

# Reslog Stories

## Voices from Akkar



SALAR International 

جزء من الرياضة السويدية  
للسلطات المحلية والأقاليم

# Empowering Communities: RESLOG's Impact in Akkar Through Local Development and Data-Driven Initiatives



Akkar, the rural region in northern Lebanon where the project is being implemented, has long faced economic marginalization due to several historical and political factors. Feudalism persisted there until Lebanon's independence, leaving farmers landless and vulnerable while feudal families retained political influence. Since 1943, Lebanon's development policies have focused on Beirut and Mount Lebanon, neglecting peripheral areas like Akkar. Neo-liberal policies post-civil war deepened these regional disparities, with Akkar receiving little support even during Syrian hegemony (1975–2005). Akkar's geographical and socio-economic proximity to Syria further isolated it, making it a primary location for early waves of refugees from Syria, beginning in 2012 and continuing with resettlements in 2023-2024.

As a result of these factors, Akkar consistently lags behind on all key development indicators in Lebanon. It has the highest school drop-out rates, the lowest female employment rates, and the highest levels of poverty and vulnerability. Poverty rate has reached a staggering 70%, according to a World Bank study published in May 2024. Villages and residents in the region lack basic necessities. State electricity, as well as power from generators, is rationed, leaving many households without refrigerators or internet access. There is no public transportation, and the road infrastructure is in poor condition. Thousands of residents are unemployed, and young people dream of moving to Tripoli, the capital of northern Lebanon and the poorest city on the Mediterranean coast, in hopes of finding work.



As part of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), SALAR International works globally to strengthen democracy and promote good governance at the local level. Since 2018, SALAR International has been running the Resilience in Local Governance (RESLOG) project in Lebanon. RESLOG focuses on enhancing municipal capacities and service delivery, promoting active citizenship, and enabling green livelihood opportunities.

In a context of political uncertainty, economic collapse, and the deterioration of basic services, RESLOG promotes local institution-building and governance improvements with a strong focus on youth and women. The project utilizes an area based approach and is built on three pillars: empowering local authorities to provide services that respond to local needs, fostering positive interactions between local authorities, refugees and host communities through active citizenship, and expanding livelihood opportunities.

The project's philosophy is largely inspired by David Cooperrider's "Appreciative Inquiry", a strength based model that emphasizes generating positive ideas rather than focusing on the problems.



**Sarah al-Dali, 27, is a young woman from Michmich who considered moving to Tripoli to find work, but her attachment to her village kept her from leaving. In 2022, she volunteered with RESLOG as part of a GIS project.**

Sarah holds a degree in Arabic Literature from the Lebanese University in Tripoli but has never found a job. «Maybe I should have chosen a different major, like nursing or computer programming. You can always find a job if you're a nurse,» she says.

In Akkar, where public transportation is nonexistent, Sarah relied on a minibus provided by an NGO to travel from her village to Tripoli for her studies. The bus ride took an hour and a half in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. «We left at 6 a.m. and returned at 4 p.m. It was exhausting, but I got used to it over time. In the winter, when it snowed, we couldn't make the trip to the city,» she explains.

Sarah has only been to Beirut once, a few years ago, for surgery. «I don't have any reason to go to Beirut, and I wouldn't know how to get there on my own,» she adds. Despite the hardships, Sarah remains hopeful about the future of her village.

«I dream that one day Michmich will be much better than it is now. I dream of a village where all our needs are met, where we don't have to go to Tripoli to get the things we need, and where the village itself is developed. In Tripoli, there is work, but here, there's not. Still, I would love to find a job in Michmich,» says Sarah, as she watches young people leave the village—some heading to Tripoli, others to Saudi Arabia, and many emigrating to Australia.



«Michmich is an agricultural village, beautiful in both winter and summer. If we had the resources, we could build factories to process our harvests, like a factory to dry apples, for example. But we have neither water nor electricity, and very few factories,» she explains.

Indeed, when you ask the heads of municipal councils in Akkar what is most lacking, they suggest flipping the question around: ask what isn't lacking in the region.

Despite these challenges, there is goodwill. Many municipal council and federation leaders are determined to do their best with the limited resources available, especially in the face of the devaluation that has affected Lebanon for the past five years. This devaluation has severely impacted municipal budgets, as the administration doesn't account for the current exchange rate of the Lebanese Lira. Nonetheless, these leaders are committed to making progress, despite the difficulties.

It is exactly projects like RESLOG that can drive change through capacitating local authorities and empower residents to take control of their own future.

# Meet The Team

When asked what they appreciate most about working on the RESLOG project, team members highlight several aspects. They enjoy working with the same people over time, helping them become agents of change in their communities. They also take pride in encouraging women to participate in all activities, fostering connections between different regions of Lebanon so that Akkar doesn't remain isolated, listening to the needs of residents, and delivering projects tailored to those needs.



**Ziad Moussa, a senior advisor on local governance, has over 20 years of experience in development work across Lebanon, the Middle East, and Europe. He describes RESLOG as a model local governance project, saying, «RESLOG operates according to the needs of the people on the ground. There aren't many projects like it in Lebanon. One of the key differences is that our team is in the field, working directly with the people, unlike many other projects where the team is based in Beirut and managed from Beirut.»**

«Our team is always present on the ground, which is crucial to the project's success. We are constantly listening and supporting the stakeholders. We tailor our approach, provide support, and adjust when necessary to make the project more effective. RESLOG builds the foundation for change, using area-based development and appreciative inquiry. Since it's a relatively small project, with only a few million dollars and a short implementation period, it has to rely on appreciative inquiry to make an impact. Instead of focusing on what participants lack, we focus on their strengths and build on those, making them stronger,» he adds.



Souraya Hammoud, the RESLOG Project Manager in Lebanon, is originally from Halba in Akkar. She is an example of a local resident who has overcome the challenges of life in the region, staying resilient in the face of adversity.

**A**fter studying architecture at the Arab University in Beirut and living on campus in the capital, she earned a degree that didn't align well with the job market in Akkar. Upon returning home, she worked with several NGOs operating in Akkar to support Syrian refugees and host communities. As an architect, she focused on shelter rehabilitation.

Despite the challenges, she managed to start her own project by borrowing money from relatives, fulfilling a dream for herself and the people of the region. In 2016, she founded Siraj, a co-working space in Halba. By 2019, she began working as a RESLOG Coordinator and eventually became the Project Manager. For her, this role is a way to contribute to the improvement of her home region.

*«Akkar is the most neglected and deprived region in the country. The people working at RESLOG are children of this community, and that's why they put their hearts into it, ensuring the projects move forward and benefit their community,» she says.*

She finds joy in seeing the difference the project makes on the ground. It allows her to adapt projects to better fit the needs of the region, address the Syrian refugee crisis, empower women, and support municipalities in numerous ways.

She adds, *«Communities give much more than you expect. When you visit remote places, you might think the community's capacities are limited, but you're often pleasantly surprised. Even though the region lacks resources, community efforts yield great results. These communities take initiatives, do their best to find solutions, work on proposals to meet needs, and now, everyone relies on data.»*



Firaz Khodr

**Firaz Khodr, who has been a Project Officer with RESLOG for four years, explains,**

*«The difference with RESLOG is that it works according to the actual needs on the ground, rather than through pre-packaged projects. This project taught me how to communicate effectively at all levels. Even if funding is limited, we still make a difference. The project meets the needs of the region, and we've built strong relationships of trust with the municipalities.»*



Waël Chami

**Waël Chami, also a Project Officer at RESLOG for four years, adds,**

*«What I like about it is that it's a development project, not an emergency or relief effort. It focuses on building the capacities of local communities so that they can continue on their own after we're gone. RESLOG is flexible, adapting to the needs of local communities and municipalities, and it emphasizes data-driven decisions. All the projects are executed based on data, not assumptions or expectations.»*

# Municipal Capacity Building in Remote Areas



Achieving sustainable development in regions as poor, neglected, and remote as Akkar in Lebanon is a significant challenge. This is especially true as Lebanon, which hosts the highest per capita refugee population in the world, faces one of the most severe economic crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century, according to a 2021 World Bank report. Despite these difficulties, SALAR International has succeeded in several projects by focusing on supporting municipalities through its area-based development and appreciative inquiry approaches. One of these projects is the digital transformation initiative, which includes the Geographic Information System (GIS), a pilot project adopted later by many municipalities and stakeholders across Lebanon.

In a region lacking essential resources, municipal mayors recognize the importance of RESLOG's work, which has focused primarily on building municipal capacity to ensure the success of its projects. The agenda includes numerous training sessions, networking with other NGOs, and outreach to other regions of Lebanon, enabling municipalities to share both their successes and challenges. SALAR International builds on existing systems, helping local authorities implement better municipal management practices as recommended by the government. It concerns in particular the autonomy of municipalities in terms of crisis management and urgent matters, while in the same time coordinating with the central government, namely the Ministry of Interior.

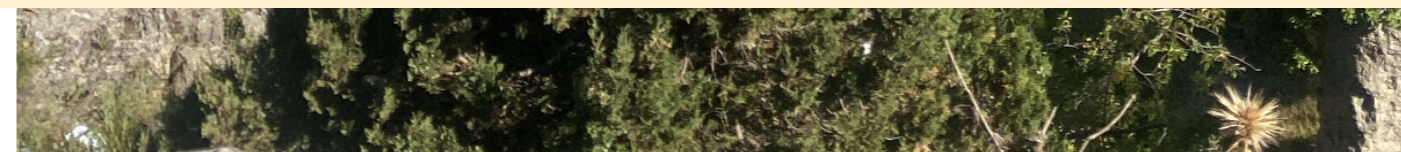
These efforts have led to training programs, computer software, and systems that enhance internal municipal management, particularly in accounting, financial management, administration, and e-archiving. RESLOG also helped municipalities manage the COVID-19 pandemic through an application called Salamati, in accordance with regulations established by the Lebanese state. Additionally, RESLOG implemented the GIS project in collaboration with the University of Balamand, creating an extensive database for the Union of Municipalities of Dreib el-Awsat and Jurd el-Qayteh.

The Lebanese Red Cross is one of several organizations that have witnessed RESLOG's valuable support to municipalities, enabling them to address national challenges. **Wissam Taim, a field officer in the disaster reduction unit for North Lebanon and Akkar**, praises RESLOG's approach: «RESLOG works according to the specific needs of each municipality; they adapt to the situation in each village. They are flexible, serious, and ensure the necessary follow-ups, which is crucial for progress, especially when there is cooperation among various parties.»

He adds that the Lebanese Red Cross has played a key role in implementing several emergency projects, including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cholera threat, contingency planning, and firefighting.

*“In Jurd el-Qayteh, RESLOG supports us in implementing the contingency plan recommended by the government for all Union of Municipalities. SALAR International always promotes networking and exchange between municipalities across the country to ensure that experiences are shared. Currently, exchanges are taking place between the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el-Qayteh and the municipality of Tyre,”* Taim explained.

He also emphasizes that the collaboration with RESLOG began during the COVID-19 pandemic with the Salamati application and continued with the First Responder Team. *“There is a genuine relationship of trust that has been established between RESLOG and the municipalities they support, and this is evident when we are on the field,”* he adds.



# Relationship

# of Trust



Samih Abdelhay

The importance of these solar panels is also stressed by **Samih Abdelhay, Mayor of Fnaydek Municipality**. *“While the country was, and still is, plunged into darkness, RESLOG acted quickly and efficiently. They installed solar panels in the municipality so we could continue our work. We had even closed our doors due to the lack of electricity. At one point, we couldn’t even make a photocopy,”* he explains.

As part of the exchanges that RESLOG has encouraged between municipalities across Lebanon, work has been done in particular on the level of tourism and environment protection. Members of the Fnaydek Municipality, home to the Qammoua and Qercus forests (Ghabet el Ezr), had the opportunity to meet with officials from the Chouf Nature Reserve and their counterparts in this region of Mount Lebanon.



Mohammed Berry

The relationship of trust established between RESLOG and the municipalities is highlighted by **Mohammed Berry, mayor of Meshmesh Municipality**. He says that *“RESLOG team is the first, and probably the only one, to work directly according to the needs on the ground. The team members inform us about every project they are aware of, even when they are not the ones funding it. Their goal is truly to develop the villages. Thanks to RESLOG, we were able to power the municipality building with solar panels. Electricity is vital for the proper functioning of the offices.”*



Saededdine Saededdine

**Saededdine Saededdine, mayor of Kherbet Daoud Municipality**, stresses upon the role of multi-purpose rooms in enhancing municipal functions. Established to encourage residents’ participation in public life and promote active citizenship (see Chapter 2), these rooms, equipped by RESLOG in seven localities, have also indirectly contributed to capacity building. They are now utilized by NGOs visiting these villages to provide training or discuss future projects with the municipality. *“I wanted to bring NGOs to my village, but there was no suitable place for meetings. Now, thanks to RESLOG, I use these fitted-out premises to host delegates from other NGOs,”* says Saeddine Saeddine.

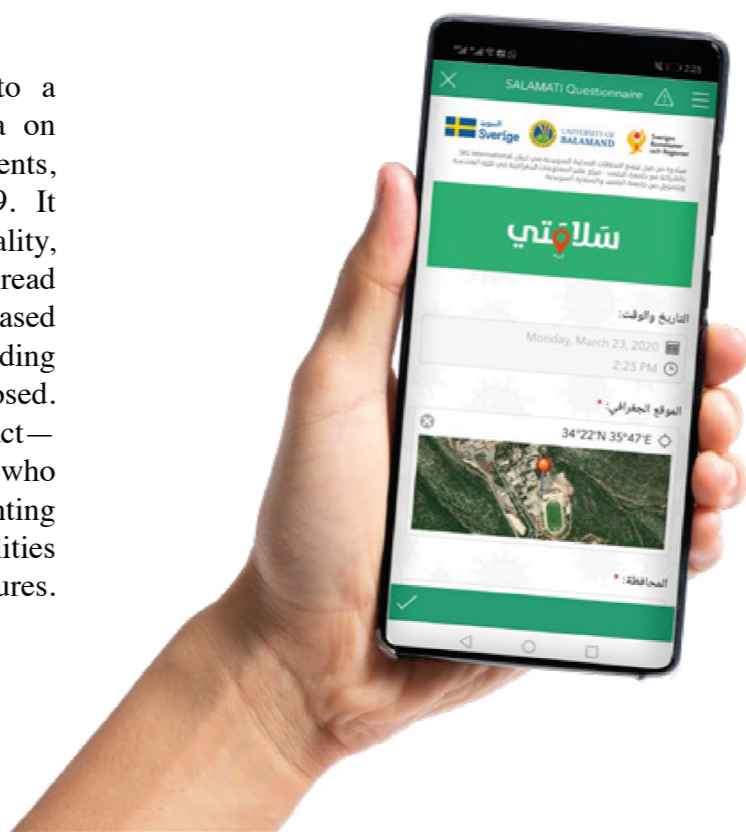
Additionally, these multi-purpose rooms offer various services to residents. *“The center has opened up numerous possibilities in Kherbet Daoud,”* Saeddine explains. He organizes most of the municipality's activities there. *“The center hosts training sessions, psycho-social support groups, vaccination campaigns, and more. Once a week, it even functions as a dispensary, where residents can see a doctor,”* he adds.

# Digitalization of Local Administration

Several modernization projects aimed at improving municipal administration and data management have been successful. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, RESLOG, in cooperation with the University of Balamand and various municipalities, developed the *Salamati* application. This GIS-based application was created to effectively combat the spread of the virus, support municipalities in managing cases, and implement government plans to prevent the pandemic.

The *Salamati* application was connected to a health calculator and included general data on demographics and the daily lives of residents, particularly those infected with COVID-19. It provided a tool to estimate risks in each locality, gather numerical data, and help counter the spread of the virus. The application categorized risks based on infected individuals, family members needing quarantine, and neighbors who could be exposed. It sent notifications to a central point of contact—usually the Head of Union of Municipalities—who then informed the national operations room fighting COVID-19, as well as the Union of Municipalities doctor responsible for taking appropriate measures.

Building on the success of the *Salamati* application, RESLOG expanded the system to address other challenges, such as cholera prevention in 2022. This led to the development of a comprehensive data collection and management system aimed at increasing the capacities of local authorities, now including access to socio-economic datasets, service maps, and more.



Abdelilah Zakaria

**Abdelilah Zakaria, Head of the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el-Qayteh**, reflects on the collaboration: *“Our work with RESLOG started during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were the driving force behind our cooperation, supporting us in coordinating with the Lebanese Red Cross and several hospitals. It was RESLOG, along with their volunteers and the University of Balamand, who conducted testing here. They prioritized raising awareness and worked under the toughest conditions,”* he says.

He also mentions how SALAR International assisted in digitizing the administration: *“Thanks to the formats and programs they introduced and funded, we can now manage all our accounting records more efficiently. Municipal tasks related to taxation and accounting take significantly less time.”*

The digital modernization of local administration and the implementation of the *Salamati* application set the stage for the GIS (Geographic Information System) project. This pilot initiative, completed in early 2022, quantified data from towns within the Jurd el-Qayteh and Dreib el-Awsat Union of Municipalities.

The population census gathered detailed information, including the number of people per household, age, literacy rate, education level, health conditions, water supply (with sources and origins of water), and electricity (including connections to Electricite du Liban, generators, and solar panels). The data went beyond individual residents, cataloging key infrastructure such as roads, buildings, forests, and water points. *“We discovered that 40% fewer people live in the region than are registered on the electoral lists,”* notes Zakaria.

He continues: *“Now we know the number of apartments, houses, their surface area, and the population of each locality. We’ve learned so much about our own villages. This data allows us to make the right decisions and has transformed how we approach municipal work. For example, in planning garbage collection, we now know the number of households and inhabitants, which helps us accurately assess our needs. The data on artesian wells also helped us with cholera prevention in the fall of 2022.”*

# Landing tight deadline projects

This data enables municipalities to respond swiftly to projects with tight deadlines, especially those funded by various NGOs working in Akkar. For instance, in Meshmesh, thanks to the available data, USAID was able to fund solar panels for an artesian well for drinking water. Mohammed Berri, the mayor of Meshmesh Municipality, explains: *“We had all the necessary data. We knew the needs, and the study and assessment were already completed. Thanks to the figures we had, all we needed to do was write the proposal.”* He adds, *“USAID required quick information, like the number of beneficiary residents and the houses served. We had all the data ready in just a few clicks. Without RESLOG’s work, we would never have secured this project. RESLOG brought support to municipalities through many channels, notably trainings, meetings, English sessions, and a comprehensive data system that has transformed our work.”*



Joumana Ahmed

Joumana Ahmed, 25, also highlights a project funded by an international NGO: solar panels connected to an artesian well in her native village of Chane, part of the Jurd el-Qayteh Union of Municipalities. This project was made possible thanks to the RESLOG and University of Balamand GIS project.

Joumana Ahmed was in her final year of university when she was hired as a coordinator by the Jurd el-Qayteh Union of Municipalities to manage the digital data for the GIS project. *“When the census was conducted, I was responsible for validating the data. I ensured that the volunteers did not make mistakes while collecting information on the field. For instance, I checked for location errors and compared the lists of residents collected by volunteers with those available in the municipalities, including electoral lists,”* she says.

Today, Joumana Ahmed holds a permanent position with the Jurd el-Qayteh Union of Municipalities as the Director of Data Collection and Head of the GIS project. *“This pilot project has computerized everything within the Union, including our internal accounting. The data is stored on a computer system created specifically for this project and is owned by the Union of Municipalities. The Union decides who can access the data and how it can be used while ensuring the privacy of individuals,”* she explains.

What does she enjoy most about her job? *“I like feeling useful and efficient. With the data I provide, villages can initiate projects. I deliver the requested information to municipalities on the same day, offering a valuable service to my region and its residents,”* she notes.





Amal Ialy

## GIS: A Pilot Project for Municipal Development

**Amal Ialy**, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Balamand and Director of the GIS Center, led the pilot project for GIS data collection initiated by RESLOG. *“It all began with a memorandum of understanding between SALAR International and the University of Balamand. What started as a dream has now become true. Today, we have a census with detailed reports in PDF, monographs containing extensive information on topics such as education, diseases, gender, and the job market. All local development indicators are included in these monographs,”* she explains.

For Amal Ialy, *“The adventure began with great ambition. RESLOG had a vision, but initially, there was many challenges to overcome. We started from scratch in a very remote area,”* she says.

One major challenge was ensuring that the computerized geographic data precisely matched, down to the millimeter, with the manual maps and the ground and relief data. *“We worked through Lebanon’s severe economic crisis, dealing with shortages of gasoline while needing to travel to remote areas. To minimize travel, we relied heavily on communication between faculty members in the office and teams of volunteers in the field,”* Amal Ialy notes.

In the next phase, it was crucial to integrate the GIS data, including field information, relief details, and house locations. *“All the data collected by volunteers on-site were incorporated into the computer system maps. For the first time, the roads in Akkar’s villages were numbered. I hope that in the future, as a next phase, we will also be able to number the houses,”* she adds.

This pilot project has been adopted by numerous municipalities and NGOs operating in Lebanon. According to Amal Ialy, the GIS project embodies an *“Iron Triangle formed by municipalities and NGOs that cooperate in development and the academia that sheds light on development with a different perspective. We give our know-how and part of the sustainability”*.



## Building Governance in Local Communities to Achieve Tangible Projects

Bilal Hussein, Senior Program Manager for the Community Support Program at USAID, says that *“although we didn’t work directly with RESLOG, it is thanks to their networking and initiatives that we were able to collaborate with the municipalities.”*

He continues, *“For example, we were able to quickly install solar panels for water pumps in Meshmesh to provide drinking water to the community. This was possible due to the groundwork laid by RESLOG. The GIS data for the project was already prepared. With our program nearing its end and with just \$250,000 left out of a \$20 million budget, we could act swiftly in Meshmesh because everything was in place. The funds were used effectively.”*

One project Bilal Hussein is particularly proud of involved a small budget of \$25,000, which was donated to the municipality of Fnaydek to purchase and later equip a small truck for firefighting.

*“This project was also made possible thanks to RESLOG’s support for the First Responder Team, set up within the framework of cooperation between the municipalities and the Lebanese State represented by the Ministry of the Environment (See chapter 2). Although the sum was modest, it significantly impacted not only Fnaydek but also the Jurd el-Qayteh Union of Municipalities, improving firefighting and forest protection in a region that is 90% covered with trees,”* he explains.

Bilal Hussein stresses upon the fact that, *“RESLOG encourages coordination between various parties and supports capacity building of municipalities for better development and they do succeed. This is the very essence of what we call non-tangible in terms of development.”*

*I want to highlight the importance of financing projects where RESLOG is involved with municipalities, using its area-based development approach. Good governance and the capacity building of municipalities ultimately lead to tangible projects in a later phase, which can be life-changing for residents.”*



# Active Citizenship The Key to Development



## The First Responder Team: A Model to Follow



**Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the active participation of residents in municipal projects. SALAR International has excelled in Akkar by involving local residents in community development, through its area-based development and appreciative inquiry approaches.**

**Active citizenship connects people, helping them develop skills and knowledge to create fairer and more resilient societies. The core characteristic of active citizens is their commitment to building trust within and between communities. In the realm of active citizenship, SALAR International's work is focused on three main areas: the first responder team, the youth consultative council, and multipurpose rooms.**

**A**ccording to the Government's requirements calling on each Union of Municipalities to establish a first responder team for emergencies, RESLOG supported the creation of such a team in the Jurd el-Qayteh. It has become a model for Akkar and even for Lebanon as a whole.

In two years, the efforts of Lebanon's first responder teams have significantly reduced the risk of fires in Akkar by 93%, according to a report from the Ministry of the Environment. The First Responder Team of Jurd el-Qayteh consists of 97 volunteers, 80 men and 17 women, Lebanese and Syrian, aged 18 to 55. Women were actively encouraged to participate, and training was conducted in collaboration with the Red Cross and Civil Defense. Activities involving first responder teams from outside Akkar have also been organized.

The need for a first responder team became evident after a massive fire that devastated Fnaydek's forests in the summer of 2020, exposing the region's lack of resources. SALAR International played a crucial role by providing training to volunteers, coordinating efforts, helping with equipment financing, and even creating uniforms. A truck donated by USAID was given to the municipality of Fnaydek, which was then equipped for firefighting and made available to the Union of Municipalities when needed. The Union of Municipalities also purchased another truck, which was equipped by Chemonics. Furthermore, SALAR covered the maintenance costs for the truck belonging to Meshmesh Municipality, bringing the total to three fully equipped vehicles ready for emergency response.



Today, the first responder team operates throughout Akkar, including Akroum, Qobayat, and Denniye. A team of five is stationed at the Union of Municipalities in Hrar to respond to emergencies promptly. Previously, before the establishment of the First Responder Team, fire response interventions could take between an hour to an hour and a half to start.

*“There are still fires, but we now control them quickly. We’ve made significant progress since 2020 when 36 people were injured while trying to extinguish a fire that destroyed hectares of forest. Since the first responder team was established, we’ve managed to put out 65 fires with no injuries,”* says Mohammed Zakaria, Director of the Crisis Management Unit at the Jurd el-Qayteh Union of Municipalities.

*“A crisis management operations room was set up in 2023 at the Union of Municipalities, following a government recommendation from 2013. This room includes all on-field responders in case of emergencies: civil defense, the army, the Red Cross, and law enforcement officials. Initially, our work focused on COVID-19, then cholera, and earthquakes,”* he adds.

*“RESLOG operates based on field needs, offering tailor-made solutions for projects, training, and networking. The team connects us with other NGOs to ensure our needs for training and equipment are met”* he adds.

In Jurd el-Qayteh, where 90% of the territory is covered with trees such as cedars, firs, oaks, pines, and junipers, forest fires during the dry summer months are the greatest risk.

In winter, the region’s high altitude—reaching up to 2,250 meters, with many homes at 1,500 meters—necessitates snow clearing and rescue operations for those stranded by storms.



**Ibrahim Jamal Hussein**



**Hasna el Ez**

## Taking Pride in Volunteering

**Ibrahim Jamal Hussein, 38**, is a Syrian refugee from the Hama district. He and his family arrived in Meshmesh, Lebanon, in 2013. Despite being a former construction worker who suffered a back injury, Ibrahim is a dedicated member of the first responder team.

Although his injury prevents him from performing some physical tasks, he is always among the firsts to respond to fires. Ibrahim is so proud of his role that he sometimes wears his uniform even when there is no active fire.

*“I enjoy volunteering and preserving nature and trees,”* he says. He learned about the first responder team through Lebanese neighbors and notes that his role has changed people’s perceptions of him. *“Being a volunteer has changed how people see me. It feels like I’m no longer just a refugee; I’ve become useful and respected. I now have a place in society. Even when I’m not actively responding, I wear my uniform to show that I’m part of the team. Volunteering has brought me closer to the Lebanese community and allowed me to perform an altruistic act, demonstrating that I’m not motivated by money,”* he explains.

To support his family, Ibrahim takes on odd jobs, including selling phone cards. His volunteer work has helped him gain more customers among the villagers.

**Hasna el Ez, 22**, is studying to be a nurse. She was one of the first women to join the first responder team training. Coming from a family of nine children, aged between 35 and 18, she is originally from Meshmesh.

*“I enjoy volunteering and being useful,”* she says. Dressed in her first responder uniform with the RESLOG logo, she adds, *“My parents have been very supportive, especially when they saw the effectiveness of our work on the field.”*

*“Before joining the first responder team, I was shy and introverted. Since then, I’ve gained confidence. I started going out more, speaking in public, and meeting people from outside my village,”* she explains.

After an extensive training delivered by SALAR through experts from the Red Cross and Civil Defense, Hasna is now active in the field. *“I write reports, have gained valuable experience, and my family—my brothers, sisters, and neighbors—are all very proud of me,”* she says.

# Multipurpose Rooms: Creative Spaces for Discussions and Projects

To promote active citizenship, SALAR International supported municipalities by setting up multipurpose rooms. While these spaces belong to the municipalities, RESLOG equipped them based on specific needs. In total, seven municipalities have benefited from these spaces, which were mainly rehabilitated, repainted, and equipped with solar panels.

These multipurpose rooms provide a venue for community members—whether women, youth, Lebanese or Syrian—to gather and organize activities with municipal support. Besides being used for municipal activities (see Chapter 1) or income generation (see Chapter 3), these rooms are central to the civic life of towns in Akkar. They strengthen the connection between municipalities and residents, allowing for increased community engagement and hosting of local events. In Akkar, where resources are scarce, these rooms are of immense importance.

In several towns, the multipurpose rooms have played a key role in uniting the host community and refugees. They have mobilized residents, regardless of their origins, to collaborate on common projects.

Saededdine Saededdine, Mayor of Kherbet Daoud Municipality, explains, *“I appreciate when men and women actively participate in municipal activities and show interest. We initially discussed the idea with RESLOG and proposed creating a space to receive visitors. However, the community was not engaged until the multipurpose rooms were established.”*



The municipality had already built a space but lacked necessary equipment. RESLOG equipped the center, they painted it, put up curtains and installed doors for the rooms, solar panels for electricity, brought an LCD projector, trained young people to sort garbage and started activities. The municipality set up a cafeteria. Saededdine’s main focus was to encourage women’s participation in community life. *“It’s crucial for women to step out of their homes and engage in community activities. The multipurpose rooms enabled us to invite women to speak up. Following discussions, we proposed to RESLOG to set up a sewing workshop based on the request of the women in the village. This project resonated with them and was a success. It strengthened the trust between the municipality and the village residents, which was previously lacking. Thanks to RESLOG, we have achieved our goal and bridged the gap between the municipality and the people,”* he says.

*“The residents began to notice the projects being implemented; they saw that we were bringing initiatives to the town and participating in activities. As the center became more active, the work of the municipality became tangible for them. This led people to visit the municipality, propose initiatives, and get involved. Thanks to these efforts, the residents realized that decisions are not made solely by the municipality. Through discussion, listening, and exchanging ideas, it’s possible to reach a consensus that benefits the entire town,”* he adds.



# An Innovative Space for Youth



**In Bireh, part of the Dreib el-Awsat Union of Municipalities, another multipurpose room has been established, specifically for local youth, both Lebanese and Syrian. RESLOG rehabilitated an abandoned school, which lacked doors and windows and required extensive renovation. SALAR International restored and furnished the premises, installed solar panels, and facilitated dialogue between the municipality and its residents. This initiative led to the creation of a youth center.**

**The multipurpose room fosters dialogue and positive communication between the municipality and young people. It helps identify the town needs from the youth's perspective and supports various projects. This space provides young people, especially those with degrees, an opportunity to voice their opinions, take initiative, and be creative, particularly since over 50% of them face unemployment, according to the municipality. This initiative has also built trust between the youth and the municipality and engaged them in local development. Additionally, involving both Lebanese and Syrians in the same projects helps reduce tensions and encourages dialogue between the communities.**



Nour Naaman

**B**efore establishing the multipurpose room in Bireh, RESLOG worked on a capacity building programme empowering youth leaders to become transformative actors in their communities and within the municipal sphere. The program was designed to equip young people in Dreib al Awsat with the skills and knowledge needed to drive local sustainable development initiatives in their villages. One group is now formalized as a consultative council to Bireh municipality and are supporting the management of the community centre. *“This collaboration allowed us to discuss, find common projects, and complete our work. We had to rehabilitate the space, paint and decorate the rooms... RESLOG was instrumental in helping us make the right choices and providing the necessary equipment,”* says **Nour Naaman, 26**, pointing out the wooden chairs and tables supplied by the RESLOG team. The facility now includes several rooms: one for children, a conference room, a meeting room, and a reading room. A kitchen for the women of the village will be set up soon.

Nour Naaman, who holds a Master’s degree in Geography from the Lebanese University in Tripoli, is currently unemployed. For her, the center has become a second home. *“To keep the center running, we organized shifts. There are ten of us—six Lebanese and four Syrians—sharing the tasks. Since we’re no longer in the creation phase, I’m not required to come every day, but I still come regularly, especially to do my readings. It’s very close to home, so I can walk here. Many of us have very limited electricity at home, but here, we have solar panels, an Internet connection, and computers for those who don’t have their own,”* she explains.

*«Thanks to the youth council and the discussions we had while setting up the center, I’ve learned to listen to others and consider everyone’s opinions to ensure the success of our projects,»* she adds.

# El-Awsat



Mahmoud Wehbeh

**Mahmoud Wehbeh, 21**, initially found participating in youth meetings uninteresting. Despite the fact that he is a relative municipal mayor, he was never keen on public life. However, his involvement in the meetings and witnessing the project's success changed his perspective. *"I realized that good work and open discussions can lead to positive change. This motivated me to engage more actively in activities and to pursue later a career in politics. I've also signed up for the Youth Parliament and plan to visit the Parliament in Beirut next year."*

The young people noticed that initially, the municipality was not very receptive to the involvement of young Syrians in activities. It was only when the work became visible and municipal council members visited the center that they recognized the value of these efforts.



## Syrian Refugees and Municipal Coordination



**A**ctive citizenship has facilitated closer connections between the host community, Lebanese beneficiaries, and Syrian refugees, leading to collaborative projects and problem-solving discussions. This has fostered friendships and helped many Syrian refugees who felt marginalized find their place in society. Many municipal council presidents now understand the importance of projects that bring Lebanese and Syrians together, creating trust and reducing tensions in the villages.

This approach is also reflected in the municipal coordinator volunteers, who are from the Syrian community. They act as a bridge between Syrian refugees and the municipality in the villages and towns they live in.



Nader Taleb

Since 2015, Nader Taleb has been involved in various NGO projects and activities, which led him to meet the RESLOG team a few years later. *“It’s crucial to have Syrian refugees working in coordination with the municipality, which is also very cooperative. We address problems through dialogue,”* he explains.

Nader has participated in all SALAR International-organized activities, including data collection for GIS, trainings, and conferences. Currently, he serves as the Coordinator at the municipality of Fnaydek. *“Syrian refugees often fear being expelled due to a lack of identity papers and residence permits. Thanks to our dialogue with the municipality, we’ve arranged to issue official rental contracts to protect Syrians from expulsion,”* he says. He has also mediated numerous disputes between community members, helping resolve issues related to arguments among children and neighbors of both nationalities. *«These disputes, given the existing tensions between the communities, can escalate into serious crises if not addressed promptly,»* he notes.

Nader believes that the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon has heightened tensions between Syrians and Lebanese. *«With fewer job opportunities, Syrian labor is often cheaper than Lebanese labor, and while Syrian refugees receive assistance from UNHCR, Lebanese do not. Organizing activities that bring Lebanese and Syrians together helps reduce tension and fosters understanding. RESLOG’s initiatives have made a significant difference, easing the situation through dialogue and improving relations between Syrian refugees and municipalities,»* he says.

**Nader Taleb** is one such coordinator. From the Homs district, Nader is a mechanical engineer specializing in agricultural machinery.

Previously a teacher at a technical school in Homs, he was forced to flee his country due to the war. He arrived in Lebanon in May 2013 with his wife and three children.

Despite his engineering background, Nader has been working as a day laborer to support his family. *“I had no choice but to take whatever work I could find to put food on the table,”* he says. Although he hopes to return home one day, he fears being labeled a deserter and imprisoned if he does.



Safaa Makhzoun

**Safaa Makhzoun, 39**, originally from Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib, arrived in Lebanon in 2013. She now lives in Mesmesh, where she works as municipal coordinator volunteer with RESLOG. She holds a degree in Education from the University of Damascus and was a teacher before coming to Lebanon. As a mother of five, aged between 6 and 17, she is particularly focused on raising awareness among youth. *“We must combat early marriages and encourage young people to continue their education despite difficulties,”* she says.

Through her work with RESLOG, Safaa has developed closer ties with Syrian women, who now approach her for assistance. *«Our coordination with the municipality has opened a communication channel where our opinions and situations are considered. This has strengthened mutual trust between Lebanese and Syrians. RESLOG has been instrumental in helping Syrian refugees feel heard and understood, and has helped bridge gaps between our communities. I value being the link between Syrians and Lebanese, and learning to listen to and understand the Lebanese perspective,»* she adds.

Like Nader Taleb, Safaa Makhzoun took part in all the activities organized by RESLOG, from tourism training to first responder teams and data collection for the GIS project. Her favorite activity was the Social Cafe, where information sessions on legal issues were held. *«It provided concrete answers to our most pressing questions, such as those related to papers, residence permits, registering newborns, and keeping our documents in order,»* she explains.

*“After 13 years of war in Syria and our migration to Lebanon, we have become one community with the Lebanese. Since there is no prospect of returning in the near future, we share the same interests,”* she says.





Choueib Awwad

## Every day, Choueib thinks about what life could have been like if there was no war in Syria

his university studies due to the war. To avoid being drafted into the Syrian army, he fled to Lebanon. He can see his village of al-Zaraa from the Lebanese border, but he knows he will likely never return. “If I go back, they will imprison me for desertion,” he says, reflecting on the tragedies the war has inflicted on his family.

With immense sadness in his eyes, Choueib thinks every day of what his life could have been like without the war. «I was studying for a degree in Mathematics and could have become a teacher. Even before the war, I was giving private lessons. My father runs a supermarket, and I would have helped with that. I also planned to build a house on top of ours, get married, and start a family,” he says.

Upon arriving in Lebanon, he had to find work immediately. He began with construction jobs and took on later various jobs. “I was 24, and it was the most challenging time of my life,” he recalls.

He remains in touch with only one friend who fled to Türkiye. “We talk about our past lives, those who died or went missing, and often end up revisiting old memories. We were a group of eight friends, and now we are the only two survivors,” he says.

Today, Choueib works with RESLOG as a municipal coordinator volunteer and is actively involved in the multi-purpose room in Bireh. “The center is very important to me, and I am deeply involved in the project. I have high hopes for it. I hope we can organize many activities, such as training sessions and conferences, as well as courses in English and graphic design. This is a chance for us to move forward, learn new skills, and expand our knowledge I feel that this center could eventually provide me with a stable position in Lebanon. Perhaps one day, it will bring me a paid job that allows me to live with dignity,” he says.

Thanks to SALAR connection, he also received a scholarship.

As for returning to his village, it remains an unattainable dream for him. He dreams of securing a stable life, whether in Lebanon or elsewhere.



Asma is Proud to Be a Working Woman

Asma Antar, 37, from Hrar, juggles two jobs: she works at the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el-Qayteh and also teaches. Additionally, she has actively participated in all RESLOG activities. Her career began early. At 17, she took on the role of executive secretary at the Union of Municipalities. Simultaneously, she pursued business management courses at the University in Tripoli. Following her father’s death when she was 21, Asma became the primary breadwinner for her family. “Ensuring my siblings’ education was my top priority, which was challenging. To save money, I sometimes skipped the bus and stayed in the village instead of commuting to university. My friends would help by bringing me the courses,” she recalls.

Today, Asma is a resilient and accomplished woman. She married at 31—a relatively late age in her region—and is the mother of two young children, Angie, 6, and Omar, 4. “My husband, who is of the same age, appreciates my strong character. He supports my ambitions and is understanding about my commitments, whether it means staying alone in Beirut for seminars or traveling with RESLOG,” she says. Asma has traveled abroad twice with SALAR International, to Türkiye and Sweden.

At the municipality, Asma has become indispensable. “I once dreamed of becoming a bank manager, but over time, the municipality entrusted me with more responsibilities. My university education in IT and accounting, along with my growing expertise in municipal laws and tax systems, has prepared me well,” she explains.

“RESLOG has introduced many new things. The team engaged with us to understand our needs and helped us make significant achievements, such as the first responder team and the network established with citizens, civil society, and municipalities. RESLOG’s efforts have led people to respect and take the municipality’s work seriously and participate in its activities,” she adds.

“What I enjoy most about my job is meeting new people and developing various skills. I dream of opening my own business one day,” she notes.

Asma is passionate about the development of her region. “Our area lacks so much, and the State’s presence is minimal. There’s much work to be done, and I hope we can contribute to enhancing our society. Seeing progress in my region makes me genuinely happy,” she says.

Determined and strong, Asma aims to change societal perceptions of women. “My work in the municipality proves that women can achieve their goals. In Akkar, women often study more than men because men are pushed into the workforce at a young age. We have many educated women who are actively working,” she proudly adds.

For the upcoming municipal elections, Asma plans to run for a seat in the municipality of Hrar, her hometown.



## Economic Development in a Region with untapped potential

To retain residents and prevent rural depopulation, as well as to unlock the touristic potential of one of Lebanon's most beautiful yet neglected regions, creating job opportunities and fostering economic development is essential. This is precisely what RESLOG has contributed to, focusing on area-based development and appreciative inquiry approaches.

Despite operating with modest budgets compared to other local and international NGOs, RESLOG's tailor-made projects have significantly improved the daily lives of the project participants. The projects were chosen based on two main factors: the region's stunning natural beauty, particularly in the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el-Qayteh, and the valuable skills that could be shared with the local inhabitants. RESLOG focused on two key areas: upcycling and tourism.

# Upcycling



To support locals earning revenues, 105 people, including 90 women divided into seven groups, benefited from trainings and seven brands were created. It is craftsmanship, especially sewing and needlework, that has been encouraged. Today, upcycling continues to help residents make ends meet.



**Takla Khoueiry**

To support locals earning revenues, 105 people, including 90 women divided into seven groups, benefited from trainings and seven brands were created. It is craftsmanship, especially sewing and needlework, that has been encouraged. Today, upcycling continues to help residents make ends meet.

**Takla Khoueiry, 43**, a sustainable development consultant specializing in crafts, agriculture, and the environment, brought her expertise to the project. Coming from a remote village herself, she emphasizes the importance of upcycling: «*Garbage must not remain garbage; it must be transformed into objects that will be used in the long term.*» she explains.

For the upcycling project to succeed, it was crucial to shift mindsets and help participants understand that items typically discarded could be reused. The project targeted individuals with skills in sewing and knitting, even if it wasn't their profession, and emphasized minimizing costs for raw materials.

For example, Syrian women skilled in crochet were encouraged to use plastic bags to create products like tote bags, baskets, and placemats. «*Everything can be made with a crochet needle and plastic bags that are washed, cut, and then knitted.*» says Khoueiry.

Additionally, women with sewing skills were guided to find free fabric in their regions. In several villages, this led to the production of tote bags, pouches, and patchwork blankets. In Kweshra, an old tradition of weaving cold cogon grass (halva) was revived and modernized, showcasing the region's unique heritage.

These upcycling activities received strong support from municipal council presidents, who were eager to boost women's participation in village life. The multipurpose rooms refurbished by RESLOG were instrumental in hosting brainstorming sessions and training. SALAR International established these multipurpose rooms as part of its active citizenship initiative across seven localities. They were equipped with solar panels to mitigate frequent power cuts, and in some cases, sewing machines were provided. For instance, Kherbet Daoud, within the Union of Municipalities of Dreib el-Awsat, benefited from such enhancements.

Saadeddine Saadeddine, the Mayor of Kherbet Daoud Municipality, emphasizes the importance of encouraging women to participate in professional life. "This was possible thanks to the multipurpose room where we organized meetings to brainstorm projects that could be useful. At the women's request, we decided to set up a sewing workshop. Many of these women were already sewing at home, and this initiative was also a way to involve them in municipal activities," he explains. The women of Kherbet Daoud formed a group called «Metra Mourabah» (which means "square meter" in Arabic) and began creating tote bags. Over time, they benefited from various training courses and, with RESLOG's encouragement, connected with people in other regions of Lebanon who shared their interests, namely My Amazing Lebanon Initiative. As a result, they successfully sold their products in Beirut.



### Loubna el-Hassan

In Kherbet Daoud, one of the multipurpose room spaces was converted into a sewing workshop. Here, nine women work part-time, choosing to come in the mornings from 9 a.m. to noon. *“This is the time with the most sunshine, making it ideal for using the electricity generated by the solar panels,”* explains **Loubna el-Hassan, 33**.

Supported by RESLOG, Loubna, a mother of five girls aged between 19 and 4, now earns an average of USD 70 per month from her sewing work. *“With this money, I help cover the household expenses because my husband’s income has diminished due to the economic devaluation. The girls need many things, and thanks to my work, I can buy some items for them without having to ask my husband for permission. It’s very important for me to work. Supporting my family makes me feel useful, and I can see the difference,”* she adds.

Loubna started with tote bags and has since moved on to making dresses for the women in the village. *“I have some experience because I used to make dresses for my daughters with a very small sewing machine. When I don’t have any fabric, I repurpose my old dresses to make new clothes. Many other women in the area do that too,”* she explains.

*“I work with my sister-in-law, and we charge USD 3 per dress, which includes taking measurements and two fittings. We can’t charge more because people wouldn’t come to us anymore,”* she says. Occasionally, there are large orders, and the nine women in the village work together on the same project. This has happened several times after exhibitions in Beirut, where buyers showed interest in purchasing more patchwork quilts and upcycled tote bags.



In Kherbet Daoud’s Syrian refugee camp, **Tahani Ghalioun, 42**, reuses plastic bags to make various products such as shopping bags, baskets, and coasters using her crochet needle. These items are priced between USD 2 and 40.

Before moving to Lebanon in 2012, Tahani lived in Homs. She was part of the city’s middle class, working as a hairdresser and running her own salon with her mother. Now, she raises her 7-year-old daughter on her own, after the death of her ex-husband a few years ago.

Living in Lebanon isn’t easy. To make a living, Tahani Ghalioun has taken on various jobs, from waiting tables in a restaurant to working in a ceramic factory, a shoe store, and a grocery store. Her fortunes changed when she joined a RESLOG project. *“I eagerly participated in the training,”* she says. *“We don’t need to buy raw materials. All we have to do is collect plastic bags, wash them thoroughly, dry them, and then knit them. Many women from the camp joined me for the training. They work depending on the size of the orders. Knitting plastic is tough; it requires strength in your wrists and fingers. But it’s a job that helps me make ends meet and buy things for my daughter, even if it’s just new clothes for Eid or her favorite fruits,”* explains Tahani. Thanks to her work, she has been able to pay off her debts and purchase a solar panel for her tent, providing electricity for one lamp, a TV, and charging her mobile phone.



Tahani Ghalioun



The project included visits to various regions of Lebanon, notably Tripoli and Beirut, allowing participants to see other successful initiatives. To help sell the products in Beirut, RESLOG collaborated with Pascale Botz and Christina Gaspar from the **“My Amazing Lebanon”** initiative. *“We introduced the women to Instagram for advertising their products and finding new markets. For two consecutive years, they participated in exhibitions in Beirut, which were very successful and led to several large orders,”* says Pascale Botz, adding that some products were even adapted to suit the tastes of the Beirut market.

# The Impact of Collaboration and Local Entrepreneurship



Abdallah Zakaria

**F**orest products, particularly wood, also inspired RESLOG's initiatives. The region of Jurd el-Qayteh, including the town of Fnaydek, is home to the beautiful Qammoua forest, filled with Lebanese cedars, junipers, pines, firs, oaks, and other trees, as well as the quercus forest (Ghabet el-Ezr), known for its golden and silver leaves in autumn.

When RESLOG first contacted the municipality of Fnaydek, they wanted to place benches in Ghabet el-Ezr. SALAR International proposed using already cut wood and broken branches from the forest and called on **Abdallah Zakaria, a 36-year-old** carpenter from Fnaydek.

Abdallah and his three brothers, who all work in carpentry and furniture manufacturing, ran a small workshop in their village. *"This project took a lot of time because I had to transport the wood from the forest, dry it, cut it, and then craft it. I made benches, trash cans, and two kiosks that are now in the quercus forest. This project helped us gain recognition in the region. RESLOG assisted with branding and even helped us come up with a name, 'al-Erz'el' (the house in the trees),"* says Abdallah.



*"The collaboration with SALAR International has continued to be fruitful,"* says Abdallah Zakaria. *"RESLOG contributed to financing half the cost of a wood veneer press, and since then, my workload has more than doubled. This machine allows me to handle large projects and manufacture apartment doors in my workshop. I no longer need to go to Tripoli for this work. What used to take me two months now takes just fifteen days. I also no longer need to deal with other establishments, saving both time and money. Thanks to this machine, I was able to hire three additional workers,"* he adds. Abdallah is confident that, even with his thriving business, he would never have been able to afford the veneer press on his own.



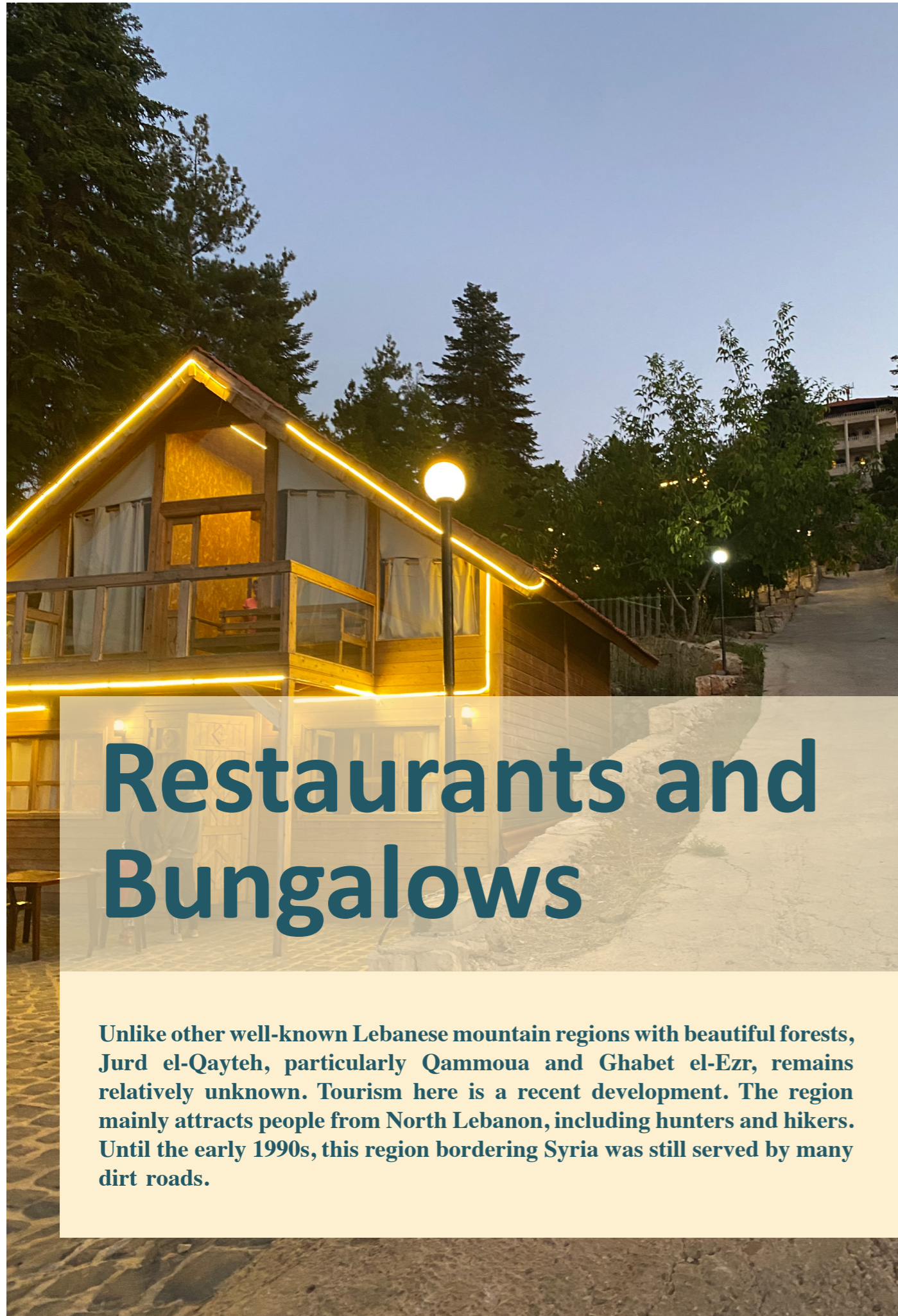
It is near one of the kiosks built by Abdallah in the quercus forest, the two sisters **Shahrazade and Rafea el-Ez, aged 64 and 53**, sell their manoucheh intermittently. The sisters, who have never married, are from Meshmesh, where they own a modest grocery store on the town's main road. Their grocery store is attached to their home, and with the help of RESLOG, they converted a terrace into a restaurant.

Shahrazade, who developed an eye disease from years of baking manoucheh and bread in a traditional 'tannour' oven, now benefits from RESLOG's support in finding alternative means of livelihood. Famous for their delicious manoucheh, the sisters transformed their spacious home terrace into a restaurant. It is now decorated with small plants in pretty pots and wooden tables and chairs with multi-colored cushions. The dishes are served on simple, immaculate white plates.

*"We serve traditional dishes specific to Akkar that many Lebanese might not know. Our menu includes starchy foods, lentils, bulgur, wheat, corn, and beans, all based on what we serve at home. We hope it will succeed through word of mouth... and providence,"* says Rafea.



Shahrazade and Rafea el-Ez



# Restaurants and Bungalows

Unlike other well-known Lebanese mountain regions with beautiful forests, Jurd el-Qayteh, particularly Qammoua and Ghabet el-Ezr, remains relatively unknown. Tourism here is a recent development. The region mainly attracts people from North Lebanon, including hunters and hikers. Until the early 1990s, this region bordering Syria was still served by many dirt roads.

**B**ilal Baarini, 36, owns the first restaurant in Fnaydek. “My father opened a butcher’s shop in 1974, and in 1994, he expanded to a sandwich shop serving raw and grilled meat to hunters visiting the area,” he explains.

“In my early twenties, encouraged by my mother, I decided to open my father’s restaurant in the middle of winter to serve lentil soup to locals returning from Qammoua, where they had spent the day in the snowy mountains,” he adds. Today, Bilal owns two restaurants: one open in the winter, facing a green meadow that turns into a frozen lake during the cold season, and another located higher up, open in the summer with a capacity of 300 seats. He also owns four bungalows.

As of 2022, SALAR International aimed to support the people of Akkar in developing tourism. Despite the region’s enormous potential, this has been a challenging task. There was essentially no existing tourism infrastructure, so everything had to be built from scratch.

Over the past decade, a hundred bungalows have been built and dozens of restaurants have been opened. Recognizing the need for skilled services, SALAR International has conducted training sessions in tourism to ensure that local residents who choose to work in this sector can offer quality services.

RESLOG has also played a significant role in promoting the region. With Lebanese internal tourism gaining popularity during the 2019 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, RESLOG has organized various activities to highlight the area’s attractions. One of them was a Swedish-style treasure hunt called Orienteering.



**Bilal Baarini**

Bilal Baarini, participated in all the training sessions organized by RESLOG, covering topics like table presentation, cleanliness, accounting, digital marketing, hospitality, business development and customer service. «I learned that customers are guests and that we are hosts, not shop owners. This shifted my perspective significantly. We need to be modest, accept feedback, and continuously improve our service,» he says.

Bilal also engaged in the Tasgheel project, where he attended initial training and then hired emerging experts for three-month internships. Zeina Ouweidate, a program manager at LAsER (Lebanese Association for Scientific Research), explains that the Tashgeel project, which collaborated with various stakeholders, focused on tailored solutions for the emerging tourism industry in the region. “We conducted specialized training for young people and business owners, covering digital marketing, hospitality management, and business development. The young participants then worked with the businesses to ensure smooth operations, set up social media pages, and handle accounting,” she explains.



**Mirvat es-Sayed**

**Mirvat es-Sayed, 27**, a decorator who participated in the training, discovered a new passion. *“Although my parents own bungalows and a restaurant, I was initially uninterested and spent my time drawing. Thanks to the training, I found a new passion for managing the family’s business and now focus on every detail,”* she says.



**Chaddi Abboud**

**Chaddi Abboud, 21**, a Syrian national, originally specializing in Biology, shifted to Business studies after the training. *“The training was a real eye-opener for me; it boosted my self-confidence and changed my career direction,”* he explains.



**Hadil Boustani**

**Hadil Boustani, 25**, who studied Social Sciences, secured a permanent job with the NGO Neopreneur, which was involved in organizing the Tashgheel training. *“I’m from Bebnine, on the coast of Akkar. I learned how to work with people from different backgrounds. Here I learned to love the land, I saw how people are attached to their land and I became like them. I now believe that Jurd el-Qayteh is the most beautiful region in Lebanon,”* she concludes.

# Kweshra

## Reviving an Ancient Craft with RESLOG’s Help

Kweshra, a village in Akkar located at an altitude of 750 meters, is one of the few in Lebanon with a Turkmen heritage. It was established during the Ottoman Empire under the Sultan Selim I, in the 16th century, when he conquered the Middle East.

Centuries later, this community has become Lebanese but has maintained its unique characteristics, including old Turkish traditions and a dialect that is no longer used in Türkiye. One of Kweshra's unique crafts, passed down through generations, involves making items from cold cogon grass (halva in Arabic), which grows along the Nahr el-Kibir river on the Lebanon-Syria border. Thanks to RESLOG’s efforts, this traditional craft has been revived and modernized.

**Mona Assi, 39**, from Kweshra, has launched an initiative called **“Acheh Laffeh”** with RESLOG’s support. This project focuses on creating carpets, bags, and baskets from halva. The process involves cutting the green grass from the riverbanks between May and July, drying it in the sun, and storing it in a dry place. Estimating the quantity needed for the entire year is crucial, and collecting the grass can be challenging.

Mona Assi has achieved financial independence through this craft, supporting her family and selling products both online and at a local cooperative space in the village. *«Before RESLOG’s involvement, we only made items for personal use. RESLOG’s experts suggested incorporating colored yarns made of wool or cotton to give a contemporary touch to the traditional items. Now, we have a market and orders from Beirut.»* she says.



**Mona Assi**

# Fnaydek

***“In Sweden, they have everything I dream of for my municipality,”***  
**says Samih Abdelhay, President of Fneidek Municipal Council.**



*“Fnaydek is a green locality with varying altitudes between 1,700 and 2,200 meters. About 90% of it is covered by forest. We are working to register two natural reserves: the Qammoua forest and Ghabet el-Ezr,”* explains Abdelhay.

Qammoua, spanning 15 million square meters, is covered with pines, firs, Lebanese cedars, oaks, junipers, and other coniferous and deciduous trees. Ghabet el-Ezr features about 70,000 quercus trees spread over a million square meters.

RESLOG has established solid ties with Fnaydek. *“They came, listened to me, assessed our needs, and we discussed how we could collaborate,”* notes Abdelhay, reflecting on RESLOG’s involvement.

*“Thanks to RESLOG, we have been able to protect and better manage the quercus forest. Before SALAR International’s involvement, the forest’s entrances were unregulated. People would litter, light barbecues, and more. We participated in various trainings, and the project helped us set up regulated entrances and collect fees. This generated income that allowed us to equip the forest with public toilets and create a pedestrian path. We also financed the salaries of forest rangers and installed benches, trash cans, and two kiosks made from broken wood from the forest,”* he says.

Abdelhay visited Sweden and Türkiye with RESLOG, including a trip to the town of Laxa in Sweden. *“In Sweden, they have everything I dream of for my municipality. In Laxa, there is a forest similar to our quercus forest, but they have a system, rules and regulations, and a population that is both sensitive and conscientious about environmental issues. In Sweden, all taxes are paid, which is not the case in Lebanon. The inhabitants there are involved in forest management. I can, with my municipality, be like them. I know how to do it, but we need the means—something that is really lacking in Lebanon,”* he concludes.

SALAR International has collaborated with Fnaydek on several projects, including establishing multipurpose rooms and combating forest fires with the first responder team.



