

Sabre Foundation/ASSABIL Book Program in Lebanon: Over 6,000 New Books and CD-ROMs Distributed to Libraries throughout the Country in 2007

A Report

Overview

In June 2007, Sabre Foundation's partner in Lebanon, ASSABIL, received a shipment of 6,644 new books and CD-ROMs from Sabre to be distributed to libraries throughout the country. In addition to the shipment, Sabre also provided ASSABIL with a \$2,000 grant to help offset some of the costs associated with distributing the materials throughout Lebanon. ASSABIL identified books for children and teenagers, fiction and reference books and encyclopedias for adults as priorities for the shipment. Funding for the project was provided by a New York-based foundation.

ASSABIL distributed the books to 24 public libraries in ASSABIL's network of libraries and schools, which includes 18 libraries in villages throughout Lebanon, as well as five public libraries and its Resource and Training Center in the capital, Beirut. In addition, ASSABIL distributed books from the donation to the Arab University in Beirut, the Children's Cancer Center (Toufoula), Beit Aftal Al Somoud Library in Beddawi Camp, Iqra Association, Burj El Brajneh Cultural Center, and to eight libraries operated by the Ministry of Culture in various cities and towns throughout the country. All are institutions that ASSABIL regularly works with and has donated books to in the past. Although ASSABIL donates books primarily to public libraries and public schools, books from the shipment were donated to the Arab University in this case because the Sabre donation included many books for university-aged students. ASSABIL specifically chose the Arab University to receive these books because it is the largest university in Lebanon, and because many of its students come from underserved populations who rely on the university's library as their **only** source for books.

Sabre was introduced to ASSABIL by the U. S. Embassy in Beirut during Executive Director Tania Vitvitsky's visit to Lebanon in February 2005. During her visit — one week after former Prime Minister Hariri's assassination — Ms. Vitvitsky was impressed with the work of ASSABIL in developing the first public library in Beirut. (A tri-lingual lending library that serves Arabic, French and English speakers/readers in a poor part of the city, it attracts a wide clientele.) In the months that followed, the Lebanon book program was conceived, with Sabre

receiving final approval for the project proposal in December 2005. Implementation of the project, however, was seriously interrupted by the outbreak of the 2006 War between Hezbollah and Israel. Finally, in December 2006, Sabre sent an offering list of titles available for selection, based on subject priorities identified by ASSABIL.

ASSABIL – History and Description

ASSABIL (Association des Amis des Bibliothèques Publiques or The Friends of Public Libraries) was founded as an NGO in Lebanon in 1997. Its first priority was to establish public libraries in Beirut. To ensure that public libraries would become a permanent part of the Lebanese landscape, ASSABIL decided to work with the Municipality of Beirut to establish public libraries in the city. ASSABIL believes that this public-private collaboration is essential for the future of public libraries in Lebanon.

In addition to establishing and managing public libraries in Beirut, and coordinating a network of public libraries throughout the country, ASSABIL sponsors a number of activities – including book donations – to ensure that everyone has access to the knowledge they need in order to become well-informed citizens who can participate in the development of society. Book donations, including the books that ASSABIL received from Sabre, play an important role in ASSABIL's efforts to ensure that people are provided with educational resources they need not only to be informed citizens but also to enrich their lives. The books that Sabre donated are being used by students to complete school assignments, by parents who are looking for information about health issues, and by people of all ages who want to participate in the joy of reading.

By ensuring that people of all ages, from different socio-economic backgrounds, and regardless of political affiliation, have access to knowledge and information, ASSABIL plays an invaluable role in the development of a well informed citizenry that can exercise its democratic rights and play an active and effective role in the economic and political development of the country.

The Importance of Sabre's Book Donation for Lebanese Libraries

ASSABIL reports that Sabre's book donation program is particularly valuable to their network of libraries because of the large selection of recently published books for people of all ages, in a wide range of subjects, and because ASSABIL has been able to select the books needed by Lebanese libraries. It was also especially important to ASSABIL that they were able to select and receive so many

recently published reference books for **university** students – many of whom attend universities with inadequate libraries.

ASSABIL works closely with a number of organizations to promote and encourage local publishing houses, where the focus is to encourage the production and publication of books in Arabic – an area in which the needs are enormous. Because the demand for books in English is also very great, and because production of books in English remains, by and large, outside the desired purview of local publishing, the books ASSABIL receives from Sabre fill an especially crucial need and have no adverse effect on local publishing.

Donation Shipment and Distribution

ASSABIL prepared the official documents in advance for their forwarding agent, so that the necessary documents were ready when ASSABIL was informed of the April 2007 shipment date. Given that the customs agency controls book deliveries, often resulting in costly warehousing and unnecessary delays, ASSABIL made sure that their forwarding agent clearly explained that (a) ASSABIL was a non-profit organization, and (b) the shipping container was a donation from the Sabre Foundation to ASSABIL's network of public libraries in Lebanon, and that this donation was intended to serve the public, in general, and university and school students, in particular.

On June 8, 2007, the Mediterranean Shipping Company (Lebanon) informed ASSABIL that the container would arrive the next day. On June 15, the customs officer unsealed the container, checked some boxes of books and re-closed the container. After the physical inspection was complete, the forwarding agent immediately delivered the container directly to ASSABIL's office in Beirut, bypassing the need for a warehouse to store the books. In effect, ASSABIL's office became a temporary storage place for the 6,644 books donated by Sabre. The ASSABIL team checked the boxes to be sure that most of them were sealed (only a few had been opened by the customs officer), and then they moved quickly to verify the inventory.

For two consecutive days, on June 22-23, librarians from the Beirut libraries, members of the ASSABIL Administrative Committee and the Beirut office staff, assisted by independent volunteers, sorted and organized the more than 6,000 books and CD-ROMs that Sabre had donated. Over the next few weeks, the books were distributed according to the recipients' needs and choices to public libraries, schools, universities, Palestinian camps, and associations.

The list of libraries that received books from the Sabre book donation includes: Aley Public Library (Mount Lebanon), Aitite Municipal Public Library (South), ASSABIL Ressource and Training center(Beirut), Baadrane Public Library, Baakline National Public Library (Mount Lebanon), Bablieh Public Library (South), Barouk Public Library (Mount Lebanon) , Batroun Municipal Public library (North), Beit Meri Public Library, Bachoura Public Library (Beirut), Geitawi Municipal Public Library (Beirut), Hamana Public Library (Mount Lebanon), Hermel Public Library (Bekaa), Jezzine (South), Joun Public Library (Mount Lebanon South), Khreybet EL Chouf (Mount Lebanon), Mobile Library (Beirut and its southern suburbs), Monot Public Library (Beirut), Mtein Public Library (Mount Lebanon), Saida Municipal Public Library (South), Safadi Public Library (North), Srifa Public Library (South) and Zahleh Public Library (Bekaa).

In addition to the specific libraries already named in this Report (see Overview, above), ASSABIL distributed books to the Ministry of Culture libraries in Tannourine, Habbouche, Taybe, Achkout, Machta al Hassan, Ber Elias, Tyre, and Kamed El Louz.

Each of the above mentioned libraries received 9 boxes of books. The transportation of the book donation was done by a van driver who visited each of the 18 villages and delivered the boxes to the librarians working in ASSABIL's libraries. Representatives from individual schools, universities and cultural centers came to ASSABIL's office in Beirut to pick up their share of the donation. ASSABIL's Training and Resource Center coordinated the distribution of books, and a member of ASSABIL's team accompanied the van driver to make sure that all libraries received their book donation.

ASSABIL took several steps to safeguard the distribution process and to make sure that books were not stolen or resold. First, members of ASSABIL were directly involved in all stages of the distribution process. In addition, ASSABIL continues to work closely with recipient organizations on a number of initiatives and programs and so are in a position to ensure that the books are being used as they were intended. Finally, the words "Not to be sold" (stamped on all books) and "Gift from Assabil" (stamped on most of the books) ensures that the books are not stolen or resold.

ASSABIL reports that "all libraries, associations, schools, and universities were delighted to receive the valuable Sabre book donation" and "are ready to receive more books from Sabre."

ASSABIL Administrative Structure and Staff

ASSABIL is managed by a seven-member Administrative Committee that includes:

Michele Warde-Fawaz, President; Assistant Professor of Sociology, Saint Joseph University

Nawal Traboulsi, Vice President; Programme Specialist, Regional Programme for the Development of Children's Literature, Anna Lindh Foundation

Ziad Bou Alwan, Treasurer; Architect and Assistant Professor of Architecture, Lebanese University

Lina Tannir, Accountant; Consultant, Ministry of Finance

Clarisse Chebli, Secretary; Librarian

Joe Haddad, Member; Architect

Claude Boustany, Member; Assistant Professor of Social Anthropology, Saint Joseph University.

The office team includes:

Lara Khattab, Project Manager

Doris Summer, Assistant Project Manager

Lama el Zein, Responsible for the Training and Resource Center

Siham Kassouf, Secretary.

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