

Study on the Integrated Tourism Development Plan in Lebanon
A project of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Second Group Interview on Social Impact of Tourism: Zahle.
Sep 18, 2003

1. Introduction

The JICA consultants, Mr. Hideo SAKAMOTO, Ms. Sandra A. CHESROWN and the local consultant Mr. Ammar ABOUD conducted a group interview with a mixed group in the region of Zahle.

2. Objectives

The meeting was aimed to achieve the following:

- To identify the objectives and the strategies of Tourism Development.
- To identify projects for Tourism development.
- To identify the criteria's of assessment of Tourism Development projects.

The results of this interview will guide the tourism master plan in finding what are the priority projects that are the most suitable to local needs.

3. Methodology

Over a period of 3 hours, participants were asked questions in plenary sessions and asked to write all ideas on paper under each theme. Group discussions were then conducted for each theme.

4. Interview Findings

4.1 Introduction

The participant were quite cooperative and enthusiastic, it was also an opportunity for many to communicate with the mayor about their concerns.

4.2 Presentation

NAME	AFFILIATION	FAVORITE PLACE
Rana Germayel	French Literature Student/Lebanese U. Arch., Culture	Paris, Italy
Evelyn Freijiry	French Lit Student Lebanese University	France, Italy
Ivana Assy	Journalism	
Rachelle Lteif	French Literature Interior Design	Hammanah
Toni Mehamma	Manager, Café Najjar	Paris cafes

NAME	AFFILIATION	FAVORITE PLACE
Rony Al Najjar	Computer Science Al-Mounawer Club (Natural Caves)	Paris cafes
Charbel Abou Cherbl	Al-Mounawer Club	Germany
Georges Huriku	Electrical Supervisor	
Issam Kharrat	Engineer/Member Municipal Council	Beirut
Georges Kfoury	Pres., Cultural Council	
Ibrahim Moussallem	Zouhal NGO Assoc. Cultural/ Enviro Preservation	Beirut – meeting point of civilizations
Elie Chalhoub	Pres., Merchants Assoc.	Lebanon
Joseph Assy	Dean, Faculty Literature Lebanese University	Paris Architecture
Ghyde Maalouf	USEK/Architect (Kaslik University) Ceramic Co. Prod. Manager	France/Paris/Italy
Carol Hanna	USEK/Arch. Student	Deir Al Qamar
Rama El-Najjar	USEK/Arch. Student	Lebanon
Marilyn Saba	USEK/Int. Des. Student	US – land of jobs
Roger Hoddat	USEK/Arch. Student	Japan – architecture Argentina-birth place
Hanna Khayat	Monte Alberto Hotel Owner	Beirut
Elie Tamer	Member Municipality/Lawyer	France
Soleiman Farah	Ambassador (pot developer)	
Mayor of Zahle	Eng. Assad Zoghaib	

4.3 Strategies

It was explained that in order to have a project, you have to start with a strategy. The team's example of strengthening Cultural Heritage Tourism. Why-to increase visitor stays and length of stay. Who benefits-local economy through increased jobs and income.

Other team examples of strategies-private public partnership, increase the number of tourist activities, use thematic routes such as wine or religious tourism, and attract the Diaspora as tourists and investors, preservation /adaptive reuse of historical buildings

Participants' Strategies

1. *Create jobs* – will make local people stay and not emigrate; all locals will benefit; will attract more tourists; requires cooperation of public and private sectors and funds (offered by head of cultural NGO).
2. *Promotion of local character*-mezze, cuisine, wine/arak, unique hospitality; requires government cooperation, not neglect (hotel owner).
3. *Promotion of History/Brochure*- to inform tourists; locals, tourists, Diaspora would all benefit; problem administrative and cooperation.
4. *Transportation Infrastructure*-buses and better roads; local merchants would benefit.
5. *Environmental Awareness Campaign*- clean up the Berdawni River and general cleanliness; problem is getting volunteers to do it (NOTE: school project)
6. *Promotion and Adaptive Reuse*-good climate, culture, gastronomy, intellectualism including poetry, internet/web site; would activate the economy; would benefit locals and all of Lebanon; problem is cooperation.
7. *Increase Environmental Awareness*-visitors will stay longer and return; all will benefit; problem is cooperation.
8. *Develop a Tourism Authority*- focus on Bekaa tourism (1 million people/one-half the population of Lebanon- Zahle is 9200 hectares).
9. *Sports Center* – all would benefit.
10. *City Beautification and Historic Preservation*-city needs design guidelines for developers to meet before being granted building permits
11. *Historical/Thematic Routes (wine/arak)*-increase tourism and related jobs; all would benefit; problem is government's neglect (also mentioned Grotto Kfar Zabad?)
12. *Public Awareness for Decentralization/Local Control and Berdawni Tourism Development Project (Mayor)*- noted that families used to be the decision-makers but now the current process discourages original thought and slows down improvements; Tourism Development Project will create 1000 jobs but decision is up to the Council of Ministers (NOTE: national strategy)- problem is cooperation between the local and national governments and public and private sectors.
13. *Water Dam* – benefit would be to farmers/65% of Zahle's population is comprised of farmers and water level is decreasing; problem is the Lebanese government.
14. *Cultural Heritage*- project would be festival for painters and sculptors including the famous Issa Alexander Maalouf; all would benefit.
15. *Activating both Cultural Heritage and Public Awareness*- locals and tourists would benefit; problem is lack of vision and planning.

4.4 Projects

Team gave examples of hospitality training, Sculpture Park, festival of poetry, visitor's center, agricultural cooperative, and handicrafts center in adaptive reuse building (Charcoal Market).

Participants' Ideas

1. *Special Touristic Project* – Mayor spoke about the importance of gastronomy to the local cultural heritage, and he added that it is not a popular food with the youth. Felt this project was diverse and included cultural sites and a center, hospitality, and food, and mentioned his interest in seeing something like Sassine Square in Acharfieh where street kiosks sell food. Also mentioned the need for family tourism that is year round, such as a puppet theatre. He spoke of a pedestrian zone like downtown Beirut where children can ride bikes while parents are enjoying leisurely dinners. The municipality would be the implementing agency, and the project will definitely create jobs.
(Note: Family tourism could include a Water Park along the Berdawni for children.)
2. *Cultural Center* – To extend visitor stays should create a centre with lecture rooms and visitor activities such as gastronomy. Problems are approval and funding.
3. *Football (soccer) Stadium* – to encourage youth activities, entertainment for youth from the entire Bekaa Valley; problem is management and lack of technical expertise.
4. *Zahle Awareness Raising Guidebook* (hotel owner)- Need to hold seminars to develop community cleanliness, to show tourists the organized and peaceful nature of Zahle. Envisions that JICA could implement with the municipality.
5. *Job Development Program/"Hire Local" Campaign* –Two people recommended this project. One problem is that Zahle people don't like low-level jobs – not considered to be honorable. They need to be educated that a job is a job (much discussion about the problem of bringing in lower paid Syrian and Egyptian workers). Instead should bring in employees from surrounding Zahle Qaza villages. Restaurant owners should be in charge of implementation.
6. *Shopping Mall* – Said this is a large local need, which could be implemented by the Chamber of Commerce but cost is the problem.
7. *University Lecture Hall* – Indicated that there are 10,000 students in areas around Zahle. Drawings have been done to create a venue. The problem is "political parties." Two people recommended this concept except one also said that NGOs would implement with the municipality.
8. *Sculpture Area* – idea of carving sculpture from rock in Berdawni restaurant area (like Mt. Rushmore); this would create a tourist activity and encourage more tourists who visit Baalbek and Anjar to then visit Zahle and dine-problem is cooperation in decision-making.
9. *Poets' Library*- Should be a Qaza wide facility in Zahle as it is so famous for its poets and to give Zahle as identity as the City of Culture. Should choose a beautiful historical building. Problem is a lack of decision-making.

10. *Youth Participation in Projects*

11. *Tile Market Project* – said this is an old idea that has yet to be implemented (unclear as to component parts and location)

4.5 Additional Remarks

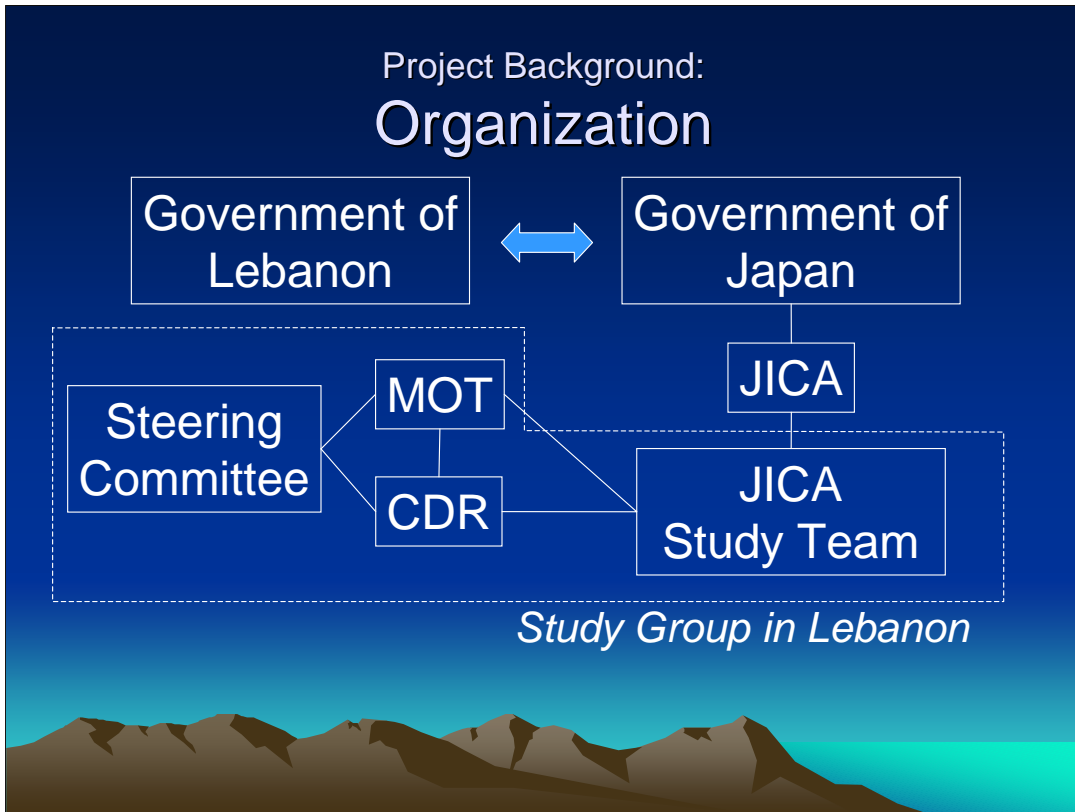
Some additional help was requested for the team. The concept of tourism development was explained such as creating unique promotional identities and enticing tourism activities to give people reasons to come to Zahle, giving Anjar (Armenian heritage/Heritage Museum) and Bcharre (religious and nature based tourism/hiking) as examples. Community development provides jobs and income but this type of tourism development takes it one step further and selects community development strategies and projects that are tourism related. The team wants projects to result in local employment through tourism, to benefit the community and increase spending throughout Zahle. The Cultural Center might be an example. It was noted that at the last focus group we talked about an agro-processing center, but no one mentioned it today. Also was discussed: a heritage museum, handicrafts center and thematic tourism – are these still considered to be important? The participants strongly supported those ideas except the handicrafts center in the charcoal market, as ownership is an issue that could prevent implementation.

Focus Group Interview ~Zahle~

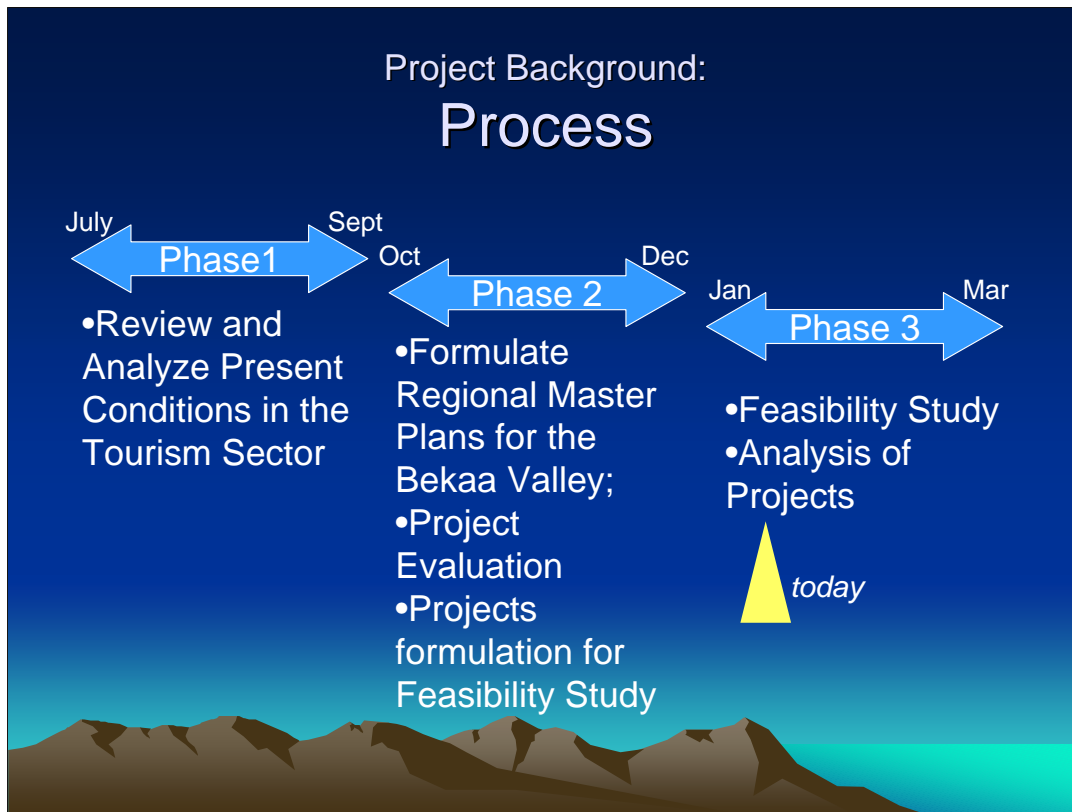
2 PM, JANUARY 15, 2004

Sandi Chesrown, JICA Study Team, welcomed the participants and President Zoghaib and his staff at the municipality, and thanked them for working with the team over the past 7 months. She noted that for all of the team it has been a great pleasure to learn about the incredible beauty and rich architectural and cultural heritage of Zahle, the City of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry.

She also thanked Mrs. Mona Fares, MOT, and Dr. Abou Jaoude, CDR, for participating in the focus group, noting that MOT and CDR have been working closely with JICA and the team every step of the way through the project, as the counterparts and the team share the goal of implementation with the community.

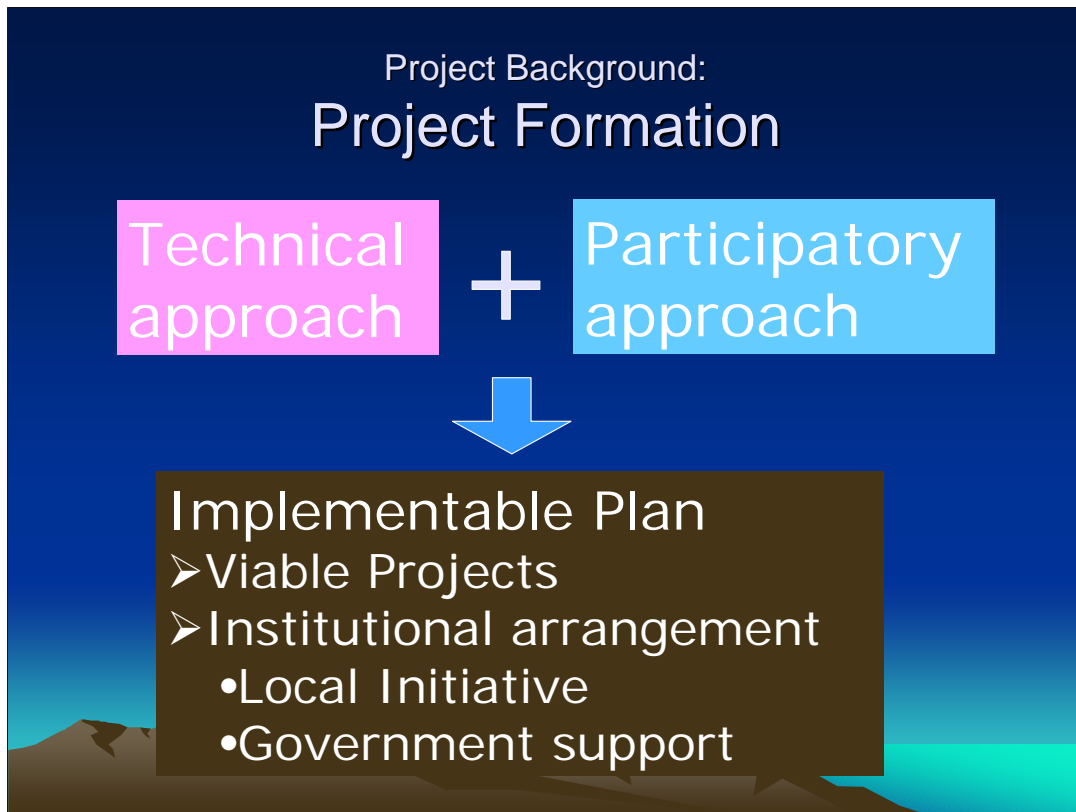


Ammar explained the organizational chart.



Ammar explained the three phased process, noting that the JICA Study Team has completed Phase 1 and 2, and is now in the process of completing Phase 3, feasibility studies and in-depth studies.

Sandi noted that Zahle was chosen from 21 projects for an in-depth study.



Ammar explained the JICA Study Team's approach, coupling technical expertise and analysis with community participation to arrive at a realistic, viable project that can be implemented through local initiative and government support. He added that the sustainability and implementation of the final projects depend on the good balance of the approaches and the participation of all actors (local/national; private/public; profit/non-profit).

Participatory approach

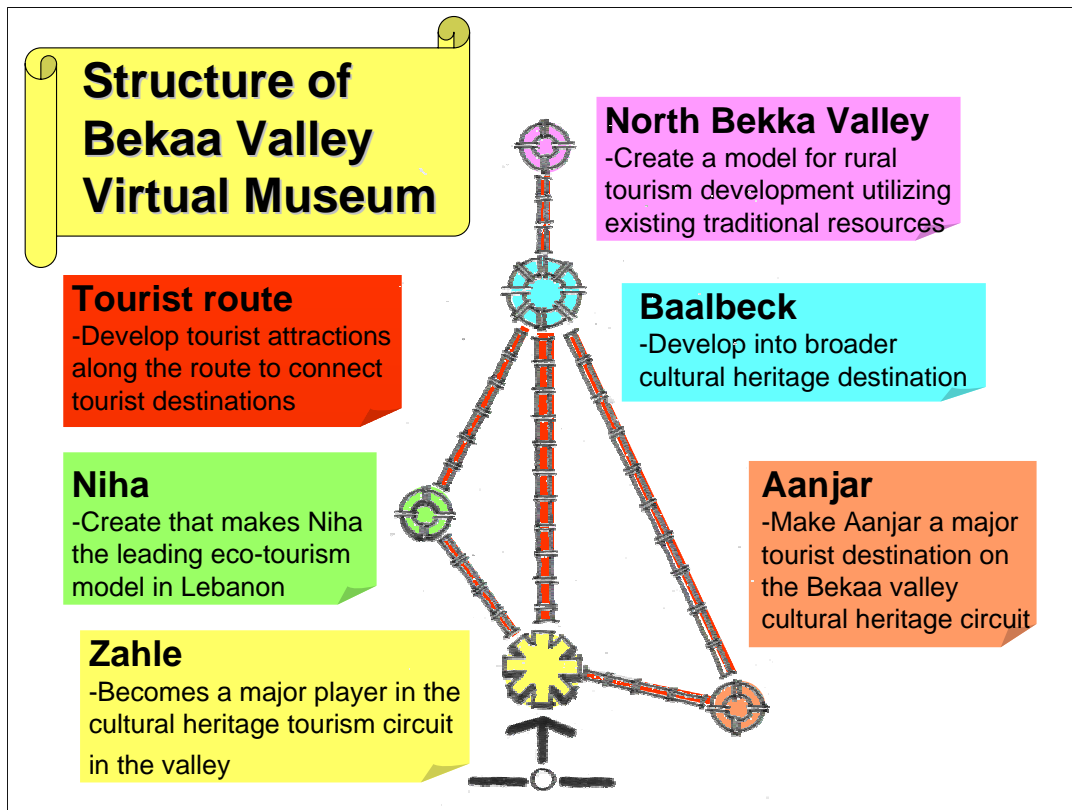
- Focus Group Meetings
 - focus group August 11, NGO interviews September 18, focus group October 18
- support for development of cultural heritage tourism
- development of thematic routes throughout Bekaa for increased tourism
- historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing fabric
- environmental awareness including clean-up of the Berdawni River
- “hire/buy locally” campaigns
- increase agro product production
- develop a cultural center and a handicrafts center
- sculpture area
- poets library and festival

Ammar explained the participatory approach used by the JST as detailed in Slide 5.

Strategy

- Zahle as Part of Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum
 - Weaving the Thread of Local Attractions to Expand Tourism Development and Alleviate Poverty
- Enhance the Well-Being of Local People through Increased Tourism Jobs and Markets
- Strategy to build upon Zahle's existing Master Plan for Tourism Development along the Berdawni River

Ammar explained the strategies as detailed in Slide 6.



Ammar explained the concept of the Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum, and that Zahle is an important cultural heritage player on the tourism circuit. He emphasized the creation of “a road map” creating a large tourism circuit for a prolonged tourism experience, where each focal point serves as an attraction as well as a starting point leading to another location.

Demand

- Meeting Demand
 - Lebanese and regional (Syrian/Jordanian) shoppers and diners
 - Syrian business people
 - Western cultural tourists en route to Baalbek/lunch or dinner on the Berdawni
 - Ksara/Beirut wine tasting
 - Lebanese Diaspora including Brazil

Ammar explained the projected demand for the cultural heritage attractions of Zahle, as detailed in slide 8.

Activities

- City of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry
- Create a Visitors Center/Museum of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry, adaptively reusing an existing historic building, to link tourists to downtown businesses and to waterfront restaurants and hotels.
- Berdawni River environmental awareness campaign.

Sandi explained that the JICA Study Team is proposing a number of project activities to strengthen the cultural heritage character of Zahle and to improve the environment for tourism.

She walked the focus group through the visitor circulation pattern, beginning with a combined Visitors Center/Museum of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry, to be located in an historic building along the Berdawni River. Two buildings that the team has identified are the Farah building and the larger Hotel Amerika building with an adjacent lot for parking/garden activities. She noted that both buildings could house the proposed architectural spatial program, and that they appear to be structurally sound. As importantly, they are historically and architecturally important buildings located along the primary Berdawni River visitor circuit, between Zahle's downtown and the Berdawni River restaurants, which could link visitors to either area.

Sandi explained other project components including training and institution building to strengthen the municipal staff and the two local cultural heritage NGOs in terms of promotion and operations, including a poetry festival and a web site linked to MOT's web site. She noted the training might also include building preservation construction techniques, a museology internship, perhaps through the Audi Foundation, and a local guides program and city architectural walking tour.

Activities

- City of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry
- Create a Visitors Center/Museum of Wine, Gastronomy and Poetry, adaptively reusing an existing historic building, to link tourists to downtown businesses and to waterfront restaurants and hotels.
- Berdawni River environmental awareness campaign.

Continue from previous slide:

She noted another concept that the President is already undertaking, clean-up of the Berdawni River, suggesting that the activity be expanded to become an environmental awareness campaign called the Zahle Berdawni River Clean-up Campaign. It could include the creation of an elementary school environmental awareness campaign, a school poster design or t-shirt competition, a media campaign, and a special event the day of the clean-up involving the broader community of Zahle.

Zahle Marketing

Part of Bacchus Wine Route and
Cultural Heritage Circuit



Sandi noted that Zahle is in the heart of the Bekaa Valley wine country. One area that could be successfully marketed is wine tourism, with the nearby Kefraya and Ksara vineyards and other Bekaa Valley vineyards such as St. Thomas, Nakad, Heritage, Wardeh, Massaya, and Musar.

Implementation Discussion

- What is necessary for implementation?
 - Who carries it out?

Sandi requested that before moving to a discussion of implementation, community members should feel free to comment on any aspects of the master plan, as we are here to hear their ideas.

Mrs. Mona Fares, MOT, re-stated the history of the project and the importance of local participation to make it sustainable. She said that MOT is committed to implementation of the project, and that the JICA Study Team is not only here to do reports.

A Mercy Corps representative asked if both the museum and the wine route are ideas imported from the West rather than from Lebanon. Sandi explained that both concepts build upon ideas generated by Lebanese, the museum through tours to the Audi Foundation's private heritage soap museum in Sidon and the silk museum, and the wine route through the Lebanese wine growers association (Union Vinicole du Liban), who are already working with Lebanese tour operators on the concept. She noted that the wine route is not based upon the West, which doesn't blend wine and cultural heritage especially well, but rather on successful examples in South Africa.

The representative of the cultural heritage NGO supported both concepts and said that the wine route is a very old route in Lebanon going back to Roman times. Discussion followed on the problem in Lebanon with "fads in food," and that the JICA Study Team should be careful not to encourage vineyards too much, as it could result in planting on the wrong soils and over-supply worsening the agricultural crisis. Sandi noted that there is a SAT system that is being used in Europe to identify the most appropriate land for vineyards, which could perhaps also be used in Lebanon. Manuel Knight from the JICA Study Team said that the wine growers have organized to look at the issue of the market and over-production.

Implementation Discussion

- What is necessary for implementation?
 - Who carries it out?

Continue from previous slide:

The President said that implementation is their primary concern, and that they are ready to assist. He said the government is the issue. He said the municipality tried to implement a cultural center, but the government turned it down, based on local conflict of interest. He said the Bacchus Wine Route is a very important concept, which he could implement. He said the JICA Study Team's plan is very important for Zahle.

A participant asked about training for private home operators (B&Bs), and Sandi responded that an earlier focus group had recommended training for the pensions that operate along the Berdawni. The idea of including training for B&Bs in this recommendation is a very good idea.

With regard to implementation, Sandi asked who would be the "local champions?" The consensus was that the President/municipality and the cultural heritage NGOs would continue to be the local champions.

Funding

- Do you have any ideas for fund raising for the project?
- Discussion of donor agencies.

The Mayor indicated that local funding was primarily possible through the municipality. He said Zahle's diaspora was weak. Sandi asked the cultural heritage NGOs if their application for a Japanese Grassroots grant had been submitted, and they said that there were discussions 2 years ago but nothing was completed.

The Mercy Corps representative noted that the very large tourism development that is being developed in the western part of the Bekaa Valley should be contacted, as it is in their interest to see tourism expanded in Zahle and other regional sites to draw more tourists. Sandi thanked her and said it was a very good idea.

With regard to donors, Sandi noted that during the coming weeks, the JICA Study Team will meet with a number of donors to encourage their participation in implementation of the projects. She read a list of donors, including the EU, Canadians, USAID, France, Japanese, DANIDA, etc., whose portfolios indicate compatibility.

Invitation

Tele-seminar for communities

- ❑ JICA Study Team prepares a seminar to share the experiences and knowledge of tourism development in Japan.
- ❑ Two seminars will be held on separate days.
 - 26 Jan (Mon): Eco-tourism development
 - 30 Jan (Fri): Partnership among Private and public
 - 12:00~15:00 (the seminar begins at 13:00)
 - At Berytech, Mar Roukos
- ❑ Transportation fee can be reimbursed. Snacks will be served.
- ❑ Language: Arabic based lecture
- ❑ 4 members from Zahle are invited for each seminar. (We need the participants' name.)

Sandi noted that the concluding slides illustrate a community tele-seminar, the first project that is being implemented by the JICA Study with MOT and CDR, and encouraged local participation in the Beirut seminars.

Ammar discussed slides 13-15. Yoshi Nakagawa, who created the seminar for the JICA Study Team, explained the seminar in greater detail and encouraged local participation.

The President thanked the team for their hard work over the past 7 months and expressed hope for implementation.

(The focus group was followed by a site visit the following morning to the Hotel Amerika.)

Theme of the seminar

- 26, Jan: Eco-tourism Development
 - History and definition of eco-tourism
 - Potential of the compatible Eco-tourism development with the local agriculture industry.
 - Case study: Hoshino-resort.
 - 30, Jan: Partnership in tourism
 - Typical and Desired organizations
 - Two main objectives in partnership:
 - To achieve sustainable and safe development
 - To share the development
-

- Case study: Kusatsu town



Photos in Tele-seminar
For NGOs
On 16, Nov., 2003

The system connects
between
Lebanon and Japan.

