

STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Feminist Emergency Response During the 2024 Israeli War on Lebanon



Introduction

This anthology is produced by the We Lead programme in Lebanon. It includes short stories of eight feminist activists who played an instrumental role in supporting displaced communities during the Israeli aggression on Lebanon from September to November 2024.

Through this documentation, we aim to celebrate the vital work of feminist activists in crises and to highlight the obstacles grassroots groups and individuals face amid the violence of war. We also aim to examine relief efforts amid conflict and funding shortages to formulate recommendations for donors and organisations to better support feminist grassroots groups.

The feminist activists interviewed share their stories and advocate for a better funding ecosystem that addresses the needs of Lebanon's volatile environment. In situations of intense conflict like war, programming and investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH-R) programmes is vital to safeguard the dignity and rights of women and girls and to ensure their health needs remain a priority. These narratives employ a feminist oral history approach, drawing on interviews with eight activists from seven organisations across diverse regions of Lebanon. The organisations and collectives are Jeyetna, SAMA for Development, Mayli Library, Noun Solidarity, I'm Possible, Gharsah, and Haki Nasawi. They are part of the We Lead Community of Action in Lebanon, a five-year sub-granting programme aimed at promoting the SRH-R of all young women and gender non-conforming individuals through advocacy and capacity building.

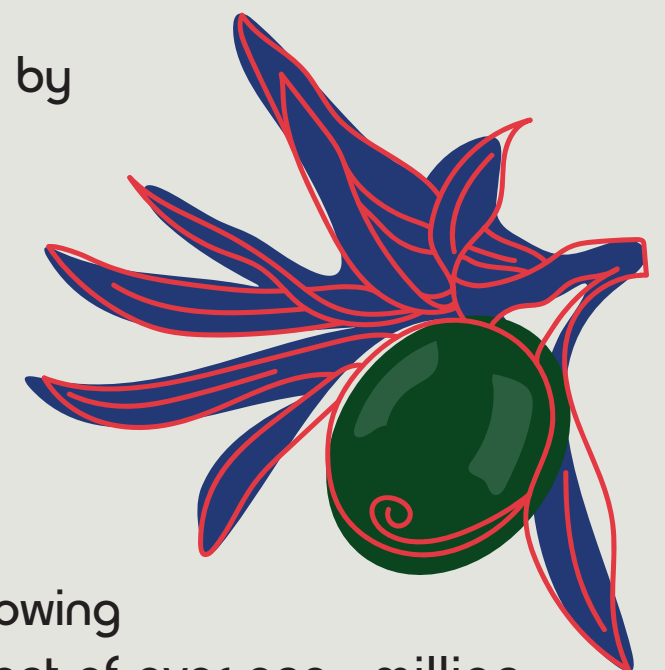
The interviews were conducted between November 2024 and February 2025 by writer and consultant Hachem Hachem and researcher Yara Assaad.

The stories were written by Hachem Hachem, and the document was edited by Nour Nahhas, the Community of Action facilitator of We Lead.

What happened during the war?

On 23 September 2024, Israel launched a military offensive on Lebanon following eleven months of aggression on the southern border. This led to the displacement of over one million people from their homes in South Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and the Bekaa Valley; many had already been displaced multiple times since October 2023. Before the escalation, the Lebanese government's emergency plan announced an emergency readiness to support internally displaced populations with shelter and aid. However, this plan was fraught with gaps and shortcomings, particularly regarding the explicit exclusion of internally displaced Syrian refugees and migrants.

The war left unimaginable destruction. The country's power and water infrastructure was extensively damaged, with repair costs estimated at 160\$ million. At least 99,000 housing units were either fully destroyed or partially damaged. A number of hospitals and clinics were targeted, causing the health sector to suffer losses exceeding 74\$ million. Lebanon continues to grapple with compounded crises, requiring extensive support to recover and rebuild.



Following the ceasefire that entered into effect on 27 November 2024, the Lebanese parliament elected a new president, and a prime minister was appointed. While the political deadlock in Lebanon is potentially coming to an end, Israeli forces remain in five strategic points in the South of Lebanon, after withdrawing from most villages. This occupation is viewed to last until Israel deems that the Lebanese government has fully abided by the terms of the ceasefire agreement, particularly through the complete withdrawal of Hezbollah from south of the Litani River.



Amidst violence and destruction, what role did feminist organising play?

Feminist organisations and collectives supported their communities throughout decades of crisis, situating themselves as important and reliable actors in Lebanon. Their role involved policy advocacy, material support, service provision, consciousness raising, political learning, and movement building. Feminist work is present in a variety of sectors such as health, education, public policy, urban affairs, environmental issues, political participation, protection and entrepreneurship. Feminist efforts have evolved from mere mainstreaming to serving as the primary guiding framework for action, strategy, and planning across both civil society and the public sector. Feminist practice is an eclectic, comprehensive and materialist one by nature. This allows it to immediately assess emerging vulnerability and structurally respond to it. Additionally, the identity attachments and lived experiences of feminist organisers supported the in-depth understanding of their social, economic and political environment, making interventions organic, structural, and deeply political, without having to label them as such. Feminist organisers work tirelessly to improve the present and future of their communities. They come from towns and cities where they feel a sense of belonging. They have loved ones in towns utterly destroyed by Israeli bombardment, know people who fled their homes overnight, and they themselves were among those people.

The sense of responsibility, duty and care that feminist organisers and activists continuously demonstrate is a political and affective process that requires infrastructure that can maintain it and support its flourishing.

