

Towards a Mediterranean LSPA Network !

Learning Journey to Lebanon

November, 22nd-25th, 2017.



- Narrative Report -



This Learning Journey was supported by FAO, through the modality of South-South cooperation among Non-State Actors.

Executive Summary

The Learning Journey of the Mediterranean network of Local and Solidarity Based Partnerships for Agro-ecology (LSPA) took place between Nov. 22-25, 2017 in different regions of Lebanon. It was organized by URGENCI international network for Community Supported Agriculture and Terre et Humanisme, and locally hosted by SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon.

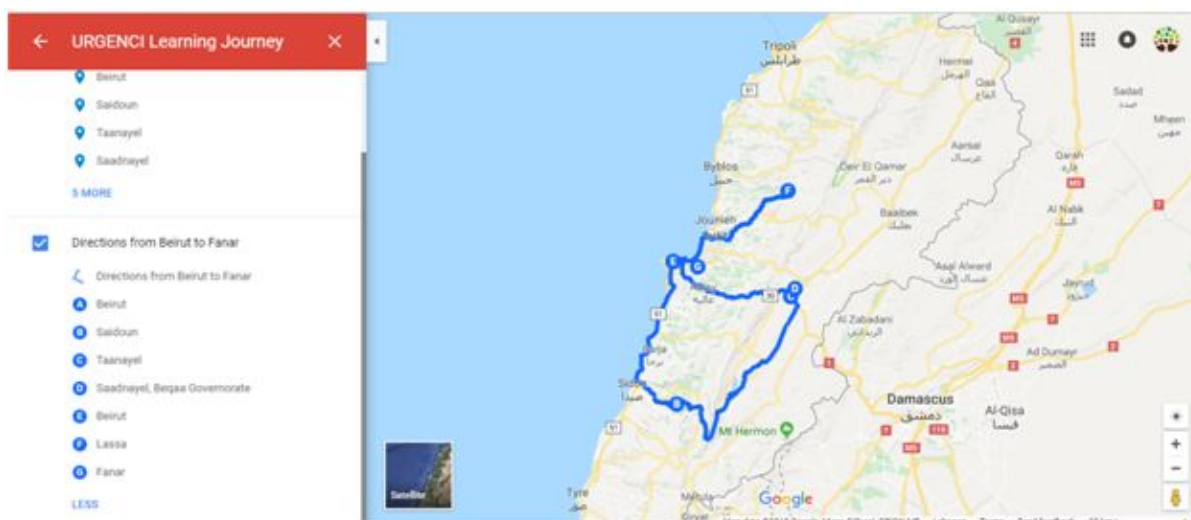
This was the second of two FAO-supported international Learning Journeys planned for 2017, under the modality of South-South Cooperation among Non-State Actors, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between URGENCI and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The first journey was held in Turkey on October 4-8, 2017.

14 representatives came from 10 countries: Rafik Djebbour, collectif TORBA -Algeria; Laura Tabet, Nawaya - Egypt; Judith Hitchman and Morgane Iserte, Urgenci and Tanguy Cagnin - Terre & Humanisme - France; Jenny Gkiougki, AgroEcoPolis - Greece; Stefania Colombara, Tavolo RES - Italy; Yahia Khawaldeh, Dana - Jordan; Saad Dagher, Arab Agronomist Association - Palestine; Mohammed Anis, Terre & Humanisme Tunisia - Tunisia; Ceyhan Temürçü, DBB & Tadya collective - Turkey; and Nadia Attar and Ali Kayali, UNPD - Syria. The group was honoured to have been accompanied on the first 2 days by a member of the FAO Lebanon country representation (Faten Adada) and a member of the FAO RNE Regional initiative on Small-scale Family Farming based in the FAO office in Cairo (Alfredo Impiglia). Their presence and input was invaluable. Jean Hatem from Lebanon documented the journey on video.

The beginning and the end of the journey were dedicated for internal work sessions, which included: introductions by URGENCI to the MoU with the FAO and reminder of the network's goals, recapitulation of the Turkey Journey, and brainstorming on the needs and contributions of the members and how to proceed in jointly developing training material on LSPA.

The core of the journey consisted of 4 field visits to producers in different regions. The producers were selected on the basis that they all practiced aspects of agro-ecology and direct sales to consumers in one way or another (selling vegetable baskets, at farmers market, on site sales), but also because they were different on many levels:

- a)** have different core activities (*conversion of orchards, food forest, seed preservation and reproduction, training*),
- b)** are managed in different ways (*NGO, collective, family*) and some involve refugee workers and volunteers in their activities,
- c)** are located in different bio-regions and altitudes (*Bekaa valley, Mount Lebanon, coastal area*),
- d)** have different land sizes (*1 acre - 37 acres*).



The journey also included a trip to Souk El Tayeb, the oldest weekly farmers market in Beirut, and a meeting with its founder, Kamal Mouzawak. A small delegation of participants and members of FAO met with the Ministry of Agriculture to introduce the network and the learning journey.

Day-by-day activities

- **Day 1: Wednesday, Nov. 22nd**

The first day was spent in Saidoun, South Lebanon, where SOILS is based. The group had spent the night in the village in guest houses and studios and met in the morning at the old public school building where representatives of FAO joined in.



The day began with introductions of the participants and their work.

Then, Judith Hitchman, president of Urgenci, explained about the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed between Urgenci and FAO; Morgane Iserte, network facilitator, did a recap of the first activities of the Mediterranean

network for LSPA: the founding meeting in Marseilles (February 2016), the mapping exercise that was done there, and the definition of common goals and the efforts made to pursue our collective adventure; Ceyhan Temürcü presented the recent Learning Journey in Turkey since he had been the main organizer.

Lunch was offered by a local cook from the village with whom SOILS collaborates. After lunch the group visited the future center of SOILS (an old stone house under renovation), and their recently planted aromatic garden.



The group went back to the school building where they did a brainstorming session on the needed activities in each country to encourage LSPA as well as the target public they address.. Ceyhan (Turkey) and Tanguy (Terre et Humanisme - France) facilitated the classification of the information on the board.



Afterwards Rita from SOILS showed a short video related to a gardening training the association implemented in a school for Syrian refugees, and its therapeutic value. Yahia (Dana - Jordan) spoke briefly about their activities in the association and some trials they did related to urban gardening while showing pictures of some hydroponic structures, which opened a debate in the room about soil-less gardening. The two participants from Syria were not able to join the group on the first day due to logistical difficulties, so they met us on the second day in the Bekaa.

- **Day 2: Thursday, Nov. 23rd**

The group headed to the Bekaa, and the first stop was at Arcenciel NGO in Taanayel. Elia Ghorra from Arcenciel gave a brief presentation of the NGO's work in different social and environmental sectors. Then he led us to the 3 dunum (0,75 acres) educational garden that was established 2 years ago by the French collective Graines et Cinema, which were also present. The garden was a first trial to put in place the reproduction of heirloom vegetables seeds brought in from different countries on the Mediterranean Basin with the purpose of re-adapting the seeds to the local climate. The group also visited the small community seed house built out of mud bricks to see how the seeds are classified and preserved. Saad from Palestine was able to see his special courgette seeds which he had given to G&C a couple of years ago that had tripled in number, and he explained that the seeds are a cross of 2 varieties one that grows horizontally and one that climbs. The group was able to exchange with Ferdinand Beau (G&C) and a Syrian worker on the varieties grown and the seed extraction and preservation methods. The garden and seed bank are currently managed by Arcenciel as G&C moved to another location.



The group then moved to the next stop a few kilometers away at Saadnayel. It's a 16 dunum (4 acres) plot managed by G&C who recently founded a Lebanese NGO called *Buzurna Juzurna* with the help of Lebanese friends (some of whom are members of SOILS). The NGO has rented the land, and hired 2 Syrian refugee workers to help them with the gardening. In addition to continuing the work of heirloom seed reproduction *Buzurna Juzurna* sells their vegetable baskets every week in Beirut at Haven for Artists (Mar Mkhael). They have also started organizing

training on organic gardening. Walid Youssef, one of the Syrian farm workers, spoke about how he learned to convert his agricultural practices to more sustainable ones to produce healthy food for himself and others, and about the importance of preserving good open-pollinated seeds. The refugee workers provided a generous fresh fruit collation.



The group then had lunch at the house of one of SOILS members in Zahle, and after lunch the debate was open with *Buzurna Juzurna* about their seed preservation practices. They said that they're receiving training and mentoring from professional seed producers in France (le Biau Germe), and that they follow specific hygiene standards to minimize the risk of importing diseases, and that most of their imported seeds come from certified bodies. Alfredo nevertheless recommended they follow a more thorough and scientific approach in classification and hygiene, and collaborate more with LARI (Lebanese Agriculture Research Institute).

Afterwards the group went to Beirut to check into a hotel in the Hamra area.

- **Day 3: Friday, Nov. 24th**

A small delegation of 5 participants (Judith, Tanguy, Saad, Ceyhan, Rita) and members of FAO (Faten, Alfredo) met with a group from the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry was represented by Roula El Achi, Majida Mcheite and 3 other members. The aim of the meeting was to introduce the network and its work and to ask for the support of the Ministry in widening the national network. It was not easy to explain what LSPA was, as it's not as clearly defined as organic agriculture or fair trade, but it was good to establish a first contact with the Ministry.

The whole group then headed towards the North, without the FAO team.



We got to Racines du Ciel's farm in Lassa at noon, and had only 2 hours for the visit and lunch. Since it was Friday, our hosts were busy with the harvest in preparation for the farmers market the next day, but they still kindly accepted to host us. Miguel, a volunteer who's been on the farm since March 2017, took us on a tour while Joanna went back home to prepare lunch. The land is around 15 hectares, with mainly apple trees. It was taken

over by Raed from his father in 2014, and with his wife Joanna he started the conversion to a more natural and organic approach using biodynamic and permaculture approaches (no certification). They first began by growing vegetables between the trees in the orchards (onions, garlic, fava beans, winter cultures, green tomatoes, basil, kohlrabi, kale, radish, broccoli, lettuces, parsley), and planted aromatic cultures at the edges of the terraces. Sadly much of the historical agrobiodiversity has been lost in Lebanon, and the apple varieties are limited to just three or four.

We visited part of the land close to the house which consisted of terraces of apple trees inter-planted with vegetables. A new structure was being built for the chicken and geese out of branches and mud under the guidance of Joanna who is an architect specialized in natural construction. The orchard is full of wild flowers and plants which add to the biodiversity and attract pollinators. In addition to selling fruits and vegetables the couple process the apples into juice, jam, molasses, vinegar, etc. We had lunch on site prepared with fresh vegetables from the garden. Then we had a brief discussion with Joanna and Raed about the challenges they face. They tried selling food baskets but had difficulty securing commitment. Joanna admits that maybe they didn't try hard enough. They discussed the Graines et Cinéma approach (blasting a message via whatsapp, setting up appointments week-by-week). Also discussed challenges of local community and insistence – sometimes aggressive – of using pesticides. It is difficult for them to resist the pressures of all the



conventional farmers who surround them, and they are the only farm in their area using natural farming methods, but they are very determined to succeed.

As the sun sets early in November we had to rush to leave Lassa and head to Fanar to Samen's Eco-Gardens. We just had enough sun to do a quick tour of most of the 4 dunum (1 acre) garden with Andrea. Highlights of the tour: rainwater storage systems, green roof of guest cottage (began with 8-10 cm of soil) and chicken coop provides insulation, orchid nursery (use distillation of herbs sometimes to keep the room humid), sycamore tree, composting worms make "black gold" from cardboard and horse manure.



We didn't get to meet Nadim the gardener as he was travelling for work. The participants were amazed by the complexity and harmony of this peri-urban food forest with subtropical fruits. We then gathered in the wooden patio where Andrea explained about the history of the garden, how they prepare and sell their produce and the challenges they face, and most importantly about the environmental mission of Andrea and her brother Nadim in maintaining this rare green urban space, and inspiring others. Before saying goodbye, Andrea generously gave everyone pots of her fruit jams.



- **Day 4: Saturday, Nov. 25th**

On Saturday we had the chance to visit Souk el Tayeb, the oldest farmers market in Beirut. Nicolas from the Souk's team was waiting for us at 9:00 am to tell us about the souk's operations and offered tasty snacks. After a tour of the stalls and seeing Raed from Racines du Ciel, we met with Kamal Mouzawak, founder of the Souk.

Kamal explained how he founded the souk in 2004 to help small producers earn a better living, and how his mission is to gather people from different communities and religions over healthy food ("Make Food not War").



The project started with around 10 producers offering provisions and traditional food, now there are around a total of 106 producers registered, with a maximum of 80 present at any one time.

Souk El Tayeb NGO provides the management of the market: tents, logistics, marketing, quality control (3 visits per year to each producer). Some of the producers have an organic certification, and most of them offer either fresh or processed food products, while only a minority sell crafts and natural cosmetics. The NGO charges 60\$/tent which can house 2 producers, and the participants debated whether this fee is affordable for the producers or not.



We had a delicious lunch at the Tawlet restaurant, also founded by Kamal, which hosts chefs from different regions to offer their regional specialties.

In the afternoon, a final work session in Haven for Artists in Mar Mkhael (district of Beirut) closed the journey. Participants were asked what their organisations need from the network and what they can contribute in terms of training, and a needs/contributions list was compiled to help figure out the concrete actions for 2018.

One common need kept coming up, that of a training of farmers and facilitators on agro-ecology. *(Refer to the contribution/needs list in the Summary report - annex 3).*



The following steps are now conducting a survey among Mediterranean partner organisations to get their feedback on training needs and convening the Editorial Committee by the end of January to draft a 2018 proposal roadmap to build a training programme for LSPA: meetings and materials.

This Learning Journey, together with the one organised in Turkey the previous month, helped participants to get greater insight into the local situations and challenges LSPA actors are facing. It also provided and reinforced a sense of community among Mediterranean partners, and the firm will to move ahead in close cooperation towards a Mediterranean LSPA network and its grand meeting in Thessaloniki, planned on November 9-11, 2018.

Appendices

1. List of participants and people met
2. Updated programme
3. Summary report: Working sessions during the Learning Journeys, Oct-Nov 2017.