



ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS SERIES

# IMPACTING POLICIES: WASTE MANAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY IN LEBANON

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# List of Acronyms

CDR	Council for Development and Reconstruction
COED	Cost of Environmental Degradation
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPEN	International Pollutants Elimination Network
ISWM	Integrated Solid Waste Management
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MBT	Mechanical-Biological Treatment
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MP	Member of Parliament
NIMBY	Not in My Backyard
OMSAR	Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform
SWM	Solid Waste Management
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollars
WM	Waste management
WMC	Waste Management Coalition

# 1 Lebanon's Waste Management Problems: A Brief Background

Since 1994, Lebanon's waste management policy has consisted of implementing a series of emergency plans, each partially and poorly executed, and extended until a new crisis emerged. Devoid of any measures to move to long-term, sustainable planning, these local emergency fixes to the lingering waste crisis have incurred high financial costs for citizens as well as negative environmental, health, and safety impacts.

Lebanese citizens are paying a high price for solid waste management (SWM). Lebanon spends \$154.5 to manage every ton of solid waste, compared to Algeria, Jordan, and Syria which spend \$7.22, \$22.8, and \$21.55, respectively (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The solid waste sector ranked first in terms of environment-related government spending in Lebanon, with a total of \$647 million spent between 1998 and 2008 (Arif & Doumani, 2014). Expenditures on SWM reached \$2.2 billion between 1996 and 2015 (Akiki, 2019).

Despite these high expenditures, the cost of environmental degradation (COED) from the solid waste sector was around \$66.5 million (0.2% of national GDP) in 2012 (Arif & Doumani, 2014), increasing to \$200 million (0.4% of GDP) in 2018 (MoE, UNDP, 2019). To date, around 20% of the waste is recovered, out of which only 6% reaches recycling facilities, 36% is landfilled, and 44% is dumped in around 940 open dumps scattered throughout the country (MoE, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, 2020).

At the same time, the private company contracted since 1994 to collect and treat much of Lebanon's waste – Sukleen (part of the Averda Group) – has generated over \$170 million in revenues per year, one of the highest waste management revenues in the world (Chaaban, 2016). Sukleen has held a monopoly in waste management in Beirut and Mount Lebanon since the 1990s, when it won a contract for building, testing, and operating a waste incinerator located in the city of Amrousiyeh. Operation at that site was short-lived as angry residents burned the plant down in 1996, but through other contracts, Sukleen came to handle around 50% of the waste generated nationally, serving around 400 municipalities (Chaaban, 2016). The company's contract was renewed three times by the Council for Development and

Reconstruction (CDR) without an open tender. With each contract renewal, collection and processing fees increased, all paid using transfers from the Independent Municipal Fund, an intergovernmental grant system that disburses taxes and fees to municipalities.

Successive plans for integrated solid waste management (ISWM) – in 2006, 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2019 – never bore fruit. Instead, Sukleen's monopoly persisted in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, with its contracts managed by the central government rather than the municipalities. Meanwhile, in other regions, municipalities and federations of municipalities managed their waste following a decentralized approach, with international aid being channelled to finance Mechanical-Biological Treatment (MBT) plants for sorting and composting, achieving low diversion rates from landfills and dumps (Azzi, 2017).

Lebanon's inadequate waste management policies must be understood in the context of its general policymaking landscape, which is encapsulated in a "politics of exclusion" (Geha C. , 2021). One dimension of exclusion is that of impunity, whereby years can go by without an ISWM plan and environmental crimes can be committed without justice ever being served. The political system that reinforces clientelism in hiring and appointments in government institutions, especially oversight institutions (the Central Inspection Bureau, the Audit Bureau, among others) and the lack of judicial independence weakens accountability. For example, several judicial decisions could not prevent the construction and expansion of the Burj Hammoud and Costa Brava landfills, despite not having approved environmental impact assessments approved by the ministry of environment (MoE) and their violation of applicable laws.

A second dimension of exclusion is the formality of informality. State institutions, parliament, and the cabinet are not the sites of decision-making. Instead, strategic decisions are in the hands of sectarian warlords (zu'ama) or party leaders. This makes accountability hard to implement. For instance, decisions to establish three waste incinerators were not based on scientific grounds, economic feasibility, or actual need, but on quotas and sectarian distribution of state utilities. Moreover, when the Council of Ministers approved the road map for waste management in 2019, they gave several days for the political parties to choose the sites of the incinerators south of Beirut, instead of adopting scientific criteria for the siting of incinerators (Arab Window, 2019).

The third dimension of the politics of exclusion is widespread corruption. Politicians treat public positions and resources as

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their own and use them for clientelism. They have no interest in, nor would they benefit from, any attempt for reform (Geha C. , 2021). The decision to adopt waste incineration, for example, despite several reports stating that it is not the best solution for Lebanon (EU; OMSAR, 2018), was driven by the private benefits some politicians accrued from collaborating with the private sector. Many suspect that a sizeable chunk of Sukleen's revenues was channelled through kickbacks to political leaders to ensure "smooth operations" (Chaaban, 2016). The company's critics often point to its strong links to the Hariri family as an example of corruption and patronage within Lebanon ( Civil Society Knowledge Center, 2016).

Corruption, coupled with negligence and incompetence, has led to persistent waste mismanagement, intensifying citizens' lack of confidence in the state as well as the private sector. The dumping and landfilling of 8090%- of waste without treatment, open burning, odours emitted from the marine landfills and composting plants, and the failure to treat the leachate generated by the landfills have amplified Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) sentiments, with residents strongly opposed to the establishment of SWM facilities in their regions.

Living along with enduring waste mismanagement, civil society has organized several advocacy campaigns throughout the years to push for better practices.

This paper tackles the evolution and role of civil society actors and advocacy campaigns concerning SWM since the 2015 waste crisis. It addresses the organization, advocacy strategies, tools, challenges, adopted roadmaps, and lessons learned from these movements and coalitions, using a comparative analysis between the Harak movement that emerged during the 2015 waste crisis and the Waste Management Coalition that formed in 2017 in the face of persistent waste mismanagement and the government plans to adopt waste incineration.

The main means of data collection for this paper were participant observations of protests, sit-ins, and activities (noting that the author of the paper is a member of the Waste Management Coalition), in addition to personal communications with activists, a review of existing literature and secondary media sources. This paper is also based on interviews and informal discussions with actors in the Harak and the Waste Management Coalition. Preliminary findings were presented during a workshop attended by municipal council members, civil society organizations, international organizations, and researchers to gauge their perspectives on activism and advocacy campaigns starting with the protests of 2015 to date.

## 2 How Lebanese Citizens Mobilized Around Waste Mismanagement: A Timeline

In 1997, the Naameh landfill south of Beirut was established to be operational for six years, until 2003. However, the closure date of the landfill was postponed to 15 July 2015, as Sukleen's contract was being renewed without open tender (Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action , 2019). By 2015, Sukleen was dumping 2,600 tons per day in the Naameh landfill with minimal sorting and recycling (Chaaban, 2016).

In 2013, residents of the villages surrounding the Naameh landfill, suffering from the stench of garbage and negative health effects, started organizing in objection to the landfill. They organized meetings with municipalities and political parties in the regions surrounding the landfill in addition to awareness raising events for local communities (Yehia, 2021). These efforts coalesced to form the Campaign to Close the Naameh Landfill. Activists and community members of the Campaign blocked the road to the Naameh landfill in the summer of 2014. After a brief standoff, the government issued a statement committing to finding an alternative solution in exchange for a one-year grace period from the protesters. By the end of that grace period, in July 2015, there was neither an alternative plan for dumping nor any evidence that the government had tried to devise one (Abu-Rish, 2015).

After studying the waste storage capacity at the facilities operated by Sukleen, campaign members realized that closing the landfill for three days would lead to the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon flooding with waste. Consequently, they decided on the day Sukleen's contract ended to block the road leading to the landfill to ensure its final closure (Yehia, 2021).

With no contract and no place to dispose of the garbage, Sukleen stopped operating in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Waste piled in the streets, and residents began to suffer from the consequences of these unsanitary conditions, as open burning was adopted amidst government indifference. The waste crisis constituted a lever for the manifestation of the worsening political crisis in the country (Kodeih, 2021).

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A wave of protests swept Lebanon in August 2015, a few weeks after the closure of the Naameh landfill. A group of civil society activists launched the You Stink movement in an attempt to politicize the garbage crisis and link it to the corruption of authorities (Kerbage, 2017).

When the garbage crisis emerged, the country had already been suffering a prolonged period of paralysis and dysfunction. Lebanon had been without a president for 14 months as the parliament was disabled by a politically motivated lack of quorum to elect a president. At the same time, the Lebanese parliament voted to extend its mandate (Kraidy, 2016).

As Kraidy describes it, “the garbage crisis exposed a decapitated, aimless and rotting, body politic—the nation

as a decomposing corpse. Symbolically and metaphorically, the You Stink movement, made this political rot hyper-visible by not only investing in the symbolic capital of garbage, with its tropes of putrefaction, odour, dirt, nausea, disease, corruption, but by insisting on a notion of citizenship grounded in a body politic imagined to be non-sectarian and subject to the rule of law” (Kraidy, 2016).

The You Stink campaign started as a hashtag launched by civil society activists to protest the accumulation of trash on the streets. The hashtag turned into a Facebook page, and later into a campaign, and a series of organized sit-ins starting in July 2015 in Riad Al Solh Square (Kerbage, 2017). Following this, more groups were formed and joined the movement as shown in Figure 1. The protests became known as Harak (Movement) as it gathered several groups and movements

Figure 1: Groups that joined the Harak (Kerbage, 2017)

Most prominent campaigns	Other campaigns established during the same period	Civil and environmental non-governmental organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You Stink</li> <li>Bidna Nhassab (We Want Accountability), including independents and members of The People’s Movement, Syrian Social Nationalist Party – Al Nahdha Faction, Socialist Arab Lebanon Vanguard Party, Shabab Dod Al Nizam (Youth Against the Regime)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jayi Taghyir (Change is Coming)</li> <li>Aal Chere’aa (To the Street)</li> <li>Sha’eb Yourid (The People Want)</li> <li>Feminist Social Justice</li> <li>Student clubs such as the Red Oak Club at the American University of Beirut, and the Radical Club and the Lebanese University</li> <li>Shabab 22 A’b (August 22 Youth)</li> <li>Hellou A’ana (Go Away)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lebanese Ecological Movement</li> <li>Legal Agenda</li> <li>Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections</li> <li>Farah Al Ataa (The Joy of Giving)</li> <li>The Independent Trade Union Assembly</li> </ul>

demonstrating against the political system (Geha C. , 2021). Coordination among the Harak was not easy. Some groups refused to organize, especially You Stink, because they did not want to resemble the current political parties, thinking they thought they are better off without it (Kerbage, 2017).

Contradictions soon emerged between organizations. The Lebanese Ecological Movement’s discourse was confined to the technical aspect of the waste crisis. It revolved around advocating for solutions, such as sorting at source and recycling (Kerbage, 2017). At the same time, as anger amplified, the circle of demands expanded from calling for a transparent, scientific, environmental solution for waste management that does not waste public money, to rejecting deals, quotas and corruption, and to demanding parliamentary and presidential elections (Al Zain, 2016). On 22-23 August 2015, thousands of citizens gathered in Riad El-Solh Square. Security forces confronted them

with excessive force using water hoses, tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and live ammunition (Kerbage, 2017). The following day, the government announced a consensus on a comprehensive plan conceived in 2014 that would divide Lebanon into six service areas and launch a tender to contract waste collection, treatment, and disposal. According to this plan, no company would receive a contract for more than two of the six regions. But under pressure from the large protests, the government cancelled the tender. Soon after, the Minister of Environment Mohammad Al-Mashnouq declared that the government would start clearing the streets of garbage, with Sukleen teams resuming garbage collection in several areas.

However, leaked footage revealed that the government was using makeshift dumpsites, in many instances through collusion with municipal authorities (Abu-Rish, 2015). Protesters demanded the resignation of the Minister of Environment, as a group from You Stink occupied the MoE

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and refused to leave before the Minister's resignation. Some protestors underwent a hunger strike awaiting Mashnouq's resignation all leading to his stepping down from the ministerial committee overseeing waste management, which he had chaired. Prime Minister Tammam Salam appointed Akram Shehayeb, the minister of agriculture, to replace him.

During September and October 2015, Shehayeb and the cabinet advocated for a plan calling for the opening of the Naameh landfill for seven days to remove the waste buildup from Beirut and Mount Lebanon. This would have been followed by an 18-month temporary plan during which the government would extend the Sukleen contract and designate two new landfills in Srar, Akkar and the Bekaa Valley near the Syrian border. The government promised financial incentives to these two regions, effectively seeking to bribe residents and their political representatives. Shehayeb said that responsibility for waste management would revert to the municipalities at end of the transitional period (Abu-Rish, 2015).

Regional NIMBY campaigns emerged. Akkar is Not a Landfill and Baalbek Harak refused the establishment of new landfills in Akkar and Baalbek. Protesters in Beirut joined them in rejecting the plan on environmental and technical grounds. The government abandoned Shehayeb's plan in December 2015 when the cabinet approved a proposal to export the country's waste abroad. Individual activists, utilizing personal relations and connections with international organizations including the UNEP and IPEN lobbied to uncover the scandal of a fraudulent plan to export waste under the name of fake companies (Kodeih, 2021). The campaign Badna Nhasseb worked adjacently on investigating the companies that were to be contracted to export the waste and discovered that they were fraudulent. On 19 February 2016, the cabinet announced the cancellation of the export plan.

At the end of February 2016, the government had returned to a variant of Shehayeb's plan, calling for the opening of the Costa Brava and Burj Hammoud landfills, which also met opposition from local residents. In Costa Brava, activists called the plan an "environmental crime," violating the Barcelona Convention that prohibits the establishment of landfills on the Mediterranean coast. Residents of Choueifat mobilized to create a crisis cell to work on long-term resistance to the landfill as activists held multiple sit-ins against its establishment. In Burj Hammoud, the Kataeb party held a month-long protest against the landfill, halting construction, suspending work and prohibiting trucks from entering the land multiple times. In September 2016, lawyers and activists filed a lawsuit against the state and private companies to block the establishment of both landfills. The CDR launched the first stage of a bid for the establishment of incinerators, a project estimated to take 3 years to establish (Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, 2019).

The violence exerted by authorities, lack of organization, and lack of development of a common strategy eventually led to the dismantling of the Harak. Its most important outcome was its cumulative impact, as it acted as a fulcrum to the emergence of new political advocacy groups working to change the system (Kraidy, 2016).

The demobilization of the Harak as a protest movement coincided with a return to the policy status quo of waste management. However, between 2015 and 2016, the social networks born out of the Harak sought to confront the political elite through an electoral campaign called Beirut Madinati (Geha C., 2019).

Beirut Madinati decided to run for municipal elections based on a comprehensive program developed by experts using a participatory approach, working on a grassroots basis. They proposed a SWM program for the Municipality of Beirut, but upon their loss in the municipal elections, met with the elected mayor and presented their program and willingness to help and collaborate in its implementation. The mayor had another plan however to build a waste incinerator for Beirut; the technology that was being promoted by the government.

In 2017, Beirut Madinati sensed the urgency of collaborating and joining forces with all groups working on SWM, calling for a meeting to establish a coalition and develop a unified strategy to advocate for better waste management and stop the acquisition of incinerators. Accordingly, the Waste Management Coalition was formed at the end of 2017, with a mission to pressure the authorities to adopt ISWM strategies and plans aimed at protecting the environment, protecting public health, and increasing resource recovery following the principles of a circular economy and sustainable production and consumption.

### 3 The Harak (2015) and the Waste Management Coalition (2017): A Comparative Case Study of Two Advocacy Movements

Two advocacy movements were selected for the comparative case study. The Harak that emerged during the waste crisis in 2015, with its massive August 29th demonstrations, is the largest mass mobilization that arose since the civil war ended in 1990 against cross-sectarian livelihood issues related to solid waste (Harb, 2016). The Waste Management Coalition



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(WMC), founded in 2017, is a social network that overlaps and builds on Harak through common narratives and shared interests. The two movements were formed as a reaction to the government's failure to find solutions to the waste crisis. WMC is a re-mobilization of the Harak using different strategies, shifting from the streets to other forms of advocacy that will be presented hereafter. Harak's breakdown did not mean that this social network did not continue to operate during abeyance; however, WMC's emergence shows that the social network remained active, causing the movement to re-emerge at another political opportunity. This comparative case study helps draw lessons learned by showing similarities and differences in terms of organization, advocacy strategies, tools used, and challenges between these two social movements advocating for change in SWM.

### 3.1 Organization

The Harak groups adopted spontaneous organizational forms that fall outside of traditional political organizations. Their structure was flexible, their discourse was emotional, and their demands were loose. Members of Harak emphasized the fact that it is a horizontal movement without leadership (Kerbage, 2017).

The two main groups of the Harak, You Stink and Badna Nhasseb, established the Coordination Committee and the Volunteer Committee. The former had around 10 to 20 participants distributed among committees for politics, media, coordination, fundraising, volunteering, and other tasks. The selection criteria of the members of this committee were not clear. The coordination committee adopted a consensual approach whereby discussions continued indefinitely until there was a unanimous agreement. As such, the meetings would sometimes go on for long hours without necessarily reaching any decision. Most of the coordination committee's decisions were made outside its official meetings. The external informal meetings had a greater impact than the internal meetings, which were rendered semi-inoperative (Kerbage, 2017).

The volunteer committee did not have a specific number of participants; the number of volunteers depended on the nature of direct actions and protests. Volunteers were not allowed to take part in the task committees or attend their meetings, their role was restricted to providing logistical field support during actions and demonstrations. This restriction of their role led to feelings of alienation and exclusion among them (Kerbage, 2017).

Initiatives led by the Lebanese Ecological Movement, Legal Agenda, and others to develop the coordination committee's organizational structure, bylaws, mandate, decision-making mechanisms, and accountability procedures failed due to refusals from You Stink and Badna Nhasseb. You Stink justified the refusal with its commitment to a horizontal, non-hierarchical,

and flexible form of organizing, while Badna Nhasseb said that organizational issues could not be discussed before agreeing on the political vision and objectives (Kerbage, 2017).

These groups failed to achieve political organization and a common vision. After the mass protests that took place on 22-23 August 2015, a dispute arose between activists from You Stink and other activists after the former used the term "infiltrators" to describe non-peaceful protestors, which was considered a form of "discrimination against the poor" (Al Zain, 2016) (Kerbage, 2017). Furthermore, the unilateral decision of You Stink to postpone demonstrations until 29 August, and their refusal to coordinate with other activists, political movements, and associations led to increased tension (Kerbage, 2017).

Several examples demonstrate this lack of coordination, including when You Stink gave a 72-hour ultimatum for the government to implement its demands without any concrete plans of escalation. On the eve of the deadline, a group of activists decided to break into the MoE without any coordination with others; another incident saw You Stink and Badna Nhasseb organizing two uncoordinated protests at the same time at two different locations.

The Harak, overall, raised funds through crowdfunding and individual donations that helped organize demonstrations, protests, sit-ins, prepare communication materials and pay for all the logistics. It could mobilize the streets in unexpected ways, attract the media, and recruit new participants through creative means. However, it was incapable of transforming the protestors' demands into a unified political program (Kerbage, 2017). Strategizing objectives empower, motivate and invest local teams, but this did not happen, which eventually resulted in the dissolution of the Harak.

While Harak's demands were wide and inclusive, WMC was formed as a more specialized and sector-specific group. It included groups of civil society organizations (political and environmental), independent experts, social enterprises, and environmental activists in Lebanon (see Figure 2). Its vision is safeguarding the environment for a sustainable future, and its mission is to address environmental injustices in waste management in Lebanon and push towards the transition to a circular economy.

WMC has an internal organizational structure that is horizontal in nature. It has a steering committee that is elected by all members that make part of the general assembly. Members are divided into groups that coordinate and report to the steering committee as shown in Figure 2.

WMC has developed bylaws defining its structure, the roles and responsibilities of the different groups, election process, dissolution, membership, and amendment of bylaws among others.

Figure 2: Organizational Structures of the Waste Management Coalition



Its founding members consisted of all the groups that responded to the call for meetings initiated by Beirut Madinati. Some groups joined for a short period, leaving soon after because of conflicts around certain technologies for solid waste treatment and disposal (e.g., Terre Liban), while others left as a result of organizational conflicts (e.g., Recycle Lebanon).

Recruitment of individual volunteers usually followed two steps. After a volunteer filled an application form, they would be accepted as a supporter and were given the chance to participate in meetings and activities. After a few months, the commitment, performance and contribution of the volunteers are evaluated to check their eligibility to become members. Once they become members, they would be part of the general assembly and receive voting rights.

As for organizations interested in joining WMC, a general assembly vote is needed for acceptance or rejection. Some political parties such as the Sabaa party approached the coalition wanting to become members; however, a general assembly decision was taken not to accept membership of any political party. Nevertheless, coordination could take place with political parties when there were windows of

opportunities that serve the mission and vision of WMC.

The membership of social enterprises and private sector entities depended on their legal status and whether their vision was aligned with WMC in terms of sustainable waste management. A general assembly vote was also needed for acceptance or rejection. WMC’s membership criteria are still under development today and were raised during the SWOT analysis undertaken internally and externally to develop a new strategy for the coalition.

WMC adopts participatory and democratic means in decision making. Decisions are made by active participation in meetings, discussions, e-mails and other modes of communication. When a decision needs to be made, a consensus is sought. If not achieved, voting would take place and decisions would be made based on the majority of votes. WMC decided to remain leaderless (without a head or president) and follow a team leadership structure that allows for more distribution of power and less centralization of decision making. Structured leadership teams encourage stability, motivation, creativity, and accountability—and use volunteer time, skills, and effort effectively. Real teams can achieve their goals, grow more effective as a team over

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time, and enable the growth, development and learning of their individual members (Ganz, 2016). Moreover, advocacy movements like WMC and You Stink wanted to defy the notion of the *zaim* that prevailed across the traditional parties they were fighting. This also helped in diffusing responsibility, personal attacks and character assassination.

Members and supporters of WMC had diverse backgrounds forming multidisciplinary teams including lawyers, engineers (civil, chemical, environmental, agricultural, architects) communication experts, environmental management specialists, immunologists, biologists, IT specialists, business management specialists, producers, translators, etc. Technical and professional members have allowed WMC to gain recognition because of their well-informed backgrounds, having the technical knowledge and neutrality, and emerging from outside the Harak. This allowed WMC to differentiate themselves from Harak (although it includes groups that were part of the Harak like You Stink), and to rebrand into something the politicians could not tarnish as they did with the Harak (Abla, 2022).

Financial and material resources are necessary to the advocacy process. To maintain impartiality and independence, the funding of WMC relied mainly on membership fees, crowdfunding, and fundraising events. No donations were accepted from political parties, foreign institutions, members of parliament or the government. Individual donations could be accepted but must be unconditional. A plateau for a single donation was set to ensure that it does not exceed a certain percentage of the yearly donations.

### 3.2 Advocacy strategies and tactics

Different strategies were adopted based on resources, time to react, and effectiveness of the tactics. It is worth noting that tactics are not always pre-planned because of lack of resources, volunteering aspects of advocacy, and lack of regular developments to react to. WMC used more strategies and tactics than Harak, while both used some common ones. They both mobilized feelings of anger and urgency among people suffering from unsanitary conditions due to waste mismanagement. They relied on different methods and tactics of non-violent direct actions in their campaigns. WMC strategies focused on five aspects: legal, technical, policy, grassroots and oversight and tried to move from an objectionable state to a demanding state. WMC members learned by doing and by consulting and discussing with activist groups. They tried to put strategies but had to always react to unexpected developments in the field taking them away from implementing their strategies. The lack of time and resources and the context-specific problems and political contexts did not allow WMC to seek international coaching/

partnerships. The following strategies and tactics were used:

#### 3.2.1 Communication and mobilization

The Harak motivated action by exposing and shaming the government's acts and mismanagement through disseminating videos and evidence on social media. It used videos of waste mismanagement and other available media, commented on them, and shared them on its social media platforms. People interacted well with their platforms, and they were able to reach around one million followers (Anonymous, 2021).

The campaign attracted a large number of volunteers, some of whom were mobilized and participated in the organization and preparation of actions at the time. You Stink members were surprised by the large number of people who volunteered and did not have the infrastructure to effectively mobilize them all (Anonymous, 2021).

Good relations were built with expat groups, which, in coordination with the campaign, organized demonstrations and sit-ins in support in several countries abroad.

Gaining public trust helped the Harak raise funds through crowdfunding and individual donations, that in return helped to organize demonstrations, protests, sit-ins, prepare communication materials, and pay for logistics.

Groups of artists, actors, and producers, among others, volunteered and launched a campaign to promote Harak and to restore the relationship of many citizens with the campaign (Al Zain, 2016).

Legal Agenda supported the formation of a committee of lawyers to protect and defend the protesters' rights. The lawyers volunteered their time to ensure the safety of the protesters and confronted well connected and politically affiliated judges to release protesters. This initiative happened for the first time in Lebanon and was distinguished by the spirit of volunteerism, dedication and perseverance of lawyers the legal creativity that they practised, the reassurance that it conveyed to the demonstrators and society, and the organization and documentation of legal breaches. The lawyers succeeded in presenting the cases of detainees to the public and raising the voice against the trial of civilians before the military court, to which 54 civilian detainees were referred following their arrest during the demonstrations (Al Zain, 2016) (Kerbage, 2017).

Social media pages of Harak groups were heavily used, and created content for media and journalists to cover and disseminate. Moreover, the extent of the problem (waste covering the streets) and the scale of the protests made the

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media coverage important and helped attract more first-timers that joined the movement. Mass media played a mobilizing role and urged people to take to the streets even without them being integrated into networks (Kerbage, 2017). Open mobilization helped in recruiting new participants, but it limited the potential of developing strong ties between these participants and activists (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009).

At the beginning of Harak, media channels allowed protesters to express their grievances and demands on live TV in what seemed like an open “Hyde Park” (Kerbage, 2017). However, the supportive media changed position on 8 October 2015 and adopted a discourse that defamed demonstrators, accusing them of damaging public and private property. The reliance on mass media and social media proved unsustainable once the media changed their agendas (Kerbage, 2017).

As for WMC, it was formed as a collective form of action by a network of empowered individuals and groups (some of which were part of the Harak) engaging the public and connecting with allies. It linked together fragments of mobilizing agents into a coherent whole and made use of ‘bloc recruitment’, that is the rapid expansion of a movement through building a coalition of smaller, already existing collectivities (Aslanidis, 2012).

WMC did not rely on mass mobilization. It continued to engage and mobilize members through word of mouth and posting videos, pictures, visuals, and documents on social media platforms. In addition, the coalition held awareness-raising sessions in municipalities, festivals, schools, and universities to inform the public about the current situation and alternative waste management systems and solutions. WMC launched several media campaigns around parliamentary elections and the role of the parliament in legislation and oversight, waste incineration, and the misleading information provided by Beirut Municipality concerning its plan to acquire an incinerator (Tadlil campaign). Moreover, to simplify the impact of mismanagement of waste incinerators, WMC developed the Toxic Flag campaign. It prepared and mounted a shocking 12-meter-long art installation that showed a flag made of black smoke, near the site of a planned waste incinerator in Beirut. The flag that was raised symbolized the black landscape that would surround Beirut and its surroundings if an incinerator was to be adopted as a solution for waste management in light of the poor management of public facilities in Lebanon. The flag was made of black smoke and aimed to symbolize the future of Beirut if the incinerator was to be built in the coming period. By making the invisible (smoke) visible, the campaign aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of mismanaged incinerators.

The coalition initiated and participated in public talks and

debates with citizens and with local authorities, political parties and experts. It organized a workshop for journalists to present data and evidence about SWM in Lebanon and convey WMC’s position.

In collaboration with Beirut DC, WMC launched a film competition about waste management, and in collaboration with artists, organized an art exhibition to raise awareness and sensitize people to the problem. Petitions were used and disseminated on social media, in public events, and at festivals to raise awareness and rally people to join the cause.

### 3.2.2 Formal statements

Public speeches, press releases and press conferences were used to declare demands and the position of the Harak and WMC vis a vis government plans.

The Harak presented its demands as follows:

- The resignation of the minister of environment, Muhammad al-Machnouk, for failing to perform his duties
- The release of municipal funds of the independent municipal fund
- Cancellation of the ministerial decision No. 1 dated 12/2015/1/ with all its related decisions
- Completing the investigation of the Financial Prosecutor until the results of corruption in the waste file are issued

On the other hand, WMC presented a number of statements concerning issues and decisions related to SWM in the country, including the expansion of coastal landfills, the Council of Ministers’ decision related to the establishment of incinerators, waste management roadmap, and the establishment of landfills in the north without environmental impact assessment studies.

### 3.2.3 Demonstrations

Popular mobilizations or demonstrations are important tools that were used by both Harak and WMC with several aims. The first aim is to convince the public of the urgency of the issue. The second purpose is to challenge perceptions and raise awareness, shaking up cultural and political mindsets to change behaviours on an individual level. The last, and most difficult aim to achieve, is the public mobilization in order to pressure politicians (Al Hindy, Haddad, & Noujaim, 2018).

The Harak organized large demonstrations where thousands of people joined to express their anger and unacceptance of the situation at the time. Marches, sit-ins, and protests took place in Riad El Solh and Martyr Square or in specific

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places such as in front of the ministry of finance to demand the release of municipalities' funds and before the building of the Military Court to protest the trial of activists. Some demonstrations were held in parallel in different regions inside Lebanon as well as overseas.

WMC called for demonstrations and protests to express unacceptance of authorities' decisions (ISWM law, adoption of waste incinerators, and roadmap for SWM, among others). Press conferences were held to present opposition to decisions taken and present demands and alternative solutions.

Within the Lebanese political context, popular mobilization lacks controllable results and has minimal impact on policy change; noting that political parties and politicians do not change their position based on popular pressure but based on their political interests (Al Hindy, Haddad, & Noujaim, 2018).

### 3.2.4 Alternative solutions

In a move that reflects the evolution and maturity of the protest movement's tactics, the Harak transitioned from completely rejecting the government's proposals to solve the crisis, to announcing in a press conference, on 29 September 2015, their alternative plan for waste management in response to attempts to impose a cabinet decision as the only option.

The alternative plan presented environmental solutions to address the waste crisis, based on reducing the need for landfills to the minimum. It proposed sound sustainable management, in which municipalities played a pivotal role. It emphasized the necessity of sorting waste at the source and valorizing it, which will bring economic benefits and development to the recycling and composting industries. It proposed the use of waste rejects in the rehabilitation of quarries. The plan categorically rejected the reopening of the Naameh landfill and the opening of a new landfill in the eastern chain that threatened the safety of groundwater. It also refused to extend the contracts of Sukleen, and reiterated its demands for the completion of judicial investigations into waste management corruption during the last period, the resignation of the Minister of Environment Mohammad Al-Mashnouq, the release of municipal funds, and the annulment of Cabinet Resolution No. 1 on 122015/1/ and all decisions related to it (Al Akhbar, 2015).

As for WMC, it presented several technical papers and solutions to solid waste problems. It developed detailed and referenced analyses for refusing the adoption of waste incineration and the co-processing of refuse-derived fuel in cement industries. It also presented solutions for the management of asbestos-contaminated demolition waste generated from the Beirut

port explosion on 4 August 2020, and for the tons of dead fish from the Qaraoun Lake. In addition, it presented a roadmap for ISWM to the minister of environment and published it on social media. The roadmap aimed to achieve a transition from the concept of waste management (disposal) to the concept of resource management, by linking waste management to resource efficiency and moving towards a circular economy. It is based on the following priorities:

- Sorting the different types of waste and reducing waste production
- Mitigating environmental damage resulting from poor waste management (especially open dumps and sanitary landfills) and the resulting negative health effects
- Establishing an ISWM system based on the waste management hierarchy and the principles of the circular economy
- Developing institutional capacities for SWM
- Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and accountability
- Reducing the cost of waste management, ensuring the financial sustainability of this sector, and recovering materials

### 3.2.5 Theatrical mobilization and “symbolic” actions

The Harak created a force of hope and confrontation that traditional organizations such as political parties or trade unions were incapable of creating due to structural and political factors. This form of politics possessed the ability to mobilize the streets (Kerbage, 2017).

During the Harak, art and graffiti were used to express the protesters' anger and demands. Graffiti artist Ali Rafei mocked the security forces' oppression in a graffiti stating, “from you, to you, and on you.” Visual artist and illustrator Jana Traboulsi identified the street battle in her *You Have, We Have* graphics. Music band Al-Rahel Al-Kabir turned the slogan everybody means everybody into a song, and rappers El-Rass and Al-Touffar sang “We and the trash are neighbours” (Kerbage, 2017).

Some stunts included throwing trash in front of the houses of officials and the Grand Serial, as well as throwing eggs, tomatoes and garbage bags at the cars of members of parliament participating in the national dialogue sessions on their way in and out of Nejme Square (Kerbage, 2017).

Breaking into and enacting a sit-in at the ministry of environment to demand the resignation of the minister was one of the direct actions unilaterally planned and implemented by You Stink without coordinating with other groups. This act was planned to escalate confrontation after giving the government a 72-hour ultimatum to implement

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Harak's demands which included the resignation of the minister of environment.

Symbolic actions also included collecting garbage; cleaning Beirut River to show the government that a number of activists are able to accomplish what the government failed to do with all the resources it has.

The effectiveness of these actions cannot be demonstrated but they kept the momentum of the movement going and kept the Harak under the spotlight.

### 3.2.6 Psychological Interventions

In a second wave of contentious action that followed violently repressed protests, Harak activists began using psychological interventions. Activists went on hunger strikes to demand the resignation of the minister of environment. On 14 October 2015, two activists attempted to burn themselves in front of the Military Court in protest at the police detention of their comrades (Kraidy, 2016). Those actions were based on individual decisions and, although not initiated by Harak, were supported by them (Al Zain, 2016) (Anonymous, 2021).

### 3.2.7 Litigation

Litigation was an advocacy strategy used by WMC as a type of group pressure. The benefit of litigation included pushing the judiciary to review an advocate's case and its applicable policies themselves; having the opportunity to triumph, and challenge ideological opponents. The challenges of this include its cost, both in terms of time and money, and the uncertainty of its outcome due to fragmented legal authority and variability of the courts (Gen & Wright, 2013).

The WMC legal team prepared several actions, including:

- Appeals to the Council of State against the three Council of Ministers' decisions (adoption of Incinerators, expansion of Costa Brava landfill and SWM roadmap). These appeals were submitted in collaboration with other NGOs (Lebanon Eco-Movement, Recycle Lebanon) and activists' groups and individuals in the regions (Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi dawla and citizens from the North).
- In its fight against the Beirut incinerator, two official warnings were handed to the Members of the Beirut Municipal Council through a Notary Public, warning them against the adoption of waste incineration and its consequences, making them accountable and subject to persecution in case the adoption of incinerators causes any environmental, social, or public health harm.
- Assisting groups in Tripoli to submit an appeal concerning the mismanagement of the Tripoli dump in addition to assisting citizens in different regions to

submit complaints about open waste burning in dumps around them.

- Filing a petition to the Judge of Urgent Matters in Beirut to issue a decision to stop mixing hazardous wastes resulting from the explosion of the Beirut port with non-hazardous ones and requesting concerned authorities to set up a plan for the proper management of these wastes.
- Reviewing and commenting on the proposed ISWM law and other related laws. The comments were sent and communicated to all members of the parliament before the enactment of the law. WMC worked with OMSAR to propose an amendment to the law.

WMC was not officially registered at the ministry of interior and municipalities, creating a challenge for litigation. Appeals and petitions were presented in the name of individuals, member organizations, or in coordination with other coalitions. The litigations did not lead to any successful changes but were a good challenge to government entities to know that some citizens and groups are monitoring their actions and decisions.

### 3.2.8 Oversight

WMC followed up on the government's responsibilities to adequately manage waste and enforce environmental rules and regulations. It also used oversight to prove to the government its inability to monitor existing environmental non-compliances and to enforce regulations. If, for example, MoE or CDR cannot monitor the environmental performance of existing SWM facilities, including small incinerators, how would they be able to ensure the proper performance of the mega-incinerators that they are planning to build?

WMC sent letters to the MoE and CDR to request environmental impact assessment reports and monitoring results for incinerators and landfills, in addition to assisting citizens to file complaints to the MoE regarding open waste burning. These actions aimed at pushing these entities to fulfil their role and mandate in environmental protection.

Letters were addressed to the MoE, European Union, German Embassy, and Combilift<sup>1</sup> on the management of hazardous chemical waste found at the port after the 4 August 2019 explosion.

WMC expert members participated in technical committees to review waste management strategy, roadmap and environmental impact assessments for waste facilities. They

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1 Combilift is a private German company contracted to remove hazardous chemical waste from the port after the Beirut Port explosion on August 4th, 2020.

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presented their feedback during the meetings and in written documents to concerned parties.

### 3.2.9 Building an evidence-based advocacy case

WMC collected a large number of documents and data about SWM in Lebanon. Based on the literature, available data and in collaboration with environmental and waste management experts, WMC prepared its arguments and proposed a roadmap for SWM. WMC developed papers about their position concerning waste incineration, the use of refuse-derived fuels, and other technologies that were proposed through the media in different regions.

The coalition developed informative materials (leaflets, posters, and infographics) which were shared online along with audio-visual materials. WMC used short documentaries – Zero Waste Lebanon and “An Incinerator for Beirut” – that were developed by coalition allies and helped explain the suggested solutions for waste management (USAID; Beyond group, 2020).

The coalition provided evidence and cost estimates for alternative solutions that could be used in place of incinerators and provided proof that these solutions exist and are possible to implement, sharing these alternatives with stakeholders.

Building an evidence-based advocacy strategy is very important; however, it was not sufficient to influence public opinion and policy change. There is a strong positive correlation between shifts in public opinion and the policies adopted by the government (Laybourn-Langton, Quilter-Pinner, & Treloar, 2021). Two potential theories have been suggested to explain this correlation:

Firstly, shifts in public opinion drive shifts in policy. According to this theory, political parties respond to the democratic will of the people. The shift in public attitudes will create pressure for policymakers to respond by changing policy. This implies that movements should focus their attention on how to shift public opinion on their cause – the salience and frame through which people see it – to be able to change policy.

Secondly, policy shifts drive shifts in public opinion. According to this theory, it is political parties’ shifting policy – and elites shifting their opinion and “signalling” to the population via communications – which then results in a shift in public opinion. This would imply that movements should focus their influencing efforts on shifting the consensus of politicians and other elites and securing policy change, which in turn will follow through to a shift in public opinion (Laybourn-Langton, Quilter-Pinner, & Treloar, 2021).

For WMC both an insider track of influencing politicians’ opinion (through meetings and debates with different parties, parliament members, ministers etc.) and an outsider track of trying to win public opinion (awareness-raising events, art, media, meetings, workshops, etc.) were used for better influence.

### 3.2.10 Demonstrating models of solutions

Pilot or demonstration projects are another way advocates may try to reform policies and programs. Pilot projects can demonstrate the efficacy of reform on small scales, thereby building support for more comprehensive reforms without imposing high risks to stakeholders. Thus, pilot projects can be seen as a strategic use of incrementalism to advocate for larger policy changes (Gen & Wright, 2013).

Members of WMC highlighted and implemented models for solutions so that they do not remain theoretical. While Beirut Municipality and other government entities were stating that sorting at source cannot succeed in Lebanon and in urban areas, Madinati Tafroz, an initiative by Beirut Madinati, implemented a sorting at source project in the Al Batrakieh area in Beirut to prove that sorting at source can be successful in low and middle-income areas. A guide for sorting at source was developed and disseminated.

In collaboration with Democracy Reporting International (DRI), WMC organized a workshop for municipalities to train them on SWM planning. The workshop showcased success stories from municipalities in Lebanon that were able to manage their waste.

Groups like Lebanese composters, members of the coalition, worked and demonstrated composting activities at household and regional levels.

Nadeera, a member of the coalition, is a social enterprise that leverages technology to promote behavioural change. It provided digitally enabled waste management solutions for municipalities and property managers to encourage sorting at source, increase material recovery rates, and reduce waste management costs. It piloted its solution in 2021 in Bickfaya, and worked with a research team from Yale University to assess the impact of Nadeera; deploying Nadeera to half the town to establish a control and treatment group. Within three months, it was able to see a 100% increase in the number of households sorting among the treatment group, and a significant improvement in the quality of sorting at source – not to mention the increased material recovery rates and improved efficiency in operations recorded at Biclean Sorting Facility, which meant higher revenues and lower costs. Over the past year, it expanded to Ras el Maten and surrounding

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municipalities working with Green Mount Recycling, servicing around 2500 households.

Yalla Return is a recyclables drop-off system by Nadeera dedicated to cities and densely populated areas. Yalla Return encourages people to collect their recyclables by rewarding them with financial incentives (60% of the value of the recyclables goes back to users) through return credits. Return credits can be exchanged for supermarket vouchers or donated to charity. This initiative is not only sustainable but is also supporting residents through the economic crisis to find value in their recyclable material. Yalla Return launched its first location in Tarik Al Jdideh (6 December 2021) and the second one in Mar Mkhayel (24 December 2021) at Nusaned Hub.

Both Nadeera and Yalla Return have shown the significant value of leveraging technology compared to traditional awareness and education campaigns. It enables higher engagement, more precise access to users, a tighter feedback loop, and more secure operations.

These actions are pilot demonstration projects in nature to show that solutions can be implemented without having WMC be drawn into playing the role of the government.

### 3.2.11 Engaging decision-makers

Informed by a political economy analysis and stakeholder mapping, WMC has engaged with local and national authorities. To capitalize on existing efforts and to support decision-makers who are against incinerators, the coalition has coordinated and engaged with members of the parliament since the beginning to ensure their buy-in and support. This coordination allowed the coalition to share resources and exchange data with both the MPs and their advisors (USAID; Beyond group, 2020).

Coalition members demonstrated their technical expertise in public appearances in the media and debates, gaining not only public trust but also that of politicians who reached out to the coalition to become more informed about the situation, leading to more effective engagement and negotiations with some. As part of the coalition's stakeholder mapping, members engaged with religious leaders to help them raise awareness through their meetings, places of worship, and schools, a very effective tactic that allowed the coalition to reach a wider audience (USAID; Beyond group, 2020).

WMC held meetings with different political parties, Beirut Municipality, UNDP, EU, OMSAR, the ministers of environment and interior and municipalities to discuss issues related to waste management. The coalition published all minutes of meetings online for transparency and public information.

WMC participated in meetings to review the waste strategy and roadmap and submitted feedback.

There is no doubt that it is difficult to convince decision-makers (both in the parliament and municipal councils) who are politically affiliated and are accountable for their parties' decisions. Surprisingly, WMC leaders did manage to convince members of the Beirut Municipal Council to change their "Yes" vote for incinerators to abstentions (USAID; Beyond group, 2020). This happened due to the following:

- Presenting technical facts and figures against waste incineration and challenging the facts presented by Beirut Mayor created doubt about the project among municipal council members and influential parties;
- Challenging the credibility of the mayor by presenting facts against his claims
- Discussions, debates, and persistent one-to-one meetings with municipal council members and influential parties;
- External factors that offered windows of opportunity, including political parties like the Kataeb and Lebanese Forces changing their mind about the project, and influential religious figures having leverage over members of the municipal council refusing the project.

### 3.2.12 Building Partnerships

WMC's advocacy work was not limited to institutional players. It built relationships with other powerful individuals and groups, inside and outside of government institutions, who dominate or influence the policy process.

Through partnerships, WMC gained resources and benefitted from technical support. Partnerships helped expand WMC outreach plans and better develop its research and documentation, as well as capitalize on community resources to design and implement its activities (USAID; Reform Group, 2020). WMC partnered with the following organizations:

- International organizations such as DRI for governance and capacity building for municipalities on SWM (meetings, common workshops, etc.) and Human Right Watch in regard to oversight, pushing for a SWM strategy, stopping the expansion of landfills and open waste dumping and burning (meetings, common press releases)
- Municipalities: for technical assistance, capacity building and awareness-raising (seminars, workshops, meetings)
- Members of the parliament (MPs Paula Yaacoubian, Elias Hankash, Nadim Gemayel, Sami Gemayel, Hagop Terzian, Oussama Saad, Inaya Ezzeddine, Ghassan Mokheiber, Georges Okaiss, Imad Wakim, Mohamad Raad, etc.) to lobby for amendments of the ISWM law and to stop Beirut Incinerator



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- NGOs through awareness-raising, lobbying, and advocacy.
- The private sector and social enterprises working on waste sorting, reusing, recycling and composting
- Syndicates, such as the Order of Physicians (pulmonologists) to highlight the health impacts of waste burning and mismanagement, Order of Engineers to advocate for integrated waste management, and fishermen to highlight the socio-economic and environmental impact of mismanagement of coastal landfills
- Influencers, whether bloggers, artists, among others, for awareness-raising and lobbying
- Media and marketing companies for campaign design (Impact BBDO)
- Government entities such as OMSAR for training and capacity building, sharing information and preparing an amendment to the SWM law

### 3.3 Challenges faced

Harak and WMC faced some common challenges and additional ones that presented themselves at different periods.

#### 3.3.1 Policymaking context

Several factors impede the effectiveness of the policymaking process in Lebanon, primarily the sectarian, partisan, clientelistic and fragmented nature of the socio-political power groups that form the legislative and executive governing bodies. Political economy analysis and stakeholder mapping are challenging in such a landscape, making it difficult to understand the links and networks between the different actors and decision-makers (members of municipalities, mayors, members of parliament, influential political figures, religious men, etc.), or to find common ground between them to work collectively and influence policy change. Hence, advocates spent significant time and effort trying to understand the political dynamics, prerogatives, and authorities among stakeholders - both governmental and non-governmental - with varying political influence (USAID; Reform Group, 2020).

Corruption and negligence among government entities in charge of waste management render change harder as decisions based on evidence and proper judgment will be difficult to make.

Advocates are engaged in public conflict with powerful (public and private) interest groups determined to resist change, divide state resources, and protect their political and private interests over public ones. These groups are

using public resources for their interest, have unlimited access to the media and are in power. In an attempt to show the imbalance of power and resources between advocacy groups and politicians, a You Stink member said that “They have unlimited resources and what do we have? A Facebook page!!!” (Anonymous, 2021).

The absence of accountability, the separation of powers, and the politicization of the judiciary system add to the challenges of advocacy groups and their ability to make change. The absence of parties, unions, and the people’s distrust of traditional parties because of their performance during the past 30 years makes partnerships challenging. (Khalil, 2021)

#### 3.3.2 Access to information

Despite the enactment of the Access to Information Law in 2017, it is still not properly implemented. Advocates faced significant challenges in accessing official information from the government. For example, it was hard to access SWM contracts or the reports prepared to study the environmental impact of incinerators. Instead, activists have relied on friends and allies within public institutions to informally share information, which, in some cases, risks de-legitimizing the campaign since they could not officially go on record or reference their source of information. The lack of reliable data, statistics and numbers that could illustrate how policies are impacting people’s lives, limited advocates’ ability to build strong evidence-based advocacy cases (USAID; Reform Group, 2020).

#### 3.3.3 Resources

The scarcity of funds sometimes influenced the effectiveness of campaigns and dissemination of information, limiting the capacity of advocates for outreach, creative activities, access to in-depth research or the ability to create convincing media material. This also prevented the recruitment of full-time people to plan and implement the groups’ strategies and plans. People in You Stink and WMC are all volunteers with time limitations and sometimes poor commitment. Failure to recruit full-time members dedicated to working on the cause limits the efficiency of implementation sometimes.

Limited resources pushed WMC to concentrate more on working at the policy level, rather than working with municipalities on the ground to find tailored solutions, and to concentrate on Beirut and Mount Lebanon rather than other regions.

This is more obvious for groups that do not accept donations from entities that might have an upper hand or influence on the group’s decisions or work process.

### 3.3.4 Pace of government actions

The quick pace of some government actions when deciding to implement some projects makes it hard for groups to plan and prepare for events or actions. For example, WMC activities during its first three years were more reactive to government decisions and actions.

### 3.3.5 Violence and character assassination

Harak encountered tremendous violence from the authorities. Protesters were confronted with excessive force – water hoses, tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and live ammunition (Kerbage, 2017) – and were arrested, dragged to prisons, and referred to military courts.

Some protesters were subjected to harassment and physical abuse at their workplace, while others were threatened with losing their job and the services they received from their political parties (Kerbage, 2017).

You Stink was accused of copyright infringement and its Facebook page was flagged daily as “promoting violence,” subsequently halving its reach (Anonymous, 2021).

Members of You Stink were accused of being part of ISIS and defamed as forming part of a strategic plot devised by foreign countries and companies aiming to bring down the regime (Al Zain, 2016). This character assassination has shaken public trust in those activists and reduced people’s participation and involvement in Harak.

This was not the case for WMC. Members did not face violence or character assassination, despite the attempts of the Mayor of Beirut to intimidate some members that were employed by the American University of Beirut where an illegal medical waste incinerator was being operated. However, WMC members made the mayor responsible and accountable for knowing about the incinerator and not taking action to stop it (Abla, 2022).

### 3.3.6 “The death of expertise”

During the waste crisis, many companies tried to sell technologies for SWM to policymakers such as politicians, municipalities, and ministries. Technologies were being marketed without any scientific grounds assessing whether these technologies are fit to the national context in terms of waste composition, legal and institutional framework, technical capacity, etc. For example, a Polish company gave a presentation about a technology called mineralization in the

Lebanese parliament claiming that it is the best technology to solve the waste crisis. Others talked about plasma, pyrolysis, and gasification, among other statements. WMC had to issue press releases about the different technologies clarifying their pros and cons and demonstrating their unsuitability to the national context (WMC, 2019). Moreover, the Mayor of Beirut, while trying to promote waste incinerators, claimed in one of the seminars held at Beirut Arab University that he placed his head in the stack of one of the incinerators in Switzerland. He said that the Mayor of Lausanne told him that the air coming out of the stack is cleaner than the air we breathe. WMC had to create a video shaming the President of the Municipal Council of Beirut and explaining that hazardous emissions can come out of incinerator stacks, noting that the temperature of the air coming out of the stack is very high that it is impossible to come near (WMC, 2019).

As Tom Nichols put in his book *The Death of Expertise* (2017): “These are dangerous times. Never have so many people had so much access to so much knowledge and yet have been so resistant to learning anything. Not only do increasing numbers of laypeople lack basic knowledge, but they also reject fundamental rules of evidence and refuse to learn how to make a logical argument. In doing so, they risk throwing away centuries of accumulated knowledge and undermining the practices and habits that allow us to develop new knowledge. This is more than a natural skepticism toward experts. I fear we are witnessing the death of the ideal of expertise itself, a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, students and teachers, knowers, and wonderers—in other words, between those of any achievement in an area and those with none at all”.

## 4 Lessons learned

**Organization and development of a common goal and strategy** are necessary for successful work. While Harak failed to organize and develop a common goal, WMC developed its organizational structure and bylaws and developed several strategies and action plans. The latest WMC strategy with its related objectives and Key Performance Indicators was developed based on internal and external evaluation of WMC activities and performance.

**Having a multidisciplinary group of people with different talents, capabilities and knowledge** allows the movement to use a variety of methods, approaches, and tools and to simultaneously push for change from different angles and perspectives. Using media tools, art exhibitions, litigation, demonstrations, public speeches, capacity building workshops, etc... helps raise awareness among different groups and to lobby with people in power to achieve change.

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**Having timely intelligence** – to know that an event is happening before others – and to organize in response is important to ensure that a good response is put in place and communicated, and that it takes place at the right moment. WMC’s members, through their networks, were able in several instances to acquire documents and information that was not available to them or the general public due to the non-enforcement of the access to information law. They were informed by people at the MoE, CDR and municipalities about projects being planned, or decisions being taken before becoming public. This gave WMC an advantage to prepare for actions against them. CDR, for example, commissioned a company called EGIS to prepare an environmental impact assessment for the Beirut incinerator based on a tender document. The report could not be accessed although one of the members of the parliament requested it through an official letter. WMC was able to access the report and confronted the Beirut Mayor with the facts and constraints mentioned in the report against the adoption of waste incineration and the need for additional studies to properly assess the environmental impact.

**Adopting participatory approaches, transparency and democracy** in internal groups’ dynamics helps retain human resources and increase efficiency.

**Careful selection of funding sources** to ensure that funding entities do not influence the group’s decision and its independence.

**Moving from opposition to building an alternative view** or solution has a better impact and shows the seriousness and credibility of the advocates. Politicians always confront activists asking them to provide an alternative solution to what is being proposed. When activists have a well-defined view of why they are opposing a solution and what could be the alternative, they have more power to confront bad decisions.

**Building evidence-based advocacy cases** is critical to building strong arguments, defending objectives and building trust and credibility among politicians, decision-makers and citizens. Trust and credibility can also be amplified by **showcasing the applicability of the solutions proposed**. The initiative Madinati Tafroz proved that sorting at source is feasible in a city like Beirut and in middle-low-income areas when people’s awareness is raised, and a complete system is put in place for collection, segregation, and recycling.

**Simplifying complex issues and making the invisible, visible** help mobilize people to support change, such as the “Toxic Flag” campaign.

**Focusing on trying to change the goals the system targets relating to the cause** (e.g., pushing for law amendments)

and the mindsets of those in power and the public at large. Discussions with ministers, parliament members, political party leaders, municipal members and raising public awareness help shift opinions. Proposing amendments to the SWM law provided alternatives to parliament members to call for changes in the proposed law.

**Mapping potential allies and decision-makers** before engaging them increases the chances of realizing objectives and impacting policy change. Choosing the right time, political moment, and language to demand rights is essential, especially given the changing political power dynamics and the context of Lebanon (USAID; Reform Group, 2020).

**The naming and shaming of practices, not public figures**, has a better impact on policy change. When attacking people or figures, their affiliates turn against your proposal even if they believe in it or think it is rightful. WMC, for instance, did not attack the minister of environment personally, instead, it attacked decisions and policies that it thought were not sustainable.

**Building partnerships and networks and combining efforts** avoids duplication, improves access to resources (both human and financial), and allows activists to share experiences, information and strategies and widen the impact of their actions. Combining efforts with DRI, which works with municipalities to strengthen governance, led to merging WMC technical expertise in waste management with DRI’s expertise in governance and helped build on their respective connections with municipalities to enhance municipal capacities in waste management planning.

**Change takes time and needs patience.** Activists must remain committed to ensure the sustainability of their movement. The timeline for policy change can be on the scale of decades, an order of magnitude longer than advocacy organizations’ programmatic and budgetary cycles. Activities with such long-term impacts are not as attractive to supporters as those with more immediate results (Gen & Wright, 2013). In the Lebanese context, policy change is not easy, especially in the absence of effective state institutions that provide a favourable environment for advocacy movements to develop and make change.

**Sometimes the results of advocacy campaigns might not be tangible because they are preventative** and cannot be quantified. For example, preventing the implementation of waste incinerators or preventing the export of waste abroad is a major achievement but is not tangible because the incinerators were planned and did not exist on the ground. Their implementation would have incurred large costs on the environment, economy, and public health, especially with the current national economic crisis.

## 5 Conclusion

Lebanon's solid waste sector continues to face challenges, now aggravated by the financial and economic crises. Public contracts for waste collection, sorting, composting, and landfilling are denominated in US dollars, and with the currency devaluation, the government is not able to pay the contractors and companies involved. In several instances, companies have stopped collecting waste. The central government is not paying municipalities their allocated budgets either, which prevents them from paying contractors and managing their waste.

At the same time, the crisis has helped some municipalities and many NGOs and private entities to become more active

in recovering materials from waste as income generation. These changes contribute to advocacy efforts to transition to a circular economy and shift from the mentality of waste disposal to material recovery.

Progress can be made in the face of environmental injustice and waste mismanagement, but those advocates and activists seeking social, economic, and environmental justice must redouble their efforts to build authentic, inclusive, powerful, and strategic change movements.

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## About Heinrich Böll Foundation

A catalyst for green visions and projects, a think tank for policy reform, and an international network, Heinrich Böll Foundation is affiliated with the German Green Party and promotes the development of democratic civil society at home and abroad. Its main tenets are ecology and sustainability, democracy and human rights, self-determination and justice.

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## About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

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