

# Pursuing Sustainable Development under Sectarianism in Lebanon

MONA CHRISTOPHERSEN



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

IPI launched the SDGs4Peace project in 2016 to understand how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is being rooted at the national and local levels and to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In its preamble, the 2030 Agenda states, "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." The SDGs4Peace project asks how countries are operationalizing this link in practice to realize the 2030 Agenda's holistic vision.

The project focuses on five case studies: the Gambia, Greece, Guatemala, Lebanon, and Myanmar. Each of these case studies is based on fieldwork, including interviews with representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society. While these countries are at different levels of development, each is going through a period of internal transformation. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda therefore provides them an opportunity not only to buttress existing aspirations but also to build new partnerships that transcend traditional approaches.

As many countries are only just starting to implement the 2030 Agenda, this project also presents an opportunity to spread the word about the SDGs and why they matter to local leaders and communities. By bridging the local with the global, it can highlight ways of working toward shared goals and adapting them to specific contexts.

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## Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda calls for inclusiveness, which can contribute to stability and peace as well as development in Lebanon. However, while Lebanon's power-sharing model was instrumental in ending fifteen years of civil war, it is outdated as the country embarks on a process to achieve the 2030 Agenda and advance the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An inclusive and just society cannot be built on a political system that is organized around patron-client relationships that generate and institutionalize dependency and inequality. Efficient, resilient, and inclusive institutions are thus key for Lebanon's sustainable development. When all Lebanese start to receive protection, social services, and opportunities for education and public sector employment from the state, they can become citizens of a nation instead of subjects of a sect leader.

Although sectarianism is impeding political processes in Lebanon, the SDGs can provide an opportunity for the country to address some of its political model's limitations. The process of implementing the 2030 Agenda will face challenges, particularly from those benefiting from the current system. Yet the SDGs could introduce crosscutting topics into the political dialogue that are currently not viewed by the sectarian leaders as legitimate or mainstream. As such, the SDGs give Lebanon an opportunity for fundamental change in a wide range of areas.

Lebanon is struggling with several environmental challenges, from sustainably managing water and sanitation, including solid waste, to providing stable electricity. The influx of more than a million Syrian refugees has put additional pressure on the environment. Although awareness around these issues is emerging, Lebanon faces the classic dilemma of finding the balance between the three pillars of sustainable development: economic growth, raising the quality of life of its people, and environmental protection. Further, the failure to develop stable electricity and water supply has pushed Lebanese to resort to private backup solutions like water trucks and private generators when public services fail. A full-scale business sector has grown up around these alternative service providers and has become profitable for influential business investors. These investors have

little interest in losing their market share by building up better organized and more efficient public services. Basic services are fundamental to a social contract between citizens and the state where the citizens can rely on stable service delivery as a measure of their trust and support of their leaders.

Education is often used as an important tool for nation building and is a key element of the state's service provision. Education is further seen as fundamental to future progress and development, and few are against education as a tool to achieve prosperity. One of Lebanon's challenges is that it has a dual education system where the majority of students are educated in private schools, often organized along sectarian lines. Although all schools, public and private, have to follow the curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the division between public and private schools gives Lebanese children unequal opportunities from the start. The challenge of accommodating Syrian refugee children has put additional strain on the public schools, which now operate in double shifts. Yet this challenge also gave Lebanon an opportunity to improve its education system in advance of the SDGs, as it had to improve both the capacity and the quality of public education in response to the refugees. These improvements are benefiting both Lebanese and Syrian children and will continue to benefit Lebanese children when the refugees return home in the future.

Lebanon is a conservative society on issues related to family and gender, and many laws discriminate against women. That is why the new government has appointed a new minister for women's affairs, who will start identifying these laws and trying to amend them to enhance the status of women and girls in the country. Currently, personal status is not regulated by a national civil code, but instead by codes orchestrated by each religious sect, resulting in different regulations depending on sect affiliation. Some personal status issues are controversial in Lebanon, and the new ministry has decided to advance step by step. It will not make a mandatory civil code for personal status, which would meet resistance from religious leaders. Instead, it will put forward some mandatory regulations, for example on the age for marriage, while going more slowly on the most controversial issues. The main priority is to allow

an alternative civil code to give people a choice to abandon the religious codes. This work is an important step toward enhancing the situation for women and girls in Lebanon.

Lebanon's economy has suffered from its proximity to the war in Syria and the ensuing influx of more than a million refugees and has slowed to 0–1 percent growth in recent years. Yet Lebanon's main economic challenge is that it has a rentier economy that does not produce economic opportunities for the majority. The priority of the new government is thus to spur inclusive economic growth of 4–5 percent to create jobs. Economic growth is often claimed to be a prerequisite for development, but without mechanisms for distributing additional wealth it will not automatically reduce inequality and poverty. To reduce inequality, economic growth must be combined with some redistribution measures to achieve the SDG targets. To align with the basic idea of the 2030 Agenda that no one should be left behind, national policies have to address inequality and exclusion as well as privileges that generate inequality in society. Reduced inequality is important for stability and peace, and all the more so in a context like Lebanon's that remains fragile, despite its resilience after the civil war.

Lebanon has made progress toward the SDGs, and its current leaders have expressed strong support for the 2030 Agenda. Nonetheless, there are many challenges ahead, particularly regarding the country's governance structure. This research highlights a number of areas particularly important for Lebanon's progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda:

1. Change from a sectarian quota system to a more democratic system of governance.
2. Build trust and form a new social contract where citizens are active and responsible actors in society rather than dependent subjects of a sect leader.
3. Increase transparency and strengthen the rule of law.
4. Foster social, political, and economic inclusion.
5. Reform the education system to reduce inequality.

## Introduction

Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing model was instrumental in ending fifteen years of civil war. However, it appears to be outdated as the country embarks on a process to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This policy paper examines Lebanon's capacity to achieve the 2030 Agenda and will address the opportunities and challenges the country is encountering in implementing the SDGs. It also explores the relationship between Lebanon's current sectarian power-sharing system and the achievement of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda calls for inclusiveness, which can contribute to stability and peace as well as development in Lebanon. However, the question remains: Under Lebanon's current power-sharing model, is it possible to promote sustainable development and reform systems for distributing resources and delivering services without triggering new conflict and violence? Can the model foster a peaceful and inclusive society?

Lebanon's long history of power sharing along sectarian lines dates back to its National Pact of 1943. This pact disproportionately favored the country's Christian groups over its Muslim population, a bias that was challenged during Lebanon's civil war (1975–1990). The Taif Accords of 1989 ended the war by renegotiating the National Pact to allow more power to the Muslim sects and create a system aiming for better representation of the Lebanese population.<sup>1</sup> The new power-sharing system was built on fixed quotas for parliament and central institutions that divided them between the country's most influential religious sects. Initially, it was intended that the agreement would be abolished and replaced by more democratic arrangements once the political situation in the country had stabilized. However, it remains intact today.

The sectarian power-sharing system has been praised for saving Lebanon after years of violent sectarian conflict and civil war and has appeared surprisingly resilient in an increasingly unstable region. Lebanon has nevertheless remained fragile, partly because sectarianism has constrained the

<sup>1</sup> Representativeness remains questionable because no official census has taken place in Lebanon since 1932 due to the sensitive balance between the country's religious groups.

development of a resilient central state able to carry out essential functions such as delivering services to its citizens. Instead, the social vacuum created by the absence of a robust central state has produced clientelistic practices in both economic and political life, which have facilitated the production and reproduction of sectarian subjects in patron-client networks.<sup>2</sup> The practice of distributing resources and services through these networks has ensured that power remains in the hands of political and sectarian elites who preserve their interests at the expense of the increasingly impoverished lower and middle classes. Although Lebanon has been characterized by political sectarianism since independence, this system is currently being constructed and reconstructed in a wider political context, particularly regionally, which poses a new and different set of challenges.

In addition to these domestic challenges, Lebanon has been severely impacted by the conflict in Syria and the influx of more than a million Syrian refugees, increasing the country's pre-war population by at least twenty-five percent.<sup>3</sup> The influx of Syrian refugees has thus placed a strain on Lebanon's resources and service delivery systems, though this has to some extent been mitigated by the international humanitarian response. The conflict next door has also had a disastrous impact on Lebanon's economy, as a substantial part of its trade went to or through Syria. Threats to the country's stability and the continued possibility of regional spillover from the Syrian conflict have also deterred tourism and investment. A representative from the government claimed that the effect of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon "was very difficult on the political level, on the security level, and on the economic and social level [as it] created domestic divisions among the Lebanese, which has kind of paralyzed the functioning of the institutions."<sup>4</sup>

Despite these challenges, Lebanon has advanced on some of the SDGs through its support to Syrian refugees. For example, both Lebanese and Syrian children have to some extent benefited from improved education programs (SDG 4), although

more can be done to achieve better quality education for all children in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, Lebanon's engagement with the SDGs had a complicated start due to several governance challenges in the last five to six years. In the absence of a strong and unified leadership, the country was without a president and overseen by a caretaker government. The council of ministers was not meeting regularly, leaving a void for national decision making. Yet in the months preceding IPI's field trip to Lebanon in February 2017, the country experienced an important political change: the Sunnis finally agreed for Michel Aoun to be president. According to Lebanon's National Pact, the president must be a Maronite Christian, but because Aoun had close links to and support from Hezbollah, the Iran-supported Shia Islamist group, he was perceived to be Hezbollah's candidate. For this reason, Aoun's appointment was for a long time opposed by the Sunnis. When the agreement for the presidency was reached, it also paved the way for the return of the Sunni leader Saad Hariri (son of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri) as prime minister in November 2016.

Saad Hariri replaced the "caretaker" administration that had operated while the presidency was vacant, and for the first time in years the council of ministers began meeting on a regular basis, strengthening the decision-making body that could start developing national strategies for the country. In the words of a government official, "Now we have new dynamics in the country, with the election of a new president [and] the appointment of Hariri as prime minister. You see that the council of ministers is convening on a weekly basis. They are able to reach very important decisions in different areas."<sup>5</sup>

These changes also created new opportunities for a hesitant sustainable development process in Lebanon. Indeed, the new prime minister confirmed the country's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs during the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit. This change

2 Bassel F. Shalloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

3 Lebanese officials claim there are between 1.5 and 2 million Syrian refugees in the country, yet they have not provided reliable statistics supporting these assumptions. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has registered fewer refugees without disputing the government's assessments; not all refugees want to be registered, and UNHCR was instructed to stop registering refugees in June 2015. See <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

4 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

5 Meeting with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

was viewed positively by many actors, including some UN representatives who had claimed that Lebanon's initial approach to the SDGs had been "chaotic and tentative" due to the governance and refugee challenges.<sup>6</sup> These crises had made it difficult to start discussions about medium- and long-term sustainable development.

## METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This report is based on two weeks of fieldwork in Lebanon in February 2017, during which mostly semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders involved in planning and implementing Lebanon's policies relating to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Aiming for a wide variety of sources, interviews were conducted with government officials in different ministries, officials representing different UN organizations, and representatives of NGOs, civil society groups, and the private sector. Because most of these actors reside in the country's capital, Beirut, we also made a point to visit a village in the Akkar region in North Lebanon. Despite this effort to find a variety of sources, we inevitably missed important actors, especially considering the comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

This report should thus be seen as a preliminary assessment of a long-term process, not as a complete evaluation. The aim has been to take a positive approach in evaluating the country's progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to identify some of the main challenges ahead. We also wish to contribute to reflections on potential lessons to learn for other countries struggling with similar dilemmas. A more comprehensive and independent evaluation of the process is suggested for a later stage.

## Sectarian Power Sharing: A Challenge for Advancement of the SDGs

Participation and inclusion are fundamental to achieving the SDGs and to building peaceful societies. Toward this end, the cabinet's June 2017 decision to change the electoral system to proportional representation could be an important step

forward for strengthening democracy in Lebanon. Indeed, there have been efforts to change Lebanon's voting system for years. The current electoral system grants different sects a certain number of parliamentary seats based on fixed quotas. However, there has been no census in Lebanon since 1932. The quotas are therefore no longer representative of the actual distribution of members of different sects within the population.

Further, the system has allowed the dominant sects to determine the outcome of elections by negotiating for seats belonging to smaller sects. Since all the voters in a district vote for candidates from all the sects, it is possible for stronger sects to build coalition lists for all the seats. The large sects thus dominate the outcome of the elections through agreements finalized before the election takes place. Sectarian leaders have also used the quota system as a tool to continue the sectarian subjectification of individuals by offering protection and services in return for support in elections, creating dependency between the leaders and members of the sect. Although the proposed election law could be a step in the right direction, concerns have been raised that the elections could be further delayed, which would be a violation of the constitution. A potentially democratic development could thus have ambiguous results.

Lebanon has officially recognized eighteen religious sects, each affiliated with a particular confession. However, according to a leader of a Lebanese think tank, religion is not these sects' most important aspect:

We call [them] the political sects,... sectarianism is a cover. It is used by somebody who wants to be the boss. So it is the fuel.... For example, if I am a Sunni leader I will tell everybody that the Shia is going to kill us. And then the Sunni will come and say, please protect us. And if I am a Shia I will say the Sunni and if I am a Christian I will say the Muslims are coming after us, and vice versa. But it is not sectarian [it is a way to struggle for power]. The civil war started in 1975 with Muslim and Christians shooting each other, or it was shown like this. But after a while it became Christian against Christian (Gaga against Aoun), it became Hezbollah against Amal (both Shia sects), so if it was sectarian, why were they shooting each other? It was because these leaders were trying

<sup>6</sup> Interview with UN official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.



to keep their territory, and they were very successful in convincing us that we are a sectarian people, which we are not. Lebanese polls show that a majority of Lebanese want to abolish the sectarian political system. And even if we do not abolish it altogether in the next election, at least give us a choice to vote for someone on a non-sectarian basis.<sup>7</sup>

He further claimed that people are captive to the sect leaders, for example because they provide important paths to employment. The sects are the biggest employer after the government, and even for government positions the sect leaders have a say in the distribution of jobs according to an informal quota system. If you are a Sunni Muslim by birth and want to be employed in the public sector, you have to go to your sect leader and ask for his approval before you can get the job. Many people therefore have no choice but to give their loyalty to the sect leader. For the sect leader, provision of employment opportunities is not an act of compassion for the poor, but part of his strategy to subjectify individuals.

The public sector employs large numbers in this way... and these people and their families are dependent on the government for their livelihood. In addition, the sect leaders are employing people directly in schools, hospitals, and security services organized by the sect, so that adds another group of people that are dependent [on] the sects for their livelihoods. Then you have those that are not directly employed through the sects: the developers, the contractors and businessmen. They are dependent on relations [with] the sect leaders to do their business, and further, [when these contractors and businessmen] employ people, [they give priority to sect members].<sup>8</sup>

This expert suggested that all these people and their families who are dependent on the sects for their livelihoods will not be part of a movement for change against the sectarian system. The result is that rather few people in Lebanon have the motivation to express their unhappiness and to go out into the street to protest.

The complexities of political sectarianism in Lebanon have thus made economic development secondary. Employment in the public sector is

guided not by the aim to implement tasks efficiently, but by the intention to create loyal subjects who will keep leaders in power. The dependency in these relationships can diminish social and political engagement to reduce the power of the sects and aim for a more representative democracy, and there are few ways to escape it. The resilience of the sectarian system was demonstrated in the election of the syndicate of private school teachers in 2017, in which all sects and political factions united to exclude the independent candidate.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, an interviewee claimed that public servants have organized street protests over the last five years to demand salary raises, a demand that was acknowledged in the 2017 state budget.<sup>10</sup>

Lebanese have the option to delete their religious affiliation from their identity papers, but this does not guarantee that the affiliation will be wiped from all official records. For example, one person who tried to do this found out that, although his sect would be deleted from his ID card, it would not be deleted from the government registers.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, deleting his religious affiliation would render him ineligible to apply for many jobs, particularly in the public sector, where jobs are distributed among the sects. Choosing to stand outside the sectarian system can thus be very challenging. In this way, sectarianism is a powerful tool for social control. As a result, most people choose to adhere to the system rather than fighting it and try to make the best of their lives within the limits and opportunities set around them.

According to an expert on Lebanese development, the sectarian system is entrenched in the Lebanese society:

The situation now in terms of polarization and extremism and in terms of destruction of values, of human rights and tolerance, is much worse than during the civil war. Of course, during the civil war people were killed just because they were from a different political party or religion. However, it [this practice of killing religious and political adversaries] was never accepted by the [majority of] people. Now the hatred and fanaticism is accepted by the popula-

7 Interview with think tank leader, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

8 Ibid.

9 "Nehme Mahfoud's List Wins Teachers Syndicate Elections," Naharnet, April 21, 2013, available at [www.naharnet.com/stories/en/80325](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/80325).

10 Interview with public servant, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

11 Interview with think tank leader, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

tion; the extremism is accepted and being presented as the main way to counterbalance the power of others, a way to show strength at the cost of others. It is the logic of fascism everywhere.... What we need is to work on civic values and [a] culture of peace. It is not just [the] peace of not going to war; it [goes] deeper into civic values [and] of being part of a common society—a nation.<sup>12</sup>

Sectarianism in Lebanon is thus creating divisions in a country in need of unity. Under the Lebanese sectarian system, the so-called social contract is between the people and their sect leader instead of between the people and the state. The sect leader provides basic services and protection in return for support of his leadership role in national decision making. This relationship is asymmetrical. It can never provide the foundation for a real democratic process where individuals are able to freely shift support and allegiances when they are not satisfied with the performance of their leaders.

The proposed introduction of proportional representation is a step in the right direction. Yet some critics argue that, because the major political

parties will still have sectarian affiliations, they will aim to win a larger share of seats when they are no longer restricted by the sectarian quotas. The capacity of these large parties to protect minority interests will determine whether the new electoral system is a real step toward the achievement of a peaceful and democratic society and just and inclusive development. Further, the tendency to postpone elections and extend the terms of parliament and the government contradicts efforts to advance democratic development.

## Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lebanon

### THE SDGS AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

Although sectarianism is impeding political processes in Lebanon, the SDGs can provide an opportunity for the country to address some of the political model's limitations. The process of implementing the 2030 Agenda will not be unchal-

Figure 1. The seventeen SDGs



12 Interview with development expert, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

lenged, particularly from those benefiting from the current system. Yet the SDGs could introduce crosscutting topics into the political dialogue that are currently not viewed by the sects as legitimate or mainstream. As such, the SDGs give Lebanon an opportunity for fundamental change.

Lebanon's work on sustainable development dates back to 2006, when the council of ministers appointed the Ministry of Environment to be the focal point for sustainable development in Lebanon in anticipation of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. The Ministry of Environment took this opportunity to push for a national strategy for sustainable development, taking the lead in an inclusive process with other ministries, the private sector, and NGOs. A road map for sustainable development was launched in March 2015.

The adoption of the SDGs in September 2015 called for a new focus on sustainable development complementing the earlier efforts of the Ministry of Environment. Shortly after the new government's inauguration in December 2016, Lebanon's commitment to the 2030 Agenda was confirmed during a meeting between the new Prime Minister Saad Hariri and the representative of UN agencies operating in the country. They agreed to develop a new road map for how Lebanon could advance on the SDGs. Given the comprehensive scope of the agenda they agreed that the government could not advance on all of the SDGs simultaneously. Nor could it adopt a blanket strategy for all the goals. Instead, they agreed to undertake a validation exercise to determine where Lebanon sits in relation to each goal. When we conducted fieldwork in February 2017, little progress had been made to put these plans into action. The delay was explained by the political impasse and governance challenges described above.

Parallel to the government's renewed focus on the 2030 Agenda, the Ministry of Environment developed a "Roadmap towards the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Lebanon" and proposed seven strategic objectives that integrate all seventeen SDGs: "(1) providing a world class

human capital; (2) strengthening social cohesion; (3) providing [for] the citizen's daily priorities; (4) enhancing economic growth; (5) conserving natural and cultural heritage; (6) promoting good governance; and (7) repositioning Lebanon on the Arab, Mediterranean and international map."<sup>13</sup> The ministry has identified forty concrete initiatives to help meet these strategic objectives, each of which fits under one of the seven strategic objectives. To complement the roadmap and provide greater detail on how the initiatives will help achieve the SDGs, the ministry conducted literature reviews and produced background papers, which were sent to the relevant ministries for review. The ministry was also planning to have representatives of the private sector and civil society reviewing these papers to ensure that the process of drafting the national strategy is inclusive.

The Ministry of Environment's road map for sustainable development also calls for a consultation process with local municipalities. This is a challenge, however, because although Lebanon is a small country, it has 1,200 municipalities. To facilitate cooperation and improve coordination, many municipalities have formed unions (there are forty-two such municipal unions in total). These unions can also facilitate the consultative process for the SDGs. At the time of the fieldwork in February 2017, the Ministry of Environment was preparing a guide to assist municipalities in enforcing environmental legislation at the local level, disseminating information about environmental protection, and organizing workshops on environmental protection for local actors.

To embark on the 2030 Agenda, the prime minister's office asked the UN Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the government, to implement a gap analysis to explore Lebanon's position vis-à-vis the SDGs. The aim is to examine how existing national policies, laws, decrees, and strategies can help advance the goals of the 2030 Agenda and to identify gaps where additional policies and plans could be implemented to improve the outcomes of the SDG process.<sup>14</sup> While useful, a gap analysis would be

13 Lebanese Ministry of Environment, "Roadmap towards the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Lebanon," March 3, 2015, available at <http://nsds.pcm.gov.lb/Cultures/ar-LB/publications/docs/Documents/roadmap.pdf>.

14 The agreement for this collaboration was signed on June 20, 2017. See [www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/06/21/signing-project-document-of-sustainable-development-goals-in-lebanon.html](http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/06/21/signing-project-document-of-sustainable-development-goals-in-lebanon.html).

more beneficial if it fed into a comprehensive and transformative approach to the 2030 Agenda, rather than simply filling in gaps with small, individual projects.

The agreement to undertake this gap analysis can be seen as a cautious start by the government to advance the 2030 Agenda and build support for its implementation in Lebanon's complex and fragile political reality. For example, the cooperation agreement between the government and UNDP (on the gap analysis) was delayed due to lack of political consensus among sect leaders on what should have been a relatively small decision. Consensus building will be particularly difficult as the country prepares for general elections in May 2018. While the current government has been appointed to serve only in the interim, Hariri's Future Movement is hopeful it will win the elections and continue its efforts toward the SDGs. However, it is a challenge for a short-term government to develop long-term strategies, which has left Lebanon with less leeway to develop policies and advance on the 2030 Agenda.

The war in Syria and the vast number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon present additional challenges to implementing the 2030 Agenda, including those relating to Lebanon's economy, the political process, and, not least, the country's stability and social cohesion. For example, in 2014 the World Bank estimated that, for Lebanon to deliver the level and quality of services it had provided to its population prior to the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011, it would need a \$2.5 billion investment.<sup>15</sup> Lebanon thus carries a disproportionate responsibility for the Syrian refugees, a responsibility it has requested the international community to share, in recognition of Lebanon's continued generous policies toward the refugees, despite the challenges posed by a 25 percent increase in the country's original population.

Another challenge to the 2030 Agenda in Lebanon is that, due to the years of governance impasse, the country has not voted on its national budget since the assassination of former Prime

Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Attempts by successive governments to pass new budgets were obstructed by lack of cooperation between the two main political blocs: the March 8 and the March 14 coalitions that emerged after Hariri's assassination. Instead, past governments have reproduced or amended previous budgets without consultations on national priorities, adequate auditing, or voting in parliament. This meant that Lebanon's budgets have been decided according to old plans and strategies or, as some claim, old ways of doing things. This lack of political direction for the national budget has led to continued deficits and an all-time-high foreign debt of \$30.4 billion in November 2017.<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 2017, the government started discussing the budget to prepare a vote in parliament for the first time in twelve years. After approval by the cabinet in March, mass protests took place against the suggested tax hikes. The cabinet has since amended the draft budget in an effort to strengthen its tax base by raising taxes for larger entities such as financial institutions instead of adding taxes for the poor. Big revisions are needed for a budget that has not been audited for years. One economist explained how they were starting to audit parts of the budget: "The new budget [needs] to find a way to pay the [public sector] wage grid. Since five years they did not raise the salaries in the public sector. This will cost [\$1.6 billion] and will be the main part of the budget assessment this year. They will not assess the whole budget of \$23 billion."<sup>17</sup> He went on to suggest that they could consider reducing the number of public school teachers: "In private schools the ratio is one teacher to twenty-two students, in public schools it is only one to seven."<sup>18</sup> There are more teachers per student in public schools because sect leaders have used the public sector to create employment opportunities for their supporters.

In October 2017 the amended budget was approved by parliament, a major step toward reforming and regaining control over Lebanon's economy. This budget will have a direct impact on

15 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

16 Trading Economics, "Lebanon Public External Debt 1993–2018," available at <https://tradingeconomics.com/lebanon/external-debt>.

17 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

18 I was not able to confirm this number but found a source citing an average student-teacher ratio of between 15.6 (at the pre-primary level) and 7.7 (at the secondary level) in 2012, not specifying differences between public and private schools. See BankMed, "Analysis of Lebanon's Education Sector," June 2014, p. 15, available at [www.bankmed.com.lb/BOMedia/subservices/categories/News/20150515170635891.pdf](http://www.bankmed.com.lb/BOMedia/subservices/categories/News/20150515170635891.pdf).

the country's ability to achieve the SDGs once the gap analysis and planning period is complete. The government also approved the establishment of a national committee to lead and coordinate implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The committee includes representatives of all ministries and other government agencies, as well as of the private sector and civil society, including development experts.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the government sees the SDGs as useful, because many of them match Lebanon's most urgent priorities. As one government official stated, these include "to jump-start the economy and jump-start...growth, because growth has been very sluggish for the last five years.... None of [the seventeen SDGs] would make sense if the economy is still growing at 0–1 percent, and you want an economy that is growing at 4–5 percent to be able to create jobs. You want growth that is inclusive and growth that is job-creating."<sup>20</sup> The government hopes to boost economic growth by launching infrastructure projects, promoting innovation, improving regulations for setting up small businesses, and providing vocational training programs for people who have dropped out of school. Further, it hopes the SDGs can help to channel some donor funding its way, a hope that may be challenged by the fact that Lebanon is defined as a middle-income country by the World Bank.

Lebanon's political instability and constant threats of insecurity lead many people to claim that peace and security are needed before work on sustainable development can begin. In this context, international pressure, such as through the process of working toward the SDGs, can be a helpful way to push important issues on the national government's agenda. For example, in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, the Ministry of Environment was required to produce a progress report, ultimately spurring state leaders to finally act on its 1992 commitment to pass legislation for environmental impact assessments. The 2019 Summit on the 2030 Agenda could provide a similar opportunity to convince politicians to advance on the SDGs.

## EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS: GOAL 16

Peace, security, and effective governance based on the rule of law are prerequisites for sustainable development, and strong and inclusive institutions are the main tool to implement the 2030 Agenda. In Lebanon, however, institutions are weak, and all the people interviewed for this report considered weak institutions to be a major challenge. While the weakening of public institutions in Lebanon started during the civil war, it continued after. Before 2005, there was a "single authority" in the country, though it was implemented by de facto Syrian occupation. Since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 (forced by mass protests following the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri), there has been a lack of a central authority.

The country's complex political composition and complicated decision-making processes, which require consensus among all the confessional groups, can make lack of decision making easy to excuse. Decisions therefore tend to get lost in sectarian intrigue over who has put forward a suggestion and which sect will benefit, in lieu of a system of checks and balances based on the rule of law. The Lebanese trash crisis in 2015 serves as an example of these weak institutions in the context of the country's prolonged political impasse (see Box 1). For this reason, the new prime minister has made strengthening institutions one of his main priorities.

"Strong institutions," however, have bad connotations for many in the Middle East who have lived under totalitarian regimes with strong institutions but limited freedom and justice. In the Middle East, therefore, the term "sustainable institutions" or "inclusive institutions" might be more favorable, not only to avoid the word "strong," but also to communicate that institutions built on the rule of law and capable of withstanding regime change are needed in this unstable region. A representative of the current government also claimed that "we don't know if we are in government for a long time, so [if we build resilient institutions] at least this will remain."<sup>21</sup> The 2030 Agenda reflects this reality, as SDG 16 calls for

19 Personal correspondence with government official, August 2017.

20 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

21 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

### Box 1. “You Stink”: Lebanon’s garbage crisis<sup>22</sup>

For many years, trash from Beirut and much of central Lebanon was sent to a landfill near Naimeh, a town south of Beirut. The amount of trash, however, eventually exceeded the landfill’s capacity, and people living nearby objected to the smell and potential health hazards. Due to the lack of response from the government in 2014, the local population decided to block the road to the landfill, causing a pile-up of garbage in Beirut. The road was reopened when the government promised to find alternative ways to dispose of the garbage. However, after a year of inaction, the locals resumed blocking the road to the landfill, and once more garbage piled up in the streets of Beirut, outside homes, schools, and hospitals.

When the government again was unable to find a solution, thousands of protesters poured into downtown Beirut to demand the government’s resignation over its inability to solve the garbage crisis. The piles of garbage on the streets became a symbol of the political paralysis gripping the country and unified many Lebanese otherwise divided by sect in what is now called the “You Stink” movement. Members of this movement demand a sustainable solution to the city’s waste problem, which they see as evidence of a corrupt and dysfunctional administration unable to take action.

The aim of the movement thus goes beyond the trash crisis; it calls for solutions to a list of other issues seen as rooted in a weak government, such as years of a vacant presidency and failure (for a long time) to agree on new parliamentary elections. While these specific issues have now been solved, many challenges remain, including insufficient electricity, entrenched corruption, lack of a comprehensive policy to manage the influx of Syrian refugees, and the threat of militant extremism spilling over the border from Syria. Also, although garbage collection resumed following the crisis in 2015, waste management continues to be a problem due to the lack of legal disposal plants. As a result, illegal dumps are emerging around the country; some people have started to burn trash out of frustration, while others have been seen dumping garbage into valleys and the sea.

“You Stink” continues to be a peaceful, nonsectarian movement aiming to mobilize Lebanese citizens to fight for their rights. It is perhaps the largest nonsectarian campaign of civil disobedience in a decade. Among the movement’s recent mobilizations were protests against the proposed new taxes in the national budget and the extension of the parliament’s term until May 2018, which political leaders claimed was necessary to organize elections under a fundamentally different new electoral system.

building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

In Lebanon, where politics are dominated by sectarian rivalries, robust and resilient institutions are all the more important. Explaining this further, a government official said:

If you are holding power, if you have arms, for example, you can enforce what you want, and this leads to inequalities. And why? Because of corruption, because of injustice, because some are privileged and others are not. So we need institution[al] reform first. Otherwise, somebody privileged from this sect, or follower of x

leader [says], “I might be more qualified than him,” or “he might be more qualified than me,” but we don’t look at the qualifications and what we can offer the country.... [Instead], laws and regulations should be enforced, and no one should be above the law.<sup>23</sup>

Sharing this sentiment, another government official referred to a statement made by the president in February 2017 in which he said that Lebanon’s army was not strong enough to protect the country. The statement points to Hezbollah, which is said to be better organized and armed, with more efficient weapons than the Lebanese army. The official elaborated:

22 The garbage crisis of 2014 and onwards was spontaneously described and commented upon by nearly all interviewees, including some of the “You Stink” initiators. See also, for example, Karim El-Gawhary, “Rubbish Knows No Religion,” Qantara.de, September 2, 2015, available at <https://en.qantara.de/content/lebanons-you-stink-protest-movement-rubbish-knows-no-religion>.

23 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 17, 2017.

Let's not kid ourselves; Hezbollah is the pink elephant in the room which no one talks about. Because we don't want [to annoy] anyone right now, they [Hezbollah] don't go on us in a backlash. But the reality is that they are an armed group in Lebanon, with their little state within the state, with their own education system, with their own health-care system, with their own sanitation system in Dahieh,<sup>24</sup> with their own network for telephones and their own welfare system. This is a reality; it is not something that I [make up].... I have this friend who did research in their schools, and they get indoctrinated from the start in different ways. They follow a different curriculum...., and when they take attendance the student doesn't say "present," he says "shahid," which means martyr.<sup>25</sup>

The government official and many others believe that the only way to resist the strength of Hezbollah is to strengthen state institutions. They hope that when, for example, the children in Hezbollah's territories start to receive education, healthcare, welfare, and other services from the state instead of from Hezbollah, they will realize that the state can fulfill their needs. The same is hoped for security and jobs; when the army and internal security forces can protect the citizens of the country and job opportunities become available, it is hoped that individuals will no longer feel the obligation to follow a sect leader to secure protection, employment, and social services.

Strong and inclusive institutions that work according to the rule of law and aim to fulfill the needs of the people can not only challenge sectarianism; they can also be used against rising extremism in the country. Generally, the Lebanese people claim they are moderate and not inclined toward extremism. However, if the country continues to have a stagnant economy that does not create new jobs and cannot absorb young people coming of age, extremism could quickly become an alternative pathway, particularly in a country that has recently lived through an ugly civil war and still builds identities along sectarian lines. When young children are poor and drop out of school before the age of fifteen, they have little resistance to someone from an armed group

approaching them with an offer of militant training and a monthly income of \$200. These groups have an interest in keeping state institutions weak, because this gives them space to build their constituency and power base as an alternative to the state. This makes it all the more important for the Lebanese state to make its institutions stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

Although Lebanon's sectarian system redistributes some wealth through charity and jobs, it also increases inequality. There are major inequalities within the sects, where a few are very rich and the majority are poor and dependent on favors from the leader. These few rich sectarian leaders control the real power in the country:

We have a mafia of people that are cross cutting all communities, a small minority of people that are multimillionaires. This group is related mainly to the political system and the neo-patrimonial state and warlords. And it is not accepted ethically by the population. They are a combination of politicians and businessmen that mainly are politicians and militia-men. And they use the political positions to become rich. You can stay one month as a minister, for example of infrastructure, and you become rich. It is not accepted ethically and is dealt with as corruption, but still [has a] little bit [of] accepted value, like people are considered clever because they know how to get money. And the honest people are compared to donkeys, like how come you didn't make money out of having this important position?<sup>26</sup>

This power structure is a legacy from the civil war, which created a kind of informal coalition between militias, the military, warlords, and the wealthy. Together they form a relatively small group of rich men controlling the majority of the country's power. Power is thus exercised through informal networks rather than through formal institutions and regulations, ultimately weakening the state. Although the country has a president, a government, a parliament, and other institutions, the decisions are to a large extent taken outside these institutions. Instead, this small powerful group can interfere in the government's decision-making processes. A development expert elaborated:

<sup>24</sup> Dahieh is a neighborhood in south Beirut that is controlled by Hezbollah.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with development expert, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

Sometimes they decide explicitly outside the institutions. That is why we had a parliament that extended [its term] for years. During two years and a half without a president...the role of the state became minimal, with institutions without plans and...twelve years without [voting on a] state budget.... Lebanon is a decentralized and fragmented [rentier] state [controlled by a] kind of mafia groups treating both people and valuables as spoils for their own benefit. It is not class or religious groups—Christian, Muslim, or Shia-Sunni—it is those few individuals with power, like tribe leaders in the Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup>

Lebanon can be described as a decentralized and fragmented neo-patrimonial state, a hierarchical system where patrons use state resources to secure the loyalty of their followers or “clients.” This system often exists in parallel to the state’s bureaucratic structures. Real power is obtained through connections, undermining the power and influence of people holding formal leadership positions. In this way, neo-patrimonialism weakens political institutions and the rule of law. Leaders often use their power under this system for personal gain rather than for the interests of the country or its people.<sup>28</sup>

A development expert explained how this decentralized system is more complicated now than it used to be. Powerful leaders used to have their power base related to a local community, which allowed local problems to be solved through local negotiations. Now, however, their power is more directly related to regional interests and power struggles, particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which also follow a Shia-Sunni divide. The result, according to this expert, is that local communities are controlled by a sect leader and his political party, but in this expert’s opinion, the political parties just serve as branches of the regional powers. This means that local leaders can no longer act in a purely local manner; their actions are to a certain extent dictated by regional interests, which makes consensus in national politics much harder to reach.<sup>29</sup>

Because parliament and other public institutions have fixed sectarian quotas and the sects are captive to regional powers, ministers and parliamentarians are no longer representatives of the Lebanese people, but are instead representatives of these regional powers sitting outside Lebanon. The development expert gave an example of this:

During the previous government, [in] Tammam Salam’s last month of being the prime minister, they wanted to take a decision about the garbage crisis, so he told them, “Look we are going to vote, so please we will have a break [for] twenty minutes.... Go and call your leaders and come back because we want to vote.” Actually they took a break and each minister [went] outside and call[ed] his leader who [was] sitting outside, with no authorization or signatory, and this is a minister!<sup>30</sup>

Instead of serving the prime minister or acting as the head of their ministries, ministers are representatives of sect leaders sitting outside the public institutions and whose approval they need to take decisions. The Lebanese political system can thus be described as a federation of totalitarian fragments that together can give the impression of a functioning democracy, but where each community is controlled by a totalitarian leader. People do not object to the leader of their community, because they depend on that leader for jobs, protection, and social services.

This fragmentation undermines the legitimacy of the state, as confirmed by another government official:

All these [SDGs] rely on a foundation of rule of law, better trust in institutions, [and] legitimacy... All the countries in your study are countries that came out of wars, or still are coming out of war and civil disobedience.<sup>31</sup> The major question [for] these countries [is] something that the West is taking for granted: [it] is the concept of legitimacy. When citizens participate in destroying parts of a city, it is not because he simply [went] nuts, it is because he has serious [doubts] that he belongs to this city. Belonging is linked to legitimacy.<sup>32</sup>

27 Interview with development expert, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

28 Adib Nehme, “The Neopatrimonial State and the Arab Spring,” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, June 2016, available at [www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20160613\\_adib\\_nehme.pdf](http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/books/20160613_adib_nehme.pdf).

29 Interview with development expert, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

30 Interview with development expert, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

31 The project includes case studies on the Gambia, Greece, Guatemala, Lebanon, and Myanmar conducted in 2017.

32 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.



The Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for the police and justice system, sees itself as playing a key role in building this legitimacy:

What we are trying to do first is to work on the code of conduct and manual procedures for the police.... For example, when we had some civil society demonstrations, something [that] was called [the] “You Stink” movement, when we had the trash crisis in Lebanon..., [there were] claims that the police did not do their job well. There were harassments and a lot of internal control. [So] we are working continuously on accountability with the police in terms of prosecution, in terms of trials for officers that abuse power.... We are also working a lot to improve human rights and the prison situation in the country. For example, in Lebanon they do [a] drug test for everybody when they get arrested, so we stopped that because we consider this to be a violation of human rights. They used to arrest LBGT [persons] and force them to do some kind of inhuman test; again we stopped that.<sup>33</sup>

The ministry did not implement this work as a response to the SDGs, but because it believed it had to improve the accountability and legitimacy of the police in order to build inclusive and accountable institutions. The ministry also focused on issues related to violence against women. If a woman came to the police station after she was beaten by her husband, the police used to tell her they could not help her because this was a personal affair. Now police officers are trained and legally required to call the general prosecutor to issue an arrest order for the abuser, as well as to provide shelter for the woman. They have also opened a hotline for complaints about police misconduct and publish statistics on complaints to reveal if particular police stations have issues with conduct, particularly regarding treatment of victims of domestic violence or LBGT persons. Such conscious efforts to build trust and legitimacy are an important part of building inclusive and resilient institutions and of implementing SDG 5 on empowering women and girls.

## PROVIDING CLEAN WATER AND ENERGY: GOALS 6 AND 7

Lebanon is struggling with several environmental challenges, of which sustainable management of water and sanitation (SDG 6) is of particular importance. Although Lebanon has better access to water than most other countries in the Middle East, during the summer the country experiences water scarcity. The trash crisis in 2015 was not only a political issue but also exposed Lebanon’s lack of solid waste management and recycling systems. Before then, waste recycling was nonexistent in Lebanon. Solid waste was commonly disposed of in the sea, in rivers, under bridges, or in valleys believed to be out of the public eye, threatening life in water and life on land (SDGs 14 and 15).

The influx of more than a million Syrian refugees, who established thousands of small informal settlements across the country and increased the population in many host communities, has put additional pressure on water and sanitation systems. The additional sewage and waste generated by the refugees has exceeded the capacity of the original infrastructure and exposed weaknesses in systems and their management.

During a visit to a village in North Lebanon with a significant refugee population, this was communicated as one of the major concerns of the village leaders. The village is thus working on a master plan for water, sewage, and other infrastructure. There is a water shortage in the summer months, making people dependent on cisterns filled from water trucks. According to a local doctor, these tanks have been linked to cases of cancer.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the doctor believes that the open sewage systems are contaminating the ground water and other water sources, leading to disease. The area used to have sufficient waste-removal capacity before the Syrian refugees arrived, but now this service is insufficient. The waste is building up in free spaces, particularly along small

<sup>33</sup> Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> These water tanks are often made of plastic material that can dissolve in the water after being used for a long time or when heated during the summer. Plastic material commonly used in water tanks is known to increase the risk of cancer. Toqeer Ahmed and Saeed Ahmed Asad, “Safe Water: Is Your Plastic Container Poisoning Your Water?,” Dawn, April 5, 2015, available at [www.dawn.com/news/1173628](http://www.dawn.com/news/1173628).

creeks and under bridges. This is further contaminating potable water to hazardous levels for consumers. According to the same doctor:

The nutrition and pollution risks are present [in our village] because of the bad sewage system. Polluted water seeps into the cultivated areas and [into] the crops, and then people eat the produce, so it is normal that they get sick. Moreover, the random trash collection forces people to burn the trash so that they can get rid of it. This causes particles in the air that people breathe and become sick.<sup>35</sup>

The region of North Lebanon, which includes the village visited during the field trip, is developing a master plan to find solutions to these environmental challenges.

Informal refugee settlements, which have emerged in the absence of planned and organized reception centers for refugees and a policy on whether they are to be resettled in refugee camps or integrated into local communities, might also change the Lebanese landscape in irreversible ways. These informal settlements are often located next to agricultural land or land that Lebanon might have an interest in protecting due to its small size and high level of urbanization. Landowners are now constructing apartment buildings in the middle of fields and renting them to refugees. This is made possible because the government is lenient with building permits in such areas, where construction is usually restricted, to alleviate the needs of the refugees. Individual landowners see this as an opportunity for extra income rather than a hazard to the rural landscape. Even if the refugees return to Syria in the future, these new constructions will not easily be demolished, at least not without a conscious policy to protect and restore the land. This increased urbanization will affect the country's food security and ability to achieve SDG 2 (zero hunger), because less land will be available for food production.

Although social movements such as “You Stink” have brought attention to Lebanon's waste problem in particular and environmental issues more generally, stable electricity supply also remained a

great concern for all the Lebanese we met during our fieldwork. Lebanon's energy supply was disrupted during the civil war, but efforts to repair and improve most of the power plants and distribution grids were completed quickly after the war ended. The electricity supply improved, and Lebanon had electricity twenty-four hours a day in most of its regions by 1998, despite the electricity system being repeatedly targeted during continued conflicts with Israel.

Since 2001, however, the gap between supply and demand has grown, particularly because of poor maintenance and outdated equipment, as well as lack of political will to find solutions for providing stable electricity.<sup>36</sup> Although the issue of electricity supply has been addressed by successive governments, little progress has been made. The inability to solve the issue has significant consequences for both the public treasury and the national economy. The Lebanese state pays around \$2 billion a year to the electrical company to cover losses. Despite these expenditures, the country continues to suffer from constant electricity cuts. *Électricité du Liban*, the public electricity company, at best meets two-thirds of the demand, not counting emergency breakdowns. In addition, the cost of producing electricity in Lebanon is estimated to be among the highest in the world.<sup>37</sup>

A development worker explained that this sector has not been reformed due to vested political interests:

[Failing to reform a] sector like electricity...[is] not because of lack of capacity. It is not because of lack of understanding of what is going on. It is pure corruption. It is rent-seeking, because people are making money out of [the current system]. It is not because there are not enough engineers in Lebanon knowing what the solution is. It is capturing of the state.<sup>38</sup>

Since the time of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in the mid-1990s, it has been suggested that Lebanon should shift its energy production from diesel to liquefied natural gas. At the time, negotiations were underway with Qatar to provide this gas, which would have reduced the cost of producing

35 Interview with village leader, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

36 Marwan Iskandar, “The Electricity Problem and Achieving Self-Sufficiency,” in *Emerging Lebanon: Towards Economic Growth and Social Welfare*, Roger Nasnas, ed. (Beirut: Dar An-Nahar, 2016), available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8xM9iN9FwMUTmldDNLVGN4VGs/view>.

37 Jean Aziz, “Lebanon's Continued Electricity Cuts Portend Disaster,” *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2015.

38 Interview with development actor, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

electricity by around \$10 billion over the past sixteen years, according to some estimates.<sup>39</sup> At the time of these negotiations, however, Lebanon was under the control of Syria, which was against the transition from diesel to gas. According to one Lebanese politician, “From 2008 we were looking forward to see[ing] electricity for twenty-four hours.... Now we are in 2017—nine years [and] we did not do any step until now, because it is too complicated.”<sup>40</sup> In the summer of 2017 the government finally approved a plan for a gradual shift from diesel to gas and alternative sources of energy and to take other measures to upgrade electricity production.<sup>41</sup>

The continued failure to provide stable electricity has pushed the Lebanese to resort to private generators. Between a third and half of electricity is now produced by these private generators, and a full-scale business sector has grown up around them. This rising market has become profitable and is dominated by business people backed by politicians and other influential individuals, diminishing political will to change the system. If the money privately invested in generators was instead channeled into the national electrical company, Lebanon could probably modernize and upgrade energy production to fulfill the country’s needs.

Further, as described by the leader of an NGO, the generators are an environmental hazard because of uncontrolled emissions:

We have hundreds of thousands of generators in the neighborhoods polluting the air.... It started with someone who got a generator for himself and maybe the neighbor, and then now the private generator industry in Lebanon [probably] provides....more electricity than the electrical power plants.... Imagine these neighborhoods having these diesel generators on the streets and, when they start, the smoke that comes out of [them]. Who is controlling them? Who is controlling if they have filters, if they don’t have filters?... After usage of one year the exhaust starts [discharging] very toxic material, because [the generator] becomes old. Who is watching the kind of

diesel they use? Who is watching if they change the oil in the generators? No one. So at night when there is no electricity, you have hundreds of thousands of these generators in all Lebanon producing this smoke.<sup>42</sup>

When asked about green energy sources, such as solar energy, our informants mostly commented that they had to solve their fundamental energy challenges before they could talk about green energy. One economist explained:

We did not succeed to have twenty-four hour electricity twenty-seven years after the end of the war. How could we have clean energy?... [Environmental] awareness is [very high]...because we have educated people, but [our] possibilities are very few.... Why [can we not] provide twenty-four-hour electricity? Because we had a deficit of \$2 billion for the electrical company.... To have twenty-four hours of electricity for the country we must build new centrals, we must invest, and with our rate of poverty we are not able to [make the necessary] invest[ment].<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, people in the north pointed to issues they saw as more pressing, such as a solution to the solid waste problem, before they would consider green energy. Nonetheless the government recently approved three permits for private sector actors to produce electricity from wind energy with a total capacity of 200 megawatts as part of a public-private partnership to improve green energy.<sup>44</sup>

Lebanon has many pressing social and environmental challenges, and awareness around these issues is emerging. According to one economist:

Now the government makes every effort possible for the environment. At least Lebanon is quite aware of the importance of the environment, but we cannot do much when we have no industry and infrastructure and we still are in deep poverty, so we will not be able to do much.<sup>45</sup>

One of the main challenges for Lebanon regarding the SDGs is how to confront the dilemma of finding a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development: economic

39 Iskandar, “The Electricity Problem and Achieving Self-Sufficiency,” p. 574.

40 Interview with politician, Beirut, Lebanon, February 20, 2017.

41 Email correspondence with Lebanese government official, August 22, 2017.

42 Interview with NGO leader, Beirut, Lebanon, February 17, 2017.

43 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

44 Email correspondence with government official, August 22, 2017.

45 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

growth, higher quality of life, and environmental protection.

#### ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL IN A DIVIDED EDUCATION SYSTEM: GOAL 4

Discussions about and attempts to promote free and compulsory education in Lebanon date back to the time of the Ottoman Empire, but the country continues to struggle to achieve this basic goal. Foreign missionaries were the first to start schools in Lebanon, years before Lebanon's independence in 1943. After independence a parallel public school system was introduced to offer free and compulsory education, partly as a tool to stimulate social cohesion and nation building. By 1960 the number of students in public schools equaled that in private schools.

During the civil war (1975–1990), however, many public services broke down and were replaced by private, often sectarian services. Private schools again took prevalence and continue to dominate the education sector. The continued weakness of the state in the aftermath of the war has contributed to a sustained dominance of private schools in Lebanon. This trend is amplified by parents' perceptions of the poor quality of education in public schools, an option they prefer leaving to the underprivileged in society. Lebanese authorities have repeatedly emphasized the right to education for all, including the need to ensure equal opportunities and accessibility, but many of the laws and decrees have not been implemented, mainly due to ongoing governance challenges.

There are three main types of schools in Lebanon: state schools, "free private schools," and private schools. In addition, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) operates schools serving Palestinian refugees. State schools are in principle free, but the student's family must pay a mandatory registration fee and contribute to the parent-teacher council (or "family fund"). Public schools are thus not entirely free, a fact that some suggest contributes to school drop-out and others argue goes against SDG 4's target that primary and

secondary education should be free for all.

"Free private schools" are public-private hybrids, as they are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's directorate for private schools but also receive state funding. Students in these schools pay a moderate fee, which is considerably lower than for private schools. Some argue, however, that the terminology for these schools is misleading, as they are neither free nor private. The majority of these schools (almost 80 percent) are run by religious groups, and the rest by NGOs and individuals.<sup>46</sup>

Private schools in Lebanon are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's directorate for private schools, and students have to pay fees that vary from \$1,500 to more than \$15,000 per year. Although the number of private schools is less than half the number of public schools, they serve more than 50 percent of students, while the public schools only accommodate around 30 percent. This is explained by the fact that many public schools are located in small villages where there are a limited number of students, while private schools tend to be in urban areas that can attract larger numbers of students.

Drop-out rates and the proportion of children who have never attended school in Lebanon are high. Students often drop out after failing and repeating years, as well as due to corporal or psychological punishment for misbehavior or progress below the teachers' expectations. Corporal punishment remains widespread despite being forbidden by law. Other reasons for dropping out include the lower quality of education in public and "free private" schools, poor parenting, lack of understanding of the importance of education, and inability to pay mandatory fees or pay for transportation and school supplies.

Lebanon has long seen a trend where parents prefer to send their children to private schools despite the high fees. Public schools have struggled to find enough qualified teachers, partly due to low wages that do not always increase with inflation.<sup>47</sup> Parents also prefer private schools because private school students have higher pass rates on public

46 Haifa Hamdan, "Education in Lebanon," War Child Holland, 2013, available at [www.warchildholland.org/sites/default/files/bijlagen/node\\_14/31-2013/education.pdf](http://www.warchildholland.org/sites/default/files/bijlagen/node_14/31-2013/education.pdf).

47 Josephine Deeb, "In Lebanon, Even Private Schools Caught in Education Crisis," *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2017.

exams.<sup>48</sup>

This trend of sending children to private schools accelerated after 2011. At that time, public schools started becoming crowded with Syrian students, challenging their capacity and ability to sustain the quality of education. Early in the response to the crisis in Syria, it became clear that a traditional humanitarian response was insufficient to protect the future generation of refugee children, and the response expanded to also include education. However, the privatized nature of the Lebanese school system, where about 70 percent of students are educated in private or semi-private schools, exacerbated the challenges of integrating an increasing number of Syrian children in the public schools, constituting only 30 percent of the education capacity.<sup>49</sup> The refugee crisis has thus put tremendous pressure on public schools. A number of them have, with international support, opened a second shift in the afternoons to accommodate Syrian students. The quality of the morning shift is often better than the afternoon shift, mainly because the teachers are less tired. Yet morning shifts have also been affected because the time allocated for teaching has been reduced to give time for a second shift.

The quality of teaching in public schools has also been affected by differences in curricula and language of instruction between Syria and Lebanon. These differences have prevented Lebanese students from progressing as fast as they did before. Lack of language skills has been a particular challenge for Syrian students, because Lebanese schools use French or English as the language of instruction and examination for math and science. To accommodate this challenge, teachers for Syrian students have been allowed to teach math and science in Arabic up to grade six. From grade seven however, they have to teach in English or French to prepare Syrian students for the Lebanese public exams.

These challenges have exacerbated the differences between public and private schools,

convincing more parents to send their children to private schools, despite the high fees.<sup>50</sup> In response to these challenges, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in cooperation with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), developed the RACE strategy (Reach All Children with Education).<sup>51</sup> The crisis thus gave Lebanon an opportunity to focus on many of the targets of SDG 4 (quality education) before they were formally adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. The RACE strategy goes beyond traditional enrollment and literacy rates, taking a rights-based approach where quality education is available to the most vulnerable children, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese, aiming to equip them with effective life skills.

Addressing the question of what free education entails, the government waived fees for the parent-teacher council for both Lebanese and Syrian children in primary school. According to a government official, “Basically there is a fee that is now subsidized: it is \$60 for the parent-teacher council fund. So through the support for the Syrians, we also subsidize the cost for the Lebanese...[because this makes] it more applicable.”<sup>52</sup>

The ministry is further asking what “equal opportunity for education” means, addressing the gap between public and private education. The ministry is planning an inclusive consultative process around these issues, which it started before being interrupted by the change of government in December 2016. It is now in the process of making an implementation plan for SDG 4, which will detail priorities, timelines, and responsibility areas for all involved stakeholders and lay out the obstacles to quality education for all in Lebanon.

Education is commonly agreed to be fundamental to a country’s future progress and development, and few are against education as a tool to achieve prosperity. In Lebanon, however, where identity is formally and emotionally related to religion and sects, education is an arena for cultural competition, making the content of

48 “The Lebanese Education Sector,” in Nasnas, ed., *Emerging Lebanon*.

49 Hamdan, “Education in Lebanon.”

50 Deeb, “In Lebanon, Even Private Schools Caught in Education Crisis.”

51 Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, “Reaching All Children with Education: RACE II (2017–2021),” August 2016, available at [www.mehe.gov.lb/uploads/file/2016/Oct/RACE%20II\\_FINAL%20Narrative\\_29AUG2016.pdf](http://www.mehe.gov.lb/uploads/file/2016/Oct/RACE%20II_FINAL%20Narrative_29AUG2016.pdf).

52 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

curricula and teaching methods sensitive political issues. Education in Lebanon can thus be a driver of conflict rather than of social cohesion and peace. Under Lebanon's divided education system, inequality starts in school, reproducing privilege and exclusion and undermining SDG 10 on reduced inequality.

Yet education is usually not an end in itself; it is often seen as an instrument for self-realization through income-generating activities. In Lebanon, as elsewhere in the Middle East, it is challenging for young educated people to find work. As a result, many young people leave the country to find jobs, leading to "brain drain." The Gulf countries have been an attractive destination for many young Lebanese, but opportunities there have decreased in recent years. Educated youth in Lebanon thus have fewer employment opportunities both at home and abroad, which can demotivate young people from pursuing education.

A politician from North Lebanon claimed that young people with the right connections in the Beirut area probably would find jobs, while less fortunate youth living in the north struggle. He claimed that the quality of education needed to be improved to give young Lebanese people skills better suited to demands in the labor market:

Even engineers, even specialists, even doctors, they study eight years minimum after high school.... Yesterday I met a person...[who] finished...four years [of higher education] and went to Saudi Arabia as a mechanical engineer. He worked there two years and returned back here, but he can't find work and now he works for an NGO. A mechanical engineer from [one of the best universities in Lebanon] working with an NGO?<sup>53</sup>

He argued that if this man's siblings, cousins, and neighbors learn that all his efforts to gain a good education could not secure him a job, why would they bother with years of hard work to gain a diploma? Although higher-quality education can help match people with labor-market needs and improve opportunities for graduates, more jobs are also needed. Part of Lebanon's education strategy could thus be to build vocational schools to educate young people for skilled jobs in combination with

job-creating initiatives like development projects and industrial zones.

## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INNOVATION: GOALS 8 AND 9

The top priority of Lebanon's new government is to jump-start the economy, which has slowed to 0–1 percent growth in recent years. It is aiming for an inclusive economy growing annually at 4–5 percent to be able to create jobs. According to one official, the government is planning to achieve this "through infrastructure, through improving the [environment for] doing business...to help innovation, to help start-ups, to help small industries, and hopefully through more vocational training for the Syrians and the Lebanese who missed their years of schooling, and definitely on better quality education, secondary and university."<sup>54</sup>

Economic growth is often seen as a prerequisite for development. However, without mechanisms for distributing additional wealth it will not automatically reduce inequality and poverty. Economic growth thus has to be inclusive and combined with some level of redistribution through taxes and improved services to achieve the SDGs.

Lebanon is perceived as having been prosperous prior to the civil war, starting in 1975, and Beirut was often dubbed the "Paris of the Middle East." The civil war was destructive to the economy and almost all other aspects of society. The peace that followed did not meet expectations for economic growth and political stability. Instead, forces outside the country continued to restrict its sovereignty. Lebanon has continued to grapple with corruption, modest economic growth, limited employment opportunities, low productivity, and an unprecedented increase in public debt.

This lack of economic progress is linked to Lebanon's political structure, because the confessional political system requires accommodating the sectarian balance in all decision making.<sup>55</sup> This requirement makes it hard to agree on development projects because, for example, the project's geographical location will be seen to benefit a

53 Interview with politician, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

54 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

55 Toufic Gaspard, "Prosperity for Lebanon: An Action Plan," in Nasnas, ed., *Emerging Lebanon*.

particular sectarian group. Other sects will demand similar development benefiting their groups before giving their support to the project. With limited resources available for a comprehensive development plan, even small projects can be stopped under these requirements.

Lebanon's debt was mentioned by many interviewees as one of the main obstacles to economic growth. A businessman shared his reflections:

We have in Lebanon four to seven [main] banks that control everything.... It started when Hariri came to power in 1993 and decided to borrow money from local banks to fund what the government was doing. This is done through treasury bonds issued through the banks at a very high interest [rate]. This means there is no incentive to create jobs. Why invest in business and make 5 to 10 percent a year when you can buy treasury bonds and make from 20 to 40 percent a year? It is usually three to four times the official interest rate.

Recently, the governor of the central bank made a private deal with three Lebanese banks; if a person brought \$20 million to the bank and block[ed] it for one year, they would give you \$4 million up front as an interest in advance [20 percent]. After one year they will give you another million dollars [5 percent], and then you can withdraw your money. At that time you have earned \$5 million. The three banks themselves have earned more than \$1 billion in two months, so if you go to them to borrow money for a business [and the] idea [is] to create jobs, they will not be interested. They do not need small customers like this when they have the government as a big customer that is giving them a big interest rate.<sup>56</sup>

The debt the government owes to domestic banks has increased dramatically since the end of 2000, reaching more than \$71 billion in 2015. The Lebanese Central Bank has become very active in the domestic debt market as a strategy to bolster its foreign reserves and defend the fixed exchange rate of the Lebanese lira.<sup>57</sup> As a result, the bank has incurred significant losses by borrowing from banks at a higher rate than the yields of its foreign assets. The problem therefore is less the level of

debt than the fact that the bank is borrowing at a higher interest rate than necessary. Further, the initial justification of the debt was to fund reconstruction after the civil war, but between 1993 and 2014 the government only spent around 9 percent of its budget on reconstruction, while expenditures on the debt reached almost 34 percent (a total of more than \$60 billion). An economist described this dire situation:

When it comes to industry and innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) we have a problem, because this requires an industrial park that facilitates infrastructure and innovation. Unfortunately we are a [rentier] economy [and thus have no interest in this]. This is the other part of our difficulties. We don't know how to get out of this [rentier] economy, and after twenty years with a stable currency we are now facing deflation. This means that the interest rate is burdening both the state and the industry.<sup>58</sup>

He explained the relationship between the interest rate and prices—how prices will skyrocket under unnaturally low interest rates and how prices will go down and economic activity will be lost if the interest rate is higher than the international standard. He claims Greece's economy collapsed because of the latter and that Lebanon keeps an even higher interest rate. The reason Lebanon's economy has not collapsed is because it is a rentier economy. The disadvantage is that it is not creating a positive environment for industry and innovation. "We should not ask the government why you don't have industry, we should ask why you have [such a] high interest rate. And they will answer that they have a high interest rate due to a problem twenty years ago."<sup>59</sup>

A sustainable and growing economy is an important part of a development strategy because it can help reduce inequality, which is often a root cause of violence and extremism. A well-functioning economy will prove that the state is taking responsibility for improving the well-being of its citizens and is capable of providing peace and security. Peace and security are prerequisites for development and economic growth, underscoring how these processes have to feed into each other to have a combined positive effect. The postwar

<sup>56</sup> Interview with businessman, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Gaspard "Prosperity for Lebanon."

<sup>58</sup> Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

### Box 2. Akkar: From poverty to opportunity?

The Akkar region in North Lebanon is considered to be one of Lebanon's poorest, but it is now developing a strategy to create jobs, as described by a politician from the region:

In the entire world they have differences in development...between the city and the villages. So for the north [of Lebanon] they are developing a strategy to attract investment and create jobs. To do this they are working with the parliament to establish a legal framework favorable to investment in the region. This includes allocating land to build industrial zones, the legal framework for building permissions, regulations for...new factories and businesses...[to] get a full tax exempt[ion] for five years, half tax exempt[ion] for the next five years before they will pay taxes equal to other factories and businesses in Lebanon. Such regulations are hoped to encourage investment for development and job creation. A similar idea is behind a plan to reopen [René Moawad] airport in [Klayaat] Akkar [which, according to another informant, was very active in the 1980s and is estimated to create up to 2,500 job opportunities if reopened].<sup>60</sup>

To attract investment in Akkar we have to ask the question about why investors should come to Akkar. I have answered this question by making it attractive through legal frameworks and...favorable tax deals. We have to do the same for tourists and students. We are signing an agreement to open the Lebanese university in Tripoli, not only a branch but a real university that offers unique courses that are not offered elsewhere, like shipping and navigation, so students who want to take this navigation education have to come to Akkar [to do it]. For tourism we should do the same; we should ask what makes it attractive for tourists to come to Akkar.<sup>61</sup>

These are all good ideas for boosting a marginalized region. Yet a transformation from ideas to a comprehensive, integrated development plan for one of the poorest and most marginalized regions of the country requires a comprehensive national plan tied to a budget and national priorities.

period, however, has shown that this is not an automatic process; it has to be a conscious policy specifically aiming at both peace and prosperity.

### ENDING POVERTY AND REDUCING INEQUALITY: GOALS 1 AND 10

Inequality was addressed as an important challenge for Lebanon by many interviewees. While Lebanon is a middle-income country, its wealth is concentrated in very few hands, and a large share of the population (between a quarter and a third) is living in poverty. By emphasizing that “no one will be left behind,” the 2030 Agenda calls for reaching out to the most vulnerable people and reducing inequality and exclusion. Different forms of exclusion—economic, political, social, cultural, or religious—can generate frustrations against those with privileges, which can lead to the sense of being left out that the SDGs aim to work against. Exclusion not only denies people their right to live decent lives and to reach their potential, but also can generate violent reactions that undermine peace and stability, as well as prosperity and develop-

ment. To end poverty it is necessary to reduce inequality by addressing the distribution of wealth.

Recent poverty studies in Lebanon uncovered stark disparities between the governorates, with Nabatieh, Beka'a, South Lebanon, and North Lebanon as the most deprived and Mount Lebanon and Beirut as the least deprived governorates in the country.<sup>62</sup> Poor Lebanese households are estimated to account for between a quarter and a third of the population at the national level, with nearly double that concentration in the periphery and half that in the urban centers. Members of poor households typically work in agriculture, construction, and service sectors, often in informal, precarious, seasonal, or low-wage jobs. They generally have low levels of formal education, live in poor neighborhoods with poor infrastructure and services, and are dependent on others on a regular basis for survival. They tend to belong to either large families or to small female-headed households. They generally send their children to public school and account for a third of all children

60 Interview with NGO, Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

61 Interview with politician, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

62 The studies use the “unmet basic needs method,” a multidimensional poverty index, or the Income Poverty Index starting in the mid-1990s until 2012, produced by various ministries and institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).



of basic school age. These households are perceived as poor by their communities. Concurrently, considerable wealth manifests itself in buildings, cars, and lifestyles, particularly in the wealthy neighborhoods in the capital Beirut and other major towns.<sup>63</sup>

According to Professor Ghassan Dibah at the American-Lebanese University, inequality in Lebanon is increasing. In 2000, net wealth per capita was around \$13,000 and the Gini coefficient of wealth distribution was seventy-six.<sup>64</sup> In 2013 the Credit Suisse Global Wealth DataBook estimated net wealth per capita in Lebanon to be around \$21,000 with a Gini coefficient of eighty-six. Lebanon is among the most unequal countries in terms of wealth distribution, with around 66 percent of the adult population owning less than \$10,000 and just 3.5 percent with \$100,000 or more.<sup>65</sup>

One economist pointed to what he sees as the main dimensions of inequality in Lebanon:

Inequality has three aspects in Lebanon: (1) the system of spoils and corruption by the sectarian leaders; (2) the inequality between the rich and the poor (the middle class is actually disappearing or shrinking and the neoliberal economic system is not helping to reduce inequality); [and] (3) the geographical aspect (the center-periphery dynamics where the center is more developed and the poor are in the periphery).<sup>66</sup>

According to the economist, the first dimension of inequality, the system of spoils and corruption, relates to a general absence of rule of law:

We don't have a minimum of rule of law, institutions, and related policies and legislation. Unfortunately this is the problem here, because the people who come from belligerent backgrounds or who are just concerned about regional projects and policies in Lebanon, they don't care about the economy because they live on rent, on spoils.<sup>67</sup>

He elaborated on the concept of corruption and

claimed that it is too simplistic for analyzing the situation in Lebanon. According to him, the concept can only be applied to contexts where rule of law is functioning and where breaking the rules has consequences. In Lebanon, however, corruption continues without consequences. This generalized and institutionalized corruption that goes far beyond bribery is fueling inequality and a dangerous sense of institutionalized discrimination that can create resentment some fear could get out of hand if not addressed.

The second dimension of inequality is the traditional gulf between rich and poor, which has to be addressed through major economic changes. Wealth in Lebanon resides mainly in finance and real estate, and rentiers have maintained their wealth through rising returns on financial capital since 1992 and the rise in public debt. By financing postwar reconstruction and fiscal expenditures through debt rather than by taxing the wealthy, the Lebanese government has increased the wealth of those who lent it money, thereby further fueling inequality. To break the cycle of public debt and rentier benefits, taxes on capital and profits could be introduced to stabilize the economy, redistribute wealth, and reduce inequality.

The third dimension is geographical inequality. According to a development worker, "You have regions where poverty is almost zero...and regions where poverty affects 40 percent...or sometimes 60 percent or even 70 percent of the population.... We [also] know there is a huge concentration of wealth.... We can do some analysis from tax revenues, bank accounts, like the deposits."<sup>68</sup> The economist elaborated on the geographical aspect of inequality:

[Geographical inequality] is amplified...[because] instability and violent conflict are more often taking place in the periphery (Arsal and Tripoli). You also see differences between local villages with different access to livelihoods, like for example [those having]

63 See, for example, UNDP, "Mapping of Living Conditions in Lebanon," 1996, available at [www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html](http://www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html); and Heba Laithy, Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, and Kamal Hamdan, "Poverty, Growth and Income Distribution in Lebanon," International Poverty Centre, Country Study no. 13, January 2008, available at [www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCCountryStudy13.pdf](http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCCountryStudy13.pdf).

64 The Gini coefficient measures the degree of inequality, with 0 being perfect equality and 100 being perfect inequality.

65 Ghassan Dibah, "Wealth in Lebanon: For Whom, for What?," *Executive Magazine*, September 9, 2014, available at [www.executive-magazine.com/opinion/comment/wealth-lebanon](http://www.executive-magazine.com/opinion/comment/wealth-lebanon).

66 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

67 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

68 Interview with development worker, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

access to jobs in the army as opposed to be[ing] more dependent on agriculture. The former experience more prosperity by having more regular income. In the rural areas [there is] not equal access or opportunity to join the army, because the army always takes equal proportions of Christians and Muslims. So in areas with a majority of Muslim villages, the Christian villages will have a better opportunity for jobs in the army due to the quota system [and vice versa], and this can create inequality in living standards between villages in the same area.<sup>69</sup>

A mayor in North Lebanon pointed out inequality as a major challenge for development, particularly the geographical inequality between cities and rural areas:

The sons of Beirut are not like the sons of Akkar. What I mean is that those from Beirut would immediately be guaranteed a job opportunity, and this is because the state treats and interacts with them with more ease..., so if you are from Beirut you will get a job way faster than if you are from Akkar.<sup>70</sup>

The mayor also drew links between inequality and the sectarian system by saying that sectarianism is the reason for wars and conflicts in Lebanon, despite truces like the Taif Accords and Doha Agreement. Such truces do not address the real causes of conflict, such as privileges for some sects and some regions and neglect of others. Instead, the Taif Accords have institutionalized divisions and inequality.

Sectarianism has messed up everything.... We are living in a moment of truth where inequalities are present, let's stop joking. I have in this village hundreds and hundreds holding master degrees and doctorate degrees, and they are working as fishermen in the ocean.... Right now I have a construction engineer working in the municipality. He graduated from the best university, but I am making him work as a tax accountant as he doesn't have any other job opportunity. But someone from Beirut that doesn't even have a baccalaureate degree, but is probably from a certain family or party or sect, will get a job as a bank director.<sup>71</sup>

He went on to compare the difference in living standards between people living in affluence in the Beirut metropolitan area and those living in his

village. He was not asking for a revolution, which he acknowledged would be painful and unpredictable and would not necessarily make people's lives better, but feared that the degree of inequality and injustice he observed could lead to upheavals.

Because education in Lebanon is divided between the public and private sectors, and private schools are seen as giving children better opportunities for success, inequality and poverty in Lebanon are also linked to the education system. Although Lebanon has high enrollment and literacy rates at the primary level, it has yet to achieve this at the secondary level. In addition, there are significant differences between regions, with children in remote and poorer areas scoring lower on public exams. A development worker elaborated:

In the fifties and the sixties a great majority of Lebanese kids would go to public school, and this has changed dramatically. So now the public school, instead of being a great leveller..., [is where] inequality starts.... If you provide a good-quality education from the public sector, this is a way to bring kids from different [backgrounds] to give them at least the same chance that you give to other kids. This doesn't happen [in Lebanon].<sup>72</sup>

Lebanon has an unexploited opportunity to develop education policies that can serve to reduce inequality. By giving children from different backgrounds the same opportunity for quality education, children from all backgrounds can more equally compete for higher education and opportunities in the labor market.

Reducing inequality will also require major economic changes. What Lebanon has seen is an increase in GDP per capita, which has not benefited the majority of Lebanese. Economic growth is not strong enough to end poverty, because it tends to create a polarization of wealth, generating both more poverty and more concentrated wealth. Poverty is thus more a result of economic policies than individual choice and ability. Reducing inequalities will be a matter of creating inclusive economic policies, as called for in SDG 8, including mechanisms for distributing the wealth generated.

69 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

70 Interview with village mayor, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

71 Ibid.

72 Interview with development worker, Beirut, Lebanon, February 20, 2017.

## ADVANCING ON GENDER EQUALITY: GOAL 5

Another dimension of inequality is horizontal inequality between men and women, where the country has seen some progress, though many challenges remain. The new government appointed the first minister for women's affairs in December 2016. This is an important step toward achieving SDG 5 (gender equality). As of February 2017 there was not yet an official ministry, but a group of unpaid advisers was working to develop plans and strategies for establishing one. Because it is under a new minister and is not yet a ministry, this working group lacks a budget to implement its work.

This work has been aligned with the targets of SDG 5 from the start, aiming to ensure that women and men enjoy equal economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights and to mainstream women's rights in the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The working group sees it as the new ministry's responsibility to help end all forms of discrimination against women and girls (Target 1 under SDG 5). It has decided to focus on reforming the legal framework on women and girls' rights: "We are identifying laws that discriminate against women; we are trying to amend them and to promulgate new laws that will enhance the status of women."<sup>73</sup>

Although Lebanon is often seen as a progressive and educated country, many Lebanese have rather traditional values related to family and gender. Advisers to the new minister thus see the need to advance on the most controversial issues step by step. Personal status in Lebanon is not regulated by a national civil code but by separate religious codes managed by each of the country's eighteen recognized sects. As a result, there are no common laws on the legal age of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other aspects of personal status.

One example is the custody of young children after the divorce of their parents. The Shia legal code says that the mother can keep her sons until they are two years old, after which the father can take them away from the mother to be raised by his new wife. The Shia code allows daughters to stay with their mother until they are seven years old.

The Sunnis, on the other hand, raised the age of custody after pressure from women's groups and now give mothers custody of children up to fifteen years old. Among Christian groups the legal age of taking custody of young children from the mother varies from nine to twelve years old.

The working group setting up the ministry of women's affairs does not plan for the ministry to develop a mandatory civil code for personal status, because this would meet with resistance from many religious leaders. Instead, it plans to develop a voluntary civil status code as an alternative to the religious codes now regulated by the sects. This will allow people to choose to follow either the civil code or the religious code. However, some parts of the new law would be mandatory for all sects, such as the age of marriage to prevent child marriages in line with Target 3 of SDG 5 and the age of taking custody of young children away from the mother. Inheritance laws and the right of Muslim men to marry up to four women are examples of what the group suggests could be left for another stage when people might be more ready to accept a comprehensive civil personal status law.

There is a long tradition in Lebanon of young couples going abroad, such as to Cyprus, to marry under other countries' civil laws to avoid religious codes that discriminate against women and children and to facilitate interreligious marriages. "I married in Cyprus because I wanted a civil marriage," said a businessman in Beirut. "[Afterwards] I can register it here [in Lebanon] and all is fine."<sup>74</sup> There is a legal loophole, however, as the Lebanese constitution does not bar the registration of civil marriages in Lebanon. The former minister of interior began accepting civil marriages in 2013 and, according to a government official, thirteen cases of civil marriage were filed on Lebanese soil through this loophole in the law.<sup>75</sup> However, the current minister refused to continue this practice.

In many places in the Middle East, a "marry-your-rapist" provision has allowed for suspending the prosecution or conviction of men for the criminal act of rape if the offender marries the victim. One by one, the countries in the Middle

<sup>73</sup> Interview with governmental official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 17, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with businessman, Beirut, Lebanon, February 15, 2017.

East are abolishing these laws: first Egypt in 1999, then Morocco in 2016, and finally Tunisia and Jordan in 2017. Lebanon joined these countries in August 2017 when its parliament voted to abolish Article 522 of the penal code, which dates back to 1943.

While such legal amendments are important for women in Lebanon, there are many other legal areas where work is needed to eliminate discrimination against women and girls. The first priority of the working group setting up the ministry of women's affairs' was to draft a law against sexual harassment, which was previously nonexistent in Lebanon. Its second priority is to amend some articles in the national social security fund that limit women's access to work. They are also working to achieve equal pay for equal work, extend maternity leave, institute parental leave for fathers, and amend other legal frameworks limiting gender equality.

The forthcoming ministry is also working to empower women. Although Lebanon has reached high equality between women and men in the area of education and higher education, Lebanese women have a long way to go to become economically independent. Empowering women economically can also help end poverty (SDG 1), because women are often claimed to be the poorest in society. In the view of one economist, however, Lebanon's economic challenges are limiting the economic empowerment of women:

We don't have a gender program. We don't have gender equality. What I mean is that we have heavy unemployment—even before the Syria crisis this was a problem. Now we have 20 percent unemployment (that is, those who want to work and don't find a job). With this level of unemployment it is difficult to speak about gender equality, because the families wish the men [to] go to work first. So if the men do not find a job, the women will not try.<sup>76</sup>

The economist further claimed that the employment rate in Lebanon is 45 percent, while the average international standard is 65 percent. The low level of employment gives Lebanon the

potential for economic growth, particularly if more women are included in the workforce.

Empowerment of women includes not only economic independence but also political participation and a role in decision making. Women only hold 4 out of 128 seats in parliament, and among the thirty ministers in Hariri's government only one is a woman; even the first minister for woman's affairs is a man. Although men and women have equal rights to stand for election, many Lebanese women are deprived of real political chances because of a general reluctance in society to be represented by women.

Many we talked to suggested and hoped for a 30 percent quota for women's representation in parliament. However, Lebanese elections are complicated due to the sectarian quota system, and an added quota for women has been seen as making the system even more complex. While the new election law approved by the government suggested replacing the sectarian quota system with a system of proportional representation, many are disappointed it still does not include a quota for women, which many political actors had promised ahead of the electoral reform.<sup>77</sup>

## Mitigating the Impact of the War in Syria and the Influx of Syrian Refugees

The Lebanese government estimates that the country hosts around 1.5 million Syrians. This number includes Syrian nationals who, for different reasons, have not registered with UNHCR, which has officially registered 1,001,051 Syrian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>78</sup> This unprecedented population increase of 25 to 30 percent has had a great impact on Lebanon's economy, social cohesion, environment and natural resources, security, and political stability, not least because Lebanon had been without an effective government for years prior to 2016. An economist claimed that the "government and leaders have not been able to

75 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

76 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

77 "Compromise and Concessions: Lebanon's New Election Law," Agora, June 20, 2017, available at [www.agora-parl.org/interact/blog/compromise-and-concessions-lebanon%E2%80%99s-new-electoral-law](http://www.agora-parl.org/interact/blog/compromise-and-concessions-lebanon%E2%80%99s-new-electoral-law).

78 However, Lebanese authorities directed UNHCR to stop updating this registration on May 6, 2015. See <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

develop a policy for how to handle the influx of the refugees.”<sup>79</sup>

According to a government official, however, “The Syria crisis...is both a risk and an opportunity. For example, the density [or scale] of the refugee crisis can... maybe reshape us in different ways,” including by pushing some sectors to move forward on the 2030 Agenda.<sup>80</sup> As discussed above, the education sector has responded to some of the needs of refugees by opening a second shift in public schools to accommodate Syrian students. Further, the government, in cooperation with UNHCR and other UN and international agencies, has developed a response plan to alleviate the needs of both refugees and host populations.<sup>81</sup> This plan has led to a shift from emergency intervention to a more sustainable and long-term response aiming for more predictable funding and programming. Nevertheless, Lebanon needs the continued support of the international community to properly host refugees and to minimize the risks identified above.

The Lebanese government has not established formal refugee camps for Syrian refugees. This is partly due to the inability to reach a political consensus on a strategy, combined with Lebanon’s experience with camps for Palestinian refugees, which still exist almost seventy years after they were established. These Palestinian camps have been out of reach for Lebanese security forces and are perceived to have impacted Lebanon’s security and stability.

In the absence of official camps, Syrian refugees are mainly hosted in Lebanese communities and informal settlements located in Lebanon’s most economically deprived areas, putting additional strain on places that already lack infrastructure and whose populations were already struggling. As discussed above, the influx of refugees in these areas has had a huge impact on natural resources, water, land, and air, as well as on the environment, because the existing infrastructure for solid waste and sanitation lacks the capacity required to

accommodate the refugees:

[There was] a huge impact on water pollution, because all these informal settlements are spread here and there next to the river, next to the water sources..., not to mention [the] increase [in] water demand. Already [Lebanon] is a country that suffers from water shortage. So [we see] increase in water demand..., wastewater generation, water pollution..., [and] solid waste generation. And this is a country which suffers from a bad solid waste management in the first place. [We also have] air pollution from the electricity generators.... And most important [is] the land and ecosystem, because these settlements are very often located next to vulnerable or sensitive environmental sites and next to agricultural terrains, and people are constructing little apartments, [which] might be irreversible in a way.”<sup>82</sup>

Another government official claimed “the refugees are influencing each and every ministry,” mentioning similar challenges but also pointing to the positive potential the refugees could have for Lebanon’s economy.

When the war in Syria started, Syrians had visa-free entry to Lebanon and could easily obtain work permits according to a bilateral agreement. In early 2015 the government started to restrict Syrian access to Lebanon and to limit renewal of residency permits. A 2016 study found that 20 percent of Syrians had legal permits, a decline from 28 percent in 2015 and 58 percent in 2014, explained by the high cost of renewing these permits.<sup>83</sup> Without these permits, refugees cannot apply for formal jobs and are prevented by mobile checkpoints from moving freely in search of informal job opportunities.

If feasible, it is beneficial for both refugees and host populations if refugees are allowed to integrate into and participate in the host society instead of being solely beneficiaries of aid and assistance. Allowing refugees to work would thus be beneficial for Lebanon. However, this is a complex issue in Lebanon, particularly due to existing employment restrictions on Palestinian refugees. Nonetheless, employment challenges for Syrian refugees have

79 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 28, 2017.

80 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

81 Government of Lebanon, “Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020,” January 2017, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-respon82-plan-2017-2020-enar>.

82 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

83 World Food Programme, UNHCR, and UNICEF, “Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2016,” July 2016, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/51239>.

been addressed by the international donor community, which has negotiated access for Syrian refugees to the agriculture, construction, and domestic service sectors.<sup>84</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that half of working-age Syrian refugees are economically active.<sup>85</sup>

Although these sectors have traditionally been dominated by migrant workers, competition for jobs between refugees and locals has sometimes fueled tensions.<sup>86</sup> As a government official claimed, “There is a problem of how to organize this. They [the Syrian refugees] are consuming a lot of resources. There is no protection of [the] Lebanese economy and employment. They are competing with the Lebanese because they are working at a very low wage.”<sup>87</sup> This is because the refugees can combine low wages with humanitarian aid as a livelihood strategy. It has been estimated that around 200,000 Lebanese nationals have lapsed into poverty during the Syria crisis and that about 300,000 Lebanese, mostly unskilled young people, have become unemployed, which tends to be blamed on competition with low-cost Syrian workers.<sup>88</sup> However, there are no formal assessments or statistics backing claims that the refugees are stealing jobs from Lebanese.

What is more important is that the unrest in Syria has caused a 60 percent drop in commercial land transportation from Jordan, Iraq, and beyond,<sup>89</sup> as well as a drop in tourists from Jordan. Tourism from the Gulf states has also declined, and investments have moved to other countries due to fear that the violence in Syria could spill over to Lebanon. However, economic decline was apparent before the massive influx of Syrian refugees in 2011, and this challenge thus transcends the impact of the refugee presence.

While the government has launched a new plan to respond to the refugee crisis in cooperation with

the UN and has established a Ministry for Refugee Affairs, it is the local host communities that face the heaviest burden on a day-to-day basis. We visited a village in North Lebanon whose population has increased by 40 percent since the arrival of the Syrian refugees (from 50,000 to 70,000). A village leader described the resulting challenge:

The presence of refugees is creating tensions between the original villages and the refugees, particularly when it comes to competition for limited housing and jobs. About one third of the refugees are living in simple tented communities erected on open land in the village, while the rest are accommodated in every thinkable shelter facility. Initially the villagers showed compassion and hospitality towards the refugees, but as time wore the generosity thin, prejudice and resentment replaced the initial [positive] feelings towards them. The refugees were increasingly accused of being an immoral or criminal threat.

As a result, a [government] curfew was imposed on the refugees after 8pm in the evening. The mayor, however, refused to dehumanize the refugees any further and did not implement this restriction under his jurisdiction, claiming that [such] restrictions on the refugees effectively limited their options in Lebanon to stealing or begging. If they chose the first, [it] would only confirm that they were criminals; if they chose the latter, nobody would give them anything anyway because of the increasing prejudices.<sup>90</sup>

In informal conversations, others claimed that the security situation was not negatively impacted by the refugees but that, due to a general disintegration of security and rule of law, some incidents committed by Lebanese were blamed on Syrians in a domestic game to score political points.

Lebanese politicians are aware of the need to provide opportunities for Syrian refugees to strengthen the country’s security and stability. In the north of the country they see the Akkar region as the gateway for refugees to return to Syria. It is

84 European Parliament, “Syrian Crisis: Impact on Lebanon,” March 2017, available at [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599379/EPRS\\_BRI%282017%29599379\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599379/EPRS_BRI%282017%29599379_EN.pdf).

85 International Labour Organization, “Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile,” April 2014, available at [www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS\\_240134/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_240134/lang-en/index.htm).

86 Mona Christophersen, Cathrine Moe Thorleifsson and Åge A. Tiltnes, “Ambivalent Hospitality: Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon,” Fafo, 2013, available at [www.faf.no/images/pub/2013/20338.pdf](http://www.faf.no/images/pub/2013/20338.pdf).

87 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 17, 2017.

88 Elias al-Araj, “How the War in Syria Left Its Mark on Lebanon’s Economy,” Al-Monitor, May 13, 2016.

89 Ibid.

90 Interview with village leader, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

therefore important to include refugees in the region's development plans to prepare them for this return: "Development in Syria can start here in the Akkar region. We can prepare a lot of things here and then transfer [the refugees] to Syria."<sup>91</sup> As the 2030 Agenda calls for "no one to be left behind," this inclusive approach is in the spirit of the SDGs and will benefit both Lebanon and Syria in the long run. Yet due to the complexities of Lebanese politics and their entanglement with regional interests, such decisions are hard for Lebanon to take alone.

## Economy of War in Times of Peace

Lebanon cannot achieve sustainable development without a continued focus on SDG 16 on peace and inclusive institutions and its relation to the other SDGs. Twenty-seven years after the Taif Accords that ended the civil war, as well as several other agreements to end conflicts and stabilize the country, Lebanon serves as an example of how development cannot be achieved without peace and how peace cannot be achieved without development.

The conflict in Syria has a significant impact on this link between peace and development in Lebanon. As an economist claimed, "[Lebanon does] not have a fatal lack of resources, not even with the presence of the Syrian refugees. We did not do anything [with the refugee problem], and still we survive, even without any policies towards them."<sup>92</sup> Although Lebanon's problems are not significantly related to the refugees, they are related to the conflict in Syria, which has created problems for Lebanon's economy linked to tourism, commercial land routes, and investments. These sectors require peace and stability to function and prosper, and peace is thus important for development in Lebanon.

The economist also noted the centrality of governance to peace and development in Lebanon: "The main challenge now is divisions inside the

society. It is about... culture, peace, politics, and ideology. [In] combination... they are dimensions of peace. SDG 16... is about two pillars or two components: one is peace and [the other] is governance. In Lebanon I would say the governance issue is extremely important.

While Lebanon's governance structure, negotiated as part of the Taif Accords and later renegotiated in Doha, initially served to end fifteen years of civil war and to start building peace, it now poses a particular challenge to the implementation of the SDGs in the country. Many claim that these sectarian power-sharing models not only are outdated but also prevent decision making in general and development in particular because they require consensus on every decision. Even if the Taif Accords were perceived as fair and constructive when negotiated in 1990, the power-sharing model now appears both unfair and destructive because many things have changed in the country during the last twenty-seven years. Almost every person we met during the fieldwork mentioned this system as one of the main obstacles to sustainable development. A development worker elaborated:

This [Taif] agreement is limiting [for development], in a way, because the same warlords became the leaders. And those are until now the leaders. So in that sense it is limiting the concept of nationality. Everything is still sectarian in Lebanon. For example, if you want to do a development project in [the northern town of] Tripoli on a high level, the Shia will say "no," or "we want the same in our region." So they will stop it, because there is competition between the regions, so [for this reason] you cannot have a national plan.<sup>94</sup>

Others described the power-sharing model as "the survival of a war economy" that permits sophisticated corruption at the highest levels of society where the sectarian leaders are dividing the resources of the country among themselves:

[Corruption] is kind of embedded, let's say as a non-written pact after the civil war, because those who were fighting [continued to control power]..., [and] the economy of war essentially stayed and became institutionalized in a sense.... People replace[d] the

91 Interview with politician, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

92 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 18, 2017.

93 Ibid.

94 Interview with development worker, Beirut, Lebanon, February 14, 2017.

public services with private services during the war, and it stayed like that.<sup>95</sup>

This statement points to the continued fragility and instability of Lebanon's public services. In many cases public services have been partly replaced by profitable parallel service-delivery systems organized by sectarian leaders. There are parallel systems for electricity, water, telecommunications, and education. For example, many private schools have sectarian affiliations and are run as Christian or Muslim schools. Many of these started during the civil war when access to public schools could be difficult or even somewhat dangerous if students from different sects were studying together.

The Lebanese state never seriously attempted to take back control over service delivery and thus to reestablish the social contract whereby citizens get protection and services from the state in return for their support of state leaders. Instead, loyalty is directed toward sect leaders who provide services, job opportunities, and, to some extent, protection. This "war economy" is thus fragmenting society and making it hard to build a uniting national identity.

These remnants of the "war economy" can only be eliminated by strengthening national institutions and service delivery. This will make ordinary people less dependent on parallel structures directly related to the county's power structures and sectarian power sharing.

While these old structures are seen to prevent development, it is encouraging that the current government is focusing on strengthening state institutions and making them more sustainable. One economist saw a glimmer of hope: "Peace and justice and strong institutions are major problems for [Lebanon]. It is a political problem. Maybe with the new government we will see a change."<sup>96</sup> The SDGs call for the government to take an inclusive approach, bringing partners from civil society and the private sector into committees and consultative processes, and this has started in some areas such as the strategic plan for sustainable development. A

government official put faith in this plan:

It will help minimiz[e] conflicts due to lack of social cohesion or lack of natural resources, so all this will help. [A strategic objective will be] building internal peace and stability, [including] social cohesion, because social cohesion is the crucial element for peace. Another strategic objective is related to good governance, and good governance is directly related to strong [or sustainable] institutions.<sup>97</sup>

However, more could be done to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive development process with the support of the international community. Achieving good governance also requires continuing developing the election law, strengthening the judicial system, decentralizing and improving accountability, and increasing access to information, which will contribute to building peace among the Lebanese. Another government official said, "Unless they take out sectarianism... from the political system and go into a civil state, it is stagnating."<sup>98</sup> Yet international and regional challenges beyond Lebanon's control will remain, including the war in Syria and the ominous struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia for control of and impact in the Arab world.

The most important aspect of the SDGs is to "leave no one behind." Success in achieving the goals has to be measured based on the progress of the poorest and most marginalized in society. Policies toward achieving the SDGs entail an aim to reduce inequality. For example, a leading figure in Lebanon's business sector urged the government to reduce poverty, claiming it to be the main challenge for development in the country. He suggested a humanitarian approach to poverty reduction based on mutual responsibility to help fellow citizens prosper while also enjoying a minimum of basic rights: "When you reach this area of no poverty, you can start thinking of other issues."<sup>99</sup> His recommendation was to reduce inequality by implementing employment insurance, where people who wanted to work could get a basic income guarantee. In his view this had to be the starting point for implementing the SDGs. The first step is to reduce inequality. The second is to adopt

95 Interview with development worker, Beirut, Lebanon, February 28, 2017.

96 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

97 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.

98 Interview with government official, Beirut, Lebanon, February 17, 2017.

99 Interview with economist, Beirut, Lebanon, February 23, 2017.



a fiscal policy that reduces the national debt without increasing inequality (e.g., through progressive tax policies targeting capital and finance).

Many interviewees advised that if inequality is not reduced, polarization and extremism could find fertile ground in Lebanon. A politician from the north warned that unemployed youth often are trained and offered jobs by militias or political parties (e.g., as guards): “We have a quote in Arabic translated to ‘the empty mind is the best location for bad things,’ because when...[a young] person... [doesn’t] work... [I do not mean to say] they are... terrorists..., but when this person has something to do..., working and liv[ing] a normal life with families, you will ensure to have peace. But today we have [many youths]... without jobs [and] they are easy target[s] for recruitment by militias and gangs.”<sup>100</sup> To counter this negative trend, alternatives have to be offered to young men through quality education and job opportunities. Giving vulnerable groups new opportunities is the basic idea behind building peace by leaving no one behind.

## Conclusions

We have addressed some key challenges for Lebanon and looked into how the government and other actors in the field of sustainable development are responding to opportunities in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The question has been to what extent measures that have been planned or implemented are addressing the country’s key challenges. That said, it is of paramount importance that Lebanon has emerged from its political stalemate by agreeing both to select a new president and to form a more operational government. Further, the government led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, which to some extent is supported by all major factions in Lebanon, claims it is committed to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Yet Lebanon is stuck in a political structure that has worked to stabilize the country after the civil war but is seen to prevent sustainable development and thus potentially to contribute to new conflicts.

This report has argued that Lebanon’s current power-sharing model, though instrumental in ending fifteen years of civil war, is an outdated governance system as Lebanon embarks on a process to achieve the 2030 Agenda and advance the seventeen SDGs. An inclusive and just society cannot be built on a political system that is organized around patron-client relationships that generate and institutionalize dependency and inequality. This model can be characterized as medieval, or “a federation of totalitarian fragments.” Combined, these fragments may appear to resemble a democratic system, but in reality each group is controlled by a “dictator” whom no one can object to or hold accountable. As long as power and decisions are taken inside this informal totalitarian structure, Lebanon’s formal democratic institutions will remain weak and powerless and sustainable development will be hard to achieve.

Efficient, resilient, and inclusive institutions are thus key for Lebanon’s sustainable development. When all Lebanese start to receive protection, social services, and opportunities for education and public sector employment from the state, they will no longer be dependent subjects of a sect leader who is now satisfying many of these needs. They can instead become citizens of a nation with the rights and obligations this entitles them to. By building trust between the citizens and government institutions that are transparent and based on the rule of law, the government can build the legitimacy required for a new social contract between the Lebanese people and their state. This process will end the remnants of the “war economy” that is still present in Lebanon. It will not be a rapid act of change, but a long-term and continuous investment in building confidence and trust, a process aiming to prove that the government and its leaders have the best interest of all citizens at the heart of their actions. Such actions will build the legitimacy necessary for the country’s leaders to take decisions on the people’s behalf.

In Lebanon there is an understanding that national policies and initiatives toward the SDGs have to be put in place for all stakeholders to move in the same direction, be it the government, the

<sup>100</sup> Interview with politician, North Lebanon, February 21, 2017.

private sector, or civil society. Yet the country is not fully stabilized despite the agreement to appoint a new president and form a new government. According to the constitution, there must be new parliamentary elections—elections that were scheduled to be held in May 2017 but have already been postponed several times due to the general political impasse and disagreements over a new election law. In June 2017 the cabinet approved a new draft election law, which will dramatically change Lebanon’s electoral system. The new law is suggested to be based on proportional representation instead of the old sect-based quota system, and elections are scheduled for May 2018. The argument for the delay is that the people of Lebanon and the political parties will need time to adapt to this fundamentally different electoral system.

If the elections go ahead under this draft law, they could be a first step toward changing the sectarian power base and moving toward a more democratic and inclusive political system. Theoretically, this change could bring power back to Lebanese institutions, strengthen them, and make them more inclusive and resilient to political change. Beyond the SDG on strong and inclusive institutions, this will also facilitate the implementation of all seventeen SDGs and their targets and help bring peace and prosperity to all Lebanese.

When the basic idea of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals is “leaving no one behind,” national politics have to address inequality and exclusion as well as privileges that generate inequality in society. Reduced inequality is important for stability and peace, and all the more so in a context like Lebanon’s that remains fragile, despite its resilience after the civil war.

## Recommendations

Resilient and inclusive institutions and service delivery based on a social contract between the state and its citizens rather than people’s dependence on their sect leaders are key for achieving sustainable peace and development in Lebanon. After years of political impasse that prevented most political decisions, the country broke the stalemate and agreed to elect a new president and form a new government at the end of 2016. The new prime minister has confirmed his full support for the 2030

Agenda and the seventeen SDGs. Despite the slow start, the government is addressing all the goals in an effort to achieve the agenda, starting with a gap analysis to validate Lebanon’s status in relation to each goal and better plan the areas where government efforts will have a positive impact.

The government has already addressed some challenges in the field of education, as well as challenges related to the environment, economy, and gender. Most importantly, current leaders understand the importance of building inclusive and resilient institutions and of building trust in the public sector, for example by reforming police conduct and increasing transparency. Yet there are many challenges ahead, particularly regarding the country’s governance structure.

The SDGs are all interrelated, and efforts in one area will have an impact in other areas. That makes the process complex. This paper is based on a limited field visit in the winter of 2017 and is not sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lebanon. It is a start to understand some of the key factors that can contribute to peace and development and some of the dynamics that can prevent reaching the achievement of these goals. Nonetheless, this research highlights a number of areas particularly important for Lebanon’s progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda:

1. **Change from a sectarian quota system to a more democratic system of governance.**

Many people in Lebanon are already calling for this change, which has been hard to achieve because the sectarian political system is entrenched at all levels of society, and the current leaders benefit from it both economically and politically. The recent proposal to shift Lebanon’s electoral system from a sectarian quota system to proportional representation creates potential for progress. Still, many obstacles remain, among them the concern that the new election law may not work as intended and disappointment over its lack of a quota for women in parliament, a longtime demand from women’s groups and activists.

2. **Build trust and form a new social contract where citizens are active and responsible actors in society rather than dependent subjects of a sect leader.**

This will be essential to break down the influence of the sect leaders, who are the main force dividing the country and thus contributing to the risk of renewed conflict and violence. To achieve inclusive and sustainable development where no one is left behind, a new social contract is needed, where citizens can elect their leaders and those leaders in return provide security and services. This would allow mutual trust to grow and give the system much-needed legitimacy.

**3. Increase transparency and strengthen the rule of law.**

This is a basic requirement for building public trust in and the legitimacy of governance institutions. Lebanon has already started this important work, for example through police reforms. It is important to continue this work and expand it to include other sectors, particularly those where influential people are bending regulations and laws for their own benefit.

**4. Foster social, political, and economic inclusion.**

Greater inclusion is key for both sustainable peace and sustainable development. Inclusion in Lebanon must go beyond the sects to include women and youth in all sectors of society. It also has to target vulnerable groups: the economically, socially, or geographically disadvantaged and refugees. Leaving no one behind means addressing processes of exclusion and systems of privilege in society.

**5. Reform the education system to reduce inequality.**

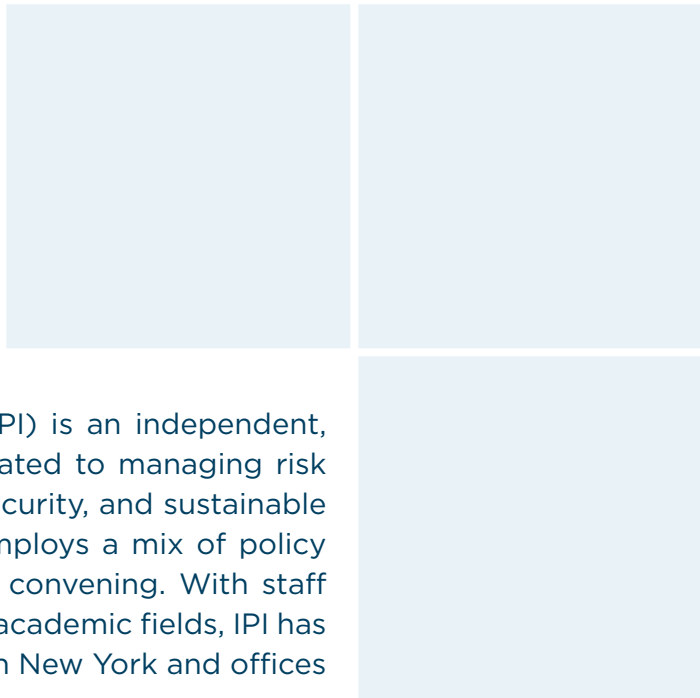
Because of the dual education system in Lebanon, with differences in quality and results, many parents continue to send their children to private schools. This is institutionalizing unequal opportunities between those who can afford private school and those who cannot. Instead, education policies should reduce inequality by offering the same quality education in all schools and universities, whether public or private. Such policies will give children more equal opportunities for both education and employment and reduce inequality in the long run.











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