Trash to Cash

Social entrepreneurship and community engagement for circular economy in Lebanese municipalities

Overview

Despite the weaknesses that permeate solid waste management in Lebanon, some municipalities have committed themselves to innovate solutions and overcome the challenges that include cost recovery issues, treatment and disposal difficulties, low capacity of dumpsites, lack of commitment from the local community for recycling, and a low demand for recycled products. Al Manara and Ghalboun municipalities are two examples on how municipalities were able to transform these challenges into opportunities.

Background

Lebanon is considered as one of the countries that lack adequate and well-operated infrastructure for waste management and disposal. The «Not In-My-Back-Yard» (NIMBY) syndrome contributes significantly to this. Public awareness campaigns were insufficient and ineffective. As a result, unresolved environmental problems have been accumulating for years, which led to major issues such as increased air pollution due to waste burning and water/soil pollution due to inappropriate waste disposal. Waste management challenges faced by municipalities are aggravating due to the increasing population (following the settlement of Syrian refugees), the insufficient capacity of landfills and dumpsites, and the economic crisis which limits the financial capacity of municipalities and the citizens.

Objectives

To overcome these challenges, the municipalities of Al Manara and Ghalboun have sought decentralized composting and waste management solutions by promoting partnerships with social enterprises and community engagement.
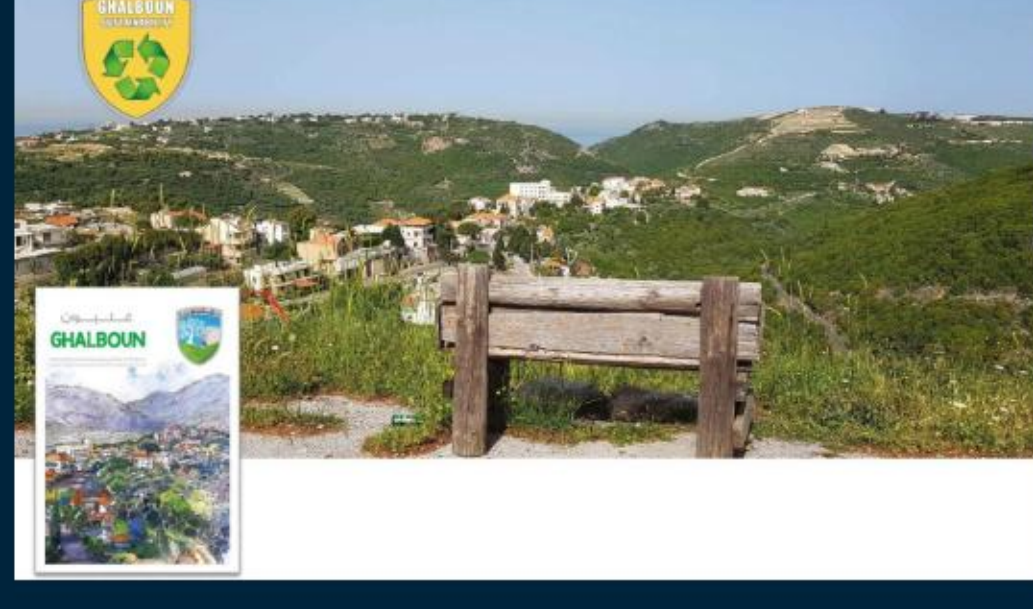
Activities

- In Al Manara municipality, a partnership with the social enterprise 'Compost Baladi' led to achieving a complete value chain for organic waste recovery with minimal machinery. Furthermore, the local community benefited from vocational training on sustainable agriculture and composting at home.
- In Ghalboun municipality, a new process was devised that is simple and applicable for all households. Each residence was provided with two bins to separate the recyclables from the rest of the trash. This process also included door-to-door awareness and cleanup campaigns along with sensitization measures. To ensure abiding with the correct procedure for separating the trash, transparent trash bags were provided making it more feasible to monitor the waste being collected for treatment. In attempt to further optimize the process of creating circular waste management, the municipality is implementing a low-tech yet effective solution of feeding organic waste to chicken that is raised in local farms.

Effects

- Reduction of waste that needs to be disposed in centralized landfills thus extending existing landfill capacity
- Mainstreaming organic compost instead of chemical fertilizers thus contributing to environment-friendly agriculture
- Diversion of 1.5 tpd of organic waste and production of 225tons of compost per year since the beginning of operations three years ago
- Raising environmental awareness in the local community
- Job creation for the local community

Conclusions

Achieving this success amidst a very complex and challenging national situation was made possible by the commitment of both the municipality and local community. To overcome the challenging start-up phase of such a transformation towards sustainable waste management and circularity, there is a need for demonstrating successful cases from other municipalities to proof the feasibility of the concept. Media coverage can thus play an important role in creating the needed ownership and pride.

ℹ more information

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Images

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