

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Dear Friends,

The year 2020 was an extremely hard year for our planet and a catastrophic one for our beloved country Lebanon.

On top of the economic crisis our country is going through and the COVID19-pandemic, there came the murderous explosion in the Beirut port. This explosion, which claimed the lives of more than 200 victims and injured over 5,000 persons, also destroyed a considerable part of our capital Beirut including its cultural and historical districts.

It is true that the three Beirut Municipal public libraries that are run by our association were severely damaged but we at ASSABIL were among the lucky ones since all the damage was material damage that can be repaired.

Through all this, our ASSABIL survived. The three libraries were completely rebuilt and operational within 90 days of the explosion thanks to the priceless donations of the association's numerous friends, the Embassy of the UAE, and Sharjah World Book Capital 2019. This great and swift moral and financial support gave us hope and strength to keep going.

Our belief in ASSABIL's values is stronger than ever. Throughout the lockdown, we have never stopped promoting cultural participation and knowledge sharing through book lending, online seminars and debates, e-books, online storytelling, etc.

More than ever, we are focused on promoting reading which is so important in helping both children and adults to overcome the tough times we are facing. More than ever, we are striving to provide inclusivity and equitable access to knowledge. More than ever, we are determined to be guided by our mission as it is how we do our part in the fight for our country's future.

As we walk into the year 2021, which no doubt will carry its own challenges, we are hopeful that humanity will overcome the global pandemic we are facing, and that our country will rise once again from its ashes, as it has done so, so many times before.

Ziad Bou Alwan
President of the Board

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A difficult and psychologically tiring year, a financial collapse, corona, and the August 4 explosion that I witnessed before my eyes, documented it on my mobile phone, and the subsequent images of horror that spread everywhere. As a professional photographer, I wanted to document from behind my camera lens – all those scenes became etched in my memory. The scenes of our three destroyed libraries, the children's books, their torn and flying toys, the shattered glass that was embedded in everything. In the tables and chairs, the books and the paintings. Even electronic devices were not spared. On the personal level, it was a year full of troubles: no face-to-face communication with those we love, loss of loved ones, news of Corona cases... I yearn for the day when I get back to work as usual, where I will be meeting the children through our Kotobus activities – that I missed so much.

Sami Musa
Kotobus Facilitator

Words cannot describe what I felt on the fateful day of August 2020 ,4. I saw in front of my eyes the shattered glass and the devastation in the neighborhood in which I was born and raised, and where I work in the public library of Beirut municipality in the Jesuit Garden of Geitawi. Nothing remained but steadfast books on some shelves, no roof, no glass, sadness spread through me while I was about to lose my second home. But the most difficult thing that haunts me to this day is the screaming of the affected people, calling for help that filled the sky of Beirut on that painful evening.

Josiane Badra
Librarian

2020 was a disastrous year – in every sense of the word. It began with an unprecedented economic and financial crisis in Lebanon, followed by the Corona pandemic that swept the world and Lebanon had its share of it, with the accompanying closure measures and exceptional preventive measures. 2020 was especially disastrous on a personal level because I lost several loved ones because of coronavirus. In order for the disastrous meaning to be complete, the Beirut port explosion came to constitute a human tragedy whose repercussions – we are still living through. The explosion left behind many victims, wounded and destroyed a large part of the city. Including the public libraries of the Beirut municipality run by the ASSABIL Association, where I work as the Activities Coordinator.

On the professional level, and in light of these exceptional circumstances, we faced an unprecedented reality. At the beginning of the year, we tried to prepare new programs that would help alleviate the impact of the economic crisis on people through new services that we would enter into the activities of public libraries. After completing the preparations, the first news of Corona cases in Lebanon and the start of the general lockdown invalidated all our efforts. After adapting to the new situation – we started again by developing a practical plan for the second half of the year, and indeed we started gradually returning activities to the libraries until the 4th of August came and shattered everything: our city and our public libraries, and with it our plan was left as ink on paper.

Mohamed Daher
Cultural Activities Coordinator

2020: A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

The situation in Lebanon is highly impacted by the current regional and global context, and ASSABIL's work is constantly changing accordingly. In October 2019, people went to the streets determined to hold politicians accountable for corruption. The street closures implemented by protesters forced libraries to close and activities to be put on hold on more than one occasion. During this time, residents of Lebanon became aware of the severity of the financial crisis, which only worsened as time went on. The impact of the financial crisis and decline in the value of the Lebanese currency was felt by all residents in Lebanon. ASSABIL began experiencing unprecedented cuts to funding available for the type of work it is committed to providing to the public.

In February 2020, the first case of the corona virus was reported in Lebanon. The country was quick to impose lockdown restrictions – further suspending activities within the library and freezing applications for funding new projects. Schools, universities, restaurants, social activities, and public spaces of all kinds were paralyzed.

It is no secret that in times of crisis, emergency relief is typically directed toward the humanitarian sector, and at this time funding was directed toward the country's COVID response. The economy was no longer able to sustain a countrywide lockdown and people needed to return to workplaces in order to attempt to earn a living. We returned to the office and reopened libraries with restricted activities taking the precautions necessary for the safety of staff and visitors. When the government reopened the libraries on July 2020 ,1, the number of COVID19- cases in the country begin to rise slowly – then time stopped when an explosion at the Beirut port shook the capital on August 4. People and donors were extremely affected by the explosion and offered support and funding to save the city. The repeated failures to form a government along

with the inability of state structures to contain the spread of COVID19- required ASSABIL to overcome the specific challenges mentioned below in order to move forward throughout 2020.

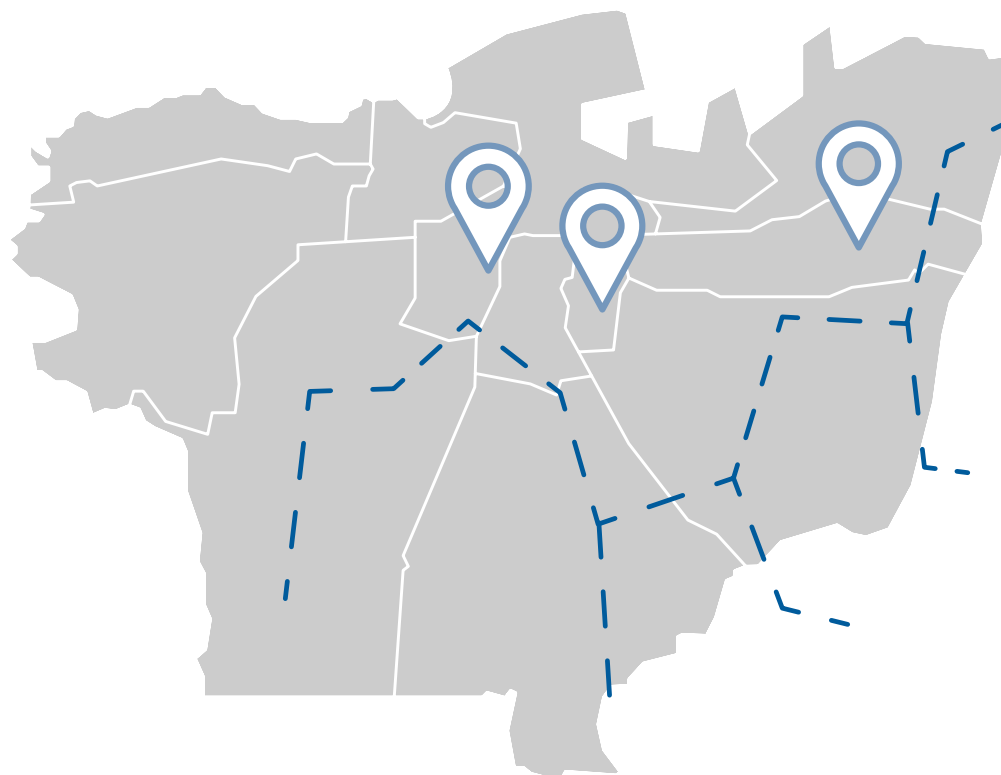
The deteriorating economy and the COVID19- pandemic presented concrete challenges that required ASSABIL to be creative in fulfilling its mission. The public libraries of Beirut, managed by ASSABIL, as a public authority, have the responsibility to continue providing services to the public that take into consideration the difficulties that people are facing in their daily lives. The economic situation shifted the needs of the people and the way in which they utilize our services. Some residents in Lebanon can no longer afford books, newspapers, transportation, internet, etc. as a result of rapid inflation and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound. Promoting Culture for All in these circumstances required ASSABIL to transform and adapt its services.

Additionally, ASSABIL has a responsibility to take the necessary precautions to ensure the health and safety of employees, library subscribers, and attendees of cultural activities. The social distancing, quarantine protocols, and continuous sanitation requirements associated with COVID19- complicate the way in which ASSABIL engages public spaces. Crowded events in the confined spaces of a library were no longer an option. Books and resources loaned to the public had to be sanitized when returned, and libraries and offices needed to be sanitized daily. ASSABIL team members are at constant risk of contracting the virus either in the libraries, in the office, or in social settings. Although the organization continues to update protocols and safety measures, the need of staff to periodically quarantine within their homes inevitably resulted in workflow interruptions.

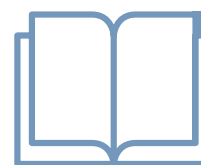


OUR LIBRARIES IN 2020

ASSABIL is commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut to manage and operate the municipal public libraries in the neighborhoods of Bachoura, Geitawi, and Monnot. We also operate a mobile library – the Kotobus – that visits public schools and childcare centers in marginalized areas.



Book Loaning



8,858 books and other documents were borrowed in 2020

Kotobus

Mobile library regularly welcome pupils and children from childcare and non-formal educational centers in Palestinian gatherings and camps. Our activities focus on sparking a love of reading in students and raising awareness about different topics and problems in society (gender, the environment, children's rights, etc.).



In January and February 2020, the Kotobus team made 16 visits and received 350 children aboard to carry out its activities.

Cultural Activities

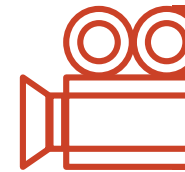
In January, the annual Reading Night's theme this year was Thawra bel Kalamat (translated: Revolution in Words).



The Arabic Book Club read *The Unbearable Lightness* by Milan Kundera, *Tab Rakan fi l-Zamen w Ahlo* by Basil Abdullah, *Cases of Memory* by Charbel Kattan and *Poor Folk* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.



The French Book Club read *Chanson douce: The Perfect Nanny* by Leïla Slimani.



Cine Club in collaboration with Nadi l Kol l Nas screened "Beirut: Dialogue of the Ruins" and "Zinar Al-Nar" (translated: Ring of Fire) both by the Lebanese director Bahij Hajij.



Western Music Night with Joelle Khoury focused on Jazz during January & February.



Oriental Music Night with Elias Sahab focused on Mohamed Abdel Wahab in February.

Special Collaborations

In January, in collaboration with Institut de Frances, ASSABIL hosted a Comics creative workshop with Samandal in Bachoura Library. Additionally, the films "Neymar Forever" and "Mosques: Art & Space" were screened in Monot Library as part of the Beirut Art Film Festival (BAFF).

In February, Antoine Boulad facilitated a creative writing workshop in Monot Library, entitled Places in Beirut.

In March, storytellers Khaled El NaaNaa, Nataly Serhan and Emtinen Karray shared their skills to provide 16 storytelling sessions on Facebook to ASSABIL followers during the start of the COVID19- lockdown.

Later in June, Antoine Boulad hosted a book signing for the book, *CONFIT FRUIT: Containment log in Beirut*, April 2020. Fourteen people testify to their confinement in Beirut, during the month of April 2020. With mockery sometimes. Often with dismay. They share their home. Without makeup. Their hope for a new world. Or not. This book is the mirror of what readers have also experienced. This collaborative effort was written by: Antoine Boulad, Christiane Dagher Yacoub, Gabriel Deek, Gisella Tamraz Akl, Hala Habache, Marie-Ségolène Lagarrigue, Mishka Mojabber Mourani, Océane Descedres, Randa Aractingi, Randa el Kadi Imad, Sylvia Keyrouz, Tamara Deek, Zeina Komboz and Zeina Mangin Salibi.



BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION: SPREADING CULTURE FOR ALL IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY

Lebanon was hit by tragedy once again on August 2020 ,4, when more than 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate caught fire at the Beirut port causing an explosion to rip through the capital at 6:08 pm. The three public libraries of the Municipality of Beirut managed by ASSABIL were severely damaged. Although the damage to the Monot Municipal library was minimal, the Bachoura and Geitawi Municipal libraries remained out of service until ASSABIL conducted an intensive rehabilitation project that lasted from August until November. ASSABIL was humbled by the quick and overwhelming support from organizations and individuals from across the world committed to the rebuilding of Beirut's public libraries. ASSABIL took advantage of this support to rebuild and rehabilitate the public municipal libraries of Beirut to the best possible condition so as to be able to serve the public.

Bachoura Library

- Replacement of damaged external windows and doors
- Replacement of destroyed blinds for windows
- Replacement of destroyed internal doors
- Installation of suspending ceiling with acoustic tiling
- Replacement of lighting trays
- Replacement of destroyed floor carpets with vinyl
- Replacement of front counter and back counter and librarian office cabinets
- Replacement of damaged AC units
- Installation of solar panels
- Painting of library



Geitawi Library

- Rehabilitation and replacement of suspended ceiling
- Replacement of destroyed light fixtures
- Replacement of destroyed window blinds
- Rehabilitation of external damaged doors and windows
- Additional gazebo installed with furniture for outdoor garden area

Monot Library

- Replacement of lighting fixtures
- Rehabilitation of external doors and windows
- Rehabilitation of internal wooden doors
- Painting of library
- Installation of surround sound system

ASSABIL was quick to reactivate the public libraries during the month of December with a number of activities that were possible once the lockdown was lifted. Storytelling sessions resumed in the Bachoura, Geitawi, and Monot libraries. The Arabic Book Club in Bachoura and the French Book Club in Monot resumed their monthly meetings. Training sessions for our project, Public Libraries act against Xenophobia: Resources and Activities for Public Libraries throughout Lebanon (funded by GIZ) were held in the Bachoura library. ASSABIL embarked on a new partnership with the British Council to activate their digital library. Additionally, the Beirut Jazz 2020 album was launched in the Monot library. We are eager to see what 2021 has in store for us.



I felt so shocked in regards the destruction of the 3 public libraries. I thought they would always be protected from harm's way. But after the generous compassion of volunteers and supporters during the reconstruction – I felt deeply that goodness always prevails.

Samar Choucair
Librarian

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Many institutions and donors responded with enormous generosity to help us overcome the challenges we faced in 2020. This has led to the establishment of new partnerships that will have a positive impact in the future, especially with those that share our goals such as promoting reading, revitalizing public libraries, etc. These partnerships include:

- **Sharjah World Book Capital 2019**
which prioritizes support for reading-related initiatives
- **Book Aid International**
which provided us with new English books that are much-needed to enrich our library collections. This collaboration will be expanded to help public libraries throughout Lebanon.
- **DJELIYA Internationale**
which supports initiatives and cultural exchange between North and South.

NEW SERVICES

In the digital environment, where readers are rapidly creating their own virtual libraries and all information seems to be available online, it is important for the Beirut public libraries to expand their services and build their e-collections. In 2021, the Beirut public libraries will explore the challenges of managing a collection of electronic resources by examining local and international digital cultural productions and publications. Turning the Beirut public libraries into hybrid libraries will involve a new collection development strategy that will incorporate both print and electronic resources in an integrated and meaningful way.

2020 was a difficult year. In addition to the challenges resulting from the Corona pandemic – in terms of health and safety precautions that must be followed in libraries and in our daily life – we found ourselves facing a great challenge which was to restore life to our libraries after the August 4 explosion. It was a great shock to find that the library of Bachoura – which is my second home, after 15 years of working there – was severely damaged. Yet in Lebanon, unfortunately we have become accustomed to difficult challenges. We started the morning after the explosion, removing the rubble, packing the books and preparing the library for the restoration process that lasted until the end of October. The process of reorganizing the library, and books on the shelves began with the help of many volunteers. We formed a new hope that a better reality will undoubtedly come.

Susane El-Amine
Librarian

UPCOMING PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Projects 2021

Building on the experience of working under difficult circumstances in 2020, ASSABIL plans on expanding its programming in 2021 to meet the challenges people in Lebanon are facing.

The project, Public Libraries act against Xenophobia: Resources and Activities for Public Libraries throughout Lebanon, funded by GIZ's Civil Peace Service, will continue to enhance the facilitation skills of librarians, promote mutual understanding among students and young people, and foster tolerance in open spaces. We plan to organize creative workshops around Lebanon utilizing the mediums of creative writing, creating comic books, and photography to encourage youth to express themselves. ASSABIL also hopes to hold a series of "open days" to bring together members of different population groups for activities and fun.

Thanks to generous support from the Fondation de France and Prince Claus Fund, ASSABIL's Acquisitions Committee will work during 2021 to replace the books damaged during the explosion and renew our book collection in all

three public libraries in order to respond to the needs of readers who are facing hardship due to the financial crisis and are reducing their book budgets.

The project, Beirut's Public Libraries Offer Distance Learning Support, funded by Secours Catholique – Caritas France will support students, parents, and teachers involved with distance learning through relevant activities and services in Beirut's Municipal public libraries. This is a pilot project in which ASSABIL will for the first time attempt to offer targeted support to students and teachers within the libraries. The ASSABIL libraries will receive technological updates to be able to support the online education of residents in Beirut.

Additionally, ASSABIL hopes to activate Kotobus to help in its mission to spread Culture for All in various villages throughout Lebanon that do not have access to public libraries. The Kotobus will not only offer book loan services, but also offer special surprise activities to be carried out in village centers on a regular basis.

Activities 2021

In 2021, despite all the obstacles related to COVID19-, ASSABIL will continue to provide a varied and rich program of cultural activities that takes into consideration the need to reduce capacity due to the corona pandemic. Weekly cultural activities that are open to everyone and free of charge include:

- Monthly screenings of Lebanese movies with film directors in coordination with local film collectives
- Musical evenings featuring traditional and contemporary Arab and western musicians and critics
- Annual concerts in the Geitawi garden and the Bachoura library

- Creative workshops
- Meetings with writers to discuss their latest work or to present awards in recognition of their accomplishments
- Storytelling sessions
- Book clubs offered in all three major languages in Lebanon (Arabic, English, and French)
- Art sessions
- Debate meetings that focus on current social, economic, political, and health issues



THANK YOU LETTERS TO ALL DONORS



The overwhelming support received from individuals and organizations across the world is the reason that ASSABIL was able to overcome the challenges and tragic events of 2020. This support also affirmed the importance of ASSABIL as a vital cultural institution in Beirut and re-ignited the passion of our team to carry on its mission to spread Culture for All – despite the challenging circumstances. Following the explosion in the Beirut port, ASSABIL announced its commitment to re-establish Beirut's Municipal public libraries as spaces for meeting, for dialogue, for culture, for positive interaction, and for free access to knowledge. Bringing these public spaces to life has been ASSABIL's mission for over 20 years. Our promise to provide Culture for All residents in Lebanon is a promise that, thanks to our supporters, we are able to keep.

Local, regional, & international organizations including:

- The Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Beirut
- Sharjah World Capital Book 2019
- Fondation de France
- Goethe Institute-Lebanon
- COBIAC
- ABF (Association des Bibliothécaires de France)
- CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals)
- DJELIYA Internationale
- C.A.I.I.L
- Alefb
- Book Aid International
- UAEBBY
- Neel Wa Furat, M. Salah Shebaro
- Lebanese Libraries Association
- Shamaa
- Amal Association
- Rotary Club Saida
- Makhzoumi Foundation
- Emirates Publishers Association

Individuals:

Lubna El Khalil, Andree Gaspard, Ghazwa El Amine, Rita Saed, Dana Ballout, Patricia Najib Rahmeh, Omar Traboulsi, Nay Ghanem Hourani, Joumana Ibrahim, Johan Mayer, Christine Fares, Belinda Ibrahim, Rayan Hamadeh, Fanny HOCDE, Micheline Brule, Veronique Schlumberger, Katharina Hinze, de Labretoigne, Antonis Schwarz, Alix Pincivy, Diane Shaw, Serena Chester, Ryuichiro Takahashi, Fadi Kerbaj, Charles Stewart, Jonathan A Feakins, Joanne Rechdan, Thomas Pizard, Promeyrat Sandrine, Rima Mokaiesh, Martin Dudek, Rawi Hage, Jestaz Laure, Haya Farah, Daniel Le Goff, Tarek Da., Celia I Jaber, Sara Giannini, Nicole Nadeau, Sofie Falkenbach, Meriam Vicken, Rym Zakaria, Fadi Kerbaj, Sarah Shtakleff, Lama Saleh, Marcia Lynx Qualey, Marina Tolchinsky, Jada Gardner, Sabine Shtakleff, Dr G.J. Roper, Genevieve Beaudry, Karim Seikaly, Nadia Muijers, Zeina Ibrahim, Lorine Atoui, Farah assir, Scott Rogers, Meryl Haddad, Eliza J McLeod, Evan Lindbergh, May Khalife, Rachit Shah, Mary Choueiter, Tania El Khoury, Joseph Monardo, Talia Souki, Carleigh Oeth, Doan Nguyen, Peter Snowdon, Trevor Janega, Hassan kanaan, Titus Nouwens, Claude Habayeb, Charles Krasun, Raghiida jamil elrahbani, Ziad Habayeb, Danielle Chagnon, Marie, D. Martel, Henriette Minvielle, Ibrahim Zakhour, Jose Cortez, Marc Saliba, Talha Cicek, Michael Gluenz, Михаил Афанасьев, John Sinclair, Michelle Warde, Jevoux Pasledonner, Kaitlyn Majesky, Ford McDonald, Mariem kastally, Sally Zacharias, Luisa Elena Mengoni, Odile DUPONT, Tomasz Szepinski, Lydia Wright, Adi Keinan-Schoonbaert, Nabil Estefan, Jad Hachem, David Hirsch, Ellen Forsyth, Nagham Duhaini, Carola Wagner, Robin Kear, Elias Nasr, Alex Winder, Rejean Savard, Robert Chlala, Milena Dobrava, Saif A.H. Aljabri, Haifa Boutros, Maia Tabet, Dima A. Boulad, Andree de Bustros, Rached Majzoub, Manal Haidostan, Christina Auliker, Corinne Thor.

Many thanks to ASSABIL sponsors:

The Municipality of Beirut, Governor of Beirut, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - AFAC, Culture Resource, Taawon, Institut Français du Liban, Goethe Institute-Lebanon, GIZ, Secours Catholique - Caritas France, UNICEF, Ministry of Culture.





FROM OUR STAFF

Introducing New Team Member

ASSABIL is happy to announce the addition of Patricia Rahme to our team!

Patricia began her career in librarianship in 2005, holding many positions in different academic libraries and information centers in Lebanon. She has been a lecturer in Library and Information Science in the Faculty of Information at the Lebanese University since 2014, where she also served as Head of Information Management Department and Coordinator of the Information Science Master's Program. She holds a PhD in Information and Communication Science from the University of Jean Moulin in France. Her research interests lie in the area of open governmental data, school libraries, and information literacy. In December 2020, Patricia joined the ASSABIL team and was appointed Beirut Public Libraries Coordinator.

Quotes From ASSABIL Staff

Members of our staff have shown great resilience and dedication to ASSABIL's mission. Therefore, we felt it appropriate to share their words of how they overcame the challenges we all faced during 2020 throughout this year's annual report.



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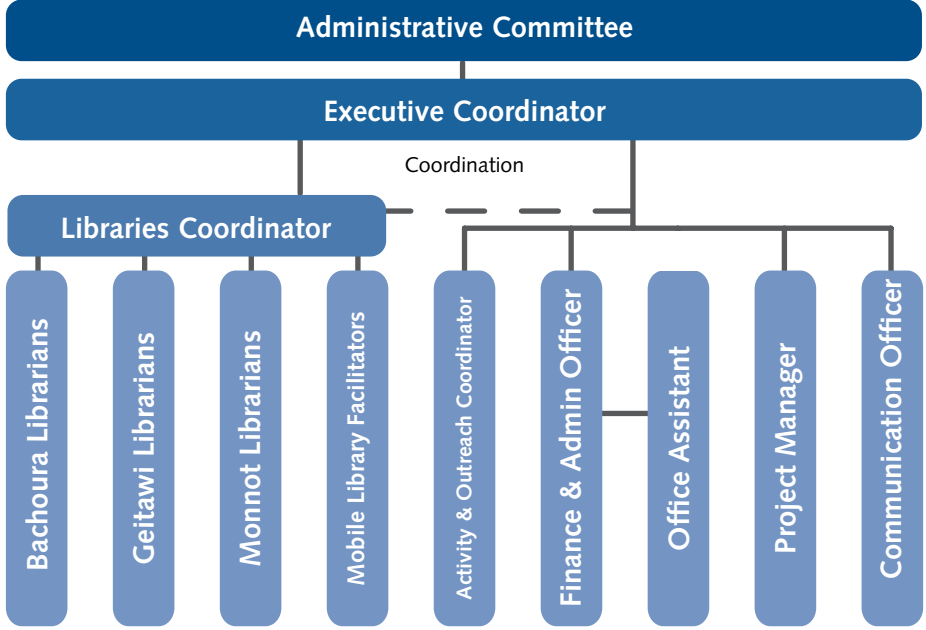
Beyond the human tragedy, the Lebanese economy plunged into a financial crisis that resulted from a sudden stop in capital inflows, foreign exchange flows dried up and the currency collapsed & slid hysterically.

As a financial officer at Assabil Association, I faced many obstacles due to this economic recession which was accompanied by high prices, inflation and an average of three different dollar rates: in banks, money changers & the black-market causing difficulties in projects expenditures & reporting.

*Desirée Aoun
Finance and Admin Officer*

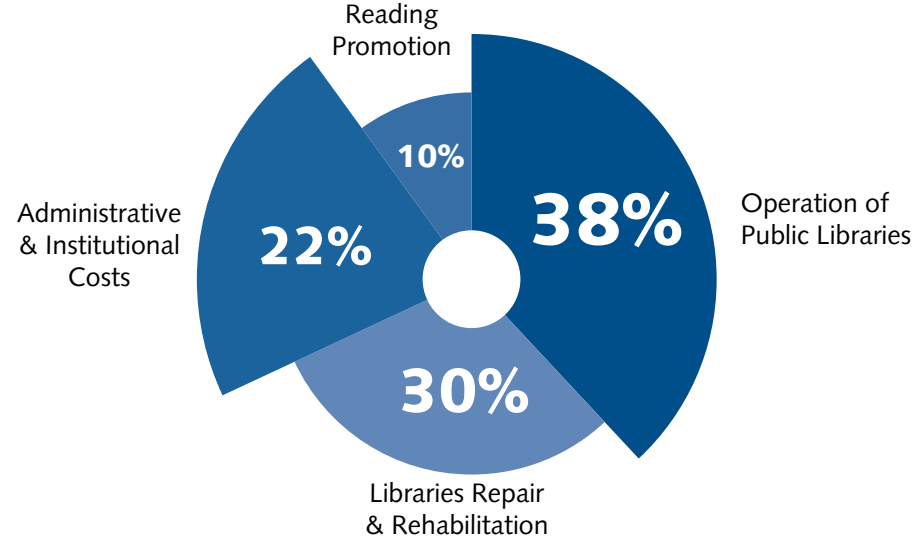
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ORGANIZATION AND FINANCES



Annual Budget

The total annual budget of 2020 was 440,277.00 USD.
The following is the breakdown:



ASSABIL

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