



Territorial Partnerships and Italian Cooperation in Lebanon

The experiences of Armadilla and CTM

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Introduction

Armadilla is a social cooperative that is primarily engaged in the field of international cooperation. It also carries out training and information activities on the topics of the 2030 Agenda, proposed by the United Nations for defending human rights and achieving the 17 goals for sustainable human development. The notebooks are a tool for disseminating information, critical analysis, and possible answers to the priority problems that are faced. The collection of all Notebooks, from 2015 till now, can be found at: <https://armadilla.coop/en/armadilla-notebooks/>.

Starting from this notebook, we will relaunch a reflection on the territorial partnership, which we believe is one of the most appropriate ways of international cooperation. Let us consider how to combine the need for centralized relations (bilateral relations between governments and the strengthening of national ministerial institutions) and what is now called "territorial cooperation" with local governments, decentralized state entities, and Third party entities Sector.

We do this starting from the problematic context of Lebanon and the specific experience of **Armadilla and Cooperation in the Territories of the World - CTM**. Today, Lebanon is a place of general crisis that requires possible causes and emergency measures with humanitarian aid and a strategic vision that identifies causes and possible solutions to allow sustainable development and quality of life in the area.

What to do?

The strategy in the three-year programming of Italian cooperation shows 20 priority countries (including Lebanon) and states that "Italy's commitment will be strengthened in the main crisis areas ... The deep state of crises, often protracted, in which many find themselves Countries, imposes a synergistic and coordinated response strategy, actions aimed at improving governance systems, institutional strengthening and supporting the processes of prevention, pacification, and post-conflict stabilization, and a forward-looking commitment that not only assists the affected populations but reduce situations of fragility and strengthen local crisis management and response capacities "...

An approach tries to give the same importance to the global vision and local action. In concrete terms, this choice of not excluding anything or anyone from the possibilities of collaboration exposes you to the risk of little impact, as there are no real priorities, and the resources and tools used are insufficient to achieve the objectives assumed.

Strengthening projects for central state bodies cannot be the same as those that must be used for supporting neighborhood governments. The history of European cooperation with

ACP countries (from the 1975 Lome Convention to the 2000 Cotonou Treaty) indicated that decentralization of cooperation activities and impacting local communities where problems affect people most directly were fundamental.

The decentralized and territorial approach to cooperation is also mentioned as a priority in law 125/2014, which reforms the Italian Cooperation. In Article 26, it is stated that "Italy promotes the participation in development cooperation of civil society organizations and other non-profit entities, based on the principle of subsidiarity ...".

The choice of partners, interlocutors, and beneficiaries of cooperation activities need careful evaluation to respect the basic principles adopted in the OECD DAC (2005 Paris Forum) of ownership, alignment, coherence, partnership, responsibility, and transparency (accountability).

The other consideration concerns the coherence between the tools and methodologies used to achieve the expected results. If the goal achieves social stability and resilience, it is necessary to overcome the paternalistic and welfare approach of emergency interventions and guarantee continuity to achieve sustainability. And therefore, to make multiannual planning and allow the strengthening of partnerships that must last over time. Armadilla and CTM have collaborated for years in Lebanon with the municipalities of Nabatieh and Tyre and with associations in these territories.

By privileging the territorial choice, and the continuity of interventions, even in different sectors, this experience has allowed us to build a solid relationship based on mutual trust and the exchange of skills between Italian and Lebanese entities.

1. The general context of Lebanon

Lebanon is a country of 6.8 million inhabitants in an area of 10,452 km². In the last decade, it has seen over 1.7 million refugees arrive from Syria and other neighboring countries where, to which must be added the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees have been hosted in the last 70 years and who today constitute a community of about 450,000 people, grown to 28,800 members with the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Today, the number of existing Syrian citizens in Lebanon is estimated at around one and a half million, of which only 892,310 are officially registered by the UNHCR.

Poverty

This humanitarian crisis is triggered by a drastic worsening of the social and economic situation of the country, which in the last year recorded annual inflation of 56.5% and an increase in the food price index of 189.8%. Recent studies have highlighted a growing rise in the poverty rate in Lebanon, from 25% in 2019 to 55% in 2020, up to around 74% in 2021. Last but not least, public debt reached at the end of April 2021, 98.2 billion dollars, of which 37.2% is denominated in foreign currency. Of the latter total, \$ 8 billion is made up of arrears of payments accumulated since the default of March 2020. High inflation and the progressive loss of income resulting from rising unemployment and wage cuts have caused a notable deterioration in the living conditions of Lebanese and refugees, triggering numerous protests among the population, especially among young people whose unemployment rate exceeds 40%.

The socio-economic crisis has mainly affected the most vulnerable categories of Lebanese and refugees, among whom 73% live below the poverty line. The conditions worsen in the cases of women heads of families or families with people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

COVID-19

Starting from February 2020, the measures to contain the contagions of Covid-19 infections have caused further economic losses and highlighted the weakness of the national social assistance system. At the end of February, The positive cases identified had exceeded one million people, and about 10 thousand have died.

Beirut Port Blast, August 4, 2020

The explosion at the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020 aggravated an already critical situation, causing 190 victims and many injured and missing. In addition, it has generated a large number of displaced people among the Lebanese and refugee populations, triggering a

logistical, food, and health emergency that has further worsened the country's economic capacities and social stability.

Emigration

Since the beginning of 2021, 77,777 Lebanese have left the country, up from 17,721 in the previous year, 2020, and 66,806 in 2019. In total, between 2018 and 2020, the number of Lebanese emigrants who moved abroad reached 195,433. The number is expected to double in 2022, the year of the parliamentary elections, as the population fears that new crises may erupt or existing ones intensify. This is also demonstrated by the 150% increase in requests for renewal of passports, a phenomenon that has prompted the General Security services to take measures, reducing the number of passports granted daily.

Crisis in the financial system

The country is still waiting to find solutions to the crisis, while one of the main priorities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its negotiations with Lebanese officials, which began on January 24, 2022, is the too long-delayed reform of the electricity and other public services.

In reality, the country is bankrupt.

Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh, at the head of the institution since 1993, is suspected of embezzlement of public funds and money laundering. He was also involved in a judicial investigation, and investigations have also been launched against him in Europe, too. However, he had received praise from colleagues and international institutes for his management of the stability of the national currency, the Lebanese pound.

Today the goal of negotiations with the IMF is to save the banking and financial system, which is collapsing with estimated losses of around 70 billion dollars (approximately 62 billion euros). The state of finances and the collapse of the banking system are such that Lebanese account holders no longer have free access to their bank accounts.

Diplomacy

To complicate the situation, the monarchies of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, where much Lebanese work, decided in the autumn, under the pressure of Saudi Arabia, to interrupt trade relations with Lebanon, for decades a sort of "little brother" to spoil. In October 2021, the Saudi kingdom went so far as to end diplomatic relations with Lebanon.

France was the first European country to offer economic assistance as a former colonial power of the country's territory and president of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), a national organization of all French-speaking countries or former colonies. Lebanon is also part of the organization, as it was under the French mandate until 1946. French President Emmanuel Macron was the first foreign head of state to travel to Beirut in the days immediately following the explosion to reaffirm the role of France as a

guarantor of the social and political stability of Lebanon and to satisfy the European stabilization policy of the Eastern Mediterranean to avoid new turbulence and migratory crises.

But the attempts to stabilize the country, which France and the European Union adopted by participating in the International Conference on Lebanon on, August 4, 2021, were rejected by the Lebanese political class, which failed to appoint a new executive within the time frame agreed upon in the conference guidelines.

Domestic politics

After months, the government of Najib Mikati, a Sunni exponent, was established and has stalled mainly due to the various political tensions between the parties that make it up. Unresolved legal cases remain in the background (including the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020, which caused many civilian casualties), which have taken on a political character. It seems clear that saving the country depends on a complicated agreement with the IMF, and this also requires a solid political consensus within a government divided between opposing factions and an institutional system now considered inadequate in the eyes of most of the interlocutors who struggle with the immense difficulty of finding sustainable alternatives.

Finally, compliance with the date of May 2022 for the new political elections is not apparent, which is considered decisive for the crisis in the absence of radical institutional reforms.

2. International cooperation in Lebanon

The strategy for the International Cooperation in Lebanon is based on the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), the national strategic plan developed by the Lebanese government starting in 2014 with technical support from the United Nations and financial contribution from the international community. Within the LCRP, the priority areas of intervention are education, health, and humanitarian aid in emergencies. In particular, as regards the response to the consequences of the Syrian crisis from 2012 to today, the Italian Cooperation has financed humanitarian aid initiatives (emergency and resilience) in Lebanon for a value of approximately 116 million euros.

Despite the absence of a specific strategic document of Italian cooperation for Lebanon, from 2016 to today, the commitment of Rome has been confirmed every year, guaranteeing approximately 45 million euros a year in response to the Syrian crisis. Of these, an average of 18 went to Lebanon, the rest divided between Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. In line with the priorities set by the three-year planning document and considering the commitments arising from past years, Italy has continued to play a primary role in the country's development and stabilization process.

Environment and climate crisis

The environment is one of the most critical issues for the country's future. From improper waste management to atmospheric pollution, from the lack of wastewater treatment plants to the depletion of water basins, from the production of electricity with fossil fuels to the constant loss of wooded and agricultural areas, many factors contribute to environmental deterioration in Lebanon. To all this, in recent years, the arrival in the country of about one and a half million Syrians fleeing the war has been added, a sudden increase in the population of about 30%.

Positive signs, however, are coming from the new generations who are beginning to develop an environmental awareness that is slowly manifesting itself in concrete actions such as the start of separate waste collection for plastic and paper in large cities. Thanks to this new awareness, the issue of environmental protection seems to have also entered the government's plan.

Italian cooperation is investing € 14.6 million in 13 initiatives dedicated to this sector.

The agricultural sector is particularly predominant in the country, as it employs about 25% of the population and represents one of the most sources of income for the poorest segments. Agricultural support is, therefore, part of the strategy to combat poverty and sustainable development of the country.

Culture

The Italian Cooperation in Lebanon works to protect and enhance the country's cultural heritage.

A commitment that not only has the objective of a unique safe in the world but also that of virtuous triggering processes of sustainable economic development, creating new and different job opportunities related to tourism and conservation.

Thanks to an investment of approximately 12 million Euros (aid credit and donation funds) and many years of experience in the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, Italy has become one of the privileged interlocutors of the Ministry of Lebanese Culture and the Directorate General of Antiquities.

Social development

With funding of around 12 million euros, the commitment of Italian cooperation in the social development sector is aimed at vulnerable groups, particularly women and minors, through the support of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In particular, the Italian Cooperation is committed to strengthening the leading Social Development Centers that offer the population social, psychosocial, and essential medical services. A social fund was also financed, which has as its objective the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable groups and the promotion of local development.

The country's economic crisis has also affected the operations of the AICS headquarters in Beirut, which risked being stuck in the arbitrary decision of the Lebanese commercial banks to block any transfer of funds to foreign banks. The commitment of various parties has allowed the situation not to remain blocked entirely. The structural problems of the Lebanese headquarters of the Italian Cooperation were already present. Today they are amplified and aggravated by the country's systemic crisis.

3. Territorial partnerships and effectiveness of interventions

A Co-responsible partnership is the foundation of positive cooperation. The experience of decades has led actors to assume some fundamental principles to ensure the effectiveness of interventions. Among these, ownership - the conscious ownership of all actors constitutes the essential prerequisite for effective and sustainable strategies, giving the main protagonist to local partners. Another is subsidiarity in its two vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The **vertical** dimension requires that in the relationships between institutional entities of different levels, the care of needs is entrusted to the entity closest to the one who is the bearer because he is more capable of coping with them.

The **horizontal** one indicates the need to involve the various entities operating in the area (companies, cooperatives, universities, associations) to share objectives and projects.

The issue of social cohesion, even in Lebanon, is becoming increasingly important. It is necessary to move from a sectoral concept of the fight against poverty to developing models of *welfare communities* that effectively include different social groups, promoting universal access to education, health, and rights.

Territorial partnership implies a broad-spectrum and multidimensional involvement on the part of the territorial actors involved, that is to say, an approach which, compared to the vectorial system typical of traditional development cooperation, can be defined as "circular," based on the intensity of material exchanges and intangible, on the interchange of interests objectives, and co-development.

It is possible to define a series of quality elements (in terms of principles and approaches) underlying this concept:

- political dialogue between peers;
- shared *ownership* of the policies to be promoted;
- reciprocity of responsibilities, commitments, and conditionality between the authorities and companies involved;

- multi-stakeholder activity and, therefore, the adoption of participatory methods to support active citizenship within the framework of democratization and decentralization processes and in compliance with the principles of good governance;
- the multidimensionality, and therefore the coherence, complementarity, and coordination between the policies carried out;
- the transition from a project approach (guided by supply, led by experts, in the short term) to a procedural process with strategies and programs (driven by demand and in the medium-long time);
- territorial cooperation, that is, cooperation between territories at a cross-border and transnational level, is now an objective of the European social cohesion policy, in contrast, previously, it was a community initiative:
- The Interreg program, a small-step, learning and trust-building approach aimed at strengthening the capacities of institutions and civil society actors;
- a territorial approach for an open and sustainable endogenous development, which enhances dynamic vocations and identities;
- the continuity of the relationship over time;
- the experimentation and application of innovative initiatives to network and compare in a shared learning process;
- inclusion in a multilevel governance framework for relations.
- The concept of territorial partnership is particularly innovative as it inserts the classic objective of cooperation in the fight against poverty within a broader and multidimensional reference framework, to include all the relationships of local Italian autonomies as well as, above all, of the various subjects of the social, entrepreneurial, and cultural world of the territories, "here and there."

Cooperation between territories should, therefore, not be understood solely as Cooperation between administrations but based on the relationships established between the various subjects of the region according to the principle of democratic governance. In this sense, this Cooperation creates social capital between territories, activating relational processes with their history and evolution and which are triggered, in particular, by the action of social actors. It is also important to reiterate that it is not simply a matter of cooperation in which different actors operate together. Still, in a model based on participatory methods and whose purpose is constructing a more democratic society at the local level, everyone, in particular the most disadvantaged people, has the opportunity to acquire the ability and power to change.

It is not just a question of "who," but also and above all, of "how" and "for what." It is the purpose that determines action.

The innovative contribution of this practice consists of place at the center of the capacity of local communities to organize their growth by reconstructing the memory of their own identity (the territorial heritage), to be put in relation with other identities, through

co-operation, that is working together to build a complex network of exchanges in a plural world.

In the knowledge of the places, it is a question of recognizing and knowing how to enhance the skills present in the territories in any latitude they are. The challenge, therefore, becomes to assign equal dignity to all skills, and this also involves respect and openness to differences and the abandonment of prejudices.

Reciprocity and circularity are central elements of cooperation between territories: regions and subjects who live in the 'North' must be as active in change as in the 'South'. Change takes place thanks to a mutual ability to question oneself, an exchange, and a desire for change that takes place equally and reciprocally in the two territories. This allows us to get out of the logic of aid, from positions of supremacy and inferiority, to place ourselves in a position of equality and reciprocal change.

Reciprocity is understood as mutual learning from concrete, helpful experiences identified in both territories, mutual cultural growth, construction of a shared vision, standard search for shared solutions, and, as regards us in particular, rethinking and modification of behavior and policy choices of development.

4. The experience of Armadilla and CTM in Lebanon

The **Lebanon Crisis Response Plan** is the strategy developed jointly by the Lebanese government and the international community under the coordination of the United Nations to strengthen levels of stability during the crisis and, at the same time, protect the most vulnerable groups of the resident population, including refugees from Syria and Iraq.

The international community is of fundamental importance in favoring the calming processes and guaranteeing humanitarian aid that preserves human lives, and in this context, the cooperation of Armadilla and CTM, which wants to get involved in strengthening an "Italian System" that carries out your role in the best possible way. The Italian System, through the involvement of various institutional actors and civil society, is promoting new territorial cooperation initiatives to encourage the growth of a new type of multilateralism.

In this process, Armadilla and CTM have favored in recent years the implementation of interchange missions to involve, in the promotion of territorial partnerships, entities that are at the forefront in the areas of intervention considered a priority by local partners. They took on the challenge of experimenting with a renewed way of conceiving international solidarity and human, equitable and sustainable development among peoples, based on participation, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the strengthening of the capacities and powers of decentralized actors. And in particular of the most disadvantaged social groups.

Armadilla and CTM take place alongside associations and services not only capable of developing and implementing ambitious programs and entities with shared vision and methodologies. Local Associations and Institutions, Italian Cooperatives and Associations, Universities, and specialist services; with them, Armadilla and CTM carry out activities and develop every moment of the action in a shared and critical form: conception, implementation, verification, evaluation.

Armadilla and CTM have been operating in Lebanon, respectively, since 2012 and 1996, carrying out multiple cooperation initiatives, both emergency and social and economic development.

The interventions of the two organizations, in line with their visions and missions, pay particular attention to the protection of more vulnerable groups and individuals, such as refugees, children, women, and people with disabilities, social cohesion, environmental protection, and to the strengthening of local actors, working in close coordination with Lebanese civil society associations, local authorities, and national institutions.

The two organizations, through autonomous paths or in partnership, have developed interventions in Lebanon mainly in the following sectors:

- **Increase in the income of vulnerable Syrian and Lebanese refugees**, thanks to the instrument of rapid temporary employment for the construction of public utility works in the Municipalities and Districts;
- support and strengthening of health and first aid infrastructures, disease treatment and prevention centers, psychosocial support centers, inclusive pathways for people with disabilities, access to care for Syrian refugees, Palestinians, and host Lebanese communities;
- training, education, childcare services, and school inclusion of children with disabilities;
- protection of the environment, support for agriculture and the transformation of local products, waste management, and green spaces.

Some interventions

In 2017, as part of the emergency initiative for strengthening the resilience of local communities and the capacities of Lebanese municipalities to cope with the consequences of the Syrian crisis, the project "Strengthening the capacity of Municipalities of Ghazieh, Erkey and surrounding villages to support the most vulnerable local Lebanese and Syrian communities." The initiative has allowed the increase in income for particularly vulnerable individuals of the refugee population and the host community, as well as the environmental and road infrastructure upgrading of nine districts in Southern Lebanon.

In partnership with the Makhzoumi Foundation and as part of the program of the Delegation of the European Union in Lebanon, "Local Authorities in Development and actions in Lebanon," a program was created to support Lebanese municipalities in the implementation of sustainable development strategies, strengthening the capacities and synergies of local authorities.

The "Environmental improvement to foster sustainable development and inclusive growth in the Municipality of Arkey" project made it possible to give continuity to the process started in the area, the main components of which are the development and enhancement of local capacities with the involvement of the most vulnerable groups including women and young people.

Coping with the worsening of the Syrian humanitarian and migratory crisis, Armadilla has developed, thanks to the collaboration with the Makhzoumi Foundation and the support of Otto per mille Waldensian, a service of mobile clinics that have made it possible to intervene in support of Syrian refugees in the governorates of Bekaa and Mount Lebanon, as well as in the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila, in the heart of Beirut.

In the period 2018-2019, in collaboration with UNDP Lebanon and thanks to the Otto per mille Waldensian funds, an intervention to strengthen the capacity of social and health workers belonging to the Social Conflict Mediation Center of the Municipality of Nabatieh was carried out, thanks to a dense training program on social, psychiatric and psychosocial issues aimed at introducing innovative methods and techniques in the treatment of people addicted to psychotropic substances.

As part of the Italian Cooperation Emergency program, CTM in Lebanon has carried out five projects aimed at the most vulnerable sections of the population:

- Rehabilitation and support actions for the "Al Fanar Hospital" psychiatric hospital in Zahrani - ROSS III (2009-2010) co-funded by the ROSS Phase III Emergency Program.
- Socio-economic development of the rural population of southern Lebanon - in collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, IAM Bari, National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas (NOWARA), and the Local Action Group of Tyre (GAL TYROS).
- **Strengthening the resilience of the Syrian refugee populations in Lebanon, and of the local communities of the Municipality of Karoun," which saw the involvement of 220 workers and 200 women in rapid employment activities.**
- Promoting children's rights and new informal education opportunities in southern Lebanon - carried out in the provinces of Tyre and Saida, including the Palestinian camps of Rashidieh and Ein El Helweh.

Armadilla and CTM have developed relationships with civil society and institutional partners, knowledge of social and interfaith dynamics, and experience managing rapid employment and sustainable development projects. Among these, it is worth mentioning:

- the municipalities of Nabatieh and Tyre, in southern Lebanon;
- the Association Justice et Miséricorde (AJEM), which operates at a national level for the defense of human rights;
- the Ghassan Kanafani foundation, run by the family of the famous Palestinian poet and which manages the educational centers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in refugee camps;
- the Oum El Nour organization, which deals with the rehabilitation and social reintegration of former drug addicts and vulnerable individuals;
- the local Palestinian association Najdeh, which works in all nine Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon;
- The Makhzoumi Foundation is a local NGO that deals with activities in the health field, environmental education, and sustainable development throughout the Lebanese territory.

In addition to local partners, the territorial collaboration network involves numerous Italian partners who represent excellence in their fields. Between these:

- The Cooperative Open Group of Bologna is essential for the creation of training of socio-health operators, for strengthening the role of associations in the area, and for the conception and development of psychosocial support actions for the well-being of women and minors. Open Group is a co-partner development project of the Social Mediation Center (SMC) in Nabatieh. The protection of children and women will still be the key factor for change, enriching the offer of community services thanks to the network of associations and services helping to build the logic of territorial partnerships.
- The Addiction Service of the ASL of Bologna, whose doctors specialize in therapeutic pathways for people with addictions, work in the training of local operators and the definition of intervention guidelines;
- The ASPHI Foundation of Bologna specializes in creating and developing innovative technologies for vulnerable people, such as people with disabilities and the elderly. The Foundation's high degree of specialization and competence represented a fundamental element in creating innovative paths for inclusion in situations with an increased risk of marginalization in Syria.
- The Faculty of Occupational Therapy of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE), with Armadilla and Aamal, supported the creation of the first Occupational Therapy course in Syria;

- Emergenza Sorrisi collaborates with Armadilla in the evaluation of new interventions in the health field, to be carried out locally and remotely (training for doctors and health personnel);
- The Municipality of Tricase (Lecce), the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences and Technologies of the University of Salento, the Natural History Museum of Salento, and the Magna Grecia Mare association collaborate in the realization of the Blue Tyre project, dedicated to the improvement of coastal and environmental management of the city of Tyre in Lebanon.