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Lebanon, Policy and Governance

### **Policy and Governance in Lebanon**

All around the world countries are suffering and/or struggling in their own ways. Whether it's shortages of goods or foods, crippling governments, large amounts of malnutrition and starvation, or even constant war, almost all or even all countries have internal problems they have to deal with. Although, some countries are having a harder time tending to those problems. In the country Lebanon, a small country in the Middle East, they are dealing with internal/external conflict, shortages of goods, malnutrition, shortages of jobs, unstable government, food instability, etc. They are in an extreme crisis with no directive on where to start. With their unstable government, uniting and working together to develop new policies and reforms might just be the key to fixing their country's despair. These policies can not only fix current problems, but also be a major lead in fixing food instability in Lebanon. Additionally, it's a firm belief that no person should have to suffer in order to obtain food, and in countries like Lebanon this is unfortunately a very common ordeal. On a global scale, food insecurity is one of the leading issues countries face. With the high amounts of malnutrition or starvation world wide, it's emergent that actions need to be taken. We must come together to help support these countries and make sure they are flourishing in a proper way, and not struggling to give their citizens a meal. This movement can start right here with Lebanon, with new policies and better structure put into place, we can push Lebanon into a new direction and out of crisis.

To start off, Lebanon is a small country located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea with Syria and Israel on its sides. Its' current population is around 7.6 million people with 11.4% being rural and 88.6% being urban. They have a Unitary Multiparty Republic as their government with one Legislative house, and their current Prime Minister is Najib Milcati (Barnett). There is 0.24 million hectares of land in Lebanon with only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of it being cultivated (Collelo pg.71). Most of the land is covered by rugged, mountainous terrain with multiple mountain ranges, and coastal plains along the sea. They have a subtropical climate with hot dry summers and mild, humid winters (Collelo pg.31). Most of the farming takes place in the level areas of the mountains in between slopes; this is because the fertile soil is by the middle mountain slopes and the river. Farming plays an important role in their economy because it's its main food source and part of their exports. Some of Lebanon's main crops are: vegetables, potatoes, grapes, and bananas.

Even with those crops, typical families have diets containing: meats, veggie dishes, bread, fruit, and meat stews. In an average family in Lebanon they typically have a family of 4 with 2 kids, and it's common for more than one generation to be living in one house. For farming families they can have 10-15 kids in order to have more workers for their land (Culture of Lebanon). Some families are managing pretty well, but the standard of living is quite low there with 78% living below the poverty line and 36% in extreme poverty (Chehayeb). This is primarily due to shortages of jobs creating the high amount of unemployment. Those who aren't unemployed work as small business owners, farmers, or work outside the country. Education is at a decent quality with 6 required years of primary school and options of attending a technical school or a secondary school afterward (Maksound); there is, however, a declining 90% attendance rate as more kids quit school to take up work for their families (Abouzeid).

Even with the abundance of land and crops and the successfulness of them, there is still a huge shortage of food in Lebanon currently. They are in the worst economic crisis in their history and their country as

whole is so deep in debt it has brought concerns from the National Bank and the United Nations. The economic situation is only worsening due to unresolved conflict, unstable government, shortage of jobs, high amounts of poverty, and shortages of goods and foods. The people of Lebanon are very wrapped up in conflicts, making them very skeptical of who's in charge of their country. There has been a lot of recent rebellions and government defiances between citizens and government officials, past prime ministers more specifically. The past couple Prime Ministers either were forced to resign or were assassinated. This has created an unstable position of the government. While they have a system to properly represent both Christian and Muslim voices in the government, there are still many disputes of who's in charge culturally.

Furthermore, Lebanon has had an improper functioning government since August 2020, when the Beirut explosion occurred and the current Prime Minister resigned. (Lebanon gets a new Government). With this instability of the government it's led to difficulties in improvement in the country and has made matters worse. There is currently a shortage in goods, medicine, food, and jobs, making the rate of unemployment and poverty increase into record breaking numbers. Also, with no government to implement policies there has been a huge spike of child labor. It has been found that with their families struggling, children in Lebanon have taken it upon themselves to drop out of school and start working in order for their families to stay fed and housed. For a lot of these kids, they are bringing in the most income for their households. Also, there has been a severe increase in violence against girls and women. A lot of women are blamed for malnutrition in their families and criticized for not bringing income into the family, but they typically never have jobs regardless (Abouzeid). With all this it's a chaotic mess with many problems that need to be attended to, but with no course of action even planned out. The people of Lebanon have spent too much time prioritizing the stability of their government that they haven't focused on implementing policies to keep their country progressing and to attempt improving the declining economy.

In the broad spectrum of things, there are many steps Lebanon needs to take in order to equilibrate their country and improve their poor economy. In order to fix the high level of food insecurity in their country, the government must focus on fixing other problems first, to in turn be able to fix this prominent issue of food insecurity. Firstly, the Lebanese government needs to establish a policy banning child labor. With those kids working as much as they do, they are adding to the deepening levels of malnutrition. These kids are being overworked at a young age and are not receiving a proper education. With this policy implemented kids would go back to school, improving the attendance rate. The more kids that go to school, the higher the standard of education. Higher education leads to more opportunities for higher level jobs, which benefits the country as a whole. The upcoming generations in Lebanon are the future of the country, and if they are receiving good education, instead of spending their childhood working at some poorly skilled job barely making any wage, they have the opportunity to achieve higher class jobs increasing the amount of skilled workers in the country. More skilled workers brings more opportunities for Lebanon, overall improving the economy making it a beneficial solution.

Another thing the government needs to focus on is the shortage of food and the high unemployment rate, but there is a way to fix these both at the same time. The next policy the government should create is a new agriculture system. As stated earlier, only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the land is cultivated and there is an existing shortage of food. Therefore, if a larger plot of land is turned into farming space it will heavily increase the amount of food in the country. Additionally, this new farming space needs workers and they can employ people that are unemployed, as there are numerous amounts. This creates income to those struggling with personal finances and/or those below the poverty line. With this new employment it contributes to the improvement of the economy, and the raised amounts of food does as well. Also, the government will still profit from this system because they get money when that food is distributed and purchased.

Keeping this in mind, or even moving away from it, there is a third policy the government can institute into the country. This would be a welfare system that gives food stamps to those without food. It's a

system used in the U.S and it's very successful, giving food stamps to those that qualify, so they can get free food and stay nourished. With the extreme levels of poverty in Lebanon this is a system that is very much needed. Although, with the stricter conditions in Lebanon it's going to have to be created and maintained differently. There's a larger amount of people who can qualify for this in their country than the U.S and not enough resources to sustain them. Therefore, there will have to be current regulations set in place. In order to qualify for food stamps, you must have a job and there must be no employed children in your household. This makes it so no one is taking advantage of the free food, which makes it more beneficial for more people. Also, if there are people who do have a job, and they still need food they clearly need financial support, and this system will help support them. With the 20-24% tax rate in Lebanon, they can pay for the agriculture and food stamp systems (Lebanon Personnel Income Tax). This is a very high tax rate, and the government clearly has money from taxes they can use, and what better way to spend taxes then to better your country.

All this overall, increases the amount of food, lowers the unemployment rate, lowers the poverty rate, lowers the child labor rate, and increases the amount of kids receiving a education while also encouraging higher education. These are movements in the right direction to improve this horrid economic crisis. Coming together as a government to create these three policies helps them unite as a government and work together, which in turn helps stabilize their government. This helps them focus on bettering their country and economy and turn their attention away from internal conflicts that start from pure power hunger. If you go about these policies the right way they will greatly benefit and improve Lebanon as a whole. Furthermore, improving the policies of the government and stabilizing it helps them focus on other problems they need to solve also. This is the recurring issue of food insecurity. Creating these three policies do increase the amount of food being produced and the amount of people receiving it. This is a big step for stabilizing food insecurity. The further these policies develop and succeed the more benefits and improvements that will come from them. It will decrease malnutrition in Lebanon, and ensure the people have food for themselves and their families.

Concluding, there are huge cultural issues in the world. The amount of people suffering from hunger is unfortunately enormous. Access to food is not something that should be earned or given, it's something that everyone should always have at all times; it's a human right. Around the world there are countries with sickening levels of malnutrition. As a whole we need to work together to help support these countries and give their people the food they need to survive. No one in this world deserves to not have access to food and to sit there wondering about when they will get their next meal. It's a god given right, and the people in these countries deserve our help. Whether it's donations of food, welfare support, or even advice and/or solutions on what we think will help, we have to do what we can. Lebanon is a Middle Eastern country that does have large amounts of people facing malnutrition. In order to improve the food insecurity in their country they need to establish a new agriculture system, a no child labor policy, and a welfare assistance policy. These will create a balance in their country and improve the access to food. With these achieved Lebanon can also focus even more on what else they can do to improve malnutrition in their country, and what else they can do to improve their country as a whole. With the rapidly declining economic crisis Lebanon is in, these are huge steps towards improvement. With that said, it's Lebanon's job to ponder these solutions and implement them into their country in the way that benefits best. On the other hand, it's our job to provide them with this advice and do what we can to support them in their process. Although, Lebanon is just one country that needs improvements, with time we can approach countries one by one and hopefully lessen the amount of people going to bed hungry every night. This is more than just within our schools or towns, this is a global problem and the more of us united, the more successful we will be.

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