Zurayk, a well-known member of Lebanon's progressive environmentalist community, quickly set up mobile clinics to deliver supplies and knowledge to farmers across the South, beginning in Al-Ash-Shab and Aytarun and moving to dozens of other villages below the Liti River.

As his development work took shape, Zurayk led the project Land and People, and partnered with Samatoul, a group comprised of many farmer AUB students who worked to provide services to the South throughout the war.

Over the last two years, Land and People has grown into a fluid and far-reaching organization, helping hundreds of farmers and producers to rebuild their farms and introduce organic agricultural practices.

It is one of several development-driven groups, most coordinated through AUB, that are working to promote conservation, biodiversity and agricultural sustainability in some of Lebanon's poorest, rural areas.

Land and People is made up of three mobile clinics, each headed by an engineer who works directly with farmers in Southern villages. Each clinic was designed to reach 260 farmers, producers and families, and to increase their yearly income by $500.

"Destoying people's livelihoods, as labeled in the war, can only be responded to by building people's livelihoods," Zurayk said.

A New York-based group of Lebanese-Americans known as SEFAL, the Italian nonprofit organization ICODEP and Germany's Heinrich Boll Foundation have provided financial support for the work.

According to Zurayk, each clinic costs $25,000 a year. But he noted that when the costs are seen through the additional profit for each farmer or producer (what Zurayk termed "livelihoods"), the project has a net return of 400 percent.

"We have met, actually exceeded our goals," he said.

Land and People's mobile clinic visits farmers across the South daily. In Der Ghebr, just south of Tyre, a farm destroyed in the 2005 conflict was rebuilt into a woman's cooperative. Twenty-two women work the land, growing vegetables and herbs and making traditional bread. All of the products are grown organically and certified by Lebanese, Lebanon's organic certification body.

"We can't give them money but we give them the tools and teach them the practices," said Khalil ElMalek, one of Land and People's three engineers.

Several kilometers down the road, a citrus grower, Ahmed Chebil, greeted Hassan Hamza, another engineer, warmly. He had been planning to cut down his citrus trees before Khraib helped him rehabilitate his trees, which had been destroyed.

Land and People engineer Bacha Barakat saw shock and resiliency. "When khala came, everything changed," said Chebil, who has also become an organic farmer.

Closer to the Blue Line in Cheama, the engineers visited Mohammad Sorie, a large farm producer. Sorie spoke about the amount of farming land that had been destroyed during the war. Along with aiding in rehabilitation, he said that Land and People helped him market his farm, made by burning green wheat, at farmers' markets and shops in larger urban areas.

This is another of Land and People initiatives — to help farmers reach larger markets and to directly connect producers and consumers, part of what Zurayk calls "linking the value chain.

An example is how this goal is more visible than in Aita Al-Shehab, where Land and People established a women's cooperative to make laurel oil and soap. Each woman from the village harvests the laurel seeds and extract the oil, by traditional methods — boiling them slowly and boiling the pot extract.

The scops and oils are marketed in Beirut, at groceries like the popular Souk Al-Thayeb farmers' market and Haithil Backer, an organic foods boutique that Zurayk helped start.

"In 2006 the whole place was littered with cluster bombs," Zurayk recalled. "The women harvested the laurel before they had been declared.

Land and People also has a strong presence in Aytarun, where engineers have helped farmers away from trees and excavated for water. "It is the people who will conserve... This won't happen unless they feel compelled to participate.

While in Beirut, Zurayk said that the center aims to work differently than donor-driven NGOs and international organizations, by creating a lasting connection between the people and the land — a sentiment that Zurayk echoed.

"If you plant something and see it grow, it's different than treating it as an abstract way," Tahtak said. "It's the people who will conserve... This won't happen unless they feel compelled to participate.

"We have met, actually exceeded our goals," he said.