

Success Story: Hima for Peace



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Foreword

It is with great pride and gratitude that I introduce this success story of the “Hima for Peace” project, a testament to the transformative power of nature in fostering harmony and unity among communities. At the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), we are deeply committed to our mission of conserving Lebanon's rich biodiversity and promoting sustainable natural resource management. The “Hima for Peace” initiative embodies our core values and represents a milestone in our journey towards a more peaceful and sustainable future.

Amidst formidable challenges such as climate change impacts and socio-political tensions, the “Hima for Peace” project has emerged as a transformative approach by uniting communities in Kayfoun and Chemlan to collaboratively manage and preserve their shared natural resources. The revival of the Hima approach – a traditional system of resource tenure rooted in communal stewardship – has allowed us to witness firsthand the profound impact of community-led conservation efforts.

This success story not only celebrates the achievements of the project but also highlights the resilience and determination of the people involved. From the establishment of sustainable water pumping systems to the creation of communal gardens and peace trails, each initiative undertaken under the “Hima for Peace” banner exemplifies the spirit of cooperation and environmental stewardship.

Furthermore, the expansion of the project's scope to include neighboring municipalities underscores the ripple effect of positive change generated by community-driven conservation efforts. The signing of the Hima Charter by six additional villages speaks volumes about the enduring legacy of the “Hima for Peace” project and its potential for replication and scalability.

As we reflect on the accomplishments detailed in this success story, let us not forget the invaluable contributions of our partners, supporters, and most importantly, the communities themselves. Their unwavering dedication and commitment to protecting nature and promoting peace serve as an inspiration to us all.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Robert Bosch Stiftung Foundation for their generous support and commend the efforts of all those involved in making the “Hima for Peace” project a resounding success. May this success story inspire others to embark on similar journeys towards a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Assad Serhal

Director General

Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL)

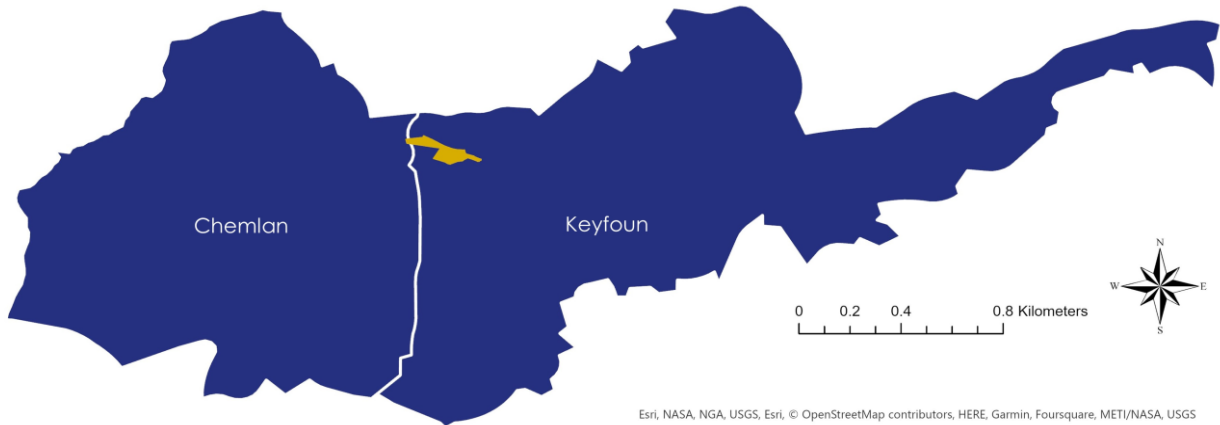
Introduction

The Middle East is one of the most water-stressed regions and is highly vulnerable to climate change consequences. It has been noted that climate change consequences would create an additional pressure on natural resources. In addition to climate change, migration fluxes have also exerted a significant pressure on natural resources, where the limited natural resources could create a conflict over the available resources. This conflict is much higher in communities with different cultures, religious backgrounds and political affiliations. Several conflicts have risen between neighbouring communities in Lebanon over natural resources, especially if the communities are from different religious sects or political affiliations.

Lebanon is rich of ethnic groups, sects, and religions. Although this could be considered as

positive diversity, this has been a source of conflict. The main reasons for that are family, or religion affiliation, ideologies or sharing of resources. Conflict can occur between neighbouring communities or between different families within the same community or village. As consequences of the civil war in Lebanon, economic hardships escalated significantly, intensifying sectarian tensions, and resulting in the unsustainable management of natural resources. The natural resources base and biodiversity facing a serious threat. In the current socioeconomic and political crisis, sectarian tensions are rapidly resurging, posing a potential resurgence of conflicts, particularly concerning the utilization of natural resources.





Map key:

- Town borders
- Hima Keyfoun-Shimlan borders

Yara Alchammas
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Kayfoun and Chemlan

Kayfoun and Chemlan are two neighbouring communities in the Mount Lebanon, approximately 23 kilometres from Beirut the capital of Lebanon. The elevation of the area ranges from 720 to 900 meters above sea level, creating a picturesque backdrop of mountains and valleys. Kayfoun shares its borders with Souk El Gharb to the north, Chemlan and Ain Anoub to the west, and Baysour to the south.

Kayfoun and Chemlan villages, along with some surrounding areas, were fierce battle grounds during civil war. Although these two villages are closely next to each other, they have major differences in their cultures and socioeconomic status. Both villages facing a complex interplay of challenges, including climate change impacts, and conflicts over shared resources.

In short, roots of the problem between the two villages lie in the following:

- **Shared Water Resource:** Both villages rely on a single well for their water needs, creating a direct point which triggers conflicts among the two communities especially within the current economic crisis that Lebanon is facing.
- **Affiliations:** The presence of different political and religious party affiliations within both villages.
- **Increased Pressure:** The displacement of 5,000 Syrian refugees to Kayfoun doubles its population, significantly increasing demand on the limited natural resources especially water resources, forests, and energy, further intensifying competition between the two communities.

Project Objectives

The “Hima for Peace” project objectives are to reduce the tension between local communities that are sharing natural resources through applying the Hima approach, which is communal tool for the sustainable management of natural resources. It aims to provide a natural resource and community-led management tool for the sustainable use of natural resources; thus, reducing the potential for conflict among users of these resources, taking into consideration potential future impacts of climate change.

To protect the biodiversity in Kayfun and Chemlan and provide a common sustainable development interest among the local communities, reducing tensions and conflicts over shared resources and fostering cooperation among local communities. Robert Bosch Stiftung foundation funded “Hima for peace project”. The project is implemented by Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon SPNL by applying Al Hima approach.

Hima Approach

Hima is a traditional system of resource tenure that has originated in the Arabian Peninsula 1500 years ago. HIMA is a traditional community-based approach to sustainably manage natural resources in a way that realizes common benefits for people and Nature. It is a traditional way to conserve biodiversity as well as the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

SPNL has revived this approach in 2004, through the support of its conservation partners Birdlife International & IUCN aiming to promote the conservation of Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas, through merging scientific approaches with the HIMA traditional values.

The Hima approach includes 5 programmes, including:

- Hima School (School with No Walls-SNOW)

A school with no borders aiming to raise the capacities of children between the ages of 8 and 12 on the general concepts of conservation whether related to biodiversity or the natural resources in order to prepare them to join Homat Hima program at a later stage.



- Homat Hima programme

Homat Hima are motivated, well trained, and equipped youth from local HIMA communities, aspiring to lead on activities and give exposure to the HIMAs. Moreover, they are ambitious to work for their communities including environmental, economic, and social concerns, and to assure the conservation of the site and its key biodiversity, and the ecological and cultural services it provides.





The "Hima for Peace" project adopts a unique and effective participatory approach deeply rooted in the Hima Approach—a traditional, community-based natural resource management system. Revived and embedded in the Lebanese heritage with the efforts of Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon-SPNL.

The participatory approach is founded on three interconnected pillars:

- **Participation:** Empowering Local Communities
- **Engagement:** Fostering a Sense of Ownership
- **Conversion:** Transforming Ideas into Action

These pillars, aligned with the Hima Methodology, represent the essential elements of community engagement in the planning, implementation, and monitoring phases.

To involve the local communities of Kayfoun and Chemlan in decision-making processes and fostering ownership and ensure community commitment to conservation goals, reflecting the Hima approach's community-based stewardship.

Project Activities

Participatory Sessions: Began with the formation of a working group comprising representatives from the Kayfoun and Chemlan villages to ensure balanced community representation. This group received specialized training on the Hima Methodology to enhance their ability to actively participate in the management planning process. Organized four pivotal sessions to navigate the Hima Management Planning steps, covering situation analysis, stakeholder mapping, development of problem/objective, and culminating in the drafting of a strategic action plan.

Management Plan Development: The approach included assessing external factors and mapping stakeholders for a better understanding of the ongoing interactions that are happening within local community groups and their environment. Then identify and classify underlying problems, transforming them into actionable objectives within the framework of the holistic action plan.

Al Hima Committee: Formation in Kayfoun and Chemlan “Al Hima Committee” for integrating participatory approaches and local community involvement. This committee, reflective of the diverse social fabric of Kayfoun and Chemlan, was formed in close collaboration with local municipalities to ensure community representation. This committee play pivotal roles in identification of main stakeholders related to Hima, identification of the main problems in the village, discussion of main potential solutions for the identified problems,

including conflicts and climate change impact, networking and facilitation, advocacy for conflict resolution, climate action, conservation and protection, and support for implementation of activities.

Climate change assessment: Conduct a climate change assessment in the Kayfoun and Chemlan villages to identify the specific challenges posed by climate change and to develop targeted, effective, and sustainable adaptation strategies that minimize the associated risks and impacts, while informing and making the local communities aware of the findings. The assessment highlights significant changes and trends in the climate of Kayfoun and Chemlan, particularly in rising temperatures and increased frequency of hot days and tropical nights. While precipitation shows variability, the overall trend in vulnerability to climate change is increasing, necessitating timely and effective adaptation and mitigation strategies in these regions.



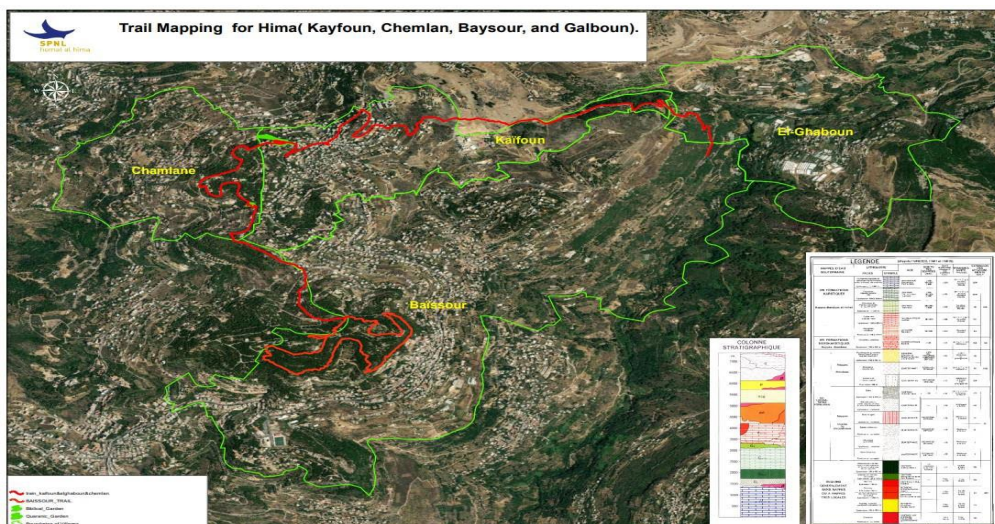
Accomplishments & Outcomes

Solar-Powered Water Pumping System: SPNL and Kayfoun municipality, with funding from German Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), installing solar-powered water pumping systems, the initiative has ensured sustainable water distribution, reducing costs and environmental impacts, this has significantly impacted the communities of Kayfoun and Chemlan by addressing water supply issues and promoting peace. This approach has fostered cooperation and unity between the villages, transforming a source of conflict into a pillar of community-led management and sustainable resource use, showcasing a successful integration of nature protection and conflict resolution.

Biblical, Quranic, and Lavender Gardens: In collaboration with the municipalities of the villages establish the Biblical Garden in Chemlan, the Lavender Garden in Shouk Algarib, and the Quranic Garden in Kayfoun as part of the "Hima for Peace" project. To promote biodiversity and environmental stewardship as reflected in holy books, also serve as peaceful communal spaces that enhance connectivity between villages. Some events were held in these gardens aimed at educating the visitors about essential topics, namely Biodiversity, Safety in Nature, and Climate Change. Additionally, created job opportunities adds significant value especially in the current economic crisis that Lebanon face.

This aligns well with the project's goals, showcasing a commendable blend of cultural respect, biodiversity conservation, and community development. Those gardens stand as evidence of the power of nature and fostering peace and harmony among communities.

Hima for Peace Trail: The "Hima for Peace" project successfully bridged divides between Kayfoun and Chemlan, fostering cooperation and promoting peace through shared engagement with nature. The establishment of the "Hima for Peace Trail" repurposing historical conflict paths into symbols of unity, demonstrates the project's profound impact. Additionally, inclusivity was emphasized by creating accessible paths for people with disabilities, ensuring everyone can enjoy natural beauty. This initiative, begun as an ambitious endeavour to bridge Kayfoun and Chemlan has now stretched its arms by "Droub el Hima " to encompass Baysour, showcases the power of community-driven efforts in overcoming past conflicts and envisioning a harmonious future. The "Droub el Hima " spans a distance of 7.7 kilometres meanders through pine trees, offering glimpses into passages from the Lebanese Civil War era. This trail is a testament to the power of community-driven conservation efforts in bridging divides and nurturing peace.



The mayor of Kayfoun, Bilal Saad, commended the cooperation of SPNL as a long-standing partner. "The establishment of a Quranic Garden and linking it with Chemlan by "Hima for Peace" trail strengthens collaboration and communication channels between the two villages". Saad extended an invitation for all to visit Kayfoun and witness the accomplishments of the "Hima for Peace" project.

Memorandum of Understanding is to establish Himas in the participating municipalities, provided that publicly owned lands are available. Now the six municipalities follow steps of Kayfoun and Chemlan to protect nature and expand ecotourism in their villages and work together for the betterment of their communities and the conservation of Lebanon's natural heritage. These communities, while once facing conflicts and disputes, have now come together with a shared vision of promoting environmental sustainability and unity among their villages. It paves the way for the establishment of Himas in these communities and fosters a profound sense of commitment to nature conservation. The commitment to Himas signifies the recognition of the vital role these areas play in maintaining biodiversity, preserving local ecosystems, and promoting a harmonious relationship between communities and nature.

Hima Charter

Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (Hima Charter) among eight neighbouring municipalities in Mount Lebanon. Extending the initiative's scope beyond Kayfoun and Chemlan to include (Baysour, Souk el Gharib, Aitat, Ain Sayde, Ein Remmeh, and Kfarmatta). The primary objective of this



The "Hima for Peace" project has made significant progress in fostering peace and cooperation among the local communities through nature conservation. This was clearly evident from the successful communication and cooperation between Kayfoun and Chemlan, especially in sharing water resources and forests. Kayfoun and Chemlan became now closer and started visiting each other in special occasions. Both communities have one goal to protect their nature and unite people together. Also opening of the "Droub el Hima trail", gathering 8 villages to sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and the continued engagement with municipalities, schools, institutions, and religious representatives reflect the project's dedication to its mission. As SPNL works tirelessly to extend its impact, "Hima for Peace" remains a testament to the power of nature in building bridges and fostering peace within communities.

Issam Hitti, Mayor of Chemlan Mayor, said, "We recognize the invaluable role played by SPNL, our partners, and our donors. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with eight villages was a symbol of our shared commitment to protecting nature, promoting sustainable development, and moving towards peace. In cooperation with SPNL we establish Biblical Garden which benefits in both the environment and the economy. Our journey with "Hima for Peace" will expand its reach, connecting us all by the "Hima for peace Trails". This ambitious endeavour connects our villages, further strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation. Our goal is clear: to protect, preserve, and enhance the beauty of nature."



The success of the Hima for Peace project extends far beyond Kayfoun and Chemlan. This unique model of community-based conservation and conflict resolution through the Hima approach can be replicated in other regions facing similar challenges. The project serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that fostering peace and protecting nature can go hand-in-hand, offering a valuable vision for a more sustainable and harmonious future.

Impacts of Hima for peace project

The impact of the "Hima for Peace" project is underscored by its effectiveness in bridging communities and promoting conservation. However, the "Hima for Peace" initiative, born from the vision of conflict resolution and uniting Kayfoun and Chemlan, has surpassed expectations. Eight municipalities have signed the Hima charter, symbolizing the deep commitment of these communities to protect nature and the heritage of their region. Following in the footsteps of Kayfoun and Chemlan, Baysour has been announced as Hima area. This was followed by the announcement Souk El Gharib Hima and establishment of a public garden, the Lavender Garden, then by the establishment of a Hima in Kfarmatta.



The relationship between the two communities of Kayfoun and Chemlan has grown very close. They have become aware of what their region is exposed to from climate change. Conflicts have been put aside, and they have begun to think uniformly about preserving nature and the heritage of their region. Now, they share natural resources together and exchange visits, especially on religious occasions. This unity is mirrored by six other municipalities that have signed the Hima Charter, which reflects the role of the "Hima for Peace" initiative in protecting biodiversity and promoting peace.

The climate change assessment offered, targeted recommendations for adaptation measures. These included strategies to mitigate fire risks, enhance water resource management, and improve community resilience, such as water harvesting and storage, improved irrigation practices, climate-resilient infrastructure, groundwater management, and diversification of water sources. The recommendations are aimed at policymakers, local authorities, and community leaders,

urging immediate and effective action to address the identified challenges.

SPNL's Mission: SPNL, the BirdLife national partner in Lebanon, aims at protecting nature, birds and biodiversity of Lebanon and to promote sustainable use of natural resources for people and with them, through reviving the concept of Al Hima. As a national environmental NGO in Lebanon, SPNL contributes to both raising awareness on environmental issues, concretely protecting natural areas in Lebanon and contributing to mainstreaming biodiversity concerns at policy level.

Dr Hany El Shaer, Director of IUCN Regional Office for West Asia, "affirmed that our goal always is to conserve biodiversity and empower local communities. We implement Al Hima approach in our projects, and our efforts and interventions would not have been possible without the collaboration of local communities in devising and managing sustainable solutions for their environment, lands, and natural resources."

The SPNL Director General Mr. Assad Serhal said “Al Hima for peace project it’s not only to protect biodiversity, but also to serve as powerful tool for conflict resolution, linking culture to nature, involving local communities, creating jobs, empowering women. SPNL last 4 decades working for establishing network system of protected areas all over the country representing all different ecosystem and habitats. Al Hima for peace calls for sustainable use of resources where the local communities are guardians of this Hima.

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About IUCN ROWA

The IUCN Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) was established in 2004 in Amman, Jordan, and encompasses 13 countries.

The framework for projects and activities developed and implemented by IUCN ROWA is guided by the three main areas of work outlined in the IUCN Programme 2030, in conjunction with the priorities identified by our members and partners in the West Asia region. In this endeavor, IUCN ROWA leverages the efforts and participation of 76 IUCN Member organizations and the expertise of IUCN Commission experts in the region.

www.iucn.org/westasia

About SPNL

SPNL is one of the oldest environmental NGOs in Lebanon. It was established in 1983 under the Lebanese Laws and licensed by the Ministry of Interior by decision no. 6/AD dated 8/1/1986.

SPNL is a national, non-geographic, non-sectorial, non-political environmental NGO. SPNL is the national partner for BirdLife International in Lebanon. It considers birds as entry points for the conservation of wider natural resources, as they act as key indicators of the status and health of ecosystems. It is a member in IUCN, MedWet, Med NGO network, WANA Forum, Medpan partner, accredited by UNEP, and a founding member of the Lebanese Environment Forum. SPNL’s mission revolves around the protection of nature, birds and biodiversity of Lebanon for people, and the promotion of sustainable use of natural resources for people and with them, through the Hima approach.

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