



**ASSABIL, Friends of Public Libraries Association**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2014**





# Word from the President

As a prelude to this annual report, I would like to share five strategic axes around which the association's work pivots essentially since the Administrative Committee, that I have the honour to preside, took office:

- First: Replacing reading and the development of public reading at the centre of the concerns of the association.
- Second: Developing actions and projects targeting displaced and disadvantaged populations.
- Third: Deploying significant efforts to engage our libraries in the technological and digital age.
- Finally: Implementing an active fundraising policy directed at local donors and sponsors.
- Internally: Taking a number of measures and reforms aiming to institutionalize a smooth and peaceful functioning of the association.

I take this opportunity to praise the increasingly large skills of our staff members as attested by several testimonies of our partners and to thank them for their outstanding qualities.



# ASSABIL at a Glance

We are guided in our work by the 1994

UNESCO Public Library Manifesto:

“Freedom, prosperity, and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture, and information. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO’s belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.”

## Who we are

ASSABIL is a non-governmental association founded in 1997 to establish and promote public libraries in Lebanon that are free and open to all.

We believe that public libraries play an important role in the development of individuals and societies. Free and unlimited access to information is an essential prerequisite for the development of a well-informed citizenry and democratic society. Public libraries are also important public spaces: places where everyone is welcome and where people from different socioeconomic, religious, and political backgrounds can meet one another and exchange ideas.

## Our Objectives

- Establishing, promoting, and supporting a network of public libraries throughout Lebanon
- Promoting a love of reading among children, youth and adults
- Sponsoring cultural and social activities that encourage people to come to the library
- Establishing a training program for librarians and others who work in libraries
- Encouraging the production of books and educational materials in Arabic – especially for children

## What we do

- We establish and manage Beirut’s three Municipal Public Libraries: Bachoura (since 2000), Geitawi (since 2004) and Monnot (since 2008)
- We coordinate and support a network of public libraries throughout Lebanon
- We organize activities for people of all ages
- We manage a Resource and Training Center (since 2009)
- We provide consultancy services to those working in libraries and to individuals and associations interested in establishing new libraries
- We publish materials related to the establishment and management of public libraries

## Where we work:

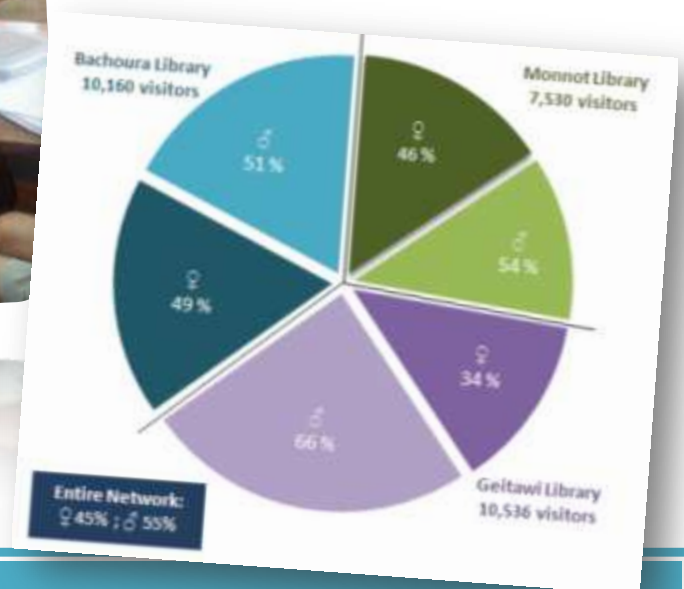
ASSABIL directly manages the municipal public libraries of Beirut and our mobile library serves the northern and southern suburbs of the capital.

Through our support to our network of partner libraries, we reach out to all regions of Lebanon.

# Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut

In 2014, the Beirut Municipal Public Libraries have:

- ☑ Received more than **28,200 visitors**
- ☑ Welcomed more than **2,100 pupils** in more than **138 organized class receptions**
- ☑ Offered **115 weekly storytelling sessions** attended by **1,506 children**
- ☑ Held **62 cultural activities** that were attended by **1,605 participants**
- ☑ Offered **63 workshops and trainings** that were attended by **765 individuals**



The Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut are directly managed and operated by ASSABIL, Friends of Public Libraries Association, financed to xx% by the Municipality of Beirut according to a three years management contract signed between ASSAIBL and the Municipality of Beirut. Other funders that have supported the libraries activities and operation in 2014 include: Heinrich Böll Foundation, Open Society Institute, Ile-de-France Region and the Canada Fund for Local Development.



The Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut are taking stock of an interesting year 2014, a year introducing quite a few changes and new activities based on the work and recommendations of the library development committee that has been installed since 2013.



### • Introducing New Activities

In order to attract new publics and inject new life into the Beirut Municipal Public Libraries, our team has sought in 2014 to install new activities: A **regular reading club in Arabic** is now taking place every month at the Bachoura library; **debate clubs** bringing together youth from various schools from in and around Beirut are organizing various activities and are trained on professional and formal debate techniques at our libraries.

In cooperation with Bank Audi Volunteers, we were also able to open the Bachoura library for **special events for children every first Sunday** of the month.



### • Networked Renting Services

In 2014, we have implemented an improved rental service, adopting one **single library subscriber's card** for all libraries; allowing the rental of 7 documents at any of our libraries with the possibility to return the documents at another library. Our subscribers are happily using this new service which had a very positive impact on our book rentals.

## • **New Competences**

New services and new activities also need new competences from our librarians. 2014 has been a year of **intensive trainings** of our library staff focusing in particular on the potential and **possibilities of technology and the internet**. All our librarians have been trained on the availability and **potentials of e-resources** and **open access resources** available for free, as well as multimedia activities that are offered to our visitors.

## • **Renewing and Improving IT infrastructure**

2014 saw the improvement of the IT infrastructure at our libraries. Thanks to the support of the Municipality of Beirut as well as the Canada Fund for Local Development, our libraries' computer stations and networking installations have been considerably improved to offer better services to our users.

## • **Improving the Integration of Syrian Refugees at the Libraries**

Given the tensions among Lebanese and Syrian library users that were reported to us from Beirut as well as other libraries throughout Lebanon, we have sought to introduce activities that aim at **bringing together children and youth of Lebanese and Syrian origins** around **creative activities**. Thanks to the support of the Canadian Embassy Fund for Local Development we were also able to offer **training to our librarians** on how to deal with tensions among their users and **how to address incidents of discrimination** occurring at the libraries.



## • **Renewing the Library Collection**

After a couple of years during which our users could only benefit from new additions to our libraries' collections thanks to the donations of private individuals, our acquisition committee was able to **purchase novelties in 3 languages**. It was the first big task of the newly appointed acquisition committee, regrouping our librarians based on a systematic needs assessment and applying a rational acquisition policy. These new arrivals were financed by Open Society Institute, Canada Fund for Local Development, Heinrich Böll Foundation as well as the Ile-de-France Region.





# Kotobus - Our Mobile Library

ASSABIL's Kotobus – our mobile library – is moving to offer its services and activities there were permanent public libraries are missing – mainly in **public and semi-private schools** in and around Beirut.



## • Working with Schools

In 2014 the Kotobus-team focused again on activities **promoting a love of reading** among primary school students as well as introducing **research and debate skills among secondary class students** in more than 10 schools thanks to the funding of the Open Society Institute. The activities benefitted more than 1300 students with whom the Kotobus team worked on a regular basis throughout the year and resulted in the creation of permanent debate clubs at the Beirut Municipal Public Libraries.



## • Collaboration with Bank Audi volunteering program

In cooperation with the volunteer service from Bank Audi, our Kotobus has visited the **SOS center in Batroun** as well as the **Children's Cancer Center at the American University of Beirut** featuring **storytelling** and **puppet show** activities for the children.



# 'Hors les murs' - Horsh Beirut Festival

The annual '**Horsh Beirut Festival**' has seen its **4th edition in 2014** and has marked its existence on the map of permanent cultural events accessible to everybody in Beirut. Awaited by many visitors to previous editions and attended by many more that have been attracted to the event by **street artists** publicizing the upcoming cultural manifestations in public spaces throughout Beirut, the Festival has attracted more than **2,000 visitors on 2 consecutive days**. Unfortunately, the third and last day had to be cancelled due to bad weather.

The organization of the Horsh Beirut Festival has become one of ASSABIL's main activities outside of the libraries – an event that takes our cultural activities to other public spaces of the city reaching out to a larger number of people.

The 2014 edition of the Horsh Festival was possible thanks to the contributions of the Ile-de-France Region, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Makhzoumi Foundation, Welfare Association.





# ASSABIL Resource and Training Center

## • Developing Public Libraries all over Lebanon

ASSABIL's Resource and Training Center located at our offices in the Ras el-Nabeh neighborhood of Beirut, is offering its services to the development and improvement of public library services throughout Lebanon. In 2014, the Resource Center has organized **6 intensive professional training sessions** benefiting Librarians from Beirut as well as partner libraries throughout Lebanon. Currently, ASSABIL has signed partnership agreements with 26 public libraries.

Partner libraries benefit from **training sessions, expertise, and book distributions**. They have also rented **book exhibits** and **activity toolkits** from the Center to offer new and different kinds of activities to their public.



# Partnerships

2014 saw the beginning and intensification of new partnerships and cooperation agreements with several Partner Institutions and Associations:

- **A Lasting Partnership for the Development of Public Libraries in Palestinian Refugee Camps**

With the aim of developing and improving **7 existing public libraries in Palestinian Camps** all over Lebanon, ASSABIL has signed a new and enlarged agreement with the Welfare Association through which ASSABIL providing important **expertise and consultancy** services, including among others **trainings for library staff** and recommendations on **collection development**. ASSAIBL is also in charge of organizing **cultural activity programs** in the public libraries of Bourj El-Chemali, Nahr el Bared, Baddawi, Rachidiyeh, Bourj al-Barajneh, Ain el-Helweh and Al-Bass.



- **Cooperation with the City of Marseille:**

ASSABIL has formalized a new cooperation with the City of Marseille, in partnership with the Municipality of Beirut, aiming at the development and improving of our library network in Beirut. In 2014, ASSABIL has welcomed an **expert mission** consulting on the possibilities, potentials and limitations of **open source library management** systems as well as **digital services** in the library operation. A **South-South-Exchange** between library practitioners from Beirut, Brazil, Egypt and Marseille has also been prepared and will take place in Marseille in April 2015.

- **Libraries without Border – Bringing the Ideasbox to Lebanon**

A memorandum of understanding was signed between Libraries without Borders and ASSABIL concerning the joint efforts that are undertaking to bring the **Ideasbox** – a mobile library system developed by *Libraries Without Borders* – to Lebanon to serve refugee populations as well as vulnerable and deprived members of the host community.



## COBIAC – Multimedia Activities at Public Libraries Throughout Lebanon

In cooperation with Cobiac (Collectif des Bibliothécaires et Intervenants en Action Culturelle), ASSABIL has developed a **Capacity Building** Project for Librarians from all over Lebanon which is currently being financed by the European Union. In this framework, 24 librarians have been trained on **multimedia activities for youth**, which will be implemented with Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian Youth in 20 libraries throughout Lebanon.

## Working on Communication Items for our Libraries with ALBA

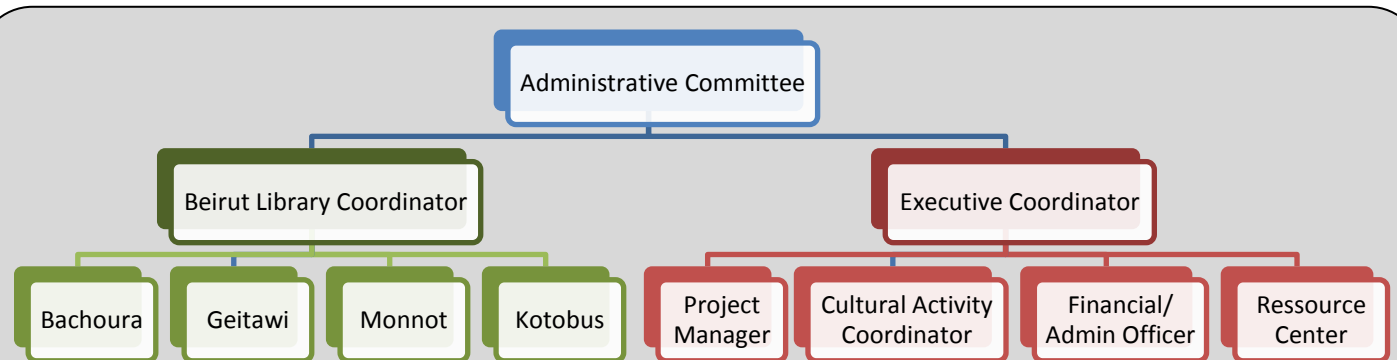
ASSABIL has established contacts and cooperation with the *Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts* (ALBA) concerning the conceptualization, design and production of visuals promoting and documenting our public libraries. Students of graphic design and film-making are hence currently working on **poster campaigns** for our libraries that will serve to increase our public visibility in 2015.





# New Organizational Chart

Since the end of 2013, the Administrative Committee has implemented a new organizational chart for ASSABIL, redistributing executive responsibilities and developing detailed TOR for all employees. In the course of 2014, all staff members have participated in systematic evaluations in order to better define job descriptions and to identify needs and expectations regarding trainings.



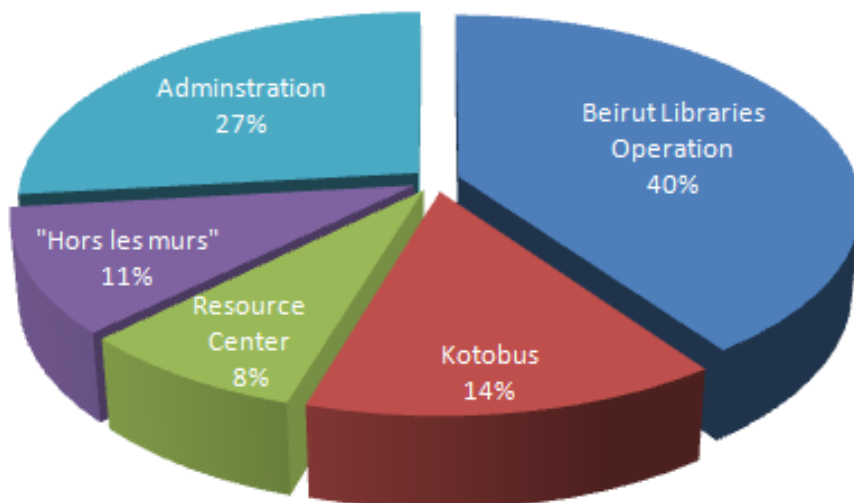
Transversal Committees were put in place ensuring continuous coordination and team work at all levels:



# 2014 Finances

ASSABIL's total expenditure in 2014 amounted to USD 414,260.

## Repartition of Expenditures by Main Activities



## Our Funders and Sponsors in 2014:









Between  
the pages  
of a book is  
a lovely  
place to be.



“The library is not  
only a fun place to  
go, it's a place to  
connect, to share,  
to grow & help  
others expand  
their horizons.”  
-Lynne T.



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