

REBUILD PROJECT



The REBUILD project exemplifies an innovative approach to resilience-building in fragile environments, particularly in Libya, where the political landscape is complex and volatile. Initiated in the framework of the Nicosia Initiative by the European Committee of the Regions, REBUILD focuses on fostering long-term, sustainable development through peer-to-peer partnership.

REBUILD's unique partnership approach to resilience

REBUILD is not a typical project focused on short-term outputs; instead, it is a process-driven partnership designed to build mindsets and systems across ten Libyan municipalities. The project emphasizes the importance of partnership-building, systemic change, and continuous support. Unlike traditional development projects, REBUILD prioritizes the cultivation of local governance capacities and the strengthening of relationships between Libyan and European partners.

Key to this approach is the transversality of the project, which serves all partner municipalities regardless of political divisions. This feature has fostered trust among partners, consolidated relationships, and laid the groundwork for territorial resilience and solidarity during challenging times. The presence of a Liaison Manager in Europe, who speaks Arabic and understands the political sensitivities, along with a Project Coordinator in Libya, has been crucial in navigating the complex political landscape and ensuring the project's adaptability to changing circumstances.

For example, when the Government of National Unity was established in Libya, unifying the eastern and western ministries, REBUILD adapted by involving the Ministry of Local Government, facilitating dialogue and minimizing potential conflicts over the concept of decentralized partnership.

Capacity building and training

Capacity building and training are central pillars of the REBUILD project, recognized as essential for empowering local administrations to lead development processes. The project has successfully conducted training at the local level through ten Libyan universities, strengthening the relationship between municipalities and academic institutions.

One particularly impactful initiative was the two one-week summer schools organized abroad, which combined theoretical training with practical case studies from European contexts. These study visits and guided discussions have led to tangible outcomes, such as the establishment of a recycling tires facility in Benghazi, which began as a direct result of insights gained during the summer school in Trento.

The REBUILD project has also transformed local mindsets regarding the value of training. Initially, there was scepticism among mayors and municipal officers about the relevance of capacity building.

However, as demonstrated by the Mayor of Tobruk, who became a strong advocate of training after witnessing improvements in municipal performance, the project has successfully changed perceptions and attitudes towards the importance of continuous learning.



Fostering collaboration and trust

REBUILD has played a significant role in fostering collaboration and trust among local stakeholders, including municipalities, civil society, and the private sector. The project emphasizes the Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD), which involves structured partnerships with local stakeholders and encourages multi-actor synergies.

A notable example of this collaborative approach is the pilot project on fishery sector development. In Zliten, the Mayor brought together fishery entrepreneurs from multiple municipalities to establish a coordination mechanism aimed at optimizing efforts for the achievement of the Eurocode for Libyan fish exports to the EU. Similarly, in Tobruk, the municipality worked with various fishermen's associations to systematize data and reduce negative competition, highlighting the project's success in promoting joint efforts and fostering sustainable development.

Overcoming challenges

Implementing the REBUILD project in a fragile environment like Libya has not been without its challenges. Financial transfers from Europe to Libyan bank accounts were initially hindered by international controls and embargoes. The project overcame this obstacle by partnering with a financial intermediary and relying on the strong solidarity and proactive approach of its local partners.

Another challenge was managing the relationship with central government institutions, which were not accustomed to municipalities taking a leadership role in international cooperation projects. The Liaison Manager and Project Coordinator played a crucial role in mediating these relationships, but most of all the strong commitment of mayors and municipal officers has ensured that the project remained aligned with local priorities while navigating the complexities of decentralization.

The fast-changing context of Libya also required a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. For instance, the shift in focus from waste management to water quality monitoring was necessary to ensure the project's relevance to the local context. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances has been key to the project's continued success.



Lessons learned

The REBUILD project offers several key lessons that can be applied to similar contexts elsewhere:

1. **Transversality and Multilevel Dialogue:** Maintaining a multilevel dialogue with both local municipalities and national authorities is essential for keeping the project relevant and alive, even in politically sensitive environments.
2. **Presence, Patience, and Flexibility:** In conflict-affected settings, it is crucial to remain flexible and patient, adapting plans as needed while maintaining continuous engagement with local partners.
3. **Community of Practice:** Establishing a community of practice minimizes isolation, fosters a sense of belonging, and strengthens the commitment to public interest among participants.
4. **Field Visits:** These reinforce the sense of proximity and value among local partners, boosting motivation and ownership of the project.
5. **Continuity and Communication:** Minimizing turnover among both international partners and project focal points as well as ensuring effective communication across linguistic and cultural barriers are critical for building trust and ensuring the sustainability of the partnership

When it comes to **how CSOs were particularly involved in the projects**, the following results emerge. This focus is relevant considering the paramount role played by CSOs in fragile situations, by providing essential services, advocating for vulnerable populations, and fostering community resilience. Their deep-rooted presence within communities allows them to understand and address local needs effectively, bridging gaps where government and larger institutions might fall short. CSOs facilitate social cohesion by engaging diverse stakeholders and promoting inclusive participation, which is vital for maintaining stability. Additionally, they serve as critical watchdogs, ensuring accountability and transparency in crisis management efforts.

The data from the survey reveal that a **varying number of CSOs addressing resilience and fragility have benefited from project support**, with most falling within the 1-25 range. The qualitative data also provides concrete examples of how partnerships have added value in reaching out to CSOs. The added value includes improved community engagement and social cohesion, leveraging the expertise of various stakeholders, and tailored strategies to fit local contexts.