

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: Niha
Oct 17, 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 Niha.

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 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 Presentation

NAME	AFFILIATION	FAVORITE PLACE
Dr. Toufic Maalouf	Doctor, ORI	Lebanon
Dr. Ghazi Maalouf	Urologist	Niha/Cedars
Jamil Fakri	Agriculture/Farmer	Bcharre
Maya Najjar	University Student Cultural Committee Library of Niha	Italy
Vera El Fakhry	Ministry of Social Affairs / Social Education Center	Beirut
Nancy Maalouf	University Student	Chehwen
Elie H. Maalouf	Law School Student	Faraya, Monaco
Dr. Elie Najjar	Physician	S. Lebanon
Ghada Harb	Biology/Nutritionist	France

NAME	AFFILIATION	FAVORITE PLACE
Salwa Maalouf	Teacher	Beirut
Roula Maalouf		Beirut
Fadia Ayoub	Animation Biblioteque Niha Library	Al Barouk
Gina Maalouf	Information Secretary	Canada
Kaissar Moulouf	Anesthesiology/Doctor	Zahle
Neeman Maalouf	Computer Engineer	USA
Hamid Maalouf	Mayor	Cornet Chehwen
Fakhry Al Fakhry	Architect	Bcharre/Cedars

4.2 Strategies

Team example: To create ecotourism, to increase visitor stays [why this project proposal], to benefit the community through increased jobs and spending [who benefits], Implementation, Management, Legal/Land Use [Problems].

Team examples of strategies: create visitor activities; promote agriculture, visitor education, visitor interpretation, visitor circulation

Strategies listed by participants:

- Sports Tourism-important to increase activities for youth and keep them in Niha; problem is the space for the courts.
- Visitor Activities- creation of area with little snack shop and souvenir shops next to the archaeological site with a theatre and educational video.
- Combined Strategy-visitor activities, circulation, education; creates personal initiative and jobs; problem with infrastructure, financing and government regulation (noted that Niha is the center of the Bekaa, 30 km from Baalbek and near Zahle and Anjar, not far from Damascus).
- Tourism Spas/Resorts-take advantage of good climate; Lebanon and neighboring countries benefit.
- Chalets/Rental Houses-could build on the outskirts of Niha, important for regional development, problems with land use and funding.
- National Peace Strategy -required to build tourism, local people benefit
- Proper Roads-necessary to transport tourists to sites, important for elderly and other tourists.
- Leisure Tourism-need restaurants and cafes, will increase LOS and improve the economy; also need sports tourism to benefit both locals and tourists, problem is funding and lack of promotion.
- Telefrique – link lower site to upper site.
- Hotel -locate next to upper site.
- “Humble” Transportation-donkeys.
- Hiking.

- Cultural Tourism (Mayor) -to include sculpture, painting exhibits like Aley has with international exhibitions, “typical village” with pedestrian access; create unique identity through cultural theme, problem funding; need to improve the road first and that will entice other projects.
- Socio-economic Strategies-to include hotels, roads, resorts, gardens, cultural tourism, tour guides; direct benefit to local community and indirect benefit to tourists; needs to be integrated with surrounding villages.
- Luna Park – Niha would be the first village to have one like Beirut’s to attract regional and international tourism, problem is lack of infrastructure.
- Open Region – Strategy to promote agriculture, agro products, and tourism-important to use local products; idea of thematic wine routes; benefit to local people; problem is lack of investors.
- Promotional/Tourism Offices – need to attract local and regional tourists (Syrian tourists go to Zahle to shop so they could also come to Niha).

4.3 Projects

Headings: Project Idea, Reason Why I Like This Idea, Who Implements/How, What is Lacking.

Team Example-Arak factory tours and wine labels; we like this idea because it used local products and creates local jobs, implementation might be through an investor, an agricultural cooperative might be lacking to organize such a venture.

Our Project Examples: Agricultural cooperative, eco-lodge, signage, site management plan, training in site management and lodge management, factory to produce wine/arak labels, sewage treatment, roads and parking, rest house.

Participants Project Ideas

1. *Sports Village* - arena and courts could be located behind the church (note: could be part of ecologic complex where the municipality has rented the land from the church; could be implemented by the Ministry of Sports and Youth).
2. *Water Factory* – to package water and sell bottled water; local participant said that this will create jobs but won’t attract tourists (note: could be part of industrial tour circuit with plastics factory).
3. *Agro Processing Center*-for local production of kishek, note: could create contemporary handicrafts base).
4. *Tourist Plan* – reference to need for master plan/land use plan to manage the area adjacent to the archaeological site; have to first create a plan to create individual products that work together including proper roads
(NOTE: A local participant mentioned that they have requested a cooperative through the Ministry of Social Affairs, BUT the local people don’t want it!).
5. *Site Excavations*-Japanese delegation a couple years ago recommended additional site excavations; could tie to unique village development including lodging and a place for a drink, perhaps an art festival.
6. *Water Park* – (Local participant asked how this would be possible when the roads are already so small, and there isn’t enough water now for such a project).

7. *Support for Toursitic Master Plan and Sound and Laser Show at the Site*-sees as a tool to educate tourists, perhaps in the evenings when they are coming back from Baalbek; would need promotion; sees implementation through a private investor with municipality and MOT support;(NOTE: no role for NGOs as they are not enthusiastic)
8. *Training Workshop*-MOT needs to make a training plan for tourism; need to improve the surroundings of the archaeological site.
9. Sewage treatment-lines reach the church and stop, needs to be completed.

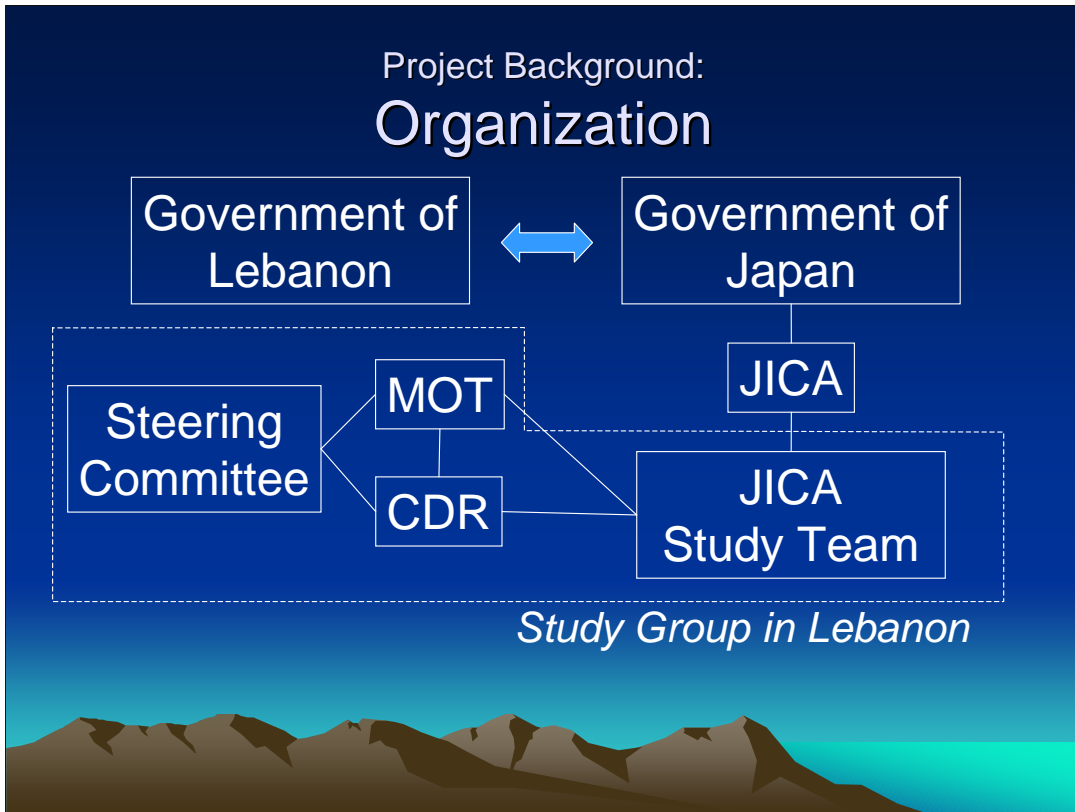
4.4 Additional Remarks

Participant concern about the identity of Niha (desert, instability). Used Byblos as an example of positive identity and visitor activities.

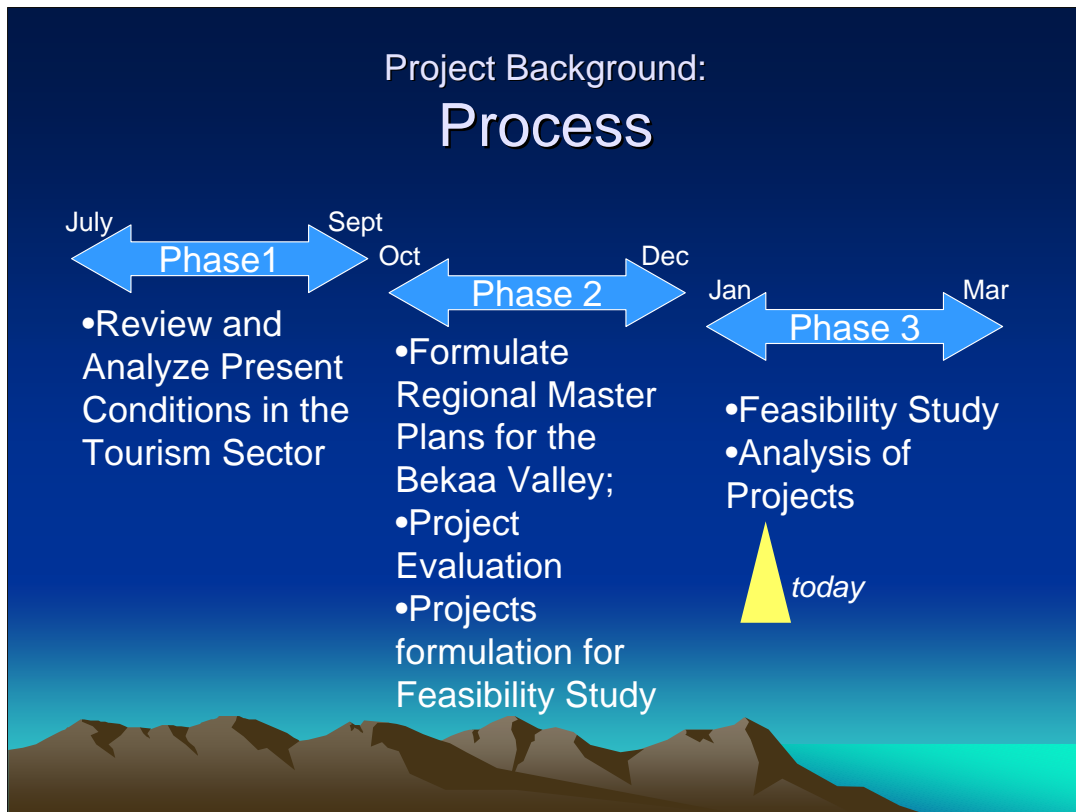
Focus Group Interview ~Niha~

10 AM, JANUARY 16, 2004

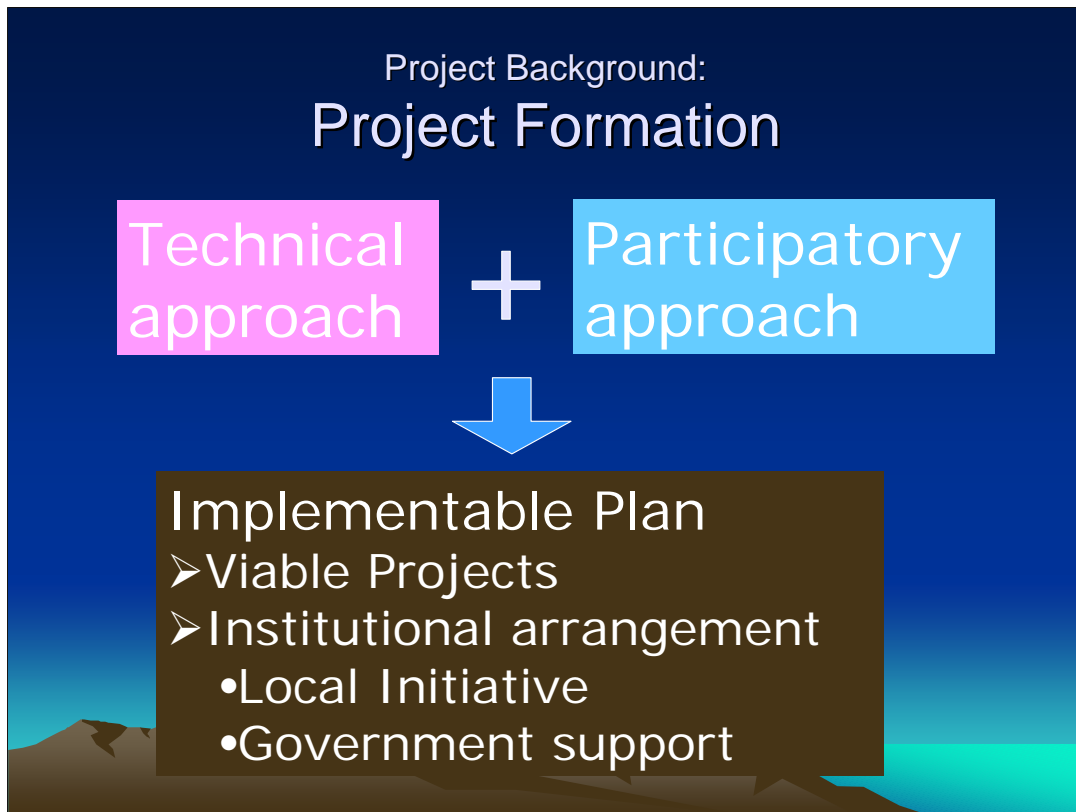
Sandi Chesrown, JICA Study Team member, on behalf of the team, welcomed the Niha participants. She especially thanked counterpart representatives, Mrs. Mona Fares, MOT, and Dr. Jaoudat Abou Jaoude, CDR, for participating, noting that they and the Ministry have worked with the team every step of the way over the past 7 months of the study. Locally, she thanked President Hamid Maalouf and all the members of the community who have been so helpful and opened a window to Niha's strong sense of community, beautiful agrarian landscape, and interesting cultural heritage sites. She said today, as a result of the team's master planning, the community will hear about a very ambitious project for Niha. If it is too ambitious, she encouraged community participants to express their concerns or recommendations.



Ammar Abboud, JICA Study Team Facilitator, explained the project's organization.



Ammar explained the phasing of the project, and that Phase 1 and 2 are completed. The team is currently working on Phase 3, and will perform a feasibility study for what is being called the Niha Eco and Site Management Project.



Ammar explained the project formation, which coupled technical expertise with strong community participation. He explained that the result is a sustainable plan and projects that could be implemented. He noted that this will depend on the good balance of the approaches and the participation of all actors (local/national; private/public; profit/non-profit).

Participatory approach

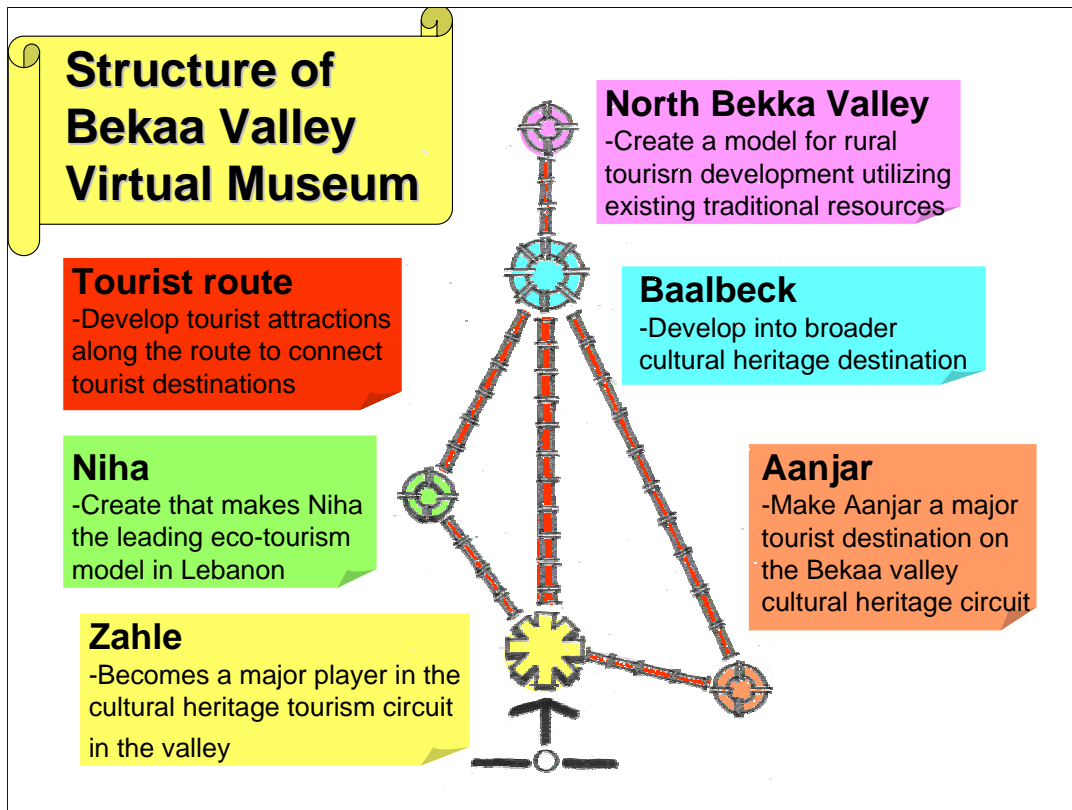
- Focus Group Meetings
 - August 9th, August 28th and October 17th focus groups
- strong sense of community and place
- intellect as major resource
- master plan for tourism development
- broad array of responses to types of tourism including sports, industrial, agro, lodging/resorts, leisure, nature based, cultural tourism
- road improvement
- sewage treatment facility
- need for training/site guides
- tourism office to promote Niha

Ammar explained the team's participatory approach. Through a series of 3 community meetings, the JICA Study Team heard the community express their major resources and ideas for tourism development, including those detailed on the slide above.

Strategy

- Niha 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

Ammar explained the joint strategy of Niha as part of a broader Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum and support for the government's goal of enhancing the well-being of local people through increased tourism jobs and markets.



Ammar explained the concept of the Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum, and how Niha would become an important player on the eco-tourism route and model for nature based tourism in Lebanon. He emphasized the creation of “a road map” for tourism creating a large circuit to encourage a prolonged tourism experience, where each focal point serves as an attraction as well as a starting point leading to another location.

Demand

- Niha Demand Driven Tourism
 - Advanced cultural tourists – Beirut expats and Westerners
 - Academia
 - Lebanese family/youth/clubs for agro tourism (picnicking, camping, orchard picking)
 - Nature-based tourists

Ammar explained that although the JST is helping to create supply and eco-based visitor attractions, it has also analyzed demand to better target Niha's market, such as sophisticated cultural heritage tourists primarily from Beirut and the West, research academics, youth and families, and nature based tourists (including a broad array of hikers, NGOs, schools, etc.).

Proposed Projects

- Environmentally Sustainable Model for Eco or Nature-based Tourism,
[Objectives]
 - Harnessing the Intellect and Skills of the Community to Create a Larger Jobs Base – Training and Marketing[Activities]
 - Infrastructure improvement
 - Site management

Ammar noted that the project goal is to make Niha an environmentally sustainable model for eco or nature-based tourism in Lebanon. By listening to the community, the team has used the intellect and skills of the community to create a master plan with a number of activities including training, marketing and promotion, infrastructure improvements such as an eco-lodge, roads and sewer/water, and site management.

Infrastructure improvement

- Drawing of Proposed Roads Improvement



Ammar explained the road improvements being proposed by the team, including slight widening and paving of the entrance road into the village and paving improvements and a culvert but no widening to the road that links the upper and lower Roman sites. Sandi noted that Yoshi Nakagawa, JICA Study Team transportation engineer, is present if there are any questions.

Site Management Plan for the Lower Roman Site

- organizational framework for policy-making (municipality/DGA/MOT)
- long-term conservation plan
- short-term action plans for site improvements to include improved lighting, mini-visitors center, interpretive signage, site clean-up, brochure and web site linked to MOT
- staffing including training for financial management, operations, visitor management

Ammar explained that a site management plan is being proposed for the lower Roman site, to include recommendations for an organizational framework to work with DGA and MOT, a long-term conservation plan, site improvements such as a small visitors center, interpretive signage, a revised brochure and a web site linked to MOT's web site, and training.

Site Management Expected Results

- site protection
- site interpretation to educate visitors
- promotion of cultural heritage
- increased number of tourists, researchers, and associated revenue
- local jobs including trained staffing (operational and guides) and strengthened municipality

Ammar explained that the project goal is to protect the site for long-term benefit, educate visitors about its importance, promote cultural heritage tourism for Niha, increase revenues and visitors to the site, and increase training and local jobs associated with the site.

Physical Improvements and Management Structure

- Part One: Environmental Systems and Eco-Lodge Facilities
 - Passive Solar INSERT ENVIRO SYSTEMS
- Part Two: Link eco-facilities to Roman archaeological sites through an interpretive trail
- Part Three: Local management cooperative as part of Bekaa Valley Tourism Development Council to strategically manage and market the sites year-round

Sandi explained the proposed physical improvements related to the village of Niha, including an eco-lodge with renewable energy systems, a trail between the lower site/village and upper site to expand visitor length-of-stay, and the creation of a local management cooperative to strategically manage and market the attractions throughout the year. She noted that the team had identified two sites for the eco-lodge, each offering different benefits to the community, and that the team hopes to hear recommendations from the community today in regard to site selection.

Eco-activities (1)

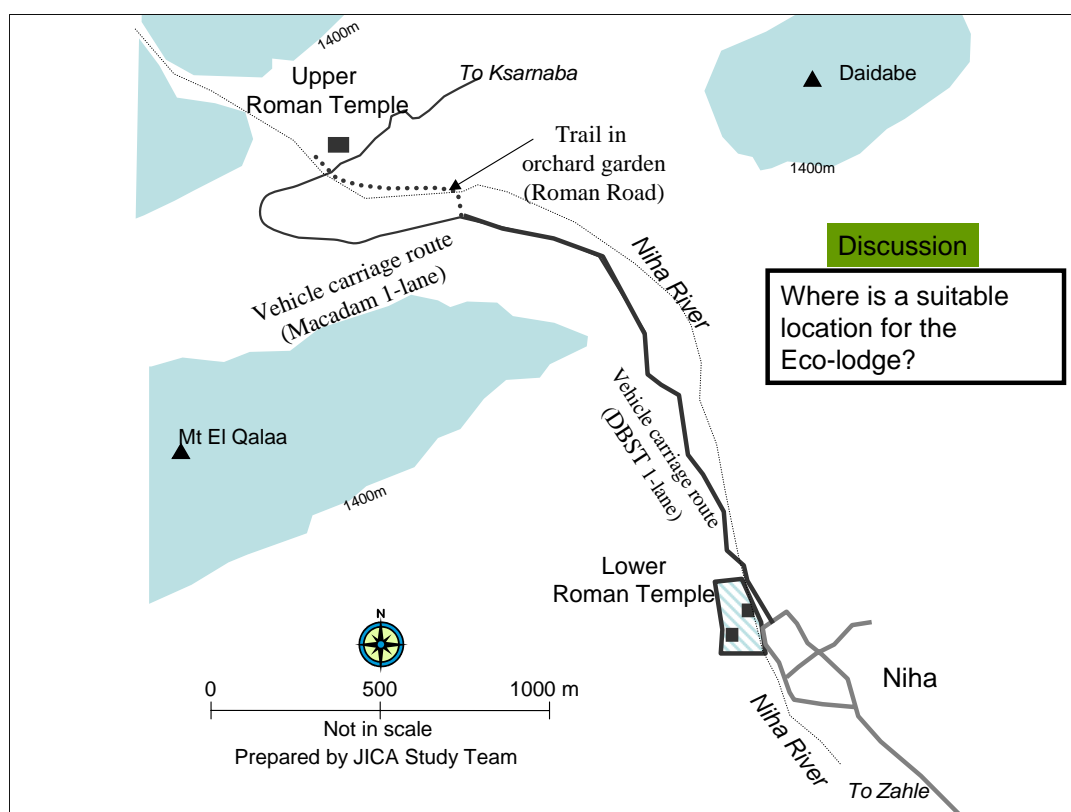
1. Development of Master Plan including Eco-Lodge Design and Preservation of Agrarian Viewshed Policy
2. Development of Standards and “green” logo for organic agro certification program
3. Festival Development
ex., Grape and Harvest, Environmental Fair, Organic Wine Fest)Seminar Development
summer eco-camp, spring and fall eco-seminars
4. Institution Building of Tourism Development Committee/Management Cooperative
5. Training for Local Handicraft Development as branch of Bekaa Valley Handicrafts Cooperative

Sandi explained the list of “eco-activities” being recommended by the project, as illustrated on Slide 15 and Slide 16.

Eco-activities (2)

7. Training of Local Guides for Archaeological Sites
8. Enviro-Education Advocacy Program
specialized library/data base
9. Marketing and Promotion Program
to include advertising strategy, brochure and web design and production
and linkages to national, regional, and international eco-tourism operators
10. Building and Landscape Design
including Xeric landscape plan and renewable energy efficient systems
11. Road Design and Construction
access lower to upper site and primary road from Ablah-Niha-Qsarnaba
12. Signage Development
Road and trails
13. Sewage Plant Design and Construction

Sandi also discussed the concept of Niha Trails Mix, and that local products could come together to create “energy food” for hikers, enhancing Niha’s identity and providing an increased market for Niha’s agricultural products (dried fruits, nuts). She passed around a bag of US made trails mix to better explain the product.



Sandi requested the group's views on the best location for the eco-lodge, noting that Option A was the vacant grassy lot behind the church adjacent to the municipality building, and Option B is somewhere between the Lower and Upper Roman sites.

She explained that the team's concept was to benefit the local community, i.e., the café, internet, library, etc. could easily be used by community members if the eco-lodge was physically located in the village. A local architect agreed with that and said that infrastructure costs might also be less (sewage and water lines).

Another member recommended that the camp be located in a more rural setting and that the ecolodge be in the village. Sandi noted that is possible, but there would be a loss of management and maintenance ease and control. One community member recommended that the lodge be at one end of the trail near the Lower Site and the camp farther along the trail. Sandi explained that the team was trying to maintain a buffer zone around the archaeological site, if possible.

The President said that the municipality owns a site west of the "N" on Niha River on the map, 1-2 km from the village. They also lease the site behind the church from the church. All agreed that it would be easier to build the lodge on land owned by the municipality. The President recommended that the group move to the site after the meeting was adjourned and then return to the municipality for lunch.

Training

- Management,
- Marketing,
- Trail Mix,
- Handicrafts,
- Special Events Organization and
- Promotion

Ammar explained the various aspects of training that the team was proposing on Slide 18.

Expected results

- Increased visitation
- Increased jobs and income to local people
- Preservation of rural landscape
- Promotion of tourism niches (nature-based/agro tourism) in Lebanon
- Improved local environmental awareness

Ammar explained the anticipated results illustrated on Slide 19.

Implementation Discussion

- What is necessary for implementation?
 - Who will carry it out?

Mrs. Mona Fares explained the long history of the project, and that MOT has worked on it for six years. She also thanked Elie Saba, an engineer at MOT who has participated in the focus groups, and Dr. Haimari, Special Advisor to the Minister at MOT, for his continuous efforts to support the project. Mrs. Fares promised that the community's involvement is very important to MOT, and that the Ministry will follow-up to try to implement the project.

Sandi asked who in Niha would be the "local champions" for the project? To date, they have been the President/Municipality and a few members of the community, such as Dr. Maalouf (urologist). Would that continue? Dr. Maalouf responded that there could be two different types of partners, i.e., the municipality could provide land and negotiate with CDR, and individuals from the private sector could be involved. All agreed that even if the President changes with municipal elections, the people involved in the project will not change, as all of Niha is interested in seeing the project implemented. The President said that the Municipality and the Festival Council will see the project through to implementation.

When asked what would be Niha's priority project, the response was the sewer and water network, a parking area for tour buses, or a master plan to guide tourism development.

Funding

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

With regard to funding, the President said the municipality might be able to contribute land for the ecolodge and agro-processing facility and up to \$20,000, and private funds and Diaspora funds might be available. The local architect asked if the project was seen as non-profit or profit-making, and Sandi assured him the team views it as a profitable enterprise that will bring revenue to Niha.

There was some insistence by a participant that the implementation should be for the private sector since public institutions could not be relied upon. Central government involvement or the creation of a publicly owned institution would mean it will not succeed.

Sandi noted that the team will present project ideas to donors over the coming weeks and will invite them to our March presentation to the Ministry/CDR and the Steering Committee. She noted that potential donors for Niha include the Global Environmental Facility, the Canadian Development Agency, the Danish Aid Agency, US Agency for International Development, and the European Union.

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 Niha are invited for each seminar. (We need the participants' name.)

Ammar explained the two upcoming training tele-seminars, which are the first results of the JICA Study, and encouraged community members to participate.

The President thanked the JICA Study Team and invited the group to accompany him to see the municipality's land that might accommodate the eco-lodge.

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.



(The group took the road to the fruit orchard below the Upper Roman site in order to have a bird's eye view of the municipality's land down in the valley. It is below a high point from which the Romans signaled as part of their communications system to Baalbeck and Majdal Aanjar. Not far away is a Roman quarry. Both could be integrated into the camping experience for youth groups. The President noted that he has already signed a contract for re-paving the road this year. The President said he has leased the other site from the church for 9 years in order to make a children's play area, and that the lease could be extended indefinitely.

At the orchards area along the proposed hiking trail, Mrs. Fares explained the history of Niha's Rose Festival (Virgin Mary of St. Maria) which occurs in May and is organized with nearby Ksarnaba Village. It was agreed that the festival and its rose water by-product could be integrated into the Niha project. Another tradition which could be interesting to visitors is the September 14 religious walk up the adjacent hill from the fruit orchards, which is done with candles.

With regard to land ownership issues, the President explained that under Lebanese law pedestrian access is allowed over private land, and that the trail running through the private fruit orchards would not be a problem. The Municipality will have control over the decision. It was noted that the back road past the Upper Roman site leads to Zahle, only a ten minute drive away, and that a person can hike it in one hour.



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

The system connects
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Continue from previous slide:

Team members continued to the Lower archaeological site to discuss the placement of the mini-visitors center. It was agreed that the existing ticket booth inside the gate should be demolished, and that the extant winery adjacent to the church and site entrance might be incorporated into the site. The local architect suggested using the roof platform for an AV show. At the municipality, it was agreed that the bus parking area should be near the municipal building, to allow visitors to walk to the site, changing the site entrance from the right side to the left side.