

Restoring Lives and Livelihoods of the Ouzai Port Fishermen

The devastating July 2006 war affected the lives and livelihoods of the local community in Beirut southern suburbs, particularly the fishermen at the Ouzai port, where an entire fleet of 300 fishing boats - the source of a living for many - were destroyed.

In an attempt to support the fishermen of this port and their dependent families, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has intervened on three crucial levels. As is the case with most UNDP projects, the focus falls on the local, small-scale enterprises, and is chiefly exercised through the provision of needed machinery that helps with expansion. The UNDP focused on the restoration of the livelihoods of fishermen and the greater community of the Ouzai region by improving the socio-economic conditions of the fishermen, sustaining healthy environmental conditions at the port, minimizing health diseases, and increasing income generation for 600 fishermen beneficiaries and their families. The UNDP supported the rehabilitation of the main entrance at the Ouzai port with the establishment of lighting polls, the reconstruction of asphalt, sidewalks, and plantations.



In addition, it proactively contributed necessary equipments for the inauguration of a cooling room for the maintenance of fresh and hygienic produce. UNDP also donated the generator needed to power the ice-making machine and installed an ice-maker machine which produces an average of 840 ice cubes per day to be sold to local restaurants and used in the fishermen's market.

"The projects encouraged local fishermen whose jobs were put to a standstill after the war to return to the ports through infrastructure rehabilitation and the organization of fishermen's registration," explained Taleb Harake, President of the Fishermen's Cooperative.

During the inaugural celebration of the new Ouzai Port expansion in June 2010, Yahya Hamadi, a member of the fishermen's cooperative and seaman, explained that "the fishermen's plight lies in the complete dependence on the ocean's providing; some days it plays in our favor and other days to our detriment."

UNDP has tried to lessen this heavy dependency by offering 5,000 - 7,000 larger and sturdier fishing nets as well as 120 SONAR radar detectors - both crucial items for a successful independent fisherman. Considering how expensive and easily torn fishing nets are, they are a difficult commodity to maintain, but nonetheless a necessary one. The SONAR



radars donated to the cooperative addressed this issue of net maintenance as well, as they gave fishermen the advantage of a warning to ocean depths and large rocks that tend to tangle and rip the nets, giving them ample time to pull them up beforehand. Not to mention, the radars detect large groups of fish, which saves precious time fishermen squander circling blindly in search for them without radars.

These technical and functional UNDP donations truly relieved the Ouzai fishermen from their most pressing and critical obstacles and helped them to focus directly on providing for their families, later allowing them to enjoy an 80% increase in produce. "With this help, we were able to rise up from our already difficult times, which were further worsened after the war's destruction," Hamadi gratefully recounts.