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March 2015



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Why women's rights is everyone's business



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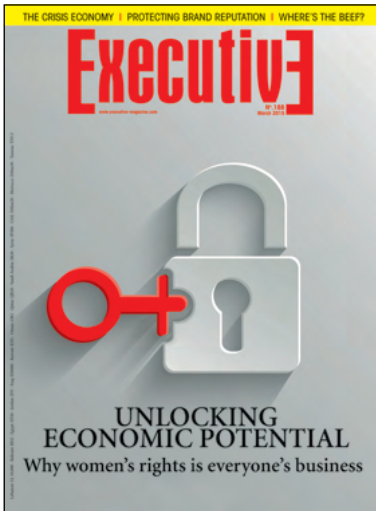
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IT'S THE PEOPLE, STUPID



Lebanon still has people, right? While this may sound like a dumb question, it was the only thing running through my mind after a 90 minute meeting with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on February 23. We were talking about Lebanon's economic opportunities, but the speaker had a singular focus: natural resources. He talked about oil. He talked about gas. He even talked about exporting water. What he ignored was our most valuable asset: human capital.

Female Lebanese, for example, are being underutilized as agents of economic growth. Empowering them would boost both productivity and GDP. We know Lebanese women are well educated, so we simply must ensure they are better represented in the workforce for the benefit of the entire country. We have proof that, despite all the obstacles they face today, women can and do succeed in the Lebanese workplace. We need to help more women join the workforce by both offering them more legal protections such as laws against sexual harassment, in particular, and creating more job opportunities in the country, in general.

We're a nation of creative minds and entrepreneurial spirits. We should have a larger and more dynamic knowledge economy in which both our men and women can prosper. Instead, we have an \$80 million fiber optic backbone for internet traffic sitting unused. Simply turning on what we already have can spur innovation, growth and job creation. And it can be done quicker than waiting for politicians to agree on exploiting what may or may not be buried beneath the seafloor.

More than oil, gas or convoluted schemes to sell water we don't even capture in a large enough quantity to meet our own demand, Lebanon needs hope and more investments in its human capital — things not even our politicians can steal.

Yasser Akkaoui
Editor-in-chief

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On the cover

Women in the workplace

Every March 8 the UN marks International Women's Day. EXECUTIVE set out to explore female participation in the country's economy and the extent of gender inequality in different aspects of Lebanese society.



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CORRECTIONS

In January's issue, the article "The house of culture" erroneously claimed that artist Tom Young's work sells for as much as \$1,500. The correct figure, according to the artist, is \$15,000.

February's article "A'chour-ed success" mistakenly stated that excavation at the Eden Rock Resort site began late last year. While preparations began late last year, actual excavation began in January according to a spokesperson for A'chour Development. Excavation on the site had also been conducted previously.

In February's "Strategy & war", when counting partner departures from Booz-Strategy, we inadvertently put the time period under consideration as March 2013 to January 2014, instead of to January 2015.

Apologies.



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The wreckage of a bus that was hit by an explosion while transporting Lebanese Shiite pilgrims in Damascus

> An **explosion** on February 1 ripped through a bus transporting **Lebanese Shiite pilgrims** to religious sites in Damascus, leaving at least six dead. While Jabhat al-Nusra claimed on Twitter that a member of the group had carried out a suicide attack, Syrian state media reported the bombing was caused by an explosive device planted on the bus.

> A joint force comprising the army, the Internal Security Forces and General Security launched a **security plan** in the **Bekaa Valley**, expanding operations and raids aimed at detaining fugitives. According to army reports, the crackdown has resulted in the arrest of over 150 suspected criminals, in addition to the confiscation of illegal drugs, light weapons and unregistered cars.

> **Hezbollah** and the **Future Movement** continued talks aimed at resolving outstanding disputes between the two sides, holding their sixth dialogue session at parliament speaker Nabih Berri's Beirut residence. Interior Minister Nouhad

Machnouk, who took part in the talks, said that a counterterrorism strategy was on the agenda.

> Former Prime Minister **Saad Hariri** returned to Lebanon to deliver a speech marking the 10th anniversary of his father Rafik Hariri's assassination. Speaking at the BIEL complex on February 14, Hariri stressed that "Lebanon does not belong to any regional axis" and urged Hezbollah to end its participation in the fighting in Syria.



Saad Hariri delivered a speech during the 10th anniversary of his father's assassination

> Speaking just two days after former Prime Minister **Saad Hariri** called on Hezbollah to withdraw from Syria, the party's Secretary General

Hassan Nasrallah revealed that the group has a "limited presence" in Iraq and is engaged in the ongoing fight there against ISIS. Nasrallah addressed those demanding the group end its participation in the fighting, calling instead for them to "go together [with us] to Syria." He also criticized Gulf states and Jordan for supporting Jabhat al-Nusra while at the same time engaging in the fight against ISIS.

> MP **Khaled Daher** suspended his membership in the Future bloc, following earlier reports that he had been kicked out. The lawmaker sparked controversy after making statements that some deemed offensive to the country's Christians. Following North Lebanon Governor Ramzi Nohra's order to remove all political and religious insignia from public locations in Tripoli,

let them start with the Christ the King statue and posters of saints."

> Lebanese Army commander **Gen. Jean Kahwagi** took part in a meeting in Riyadh bringing together military commanders and chiefs of staff from countries participating in the US led coalition against ISIS. While Lebanon has not joined the coalition in Syria and Iraq, it has been confronting the organization along the Syrian border.

> In a statement released on February 17, **Human Rights Watch** (HRW) called on General Security to immediately reveal the whereabouts of two Syrian nationals who disappeared in Lebanese custody, amid fears that they had been deported to Syria. HRW's Middle East and North Africa deputy director Nadim Houry said that Lebanon's refusal to disclose their location made the authorities "complicit in any harm that comes to them."

> Quoting **UNHCR** sources, The Daily Star reported that the Lebanese Army ordered about 17,000 refugees in the eastern Bekaa Valley to vacate their informal tented settlements.

> A February report commissioned by the International Labor Organization, UNICEF and Save the Children estimates that **over 1,500**

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“IT IS NOT WISE TO ENCOURAGE SYRIANS TO LEAVE SYRIA”

- Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil

children work on the streets of Lebanon, often subjected to various forms of exploitation. According to the report, the most prevalent forms of work were begging and street vending, accounting for about 80 percent of the examined cases.

> In late January 2015, Lebanon's **Ministry of Labor** rejected a proposal to create a **union for migrant domestic workers**, after the National Federation of Labor Unions had endorsed the move. According to a statement released by the ministry, “advanced laws would solve the problems that the sector is suffering from, not the formation of groups under the guise of a syndicate.”

> Lebanon's **top three banks** have released financial results for 2014, all showing steady growth despite the economic situation in the country. **Bank Audi** reported assets of \$42 billion at the end of December 2014, a 15.9 percent year on year growth. Meanwhile, **Blom Bank** and **Byblos Bank** reported asset increases as well, to \$27.98 billion (7 percent) and \$19 billion (3 percent) respectively.

> Lebanon's **gross public debt** reached \$66.6 billion at the end of 2014, representing a 4.9 percent increase year on year.

> According to recent statistics released by the **Port of Beirut**, activity

growth saw a modest increase in 2014, with a 0.2 percent rise in aggregate freight handled, compared to 14.4 percent in 2013.

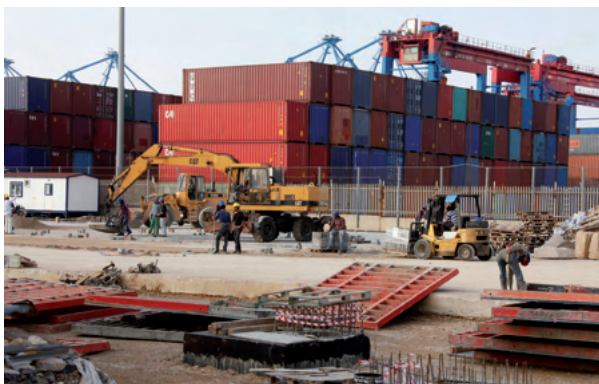
> The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization sent a delegation to inspect the **Beirut slaughterhouse** in Karantina. The facility was ordered closed in November 2014 by Beirut Governor Ziad Chebib after inspections revealed numerous health and sanitation violations. Beirut's main fish market, also located in Karantina, has recently reopened after renovations were made to address violations.

> According to figures released by the **Association of Automobile Importers (AIA)**, 2,436

that **real advertising expenditures** in Lebanon rose 1.9 percent from 2013 to 2014, increasing from \$185.5 million to \$189 million.

> Figures released by **Beirut International Airport** showed a 11.4 percent year on year increase in the number of passengers for January 2015, while total freight handled by the airport decreased by 16.4 percent.

> In its annual survey assessing the state of press freedom in 180 countries, **Reporters Without Borders** ranked Lebanon second in the MENA region, behind Kuwait, and 98th globally, rising eight places from last year's rankings.



Beirut Port's 2014 growth is significantly lower than in 2013



January car sales show a modest increase on last year

new passenger cars were sold in January 2015, a 2.7 percent increase from the 2,372 cars sold in the same month of 2014.

> The annual survey of the advertising market in the Arab world, carried out by research firm Ipsos and ArabAd magazine, showed

> Lebanon ranked 94th out of 186 in the Heritage Foundation's **2015 Economic Freedom Survey**. The survey assesses the state of economic freedom in a country on the basis of four categories: rule of law, government size, regulatory efficiency and market openness.

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> Working women

Closing the gap

Integrating more Lebanese women into the workforce is an economic imperative

Imagine that you are thrown into a fist fight against a fully abled opponent, but one of your hands has been tied behind your back. Your ability to compete would be reduced by at least half making your chances of winning pretty slim.

This analogy, with Lebanon as the fighter, illustrates the difficulty of having a competitive economy when a significant portion of the population is inactive in the labor force.

Today, in 2015, many countries still struggle with issues relating to the equal representation of women in the workforce. This is demonstrated by the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap 2014 report, which estimated that it would take 81 years to completely seal the gap.

Lebanon, which ranked 135 out of the 142 countries surveyed in the WEF's report, is perhaps centuries from closing that gap, with women constituting only about 25 percent of those employed, according to a 2007 Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) report.

We now know that there is a correlation between the percentage of women employed in a country and that country's GDP growth rates: Countries with a narrow gender gap have more economic productivity.

Faced with such a reality, women's advancement in the workforce in Lebanon becomes more than a human rights issue or an issue of fairness: it becomes an economic imperative.

With the dire state of its economy, Lebanon must fully capitalize on all its resources, starting with its women.

What adds fuel to the fire is that Lebanese women are highly educated, with women constituting 55 percent of university students. The loss of productivity incurred when these educated women do not utilize these skills is inexcusable.

Many international studies have also linked a high representation of women in top management positions with better performances for those corporations placing them there, and for the country's GDP in the final outcome. According to Credit Suisse's CS Gender 3000: Women in Senior Management report, companies with a higher than average percentage of female board members outperformed those with fewer women on their boards by 30 percent.

In Lebanon, the number of women CEOs or women in top management positions is very small. Corporations in Lebanon should therefore wake up to the benefits of advancing women to top managerial positions for both themselves and for the country as whole. They would be wise to implement policies which would make the workplace a



friendlier place for women, such as flexible working hours and parental leave where both partners could take paid time off work to rear their child, knowing their job is secure when they return.

The journey towards the global advancement of women in the workforce is admittedly long, more so in Lebanon where their representation is well below the average and where communal structures tend to hold women down and perceive their primary role as that of a mother while a career is always secondary (see page 46), but we need to start somewhere.

The country as a whole needs to stop viewing this issue as merely a symbolic one raised once a year, on International Women's day, and see it for the economic issue that it is.

Corporations can and should do their part, but major change must be driven by government initiative. A national strategy must be developed whereby women are encouraged to enter and remain in the workforce, and not forced to exit early when they are too pressured by society's expectations of them as caregivers.

This strategy should include replacing laws that discriminate against women, such as the personal statuses law and the NSSF law, and enacting laws that protect women in the workplace and foster their sense of empowerment, such as laws prohibiting sexual harassment or ones that guarantee women equal opportunity in being hired.

As a country, starting from the individual, moving on to civil society, corporations and the government, we need to keep advocating the equal representation of women in the workforce until Lebanon's women rise and the economy rises with them. Only then can Lebanon fully compete in the fist fight, maximizing the use of its full capacities.

> Crisis economy

The blame game

Lebanon must not hold Syrian refugees responsible for its economic woes

Lebanon's two current crises will not evaporate anytime soon. Our economy is struggling and GDP growth rates are too low for the needs of an emerging country. Our cities and villages are confronted by a refugee crisis of immense proportions. Neither problem will go away if we just close our eyes and both are related in many ways, but the one capital error that we must eradicate above all is to blindly blame one crisis on the other.

As the Syrian conflict enters into its fourth year evidence of human rights violations committed by all conflict parties against civilians continue to mount. The war has displaced more than 10 million Syrians, both inside the country and out, and left vast areas of Syrian territory unsafe for refugees to return. Reluctantly, Lebanon has welcomed 1.16 million Syrians seeking refuge into the country, but the surge in population that the refugees represent has strained relations.

The Lebanese government has introduced policies aimed at limiting the number of refugees in Lebanon, and political sentiment has placed the brunt of the country's economic woes at the feet of the refugees. But blaming the refugees for Lebanon's faltering economy demonstrates a fundamental lack

of understanding of this economic crisis and jeopardizes the country's ability to solicit donors for needed humanitarian development aid.

The vast majority of refugees have no other choice but to stay in Lebanon for the foreseeable future, and attempts to push them out of Lebanese territory through discriminatory practices, such as municipalities imposing curfews for Syrians and the deregistration of refugees, will help address neither Lebanon's immediate needs for humanitarian aid nor its long term need of revitalizing physical and social infrastructures. Rather than continuing to blame refugees for the country's economic woes the Lebanese government must remain resilient — its economic success depends on harnessing Lebanon's spirit and ability of entrepreneurship to identify ways through this crisis.

It is clear already that Lebanon has missed the huge economic opportunity that attracting Syrian industrialists to the country would have produced. Instead, many of Syria's businesspeople have opted to restart their businesses and factories in the Gulf countries or Egypt. This mirrors Lebanon's inability to support its own manufacturers where unreliable access to electricity, the high cost of energy, ineffective industrial zones, and transit costs are among the contributing barriers to Lebanese factories' competitiveness in regional and global markets. But it has also reflected upon the government's inelasticity to quickly address this economic crisis.

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As bad as Lebanon's economic situation now appears there may still be opportunities to capitalize upon. On our streets one can see plenty of budget-size cars with Syrian license plates, but also enough SUVs and luxury sedans to imply that Lebanon is hosting Syrian population segments that have some level of purchasing power. The hospitality industry has realized that opportunity — often led by Lebanese businesspeople. More than a few restaurateurs have found success in marketing their establishments to the large Syrian population able to afford a meal out.

The state still has chances to make good. At specific levels, the reduction of bureaucratic red tape can coax small gains for Lebanon's industries. Reducing barriers to imports would help, for example, hospitals reduce the time and cost of acquiring medical equipment not produced in Lebanon. Even as the Lebanese government remains restrained by

an imposed political paralysis, there is much more that its ministries can do to facilitate transactions in the country's economy. Instead of pointing the finger of blame at refugees, Lebanon's politicians and government leaders should be looking at ways to leverage the crisis.

Rather than abhorring their presence, Lebanon must actively identify the communities and projects that would contribute most to addressing the needs of both refugees and their host communities — an initial step in reassuring donors of Lebanon's worthiness as a country to invest in. Lebanon's leaders must also stump for those investments to convince the international community to finance infrastructure products that will immediately alleviate the suffering of refugees, improve provision and quality of infrastructure services for all inhabitants in the short and mid term, and spur economic growth in the long term.

> **Fiber optic internet**

Flip the switch

Or give us a better reason it's off

In fact, it could be a lot faster immediately, at very little effort or cost. A new state of the art network of fiber optic cables has been installed connecting some 350 central offices around the country (where international capacity is delivered before it reaches the end users), to many heavy users — such as hospitals, universities and businesses. This network is actually designed to serve all of the country, down to the last hovel.

This fiber optic backbone, however, is turned off. That means the fiber is in the ground, connected to the various modems, routers and switches, and ready to go. But there is currently no data traversing it. The “switch” — or more accurately series of devices in the central offices — has not been turned on. This comes in spite of internet speeds being increasingly cited as a factor of economic growth. In low and middle income countries, a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration has correlated to an additional 1.38 percent in GDP growth, according to the International Telecommunications Union's research presented in its Impact of Broadband on the Economy 2012 report.

Turning on the switch would have a significant impact on Lebanon's internet speeds. While the fiber optic cable does not yet connect residences, it would from day one benefit the operations of many places such as businesses and academic institutions — where much of the country's productive work is done. Faster internet would also make the country more competitive, and would draw in badly needed investments, particularly in the ICT field.

From all the evidence that we have, we get the impression that the fiber could go on within weeks. We have not been presented with any remotely logical excuse explaining why this is not the case. The switch needs to either be turned on,

or those responsible for overseeing Lebanon's fiber optic infrastructure need to step forward and give us a proper reason why it's off.

While EXECUTIVE is still waiting on several interviews requests with people from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Ogero, the consultants to the Minister of Telecommunications who spoke to us claimed that the fiber is off because of certain technical mistakes from the company that was contracted to do the work. The affected infrastructure segments are in the process of being redone, the consultants said. Though they could not specify exactly how much of the infrastructure actually needed reworking, they did acknowledge that it was only a small part.

This explanation is not exactly satisfying to explain why an entire fiber optic backbone is sitting idle, and why we haven't already put some of it to use. We're still entirely relying on what is an old and outdated infrastructure, mostly made of copper save for a small fiber optic loop which was originally meant to serve as a local network for Ogero's internal operations. The fact that we have newer infrastructure across the country and are still making do with the old is absurd.

Currently, both the Ministry of Telecommunications and Ogero have oversight over the telecom infrastructure. These entities need to be accountable to the people for the assets they are managing. The fiber optic cable was paid for by government money, and any investment made by the government has to benefit the people. The Ministry of Telecommunications and Ogero need to either flip the switch or present a proper explanation to the Lebanese people as to why our fiber infrastructure is not in use, and when it will be readily in use.



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Misplaced blame

Inflows of humanitarian aid into Lebanon have helped mitigate economic losses *By Jeremy Arbid*

For many Lebanese, from government ministers to taxi drivers, the cause of the country's economic downturn is clear: 1.16 million Syrian refugees. While a population increase of more than 25 percent has certainly strained infrastructure and further challenged the state's ability to provide basic services, the notion that the refugees are directly responsible for sluggish GDP growth since 2011 simply does not correspond with the facts. Mirroring its regional neighbors, the Lebanese economy began to cool down as large scale, antigovernment protests moved from one Arab country to the next, beginning in Tunisia in late 2010. The uncertainty the so called Arab Spring inspired helped drag Lebanon's GDP growth down to 2 percent in 2011 from 8 percent in 2010. The Lebanese economy has been in crisis mode since. Since 2011, the country's exports have consistently decreased, consumer confidence has steadily declined and the inflows of foreign direct investment into Lebanon have plunged sharply, with demand for high end real estate also falling. Meanwhile, tourism and hotel bookings have dipped in line with travel warnings and bans from GCC governments, citing numerous bombings and other security incidents that have destabilized Lebanon in recent years.

By February 2012, according to the UN, months of protests in Syria had turned into civil war. The conflict in Syria has disrupted traditional trade partnerships and transit routes for Lebanon, but in the first nine months of unrest few refugees headed to Lebanon. By January 27, 2012 — the earliest reference date available on its website — UNHCR had registered



only 6,290 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, though economic growth for 2011 had already dropped significantly compared to the previous year. The violence in Syria, however, intensified, forcing more and more Syrians to flee their homes in search of safety — an estimated 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced, according to November figures from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, and an additional 3.7 million Syrian refugees are currently registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, with the largest number residing in Lebanon.

Previous research had indicated the spillover effects of the conflict in Syria had significantly affected the Lebanese economy. For example, a World Bank report from 2013 identified losses to economic activity, income and public services, and noted direct and indirect impacts on trade and tourism as well as health, education, and other social services. The report estimated that the Lebanese economy would incur a cost of \$7.5 billion by the end of 2014 due to the refugee influx. That said, new research from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) shows that hosting these refugees has

not been a total loss for the Lebanese economy. With the refugees came a steady flow of humanitarian aid that has helped mitigate losses incurred from the conflict in general and from the refugee situation in particular.

A 2014 study by the International Rescue Committee was among the first to consider whether the refugee 'burden' had any positive implications upon the Lebanese economy. UNHCR's winterization program disbursed \$41.4 million in cash, channeled via ATM cards, over a three month period beginning in January 2014. The results found that each dollar spent by beneficiaries generated \$2.13 for the Lebanese economy — i.e. a multiplier effect of 2.13. However, the study is problematic for two reasons. First, it uses a general mathematical formula not specifically tweaked for Lebanon to compute a multiplier effect and, second, it uses the spending habits of Jordanians as a basis to estimate how Syrian refugees in Lebanon might have spent aid money.

The more recent UNDP study written by the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI), a Lebanese company familiar with the local economy, found that an estimated

\$800 million in humanitarian aid that flowed into the Lebanese economy in 2014 brought with it a 1.6 multiplier, meaning every \$1 in humanitarian aid resulted in \$0.60 in extra spending. The report does not offer a picture of growth in the entire economy for 2014, yet assuming all other factors are constant, it shows that humanitarian aid had a 1.3 percent contribution to Lebanon's GDP. Adding context, the study factors in losses in tourism and exports in 2014 — "While it helped mitigate the effects of the refugee crisis, the humanitarian package did not completely offset those effects," the report notes, concluding that "the combined effect of a 23 percent decrease in tourism volume, a 7.5 percent decrease in exports, and the injection of the same aid package (\$800 million) results in negative GDP growth of -0.3 percent instead of the initially obtained positive growth of 1.3 percent." Without the aid money, the study notes, tourism and export losses would have dragged growth down by 1.6 percentage points.

CETERIS PARIBUS

"We wanted to understand, if we inject \$800 million into the economy, spent in the particular manner they were spent in, how much you would have a multiplied impact into this economy," Rola Rizk Azour, a senior economic advisor at the UNDP, explains. Azour also clarified that "we consider the economy [to be] a closed box. We insert the \$800 million received and — barring any other changes in the environment — [measure] what is the outcome. We wanted to see where this humanitarian assistance has had the most impact." To do this the UNDP contracted CRI to simulate the effects of humanitarian spending on the economy in 2014 using expenditures of the four UN agencies from that year — estimated at \$800 million.

The exercise measured which economic sectors were affected via the

distribution of humanitarian aid. As expected, Azour points out, aid money was spent primarily on food products (27 percent) related to the World Food Program card voucher program. Other sectors where aid spending concentrated were: real estate (which includes rent, 14 percent), chemicals (i.e. medicine and gasoline, 9 percent) and education services (7 percent). The humanitarian aid spent according to the distribution keys within the simulation had an overall multiplier effect of 1.6, Azour explains.

"It's a huge number crunching exercise — [and tells] only part of the story of this economy," she says, adding that the UN system and humanitarian aid should not be celebrated for any growth the economy might record for 2014. The report cuts straight to the point in

HUMANITARIAN AID FLOWING INTO LEBANON WAS NOT THE ONLY THING AFFECTING LEBANON'S GDP FOR 2014

its conclusion, and Azour stresses the notion, "while it helped mitigate the effects of the refugee crisis, the humanitarian package did not completely offset those effects."

Azour repeatedly points out that the humanitarian aid flowing into Lebanon was not the only thing affecting Lebanon's GDP for 2014 — "there were other factors in this economy that were also not taken into consideration, like the stimulus package of the [central bank]."

Lebanon's central bank introduced its first stimulus package of \$1.4 billion in 2013, which the bank says contributed 1.5 percent to GDP growth that year. The bank injected another \$800 million into the Lebanese economy in 2014, though about half of that was leftover money from the previous year's package, EXECUTIVE has reported. The bank's

governor, Riad Salameh, announced in October another stimulus package of \$1 billion for 2015.

Clearly the results of the simulation show that aid distributions centered on the staple items of food, housing and medicine to alleviate suffering and mitigate the refugee crisis that the war in Syria instigated — the UNHCR and the WFP are among the largest distributors of these subcategories of aid in Lebanon. The study, it should be noted, looked at only four UN agencies delivering humanitarian aid in Lebanon — UNDP, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF. While the four account for "at least 70 percent of UN humanitarian aid within the context of the Syrian refugee crisis" in Lebanon, the study reports that other donor money arriving through other channels was excluded, meaning the true impact of humanitarian aid money was not fully assessed.

LIVING ON LITTLE

The aid Syrian refugees have received has been significantly inadequate. Due to the shortfall in funding, the WFP announced in December that it had suspended payments of food aid to Syrian refugees, not only those in Lebanon but also across the region.

In 2014, organizations distributing humanitarian aid in Lebanon received only 50 percent of the \$1.7 billion appealed for in that year's Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. Ninette Kelley, head of the UNHCR in Lebanon, addressed the impact of funding shortfalls to the organization in a December interview with EXECUTIVE saying, "the level of assistance that we can provide continually needs to be heavily targeted and we're simply unable to meet all needs."

In the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for 2015, humanitarian organizations, including the UN agencies, have appealed for \$4.5 billion to address the refugee crisis across the region. As of late



Never enough. Each year global appeals for Syrian refugees fall short.

February, those organizations distributing aid in Lebanon have received only 3 percent of the nearly \$2 billion requested in appeals.

PREPARING FOR A LONG WAR

The UN Commission for Inquiry on Syria — set up to investigate violations of international human rights occurring during the country's four year civil war — said last month in a press release announcing its latest report that “unthinkable crimes continue to occur daily in Syria.” The report neither implies that stabilization in Syria is likely soon nor does it suggest Syrian refugees will be able to safely return to their homes in the near future. That is to say the refugee crisis will likely continue for years to come.

The outlook is grim. The ongoing war in Syria suggests that Lebanon's economy will continue its poor performance due to the turbulence and barriers to economic stability that an unpredictable security situation implies. Likewise, funding shortfalls in humanitarian aid donations means less money that refugees can spend in the Lebanese economy on basic necessities for their families. Syrians seeking refuge

in Lebanon have no other choice but to stay and scrape by. But addressing the immediate needs of refugees is not Lebanon's only dilemma — the country is also concerned about crumbling physical infrastructure and the declining quality of health and education services. The World Bank estimated in 2013 that \$1.6

LEBANON'S ECONOMIC WOES WILL NOT SIMPLY EVAPORATE

billion would be needed to maintain access to quality health, education and social safety nets for the period 2012–2014, and investing in these services has been found to have a significant impact on economic growth in the long term.

Due to the state of Lebanon's infrastructure, the international community needs to support the country in maintaining service delivery to refugees, the president of the World Bank Jim Yong Kim noted during a school visit in Beirut in June 2014.

“The data now is overwhelming,” Kim says in a recent interview with Freakonomics Radio, “in that investments in health and education, for example, are critical aspects

of a growth strategy [and that] fundamental investments in human capital lead to growth.” A group of economists, led by Lawrence Summers — a former director of the National Economic Council advising US President Barack Obama — wrote in Global Health 2035 that “the returns on investing in health are impressive,” with the study concluding that in low and middle income countries roughly 24 percent of economic growth experienced between 2000 and 2011 was due to better health outcomes.

With no end to either the refugee or economic crises in sight, Lebanon will need support to maintain and improve its basic services such as water, sanitation and roads, as well as in social services like health and education. To do this, the World Bank had partnered with Lebanon's government to establish a multidonor trust fund in March 2014. “The Bank deals with development issues,” writes Mona Ziade, a communications officer in the World Bank's Beirut office, in an email to EXECUTIVE, adding that the fund “is strictly for development projects that will help boost the resilience of the Lebanese host communities.” Derek Plumbly, former UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, remarked in a statement announcing the fund that “this is the only one established specifically to provide assistance to the government and municipalities, established specifically to mitigate the impact of the Syrian crisis.”

Lebanon's economic woes will not simply evaporate — more humanitarian and development aid will be needed in the coming years. Aid will continue to help Lebanon alleviate refugees with money to be spent meeting basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, that does flow back into the economy; similarly, development aid will help Lebanon to invest in maintaining infrastructure and services, setting up the economy for future growth.





**BANQUE
BEMO**

SUCCESSFUL CLOSURE OF SUBORDINATED BONDS' ISSUANCE

BANQUE BEMO SAL SUCCESSFULLY CLOSED THE ISSUANCE OF ITS SUBORDINATED BONDS OF USD 25.000.000,-

Banque BEMO sal is pleased to announce the successful closing of its USD 25,000,000 Subordinated Bonds' issuance which registered an oversubscription confirming investors appeal in the Bank's standing and financial posture.

The Bonds having a tenor of six years with final maturity being on January 4, 2021, bear a fixed annual rate of 6% payable semi-annually net of the presently applicable 5% Lebanese withholding tax on interests received. Subscribers to this new issue are spread between local and regional individual and institutional investors.

The net proceeds of the issue of the Bonds will be used to shore-up the Bank's capital base, a measure intended by the Bank to enhance its capital adequacy ratio. Further to the approval of the supervisory authorities, the Subordinated Bonds' Issue will be considered as part of Tier II capital and the improved capital structure will support the expected growth of the Bank's assets, its funding needs, and the expansion of its commercial banking activities and services in the respective markets of Lebanon and the neighboring Arab markets.

"The diversity and large interest shown by subscribers and the oversubscription registered are mainly further confirmations of the success of the Relationship Management business model and transparency as embraced by the Bank's Senior Management and its Board of Directors", indicated Mr. Samih Saadeh, Vice Chairman of the Board-General Manager. The Bank views this as an additional indication of confidence confirming what it believes in: "Relationships are built .Trust is earned" The legal advisor on this transaction was Prof. Nasri Antoine Diab Law Firm.

The latest comparative consolidated financial indicators of Banque BEMO sal were as follows:

<i>In LBP millions</i>	Dec 31, 2012 Audited	Dec 31, 2013 Audited	Dec 31, 2014 Unaudited
Total Assets	2,245,254	2,238,082	2,225,156
Total Deposits(1)	1,891,498	1,829,979	1,832,632
Total Loans(1)	920,730	920,561	969,675
Shareholder's Equity	159,203	210,757	191,256
Net Income	5,594	9,593	17,026

(1) Including deposits and loans to related parties

Banque BEMO SAL
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List of Banks No. 93, Commercial Registry Beirut 17837

US \$ 25,000,000

Private Placement of
6 per cent Subordinated Bonds

Due on January 04, 2021

Issue Price US \$ 100 per share

Legal Advisor
Prof. Nasri Antoine Diab Law Firm

December 2014
This announcement appears as a matter of record only

Prognosis growth

Humanitarian aid inflows spur growth in Lebanon's healthcare sector

Perhaps the first thing refugees fleeing a war zone need is medical attention. It is no surprise, then, that Lebanese hospitals have been busier than usual since war engulfed Syria in 2012. According to a recent UNDP study, in fact, in 2014, humanitarian aid inflows focused on Syrian refugees have spurred 1.76 percent in additional growth for the healthcare sector, according to a UNDP study. That year, UN agencies and affiliates supported 180 primary healthcare centers and 65 hospitals throughout Lebanon. With a swell of new patients, particularly in 2013, hospitals have experienced positive growth and have consequently invested in their infrastructure and service provision. "When these hospitals have more business, they are going to buy more medical supplies and more medications from pharmaceutical companies," says Walid Hallassou, general manager of GlobeMed Lebanon. GlobeMed is the third party administrator that UNHCR has contracted to help it manage its healthcare response. "They are going to employ more doctors, more nurses and so on," he adds.

At times, healthcare facilities also received direct, in-kind aid from UN agencies. Over \$1 million were used to purchase roughly 6,200 items of medical equipment for primary healthcare centers in 2014 alone. Hospitals, primary healthcare centers and even the Ministry of Public Health also received training for staff and support to hire new professionals — at least 81 new professionals were hired with direct UN support in 2014, according to the UN.

Healthcare aid to refugees and affected Lebanese communities has also included direct provision of medication, which has sparked

growth in Lebanon's pharmaceutical sector. According to a 2015 Business Monitor International report on Lebanon's healthcare expenditures, pharmaceutical sales in Lebanon jumped from \$1.3 billion in 2012 to \$1.46 billion in 2013 — and then again to \$1.59 billion in 2014. Pharmaceuticals are also playing a bigger role in Lebanon's economy: drug sales as a percentage of GDP increased from 3.05 percent in 2012 to 3.37 percent in 2014, the report found. As part of the support to affected Lebanese communities, \$6 million worth of pharmaceutical products were purchased by UN agencies and distributed to primary healthcare centers and hospitals. Unfortunately, numerous pharmaceutical companies contacted by EXECUTIVE — including Omnipharma, BroadMed, Omnilab and Medex — either did not respond to requests to comment or declined to provide any information about particular growth within their companies.

There are also a number of intermediaries who have experienced growth as a result of aid — not least of which is GlobeMed. Contracted by UNHCR at the end of 2013, GlobeMed manages the secondary and tertiary levels of healthcare provision for Syrian refugees and is the refugees' point of contact for healthcare issues. Partnering with UNHCR has brought multiple dimensions of growth to GlobeMed.

"For an organization that used to serve about 500,000 lives in Lebanon to take on another 700,000 overnight was not an easy task," Hallassou tells EXECUTIVE. "We recruited a lot, we opened offices, we bought equipment, we had system developments to do."

However, these investments are made warily. Describing UNHCR as

a "high risk client," Hallassou says GlobeMed — and other firms in the healthcare sector — are painfully aware that their contracts are valid only so long as UN agencies continue to have steady funding. This precarious situation means that GlobeMed manages its growth carefully, apprehensively, and on a short term basis.

"Usually our employees are on unlimited contract[s] — now we need to recruit employees on a limited basis. They are brought in as consultants or employees with limited contracts so that we protect them and we protect ourselves," Hallassou admits. Purchasing new equipment to manage the refugee workload works the same way — GlobeMed's management has to continuously consider whether new systems or pieces of equipment can be used for other projects if its UNHCR contract abruptly ends. Still, Hallassou says, the contract has been worthwhile from a business point of view.

That view might not extend to the long term. Hallassou is skeptical that the quality of the healthcare system as a whole in Lebanon has been buoyed by international aid. While there may well be improvements in some institutions, this is not represented across the industry. As long as hospitals and primary healthcare centers have "weak foundations" in infrastructure and service provision, he says, new equipment and new staff won't boost quality. The conclusion is worrisome: although humanitarian aid money may be providing the sector a profitability boost today, the long term implications of this capital injection may prove to be minimal.





LES COTEAUX DE CHÂTEAU KEFRAYA



LES COTEAUX DE CHÂTEAU KEFRAYA

CHÂTEAU KEFRAYA REVIVES LES COTEAUX

Historic wine captures both the winery's heritage and its commitment to innovation

- Les Coteaux de Château Kefraya, a wine first-launched in 1979, returns to win an immediate gold at the recent International Wine Challenge in Vienna and a double-gold at CWSA, China!
- Michel de Bustros, winery's founder and CEO: "Les Coteaux is a return to our origins; the wine is different, but the emotion is the same."
- A wine that expresses Château Kefraya's unique Bekaa terroir

Château Kefraya, one of Lebanon's most prominent wineries, has relaunched Les Coteaux de Château Kefraya, a distinctive and elegant red wine with a proud heritage. Les Coteaux 2011 captures the power and intensity of Bekaa's terroir - in particular that of the village of Kefraya - and highlights the winery's commitment to producing innovative wines of the highest standard, while respecting the traditional values upon which it was built.

Les Coteaux was one of the first wines produced by Michel de Bustros, the winery's CEO, when he founded the winery.

"Les Coteaux is a return to our origins; the wine is different, but the emotion is the same."

Les Coteaux 2011 was not even released when it won a gold medal at the recent International Wine Challenge in Vienna and the vintage 2012 : a double-gold medal in CWSA, China! "Some time ago, I opened one of the few remaining bottles of the original 1979 vintage and felt there was a unique expression that we could revive," said oenologist Fabrice Guiberteau. "The challenge was to interlace the historic vintage's style with the evolution of our terroir and modern winemaking techniques."

Made from Syrah, Marselan and Cabernet Franc and aged in French oak barrels for 18 months,

Les Coteaux offers structure, roundness and purity of fruit, with fine spicy notes.

Like all Château Kefraya's creations, the journey from vine to bottle is carried out with the most meticulous attention to detail. The grapes are hand-harvested exclusively from the winery's vineyards and then sorted on an optical-table to achieve optimal quality. After fermentation, the wine is aged in premium French oak barrels before being estate-bottled. Lebanese wine writer Michael Karam commented in the social media: "Les Coteaux is a great Lebanese blend illustrating Château Kefraya's pioneering and imaginative use of grapes to create exciting blends. There's the Syrah with all that licorice and leather going on, the juicy red berry fruit and soft spice of the Marselan, all wrapped up in the finesse of the Cabernet Franc, but with the power and intensity of the Bekaa terroir. What's not to like? Bravo!"

TASTING TIPS:

To best appreciate Les Coteaux de Château Kefraya 2011, it is recommended to serve it at around 17 degrees. It is the perfect accompaniment to grilled meat and cheeses, as well as slightly spiced dishes.

A refugee on paper

Running from war, bureaucracy could be Syrians' greatest obstacle *By Maya Gebeily*

The unprecedented rate at which the number of Syrian refugees in the region has grown has caught the world's attention. After nearly four years of unrest, roughly 1.17 million Syrians are currently registered as refugees in Lebanon — and the number continues to creep up. But an often underreported and misunderstood figure is the number of those who have had their refugee status deactivated. During 2013 and 2014, at least 137,000 Syrians lost active refugee status with UNHCR, the agency managing the international response to the refugee crisis. Vague and noncommittal statements to the press by UNHCR, coupled with sudden and at times brash government announcements on the topic, have added to the confusion. With growing government involvement in registration and deactivation, human rights agencies have expressed concern that Syrian refugees will not continue receiving appropriate protection in Lebanon.

DEACTIVATION IN LEBANON

Deactivation of refugee status happens when someone registered as a refugee is removed from UNHCR's active registration lists. As a result, that individual can no longer receive support from the refugee agency or its partner organizations in Lebanon. The process is part of normal UNHCR procedures around the world: as the situations of refugees change — as they head back to their country of origins, are resettled or are no longer in need of international protection — UNHCR removes them from their registration lists.

UNHCR began registering Syrians as refugees at the end of 2011 in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and



Lining up the paperwork could make all the difference

deactivation procedures began in 2012. The year 2013 saw a significant rise in refugee numbers in Lebanon. In that year alone, 690,399 Syrians were registered as refugees in Lebanon — and 36,000 files were deactivated. Lebanon ended the year with 805,835 registered Syrian refugees.

In 2014, refugee numbers continued to rise, albeit more slowly. Roughly 441,684 new refugees were registered but 107,250 had their files deactivated. The difference is notable: although many fewer refugees were registered in 2014, those that were deactivated tripled. These deactivations have led, according to UNHCR's online public portal, to a net decrease in refugees registered in Lebanon.

According to the UN agency, refugee files can be deactivated for a number of reasons, including death, leaving Lebanon and failing to keep

in contact with UNHCR offices as required. Agency spokesperson Dana Sleiman tells *EXECUTIVE* that this policy is communicated to refugees through counseling sessions during the registration process. To reactivate their status, Syrians can approach UNHCR to request an interview — but reactivation isn't an automatic process, she says.

The first trigger for deactivation — death — is self evident, but the rest are slightly more complex. Failing to keep in contact with UNHCR offices includes regularly neglecting to appear at distribution appointments and failing to renew UNHCR registration documents within two months after their expiry. UNHCR's staff declined to specify how many distribution meetings had to be missed before refugees would have their files deactivated.

Leaving Lebanon also meant risking potential deactivation. If registered

BACARDI UNVEILS A BOLD NEW PACK DESIGN

New Bottle: Same great taste & relentless passion since 1862



Beirut, February 4th, 2015: February 4th marks Bacardi Founder's Day, a day which celebrates the birth of the family-run business. This year, Bacardi celebrated its 153rd anniversary at the "Twenty Seven", pop up bar at Downtown Beirut. Because a "little party never killed nobody," employees, partners and friends of the brand mingled with celebrities as well as local distributors, baristas, and amateurs of the most awarded spirit in the world. It was a tribute to the company's history and to its soul, knowing that this company remains family owned against all odds since 1862 and that the unique flavor profile of BACARDÍ rum has remained untamable.

The Bacardi culture embraces a bold entrepreneurial spirit, valuing success but also rising up to challenges. Bacardi leaders consistently overcame adversities to emerge stronger, gradually positioning the Company as a successful, multinational leader across the global spirits industry. Bacardi holds its heritage close to the heart and takes great pride in its journey. In fact, over the last 40 or 50 years, Bacardi and rum have become synonymous.

Everyone was celebrating in a joyous atmosphere when the surprise of the party was announced. In fact, BACARDÍ, the world's number one selling rum, presented the first packaging update in more than a decade. The new bottle design reflects the brand's unique heritage and provenance, although its timeless quality ensures it looks just as good in some of the world's finest bars today as it did in the 1920's. Designed in consultation with some of the world's leading bartenders, the bottle is taller, slimmer and more cylindrical. It features the iconic BACARDÍ bat logo which represents good fortune, good health and family unity. Actually, the first samples of the smooth, light-bodied spirit that the world now knows as BACARDÍ premium rum originated from a humble tin-roof distillery with bats in the rafters.

Bacardi have been throwing parties since 1862, and man, there have been some parties!

In this year's party in Beirut, they did more of the same. During this lively unforgettable event, the winner of the Bacardi Legacy Global Cocktail Competition, Jad Ballout, was proclaimed and acclaimed. The Bacardi Legacy Global Cocktail Competition is a bit different from other global cocktail competitions in that every bartender presents a single drink to the judges. The reason for this is that the goal of the competition is for the bartender to create a future classic cocktail that can and hopefully will be made around the globe for many years to come. Eventually, the world's best bartenders meet in a global final to create rum cocktails inspired by over 150 Years of The Bacardi Legacy.

The legendary BACARDÍ rum cocktails are now more popular than ever. More than 6 million Original BACARDÍ cocktails are enjoyed every day around the world.

"Here's to the next 153 years of Bacardi, the untameable spirit since 1862!"



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SINCE 1862

refugees are found to be going back and forth into Syria, UNHCR brings them in for an interview to determine the nature of their visits. The agency declined to specify whether it utilized a numerical threshold for how many visits back and forth to Syria would warrant an interview with UNHCR, but deactivation occurs “based on the reasons for return and duration of their stay in Syria,” spokesperson Sleiman says. Reasons for visiting Syria considered acceptable by UNHCR are, for example, visiting a sick relative, checking on property and “go-and-see visits” — trips to Syria to check if it’s safe enough to return permanently.

As UNHCR conducts these interviews with refugees, Sleiman says the rule of thumb is whether or not these refugees were afraid to travel to Syria. “It boils down to the fear of return. If there’s no fear of return, then a Syrian national should not be registered with UNHCR,” she clarifies. “There is no mathematical equation to figure this out.” According to Bill Frelick, refugee program director at Human Rights Watch, UNHCR Lebanon’s “fear” clause is in line with definitions on refugee status.

“We think that people fleeing conflict ought to be protected on a complimentary level, but the refugee definition itself is a well founded fear of being persecuted,” Frelick tells EXECUTIVE. As such, UNHCR has to constantly make “judgment calls” on who should be deactivated, he adds.

Because of the proximity and relatively open borders — at least, until the beginning of this year — Syrians could cross back and forth into Lebanon fairly easily. Many, whether registered refugees or not, would go back into Syria periodically for the “legitimate” reasons listed above. One Syrian-Kurdish refugee told EXECUTIVE in September 2014 that despite the fraught situation in his hometown in Aleppo, he would make the dangerous journey there every year to check on his old family home. Additionally, Syrians with residency in

Lebanon who could not pay the \$200 yearly residency renewal fee would travel back to Syria, so that they could get a renewal for free upon their entry into Lebanon.

But a government announcement in June of 2014 changed that. As Ministry of Interior representative Khalil Gebara told EXECUTIVE in December, the government’s ultimate aim is “negative growth” — more deactivations and fewer refugees coming in because of tighter border controls, so that the number of active refugees is constantly decreasing. To that end, Minister of Interior Nouhad Machnouk declared last June that any refugees who went back to Syria would have their refugee status revoked. In reality, the process for deactivation was more nuanced than that.

During June and July 2014, Lebanon’s General Security Office provided UNHCR with the names of all Syrians who had traveled into and out of Lebanon. UNHCR then cross referenced these names with its registration lists. Registered refugees who had traveled into or out of Lebanon were interviewed by

“IF THERE’S NO FEAR OF RETURN, THEN A SYRIAN NATIONAL SHOULD NOT BE REGISTERED WITH UNHCR”

UNHCR to determine whether or not they feared returning to Syria.

By the end of June 2014, according to a source close to the subject, 12,345 Syrians had lost their refugee status specifically because of their commutes into Syria. UNHCR declined to provide EXECUTIVE with data on how many refugees had their status deactivated this way, but said that it was a minority of the total number of deactivations. An emailed statement by UNHCR noted that the cooperation mechanism with General Security on this matter was no longer active at the time of writing.

UNHCR REGISTRATION: GROWING IMPORTANCE

How a refugee’s status changes has a lot to do with how that refugee was registered. Syrian refugees in Lebanon are registered under a temporary protection regime, based on criteria that UNHCR has agreed upon with the government. Lebanon is not party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which defines refugee rights and state responsibilities towards them. Consequently, when refugees in Lebanon are registered, their status is recognized by UNHCR and its partner organizations, but not officially by the Lebanese government.

Nevertheless, Lebanon — in practice, if not in law — has afforded value to registration with UNHCR. According to Ministry of Interior representative Gebara, Syrian refugees who are seeking to renew their residency in Lebanon are now required to present their UNHCR paperwork to a General Security office. This new requirement comes as a consequence of Lebanon’s new regulations on the entry and residency of Syrians into Lebanon, which came into effect on January 5. The result, from Lebanon’s perspective, is a semi recognition of refugee status; although the country does not legally assign it, it requires UNHCR documentation to provide legal residency for Syrian refugees. From a Syrian refugee’s perspective, it makes registration with UNHCR all that more important — as it is now increasingly demanded by the government in order to live in Lebanon legally.

Whether registered or not, refugees are entitled to a level of protection in Lebanon. The Lebanese state “has an obligation under customary law not to forcibly return refugees who have a real or perceived risk of persecution,” says Khairunissa Dhala, researcher and adviser on refugees at Amnesty International. “Doing so would amount to a violation of the principle of non-refoulement, which is binding on all states.”

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WEALTH MANAGEMENT

*How to measure fear?*

Aside from the limited benefits afforded by the Lebanese state, refugees receive significant support from UN agencies if they are registered. This aid includes everything from food and healthcare to education and psychosocial care. Registered refugees are also eligible to access UNHCR's resettlement program to be resettled in a number of Western countries.

The growing importance of holding UNHCR refugee status makes deactivation all the more significant. But with the government requiring proof of registration in order to renew residencies, deactivation also has legal consequences for Syrians seeking to stay in Lebanon legally.

IN THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDS?

The process of registration and deactivation will see more involvement by the Lebanese government in the coming months. Lebanon has recently been seeking greater control over the presence of Syrian refugees on its territory, as exhibited by its decision at the end of 2014 to require that Syrians entering Lebanon obtain visas, which EXECUTIVE reported on in its February issue. The next step, according to Ministry of Social Affairs representative Hala El Helou, involves UNHCR sharing its information

on registered refugees with the Lebanese government.

"Transfer of data is for the government to be able to have the data of the people who are present on its territory," Helou explains. "We're working very closely as the government with the UN. The data has to do with mapping and just

"AT THE END OF THE YEAR, THE CALCULATIONS SHOULD SHOW MORE DEACTIVATIONS THAN NEW REFUGEES"

having the numbers and figures of who is present, and to build on that."

Helou adds that the effort stems from a need to make assistance to refugees more efficient by identifying those who are most in need. "Because the assistance is becoming less and less, we need to work on rationalizing it ... we need better targeting," she says.


UNHCR and the Lebanese government are still in talks to determine the exact nature of their future prerogatives, but Helou says the government will be more involved in registering new cases. Amnesty International's Dhala says it's unclear how the government will use the information shared with it by UNHCR and what criteria it will use

to determine refugee status. Whatever Lebanon decides, Dhala says, it should continue to provide Syrians with "international protection in accordance with international law, as they have a well founded fear of persecution in Syria due to the nature of the conflict."

The government has already asked UNHCR to stop registering new refugees without the Ministry of Social Affairs' approval, Helou tells EXECUTIVE. She adds that Lebanon will also have a hand in the "possible evaluation of the registered cases." The mechanisms have yet to be established, but government influence on them may be cause for concern for human rights NGOs.

"The Lebanese government has a policy regarding Syrian refugees and asylum seekers which we do have a lot of concerns about," comments Lama Fakih, Human Rights Watch's Syria and Lebanon researcher. Based on government statements, including Interior Minister Machnouk's statement mentioned above, Lebanon sees refugees visiting Syria for any reason as de facto forfeiture of their refugee status.

When asked whether the government had pressured them into tougher measures on registration or deactivation, UNHCR representatives told EXECUTIVE in an emailed statement that "the government of Lebanon has always and consistently respected UNHCR's role and responsibilities," and declined to comment further.

Nevertheless, the government's objective remains the same: decreasing the number of registered refugees in Lebanon. "At the end of the year, the calculations should show more deactivations than new refugees," says Gebara, the Ministry of Interior representative. With stricter regulations on Syrians entering Lebanon, more deactivated cases year after year and growing government involvement in registration and deactivation, the government's goal of "negative growth" doesn't seem so far away. 

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Flipping the switch

Lebanon's fiber optic internet backbone is largely in place, but remains unused

Boosting Lebanon's internet speeds — as well as its GDP — would be surprisingly simple. The country has a new, multi million dollar fiber optic network that forms a backbone for data traffic. It is laying idle, however, because a few switches needed to pass information have not been flipped.

That is, the fiber optic cables are laid, connecting the central offices (COs) together and with heavy users. COs operate like traditional telephone switchboards and route content to end users and other COs. The dense wavelength division multiplexing (DWDM) machines — technology that combines several data channels into the same pulse of light — are in the COs, waiting to be used. But the network is off. There is no data traveling through the cables.

"The [network] that was implemented last year isn't being used at all. It hasn't been accepted by our services," affirms Margot Moussy, advisor to Minister of Telecommunications Boutros Harb.

The unused fiber optic backbone connects almost all of Lebanon's approximately 350 COs, and it also connects heavy users across the country, such as hospitals, universities,

ministries and businesses, according to Dany El-Horr, vice president at civil works company Consolidated Engineering and Trading (CET). The company was commissioned to lay the fiber optic backbone in 2011 by then Minister of Telecommunications Nicolas Sehnaoui, with Alcatel-Lucent as subcontractors who installed the fiber optic cables. The budget for the project was \$55 million. However, as soon as the new minister came in, El-Horr claims that payments to the company stopped and CET was denied access to the COs to test the equipment.

Walid Karam, advisor to the current minister, claims that the projects were halted because in some places the "equipment didn't pass the test" or meet the standards set by the ministry. Neither he nor Moussy were able to say what percent of the project was actually at technical fault, nor did they know when the network would be turned on, though they added that some work was being redone with the intent of eventually turning on the network.

When EXECUTIVE spoke with CET, El-Horr claimed that "everything that was asked from us to be done, we've done it," adding that "of course it's a huge project, no one, not one person, can see all of the project."

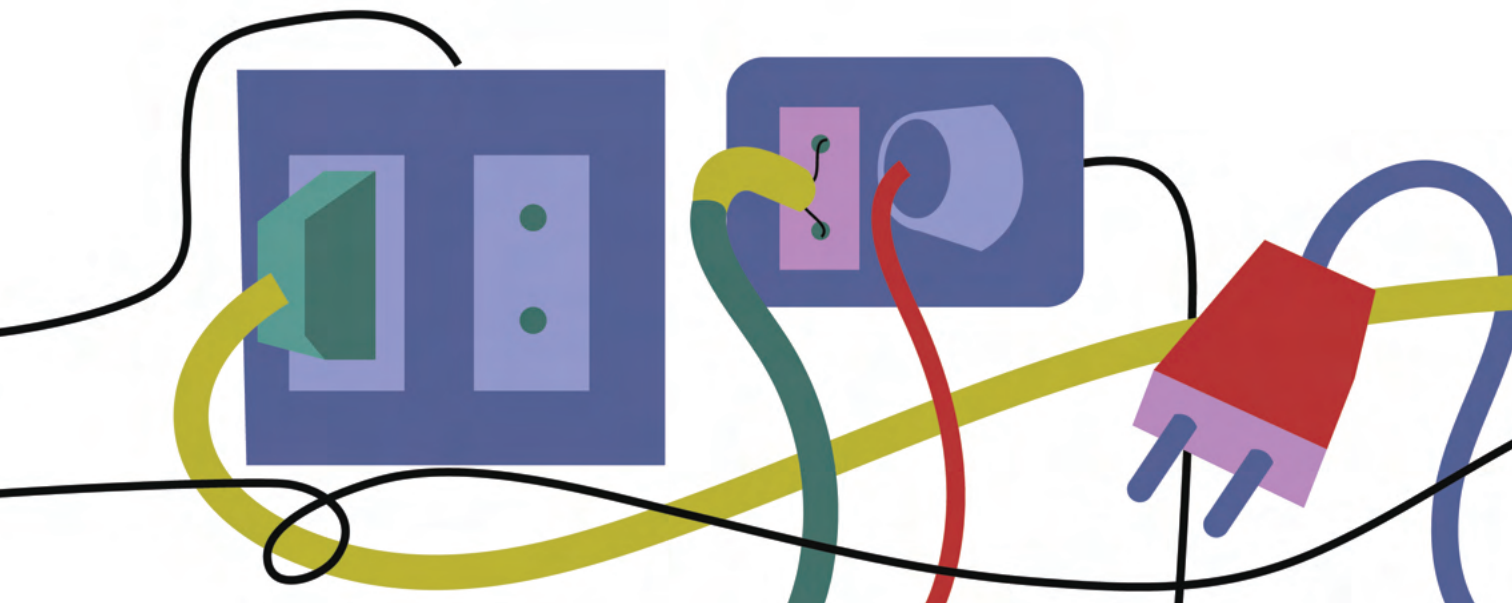
HUNG UP ON COPPER

But wherever the fault lies, the country is still relying on its older more decrepit infrastructure. Lebanese internet speeds average around 3.4 megabits per second (Mbit/s) according to an Ookla Net Index for household downloads, calculated based on those who ran a speed test over a 30 day period up to February 19, 2015. However, this research method might be biased to the connections of those users tech savvy enough to actually look up their connection speed. EXECUTIVE tried to download Ookla's entire source data dating back to January 2008, but the 1.6 GB file would have taken 13 hours.

No business EXECUTIVE has asked has cited a connection higher than 22 Mbit/s, which is about as fast as you get on a shared network, according to Richard Azoury, head of business development at Solidere, which benefits from an older fiber optic network stemming from Beirut Central District (BCD) and connecting a limited number of COs. Some international businesses at BCD are able to get higher speeds via a dedicated connection, though as Azoury puts it "you get what you pay for."

"There is a direct correlation between internet speed, growth, productivity, prosperity and competitiveness. Lebanon suffers on all those because of our slow internet," he says.

The current infrastructure we have is mostly made out of copper, which was rolled out beginning in the 1990s. The older fiber optic network that makes



up a short central loop connecting five COs — including Adlieh, Jdeideh and Tripoli — is currently carrying internet data, despite the fact that it was initially meant to be used for Ogero billing and back office traffic, according to Maroun Chammas, CEO of internet service provider IDM. “It’s doing internet, but it has a lot of limitations. Because it’s not meant to carry internet traffic,” he says, adding “It’s like a [local area network]. It was not a [wide area network]. It was for their internal network.”

Besides the limited capacity of the fiber optic cables linking a few COs, the rest of the network is old, legacy copper. And the copper cables are “not in the best state,” according to ministry advisor Karam.

But even in the best state, fast internet can’t travel very far on copper. Ghassan Hasbani, CEO of ICT managing and consulting firm Graycoats and formerly partner at Booz & Company, explains that limitations start at about 200 meters from the CO. And the farther you get from the CO, the slower the connection gets.

However, turning on the new fiber would allow speeds of up to 100 Mbit/s according to Hasbani. While fiber lines do not yet reach the ‘last mile’ from the COs to the internet user — meaning many at home may not see astronomical results — turning on the network would allow much higher capacity for the heavy users.


Turning on the fiber optic infrastructure would not solve all of the country’s internet problems. Fast internet remains expensive, as prices per megabit are set by government decrees, which in practice take time to issue. While the numbers circulating on internet speeds are inconsistent, Massachusetts based cloud services provider Akamai pegs the

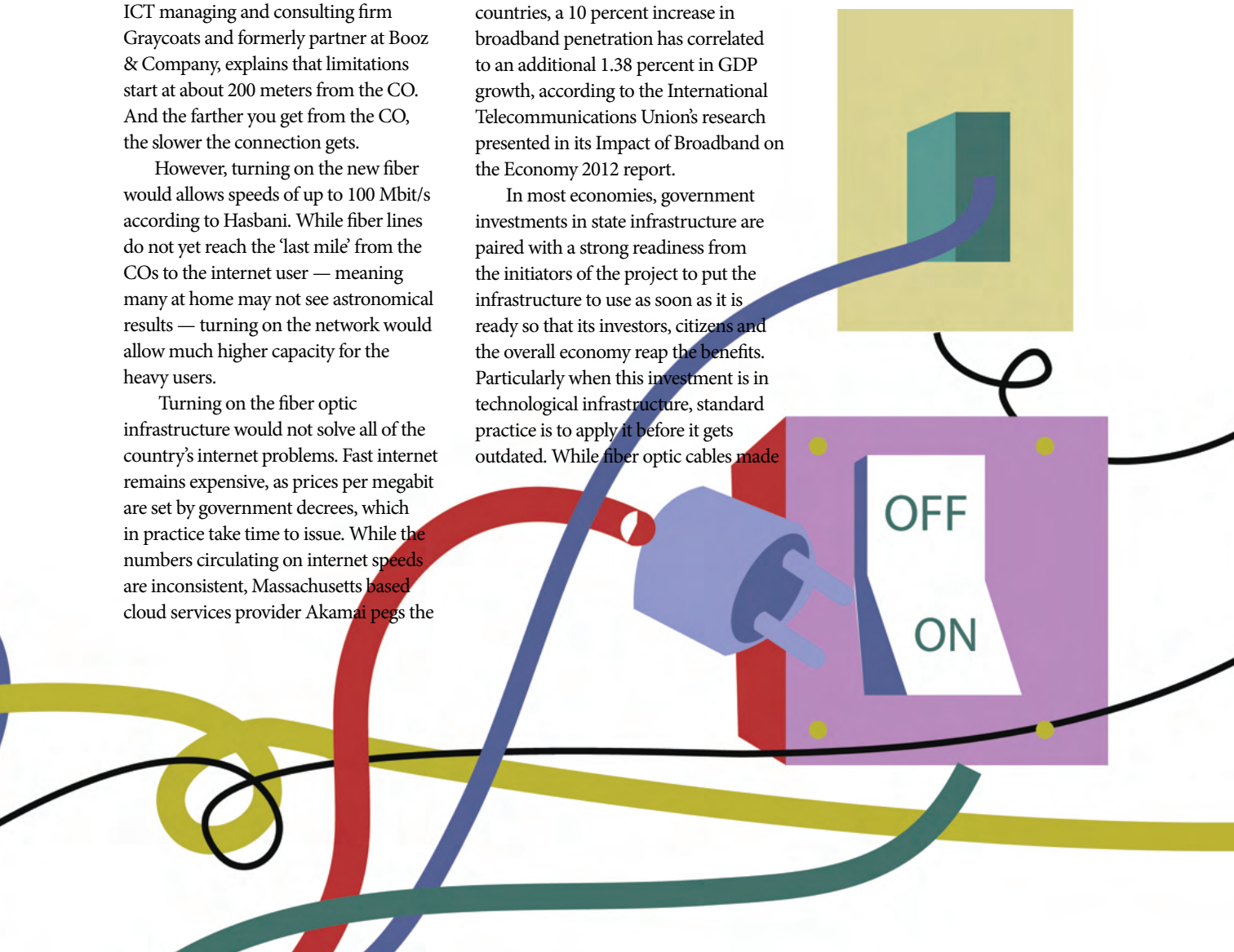
global average connection speed at 4.5 Mbit/s in its State of the Internet 2014 report for Q3. The report cited the UAE’s internet speed at 4.7, with 3.5 percent of the population having speeds above 10 Mbit/s, but 51 percent of its connections over 4 Mbit/s.

In Lebanon, this was a piece of infrastructure that was a considerable investment on the part of the government, yet has so far not generated any gains. Particularly considering Lebanon’s international capacity which, depending on who you ask, falls somewhere between 400 and 600 gigabits per second. Even if these numbers are inflated Lebanon’s international capacity is by far underutilized. Increasing citizens’ access to broadband has been cited as having a direct impact on the country’s economic performance. In low and middle income countries, a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration has correlated to an additional 1.38 percent in GDP growth, according to the International Telecommunications Union’s research presented in its Impact of Broadband on the Economy 2012 report.

In most economies, government investments in state infrastructure are paired with a strong readiness from the initiators of the project to put the infrastructure to use as soon as it is ready so that its investors, citizens and the overall economy reap the benefits. Particularly when this investment is in technological infrastructure, standard practice is to apply it before it gets outdated. While fiber optic cables made

of glass are good for a lifetime provided the coatings remain in good shape, according to the Fiber Optic Association, increasing global bandwidths and the products and services that fit new internet speeds will likely eventually make the resistant fiber optic cable obsolete. Just as not even 20 years ago when 56 Kbit/s would be the deluxe access to internet on dial-up, Google Fiber may yet take over the world, with claims that its speeds are “100 times faster than today’s basic broadband.”

But Lebanon is not most economies. Were the fiber to be turned on, it would deliver internet to many spaces where learning and commercial activity is carried out, hiking up national productivity. “Today there is a fiber [backbone], let’s switch it on and let’s deal with the end user, last mile when we come to it,” says Chammas. 



Cleaning up

Turning trash into profit



Naameh dump receives most of Beirut and Mount Lebanon's waste

If all goes as planned, 2015 will be a big year for new contracts in the waste management sector, which has been dominated by the Averka companies Sukleen and Sukomi since the 1990s. The government is pushing ahead with a national municipal solid waste (MSW) plan that will see the country divided into six service regions while grant money from the European Union will also fund the construction of new sanitary landfills and waste treatment facilities. Combined, there are 21 MSW projects in the pipeline, five of which are currently being tendered, according to officials responsible for implementing them. While these new projects mean business opportunities for both local and international companies, they could also mean the end of uncontrolled dumps, the dangerous

“final” resting place of nearly 30 percent of Lebanon's garbage.

TALKING TRASH

In 2014, Lebanon disposed of an estimated 6,549 tons of MSW, according to an environmental assessment of the Syrian conflict on the country, commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and published in September. While the report noted that 99 percent of the waste is collected, it did not give a complete breakdown of where the waste went. In 2013, statistics compiled by Sweep-Net — an organization focused on waste management in MENA — showed that 8 percent of Lebanon's MSW was recycled; 15 percent composted; 29 percent thrown into uncontrolled dumps; and 48 percent put into sanitary landfills — which are designed

to keep rotting garbage from polluting the soil and groundwater beneath them. The Sweep-Net figures exclude additional MSW resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees, and the accompanying report notes that the recycling figure may be higher because of informal collection of valuable recyclables, which the organization admits cannot be quantified.

Managing all of this garbage has long been a challenge for the state. According to its website, the engineering consultancy LibanConsult AGM won a contract to help the government plan a national strategy back in 1971. To date, the closest thing to a master plan for MSW that Lebanon has is the 1997 Emergency Plan for the Greater Beirut Area. As its name implies, it was not meant to last forever. Since then, various efforts

at creating a national MSW strategy — including an attempt to ratify a unified MSW law — have failed. From a legal perspective, waste collection and disposal are the responsibility of municipalities, although various other legal texts give ministries such as those of the interior, environment and public health a role in MSW management as well (hence the attempt to define responsibilities for waste management in one law).

THE BIG FISH

According to Averda's website, Sukleen has been sweeping Beirut's streets and collecting its residents' trash since 1993. Its sister company, Sukomi, won contracts to treat and landfill that waste in 1998. Treatment consists of composting organic material as well as sorting and reselling recyclable materials. Today, the two companies are the waste managers for Beirut and five other districts (i.e. the province of Mount Lebanon, excluding the Jbeil district). Sukleen and Sukomi's service area accounts for around 50 percent of the country's garbage. Given that parent company Averda is privately held, data on the Sukleen and Sukomi's profits — particularly their margins in Lebanon — are private. Sweep-Net reported in 2013 that Averda is being paid \$130 per ton for waste collection and treatment in Lebanon, without citing a source. The 2012 strategic environmental assessment for Lebanon's nascent oil and gas sector, however, quoted head of the urban environment service at the Environment Ministry Bassam Sabbagh saying Averda is paid \$140 per ton. Neither Sabbagh nor Averda's chief operating officer for the Levant and Africa were available for an interview. However, an Averda spokesperson sent EXECUTIVE an infographic on Sukleen and Sukomi's work that said the companies handle 3,000 tons of waste per day, which would make the contracts worth between \$142 million and \$153 million annually, depending on which price-per-ton is accurate.

SMALLER POND

In line with the government's new solid waste management plan, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) is currently tendering for three newly created service zones that slice up Averda's current area of operations, explains Bassam Farhat — who handles waste management at CDR. In past plans, Beirut and Mount Lebanon were always kept together as one service zone. Under the new plan, Beirut and its immediate suburbs are one zone; Jbeil, Keserwan and Metn (minus suburbs tacked onto the Beirut zone) are a second; and Chouf, Aley and Baabda (minus suburbs tacked onto the Beirut zone) are a third. Bid documents from

MANAGING ALL OF THIS GARBAGE HAS LONG BEEN A CHALLENGE FOR THE STATE

companies interested in these zones are due April 14, he says, noting that one company — or consortium, as joint ventures are allowed to bid — cannot have more than two contracts. Averda was not available to comment. Without giving an exact timeline, Farhat explains that the issuance of tenders for the three remaining service zones — the Bekaa (including Baalbek and Hermel); the North (including Akkar) and the South and Nabatiyeh — will happen in the future.

Farhat repeats during the interview that the plan was the result of a “political decision.” Asked if that meant it was flawed or ignored advice from agencies like CDR and the Ministry of Environment — which developed past draft strategies — he said the cabinet had all of the relevant information needed to make the best decision but “in the end, it was their decision.”

RULES OF THE GAME

To win a contract for one of the new service zones, a local company bidding alone has to have experience in both

collection and disposal, Farhat explains, reading from the tender document. If companies form a joint venture, there must be three: one foreign, one local and one either foreign or local. For joint ventures, one of the partners must meet the experience requirements. The tender rules also stipulate that bidders must have a minimum annual turnover, depending on where they are bidding (for Beirut: \$80 million; for Metn, Keserwan and Jbeil: \$65 million; and for Baabda, Aley and Chouf: \$50 million). For joint ventures, he notes, each partner must meet 20 percent of the turnover requirement individually and the consortium must meet the full target.

When it comes to determining how to treat the waste and where to put it afterward, Farhat says the winners have some latitude. The tender document stipulates that a bidder must choose from a preapproved list of potential sites for sanitary landfills, sorting or composting facilities, or waste incineration or waste-to-energy plants — depending on which mix of management methods the bidder chooses. The sites, Farhat says, are mostly old quarries or open dump sites. He notes that if a winning bidder chooses to build a sanitary landfill, it cannot landfill more than 40 percent of the waste it handles in the first three years and in years four through seven, it can only landfill up to 25 percent of the waste. The contracts have a lifespan of seven years, renewable for another three.

EU MONEY

In 2013 and 2014, the European Commission approved a total of €35 million (\$39.8 million) funding in support of MSW management in Lebanon. The money is being channeled through the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform. Mohamad Baraki, who is in charge of the projects, explains that the money will be used to build six sanitary landfills and seven sorting, composting or refuse-derived fuel (or waste-to-



energy) facilities. It will also be used to upgrade two existing waste treatment facilities and train municipal staff on operations and maintenance of the yet to be built infrastructure. Baraki says tenders for a sanitary landfill in Joub Jannine and an upgrade to existing facilities in Zahle have been launched while tender documents for sanitary landfills in Baalbek and Srar — in the northernmost district of Akkar — are currently being prepared. Documents from the European Commission's (EC) website outlining the details of the two grants note the projects are specifically aimed at reducing tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities. They are targeting the areas currently underserved by waste management

companies — i.e., everywhere outside of Avera's service area. While the rest of Lebanon has collection services and — to some extent — sorting and composting facilities, there is by no means nationwide coverage, and Zahle is the only other city with an existing sanitary landfill. The EC documents and Baraki say these projects are meant to fully service areas outside of Avera's area of operations, which raises the question of why there would then need

VARIOUS EFFORTS AT CREATING A NATIONAL MSW STRATEGY ... HAVE FAILED



Avera has held a near monopoly over waste management since the 1990s

to be government contracts to build more facilities. Both Baraki and Farhat explain that the government was aware of the EU projects when deciding on a final plan and will take them into account when tendering. Asked if there is a risk of doubling infrastructure, Farhat says, "No, there will not be more [waste management capacity] than needed."

THE 800 POUND GORILLA

The primary sanitary landfill for Beirut and most of Mount Lebanon is located some 20 kilometers from the capital near the village of Naameh. Farhat explains that it was initially intended to close in 2008. Two three-year extensions later, residents living near it were sick of the smell. When it looked certain the contract would be extended once again in 2014, angry residents stopped Sukomi dump trucks from accessing the landfill. Trash bins, and Beirut's streets, were soon buried in mountains of garbage. Politicians and locals reached an agreement in 2014 to keep the landfill open for another year while the government promised to find a solution and close it for good in January 2015. That, of course, did not happen exactly as envisioned. Prime Minister Tammam Salam's government, formed in February 2014, appointed a ministerial committee to develop a new national solid waste strategy, but the cabinet did not approve a plan — detailed above — until three days prior to the now extended January 15 deadline for closing Naameh. The plan, however, only called for extending the landfill's operation for three months, renewable once. Given that CDR will only receive bids for the service areas currently dumping in Naameh one day prior to the first three month deadline, it is unclear how an alternative will be found by July 15. Asked if the tender documents offer any hints, Farhat says, "This is a decision the government has to make. The government decided to close it. It's the government's decision." ■

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Where's the beef?

Beirut's butchers seem to have moved their operations, but where to is anyone's guess

The most conspicuous result of Beirut Governor Ziad Chebib's November decision to close the city's main slaughterhouse because of unsanitary conditions is the lack of impact it had on the market. The price of cattle and sheep meat remained stable as supply was, apparently, completely uninterrupted.

"Are you still eating the meat in Lebanon?" Chebib asks *EXECUTIVE*. After receiving an affirmative reply, he continues, "this means the market is in chaos." Chebib says he does not know where the butchers who were using the slaughterhouse are currently practicing their trade, but notes that if there are more slaughterhouses in Beirut, "they are illegal." He says that the Municipality of Beirut's 13 health inspectors are on the lookout for outlaw abattoirs and insists his decision to shutter the slaughterhouse was not directly related to Minister of Health Wael Abou Faour's food safety

campaign, launched in late 2014. "I was nominated in May, and I had many, many, many problems and files. When I opened this file, I found that something had to be done, and I've done it. That's what happened."

CHEAP RENT

The 1977 law that governs municipalities gave them authority to "[protect] individual and public health" and "[ensure] the health control" of "all the places in which food or beverages are manufactured and sold" within their jurisdiction. This includes slaughterhouses. In the case of Beirut, the municipality is in direct control of the abattoir, and its general director is a city employee. Chebib, who left his job as a judge when appointed governor, does not elaborate when *EXECUTIVE* asks what legal justification the city has for actually running the abattoir — after all, the city doesn't run all of the

restaurants within its jurisdiction. Instead, he explains that it is a result of a tradition dating back to the Ottoman era.

The current slaughterhouse was built in 1994 and was intended to be a temporary facility. Like many things temporary or interim in Lebanon, however, 21 years later, no permanent alternative has been found.

Joseph Mounem, director general of the slaughterhouse, explains that its existence was the result of a postwar compromise. In 1966, the city built a slaughterhouse in the Karantina neighborhood, according to a mid 1970s magazine detailing city accomplishments that an advisor to Chebib showed *EXECUTIVE*.

War forced the building's closure, and Mounem explains that by the early 1990s, the butchers who once used it were instead slaughtering animals in the then-largely destroyed Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium on the



Beirut Governor Ziad Chebib closed the Beirut slaughterhouse in November due to its unsanitary conditions

CAPITAL CONCEPT S.A.L.

STRATEGY - FINANCE - GOVERNANCE

southern edge of Beirut's city limit. When the government decided to rebuild the stadium, the butchers had nowhere to go, Mounem says. Instead of paying them to leave via the Fund for the Displaced, a compromise was reached. The old slaughterhouse was by then a Lebanese Army position, so the city built the butchers a new slaughterhouse in 1994 near the port on land owned by the government

until they could be relocated. That never happened, so the meat traders — who numbered 20 in 1994 but only 12 today, Mounem explains — continued work in favorable financial conditions. Mounem says each week between 900 and 1,300 sheep were slaughtered in the facility along with between 170 and 225 cattle. He explains that the butchers paid a municipal tax of LBP 5,000 (\$3.33) plus VAT per head of

sheep and LBP 10,000 (\$6.67) plus VAT per head of cattle. When the municipality tried to raise the tax on sheep by LBP 1,000 (\$0.67) and the tax on cattle by LBP 2,000 (\$1.33) in 2000, the butchers protested and eventually forced the municipality to rescind its decision in 2003, Mounem says. EXECUTIVE has been unable to reach any of the butchers.

DATA DEFICIENCY

Information on the country's meat market is scarce. According to Mounem's figures, the Beirut abattoir accounted for 8,840 to 11,700 slaughtered cattle and 46,800 to 67,600 sheep annually. Statistics from the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, covering 2010–2011, show that during that year, there were 63,000 cows and 375,000 sheep in the country, but does not say how many were slaughtered in that period. EXECUTIVE has not been able to find a breakdown of the meat market, and could not reach Maarouf Bekdash, president of the meat traders' syndicate, for comment.

As for the future of the Beirut slaughterhouse, many argue that it should be moved. Municipal Council member Hagop Terzian tells EXECUTIVE that there are both political and sectarian reasons why the abattoir has remained where it is for so many years, but refuses to elaborate on exactly what that means. Asked why no previous governor had addressed the unsanitary conditions at the slaughterhouse, Chebib offers, "I don't look behind me." He says the building is currently being renovated but did not follow through on a commitment to give EXECUTIVE the refurbishment plans. That said, he admits he also wants to move the slaughterhouse and explains, "We are studying the map in Beirut and its suburbs. There is a tradition that Beirut must have a slaughterhouse, but that doesn't mean it has to be in Beirut."



**MANY ARGUE
THAT THE BEIRUT
SLAUGHTERHOUSE
SHOULD BE MOVED**



The failure of past plans to relocate the abattoir has been blamed on both political and sectarian factors

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A new entrant to Lebanon's banking sector looks for rapid growth



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But this month the Lebanese are presented with the debut of yet another commercial bank that vies for their deposits — and this institution has borrowed its name from their national symbol. “Cedrus Bank will be specialized in [serving] commercial and retail clients. And we have an organic growth strategy,” says Fadi

Assali, just having been elected chair-general manager of the new bank.

EXECUTIVE visited Assali at Cedrus Invest Bank, a Beirut based wealth management provider where he is cofounder and chief executive. Itself hardly four years old, Cedrus Invest operates under a specialized banking license and is majority shareholder in Cedrus Bank with an 85 percent stake. Participating in the new bank for the remaining 15 percent stake is Nicolas Chammas, the head of Beirut Traders' Association. He will be board member and vice chair of the bank.

Although Cedrus Bank is just rising from the starting blocks, it is not a greenfield establishment. It enters the market with the existing branch network, systems, asset, deposit and lending portfolios, and almost all the employees of the Lebanon operation of Standard Chartered Bank. As EXECUTIVE went to print, Cedrus Invest's acquisition of Standard Chartered was set to close with a final shares transfer scheduled for February 27. The Lebanese central bank had approved the takeover in the last quarter of 2014.

As Assali and Cedrus Invest cofounder Raed Khoury tell EXECUTIVE, the acquisition equipped Cedrus Bank with a client portfolio of 12,000 accounts, 6,000 credit card relationships, assets and deposits of about \$90 million and \$75 million, respectively, and a loan portfolio “in the \$50 millions.”

“But the plan is to grow the business quite substantially,” adds Assali. To digest all aspects of the acquired bank and prepare Cedrus Bank for growth, “What we are doing now, [as a] first step, is raising the equity of the acquired bank to be around \$60 million,” he says.

SHOOTING IN THE GREEN

The current equity boost comes after previous increases that saw Cedrus Invest's capital more than double from \$52 million in 2011 to \$110 million last year.

According to Assali, the capital increase in 2014 amounted to about \$47 million because the initial capital was already boosted by retained earnings. The increase was supported by all existing shareholders, including

**“CEDRUS BANK WILL
BE SPECIALIZED
IN [SERVING]
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several prominent Saudi investors, but also entailed the addition of new shareholders who were mainly Lebanese.

“Under an agreement with our historical investors, we wanted to introduce new blood to the structure. So the capital increase was done in a way whereby two thirds of new funds came from existing and one third from new investors,” Assali explains. He acknowledges that the capital increase diluted the shareholdings by Assali and Khoury “a little” from their initial combined 8 percent shareholding.

TRACKING MANY DETAILS

According to Assali, the confidence of Cedrus Invest shareholders and management in the expansion was founded upon growth experiences of about 25 percent per annum since 2011 in both assets under management and profits. The plan for Cedrus Bank is to reach profitability

after two years of operations.

In local banking history, the launch announcement of Cedrus Bank on March 3 is actually the repatriation of this financial institution in a third life. It had been founded as an independent local bank under the name Metropolitan Bank in 1979 and was acquired by Standard Chartered in 1998, marking a rare investment by a foreign bank via takeover of an existing license.

From Standard Chartered's perspective, this investment came at a time when the UK based institution — with specialization in emerging markets — was on a drive to expand its global footprint. Its decision to divest of the Lebanese unit, which became public knowledge in the last quarter of 2013, was apparently triggered by underperformances of Standard Chartered in complex global endeavors and important Asian markets, and was sold by the bank as a refocus on "priority markets" that entailed withdrawals from several countries.

While Assali would not confirm how much Cedrus Invest spent on the acquisition because of an agreement with Standard Chartered not to divulge the price, he admits that the \$24–27 million range quoted in local papers was "not far off." Standard Chartered did not comment on its sales decision and future strategy for its Lebanon presence when contacted by EXECUTIVE on several occasions.

Assali explains that Cedrus Invest is walking away with Standard Chartered's entire retail banking operations as well as some private banking clients, while Standard Chartered will maintain a representative office in Beirut to service a small corporate portfolio that it retained.

The takeover was a somewhat drawn-out process, because Standard Chartered had concerns over the future of the employees, and also because of issues which Assali

describes as "logistics," related to the transaction, such as usage of Standard Chartered's proprietary systems during a transition period. Assali also notes the seller has paid particular attention to Cedrus Invest's strategy going forward and that both sides agreed on entertaining a post-acquisition relationship.

As the Cedrus brand previously only stood for private banking and wealth management operations, their venture into retail business constitutes not only an asset acquisition, but also a talent buy. Assali claims they intend to keep about 85 percent of the acquired bank's staff and selectively add new people where it did not have

capabilities, such as housing finance. By end of the year, Cedrus Bank will have a headcount of 100 to 105, he says, compared with about 30 current employees at Cedrus Invest.

With an eye on the toughening of operational challenges for Lebanese banks and banking in general, Khoury acknowledges the presence of "clear pressure" on banking profitability in 2015, but argues that Cedrus Bank can take a long term approach because its shareholders are not seeking quick returns. "We will be happy to grow our balance sheet quickly in terms of multiples which will be very high, but in terms of absolute [numbers] we will

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be building our balance sheet very slowly and can pick and choose our clients according to risk conditions because we are starting from a small base,” he says.

Moreover, he argues, the tough times already have proven fortuitous for Cedrus. “All conditions have a positive and a negative aspect and because the conditions in the region and in Lebanon represented a higher risk for Standard Chartered than they were comfortable with, the opportunity was created for us to step in. If conditions in the region would have been very good, they would not have thought of selling or the price would have been much higher,” he says.

THE GOVERNANCE PROPOSITION

Cedrus Invest Bank and Cedrus Bank will be run by two different boards and operate as separate entities dedicated to commercial and retail business at the latter and investment and private banking services at the former. Assali says, “The private banking arm is the Cedrus Invest Bank, so we have a very clear separation between the lines of businesses and the way they are run. But with complete synergy; [it will be] separation with synergy.”

According to him, the assets-under-management portfolio at Cedrus Invest, plus a small addition of private banking business via the acquisition, has expanded to being currently “very close to \$500 million.”

The current Cedrus Invest board that was elected in 2014 for a three year term includes cofounders Assali and Khoury, with the latter holding the position of chair-general manager, plus three shareholders as non executive members and two or three independent members, among them Ghassan Ayache, a former vice governor of the central bank and previous chair of Cedrus Invest Bank.

The board of Cedrus Bank is starting out with five members headed by Assali as chair and by minority shareholder Chammas as vice chair, Assali says, and will be expanded very soon by adding at least one new member.

It is not intended for the group to stay at this stage for a very long time. While Cedrus Bank is starting out with three existing branches previously run under the Standard Chartered brand, the plan is to quickly utilize two additional existing branch licenses that had become disused. In the short term, the bank aims to have two to three new branches running within 18 months.

The organic growth strategy will involve further developing their retail banking services, beginning with new delivery channels and including a roster of new credit card and lending offerings focusing on what Assali dubs the “middle market” clientele. “We see a need for that niche of market to be well served,” he says.

Reflecting the importance of expanded human advisory and automated service points such as electronic branches, the largest investment budgets of the rollout and refurbishing of the branches will be allocated to technology and human resources. The technology budget on its own will surpass \$1.5 million per year for the next two years.

STRATEGIZING FOR MUCH MORE

In the medium to long term, however, Cedrus Bank is intended by both its investors and executive management to become a player that can benefit from the economies of scale required to make a mark in Lebanon’s banking sector.

Over the coming five to six years, the young Cedrus Bank thus envisions expansions that could well go beyond organic into what Assali calls growing “organically and opportunistically–inorganically.”

This, he adds, is “because in commercial banking, size matters. And you have to have a certain size in order to be able to compete.”

Ultimately then, Assali and Khoury aim at joining the top of the size league, the alpha group of banks which hold customer deposits of above \$2 billion by current reckoning. As Khoury insists, however, “we are not obsessed with being alpha or beta. Alpha is not a target by itself but will be [a] natural consequence of what we want to do.”

While the two declined to divulge any specific plans for future mergers and acquisitions, both

“IN TERMS OF ABSOLUTE [NUMBERS] WE WILL BE BUILDING OUR BALANCE SHEET VERY SLOWLY AND CAN PICK AND CHOOSE OUR CLIENTS ACCORDING TO RISK CONDITIONS”

confirm that the new bank will need inorganic growth to achieve such dimensions. Citing lower valuations experienced by local banks when compared with 10 years ago, Khoury sees three reasons for new takeover opportunities to arise. “We feel that there is a future possibility of banks being sold because they are not able to maintain a good [internal rate of return]. Next, the central bank promoting mergers and acquisitions and third, many bank owners are no longer young and face succession issues so some might be interested in selling,” he says.

Noting these ambitions, and evolving conditions for the banking industry, it appears quite possible that the entry of Cedrus Bank into the market could become a factor in sector consolidation rather than adding just a new brand for corporate and retail banking.

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WOMEN MARCH ON


Addressing gender equality in Lebanon and the region *By Jeremy Arbid*

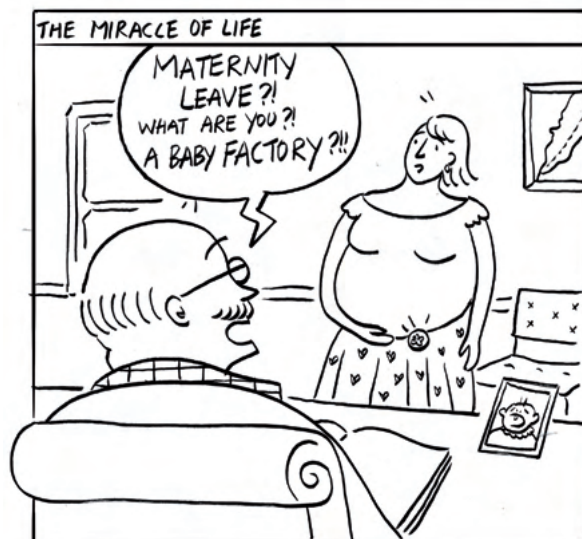
Every March 8 the United Nations marks International Women's Day to highlight the progress women have made towards equality with men and drawing attention to the challenges women continue to face across the world — the societal pressures, prejudices and violence subjugating them. EXECUTIVE set out to mark the occasion by exploring the sadly inadequate engagement of women in the Lebanese workplace, and identifying some who have broken past discriminatory laws and prejudices to rise to the top of male dominated fields.

The societal expectations prevailing within Lebanon and across the region, as well as the subjugation and violence women face, underline women's rights as a critical issue, but one that is not often a priority. What is clear is that the women of the Middle East continue to live in patriarchal societies where at one end, the violence — including harassment, assault, mutilation, rape and murder — that women suffer drives them to further dependence on male guardians for protection, while at the other it is the systematic discrimination of women via civil or religious law that undermines their march towards equality.

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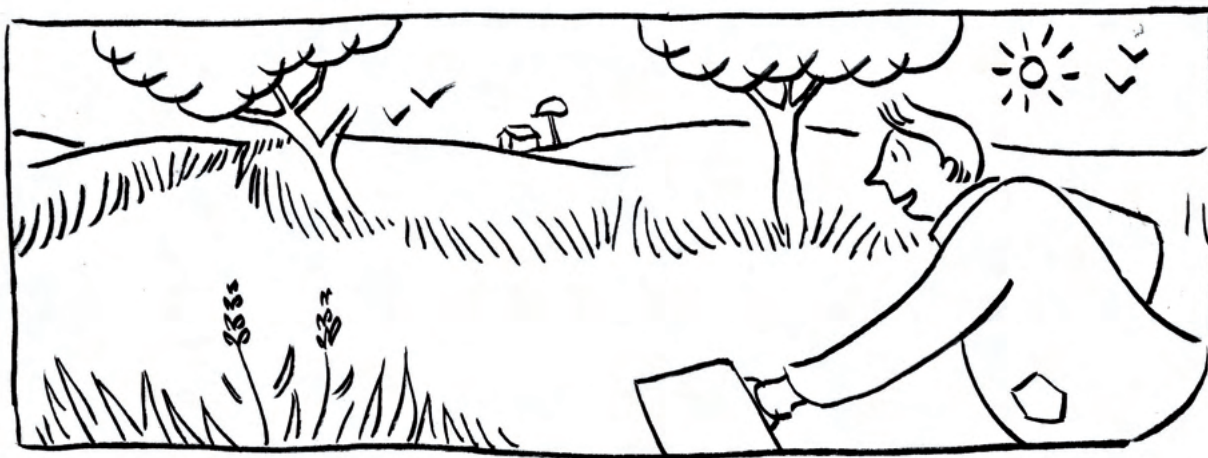
Even when women are free of blatant subjugation, more subtle biases take over. Oftentimes these prejudices manifest in the office, where employers continue to see marriage and domestic obligations as a hindrance to productivity that blocks women from decisionmaking positions. Statistics can tell only part of this story. In Lebanon, where available data is sorely lacking, the numbers do not paint a good picture, and even in Western countries where for decades movements have advocated gender equality, statistics still show gaps between males and females in terms of wages, the number of female executives and board members, and in political representation.

Data deficiencies aside, EXECUTIVE's investigation reveals the prevailing pressures women confront on a daily basis in Lebanon and the region. Interviews with gender policy experts and women's rights advocates, as well as personal anecdotes and a broad review of the literature documenting gender based discrimination and violence, all indicate the existence of an anti woman cultural norm stemming from the patriarchal leadership in the household — where the uncompensated work of raising children, maintaining the house and catering to the patriarch are the defining burdens that women are expected to bear. 



An obstacle course

Lebanese women are striving to confront gender discrimination in the workforce *By Nabila Rahhal*



T rue story: Two candidates are applying for the post of development officer at a well established institution in Lebanon. Candidate A has two years working experience over candidate B, nine years in total, more international experience and enjoys a wider relevant network of key contacts, having chaired charities in the institution's field.

While candidate A would seem like the obvious choice for the position, the institution still hired candidate B, a male. Why? As candidate A, a woman, later learned from an inside source, the hiring director feared that her gender made her an "unstable" investment: that, while both candidates were single at the time, she would get married and choose to quit her career.

Workplace discrimination comes in many forms, from racial, to age or sexual orientation, but discrimination against women in the workforce affects half the global population and therefore significantly impacts economies worldwide.

Discrimination against women in the workforce is not restricted to Lebanon, and the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2014 index shows that the gender gap for economic participation and economic activity is 60 percent worldwide and would take 81 years to completely close, if everything else remains the same.

Beyond its human rights implications, the issue of women in the workforce is significant because studies show that there is a loss in economic productivity when women are weakly represented in the labor force. According to *Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the US Economy*, a study conducted by McKinsey and Company in 2011, "the additional productive power power of women entering the workforce since the 1970s accounts for about a quarter of current GDP."

While no such research exists in Lebanon, what is known from the Central Administration of Statistics' (CAS) Living Conditions Survey of 2007 is that women make up only 25 percent of the Lebanese workforce. The country has several challenges to address within the workplace, and at the societal level, before it can begin to close the gap and improve its economy. "The entire national economy, the regional economy even, is suffering because you are losing half the talent and half the productivity that could come from women," says Dima Jamali, professor of management and associate dean for faculty at the Sulieman S. Olayan School of Business at the American University of Beirut.

UNIVERSITY YEARS: A HEAD START

According to the Global Gender Gap 2014 report, which rates countries on four different sub indexes, including women's educational attainment, Lebanon is in the top percentile when it comes to tertiary education. This is supported by CAS statistics which show that women constitute 55 percent of students in higher education.

Such an investment in education, which is also true for women in the Arab region, is not being translated in their careers. "Women in the Arab region are gaining more university education than a decade ago, but this is reflected neither in their employment nor into their advancement to higher level managerial positions," says Jamali.

EARLY CAREER DAYS

After graduating from university, both genders initially begin applying for posts in their chosen profession. According to Rana Salhab, partner at Deloitte & Touche and an advocate for women's advancement, while the hiring process

“A WOMAN’S ROLE IS PRIMARILY PERCEIVED TO BE AT HOME”



among genders is almost even in most professions, fields such as engineering are skewed to men. According to numbers from the Lebanese Order of Physicians (for all cazas except North Lebanon) male physicians far outweigh females with only 2,652 females doctors in Lebanon out of a total of 11,341.

According to Roula El-Masri, gender equality program manager at ABAAD, a Lebanese resource center for gender equality, hiring is not equal among both genders when some fields are perceived as “men’s work”, while others are the domain of women. “Women are mainly employed in the services industry, in advertising or public relations, or in the fields of education or nursing. This is a form of discrimination as not all careers opportunities are equally open to them,” says Masri. CAS’s 2007 Living Conditions Survey shows that 64 percent of working women are indeed employed in the services sector versus 34.2 percent of employed males.

The country’s political scene is dominated by men. “Even if we take [the 128 member] parliament as an example — there are four female parliamentarians. In a country where women are as educated and as present in public life as in Lebanon, it’s a very surprising statistic,” says Lama Fakihi, the Syria and Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

EDUCATED WOMEN DROPPING OFF

After the first few years of work, the number of women in the labor force begins to taper off. “When you move forward along the career path a little bit, women exit the workforce earlier than men. This is why the percentage of women in your organization pyramid, which starts off as almost 50/50, gets less and, globally, women in leadership positions are barely a handful,” explains Salhab.

As per CAS’ survey, only 29.8 percent of Lebanese women surveyed were economically active between the ages of 23 and 29. That percentage tapers off to 24.3 between the ages of 35 and 39.

The first age bracket correlates with the age where some people consider getting married and starting a family. While legislation in countries such as Sweden, Canada or the UK see child rearing as a shared responsibility — awarding both parents leave from work when their child is born — the Arab region, Lebanon included, does not. “A woman’s role is primarily perceived to be at home, raising the children and managing the household. If she is to work outside of the home, it is often viewed as secondary to her role at home or only to complement her husband financially when economic times are tough,” says Masri.

These responsibilities make maintaining a career difficult for most women. “There is a lot of pressure on them to be available for the role of mother and be available for motherhood and domestic roles, as opposed to productive roles in the workplace. Women feel and see this pressure and this is the primary explanation, from a cultural and social perspective, as to why women’s educational attainment is not reflected in their labor force representation,” explains Jamali.

According to HRW’s Fakihi, once women do opt out of their careers for marriage purposes — globally — it is not temporary. “Even in cases where women do divorce, they have a very difficult time getting back into the labor force after this prolonged absence,” she adds.

This early exit from women in the workplace could explain the low numbers for the representation of women in the labor force.

NOT AN EASY PATH

Other women decide to balance both roles, despite the difficulties. All the women in top positions profiled by EXECUTIVE for this report (see page 52) said that balancing their personal life with their careers is a challenging task, one that women at all levels struggle with.

Women are at a career disadvantage in that they have to also give time to their obligations as caregivers, within the context of Lebanese society, while men can focus only on their career. “Women who do remain in the labor force take on positions that allow them to balance their private responsibilities with their work responsibilities. So that means, in many cases and in many industries, not working long hours, not having travel commitments and not being at a senior position,” says Fakh.

Such consequences place women at a disadvantage when it comes to investing time and developing in their careers. “There is also a glass ceiling which we cannot deny and a certain bias in promotions mainly because the top levels of organizations are usually dominated by men who think and make promotions with conscious and unconscious biases. There are multiple factors we need to be aware of,” says Salhab.

As Salhab explains, these multiple factors include assuming that a leadership position requires a man or that an equally qualified woman would not be as committed as a man for a top management role because of her domestic obligations. In the Lebanese context, this would imply that a woman might get called to go home if a child is sick or she may not be able to travel and leave her children.

An associated challenge which women face in the workforce is the discrimination in pay between them and their male colleagues for the same job. This is a global issue — the pay gap in the United States for example is 80 cents to the dollar — and although there are no statistics for this in the Lebanese labor force, the CAS’ 2007 survey notes a 6 percent gender pay gap overall, exceeding 30 percent in some employment sectors.

SO NOW WHAT?

In the face of such career obstacles and discrimination, it would be easy to give up on the advancement of women in the workplace but this attitude would not be conducive to change or growth in the economy.

The career women and experts interviewed agree that the basic step for change in Lebanon is the empowerment of women at all levels. This need for empowerment starts with laws that discriminate against women in their private life encroaching on their ability to fully perform in their public life, such as the personal status laws (see page 80). “We continue to see an undermining of women’s autonomy, of women’s rights, in a way that interferes with their ability to engage in public life,” says Fakh giving a simple example

of how women don’t have the authority to open a bank account for their children, which weakens their sense of empowerment and society’s view of them as leaders.

In the tangible sense, laws and policies supporting women in the labor force, at the government and corporate levels, need to be introduced into the system. Nayla Geagea, a lawyer specializing in human rights, explains that up until now, Lebanon doesn’t have a comprehensive legal system that ensures gender equality and it is difficult to create one because there is no real monitoring system that would lead to comprehensive and accurate figures on the workplace environment. This is exemplified by the fact that the most recent national study regarding women’s representation in the workforce, used in this article, is from 2007.

Some laws have been created, such as the law that extends maternity leave from 49 to 79 days which was passed in parliament in April 2014. There are two draft laws being prepared in the framework of women’s rights — one against sexual harassment in the workplace and another for allowing women to have their children and husband as their dependents under NSSF insurance.

Yet, Geagea warns against focusing only on changing laws at the macro level. “Of course we need to talk about a change in the legal framework but at the same time, we need to keep in mind how long it takes to achieve legal change. This means, other initiatives should start at the level of the corporations. Women who are working in these environments should impose standards and minimum conditions,” she says.

Salhab suggests that corporations could adopt female friendly policies such as part time or flexible working hours to their own advantage, giving an example of how a dedicated and hardworking female colleague in Deloitte’s Lebanon office was promoted to director, despite her working part time hours.

A policy that helps ensure an equal representation of women in top management positions is the quota system, which guarantees a percentage of women in certain positions. It is a law in some countries like France and a voluntary corporate policy in others such as Germany. In Lebanon, suggests Salhab, gender quotas could be initiated at the level of the parliament and the ministries and in the form of targets in corporations (increase the number of women by x percent) as that would better take into account the situation in the country.

The path to an equal and fair representation of both genders in the workplace is long and progress has been slow both globally and in Lebanon. Yet, the fact that more people in Lebanon are publicly addressing issues of women’s rights, and recognizing the economic importance of increasing women’s representation in the workforce, is certainly a step forward on that journey.



THE BASIC STEP FOR CHANGE IN LEBANON IS THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS

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Second class citizens — or worse

Director of HRW Kenneth Roth discusses the oppression of women in the Middle East *By Jeremy Arbid*



The subjugation of women — often unwitnessed, overlooked or otherwise ignored — is today's greatest challenge facing equality among the genders in the Middle East, says Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch (HRW). In Beirut, presenting the organization's annual global report on human rights practices, Roth spoke with *EXECUTIVE* about women's rights in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and the severe oppression of women occurring in those countries.

ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

"The ideological suppression of women," says Roth, in areas under the control of ISIS, namely Syria and Iraq, defines the now familiar barbarity central to the jihadist group. While much of the attention on ISIS, for Western media, has focused on its execution of prisoners, it is ISIS' treatment of women — albeit underreported — which underlines its rights violations.

Among its most acute atrocities, Roth explains, is the group's treatment of Yazidi women — a Kurdish sect traditionally concentrated in the northern Iraqi province of Ninewa. In HRW's 2015 World Report, Roth wrote that ISIS "militants have enslaved, forcibly married, and raped Yazidi

women and girls." In 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an advocacy group, reported documented cases of Yazidi and Syrian women kidnapped into slavery. The organization said it also has evidence of Yazidi women sold into marriage to ISIS fighters for \$1,000 each. Roth adds that 'marriage' under ISIS is really a "euphemism for forced rape," and that it epitomizes ISIS' utter disregard for women as human beings.

Coming upon an abandoned ISIS military checkpoint, Iraqi Special Forces and Kurdish Peshmerga found two women naked and chained who had been raped multiple times, *The New York Times* reported in August. To supplement its insatiable domineering appetite, ISIS — in Al-Bab, a city in the Aleppo province of northern Syria — has set up a so called marriage bureau to wed single women and widows to the jihadist group's fighters. "They're really almost just treated like chattel and handed out to fighters as sort of the prizes of war," Roth says.

ISIS, in defending its actions, has referred to the Quran to justify its kidnapping, subjugation and forced rape of Yazidi women. In ISIS' fourth issue of Dabiq, its English language online magazine, the group notes that "women could be enslaved" and that upon their capture "the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State." The maliciousness of the jihadist group is not unique, Roth says, adding that "in many ways it harkens back to the Taliban era in Afghanistan or to some of the abuses in Saudi Arabia."

SAUDI ARABIA

"Under King Abdullah, there seemed to be some commitment to improving the rights of women. I say some because he operated very slowly, very incrementally," Roth explains. While women's rights in Saudi Arabia are undoubtedly not favorable, a slow moving effort towards granting more rights to women has begun in the last few years.

Listing the improvements, Roth explains that not too long ago, in 2011, the late king declared women would be able to vote and run in the 2015 municipal elections, as well as be eligible for appointment to the Shura Council — 30 women were

appointed in 2013. There has also, he says, been a gradual increase in the professions that are available to women.

Saudi statistics on its labor force demonstrate the kingdom's inclusion of local women. While certain types of professions might still be off limits to Saudi women, their access to the labor force has increased markedly in the past five years. Of the total Saudi female population 20 percent were employed or actively looking for jobs in 2014, according to Saudi Arabia's Central Department of Statistics and Information 2014 labor force survey. But in 2009 that figure stood at only 12 percent: in five years the number of economically active Saudi women has increased by over 1.1 million.

The statistics portray just one angle of Saudi Arabia's incremental approach towards female inclusion in the labor force. An advisor to the Saudi Ministry of Labor described proposed policies to *The New York Times* in November to promote female labor force participation — the building of childcare facilities nearer to places of work and the creation of jobs in the industries of healthcare, manufacturing and information technology — which, if implemented, could further open the door to the labor market for Saudi women.

While Roth acknowledges this as a positive development, he counters with what he describes as the main obstacle for Saudi women willing to work: the archaic guardianship law. Under the law, the most basic decisions in a woman's life cannot be made without the consent of her male guardian. This lack of agency, Roth says, makes it very difficult for Saudi women to operate in modern society. Were a woman to find gainful employment in the kingdom, she must still obtain permission to show up for the job and she still cannot drive herself, he adds.

Roth also points out that the change that began under Abdullah is not certain to continue. His organization has no idea where King Salman stands on women's rights. "We still have a blank slate on this, and he himself is old and incapacitated, so it's just not clear how much he is going to be able to push things forward." Some reticently voice their concern. The recent appointment by Salman of Muhammad Bin Nayef as deputy crown prince and second in line to the throne is troubling news for women and human rights advocates, an anonymous letter to the new king published in Politico points out. And Roth agrees; under Abdullah, Bin Nayef served as minister of the interior where he orchestrated the detainment of female drivers, impounding their vehicles. In one rare case, two female drivers were referred to a court established to try terrorism cases — not for driving, but for speaking about the incident on social media. Bin Nayef, says Roth, has "given no indication that he is going to pursue or let alone build upon King Abdullah's willingness to countenance a slight opening for the rights of women."

EGYPT


For Roth, female genital mutilation (FGM) remains one of Egypt's most destructive women's rights violations, and the practice is considered as a form of torture under the UN Con-

vention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. According to UNICEF, an estimated 125 million women around the world have undergone the procedure. The practice of FGM in Egypt remains high — 91 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49, which represents 27.2 million Egyptian women — have been subjected to cutting of external female genitalia, including partial or total removal of the clitoris, according to a 2013 UNICEF report. FGM was banned by the Egyptian government in 2008 — yet implementation of the law has not been a priority. But years of activism and education by Egyptian civil society, Roth says, may be dispelling the cultural taboo of questioning FGM leading Egyptians to think of it as a widespread problem of public health and human rights abuse.

In January 2015 — in the first instance Egypt has applied the law — a doctor was convicted of manslaughter for performing FGM on a 13 year old girl, forced by her father to undergo the procedure, who died soon after. The doctor received a two year prison sentence, the maximum allowed under the law, while the father received three months of house arrest. In response to the girl's death, local activists launched the Kamla campaign aiming to eliminate the practice of FGM under the slogan "Our daughters are complete. Why do we want them to be incomplete?"

While Roth does highlight the significance of the conviction, he also clarifies with context — several years of internal turmoil and struggle have intensified what was an existing problem: the sexual harassment of women in public. HRW reported in July 2013 that 91 women were raped or sexually assaulted during protests against then President Mohamed Morsi in Tahrir Square that June. Similarly, a graphic YouTube video, first posted in June 2014 but believed to be dated much earlier, depicted a woman stripped naked, assaulted and dragged through the middle of Tahrir Square as she attempted to escape a large group of male assailants. The public harassment of women on the streets of Egypt, Roth points out, is "indicative of a broader disregard for women and the treatment of them not only as second class citizens but people who can be freely abused." Indeed, statistics from UN Women put it bluntly — 99.3 percent of Egyptian women and girls surveyed in 2013 said they've been subjected to one form of sexual harassment or another.

A TOUGH FUTURE

Though there have been occasional and modest steps towards equality between the genders, the unrest raging across the region makes significant achievements and improvements for women's rights difficult. "Women," says Roth, "continue to suffer severe repression in most countries of the Middle East. There are major countervailing pressures and a lot of the big steps towards basic equality and women's rights have not been taken by many of the governments in the region." Where they can, women are fighting back. 

7 SUCCESSFUL LEBANESE WORKING WOMEN

By Nabila Rahhal

For this month's special report on women in the workforce, *EXECUTIVE* chose to profile a selection of seven successful, upper managerial level, Lebanese working women. Some of these women work in the private sector, others are in the public sector, but for all the differences in their job titles and roles, they share some commonalities. They are all ambitious, hard working and were able to build up their careers despite the obstacles that most working women face. They were all raised in supportive families who fostered their ambitions, and they all now credit the family they have built, their husbands and children, and the motivation and support they offer, for helping them achieve this success. In these profiles, we ask them how they managed this balancing act, what drives them to succeed and what lessons they would give to the young women who are just entering the workforce.



MONA ABDUL LATIF

**A real life superhero
For a Lebanese woman, balance is the secret to a successful career**

Above the desk of Mona Abdul Latif, the director of buildings at the Ministry of Public Works, is a drawing by her 10 year old daughter depicting her as a superhero. "It means a lot to me that my daughters are proud of my achievements and see me as a role model for their future career choices," she says.

Abdul Latif, who has seven siblings, says her parents were very open minded compared to others of their generation in the 1960s. They insisted that all their children, regardless of their gender, get a competitive higher education and so she studied civil engineering at the Arab University. "There were very few women majoring in civil engineering at my time and when we graduated, we were among the first women engineers in the country. But today, there are many."

Upon graduation, Abdul Latif joined the Ministry of Public Works as an engineer and says she proved herself through her hard work and perseverance, focusing on bettering her skills by taking voluntary computer and AutoCAD design courses. She rose up the ranks over the course of eight years until she was made director of buildings at the ministry, one of the few, if not only, "first level" female directors in the public sector.

To Abdul Latif, being a successful woman is all about balance. "It is not enough to only succeed in your personal life, in society and at home and be a failure when it comes to your career, nor is it enough to have an outstanding career but have your personal life in shambles. A balance is great."

Key to achieving this balance, says Abdul Latif, is dedication and devotion in both the private and public spheres. "I always complete my work with the government to the best standards, complying with all policies and procedures at the risk of upsetting people. And I show this same dedication to my family life."

She also attributes part of her success to the partnership she has at home with her husband, which she compares to managing a company. "My husband, a general in the Internal Security Forces, and I collaborate in raising our three daughters. He takes on some tasks such as helping them with their schoolwork and driving them to school, whereas I take on other tasks such as cooking," says Abdul Latif. She adds that, as a couple, they also

**"WHEN WE
GRADUATED,
WE WERE
AMONG THE
FIRST WOMEN
ENGINEERS"**

encourage each other to move forward in their careers.

Abdul Latif was among the 15 shortlisted for the Lebanese Outstanding Women Award 2012, a recognition which she says she was honored to receive. "This nomination meant that I was recognized for my achievements and that my career has a meaning to people, that I did not just pass by unnoticed."



NESREEN GHADDAR

All alone at the top
One engineer's fight to bring women into the science lab

For most of her academic life, from her years as a student to teaching as a professor, Nesreen Ghaddar, associate provost and Qatar Chair of Energy Studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB), has been the only woman around.

But Ghaddar has always viewed this as a learning experience. "Sometimes people are afraid of your success, especially when you are the only woman. People don't know how to respond at the beginning and what to expect, but this changes with time when you prove yourself. You need to always keep your focus on the end goal."

Ghaddar received her bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from Kuwait University, in the country of her birth. She says her parents were supportive of her choice of major but the challenge was in convincing them to allow her

to continue her studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). "I was the first woman in my family to leave home to study abroad so my father was resistant but I convinced him by working out the funding on my own and by showing him the acceptance letter and scholarship together."

"SOMETIMES PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF YOUR SUCCESS"

Ghaddar went on to complete both her master's and doctorate degrees in mechanical engineering at MIT in the 1980s. In 1992, she accepted the position of professor of mechanical engineering at AUB. She remembers that there was never more than one woman in mechanical engineering classes at the time, but when there was one, she was usually the top of her class.

Things started changing when Ghaddar became department chairperson in 2002. "First, [with me as chairperson] women had a role model in that field. At the same time, our labs became softer with more programming courses and connections to sustainability and environment issues, which are of interest to both genders. We started having more women in the department and though it is still the lowest [gender ratio] in the faculty, it is better than before," says Ghaddar.

Ghaddar finds her experience as a chairwoman both difficult and enriching, and explained that she had targets and goals to achieve regardless of people's reactions. "I had to make hard decisions and bear their consequences ... but the culture changed and engineers changed."

While Ghaddar admits that it is never easy to balance one's personal life with work, she feels that living in Lebanon helps a lot. Here, she says, women can enjoy the invaluable support of their extended family when it comes to taking care of children.



LAMIA MOUBAYED

At society's service
A public servant working to make gender a non issue

Lamia Moubayed, head of the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan (IoF), believes that there is *de facto* discrimination against women in top management roles. "I personally avoided, as much as possible, work related social functions because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to manage my many duties. This affects your prospects for advancement or promotion to higher duties as you are seen less in circles of power and probably miss on some good 'introduction' opportunities," says Moubayed, explaining that this is one reason why quotas are crucial to stop top positions being filled only with men.

Moubayed was selected as head of the IoF by the French Ministry of Finance in 2000, when it was still a private French-Lebanese initiative. She led the IoF's transformation from a bilateral cooperation project into an independent public agency under the tutelage of the Lebanese Ministry of Finance. Today, Moubayed heads a team of 26 at the institute, whose main services are capacity development of civil servants, training and documentation services.

The Institute of Finance has predominantly female employees (19 out of the 26), but Moubayed says this was not their aim. "When we talk about female employment it is not at the expense of male employment, there should be diversity where each person brings to the organization a different perspective. In public affairs, diversity is a sign of health because if you want public servants to be responsible, efficient and attentive to citizens' needs, they have to be representative of their society. In IoF, we have this very nice way of making the best out of our difference. We work for gender to become a non issue, and here, diversity is the key," she says.

"WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ENJOY A NUMBER OF BENEFITS SET BY LAW"

Moubayed believes that there are very few barriers facing women, in general, in the public sector. "As far as I am concerned, the discrimination in pay between genders in the public service is rather rare, as you are paid according to a well established scale as per your grade. Also, women in the public sector enjoy a number of benefits set by law that no supervisor can deny or ignore, including maternity leave, convenient working hours [until 2 pm in administrations], pension and so on. They have a legal system and an institutional framework that guarantee their rights, protect them from abuse and allow for retaliation in case of abuse. Moreover, they enjoy two most important privileges: job security and non interruption of their pay," explains Moubayed.



HAYAT NADER

Making it count
A former Finance Ministry manager still going strong after mandatory retirement

"I'm very comfortable with numbers and I love to work with them," says Hayat Nader, head of compliance at Credit Libanais Group since 2013.

She was one of only three girls among 60 students in the Baccalaureate with a specialization in mathematics at the International School of Choueifat. Later on, at the Lebanese University, where she majored in finance and accounting, she was once again one of only five girls in the entire faculty. "Now, if you go to the school of business [at the Lebanese University], it is mostly girls that major in business, but I'm talking about back then," says Nader.

When her soon-to-be-husband's job as branch manager at the Orient Credit Bank took him to Tripoli, Nader says she moved there with him and started her career as accountancy controller at the Ministry of Finance in 1974. "It was better for me as a woman to work in the public sector. In the public sector you are assessed and assigned to a post based on an exam, but in the private sector they didn't give you a good post — they saw women as secretaries at that time," says Nader. She then started working in the ministry in tax auditing and was promoted to head of the audit division in Tripoli.

In 1987, Nader and her husband moved back to Beirut where she was made head of the auditing of banks for the ministry. "When I used to go with my team to audit a bank, they used to look first at the men but they would soon realize that I was the head," recounts Nader, adding that her dedication to her career is what makes others respect her.

In 2002, Nader was promoted to head of the department of inheritance tax in Lebanon and in 2010, when the government commissioner left, she seized the opportunity and asked to be promoted to that top level position.

When she reached the mandatory retirement age for public sector officials, in 2012, then Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi asked her to stay on as his advisor, which she accepted, remaining in that post for a year. Having worked on many projects with the Ministry of Finance, Nader found it easy to move on to her current post with Credit Libanais Group, where she is in the process of building a new career at age of 66.

While working at the same time, Nader bore and raised a son. She believes that an ambitious and hard working woman can balance her personal life with a fulfilling career that certainly does not have to stop at the official age of retirement.



RANA SALHAB

Breaking the glass ceiling
One woman's risk taking propelled her to a partner position at Deloitte

"When I travel for work, people ask me how I have the heart to leave my child, whereas when my husband travels, even my mother says he is suffering to bring prosperity to his family," says Rana Salhab, Talent and Communications partner at Deloitte Middle East.

Salhab's career path had its own share of difficult choices and she believes risk taking, having a thick skin, taking leadership roles and displaying confidence are characteristics that have helped her forge her way forward. Her first job in the early 1980s was in the education sector in the Gulf. "At that time in

the Gulf, education was among the only career options available to women so I took it, though I did not see myself growing in that field," she recalls.

With 12 years of experience in education under her belt, Salhab's husband's job took them to Cairo where she decided to switch careers. "I was offered a starting position in Andersen so I went back to

them and said that I would work for free for three months after which they can decide to either offer me a management position or I leave with no hard feelings. Despite the obstacles, they made me a manager and offered me more than triple what they had at the beginning," says Salhab.

Three years later, Salhab accepted a global post at Andersen, before eventually moving to Deloitte and becoming the first woman to be made partner in the company's Middle East branch. "Percentage wise [of women in executive positions globally] that is nothing, but the fact that we got to shoot the glass ceiling is an achievement by itself," says Salhab.

Her career — and her husband's — involved a lot of moving from country to country and traveling. It was a challenge to balance family life alongside her career. "I've had to call my mother many times, and she even flew in to stay with me in Geneva when there was nobody to take care of my daughter who was then seven," recalls Salhab.

Salhab believes her real value professionally is her pragmatism and an ability to be priority oriented while also displaying the skills she believes women excel at over men, like consensus building and diplomacy.

Throughout her career, and especially with her role in Deloitte, Salhab has been an advocate for women's economic advancement. She says she would like to be described as a coach and a leader who facilitated the advancement of women.

SALHAB BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN TO BE MADE PARTNER IN DELOITTE MIDDLE EAST

"THE PRIVATE SECTOR ... SAW WOMAN AS SECRETARIES AT THAT TIME"

Banque Misr Liban -BML

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN AT BANQUE MISR LIBAN (BML)

One of the foremost objectives of the restructuring effort that since 2007 has transformed BanqueMisrLiban(BML) into a dynamic, growing financial institution was the development of its human resource base. This was only natural as "excellence in service" and being the preferred bank for its customers are a basic element of BML's mission and this necessarily requires a highly skilled, knowledgeable and experienced cadre of banking and support staff who are up to date on all modern banking products and services, as well as management and support functions.

Accordingly, and in parallel with the rapid growth of the size of its operations and business, and the expansion of its branch network, BML's total staff increased from 216 At the end of 2006 to 280 in 2014, or by 30% percent. But the numbers do not tell it all as this increase was accompanied, on one hand, by a considerable emphasis on developing the quality, experience and professionalism of the bank's staff through rigorous selection of the most qualified candidates, and continuous training and career development, and on the other hand, by a conscious effort to achieve a proper gender balance in recognition of qualifications of women and their major contribution to the workforce and economy of Lebanon.

The bank's staff training and career advancement programs are mainly focused on customer service and the techniques of service excellence, as well as detailed techniques and procedures of support functions. For this purpose also, the bank keeps up to date on the latest in customer service methods and innovations, and ensures their timely adoption while creating the necessary buzz to make sure that existing and potential customers know about them.

On the equally important issue and objective of gender balance, the bank had only one woman employee in 2006 at the start of the restructuring program and management has since given top priority to correcting the gender balance and pursued it with diligence. The result has been a steady rise in the proportion of women in the bank's total staff from 21% in 2008 to 33% in 2014. Admittedly this proportion remains below the banking sector average in Lebanon of around 45%, but BML is steadily moving towards that average.

Needless to say, correcting the gender structure is not simply a numerical target for its own end. It is more of a pragmatic business and social goal for BML in that it helps the bank to benefit from the qualifications, skills and talents of women in the active labor force in Lebanon, while also serving a social and economic purpose of promoting the much needed contribution of women to the Lebanese economy.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
% females in total staff	21%	24%	29%	32%	32%	31%	33%



CHRISTINE SFEIR

Quite the balancing act
Life as an entrepreneur has some benefits for women

"My mother is very important to me. She raised four children while working when most of her friends didn't work. This is something I definitely admire and I feel that if she could do it with four children, I should be able to do it with my two daughters," says Christine Sfeir, CEO of Treats Holding and Meeting Point, which holds the Dunkin Donuts franchise in Lebanon.

With such a role model and upbringing, it was no wonder that Sfeir took her career seriously, starting her first big project bringing the Dunkin Donuts franchise to Lebanon at the age of 22. Sfeir says the idea of bringing Dunkin Donuts to Lebanon first came to her when she was doing her masters in food science in McGill University and spent a lot of time between classes in coffee shops, something that was not common during her undergraduate years at the American University of Beirut in the early 1990s.

Sfeir came back to establish Dunkin Donuts in Lebanon and opened the first shop in Zalka, north of Beirut, in May 1998, and several other shops opened soon after. At that time, Sfeir says the main challenge she faced with people's perceptions was her youth, not her gender. "Sometimes people didn't take me seriously at first which led to some humorous incidents or reactions but it was my age more than my gender that was the issue."

Sfeir moved on in her career and in 2008 her company established Semsom, a Lebanese cuisine concept, which is currently operational in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman, and opening in New York next month.

"DON'T LET ANYONE CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU ARE NOT UP FOR THE TASK"

Even now with her company's growth, Sfeir does not feel discriminated against as a woman. "As an entrepreneur, I run my own business instead of being an employee so, for instance, there is no issue of glass ceiling," she explains.

Balancing the running of a company with a family requires a lot of effort, combined with an encouraging family network, Sfeir says. "I always say I have a very supportive husband who is very proud of what I am doing and does not have a problem with me not being present as much as we would both like me to be. Also, my mother helps a lot as she stays with my daughters in the afternoon until I come back from work," says Sfeir.

She advises women who want to become entrepreneurs to choose something they are really passionate about. "Don't put limits on yourself and don't let anyone convince you that you are not up for the task," concludes Sfeir.



LAURE SLEIMAN

A news worthy woman
Battling sexism in journalism

When Laure Sleiman was first appointed as director of the National News Agency (NNA) in 2008, the official news agency under the Ministry of Information, a criticism she heard was that "this job needs a man." Eight years into the post, handling the broadcasting of many delicate political news items in a timely and efficient manner, Sleiman says: "I proved them wrong. I showed them that what this position needs is determination and hard work, regardless of gender."

Within days of graduating from the Lebanese University's faculty of media and documentation in 1992, Sleiman had landed

"IT TAKES AN OPEN MINDED AND FLEXIBLE PARTNER TO BEAR ALL THIS"

a post at Voice of Lebanon as a news broadcaster and correspondent after having demonstrated her skills during an interview for a university project with then president of the Kataeb party, George Saadeh. She stayed in that post for three years while simultaneously working with the Al Markaziya News Agency, an independent news agency,

and the *Al A'mal* newspaper, which later shut down.

After getting married, Sleiman left these jobs and accepted a position in the NNA in 2004. "I preferred working with the NNA as it was a better position with more flexible working hours, which was important to me at that time," explains Sleiman. She rose up the ranks in the NNA, getting promoted from secretary of the news division to the director of that same division. She was finally promoted director of the whole agency, becoming the only woman in the Arab region to be a director of a national news agency, according to her.

Sleiman explains that she often gets work related calls at night or during weekends when a newsworthy event occurs. Balancing a family life with that sort of pressure is not easy and "comes at the expense of my health and comfort," she says. "I have three children and when I first started at NNA, in 2004, they were still at the age when I was helping them study at home. I put in a lot of effort to balance these two roles and didn't get the time to rest even at night," she says.

Still, Sleiman says she loves her career and the thrill that comes with it and attributes part of the strength she has to move forward with her work to her husband and children. "It takes an open minded and flexible partner to bear all this."

Sleiman advises young women to not look at their job as just a paycheck at the end of the month, as "success comes through dedication and motivation in what you do."

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IN A MAN'S WORLD

LEBANESE WOMEN DEFYING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN A QUEST FOR SUCCESS

By Greg Demarque



NAJWA LAYAN
Police officer

Journey and motivation

Ever since she was a child, Najwa Layan has been attracted to military life. She says that three years ago she heard there was a call for women to join the Internal Security Forces, so she applied. There were specific criteria for entering, and she met them all.

Others' perceptions

Layan notes that her entire family

supported her decision, telling her she had a strong personality that would fit perfectly with the job. Her male colleagues have also been extremely supportive, helping her with training in the street and teaching her many things.

Obstacles

Layan notes that in the past people were surprised to see a woman working as a police officer in the streets. Now, however, after the government began encouraging female applicants, the public has gotten used to the sight of a female police officer. She says that many people are actually happy to deal with a policewoman.

Future plans

Layan says she enjoys every moment spent on the job, and thus doesn't imagine herself leaving it to do something else. She wants to work on developing herself and hopes to rise as far in the field as possible.

Advice

Layan encourages other women to join the ISF, saying that the job helps to develop a strong personality.



ELSY ABOU ZEID

Mechanical technician at Volvo

Journey and motivation

Elsy Abou Zeid was raised with three brothers and 10 cousins, all boys. She grew up playing boys games in order to fit in and have a chance to spend time with them. As she grew older, her interest in things traditionally reserved for men only grew.

After earning her baccalaureate degree she held several internships,

but it was one she did at a garage that interested her most. This is why she decided to become a mechanical engineer and begin her studies at the Lebanese branch of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM).

Others' perceptions

As the only girl in her class, Abou Zeid felt like an intruder in the beginning, but things started getting better for her.

Her father, having seen where her interest lay from a young age, was supportive of her chosen career path. Her mother, however, was reluctant because she viewed the job as harsh. As for her colleagues, Abou Zeid notes the younger ones are the most accepting.

Obstacles

The only difficulty Abou Zeid faces is the physical constraints. She explains, for instance, that it is hard for her to move a 100 kilogram engine. However, she strongly believes that being a woman sparks some welcome curiosity among employers.

Future plans

Abou Zeid is intent on continually working to evolve in this job, and hopes to some day open her own auto repair shop.

Advice

To women still hesitating on whether to pursue this path, Abou Zeid says that if a woman has a passion for automotive work, she shouldn't think twice.

CYNTHIA BITAR

Owner and executive chef at Nazira Catering

Journey and motivation

Cynthia Bitar's mother, Nazira, was one of the first women to enroll in the hospitality school in Dekwaneh, graduating in 1967. Nazira then worked in the restaurant at Al Bustan Hotel in Beit Meri, and later gave cooking classes for years. Thanks to her mother, Bitar grew up immersed in the world of cooking.

In 1997, Bitar decided to study at the Institut Paul Bocuse in Lyon, a school specializing in culinary arts and hospitality. She came back to Lebanon in order to develop the family catering company, which Bitar explains was the first one in Lebanon.



Others' perceptions

Bitar says that in France, men are more accepting of women working as chefs, whereas in Lebanon she sees a lot more sexism.

Obstacles

According to Bitar, there are several obstacles for female chefs, compared to their male counterparts. First, there are the physical constraints, with the heavy lifting required and the long working hours. Women, says Bitar, need to work more and do more in order to prove their professionalism.

Future projects

Bitar has plans to begin working on her first book, as well as give cooking class. She also would like to expand her catering company outside of Lebanon.

Advice

Bitar believes that women should be confident and professional. For her, cooking is not just an ordinary job, it's a passion, and chefs should fully immerse themselves in their work.



ROLA HOTEIT
Pilot at Middle East Airlines

Journey and motivation

While still a mathematics student at the American University of Beirut, a friend jokingly showed Rola Hoteit a newspaper advertisement for a pilot posi-

tion at MEA. She took it as a challenge and she sat for the exam and passed.

Others' perceptions

Hoteit believes that men's perception of women pilots is changing with time, even though there are still less female pilots in the Arab world than

in Europe. Twenty years after joining MEA, she is still the only female pilot in the company. She explains that some aircraft operators still call her "sir" when communicating with her.

Obstacles

At first, Hoteit's father disapproved of her career choice, hoping she would continue her mathematics studies. However, she eventually succeeded in convincing him it was the right choice and now he is very proud of her. As for her colleagues, Hoteit says that her first two years as copilot were difficult, as others weren't used to seeing a woman in the cockpit.

Future projects

She plans to finish her master's degree in philosophy, and hopes to open a bookstore in Lebanon.

Advice

Hoteit directs advice at men, saying, "Let women dream, they are capable of doing anything."

NANCY ARBID
Aerospace engineer

Journey and motivation

While studying mechatronics at Hariri Canadian University, Nancy Arbid enjoyed her time as an intern with Middle East Airlines. So, after she finished her master's degree, she applied to work there. Arbid is still the only female aerospace engineer at the company.

Others' perceptions

Arbid explains that initially her parents did not know exactly what she was doing. Now, however, they are proud of her and her accomplishments.

Obstacles

Arbid says that while it took some time for her male colleagues to accept her on the team, the work environment is currently much better and her colleagues now listen to her opinions.

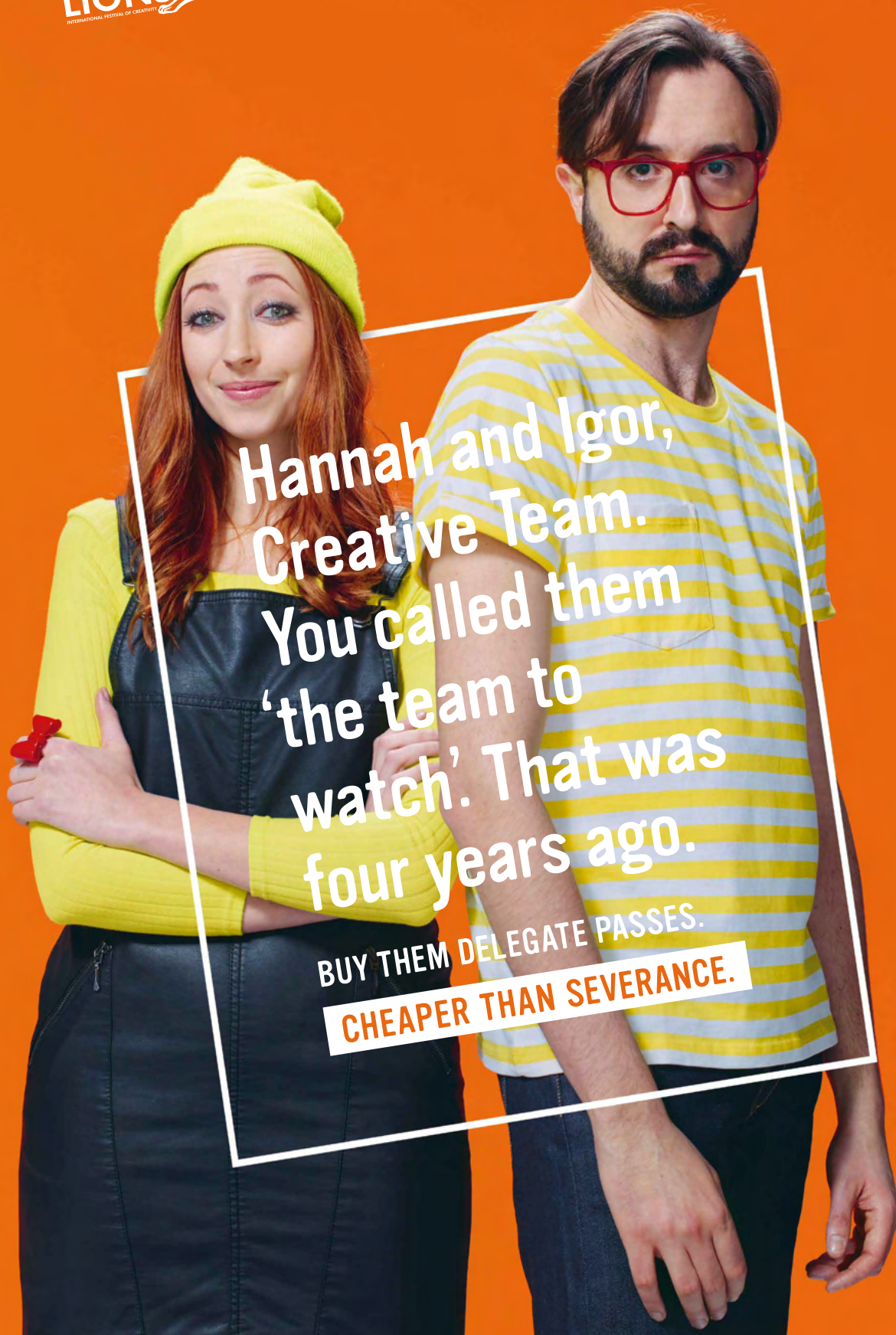


Future projects

Arbid hopes to obtain certification from the European Aviation Safety Agency.

Advice

Arbid says it's a very challenging job, but male colleagues should be given some time to get used to women making their way in this work environment that is traditionally occupied by men.



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DIANA SALAMEH
Winemaker at Domaine Wardy

Journey and motivation

Growing up under her grandparents' grape vines, it felt only natural

for Diana Salameh to study oenology at the Institut universitaire de la vigne et du vin in Dijon, France. She received her bachelor's degree in 1992, and later earned a specialized diploma in oenology.

Others' perceptions

Salameh says that at first her parents thought she had chosen to study oenology in order to leave Lebanon indefinitely, because the wine sector was highly underdeveloped in the country at that time.

Obstacles

According to Salameh, winemaking as a career choice is still relatively new in Lebanon, so a preference has

not developed for male winemakers, compared to France where she says it's been considered a job for men for a long time. As for the agricultural sector in general, Salameh claims that men still have problems with being led by a woman.

Future projects

Salameh wants to work on bettering the quality of wine in Lebanon, while at the same time make it available to everyone.

Advice

She says that someone should only choose this career if they have a passion for it, because it's physically very demanding.

CHRISTELLE YARED
General Manager at MSCA –
M. Special Car Armoring

Journey and motivation

When Christelle Yared was finishing her bachelor's degree in business and management at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, she took the challenge to relaunch her father's vehicle armoring company in order to upgrade the car of one of her father's previous clients. In two months, she succeeded in building a team, finding a location to carry out work, identifying providers for the car parts and delivering the car to the client. For two years, the company was only working on one or two cars a year, which made it possible for Yared to focus on developing herself and learning different techniques.

Others' perceptions

Yared notes that the team initially had trouble being led by a younger woman. With time, however, they ended up accepting her. She explains that even the suppliers questioned



what a woman was doing in this field. Clients now only have doubts for about five minutes, as they are quickly convinced by her professionalism and passion for her work.

Obstacles


Her biggest obstacle has been gaining her clients and providers' trust. Yared worked very hard the first two years, which kept her away from her family, friends and social life. But she says that it was

her way of showing everyone her determination to succeed.

Future projects

She wants to develop and expand the company into Africa.

Advice

Yared advises women to be determined in whatever they do. Women can do anything, she says, and can even be stronger than men in fields considered "traditionally male". 



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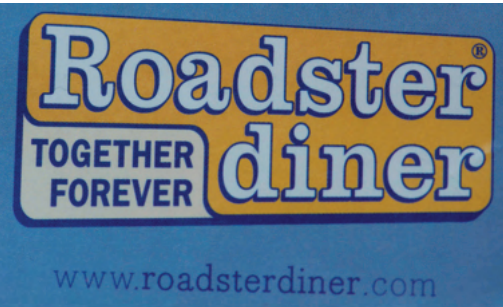
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Serving peace of mind

The brand, the consumer and the management of a reputation crisis *By Nabila Rahhal and Thomas Schellen*



When Lebanon's health ministry last year embarked on a proactive national food safety campaign, it disrupted industries that by all indications had been complacent for far too long. Inspections of establishments in all parts of the citizens' food supply chain revealed practices ranging from bad to repulsive to outright criminal — such as unsafe storage of perishables, non separation of waste bins from food preparation areas, and sale of spoilt foods.

Whether such violations of both official standards and common sense are concentrated in specific segments of the food industry, and whether the longstanding laxness of supervision caused the entrenchment of potentially disastrous practices in food sector establishments, are questions that cannot be answered conclusively at this point.

It also has yet to emerge whether the personal crusading of Minister of Health Wael Abu Faour, laudable as the act is, can be solidified into a regulatory and supervisory presence that will award the Lebanese consumers with a universally enhanced level of food safety.

What can already be said, however, is that some brand owners in the Lebanese hospitality industry are now paying much greater attention to the need for crisis readiness. This increased attention, claims the chief executive of Roadster Diner Donald Daccache, at his

firm entails both a new food safety plan and reputation management in case of a crisis.

Roadster Diner, a successful local chain of casual restaurants, was among the handful of branded companies that were named by Abu Faour in November as safety violators. According to the minister's publicized list, a tested chicken product from one Roadster Diner was in violation of standards. Daccache admits management was hit unprepared by this. "We didn't have a crisis management team at the time and, as we were very surprised [by the situation], tended to be reactive," he says.

Immediately, the reactive method did not perform all that well for the company. There were some blips and misunderstandings in communication. Negative word of mouth spread faster than the positive one and Daccache says, "we felt that we were hit financially and at a reputation level."

Reputation risk is a paramount issue for any company that derives most of its value from brand equity — and according to Daccache the brand and the people represented "at least 70 percent" of the (double digit) millions of dollars he paid for a controlling stake in Roadster Diner in 2013 in an intra-family takeover.

Despite the expanded importance of brand reputation and heightened impact potential of associated risks, crisis management is not yet a common capability in Lebanon, says Nadine Yehya, professor of marketing at the American University of Beirut. She explains that the lack of plans or teams for crisis management is due to the infrequency at which local companies and business owners have been challenged by media or consumers.

"Whereas companies in the US have strategies in place to deal with all crises

that might arise in their line of work, reactions [of Lebanese companies] are more responsive to crises and sometimes they are quite emotional, even though that is not the case with large well structured corporations but more with smaller restaurants," Yehya says. She adds, however, that consumers are becoming more attuned to challenging corporations and demanding their rights from them alongside increased attention that the media is giving stories related to corporations and brands.

HOW TO REACT

Yehya explains that there are several responses which are most commonly used by crisis management teams to protect a brand's image after negative news has been shared through media outlets. She adds that, today, with the prevalence of social media, consumers can reach a corporation directly, which is an aspect that crisis management has to take into consideration.

One response, according to Yehya, is the "no comment" approach, where the corporation keeps a low profile until the negative news is forgotten by the consumer. Speaking about Lebanon's recent food safety scare, Yehya says: "At first, people were impressed with the minister's campaign but with time, they got tired or 'burnt out', from a consumers' perspective. They don't want to overthink every aspect of their lives and want to go back to their comfort zones, away from high agitation. That's why many corporations use the 'no comment' approach and wait until the storm has passed."

According to Daccache, this method of stepping back from emotional and reactive responses worked for the company and as the negative buzz subsided, the year-on-year contraction in revenues moderated to about four

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percent by February, compared to the nearly 10 percent contraction in the first month after accusations made the rounds in November.

As Yehya also points out, however, not commenting has its own dangers. She warns that one of these dangers is that consumers would come to believe that corporations have something they are trying to hide, especially when communication is via social media where ‘no comments’ are perceived as shirking.

Another restaurant chain, Kababji, which offers traditional Lebanese food, says that it countered being mentioned in Abu Faour’s list of food safety violators head-on via social networks. “Through our social media channels, we communicated with our customers directly, assuring them that we were investigating the issue. This was very important to us because sometimes there are misperceptions or misinformation,” says Boudy Boustany, head of marketing at Kababji.

According to him, Kababji received minimal negative comments from consumers and the brand was barely affected by the uproar over the food safety campaign launched by Minister Abu Faour. As Boustany describes it, “The first thing we did was validate the information from the source, getting the details from the ministry on what exactly the issue was. Then, we went through our entire supply chain to see if there was a glitch in our system and set a marketing strategy with our team. Finally, we communicated with our customers in a transparent manner and moved on with our usual strategy of focusing on quality and customer experience.”

Kababji’s approach mirrors what Yehya lists as best practices in crisis management, where a corporation should start its response with self examination, assessment of what changes are needed, development of a change strategy and then communication of the improved processes to stakeholders, along with

giving reassurance that the company’s primary concern is about quality and the consumer.

LEARNING FROM THE CRISIS

Both Kababji and Roadster stand out as brands in an environment where the vast majority of restaurant operators are much less defined. Each of the two eateries has invested in building a community, and loyal consumers defended them on social media channels when the allegations against them were first aired.

Roadster, which has more restaurants and which according to Daccache started thinking in brand development terms about 10 years ago, has an edge in the brand journey when judging from the number of its

“WHAT THE MINISTER DID IS QUITE GOOD IN TERMS OF SHAKING THE PEOPLE UP”

social media followers on Facebook — over 168,000 — about three times that of Kababji.

This in turn implies that Roadster would have more to lose than many other hospitality companies if its brand sustains significant damage from a food safety crisis or other reputation impediment.

Daccache claims that in addition to the lack of crisis management preparedness a second surprise factor in Roadster’s experience with the food scandal was that the company had previously felt rather secure in their food safety standards, as it had established and certified processes in place and maintained ISO 22000 certification, a derivative of ISO 9000 dealing with food safety.

The main lessons that Roadster internalized from the recent crisis, according to Daccache, were to avoid reactive behavior and always have an up to date crisis management plan and communications strategy. The

company addressed these needs by bringing a public relations company on board with a reputation for crisis management skills.

Besides these insights, he and his team felt a “definite push” on the food safety level. “We have a very solid strong system but, in Beirut, you have lots of challenges, and so we have to personally do the job of carrying out safety checks on many levels,” Daccache says. He cites problems of water pollution all throughout the food chain and suppliers with fake certification as examples of such challenges.

Procedures for checking the safety of fresh produce have been stepped up and Roadster is looking into establishing its own food safety laboratory for its current and eventual incoming brands, he adds. However, a plan for donating a food lab to the government was a miscommunication, Daccache explains. He even puts a positive angle on the health ministry’s new vigor for inspections by saying, “I think what the minister did is quite good in terms of shaking the people up.”

In dollar terms, Roadster has dedicated 40 percent of its marketing budget — \$500,000 — since November to communicate about food safety. However, the food safety and communications program are still in the planning phase. “Getting back on track needs a lot of time and we are getting prepared for full communication,” Daccache explains. He adds that full implementation of all planned new controls at the intended pace will take one to two years.

In the end, the exposure to food safety problems suffered by sizeable local brands such as Roadster and Kababji may help the entire sector — including many unbranded players — understand the seriousness of the need to improve. “We will react to this professionally,” Daccache emphasizes, “and we take our business extremely seriously. Whatever tips this crisis could give us to become better, we are open to critiques and learning.”





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Guess who's coming to dinner?

Tokyo based Cookpad pays \$13.5 million for Lebanon's NetSila



The team behind NetSila will continue to manage operations under Cookpad MENA

In every corporate narrative, some dates are noted as remarkable, while others less so. For the founders of Shahiya, a digital portal for Lebanese culinary secrets and cooking instructions, January 28, 2015 is one such memorable date. It is the day when NetSila, the holding company that owns the five year young Shahiya recipe site, completed the last step of handing over its entire equity to Japanese acquirer Cookpad for \$13.5 million, as well as the date they had to evacuate the Cookpad team on only its second visit to Beirut.

Just as the ink was drying on the papers that would finalize the acquisition, a cross border exchange of fire, including rockets, erupted on the country's southern border in what is considered the most significant military confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah since 2006. There is perhaps no better example of the Lebanese security situation taking its toll on business than the anecdote of having to evacuate the buyer.

For those of us used to these cyclical bursts of violent happenings, generally without

COOKPAD IS A RARE EXAMPLE OF A JAPANESE COMPANY BUYING AN ARAB STARTUP

escalation, it would be good to remember this is not necessarily something that falls within the comfort zone of your average buyer — and certainly not your average Japanese one. Tokyo was ranked the safest city globally by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Safe Cities Index 2015, with third largest Japanese city Osaka also ranked high at number three.

Perhaps not surprising, then, is the absence of significant Japanese investment in Lebanon. Cookpad, which operates in the same digital space as NetSila but with global ambitions, is a rare example of

a Japanese company buying an Arab startup. Though the Japanese embassy in Lebanon could not confirm whether Shahiya was the first acquisition made by a Japanese company, they did assert that Japanese investment in Lebanon was marginal. Japan does not appear on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) list of foreign direct investment into Lebanon by country, which includes 15 states.

THE BUSINESS OF FOOD

But while Beirut and Tokyo are very different in terms of lifestyle, security and culture, there is something that brings Lebanese and Japanese people together: food.

Food, that is, and the internet. In the increasingly digital world, where content perusing has shifted to the web and mobile platforms, the Shahiya team is still convinced that some things have remained the same, particularly people's appreciation of, and fascination with, food. "The tools are changing, but the relationship, the need, is constant," says Daniel Neuwirth, cofounder of Shahiya. The portal, created in 2010, was focused on food all the way. "We really wanted food, the best in food, only food," says Hala Labaki, cofounder and CEO of Shahiya. Labaki and Neuwirth are two of the four cofounders of the platform, along with Carole Makhoul Hani and César Gemayel.

Cooking up the concept for Shahiya in a period when digital business in Beirut was very young and new startups could still find virgin markets, the four founders tell *EXECUTIVE* that they specifically moved back to Lebanon to start the venture. Living abroad at the time,

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they saw promising signs that internet penetration in Lebanon, which had been lagging behind, would increase. “We sensed very positive growth signals in this industry in particular. And we thought, ok, let’s do something,” says Labaki.

Five years on, the numbers proved them right in so many ways. Usage of the new site roared along with roughly 100 percent annual expansion in user numbers and peak consumption during Ramadan, the Shahiya team says, citing a “smooth” progression to 3 million unique visitors per month at the time of acquisition. In terms of turning a profit from their advertising based business model,

the team would not say more than claiming they are “almost there.”

But present operational profits should momentarily be a reward of very minor concern for the founders and NetSila’s two local financial investors, Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP) and the Building Block Equity Fund. By far the most dramatic growth ratio in the venture’s short history is its increase in valuation when you compare the \$13.5 million sale price cited by MEVP to the valuation in 2012 when MEVP and the Building Block Equity Fund injected \$500,000 (\$250,000 each) into the company.

According to Walid Hanna, managing partner at MEVP, the two financial investors each took an 11.1 percent stake at the time, implying a valuation of \$2.25 million. This translates into, for Lebanese standards, an almost incredible valuation leap of 500 percent in under three years. It also means that the two funds each walk away with close to \$1.5 million and the cofounders with over \$10 million shared between them. Labaki, however, would not go into those details and says the quartet did not wish to disclose the shareholding structure at the time of the exit.

For Shahiya, having no prior ties to Cookpad, it was a bit of a surprise when their eager Japanese colleagues contacted them via LinkedIn. Labaki acknowledges that while they hadn’t anticipated an exit so soon, when building a company that resembles companies in other more mature countries, the idea of an exit was not entirely far fetched. “You always think about what is the global player that can acquire you, because this is a big part of the game. You’re not obsessed about it, but you’re aware,” she says.

For Cookpad, the company had been waiting to sink its teeth into an Arabic language food portal. After investing in Indonesian recipe

service DapurMasak in 2014 and acquiring American recipe apps provider Allthecooks and Spanish recipe provider Mis Recetas in 2014, the Shahiya acquisition was Cookpad’s fourth installment in their chosen quest of virtually conquering the food world.

While food appreciation remains a human staple, one thing the digital age has brought on is the appetite for user-based companies to expand globally. Tomoya Yasuda, head of international business development at Cookpad, had been busy scouring markets for potential buys, and settled on Shahiya because he claims they were the “largest in the region” in the domain of food. When

THIS IS FOR LEBANESE STANDARDS, AN ALMOST INCREDIBLE VALUATION LEAP OF 500 PERCENT IN UNDER THREE YEARS

EXECUTIVE jokingly asked Yasuda if Cookpad was seeking world domination, his answer was short and to the point: “Yes.”

BIG IN JAPAN

Cookpad is listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) and has seen its share price grow by over 250 percent in the past two years, taking the closing of the NetSila deal on January 28, 2015 as a reference date at which the value of the Cookpad stock was JPY 5,000 (approximately \$42). Coming after years when the Japanese stock market had been in slow-cook mode, the stock’s rise came in context of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic reform policy — coined Abenomics — initiated in 2012, which has consisted of fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms that have led to a boom in the Japanese stock market overall.



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However, Cookpad's share price growth was unusual even when taking this positive environment into account as the stock outperformed the TSE's broadest index — the TOPIX general index — almost four times over the same two year reference period.

According to Cookpad's latest financial disclosures, the company achieved sales of JPY 6.7 billion (\$56.4 million at current exchange rates) and net income of JPY 1.52 billion (\$12.8 million at current exchange rates) in an eight month period ending on December 31, 2014. The company did not calculate percentage changes as the reporting period reflected a change in the financial year from April to December.

According to its full year financial statements for 2013 (ending in April 2014), sales increased 30.5 percent between 2012 and 2013 from JPY 5 billion (\$42 million at current exchange rates) to JPY 6.5 billion (\$54.7 million at current exchange rates). Their largest revenue is in premium services, which make up over half of their sales, with most of the remainder in advertising. By the end of Q4 they had 44.04 million monthly unique users, with 1,300,000 paid members for their premium services business, served by 181 employees. In addition to their acquisitions of the other food companies, they also acquired Coach United, a Japanese marketplace of private lessons, to diversify their business in Japan.

THE CROSSOVER

NetSila will become Cookpad MENA, which is wholly owned by Cookpad and registered in Lebanon. The Shahiya team will stay on board as managers to guide the growth of Cookpad MENA.

Both parties are understandably excited about the amalgamation.



“COOKPAD ONLY GIVES US MORE MEANS TO GROW FASTER AND MORE AGGRESSIVELY IN OUR STRATEGY”

“Cookpad only gives us more means to grow faster and more aggressively in our strategy,” says Labaki. “More technology, more experience in a lot of things: data, technology, user behavior, [user interface]. They have maybe one of the best [specialists] in [user interface/user experience] in Japan.” Both companies spoke of staff exchanges between the MENA team and the Japanese team, though Yasuda, when asked how that will be affected by the security situation, acknowledged “I don’t know, to be honest.”

Cookpad is set on the steady growth of Cookpad MENA. An investment from the parent company will help fuel Cookpad MENA's growth in the region. While the Shahiya founders would not disclose the amount, Neuwirth said “it’s easily at par with [venture capital] funding.” He adds, “We always had ambitions about growing much larger than we are today but the difference now is that the

partnership with Cookpad just came to the table and it came out that with Cookpad, we will be growing faster.”

Cookpad MENA is to turn into a subscription based business in line with its Japanese parent, whose managers are staunch believers in that model. “In terms of financials, as of today, subscription business [brings] major resources, and I think that’s what we should do ... whether we can deliver enough value for the users, that’s the key,” says Yasuda. Subscription is the most profitable line of business for Cookpad in Japan.

For the Cookpad MENA team, as well as their Japanese parent company, regional expansion is the way forward. But this begs the question: since Lebanon and the Middle East have so many obstacles stifling business — the lack of credible capital markets, for one — would the kind of growth that Cookpad MENA is looking for be possible without the help of a larger, parent company? While Labaki has seen her fair share of obstacles, she was confident in the capability of Lebanese bred business. “With the right financing we could have become a very serious and annoying player,” she says.

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On February 12, **Byblos Bank** and **MasterCard** celebrated the success of their latest "Fly to the Swiss Alps" offer, that allowed hundreds of cardholders to redeem 29,000 of their accumulated Points/Miles for a travel ticket to Switzerland during winter's high season.

The annual **Pikasso d'Or Awards**, a competition showcasing the best work in Out Of Home advertising and creativity, announced its 2014 winners during its 22nd awards ceremony on February 19 in the presence of HE Minister of Tourism Michel Pharaon.

The **US Embassy-funded BALADI** program launched the second call for applications for funding for municipal development projects.

Al Mawarid Real Estate, the real estate arm of Al Mawarid Bank, introduced its latest real estate project in Ashrafieh designed by Youssef Tohme Architects and Associates.

BSEC has launched and co-placed with **Fransa Invest Bank** an auto-loan securitization issuance for **Century Motor Company SAL**, the exclusive distributor of **Hyundai** vehicles in Lebanon.

During the month of the Francophonie, **Cre8mania** is organizing a special event under the patronage of the Swiss embassy in Lebanon and in partnership with **Saint-Joseph University**.

Roger Abed & Sons launched the new venue Le Blanc Bleu for weddings and all other private ceremonies in Halat, on the seaside road.

King Food S.A.L. recently introduced the Big Fish Sandwich to its lineup of menu items in recognition of the Lent season.

As part of the "Choose Wellness, Choose **Nestlé**" campaign, Nestlé invited people in the Middle East to join its new activation in malls across the GCC, Lebanon and Jordan to help children adopt a healthy and more active lifestyle by donating footballs to the youth.

After covering more than 9,000 kilometers spanning Argentina, Chile and Bolivia, **Mini** won the Dakar Rally for the fourth time in a row.

Bank Audi's performance in 2014 confirms the suitability of the Group's diversification strategy in the prevailing operating environment and its aptness for growth, with consolidated net profits rising by 15 percent relative to 2013 to reach \$350 million, 42 percent of which are in entities outside Lebanon.

The **Ecole Supérieure des Affaires** and **SGBL** organized the 38th management breakfast, moderated by Alexandre George, professor at ESCP Europe and at ESA, in the presence of more than 50 participants.

The all-electric **Nissan LEAF** has beat its own sales record with a 33 percent increase in sales in 2014 over the previous year.

The **American University of Beirut Medical Center** celebrated the inauguration of its new Medical Administration Building on January 19, 2015.

Radisson Blu Martinez Beirut was given a "Green Key" Certificate, the global eco-label for accommodation, and is the first hotel in Lebanon to achieve full environmental certification for environmental conservation.

Byblos Bank released full-year results for 2014, reporting healthy ratios and respectable increases in assets, deposits, loans and profit despite challenging local and regional conditions.

Nissan has become the most awarded automotive brand in the **Global Cristal** awards for last year while Nissan Middle East garnered more of the awards than any other Nissan office worldwide.

Dunya Restaurant management hosted a select crowd of media representatives who participated in a luncheon to share with them the passion of "Dunya".

Alfa announced that it has launched in collaboration with **BLOM Bank** a new and unique offer allowing Alfa postpaid subscribers to buy the latest smartphones in 6 to 12 installments.

Hala Ajam recently joined monthly **Toufoula Foundation** on its mission to help children suffering from cancer and blood diseases.

Etihad Airways carried a record number of passengers and cargo in 2014, marking its strongest operational performance to date.

Mashrou3 el Jil el Jdid was launched for the fifth consecutive year with the support of famous Lebanese actor Georges Khabbaz.

Paule Ka announced the appointment of Catherine Vautrin as chairman and chief executive officer of the company whose role will be to guide the evolution of the brand's identity and to continue with its expansion both in France and abroad.

The Body Shop's new limited edition body care and fragrance range draws inspiration from flowers and hot spices.

Since its inception in September 2012 until end of December 2014, **Banque Libano-Française's** total return bond fund generated a net cumulative return of 14.2 percent.

Starting a year of tributes to the shoe that started a movement, **Adidas Originals** presents the Superstar model in its original form for the Vintage Deluxe Pack.

Bassoul Heneine sal, the official **BMW Group** importer in Lebanon, announced three powerful new BMW M vehicles this spring following their unveiling at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit last month.

Nissan Middle East has honored its finest sales executives and service technicians from throughout the region at a gala event in Dubai.

Mindshare, part of **WPP** and a global media agency, is pleased to announce a change to its team in the UAE with the selection of Nicholas Coetzee as the new regional head of digital at **Mindshare MENA**.

Nissan Motor Co., Ltd. announced improved financial results for the nine months to December 31, 2014, as solid US sales, cost efficiencies and favorable currency movements contributed to a 23.6 percent rise in net income.

Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. announced new and expanded display products at the 2015 International Consumer Electronics Show, including a complete line-up of Curved monitors and SMART LED Signage.

Byblos Bank launched a new personal loan offer allowing its clients to get \$14,900 for \$299 per month over six years, while exempting them from two installment payments.

Under the banner "Creating Possibilities, Shaping the Future," **Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.**, unveiled its vision for smarter living at the company's 2015 International Consumer Electronics Show press conference.

Sakker El Dekkene association honored agents and officers from the Ras Beirut Pilot Police Station on Bliss Street, rewarding them for fighting corruption, arresting bribers and referring their cases to the general prosecution.

T. Gargour & Fils have announced the launch of the **Mercedes-Maybach S-Class** in Lebanon.

Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. announced that it has received the coveted Monochrome Printer/MFP Line of the Year Award for the second consecutive year, along with five awards for Outstanding Achievement at the 2015 **Buyers Laboratory** Winter Awards.

The UK's **HMG Aerospace** announced that **flydubai** has won, for the second year in a row, the "best airline IFE provider for the Middle East" at the third Inflight Magazine Awards.

Adidas's Ultra BOOST answers every runners needs by offering the very best in energy return, support, stability, comfort and style.

Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel Beirut launched its new 'One Touch' mobile application during a press conference held at Celtis meeting room.

As a renowned innovator in its field, and in recognition of its historical connection to the ocean, **Blancpain** collaborated with **The Economist** to present the Ocean Innovation Challenge.

Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. unveiled the new Galaxy A7, one of the slimmest

Galaxy smartphones equipped with premium hardware for a superior social experience.

Etihaad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, has donated more than 100,000 dirhams to underprivileged communities in Sri Lanka.

Rotana has published its Sustainability Report for 2014 as part of the Group's commitment to addressing environmental, social and economic priority areas and measuring the progress and performance of their CSR and sustainability initiatives.

On February 16, **Nissan** launched its 2015 Juke at a regional launch event in Dubai. The latest Urban Crossover will be available from all Nissan dealerships across the region starting February.

Following the success of the "On the way to your safety" campaign launched in 2013, **Total Liban** has re-launched this Total group program for the 2014/2015 school year with 4,000 other children.

Mini, the British premium brand, continued its success in the annual readers' choice rankings of "auto, motor und sport" magazine with a double victory.

Officine Panerai is pleased to announce the stages for the 2015 Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge during which enthusiasts will once again see these Grandes Dames of the Sea do battle.

The **Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program** at the **American University of Beirut**, Faculty of Medicine and Medical Center in joint providership with **Cleveland Clinic** held its seventh regional conference on January 31.

Sidel, the leading global provider of PET solutions for liquid packaging and **Nestlé Waters** have been in a successful partnership for 50 years.

SGBL sponsored the "AGRAFE" project, which was officially launched by France's

ambassador, HE Patrice Paoli, during a press conference at the Residence des Pins in the presence of the French Consul Cécile Longé, the project's partners and members of the press.

Creditbank S.A.L on February 11, 2015, was the first bank in Lebanon and one of the first in the Middle East and North Africa region to launch the Multi-Currency Prepaid Card by MasterCard.

Impex, the exclusive dealer of **Chevrolet** and **Cadillac**, is proud to have hosted a blood drive for Donner Sang Compter on January 23 at its Service Center.

Officine Panerai pays tribute to Galileo through Lo Scenziato – Luminor 1950 Tourbillon GMT Ceramica, a watch of remarkable technical content with costly finishing.

Dermapro anticipated the uptake of microsurgery and non-surgical solutions trend by launching a new medical clinic, detox and wellness center in Saifi.

Under the patronage of Minister of Tourism Michel Pharaon, the 12th edition of **Wedding Follies** took place from February 19 to 22.

Land Rover has launched the first in a series of inspirational films with the story of an emotional journey that motivated UAE-based adventurer and entrepreneur Nizar Fakhoury to start Climb for Cancer.

The **Heartbeat Association** launched the "Heartbeat Box" initiative, at ABC Mall Ashrafieh, on February 5.

Jaguar MENA has revealed the prize winners of its Design XE competition which ran from September to December, 2014, in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Air Arabia announced its financial results for the full year ending 31 December, 2014, reflecting another year of continued growth and high levels of profitability.

Bahrain-based **MBA Fakhro Group** has announced the formation of **Voyager IT Solutions**, a Kerala, India-based company that will represent and spearhead the Group's expansion in the internet sector.

The **Coca-Cola Foundation**, in partnership with **INJAZ Al-Arab**, have declared the winners of the sixth edition of the 'Ripples of Happiness' program from a wide variety of projects submitted by hundreds of Arab youth across the Middle East.

Lime Tree invited local media representatives and their loved ones to enjoy an original dining experience from February 3 to 9.

Aishti announced the winners of the 2015 Jaguar F-Type Coupe V6 in an outdoor ceremony in front of the brand's flagship store in Downtown Beirut on February 10.

Eucerin® launched the AtopiControl cleansing, caring and active range of products.

Joining together in the UAE, North Africa and Middle East, **NAME** leaders in dentistry and public health launched a regional campaign to stop cavities.

Wild Discovery signed with the **University of Saint Joseph** the renewal of the sales training program, the first tourism training initiative in Lebanon co-signed by the private and the academic sectors.

Saad and Trad, the exclusive dealer of **Jaguar** in Lebanon, announced that the Jaguar XE model was nominated the "Most Beautiful Car of 2014" at the 30th "Festival Automobile International" in Paris.

KidzMondo will open in the first quarter of 2016 in Doha, Qatar. The exciting project will be brought to life in partnership with the leading Qatari conglomerate, **Aura Retail Company**.

Majid Al Futtaim announced that **VOX Cinemas Lebanon** has enjoyed the highest attendance at any cinema in Lebanon in 2014.

Reliance Communications, India's fully-integrated telecommunications service provider, entered into a multi-year, multi-million dollar mega-agreement with **Avaya Inc.** to transform its call center operations.

The highly anticipated 500L Trekking model by **Fiat** has arrived to **Saad & Trad** Showrooms in Beirut.

The 2015 **Qatar Motor Show** played host to **Porsche's** latest automotive advancements in the form of four regional premieres as the brand revealed a new age of performance benchmarks within the motoring industry.

King Food S.A.L., the **Burger King** brand franchisee in Lebanon, recently introduced the upgraded Chicken Royal Steakhouse sandwich across all local branches.

Harry's Bar, an upscale Italian restaurant, is situated a short distance from the business district and the hubs that animate Beirut's nightlife.

The **Cisco** 2015 Annual Security Report released on February 2 examined both threat intelligence and cybersecurity trends, revealing that organizations must adopt an 'all hands on deck' approach to defend against cyber attacks.

Boecker granted its exclusive Q-Platinum Award to all F&B outlets at **Phoenicia Intercontinental**.

Boecker launched a specialized innovative cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism to deliver special training sessions to the ministry's food inspectors.



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7 Mar	Youth to Business Forum	AIESEC	+961 76 948001; abdallahman.hajjar@aiesec.net	lb.aiesec.org
17-19 Mar	Arabnet	Arabnet	+961 1 751 180; info@arabnet.me	www.arabnet.me
26-27 Mar	MENA Games Conferences	IFP	+961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
15-17 Apr	CSR Levant	Informa Middle East	+971 4 335 2437; register-mea@informa.com	www.csrlevant.com
18-Mar	Build IT Green Lebanon	e-Ecosolutions	+961 9 856565; events@eecosolutions.com	www.eecosolutions.com/events
2-3 Apr	The Fifth Risk Management Annual Forum	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
29 Apr - 1 May	IEEE	IEEE	icm2013@ul.edu.lb	sdiwc.net/conferences/taeece2015
8-9 May	EU Lebanon Cooperation Day	IFP	+961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
5-6 May	Arab Economic Forum	Al Iktissad Wal Aamal	+961 1 740 173; forums@iktissad.com	www.iktissadevents.com
26-27 May	The Smart Banking Event	Arabcom	+961 5 450212; yp@arabcomgroup.com	www.arabcomgroup.com
11-12 Jun	The Third Media Economic Forum on: "The Role of Media in Promoting the Economic Boom in the Arab World"	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
6-7 Aug	Financial Inclusion and its Role in Economic Development	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
DUBAI				
8-9 Mar	Eighteenth Global Women Leader Conference	Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
8-11 Mar	Dubai Lynx Festival	Dubai Lynx	+971 4 427 3090; emmal@f@dubailynx.com	www.dubailynx.com
9-10 Mar	Outreach 2015 - The Digital Marketing Summit	Fleming Gulf	+971 4 609 1555; info@fleminggulf.com	www.fleminggulf.com
17-18 Mar	The Cargo Show	Terrapinn	+971 4440 2500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
22-Mar	GCC International Water Day Summit	Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
22-26 Mar	Sixth GCC 2020 Human Resource Conference	Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
23-25 Mar	Building Future Learning Spaces	Informa Middle East	+971 4 336 5161; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
24-26 Mar	Real Time Communication	Fleming Gulf	+971 4 609 1555; info@fleminggulf.com	www.fleminggulf.com
30-31 Mar	Middle East Investment Summit	Terrapinn	+971 4440 2500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
13-14 Apr	The World Takaful Conference	MEGA Events	+971 4 343 1200; yasmeen@megaevents.net	www.megaevents.net
14-15 Apr	Fourth Annual Logistics in Oil, Gas and Petrochemicals Summit	Fleming Gulf	+971 4 609 1555; info@fleminggulf.com	www.fleminggulf.com
26-30 Apr	Strategy Leaders Forum	Informa Middle East	+971 4 336 5161; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
29-30 Apr	Communications Technology and Information Security in Banks Forum	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
ABU DHABI				
2-3 Mar	Managing Human Assets in Energy Forum	EPOC Messe Frankfurt	+971 4 389 4500; info@epocmessefrankfurt.com	www.epocmessefrankfurt.com
9-10 Mar	Global Forum for Innovations Agriculture	Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority	+971 02 234 8400; info@InnovationsInAgriculture.com	www.InnovationsInAgriculture.com
9-11 Mar	Third Annual Port Management Strategy Summit	Fleming Gulf	+971 4 609 1555; info@fleminggulf.com	www.fleminggulf.com
16-17 Mar	Economic Diversification & Development Forum	BME Global	+44 207 511 9582; info@dme-global.com	www.bme-global.com
22-28 Mar	SOGAT 2015	Dome Exhibitions - Abu Dhabi	+971 2 674 4040; neha@domeexhibitions.com	www.sogat.org
24-26 Mar	Abilities SME Exhibition and Conference	DMG Events	+971 4 438 0355; dmgdubai@dmgeventsme.com	www.dmgevents.com
31 Mar - 2 Apr	National Security Summit Middle East	IQPC Middle East	+971 4 364 2975; enquiry@iqpc.ae	www.iqpc.ae
QATAR				
10-11 Mar	Qatar Projects Conference	Meed Events	+971 4818 0200; events@meed.com	www.meed.com
24-25 Mar	The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Forum	Fleming Gulf	+971 4 609 1555; info@fleminggulf.com	www.fleminggulf.com
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1-2 Mar	Cyber Defence Summit	Naseba	+971 4 3671376; alir@naseba.com	www.cyberdefencesummit.com
23-24 Mar	Hospitality Expansion	Naseba	+971 4 3671376; mohammed@hotelexpansion.com	www.kingdomhotelexpansion.com
14-15 Apr	WEPower	BME Global	+44 207 511 9582; info@dme-global.com	www.bme-global.com
OMAN				
1-4 Mar	10th Annual Asset Integrity Management Summit	IQPC Middle East	+971 4 364 2975; enquiry@iqpc.ae	www.iqpc.ae
16-18 Mar	Oman Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition and Conference	Oman Expo	+968 246 60124; info@omanexpo.com	www.omanexpo.com
19-21 May	Oman Energy and Water Exhibition and Conference	Oman Expo	+968 246 60124; info@omanexpo.com	www.omanexpo.com
TURKEY				
5-6 Mar	The Fifth Arab-Turkish Economic Dialogue	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	-
16-17 Mar	Eighth Annual Turkey Energy and Infrastructure Finance Conference	Euromoney Seminars	+44 20 7779 7222; registrations@euromoneyplc.com	www.euromoneyseminars.com
25-26 Mar	Pipeline Security 2015 Summit	International Research Networks	+971 4453 3515; info.me@irn-international.com	www.irn-international.com
BAHRAIN				
8-11 Mar	Middle East Oil Show	Arabian Exhibition Management	+973 17 550033; fawzi@aemallworld.com	www.meos2015.com
27-29 Apr	Bahrain Energy and Infrastructure Forum	Meed Events	+971 4818 0200; events@meed.com	www.meed.com
EGYPT				
1-2 Apr	The Arab Banking Conference	Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
TURKEY				
25-26 Mar	Pipeline Security 2015	International Research Networks	+971 4453 3515; info.me@irn-international.com	www.irn-international.com
1-2 Apr	Turkish-Arab Economic Forum	Al Iktissad Wal Aamal	+961 1 780 200; forums@iktissad.com	www.iktissadevents.com

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EXHIBITIONS

DATE	NAME	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT / E-MAIL	WEBSITE
LEBANON				
6-9 Mar	In Shape	Careers	+961 5 456745; info@esquareme.com	www.esquareme.com
20-23 Apr	HORECA Lebanon	Hospitality Services	+961 1 480081; info@hospitalityservices.com.lb	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb
29 Apr - 1 May	IEEE	IEEE	icm2013@ul.edu.lb	sdiwc.net/conferences/taeece2015
13-17 May	Beirut Boat	IFP	+961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
21-24 May	Men's World 2015	Fairs and Exhibitions World	+961 3 823447; linahaj@fewlb.com	
26-30 May	Garden Show & Spring Festival	Hospitality Services	+961 1 480081; info@hospitalityservices.com.lb	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb
2-5 Jun	Project Lebanon	IFP	+961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
DUBAI				
2-4 Mar	Paperworld Middle East	EPOC Messe Frankfurt	+971 4 389 4500; info@epocmessefrankfurt.com	www.epocmessefrankfurt.com
2-4 Mar	Middle East Electricity	IIR Middle East	+971 24935168; infoex@iirme.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
16-18 Mar	Agra ME	IIR Middle East	+971 24935168; infoex@iirme.com	www.agramiddleeast.com
17-18 Mar	The Cargo Show MENA 2015	Terrapinn Middle East	+971 4440 2500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
14-16 Apr	Aluminium Middle East	Reed Exhibitions	+971 4 364 2813; wellah.ellis@reedexpo.ae	www.reedexpo.com
15-17 Apr	Gulf Education and Training Exhibition	International Conferences & Exhibitions	+971 4335 5001; info@icedxb.com	www.icedxb.com
21-23 Apr	Arab Oil & Gas	International Conferences & Exhibitions	+971 43355001; info@icedxb.com	www.icedxb.com
ABU DHABI				
21-23 Apr	Cityscape Abu Dhabi	IIR Middle East	+971 24935168; infoex@iirme.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
27-29 Apr	Al Ain Education and Career Fair	IIR Middle East	+971 4 336 5161; infoex@iirme.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
22-24 Apr	Gulf Education and Training Exhibition	International Conferences and Exhibitions	+971 4335 5001; info@icedxb.com	www.icedxb.com
KSA				
1-2 Mar	Saudi Plastics & Petrochem - Jeddah	Riyadh Exhibitions Company	+966 1 2295604; info@recexpo.com	www.recexpo.com
18-21 Feb	Saudi Print & Pack - Jeddah	Riyadh Exhibitions Company	+966 1 2295604; info@recexpo.com	www.recexpo.com
9-12 Mar	The Big 5	DMG Events	+971 4 438 0355; dmgdubai@dmgeventsme.com	www.dmgevents.com
5-7 Apr	Future Makkah	IIR Middle East	+971 4 3352437; register@iirme.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
14-15 Apr	WEPower	BME Global	+44 207 511 9582; info@dme-global.com	www.bme-global.com
3-5 May	The Hotel Saudi	DMG Events	+971 4 438 0355; dmgdubai@dmgeventsme.com	www.dmgevents.com
5-7 Apr	Cityscape Jeddah	IIR Middle East	+971 4 3352437; register@iirme.com	www.cityscapejeddah.com
OMAN				
16-18 Mar	Oman Refining & Petrochemical	Oman Expo	+968 2 4660124; info@omanexpo.com	www.motorshow-oman.com
30 Mar - 2 Apr	The Big Show 2015	Oman Expo	+968 2 4660124; info@omanexpo.com	www.motorshow-oman.com
20-22 Apr	Global Higher Education Exhibition	OITE	+968 2465 6010; sales@ghedex.om	www.oite.com
27 Apr - 1 May	COMEX IT, Telecom and Technology Show	OITE	+968 2465 6010; sales@ghedex.om	www.oite.com
EGYPT				
9-12 Apr	Cityscape Egypt	IIR Middle East	+971 4 3352437; register@iirme.com	www.cityscapeegypt.com
IRAQ				
9-12 Mar	Project Iraq	IFP	+961 5 959111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
BAHRAIN				
14-Apr	7th Food & Hospitality Expo 2015	Bahrain Exhibitions	+973 17558800; beca@beca.bh	www.bahrainexhibitions.com
12-14 May	GULF INTERIORS 2015	Bahrain Exhibitions	+973 17558800; beca@beca.bh	www.bahrainexhibitions.com
12-14 May	Gulf Property Show 2015	Bahrain Exhibitions	+973 17558800; beca@beca.bh	www.bahrainexhibitions.com

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> **Women's rights****(Un)happily ever after**

Lebanon's patchwork of personal status laws is failing women

All couples hope their marriages will work out and they will live happily ever after. But the truth is that many relationships end in divorce and Lebanese couples are no exception. According to a 2012 study by the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, there were almost 6,000 divorces in 2010. The issue for these couples and for society at large is how to ensure a fair separation that guarantees the rights of each spouse and protects their children.

On that front, Lebanon is failing miserably to ensure fair treatment of women. It is widely known that Lebanon does not have a civil code regulating personal status matters. Instead, there are 15 separate personal status laws for the different recognized religious communities, which are administered by separate religious courts. Human Rights Watch (HRW) recently reviewed 447 legal judgments issued by these religious courts to examine how they handle divorce, child custody and financial issues emanating from separations or divorce. The cases, dating from 2009–2012, were selected at random.

The findings were troubling. Lebanon's religion-based laws discriminate against women across the religious spectrum. Women had lesser rights than men to ask for divorce. Under Lebanon's Shia, Sunni and Druze laws, men can demand a divorce at any time — unilaterally, and without cause — while a woman's ability to access divorce is limited, and often at great cost and after lengthy court proceedings. In principle, Islamic laws allow women to have an explicit clause inserted into the marriage contract stating that the wife can also have an equal right to unilateral divorce, but this right is rarely exercised due to social customs. Only 3 of the 150 divorce judgments before Islamic courts that HRW reviewed included such clauses. While divorce is difficult for both men and women under Christian laws, Christian men find it easier to circumvent these restrictions, including by converting to Islam and remarrying without divorcing.

As a practical matter, many women who spoke to HRW said these restrictions meant that they were forced to stay in abusive marriages — at great risk to themselves and their children, and that in some cases they had to give up their financial or custody rights in exchange for a divorce. Some women even had to pay their husbands to seek the divorce.

Women also face discrimination in relation to distribution of marital property after a marriage ends. Lebanese law does not recognize noneconomic contributions to a marriage or the concept of marital property, so after a separation property reverts to the spouse in whose name it is registered — typically the husband — regardless of who




Lebanon is failing miserably to ensure fair treatment of women

has contributed to it or what role a wife may have played in supporting her husband throughout their marriage.

In addition, even though the Druze and Christian confessions require the spouse responsible for the termination of the marriage to compensate the other, in practice these amounts are usually not enough to allow women to support themselves. In Lebanon's Islamic courts, after a divorce, a woman is left with only the deferred *mahr* (dowry) stipulated in the marriage contract, but this is often just a symbolic figure such as one lira or one gold coin.

Discrimination also extends to one of the most difficult aspects of any separation: child custody. The HRW review of court cases found that in many cases, judges removed children from their mothers, but not their fathers, on grounds of fitness due to 'questionable' social behaviors because of the mother's supposed religious affiliation, or because she remarried instead of making these decisions based on the best interest of the child.

The fear of losing their children was so great that some women HRW interviewed stayed in abusive marriages, gave up their monetary rights, or did not remarry so they could keep custody. "I forced myself to bear beyond what a human being can take, all the injustices and violence," said a Maronite woman who endured years of physical abuse but only sought a divorce after her children became adults because she feared losing them.

The current system is not only unfair. It is broken. Some couples are converting to different confessions to be able to get married while others are converting to get a divorce. And many couples are simply voting with their feet, getting on a plane to get a civil marriage abroad. Ending a marriage or determining who a child should live with after a divorce are difficult enough decisions. The least Lebanon can do is ensure that the laws are fair. It is time for the country to adopt an optional civil code that would ensure equal rights for all Lebanese who wish to marry under it. But it is also time to get the Lebanese state to exercise oversight over religious courts. Not all marriages last, but at least we should have laws that help to give them a happy ending. 

NADIM HOURY is deputy MENA director at Human Rights Watch. He is also the director of the Beirut office.

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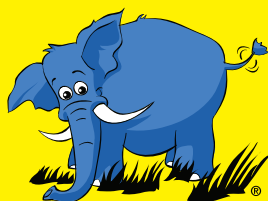


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