

AIN KANI DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

AIN KANI - TOWARDS A MODEL VILLAGE

A Preliminary Assessment of Economic and Social Needs of
Ain Kani, Elchouf, Lebanon¹

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1. PRELUDE

The “glory” of Ain Kani is its past when the economy depended on agriculture. Ain Kani produced and exported, among other things, scores of tons of silk and of olive oil which kept 2 olive presses busy. Politically, Lebanon (Ain Kani included) enjoyed relative freedom. With this favorable atmosphere, the “elite” of Ain Kani did not emigrate but stayed and worked home strengthening the local economy and cultural life. On the contrary to that, and due to the stagnant economy, the present elite of business and educated people find themselves obliged to leave Ain Kani, even Lebanon, and emigrate to the Arabian Gulf, Europe and the Americas seeking a better and more secure life.

With frequent civil wars, bad politics and neglect, the economy of Ain Kani deteriorated: the olive presses stopped, cultivation of silk worms ceased, berry trees and their fruit trees replacement dried and died, and other food manufacturing like molasses stopped. Youth and social programs also deteriorated: boy and girl scouts programs were discontinued, the only school closed

¹ This report was written following a meeting with Mrs. Rola Majdalani and Dr. MahaYahya at the ESCWA building in Beirut. I was frank in telling them that I have little experience in such reporting, but I was very sincere in finding a way through ESCWA to help my village Ain Kani. We agreed that as a start, I write whatever comes to my mind, and they look at the content rather than the style. With this understanding, I am presenting this report full with hope that positive results will come up and Ain Kani will be helped.

down, the “Heroes”, a top ranked volleyball team in the area, lost its sponsors and was dissolved, so did the Cultural Society of Fraternity and Equality and its Orchestra, once the pride of Ain Kani.

Such deterioration in village life should not be allowed to continue, it should be stopped and deterioration reversed. Thus the challenge now to us and to all NGOs is to search for ways and means to convince the villagers to stay in their land and houses and improve their conditions, and better still, how to convince those villagers who left to return back. This is why the Ain Kani Development Society is formed and the assistance of ESCWA is requested via this report.

2. INTRODUCTION

To properly assess the socio-economic needs of Ain Kani, a team of MAADATA Statistical Consulting Center, Mrs. Umayma Yamut and Miss Ghada Hakim, was asked to conduct a survey of the population and identify such needs. In the meantime, in order to prepare this report, a focus group of the community leaders was hosted to help obtain an interim assessment of such community needs and their priorities.

Few estimated facts to put on focus:

Total number of inhabitants	2,600
Number of voters	1,200
Number of women voters	605
Schools	None
Infirmaries	None
Municipality	Governor + 9 members
Selectman	Selectman + 3 members
Consolidated Villages in Upper Chouf	12
Number of inhabitants in Upper Chouf	35,000 – 40,000

3. PROBLEMS

3.1 The Forest of Ain Kani (The Horsh)

The Forest, better known as “The Horsh of Ain Kani” forms the boundary line between Ain Kani and Baadaran. The terrain is very steep and the elevation above sea level drops almost vertically from 950 m adjacent to Baadaran to 902 m at upper Ain Kani to 850 m at the Midan (Main Street). This steep slope is not accessible except for a trail connecting Ain Kani with the Monastery of Qataleb in Baadaran. In 1946 the community ownership of the Horsh was divided among the families of Ain Kani into individual ownerships to facilitate the use of its trees for fire wood. Fortunately the people of Ain Kani were mature enough to realize that if the Horsh loses its trees, many of them would lose their house by loose rocks rolling down the steep slope.

The Forest is known for its red trees called Qatlab. It bears small red fruits similar to grapes and known for their medical benefits. Other trees are mainly oak trees.

The Forest is living naturally without any interference, good or bad, from Man. This is positive in a way as man’s interference is usually negative.

3.2 The Springs (Oyoun)

There are 7 springs in Ain Kani: Ain El-Sheikh, Ain El-Awather, Ain El-Deep, Ain El-Halazoon, Ain El-Mighraka, Ain Watamaraya, Ain Al-Howar. All of these springs were flowing 40 years ago. As dwellings increased and spread, the water of the springs became less and less abundant and its suitability for human consumption became questionable. The springs died and with their “death” much of plant life and irrigated land died too. Ain El-Awather for example was the main source of potable water until “piped water” reached Ain Kani in 1967 from the Barouk River. There is even

lack of emergency water in case the pipeline from the Barouk River is discontinued for any reason.

3.3 The Mills

There were 7 Mills in Ain Kani at one time working with water and animal power. They used to process olives turning them into oil, wheat turning it into flour, grapes turning it into molasses. With the death of the agriculture economy, the Mills lost their market and stopped operation. Currently, they are in a miserable condition: ruined and deserted, many are turned into houses and their history is lost with them. Hundreds of years of “factory” heritage have been lost in few years of neglect.

In summary, all the mills are damaged beyond repair and human imagination can bring them to “virtual” life again.

3.4 Agriculture

Agriculture has been the backbone of the economy of the Chouf area since time immemorial and is now losing ground to neglect and absence of economic planning. Agriculture is the anchor of people to their land, but the anchor in Ain Kani and the Chouf in general is shallow, as the slopes are difficult to cultivate by machinery and are expensive to cultivate by hand. Another drawback is the competition from subsidized products imported from neighboring countries. All these factors contribute to the migration of people into the city or to foreign land.

3.5 Waste Collection and Disposal

In 1998, Ain Kani executed a waste water network to collect the waste water and transport it to a treatment plant shared with neighboring towns of Upper Chouf. Septic tanks were discontinued and house waste water was connected directly to the network. As a result, the ground water started to get clean. However, in recent years, Ain Kani expanded southward away

from the network with new dwellings discharging their water directly to the river; thus contaminating surface and ground water once again.

3.6 Workplace for Women

In a conservative society like ours, it is difficult and limiting for women looking for a job to find one that meets their expectations or needs. This situation often leads to misery, if a certain woman is divorced or remains single living with her parents or older brother after her parents pass away. This sensitive issue needs to be handled with care especially when we know that tolerance of social “misbehavior” of women in these communities approaches zero to protect family “honor”. Any misconduct or even a rumor of such conduct can lead to death punishment to the woman. Fortunately this dark picture is not common in Ain Kani and its surrounds but remains in the sub conscience of many. It is the duty of the whole society to change these norms of behavior. But until then, and in trying to create job opportunities for women, their welfare should be given prime consideration in order to reduce their misery.

3.7 The Youth & Community Center

The youth of Ain Kani share the same problems with the youth of the Chouf and many parts of Lebanon, namely, lack of facilities to fill their free time with meaningful activities instead of falling victims to social and psychological problems, school desertion, violence and probably drugs. Ain Kani in particular lacks a Community Center to promote indoor activities such as lectures, exhibitions, competitions, etc... The building that was built by donations in the early eighties to be an elementary public school is still incomplete and deserted. This building could be used as a Youth and Community Center. The Ministry of Education adopted a policy to centralize the schools in rural areas and the students of Ain Kani attend schools in the neighboring villages (Ammatour, Mokhtara, or Khraibi).

3.8 Traffic Blocking on Main Street

Weddings in Ain Kani and other towns in the Chouf and Lebanon usually take place on weekend summer days. Roads that connect the towns together pass through the Main Streets of the towns. Therefore, any traffic disruption leads to a traffic jam.

In Ain Kani, the entrance to the Town Hall is from the Main Street. As the parade of the bride and groom arrives to the village, the couple gets out of their ride and walk to the Town Hall accompanied by the orchestra and about hundred persons singing and clapping. Leading the parade is a band of dancers and sometimes dancing horses which perform a show before entering the Town Hall for the reception. This process (except the reception) takes about 30 minutes and traffic on the road is blocked during this period. It is not difficult to imagine what happens next. To avoid embarrassment and possible fights between the rejoicing band in Ain Kani and men, women and children packed in their cars and travelling through the village, a solution for the traffic and parking on the Main Street should be found.

3.9 Outdoor Sports Facilities

There are no facilities good enough to attract the youth and absorb their free time and energy. The playground of the incomplete school building serves as a school yard more than a sports facility. Borket El Aroos, was till the sixties, the swimming pool for competition among the youth in swimming and diving. Now its water is contaminated by sewage disposal and its road is closed by shrubs and is not accessible to the citizen of Ain Kani.

3.10 Job Opportunities

Lack of identification of job opportunities is leading to high unemployment which is the essence of social problems.

4. SOLUTIONS

4.1 The Forest

Positive interference is needed to reduce the risk of any disastrous encounter with nature. There is a need to introduce a protection mechanism to allow fire fighters to perform their job, such as trails, helicopter pads, water outlets for the use of fire engines, and trained fire fighters.

Initially, there is a need to conduct a study that would identify safety measures to keep the Horsh protected. The study should take the following points into consideration:

- Fire water system including fire hydrants to provide large quantities of water to fire trucks;
- Training young people on fire prevention, fire fighting and safety measures;
- Trails to enable rescuers to reach the burning areas;
- Nearby helicopter pads; and
- Cutting the dead trees and branches and carting them away.

In addition to fire protection, the Horsh needs yearly pruning and periodic checking for unhealthy growth and any type of botanical diseases.

4.2 The Springs

These springs are essential to life in Ain Kani in case the “piped” water from the Barouk River is somehow interrupted. To prepare these springs to become operational, there is a need to conduct a technical study to address the following:

- Locate the sources of springs;

- Measure their capacity;
- Test contamination and suitability for human consumption;
- Identify means to protect the springs; and
- Identify ways to make the location of springs accessible by car.

4.3 The Mills

To prepare these mills to become a touristic value and part of a culture, there is a need to conduct a study that undertakes the following:

- Locate and make an inventory of the original structures or parts;
- Draw sketches of the mills showing the original structures;
- Open roads to allow easy access; and
- Include the mills in any Ain Kani heritage publication.

4.4 Agriculture

Ain Kani asks specialized local and international NGOs to research methods and types of agriculture that would provide better income to the farmers and tempt them to stay in their homes and cultivate their land.

We look forward to starting such a program in Ain Kani as a center of agricultural development. Initially, a study should be conducted to address the following:

- Nursery: start an agricultural nursery for research and development;
- Research, testing and advising: start a research project to find the optimum product to be planted, and then educate the villagers on how to handle this product. Plants that might be of economic interest: roses and medical plants; and

- Roads: surface the existing roads and open new roads to enable each person to reach his land by car

4.5 The Youth & Community Center

The Elementary School building in Ain Kani, if completed, can be a community center to house many activities such as computer room, ladies section, adult education, address learning disabilities in young children. There is a need to conduct a study to address the following:

- Identifying the functions needed;
- Designing the interior to become suitable for the intended functions;
- Completing the interior finishing work (plaster, paint, etc.);
- Identifying the required equipment for the functions; and
- Training on the functions.

4.6 Outdoor Sports Center

Football, volleyball and basketball are the most popular sports among the Ain Kani youth. Providing the land is the most important issue, and if done, the activities can be easily arranged. Locating the piece of land is in process.

4.7 Waste Collection and Disposal

This issue should be studied with the Ministry of Interior and Centralized Office of the Municipalities of Upper Chouf.

4.8 Identification of Areas of Job Opportunities

There is a need to conduct a study that identifies job opportunities that encourage the people of Ain Kani to stay on the land and to attract immigrants to return to their village.

5. PHOTOS



Ain El-Awather



Ain El-Sheikh



Mill for Wheat and Olive Oil



The Horsh



Youth and Community Center



Ain Kani Orchestra, taken in 1930