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Amidst Ongoing Energy Crisis, Town of Al Qaraoun Lights Up Again

USAID-Provided LED Streetlights Enhance Residents' Safety and Security after Dark and Enable Significant Municipal Savings



USAID-provided streetlights in Al Qaraoun are enhancing residents' safety and enabling important savings for the municipality.

“This intervention by USAID’s CSP is alleviating the burden of electricity bills on the municipality by over 70%, which is allowing us to focus on serving the community in other essential areas.”

Yehia Daher, Mayor of Al Qaraoun

Located in the southern region of the Beqaa Valley, the village of Al Qaraoun is home to around 14,000 residents, over half of which are refugees. The village is known for its lake which was formed by the construction of Lebanon’s largest dam built in 1959. “Although our town’s proximity to the dam had initially shielded us from the worst effects of the energy crisis, the electricity was completely cut off from one day to the next,” explained Yehia Daher, Mayor of Al Qaraoun. By 2020, residents were barely receiving an hour of state electricity per week, which not only impacted people’s ability to light up their homes, but also plunged large areas of the town into complete darkness after sunset. The existing streetlights were run by gas, which was highly inefficient to keep on throughout the night. “With the devaluation of the national currency, we could no longer afford to maintain and operate the outdated streetlighting system, which fomented an increasing sense of insecurity among residents, especially after dark, and fuelled tensions among the community.” Moreover, the cost of operating the few lights that were still functioning was unsustainable for the municipality and residents alike: “The municipality used to pay around \$2000 each month just to cover the streetlights’ maintenance,” said Mr Daher. Such a high cost was further hindering the municipality’s ability to provide other essential services to the community.

In response, USAID’s Community Support Program (CSP) upgraded Al Qaraoun’s public streetlighting infrastructure by installing 550 LED-type streetlights at strategic locations across the town. “The new LED streetlights cost a fraction to run compared to the gas lights,” stated Pompidou Mreiden, the municipal electrician in charge of operating and maintaining Al Qaraoun’s public streetlighting system. He shared that his job is now far safer and more straightforward as a result of the upgraded system: “Whereas the gas streetlights could leak and required several different accessories to maintain, the new LED lights use a set of standard parts and are much safer to maintain since the voltage remains constant and does not damage the bulbs.” More than a year after their original installation, only a couple of bulbs have needed to be replaced and the municipality has been running the streetlights throughout the night.

Despite the ongoing crisis in Lebanon, a certain sense of normalcy has returned to Al Qaraoun: “People feel much safer after sunset,” stated Mr. Mreiden, “and small local businesses are staying open until much later, especially during the winter months.” Beyond the direct impact on residents’ safety, Mr. Daher points to how this intervention has expanded the municipality’s ability to continue to serve the community in other areas: “Savings on streetlight maintenance have enabled the municipality to support the local public school, as well as pay the salaries of our civil servants and daily workers to sustain their incomes during a time when many public sector employees are being forced to take unpaid leave as a result of Lebanon’s rampant inflation.”