum going from within the community itself.

**Working with institutions, not around them:** It can be tempting to bypass slow or weak local institutions and work only with communities or NGOs. But Reslog's undeniable certainty is that long-term change depends on strengthening municipal systems. Local governments have legitimacy and a mandate that matter to residents. Working with them can be slower and more challenging, but it builds lasting capacity in the end. If local authorities are completely sidelined, any progress risks disappearing once the project ends, despite all the noble "do no harm" intentions.

**Relationships, not one-off support:**
real change does not happen through a few workshops or training sessions, or through some scattered pilots here and there. In Akkar, what mattered was building trusted relationships over time. This mean being physically and continuously present at a 30 minutes' drive away rather than visiting sporadically from Beirut every few weeks, responding to local diverse needs with empathy and openness, celebrating small successes, and staying engaged throughout setbacks. Change is nurtured by these relationships and shared commitment, not from isolated activities. Replicating this experience elsewhere should focus on mentorship, peer learning, and continuous field presence, and this cannot be understated or sidelined.

**Honest expectations:** Again, let's put it straight; change often moves in ways we can't fully plan or predict. Both local partners and donors need to understand this from the start. We must avoid raising hopes or making promises that can't be met in the short term. In Akkar, it helped to be clear about a long-term vision, while also being very honest that progress would happen step by step. Setting realistic expectations early on helped keep trust strong and kept everyone committed through the ups and downs of the process.

**Understanding local politics and culture:**
Each union and municipality has its own social dynamics, power structures, and history. What works well in one place may not work in another. Success depends on understanding these local realities. Without this understanding, even a well-designed project can meet resistance. In practice, this means listening to a wide range of local voices, learning before acting, and adapting the project to fit the local context, not the other way around.

In short, replication is not about exporting or parachuting a fixed model, no matter how well this model worked in another setting. It is about helping new local solutions grow with patience, humility, and partnership. The experience of Reslog has shown that even in times of crisis, and with limited resources, meaningful innovation in governance is possible. But it only works if we walk the journey with local actors, not for them and on their behalf.

This is the spirit we hope to carry forward. It calls for more listening, more flexible project design and funding, more focus on building what already exists locally, and a deep respect for the time and trust that real change requires.

RESLOG
المرونة في الحكم المحلي • لبنان

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