

AFKAR

A Story Of Success



Funded by the European Union



*Under the Framework of AFKAR Program
Funded by the European Union
and Managed by the Office of the
Minister of State for Administrative Reform*





AFKAR

AFKAR, the Reward of Commitment to a National Cause

- By Nidal Ayoub

Her voice quivers with excitement: "AFKAR program is blooming! What was once a side project with a modest budget granted by the European Union, intended to assist a limited number of Lebanese civil society organizations (CSOs) in their own small though ambitious endeavors has grown to be a consistent and integrated program at the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR). It is now equipped with a coherent package of tools finely tailored throughout fourteen years of grass root work, linking the civil society and the State institutions to improve their dialogue, cooperation and efficiency. The ultimate beneficiary is ... all".

This unique combination of passion, commitment and will reflected in the words of AFKAR Project Manager Youmna Chacar Ghorayeb, is a permeating energy stimulating active AFKAR team. Supported by the consecutive ministers who believed in the role of the civil society and adamantly backed AFKAR program, and despite delaying impediments, AFKAR has come a long way, becoming itself a bonding bridge!



Impacting Souls and Soils

In the midst of turmoil, upheaval and unrest that have been shaking Lebanon for decades, Lebanese Civil Society has at all times, shown resilience and determination to face adversity of all kinds. It struggles to counter devastating effects of conflicts, underdevelopment, outdated legal frameworks, ... reduce prejudices, prevent corruption, provide for basic services, incorporate empowerment and protection measures, to promote change.. Lebanese CSOs play a key role in implementing life changing projects; yet they are constantly faced with many challenges and ever-changing contexts.

Providing support to Lebanese CSOs is, no doubt, an added value. It is essential to improve their work efficiency and thus, to maximize the sought impacts of their projects, besides encouraging them to collaborate and coordinate with the local authorities and the Central Administration. All this is meant to facilitate the realization of their goals, turning these into effective achievements and social benefits.

In light of its mission to remain responsive to the demands of the Lebanese administrations (ministries, central bodies, public agencies and municipalities) and to modernize them by building effective partnerships with them as well as with international donors, non-government organizations and the civil society, the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform initiated, in



January 2004, AFKAR, a new program funded by the European Union.

With a one-million-euro EU donation, the program was launched as a pilot project, focusing on the consolidation of the state of law and the promotion of citizenship, the encouragement of dialogue and the support of marginalized groups. It laid the foundations for a modern approach to deal with civil society organizations by providing them with a new experience that goes beyond grants, reaching an active partnership between the Civil Society and the Public Sector, through the implementation of initiatives related to human rights issues and the establishment of dialogue platforms among those concerned by these issues.

The overall number of projects supported by AFKAR program grew with AFKAR III to 64. The budget allocated for phase I of the program, implemented from 2004 to 2008, went from 1 million euros to 3 million euros assigned to the second phase which started in 2006 and ended in 2011. For its third phase (2010–2020), AFKAR was granted 10 million euros! Funded by the European Union, programs aiming to enhance dialogue among various social categories, especially the youth, promote respect of civil and political rights and improve life conditions of vulnerable communities, were identified and supported throughout Lebanon, reaching out to peripheral regions.

CSOs grantees under AFKAR III were targeted as effective vectors of democratic and socio-economic development and reform. Along the long chain of actions and responsibilities needed for the successful implementation of such diversified projects, AFKAR team took up a specific role: to technically support CSOs for the best execution of the programs. Strengthening the skills of these organizations, building their capacities, along with those of the government staff, through consultations, trainings and dialogue were,





still are, a main part of this process in order to consolidate good governance concept and practices.

The program that was intended at first to set a real and fruitful cooperation between the government and Civil Society in Lebanon with a strict focus CSOs empowerment by supporting their abilities and initiatives, promoting thus democratic values and human rights as well as social and

economic development, has come a long way.

Juliette Dahdah, General Coordinator of Fista North Lebanon underlines the "meticulous guidance" provided by AFKAR team on both the financial and technical levels. Quoting her "We have acquired detailed and inspiring ideas on how to better advance with the remaining activities. Thank you, AFKAR team. You were indeed very helpful for the improvement of our activities".

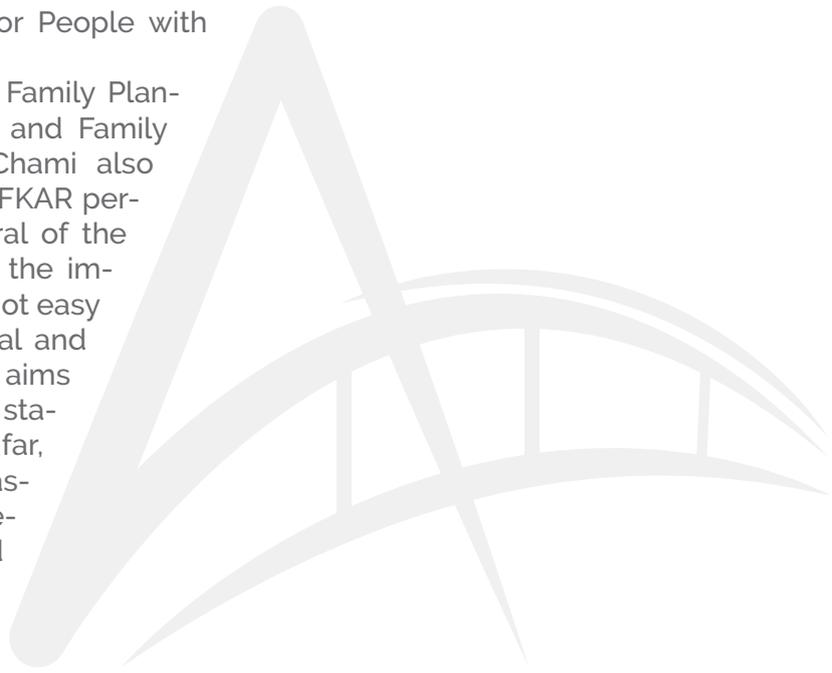
"While working with the AFKAR team, we came to acknowledge their expertise and outstanding professionalism. We put together a constructive and cooperative relationship based on the valuable attempts to build bridges between the Public Sector and CSOs. Their expertise and engagement are reflected throughout the widely recognized success of all the projects they work on" asserts Hanine El Chemaly, General





Director at The Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD).

Programs Director at the Lebanon Family Planning Association for Development and Family Empowerment (LFPADÉ) Cécilia Chami also recognizes “the dedication of the AFKAR personnel to help us overcome several of the difficulties we encountered during the implementation of our project. It was not easy for us to manage the organizational and financial facets of this project that aims to empower the socio-economic status of women in South Lebanon. So far, 180 women from Kawkaba and Hasbaya have been trained on food safety, management, accounting and meeting legal requirements. The lives of their families have been improved.”



Through AFKAR CSOs projects, various marginalized and vulnerable groups including prisoners, drug addicts, abused children, disabled persons ... benefit from upgraded civil rights and/or improved life and health conditions through advocacy actions, skills trainings and the rehabilitation of inadequate infrastructures. In parallel, security forces, media professionals, educators, politicians ... are solicited to promote relevant laws, ethics, liberties, dialogue and peace. Development, on both individual and collective levels, is the key concept underlying a vast range of projects extending from agriculture, to ecotourism, social behavior, economic improvement...





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Many projects undertaken within the framework of the AFKAR program leave unparalleled traces/impacts on society, nature and individuals. The supported projects under AFKAR III, were mainly focusing on socio economic development and reform. Human rights were also tackled from a socio-economic perspective. They included building the capacities of civil society organisations, municipalities and schools on development projects in terms of research, planning and implementation. Projects as aimed also at developing agricultural production capacities, manufacturing and marketing of agricultural materials, while others consisted in constructing facilities and supplies, paving the way to identify suitable solutions for agriculture and irrigation problems.

The number of persons directly or indirectly impacted by the projects developed under AFKAR program keeps growing exponentially. Thousands of untold stories can be underscored. One of them is Ghassan Ahmad's, a 38 year old electrician from Baalback whose true passion has al-



ways been to raise honey bees. When he learned about the Makhzoumi Foundation's opportunity to start up a small apiculture business, as part of the Civil Society project in Action for Sustainable Development, financed by the European Union and managed by OMSAR, he decided to enroll himself in a capacity building session which he received two hives besides, of course, the needed technical support to improve his skills. Nowadays Ghassan has acquired the adequate theoretical and technical skills that will enable him to test himself by introducing a new queen bee (that he got from Germany) to one of his hives. This process has offered him the opportunity to increase the number of hives from two to eleven, and consequently collect the quantity and quality of honey he has always longed for. He is also planning to further develop his business and finally start selling jars of honey in his village in the hope of having labeled branded jars in the year to come.



Along the path of the Lebanon Mountain Trail in North Lebanon, where the Italian CSO Cospe, in collaboration with the local organization LMTA, implemented their project for the Conservation and Development of Economic Opportunities on the Trail, a list of well-known names is echoed. Youssef Tawk, a pioneer of conservation and an environmental activist, has dedicated his life to the conservation, protection and environmental enhancement of the majestic but also vulnerable Cedars of Lebanon ... Sister Madonna Azzi of Aaqoura's Convent of the Holy Family goes beyond the call of duty to make sure all tourists feel

welcome, and sees them off with a jar of carob molasses as a goodbye gift. She believes that the Lebanon Mountain Trail can always provide tourists with the best that Lebanon has to offer and that it has the potential to change people's minds/vision about the country which is so often geared towards pessimism as a result of the broadcasted news and social media. In every unfolded story, AFKAR Program proved to be a change maker. Angela Kalaani (LFPAD CSO) confesses: "AFKAR program represents a special phase in my life, during which I assumed a lot of responsibilities that made me believe in the possibility of change. Teaching a large number of women in Hasbaya in South Lebanon new skills that help them generate income for themselves and their families was a catalyst for me because I got acquainted with a wide range of persons such as mayors, investors, beneficiaries of our projects ..."

"Today we have a far better understanding of the problems the Lebanese society faces, its needs, and the CSOs' way of working" as Youmna Chacar Ghorayeb, the Project Manager of AFKAR, affirms. "It has become evident for us that the associations and organizations of civil society must meet, cooperate, exchange/share information and experiences, and build a partnership among them in order to maximize their abilities and proficiency. An intensive common effort well-coordinated and smoothly synchronized, is requested in this respect".

This finding turned into a profound conviction which opened new paths for OMSAR in general and AFKAR program in particular. It allows it to have a wider scope of fields of intervention and an entire scope of actions. AFKAR program's identified objectives: facilitating the establishment of desired platform for the CSOs and the Public Sector to strengthen their common capacities and increase their involvement in a consistent policy dialogue in the near future.

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Scaling Beyond Limits

“The initiative of the Ministry of Administrative Reform via AFKAR program to support civil associations, has indeed changed my point of view on the importance of inter linkages and communication between the different parties involved in the projects with obvious socio-economic impacts. I learned that we all have the same goal and that reaching it becomes a lot easier only if we resort to dialogue and partnership to create public policies and manage development projects”. Zeinab Dirani (LFPAD) says it all!

This sentiment is echoed by all AFKAR partner CSOs. It has led AFKAR program to initiate a series of brainstorming sessions gathering representatives of the CSOs from AFKAR I, II and III programs and coordinators designated from thirteen ministries.

This ground breaking achievement of AFKAR III program is the amalgamation of the implementation of a series of consultative meetings and interviews for developing a Strategy for AFKAR towards dialogue on public policies between Civil Society and the Public Sector. In support of policy dialogue, a proposed frame is the platform including both representatives of CSOs and official institutions emerged from an intensive series of meetings and workshops between CSOs and Ministries' coordinators. As such, the platform was suggested to be a “Partnership Platform”, whose benefits, objectives, challenges and possible structure are developed by the Platform working teams. This brought forth a call for a “Partnership



Charter” as a guiding reference for the dialogue process to ultimately reach the government attention and adoption.

Out of these meetings and workshops, and in order to bring the outputs of all the discussions to a more practical level, and guarantee their consistent and sustainable implementation, a core group composed of CSOs and coordinators designated by different ministries, defined a training program for the pilot capacity building workshop on public policy dialogue between Civil Society and public institutions. This pilot workshop engaging AFKAR III grantees and representatives of local public authorities cooperating with CSOs on their various projects established a successful reference for future trainings to be implemented in the process of training on public policy dialogue. The proceedings of the workshop are published as a training guide -“Guiding Steps towards Policy Dialogue between Public Sector and CSOs”- to provide guidance in the implementation of such capacity building endeavor in the future.

“ *Lina Yamout,*
Ministry of environment:

I would like to express my sincere thankfulness and gratitude to AFKAR Programme for its efforts and contribution towards strengthening the partnership. One of the advantages of such a programme is bringing together the concerned government officials and the NGOs to share their experiences with one another and enrich our knowledge in different aspects related to partnership. This is very helpful for future networking, and we hope that the partnership built is everlasting. **”**

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AFKAR program in its series of technical capacity building sessions in different areas is integrated in a knowledge tool training manual to guide future work in this respect- "Handbook for Civil Society Organizations in Managing Projects".

“ **Christal Azzam,**
AFDC:

Although I was already familiar with M&E and had substantial experience in the field, this training opened my eyes on details that I had missed previously and gave me the opportunity to work with my colleagues on developing and re-viewing our own proposal **”**

Also the intensive monitoring and evaluation of the AFKAR III grantees resulted in recommendations enlisted in a booklet reflecting the situation and challenges of CSOs in Lebanon – "Sharing Best Practices and Recommendations for AFKAR III Program: Designed for Aid Effectiveness Partners and Development Practitioners".





After several capacity building workshops involving representatives from the Public Sector and the Civil Society, conducted by AFKAR, the reflections and discussions between CSOs and Public Sector working groups took a new leap. These discussions lead to two concept notes. One of these documents addressed a bold project going beyond all expectations: the Platform for Partnerships for policy dialogue between the CSOs and the Public Sector in which AFKAR plays the role of the coordination committee to document, prepare meetings and trainings ...

Roula Leilo,
Ministry of Industry:

...Thanks to AFKAR, and to their transparent culture inviting everyone to share their responsibilities and to embrace the change and the willingness to transparency and accountability. This open culture of sharing in an open and transparent way will help the Ministry of Industry (MoI) to achieve its goals, since the MoI speaks the same language and invites everyone to work in complementarity.

This one-of-a-kind joint platform will not only constitute a space to promote dialogue, build trust and assist in the exchange of experience and knowledge, but is also seen as an important coordinating frame" as the Team Leader of Technical Experts Najwa Ksaifi defines it. Its function is to enhance the cooperation between CSOs and organize them as an operational entity while unifying the demands and requests to the various governmental institutions. At the same time, it would allow the establishment of direct channels of communication between the CSOs and the Public Sector, thus facilitating and expediting the implementation of projects to the best interest of their beneficiaries. The second document which followed from and built on the first one was drafted in order to define the fundamental principles, rights and directions of this anticipated partnership. Bearing the title of "The Charter of Partnership between the Public Sector and the Civil Society"

Kassem Oleik,
Al Amal Al Baladi association:

...AFKAR project allowed us to build a tripartite golden relation between, people, funding agencies (EU), and the public administration, moreover AFKAR encouraged civil society actor to liaise with national and local government to maximize impact of the action.



it is based on the already existing "Charter of the Citizen" developed by OMSAR in 2001. The Charter of the Citizen abides by definite requirements and goals such as improving the relationship between the State and the citizens; complying with the rule of law; achieving the principle of transparency and responsibility of the public administration towards the citizen; defining the citizens' rights and obligations, meeting their needs and offering them optimum services. "The Charter of Partnership between the Public Sector and the Civil Society" will be put forward to be adopted by the Lebanese government.

Based on the above components (Platform of Partnership, Charter of Partnership, Trainings), AFKAR has gained a well-defined, purposeful and futuristic strategy embodying the years of accumulated experience in bringing the CSOs and the Public Sector together over shared views and common purposes for the best interest of the Lebanese society.



AFKAR on the move

AFKAR is now provided with proficient tools and a coherent and evolutionary strategy. It can pursue its mission and confront the future with confidence.

Commitment and accuracy were, for so long, key words continuously coming up in the lexica used by all actors, team members, technical experts and CSOs' representatives involved in the AFKAR program. (As if the main concern to sustain AFKAR). The "upgrading" of AFKAR program now occurring after long years of commitment to the good of Civil Society in Lebanon also opens ways to acknowledge the work of so many unknown and "hidden" State officers and civil servants. Putting into effect a number of long-standing charters such as the "Charter of the Citizen", and the recognition of a long memory/history of undertaken fieldwork in coordination with the State stakeholders (public administrations and ministries), would be at the top of the program's priorities.

AFKAR, which had initially been chosen to refer to diverse initiatives, rings today another bell. AFKAR, meaning "ideas", but also "thoughts", has grown to refer to a whole new conception of the relation to be between Lebanese Civil Society and the Public Sector. If the focus of AFKAR program, in its third phase, is directed towards policy dialogue and cooperation between the Public Sector and Civil Society in order to improve protection of Human Rights, it now embodies a progressive philosophy of social and governmental interaction based on a holistic practical approach.

Indeed, when speaking of AFKAR, it is needless to say that, brandishing its tireless motto "When there is a will, there is a way", - or is it a bridge?! -, its fearless motivation, now boosted by decisive means, puts it in the lead towards the next milestone, to the ultimate destination: the future!

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