



La Brocante, a re-use centre for furniture and household items in Damour, Lebanon

La Brocante is a re-use centre and second-hand shop, where people can donate furniture and other objects to be repaired or upcycled, and then given to people in need or sold as second-hand products.

OBJECTIVES

This project has several social and environmental objectives:

- Promote the re-use of discarded items to expand their lifespan, and recycle what cannot be reused;
- Provide employment for disadvantaged populations in the workshops;
- Provide second-hand products at a very low price or for free for people in need.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LOCATION

General information on the territory:

- Location: City of Damour, a village located 15 km from Beirut
- Country: Lebanon
- Population of the urban area: 10,000
- Density: 990 inh./km²

IMPLEMENTING BODIES

The project was implemented by arcenciel, a Lebanon-based non-profit organization established in 1985. Arcenciel follows the principles of sustainable development, while emphasising on the social and economic integration of marginalised people. They have five working themes, among which sustainable agriculture and environment, for which they develop projects focusing on waste management. Arcenciel operates several sorting centres across Lebanon, and works with about 80 municipalities either to collect or recycle their waste, or to help them build their own sorting centres.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

Arcenciel funds its project mostly thanks to its self-generated revenues, and 20% is funded by private donation and grants (from the UN, the French Development Agency, the European Union, etc.).

The project involves disadvantaged and people with disabilities by providing them a job at the workshop or in the shops.

KEY INFORMATION

- **Topic:** re-use, recycling
- **Waste fraction:** furniture, WEEE, clothes
- **Target group:** households
- **Instruments:** infrastructure, social inclusion

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Since 2007.



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GENERAL CONTEXT

This project is part of arcenciel's programme on social support and housing, that focuses on helping vulnerable people to integrate within society. "La brocante" ("the flea market") is one of the key projects within this work programme, along with a second-hand shop for clothes ("La boutique" – the shop) and a social bureau. This project has a very strong social component, as it aims to provide a job and second-hand products at a low price for people in need.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

La boutique consists in a second-hand shop for furniture and discarded electrical and electronic equipment. Originally, the project focused on the refurbishment of old items as a free service or to provide furniture for free for people who could not afford it. However, the donations kept increasing, which led to the opening of a second-hand shop for people looking for refurbished, vintage products, where the most valuable items are sold.

Collection is organised on demand: people can call the service to get their items collected from them: furniture, books, cooking tools, bric-a-brac, etc. The collection team first checks the donated products and decides to send them either to the workshop if they are in good condition, or to their recycling centre if not.

When reaching the workshop, a second sorting is performed, and products are classified in four categories: good condition, need for restoration, need for repurposing, need for recycling. Many types of products are accepted, ranging from furniture (chairs, tables, buffets, etc.), to toys, music instruments, books, or decorative items.

La Brocante organises regular events and sales to promote its activities. New products are promoted on [its Facebook page](#).

Every year, arcenciel organises "la Brocante des Artistes" ("The Artists' Flea market"), where local artists refurbish and paint second-hand products to make pieces of art out of them. [Auctions](#) are then organised, with the revenues funding the project.

A second shop was opened in 2017 in Corniche el Nahr.

Arcenciel organised a special service after the Beirut blast of August 2020. Donations of furniture (beds, chairs, etc.) could be made by calling them, and then pictures of the furniture have to be sent to the team. After this, volunteers come and pick them up.

Arcenciel also operates another service, called "La Boutique" ("The Shop"), that focuses on re-use of clothing. People can donate pieces of clothing in good condition at various collection points (e.g. in schools), that are then displayed in one of the three shops in Taanayel in the Bekaa, Halba in North Lebanon, and Sad el Baouchriyé in North Beirut. Clothes are then sold at a discount price to disadvantaged people, that can pay as much as they are able (or the full price). Clothes that cannot be re-used are used to create new products. In 2017, new containers were installed in public areas for people to bring their used clothes.

FINANCING AND COST RECOVERY CONTEXT

The renovated products are sold at the second-hand shops, with the revenues funding the project and providing additional resources to the association. Furniture, Electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE), and clothes are donated by the inhabitants. The economic balance used to be positive, but a fire destroyed the centre in 2019. Following the Beirut blast, the re-use centres devoted their resources to help families in needs. The current economic crisis in Lebanon and the increasing cost of raw material following the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the economic balance, and the re-use centre relied on arcenciel's resources to survive.



MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND RESULTS

The project has the following impacts:

- La Brocante employs about 30 people in need of work to repair and sell the products. After the Beirut blast more than 1,000 homes were refurbished, and more than 9,000 pieces of furniture were repaired. In 2019, about 250 people donated items, ranging from single items to the entire furniture of a house.
- La Boutique helped more than 7,000 people and received about 45,000 pieces of clothing in 2015. In 2017, more than 92,000 clothing items were donated to individuals or organisations.

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The fact that La Brocante belongs to Arcenciel is regarded as a key factor of success: the project benefited from the good reputation of the association and the fact that the population trusts it. The association also funded the project when its economic balance was endangered due to the series of unfortunate events mentioned above.

BOTTLENECKS, LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

In 2019, several significant fires occurred in Lebanon, and one fire in Damour damaged the re-use centre, including the second-hand products. The current economic crisis also impacted the purchasing power of the population, and thus the sales of La Brocante. The increasing costs of raw material also negatively impacted its economic balance.

LESSONS LEARNED AND REPLICABILITY

La Brocante faced many difficulties and, following the 2019 fire, it was moved out of the Damour village to Beirut, where it opened to new opportunities in terms of market. It also undergoes a continuous improvement of its functioning, by computerizing its management tools, proposing online sales, improving communication of its social and ecological mission and finally acquiring equipment to reduce production costs and better value donations through upcycling.

REFERENCES, LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION:

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