



SUCCESS STORY

Improving Conditions in Underserved Communities



ANERA

Young women in Hey Al-Muassiseh participate in a creative group activity illustrating their vision for an improved community.

The 2007 conflict in Nahr El Bared has raised awareness of how conditions in and around Palestinian refugee camps pose a threat to national stability.

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April 2008 – With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives, American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) is helping to improve the quality of life in areas housing a mix of Palestinian refugees and low-income Lebanese citizens. Home to the poorest of the poor, these informal communities, or “gatherings,” have long been forgotten, as they fall outside the official refugee camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. ANERA is working with local partners in the southern city of Tyre, where successive waves of Palestinian refugees have created pressures on cash-strapped municipalities and tense relationships with neighbors.

The 2007 Nahr El Bared conflict, which set Islamic fundamentalists against the Lebanese Army, illustrated how conditions in and around refugee camps can create a fertile ground for extremist groups. Capitalizing on heightened awareness of the dangers posed by continued neglect of these communities, ANERA has initiated a series of small-scale infrastructure rehabilitation projects that will deliver tangible benefits while building goodwill between displaced populations and their neighbors.

In Hey Al-Muassiseh, a gathering near the Burj As-Shamali refugee camp, efforts are underway to repair the electrical network through a participatory process involving residents, nongovernmental organizations, and municipal authorities. The badly damaged network is the cause of frequent power outages, and faulty wiring impedes efforts to light streets and creates a risk of electrical shock and fire.

Rehabilitation of the network will not only address these problems but also alleviate tensions, as the uneven provision of this basic service has been a major source of conflict, most recently sparking riots in Beirut that left seven people dead.

For residents of Hey Al-Muassiseh, the project promises to foster cooperation among local players and to reverse a long history of mistrust between Palestinian refugees and their Lebanese hosts. In the words of Mustafa, a young man who helped assess needs in his neighborhood: “Working together to discuss how we can build a better community gives us hope that things will be better in the future.”