

# Alleviating the Issue of Famine and Food Insecurity in Lebanon

**Forum:** Advisory Panel

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## Introduction

Throughout human history, the greatest enemy of human beings was famine. A famine is an extreme event in which large populations lack food, leading to malnutrition and deaths. It is caused by several factors including war, inflation, crop failure, population imbalance, and government policies. Now experts define famine with an agreement on three characteristics. The characteristics are that at least 20% of the houses in an area face extreme food shortages, the widespread presence of serious malnutrition in children exceeds 30%, and the death rate exceeds two people per 10,000 people per day. The issue of famine and food insecurity in Lebanon has become one of the most serious issues in the world, and it needs an immediate solution.

## Background

The famine is serious, and the cause of this situation is due to the economic crisis in Lebanon. This issue is similar to the economic crisis that occurred in Lebanon in the late 1900s. The long-lasting civil war in Lebanon caused a serious economic crisis that was difficult to recover from. During the first 10 years of the civil war,

Lebanon's economy was strong and flexible. However, in the mid-1980s, due to the continuous destruction of the country's infrastructure, the value of the Lebanese pound fell steeply. After the civil war, the Lebanese government launched a program to reconstruct the economy. This program was initiated by Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri in the 1990s, which aimed to revive Beirut as a regional financial and commercial center. In effect, an economy grew rapidly until 2010. Starting from 2011 to 2017, however, the growth of the economy slowed to less than 2 per cent due to the Syrian civil war and a massive influx of refugees. In 2018, an economic crisis emerged as the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeded 150 per cent.

The main causes of the economic crisis in Lebanon include political corruption, COVID-19, the explosion of Port Beirut, and the inability of the government to address the crisis. As the crisis worsened, famine and food shortage became the most serious issue in the country. To make matters worse, the explosion of the Port of Beirut destroyed large sections of one of the largest and busiest ports on the Eastern Mediterranean, causing billions of dollars of damages in the city. Across the country, 60% of the population faces challenges in getting enough to eat. Moreover, 78% of the Syrian refugees face food insecurity and the economic and



*The Lebanese people face famine and poverty due to an economic crisis*

social impact of the Syrian war is also an issue Lebanon is facing right now.

### Problems Raised

#### *Currency Crisis*

Lebanon is now in the middle of the worst economic crisis in history. Moreover, its currency, the Lebanese Lira, joined the list of dozens of failed currencies such as the Venezuelan Bolivar and the Zimbabwean Dollar. Lebanon is based on a service economy, mostly dependent on tourism. However, due to corruption and an unfriendly system to businesses, Lebanon did not develop itself on a self-supporting economy, like other neighboring countries. Moreover, 80% of its products are imported, which includes oil, meat, grain, and other supplies.

Due to the civil war in Syria, which is right next door to Lebanon, officials pushed hard to engage more creativity in financial engineering to keep the Lira stable. The main reason for this situation is the influx of refugees, and due to the rise in the price of the foods, it is harder for people to buy them. However, to keep the illusion of stability, banks offered interest rates as high as 14 per cent, which required more deposits to pay the high-interest rate, consequently creating a Ponzi scheme, which is a type of fraud that pays the investors with the funding from the new investor.



*Due to the currency crisis in Lebanon, people are protesting against the government*

#### *Protests*

On October 17, 2019, the Lebanese cabinet announced that they will use a new tax measuring system to fight against the economic crisis the country is facing right now. In response, tens of thousands of peaceful protesters came out to the streets and protested for their social and economic rights, and also for the end of the corruption. Although the cabinet surrendered to the protest, there were still many ruling figures who remained in their positions. Later on, in January 2020, a new cabinet was formed with little change to address the population's

demands, and the protest continued. To make matters worse, the explosion of Port of Beirut killed 190 people, injured more than 6500, and caused 300,000 people to be homeless. This unfortunate event reignited the protest that was held on October 17, 2019. On August 8, people again came out to the streets and shouted for justice and responsibility. This caused the cabinets to reunite, and the peaceful protest turned into a violent and bloody protest after the Lebanese force and security got engaged. In addition, the government has stolen the citizen's money to pay their debt, and this is one the biggest reasons why the citizens are protesting and are mad at their government.

#### *Food Shortage*

UN agency warned that more than half of the population is at the risk of facing food

shortages after the occurrence of the tragic event at Port of Beirut. As the country's largest grain silo is located in the port and the economic damage from the explosion made economic crisis worse, the issue of food shortage became one of the most serious issues in Lebanon. Although many NGOs and other organizations are funding and helping Lebanon to deal with food insecurity, the issue of the food shortage is not resolved completely. Therefore, Lebanon needs a long-term solution to deal with the issue of food shortage.

### **Actions Taken by NGOs and other Organizations**

#### *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)*

The Food and Agriculture Organization assists Lebanon in the development of disaster risk management, supporting livelihoods, food security, transboundary animal disease control, restoration of animal production, climate-smart agriculture, and natural resource management. FAO and Lebanon have made a contract for 43 years partnership for agriculture, rural development, and management of natural resources. Moreover, FAO also assists humanitarian development, by focusing on the protection of the most vulnerable people among displaced Syrian refugees and the poorest Lebanese people. Also, FAO promotes the environmental and institutional stability of Lebanon through expanding economic living opportunities that benefit local economies.



*The World Food Program assisting Lebanon with food supplies*

#### *World Food Program (WFP)*

The World Food Program is helping Lebanon to prevent food shortages as the country is in great downfall by the triple shock of the explosion in Beirut, economy meltdown, and COVID-19. The WFP has delivered 17,500 metric tons of wheat flour and a three-month supply of wheat to help people that are suffering from food shortages in August 2020. The organization has also scaled up its cash assistance program that serves 100,000, and its goal is to reach 1 million across the country.

### **The P5 Nations' Stances**

#### *United States of America*

The United States seeks to help Lebanon to maintain its independence, sovereignty, national unity, stability, and territorial integrity. Since 2010, the USA has provided more than 4 billion dollars to assist Lebanon. US assistants support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to secure the border and counter threats. Besides, the United States also has provided 2.3 billion dollars in humanitarian assistance in Lebanon since the start of the Syrian crisis. The funding helps the health care system, increases access to water, sanitation, hygiene, and provides emergency food assistance to refugees and vulnerable Lebanese.

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### *People's Republic of China*

Lebanon and China made some progress in their cooperation in economy, trade, culture, education, and press. In 2013, Lebanon became China's top trading partner. Moreover, China also sent forces to help Lebanese people with COVID-19 and to support humanitarian aids in Lebanon. The longstanding Chinese military force in Lebanon has helped Lebanon with establishing more infrastructure and medical assistance.

### *France*

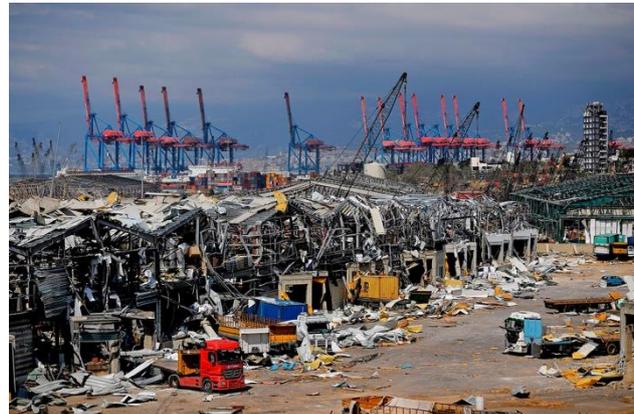
France has a long history with Lebanon. The relationship between the two countries started with the colony. However, after Lebanon got independence, France became one of the main political partners in the 20th and 21st century. France supports the stability, unity, independence, and sovereignty of Lebanon. In 2018, France was the seventh-largest supplier to Lebanon. Besides, the Lebanon Armed Force (LAF) is also aided by France, through assistance in carrying out missions in Lebanon and the area under the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFL). Since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis, France has provided Lebanon with supports and assists in humanitarian assistance. World leaders and organizations have funded 300 million dollars of emergency humanitarian aid, but they all claim that this aid would not be effective until the Lebanese government commit themselves to serious political and economic reforms.

### *Russian Federation*

The Russian Emergency Ministry announced that they have sent five planes with humanitarian aids to Lebanon after the explosion of the Port of Beirut. The planes will deliver mobile hospital, rescue and medical specialists, equipment and supply of medications. Due to COVID-19, the ministry has announced that the specialists will be wearing special suits when they are helping the Lebanese.

### *United Kingdom*

The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) has announced that they will be sending 20 million euros of aid packages to Lebanon after the massive explosion in Beirut. The funding will help feed the most vulnerable people and prevent food crisis in Lebanon. In addition, the UK has also sent a specialist team of medics to assess the health needs in the city. The UK is also raising funds to help Lebanon with a food crisis and economic crisis.



*Rebuilding the Port of Beirut*

## **Possible Solutions**

### *Reconstruction of the Country's Grain Silo*

The Port of Beirut is the center of trade and all economic activity in Lebanon. However, due to the explosion of the Port of Beirut, the issue of famine and food insecurity in

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Lebanon has gotten worse. The largest grain silo is placed in the Port of Beirut; the Port contains 60 percent of imports, and 85 percent of all cereals and grains are stored in the silos. It is estimated that 15,000 tons of wheat were being stored at the silos at the time of the explosion. Therefore, the reconstruction of the country's grain silos in the Port of Beirut is one of the most important tasks that can lead to the solution for the famine and food shortages in Lebanon.

### *Raising Awareness*

Although raising awareness is a solution for all crisis and issues, it can be one of the most important solutions for famine and food insecurity. To resolve famine and food insecurity, resources are needed in the first place. Where does the resource come from? By raising awareness, more people will volunteer to help the people in need. For example, the organization called FoodBlessed has volunteered to help and deliver food packages to people who are suffering. The beneficiaries include migrant workers, disabled people, addicts, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

### *Connecting the Farmers to the Market*

Due to the currency crisis in Lebanon, farmers are suffering in particular. Out of the total amount of food supplies Lebanon uses, 85 percent of the food supplies are imported. The imported food supplies are stored in the largest grain silo in the country, which blown up by the explosion of the Port of Beirut. Therefore, it is crucial for the country to develop their agriculture and use their farmers to produce more food supplies. However, due to the Lebanese currency crisis, the farmers do not have the money to buy supplies to plant seeds. Therefore, this issue needs an immediate solution.

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## **Glossary**

*Lebanon Armed Force (LAF)* – the military of Lebanon Republic, consisted with three branches: the army, air force, and the navy.

*United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFL)* – a UN-NATO peacekeeping mission established on 19 March 1978 by the United Nations Security Council.

*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* – a UN agency authorized to aid and protect refugees.

*Debt to GDP ratio* – a ratio between a country's government debt and its gross domestic product

## **Timeline**

*1975 April* – Phalangist ambush a bus and kills 27 passengers. Start of the civil war.

*1982 June* – Israel invades Lebanon

*1988* – President Amine Gemayel forms a military government in East Beirut. Prime Minister Selim el-Hoss forms a Muslim rival administration in West Beirut.

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*1990 October* – Syrian air forces attacks the Presidential palace at Baabda; this formally ends the civil war.

*2011 March* – Syria's multi-sided civil war starts.

*2013 September* – United Nations refugee agency says that at least 700,000 Syrian refugees are in Lebanon.

*2020 August* – Diab's government quits after months of protests and the fall of the currency, lockdown due to COVID-19, and the explosion of Port of Beirut.



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