

Executive

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WANTED

FIGHTERS FOR A FREE PRESS



EDITORIAL

#264

Finality

The Lebanese political class looks vulgarly conniving when it collectively promotes an International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal as a finality while their real intentions lay against it. What is even more bewildering is how contagious this fake stance is. It has infected every speech or media appearance among even the most reformist Lebanese economists, analysts and journalists.

For more than twenty years, this magazine has been advocating tirelessly for similar reforms as the IMF and the international community. As Lebanon's best global advisors have been saying on many occasions, like during the CEDRE conference in April 2018, we also consider that institutional, judicial, fiscal and monetary reforms are useless unless coupled with an ambitious strategy that put our assets to good use. A strategy that could provide public services; creating and growing value in an inclusive, responsible and transparent manner.

Gullible is whoever thinks that this mob ruling the country has any intention to embark on any type of reforms. Their performance since the beginning of the crisis and the masquerades we have been witnessing at parliament since the election, says it all. Correspondingly, the lack of leadership, purpose or vision from successive governments is proof that we had cabinets that are incapable of presenting a serious strategy. One that promises to institute a governance program which would allow state owned enterprises to devise and adopt stratagems capable of delivering basic services, which the citizen desperately needs.

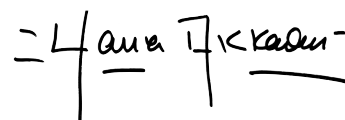
Our dysfunctional state-owned enterprises are precious to our politicians. It is where they have been employing their cronies and nourishing their captive electorates with a license to steal, reinforced by a disgusting sense of religious and sectarian self-entitlement and impunity. The lack of basic public services allows the parallel economy to flourish; depriving the citizen of any reliable facilities and exposing them to prohibitive costs. No wonder reforms are dismissed, rejected and made unattainable.

The good news is that in Lebanon socioeconomic conditions are stimulated by private sector adaptability and performance rather than by the public sector. Public policies have always had a downward pressure on social factors, while the private sector has an agility and readiness to embark on corporate transformation and embrace innovative solutions to retain value and pursue strategies which can sustain healthy earnings.

The Lebanese media – the most vulnerable – industry has expressed its need to embark on corporate transformation and will to challenge the local conditions that work against its own vocation and purpose. Executive Magazine captured their needs and requests, while documenting the gaps which need to be addressed in a report published in this issue.

It is crucial that independent media companies are able to continue to defend freedom and democracy by providing independent unbiased content which upholds accountability, not impunity and manipulation.

Now that is a finality worth fighting for.



Yasser Akkaoui
Editor-in-chief

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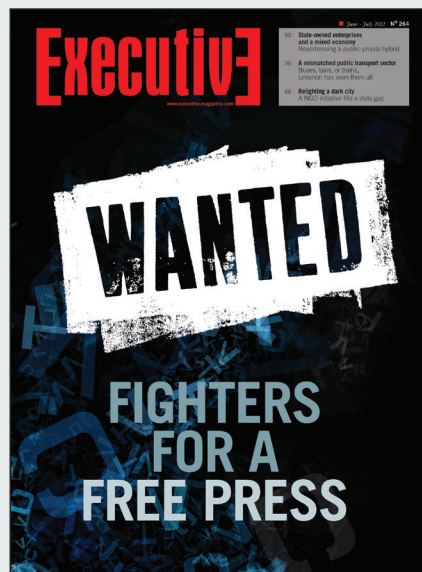
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LEADER

STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES

The vanishing space of political economy...

...and what it means for Lebanon

All individual and group-based economic activity – simply, all human economic activity – inextricably relates to the community or society that the individual or economic group is embedded in. This is the fundamental economic truth of every business entity; from the single tradesman, craftswoman and creative entrepreneur to the largest company, enterprise, or corporation.

This fundamental economic truth is anchored in the human condition of being that old *ζῶον πολιτικόν* – a social and political animal. Secondly, it is a function of the microeconomic give-and-take by which humans sustain their material needs.

In the latter sense of a multi-tiered give-and-take process of production and exchange, all economic activity therefore involves not just conceptual antipodes of private property and public interests, but competing interests of interdependent stakeholders.

One, in modern times very popular, method of harnessing economic energy is the state-owned enterprise (SOE). Unlike any intellectual musing about the correlation or juxtaposition of public and private in the economy, the SOE is a concrete, measurable expression of state involvement in economic activity.

Constructed to function with political public good mandates in accordance with market rules, the SOE nonetheless ignites eternal questions over the just and productive design of the economy.

As they appear in front of a polity, SOEs are corporate entities that are entrusted with providing services

and goods in natural resources, or in provision of communication, information, electricity, transportation, finance and banking. These are sectors of vital importance in all countries, but particularly for Lebanon, where initiation of higher productivity is a matter of survival.

Not only this, but good and affordable public services, like water, electricity, and infrastructure, are an indicator of economic prowess; placing a nation in a position of comparative advantage. Whereas on an individual level, consumers with extra disposable income boost the economy and help society function. Value and productivity are improved, and the cycle goes on.

A WORLDWIDE MODEL?

The global trajectory of SOEs as enterprise models seems at first glance straightforward. The numbers point up ever since the days when the tides of monetarism, Reaganomics, Thatcherism, and the economic opening of China under Deng Xiaoping began to rise. As a 2020 research paper by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) notes, SOEs in the early 1980s accounted for 15 percent and 8 percent of economic output, in developing and advanced economies, respectively.

By the mid-2010s, the rise of SOEs was reflected in dazzling numbers. The share of corporatized SOEs, or state-owned enterprises managed according to corporate principles and aligned with profit motive, was expressed by SOEs holding \$45 trillion in assets (equivalent to 50 percent of global GDP). Among the world's 2,000 largest firms, SOE assets reached 20 percent.

According to the findings of IMF researchers, very large SOEs have

morphed into multinational enterprises, which control assets of entities in other countries. They often have mixed ownership and their multinational expansions can be driven by economic, and more divisively, political motives. Multinational SOEs have been popping up in China and other powerful developed and emerging countries, among them Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

However, the SOE equation is not as simple as the numbers suggest. It is clear that government moves toward mixed-economy models, characterized by public-private partnerships (PPPs) alongside the corporatization of SOEs, were received favorably by populaces at first, especially when compared with counter trends of socialization on the left, and full privatization on the right.

But the mixed-economy way of PPP and corporatized SOEs has not been confirmed as the golden path. Over the past few years, the election choices of populaces and the economic programs of leaders

■ The SOE is a concrete, measurable expression of state involvement in economic activity

on the right and left in both small and large emerging countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, have shown this. Even the PPP track records in developed Europe cannot be called impeccable.

As the IMF acknowledges, there is actually no clear and commonly accepted delineation of the SOE in the political economy. The hybrid beasts and public-private crossbreeds of SOEs and PPPs can – and in the ideal

case will – combine public and private genes; like the publicly minded desire to deliver public goods and the business mind's habit of optimizing efficiency.

Or on the contrary, they can be deeply flawed and corrupted beasts which merge the destructive genes of political power-seeking with the hyper-aggression found in the most despicable private-economy predator. Moreover, in the context of recent geopolitics, the practical contradiction of SOEs unfolds in the fact that the SOE has become the pawn in a game of increasingly powerful national and border-transcending activities.


POOR MANAGEMENT

The political economy, in the meaning of the state acting as eco-

nomic power, has no prospect of disappearing. For the economic-collapse-and-aspiration-of-recovery setting Lebanon, the derivative question is if the country's political economy can be restituted with the SOE as the winning model, or if the space for Lebanese political economy has disintegrated altogether.

This is a result not only of the economic and monetary collapse which has wiped out, for the next few years at least, the possibility of selling SOEs for a fair price via any form of PPP or privatization. But also, the extinction-like event of Lebanon's political economy has transpired in the populace's total distrust in the state; its hitherto practiced bad and partisan management of SOEs, the

exploitation of profitable sectors for fiscal gains (telecoms), and its failure to perform as a steward of anything involving money and mutual obligations.

Practical solutions for managing Lebanon's economic challenges are available; namely the strategic advantages of SOEs or PPPs, such as efficiency or competitiveness on a corporate and local level. But as long as there exists a mutual cycle of division their implementation will remain merely an ideal, while the smartest and most knowledgeable, who advocate for Lebanon's rescue, remain adamant to assert that they do not see the issues as their opponents do, never mind the rationality of their position. 

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LEADER

MEDIA ACTION PLAN

The ambiguity of being wanted

Economic success and free press

Journalists can tell you a thing or three about what it can mean to be wanted – most of them either unpleasant or seriously dangerous.

The first common experience of being a wanted, or in-demand journalist is that of being a “useful idiot”. Almost everyone who signals their desire to talk to the media simply wants to sell something. It might be a “scientific” opinion, an individual political image, a panacea for assorted social ills, or perhaps an ideology and entire political system. If general interest media are the seller’s target, it is not an idea that is being peddled. It might be an (overblown) success story, a brand, or a “unique” and “unmissable” (neither term being quite logical) vehicle, fashion item, food concept, travel destination, smoke, drink, bargain, free lunch, or other con.

The second, rarer but still all too common, experience of being a wanted journalist is that of being a species at risk of extinction. Working journalists are murdered in embassies, shot on streets and in jungles, taken from airplanes, detained from street side cafes, exposed to duplicitous litigation, kidnapped, forced to recant articles, and tortured. Every exposure of a journalist to such violence is a horror story of being hunted for doing their job.

As a media organization operating in one of the world’s most conflicted regions, Executive is aware that the ability to report, conduct and publish journalistic work is being tested. Yet not by the unstable political and economic climate, but by its ramifications – inadequate industry

standards, protection or regulation.

Executive’s Business Development Special Report on the media industry published in this issue has been designed and compiled with this in mind; as a call to action for the corporate transformation of Lebanese media enterprises. Businesses need to build strategic models and attract investment; embark on innovative technological solutions, adopt codes of conduct and advisory boards, and ensure transparent behaviors.

We may be journalists, but we need to think like business people; retain business models that can grow value and ensure the future and integrity of press freedom. Lebanon used to lay the path for media outlets in the Arab world. Today, the industry is flagging; bogged down by politically aligned news companies, absent business strategy and weak regulation, against a backdrop of unprecedented developments in global media.

Without sustainable business models, the safety and security of journalism and journalists cannot be guaranteed, and ethical practices risk falling by the wayside. Executive editors use the issuance of our report to voice solidarity with journalists working in 28 countries who suffer “very bad” press freedom environments, according to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index by press freedom advocacy group Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF).

The Index, informed by the opinions of scholars, activists and journalists, sees Lebanon as one of more than 40 countries with a “difficult” environment. Seventy countries, or nearly 40 percent of the 180 nations covered, are flagged as having very bad or difficult working environments for the media.


We demand that governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – almost all are seriously or very seriously lacking in matters of freedom of expression – upgrade the

legal protections of journalists and their working environments so that the dangers of information wars, antagonistic partisanship, and detrimental social media can be mitigated.

This magazine reiterates its commitment to stand up for press freedom in Lebanon and the Arab world by promoting the advancing, governance and professionalism of media enterprises. Not wanting to be satisfied with raising our voice in advocacy of press freedom, however, Executive advocates a third way in which fighters for press freedom, that is professional, fact-based journalism as personified by individuals and media enterprises in the MENA region, are “wanted.”

This is to say, quality journalism made in Beirut is wanted and needed for social and economic development, and this constitutes the internal driving force behind the media enterprise development project featured in this issue. In 2022, as in the previous two years, political disruptions, including escalations of autocratic rule, have been proliferating in MENA and appear to roll back developments of popular sovereignty. Economies are tumbling from one crisis to the next, not only in Lebanon.

The positive correlation between freedom of expression, rights of the individual, and economic equity may be not as strong as journalists love to think. But unless media enterprises are built on foundations of economic growth and value, their viability and development will remain limited.

It has been demonstrated time and again that a diverse, well informed society with a base of mutual obligations and agreed tenets of moral behavior, is better positioned for development than a society that is steeped in fear and unfreedom. Likewise, with the same attitude, media businesses bolstered by quality skills and resources will invite journalistic and economic success. 



LEBANON ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Executive

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

June 2022



<https://www.executive-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Media-Development-Action-Plan.pdf>

FOREWORD

■ For many years, Lebanon enjoyed a journalistic creative freedom which set it apart from regional news players. A combination of high cultural literacy, diverse traditions and a trilingual foundation propelled Lebanese journalistic endeavors to the forefront.

However, over time the landscape became polluted as local producers fought for space among politically-affiliated media and profit-first organizations. On a regional level, state-owned media channels further created a testing climate for Lebanon-based media.

Today, the country's economic crisis is hampering the ability of the sector. Growth opportunities; like value prioritization, job creation, and digital solution investment have been left out in the cold, as instead businesses battle to retain staff and cushion the blow of collapsing salaries. It has left the industry calling out for fresh strategies and approaches so it can set sail once again.

Quality journalistic products, like accuracy born out of fact-checked, analytical and investigative content, is needed more than ever amid a dynamic global climate. The unprecedented growth of social media has added clout to already overcrowded news channels. Moreover, for countries, like Lebanon, in regions where conflict and crises reign, journalism is more vulnerable to the twists and distortions of disinformation and fake news.

At Executive Magazine, since we began publishing 23 years ago, we have always pushed for transparency, accountability and reform in Lebanon's industry. In a liberal economy, freedom of expression can flow without boundaries, and we believe Lebanon's media sector can and should manifest this. As a journalistic publication, our experience qualifies us to not only encourage Lebanon's media organizations to take a look in the mirror, but to join them too.

With this in mind, Executive Magazine, in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Lebanon Enterprise Development (LED), has endeavored to present a long-term, value-added view on the commercial and intangible profit matrix of digital-era journalism and media enterprises in Lebanon through this Media Gap Report.

INTRODUCTION

■ The Media Gap Report is part of a media development action plan consisting of two main components. The first report identifies corporate structures and contextual specificities of local media enterprises and divergences of their standards and practices, versus best journalistic and media practices. The second report recommends solutions which are compatible with the Lebanese media and general business environment. In addition, the report will enable locally focused and Lebanon-based regional media enterprises to optimally align themselves with paradigmatic international media practices, and develop winning strategies for journalistic quality in conjunction with economic success.

The survey of Lebanese media organizations was conducted between February and April 2022. Organization profiles, business models, revenue streams, editorial standards, journalist and support staff security were the topics inquired about in phone and face-to-face meetings. The usage of a 58-question survey with multiple-choice and subjective answers was adopted as methodology. The total number of respondents was 30 media organizations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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GAP REPORT

p.12 Part I – Proprietorship, executive leadership, and scope of media organization

- The vast majority of surveyed media organizations have been active and operational for more than five years
- The sector is dominated by small and micro-sized enterprises
- Most of the publications investigate and produce exclusive stories on a periodic and regular schedule
- The majority of respondents do not have a corporate board or advisory board
- Only one out of the 30 organizations publishes annual reports and economic results to the public
- The main sources of revenue are advertising and sponsorship reflecting the absence of a clear fund-raising strategy
- Less than 10 percent of organizations are engaged with adjacent media activities such as research and production
- Most media outlets surveyed do not have 24/7 electricity; demonstrating both the intense impact of the Lebanese economic crisis on the media and the fact that a substantial number of media enterprises, despite everything, have proven themselves capable of achieving business continuity and securing employee needs, like for example, productive interaction between editorial team members

p.17 Part II – Policies on non-content revenues

- Only a minority have a clearly formulated advertising policy
- Programmatic advertising is not within the scope of any organization
- The majority of the companies surveyed do not have a strategy pertaining to native advertising

p.18 Part III – Community Management

- Organizations do not employ a branding and marketing approach associated with a marketing team to help them with reader acquisition
- The majority of organizations do not provide readership acquisition incentives
- The vast majority do not have processes for triggering coverage of specific issues

p.19 **Part IV – Readership complaints resolution**

- 90 percent of the surveyed media outlets do not have an independent ombudsman who readers and interviewees can call upon in case of disagreements over coverage

p.20 **Part V – Staff development**

- 70 percent of the media enterprises surveyed do not offer journalists insurance coverage while on assignment
- No clear articles relating to the protection and safety of staff inside and outside the office are available
- Inadequate training and development are detected due to lack of funding

p.22 **Part VI – Digital development approach**

- A prominent deficiency in hardware and software technologies for the conduction of assignments is detected
- Staff is not trained and educated on cyber security methods
- Organizations do not own up-to-date equipment for the production of podcasts and other content targeted for online migration

p.23 **Part VII – Journalism ethics and fact-checking**

- There exists a very limited capacity when it comes to governance; whether compliance with a code of conduct and code of ethics, fact checking, censorship or strategy formulation, implementation and monitoring

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RECOMMENDATIONS



GAP REPORT

The gap report reveals the main hurdles obstructing the sustenance of Lebanese media organizations.

Part I

Proprietorship, executive leadership, and scope of media organization

1. How long has the organization been active in content production?

The vast majority of surveyed media organizations, 90 percent, have been active and operational for more than five years. Of three organizations with less than five years of organizational history, two have been active for between one and four years, and only one has been operational for less than a year.

This indicates that these organizations have an operational track record which suggests viability under radical economic uncertainty and changing business environments at the base of operations. While the viability of organizations indicates continuity and vitality of the media industry in Lebanon, it cannot be ascertained if the organizations' longevity is linked today to advertising revenue, online subscriptions or digital sales of content, other commercial interests, grants or out-of-country sponsors.

Against a background of numerous media closures and the downsizing of organizations over the past decade, and a concurrent shift to protest movements between the 2015 "trash crisis" and the 2019 "Lebanese uprising," it is striking that no larger proportion of active media was conceived as part of the popular opinion wave of the Lebanese uprising. This contrasts with our observations and social media evidence of increased communication activity, by civil society organizations and anti-establishment political parties derived from both the 2018 elections and the uprising of October 2019.

2. How many employees does the organization have in total?

Most Beirut-based media organizations would be considered micro and small enterprises under business measurement standards of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the International Finance Corporation (IFC). From a local perspective, almost all of the media organizations qualify as small enterprises, divided between 40 percent that describe their workforce as numbering up to 10 employees and another 33 percent that employ between 11 and 20 staff members.

Moreover, nearly all of the 26.7 percent of organizations with 21 or more employees, must also be categorized as small-to-medium. Only one organization would fit into the category of a medium enterprise, by prevailing Lebanese standards. Taking into consideration that the Lebanese media industry historically has been segmented by the use of three different publishing languages (Arabic, French, English) and also by diverse communal identifications, the news media sector's fragmentation suggests a duality of many partisan content providers under organizations' economic vulnerability and absence of concentration in the media sector.

This picture of precariously small organizations is further enforced by serious contractions of the workforce at one privately-held media organization with more than 50 employees. This legacy publication, which entered the 1990s with reportedly well over 140 employees, has suffered two massive downsizings in the past decade, supporting the assessment that the media sector has shifted in its business acumen and its employment structure, shrinking down from medium to micro-sized organizations. Based on the data accumulated, these workforces include editorial, technical, and management staff which shows that the number of editorial resources must be considered small or tiny in the majority of locally-based publications (see response 3).

3. Among its total workforce, how many editors and staff writers does the organization employ?

In alignment with the overall size of the media organizations, 30 percent employ 2 to 5 editorial staff, 40 percent employ 6 to 10 editorial staff, 23 percent employ 11 to 15 editors, while only 2 have more than 15 editors and staff writers.

However, when business needs of media organizations are taken into consideration (marketing, community management, circulation, or advertising sales) it cannot be denied that the numbers of editors and editorial staff can be large when compared to the size of the overall organization, specifically regarding small and micro-sized organizations. Apparent discrepancies from variances in editorial staff ratio by different organizations suggest that there is no typical profile of a media communication and publishing venture that can be used as the media industry benchmark in Lebanon.

4. Does the organization investigate and produce exclusive stories on a periodic and regular schedule?

According to survey responses, 96.7 percent responded that they do in fact investigate and produce exclusive stories on a periodic and regular schedule, while only one publication said that it doesn't.

The high rate of affirmative responses to the question of own editorial content production further supports the impression that there is little formal coordination of joint content production or development of branded content under a local consortium business paradigm. As the latter is a proven means of cost efficiency and often quality control in news media, it is an ambiguous observation that the vast majority of surveyed organizations say that they do independent journalistic research and investigations.

In addition, regarding the division of online news providers who are based in Lebanon, it deserves to be stated that the number of news aggregators in the sample is small in comparison to the total number of Lebanon-based news aggregation sites. This indicates that the selection criteria of the media survey were successfully predicated toward genuine media.

5. Is the organization for profit?

The legal status of a for-profit enterprise in Lebanon is the default format of incorporation as either Joint Stock Company (SAL) or Limited Liability Company (SARL).

In this regard, the fact that 53.3 percent of enterprises answered question 5 in the negative, while the remaining 46.7 percent said yes, is suggesting the need for a shift in legal structures of media organizations.

It is important to highlight that being for profit directly relates to the corporate culture and strategy of the organization. Accordingly, there is an even split between news outlets which are designed as for-profit companies with their ownership and governance structures (or lack of governance and reporting mandates in the case of most private sector enterprises in Lebanon) and ventures that are purporting to apply another incorporation structure.

6. Do you have a board of directors/advisory board?

The majority of respondents said no to having any kind of board, but 23.3 percent said that they do. Formal and active board structures are not found in many Lebanese enterprises of the micro and small category, which means that the low presence of formal boards is not out of character. It only raises the same concern as the

absence of board structures in media organizations in general.

7. In the case of having a board of directors, how many members does it entail?

Five members was the default response among the quarter of enterprises with a formal board structure. Two other media enterprises have boards of three and seven members, respectively.

8. Does your board convene once a year or more often?

The majority of respondents, 71.4 percent, said board meetings take place once a year, while only two organizations convene more often.

Answers to questions seven and eight of the survey suggest that overall governance structures of media enterprises are not highly developed, but fall in line with the prevailing structures of the overall enterprise sector.

Additionally, the number and frequency of board meetings does not indicate that board roles are overly large or compensated.

9. Do you publish annual reports or communicate your economic results to the public in other forms?

Just one out of the 30 enterprises interviewed publishes annual reports and economic results to the public.

The behavior matches the culture at small and medium privately-held enterprises in Lebanon, demonstrating the enterprises' local business roots.

It should be noted that the single enterprise which did publish annual reports is aligned with European granters for its funding and reporting.

10. Has the organization written annual profits in any of the past five years to make it commercially viable, i.e., generating revenues that cover cost of operations?

From a perspective of overall media viability, it is encouraging that 43.3 percent of companies in the sample pool, discounting the one-year-old company, have a historic record of achieving profit at some point in the past five years.

This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the Lebanese economic crisis. As well as in light of the changes in the media landscape during the early 2010s, as sponsorship deals and subscription support from abroad dwindled.

11. Is the organization financially viable, i.e. does it have a stable source of revenue and/or funding?

The fact that there is no large divergence between the responses to the financial viability question (46.7 percent said no, while 53.3 percent said yes), and the preceding question number 10 about profits in one of the past five years, aligns with the previous finding of existing media viability despite the ongoing Lebanese economic crisis.

12. Has the organization written annual profits in any of the past five years?

A dominant portion of the sample pool, representing 76.7 percent, answered no to writing annual profits in

the past five years, with the remaining 23.3 percent answering affirmatively.

As a control question on the bottom line versus the operational results of media ventures, the higher number of negative responses on bottom-line profits indicates that profitability is not clearly defined on the basis of available information, since their results are not made public. There are question marks over the commercial viability of individual media enterprises' business models.

13. Question: Which revenue sources are key for the organization?

Respondents identified several key revenue sources for the organization; 75 percent rely on advertising, 48.4 percent on sponsorships, and 39.3 percent depend on donations and subsidies. In a further breakdown of revenue sources, 33.6 percent of media outlets said they include crowdfunding campaigns, 10.7 percent rely on a subscription model, street sales are mentioned by 3.5 percent, and 10.7 percent rely on other commercial activities.

Street sales and subscriptions historically have been minor sources of income for media in Lebanon. Advertising has always prevailed as the main source of revenue for companies, followed by sponsorship deals.

Such a revenue structure appears to be congruent with the findings (question 2 et al) that the media sector is dominated by small and micro-sized enterprises whose sole focus is content production. The sector is not characterized by a large concentration of market power in a few media empires or diverse conglomerates. On the other hand, the dual dependency on advertising and sponsorship represents a vulnerability and potential exposure to special interests of either advertisers in commercial terms, or sponsors in noncommercial terms.

14. Questions: Does the organization rely on electronic distribution channels or does it have a print edition?

One hundred percent of companies responded yes to leveraging electronic distribution. Although five companies also rely on a printed edition (14.7 percent).

The shift from print to digital distribution by this indication has been accelerated by three country-specific factors. Firstly, on the supply side, the cost of printing has been exacerbated by the need to import nearly all materials, from ink to quality paper. While concerning purchasing power, consumers have suffered sharp, albeit vastly uneven, reductions of spending power at their disposal. Thirdly, the physical infrastructure of newsagents and book shops was badly impaired in certain neighborhoods by the 2020 explosion at Beirut Port, and compounded by closures of outlets under coronavirus lockdown precautions. Any attempt to reverse the shift to digital distribution channels will have to contend with historic news consumption habits negated by the above three factors.

15. Question: What are the costs of content production in relation to overall costs?

Content production is regarded by all respondents as a preeminent cost factor, with 90 percent identifying it as up to 70 or 80 percent of the overall enterprise cost. Similar to other responses (cf. question 4), the prevalence of content production costs suggests efficiency and productivity gaps in many Lebanese media organizations.

16. Question: Does the organization have other publishing income that is not derived from its main media outlet?

In a further deepening of the mono-production vulnerability implied by high content production cost shares, virtually all media enterprises (96.7 percent) have no other publishing income than what is derived from its main media outlet.

Less than 10 percent of organizations are engaged with adjacent media activities such as research and production, which is indicative of underused economic diversification potential in the professional news media sector.

17. Is the organization part of a business group that has non-publishing income?

Answering this question, 93.3 percent said no, and only two said yes. Responses to question 17 corroborate the gap report's earlier observations on business ownership, company size and general structure.

18. Do you use crowdfunding channels?

Most media outlets (96.7 percent) do not leverage the tool of crowdfunding, while merely one enterprise says it actively uses audience channels. This is juxtaposed on one hand with the very high usage of the digital distribution channel (cf. question 14) and the responses on usage of the crowdfunding channel for revenue generation (cf. question 13).

Global media experiences using crowdfunding are not without ambiguity. Nevertheless, the lack of deploying this tool indicates that Lebanese media organizations lag behind in diversification of financing and revenue sources, a notable weakness in the context of their desire to seek investment, as demonstrated in the following response set (question 19).

19. Are you seeking investments?

The majority of publishers (76.7 percent) are in search of investments, while 23.3 percent do not require financial assistance.

In the context of private sector companies, it is not surprising that some publishing houses have no interest in finding investments, since they want to maintain their organizational control. However, from an access to finance perspective (where high demand has in recent years not been met with supply), it is significant that the majority of media outlets, albeit perhaps with varying degrees of commitment, are seeking investments.

20. Do you have 24/7 power at your offices?

Nearly all media outlets, 93.1 percent, said they do not have 24/7 electricity. Only two companies do not experience power cuts. This evident vulnerability of all Lebanese enterprises has to be noted as an impediment to business continuity, as well as optimal publishing schedules for digital companies operating online news sites, whose readers expect round-the-clock access.

21. If not, do you need solar energy to fill the gap?

All media organizations stressed the need for solar or renewable energy to fill the electricity gaps experienced in Lebanon. The unsurprising finding underscores the country-specific need and immense enterprise demand for solar photovoltaic solutions and the development of renewable energy.

Part II

Ethics and dependency in non-content revenues

22. Do you have an advertising sales unit or do you rely on a media agency for executing your advertising sales and/or public relations?

In apparent incongruity with the importance of advertising income for the surveyed media organizations (cf. question 13), close to half of respondents do not employ an advertising sales unit. Media planning and online communication strategies have evolved significantly over the past decade in Lebanon and around the world. It should be noted that an equally large segment of media organizations has a proprietary sales team, while only 10 percent of respondents employ creative ad agencies.

With the efficacy of digital marketing and advertising sales models being in constant flux, the reliance of more than 40 percent of media organizations on their own sales units warrants further observation of the trend. Historically, the trends have been characterized by cultural specificities and interpersonal networks of Lebanese communication workers around the region. The interactions of media organizations, marketing communication agencies, and individual professionals may offer new potentials of mutually profitable synergies if the theory is tested over longer periods.

23. Re-advertising; does the media organization offer editorial coverage in conjunction with any advertising contracts or sponsorship contracts?

Only 10 percent of media organizations provide editorial coverage in conjunction with ad deals, while the majority do not.

The high rate of denials between advertising and content offers demonstrates a strong awareness of ethical practices. At the same time, the evidence seen from publications throws doubt on such high media standards, and therefore warrants detailed tracking and monitoring of correlations between the renting out of advertising space and the appearance of editorial content.

24. Does the media organization have a code for advertising (which advertising types are accepted, rejected, are there fair parameters etc.?)

A mere 13.3 percent of organizations apply a special code for advertising which is officially written and implemented, while a little short of half (46.7 percent) do so informally, and the remaining 40 percent do not have such processes in place.

The findings show that only a minority have a clearly formulated advertising policy, suggesting that media and editorial alignment is a gray area in need of clarification and structural reorganization. Furthermore, it matches previous observations of the opaque practices among Lebanese media enterprises in terms of publishing authentic readership and circulation figures, or reliable online audience measurements.

25. Does your organization have a native advertising strategy?

The majority of the companies surveyed do not have a strategy pertaining to native advertising, while 20 percent have a strategy in place.

Against a backdrop of increasing native advertising and advertorial content in media organizations in Lebanon, there is a growing need for the tighter setting of standards and practices by industry organizations and syndicates, like the publishers and journalists syndicate. Better regulation will also work to increase public trust.

26. Are your advertising spaces run programmatically?

None of the news outlets surveyed apply any programmatic advertising.

In addition to the deficiencies that are mentioned in the comment on question 25 above, the lack of programmatic advertising strategies indicates that media organizations are not fully accessing innovative revenue strategies which are in accordance with international media practices.

Part III

Community management

27- Do you have a marketing department?

More than half of media outlets (60 percent) do not contain marketing departments to help with brand visibility and awareness, but 40 percent employ a marketing division.

As previously noted, when a disproportionate weight is given to content production and editorial roles, it can become counterproductive if there are weaknesses on both the marketing and advertising revenue sides, which risks leading to impairments of the performance and independence of media companies.

28- Do you employ a branding approach and do you use an external consultant or agency for awareness creation?

A large number of media enterprises (93.3 percent) do not employ a branding approach for awareness creation.

In Lebanon, media readership has fragmented along communal, language, and geographic lines. In conjunction with the division of public interests, the absence of branding strategies at most media indicates a lack of efforts towards developing legacy audiences with narrow interests into broader national audiences with diverse opinions.

29- Do you provide incentives in the acquisition of readers?

The neglect displayed towards branding is also present in the fact that the overwhelming majority of news publishers do not provide readership acquisition incentives, with the exception of one media enterprise.

30- Do you measure readership and community interaction?

Eighty-three percent measure readership and community interaction, while the remaining 16.7 percent do not focus on such metrics.

31. Do you have an institutional process by which audience stakeholders can trigger coverage of a specific issue?

The vast majority do not have such processes, while only 16.7 percent confirm that they do.

Assessing the responses of questions 28 to 31 leads to the impression that media companies are vulnerable in the areas of audience acquisition, retention, and diversification.

Part IV

Readership complaints resolution

32. Do you have a policy regarding the publication of corrections and refutations?

More than half of the surveyed enterprises refer to the stipulations of Lebanese media laws as governing their policy on corrections, refutations, and voluntary clarifications. Only 16.7 percent of respondents highlighted that they do have a proprietary written and implemented policy.

Noting that 26.7 percent describe an informal implementation of refutation rights, and one media enterprise having zero policy, the reliance of media enterprises on the media law indicates both the need for further investment into the legal process, and for better standard setting in the form of voluntary agreements by media companies.

33. Do you have an independent ombudsman that readers and interviewees can call upon in case of disagreements over coverage?

In further evidence of the need for improved voluntary standard setting in the media sector, only 10 percent of respondents have an independent ombudsman, while 90 percent do not.

34. Do you have a dedicated community manager or public relations manager whose mandate includes the handling of reader inquiries and complaints?

Exactly half of all surveyed publishers possess a community or public relations manager, while the other half do not.

In the absence of consistent industry practices, individual companies take initiative on the best course of action regarding community outreach management, leaving a considerable level of uncertainty surrounding media companies' best practices in this area.

35. Do you have legal counsel on retainer to deal with all eventualities arising from your publishing activity?

Most media publishers have legal counsel on retainer, while 16.7 percent do not. It is clear that companies recognize the need to protect their interests against legal contingencies in the Lebanese environment, which is widely regarded as rife with judicial red tape and favoritism of power holders.

Part V

Staff development

36. Do you provide your staff journalists and freelancers with legal assistance in case of libel or similar challenges?

The majority of media enterprises (86.7 percent) provide their editorial writer with legal assistance, but four media enterprises deny such assistance to their journalists and freelancers. Given the uncertainty that exists in judicial matters (as noted in the analysis of question 35), the development potential of media companies falls behind global standards of mitigating legal risks for journalists and contributors.

37. Do you provide your writers with insurance coverage while on assignment?

A large portion of the media enterprises surveyed do not offer journalists insurance coverage while on assignment, while 30 percent do.

In the Lebanese system of weak or partial social insurance provisions, the economic crisis of 2020/21 has exacerbated risks such as accidents, and unforeseen health insurance needs of all population groups. Within the specificity of the journalism profession, a modicum of insurance protection seems to exist, but questions remain over the extent of these safeguards. Providing journalists with coverage under the outdated National Social Security Fund (NSSF) system of Lebanon is not adequate to the specific risks that journalists encounter, as this system today effectively does not cover the needs of any white- or blue-collar worker.

38. Does your organization provide employees with health insurance, retirement insurance, and any other form of social insurance?

More than half of news agencies do not provide any sort of health or retirement insurance or any other form of social insurance, while 36.7 percent only provide social insurance in the form of NSSF.

The weakness in social coverage of journalists reflects the general composition of social insurance in the Lebanese market which is found to be massively insufficient.

39. Are your writers and freelancers exposed to conflict situations?

According to the responses, 43.3 percent of companies do not expose their writers or freelancers to con-

flict, while more than half of news publishers concede the possibility of being exposed to such dangers.

There is a discrepancy between the risk protection of journalists and prevalent practices in the media enterprises, in particular in light of the high-risk environment of reporting in the Middle East region; from the abductions of journalists for ransom, to “accidental” shootings and orchestrated murder.

40. Do you have procedures for the case of an unexpected exposure to a conflict situation or intimidation of a journalist by an interviewee or person in a position of power?

Based on the surveyed data, 40 percent of companies do not have procedures in place for unexpected conflict situations, while 60 percent do.

Again, the picture further exposes the heightened risk associated with the diligent pursuit of the journalism, against an absence or weakness of adequate protection and coverage mechanisms.

41. Do you have an anti-harassment policy inside and outside the office?

A mere 26.7 percent of enterprises surveyed contain an anti-harassment policy in and outside the office, while the clear majority (73.3 percent) do not enact such policies.

It is no comfort to journalists, who by definition are exposed to often powerful interview partners, and who work in environments with often an entrenched male dominance of decision-making positions, that the lack of anti-harassment protection is in line with prevailing workplace behaviors and standards in Lebanon.

42. Do you have whistleblower policies and protections?

All news outlets surveyed are armed with whistleblower policies and protection.

43. Do you offer internships?

More than half of news outlets provide internship opportunities to up and coming journalism students, however, 33.3 percent do not offer such opportunities.

The fact that two thirds of enterprises offer internships appears congruent with the size of companies in the sample and the need to have a certain level of manpower before a media enterprise can take on interns and provide them with a career-enhancing experience.

44. Do you provide training and continued education opportunities to your staff?

A clear minority of news outlets surveyed (26.7 percent) provide continued educational opportunities toward their staff, while 73.3 percent do not present such opportunities.

As with the situation of readership retention and community development, gaps between current practices and desirable provision of continual job training and qualification opportunities have to be diagnosed.

Part VI

Digital development approach

45. Do you provide your staff journalists with the necessary technologies (both hardware and software) to conduct their assignments?

More than half of respondents (56.7 percent) do not provide their staff with the necessary tools and technologies to conduct their work, while 43.3 percent said they do offer both hardware and software support.

It is a notable gap in the provision of technical support and managerial care versus best practices that more than half of surveyed media companies put the burden of journalistic essential tools onto their individuals, both freelancers and staff members.

46. Does the organization train and educate the staff on cyber security methods?

Just 20 percent provide training in cybersecurity. Considering that Lebanon is exposed to cyber insecurities and risks of attacks, the absence of cyber security training and literacy in media organizations indicates a high level of vulnerability. This is not just a detriment to organizations, but also poses a significant danger to individual employees.

47. Does the organization train and educate the staff on data journalism and analysis?

Only 36.7 percent of respondents train their journalists and editorial staff on data journalism, while the majority does not.

Alongside the indications found among other survey answers, there is much evidence of the widespread legacy of journalistic standards and behaviors dating to the pre-digital age as the operational “normal”. This indicates a setback against the digital frameworks that media organizations and individual journalists are working under today. This gap could serve as an impediment for the competitiveness level of Lebanon-based media organizations, even if all other operating conditions in aspiring media hubs were met.

48. Do you employ a social media management team that aids in the production of news pieces, such as videos, infographics, podcasts, animations, posters...?

More than half of news publishers have a social media management team, while 40 percent said they do not have such a team in place.

Based on the answers provided, media companies place greater importance on social media awareness than on data journalism and analysis. Despite this, there remains a deficiency until social media teams become ubiquitous in the Lebanese media ecosystem, particularly as all respondents rely on digital channels for distribution of content (cf. question 14).

49. Do you have a strategy for digital development and innovation?

More than half of respondents do not have a strategy for digital development, while 40 percent do. This indicates the need for improved equitable sector practices and an unfilled space for collaboration on critical strategies, innovation, and reputational development of the Lebanese media sector.

Part VII

Journalism ethics and fact checking

50. Do you have a clear workflow regulation on headline writing, captions, and copy editing?

While there are clear gaps on the development and digital innovation side, traditional media standards are better practiced, even if not applied universally. The majority of news outlets (80 percent) noted that they have a clear workflow regulation.

51. Do you use a stylebook adopted from an international news organization, a proprietary stylebook, or no stylebook?

The majority of local media outlets do not publish in line with a stylebook. For a media sector with aspirations to greater quality and reputation, the results signal a standards gap. Few media enterprises in Lebanon have developed a proprietary stylebook or rely on guidance literature from journalism schools or international media giants, like the Associated Press.

52. Do you operate under a journalistic code of ethics?

The majority of outlets surveyed (76.6 percent) informally implement a journalistic code of conduct, while 13.3 percent use an official code of conduct, and 10 percent operate without one.

The absence of a formal code of journalism endorsed by prevalent media syndicates, should not in itself be regarded as a gap to international best practices. Journalistic codes of ethics exist within a wide range of differences and competing perspectives, regarding both general ethics and professional journalistic behavior. There is not one universal standard set of codes.

However, the fact that in more than half of the surveyed organizations, the code of ethics cannot be traced to a formal document, makes it difficult to foster mutual trust between the audience and media. More attention to the ethical challenges and provision of written support codes by Lebanese media organizations should be considered as a means to dispel distrust in the media and reduce eventual conflicts of opinion and interest.

53. Does this code entail conduct rules that prohibit corruption and misrepresentation of journalists?

Survey responses indicate that there is a common deficiency of quintessential journalistic behavior controls for code of conduct components, such as the self-identification of journalists, prohibition of bribery, and conflicts-of-interest avoidance.

54. Do you have a dedicated fact checking unit/editor?

Only 16.7 percent of all respondents contain a fact checking unit or editor.

This is indicative of a weakness in the area of fact-checking and corroboration of journalistic content.

55. Who in your organization is ultimately responsible for fact checking and compliance?

A dedicated fact checker is employed at 10 percent of respondents. With 16.7 percent of media outlets relying on the author for fact checking, 56.7 percent of the companies placing fact checking responsibility with the top editor, and 16.7 percent of enterprises not practicing any form of fact checking, the corroboration and quality control levels of Lebanese media organizations are a significant step away from responsible and reliable journalism.

56. Do you practice self-censorship?

Only 13.3 percent of companies confirmed that they practice self-censorship.

This suggests an upward shift of local media cultures in terms of self-respect and accountability, based on the observation that self-censorship might have been hailed as the dominant local practice by leaders of the publishers' syndicate earlier in this century.

57. Do you observe the red lines when it comes to covering controversial topics?

Most companies (76.7 percent) draw red lines concerning coverage of controversial topics, while the remaining portion say they do not have barriers against coverage of controversial issues.

Interrelated to the issue of self-censorship, the drawing of red lines by so many media organizations implies the need to further fortify journalistic performance against pressures by media owners and publishers.

58. What statement on compliance with code of conduct stipulations applies to your organization?

Compliance of content with their code of conduct is monitored for all stories by 16.7 percent of respondents. While 53.3 percent say they do compliance checks mainly for investigative pieces and 26.7 percent do so through occasional samples. One media venture says it does not ever monitor content quality in this way.

The lack of consistent editorial supervision structures and the over-reliance on the top editor for compliance monitoring is a gap to preferred media practices. It leaves room for the skirting of standards by members of editorial staff and by external contributors. This compliance monitoring deficiency creates risk for media companies in terms of both credibility and legal liability based on journalistic misbehavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the Media Gap Report

The Media Action Plan project developed by Executive Magazine in Partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is designed to support the media sector in Lebanon in three leaps upward. The first of these stages is the Media Gap Report, which identifies profiles of Lebanon-based media enterprises, and the gaps that separate them from best-in-class media. The report dissects practices in the areas of corporate and ownership structures, media behavior and organizational safeguards, and the treatment of writers and practice of journalistic codes.

Following on from the Media Gap Report, the Media Development Plan team presents a structured list of recommendations in this report; informed by the Media Gap Report and the action plan team's research, alongside Executive's own experience as a media enterprise.

The third stage of the project, the Proposed Action Plan, will bolster these recommendations with a lineup of international and local organizations which serve as an example to Lebanese media enterprises should they choose to implement the findings of the Recommendations Report.

All three components of the Media Action Plan project are positioned as a platform for further discussion and adaptation by passionate and professional stakeholders in the Lebanese media and news publishing fields.

CONTEXT: the value proposition of the media enterprise

In discussing the specificities of the publication business, it should go without saying that media enterprises, in business terms, owe their existence and evolution to their ability to improve the flow of information and situationally pertinent knowledge. The more an enterprise is able to optimize delivery of what is needed and desired (the duo is rarely the same), the more it can compete in the political economic context, whether this be a capitalist, authoritarian, totalitarian, autocratic, communitarian or even partially anarchic one.

This means that media in a for-profit system is systemically formed by not only the dynamics of creative destruction in business terms, but equally by the agility in using new technologies in unprecedented, trial and error, creative ways.

As a third ingredient, the formula of media enterprises is based on the ability of spinning a convincing – emotional, intellectual and ethical – narrative. Media cannot prevail without its roots of storytelling alongside society's moral codes.

And so, the three basics in the recipe of viable media are profit-orientation, technology adoption and human capital. The media in Lebanon should not exist outside this formula, nor will it succeed if they neglect to find compliance with:

- a)** a good corporate organization and profitability, however indirect. It may mean involving tradeoffs between revenues and reputational gains
- b)** agility and innovation in digital technologies; including digital content creation tools and digital payment methods
- c)** the nurture of authenticity and ethical behavior of their writers

Our stakeholder approach on recommendations

Both contract researchers and the editorial team of Executive Magazine have been involved in this project from the initial planning phase in late 2021, until the presentation of outcomes and recommendations in June 2022. In this regard, we want to acknowledge and indeed make explicit that Executive Magazine is a stakeholder in the Lebanese media sector and therefore has an interest to succeed, and continue to succeed as a media enterprise.



Many of the observations documented in the Gap Report apply to Executive Magazine, and many recommendations are also recommendations to ourselves. Our rationale and justification to have become involved in the Media Action Plan project quasi “from within” is the concept of the “win-win” philosophy. Executive is convinced that the media sector in Lebanon is faced with challenges which mandate the development of strategies to benefit all and every media enterprise that has ambition – as we do ourselves – to achieve new levels of media professionalism and profitability, alongside economic and social viability.

Given that we regard alignment with highly respected codes of journalism, the adoption of successful technologies, and world-class corporate governance as fundamentals of journalism, the list of recommendations is based on the idea that meeting these standards is imperative for the sector’s survival. The recommendations in this document are calculated from within the local media sector and intended for the specific environment of Lebanon – on media enterprise level and on media industry level. We aspire that these recommendations, which are built from the foundation of the Media Gap report, will assist all Lebanon-based media organizations in narrowing the gap to achieve business and economic ideals.

Finally, it should be noted that the intrinsic volatility of journalism as a carrier of information and historic gatekeeper of information access appears to have entered a new phase. Media in the digital age has shifted from being the default delivery mechanism of scarce information and analysis, to a facilitator for mass and individual consumption of news, analysis, and opinion – falling under the umbrella of information value and often, entertainment value. What is more, news consumption has long been gyrating to the cheap economic proposition of acquiring and reselling consumer attention under the business model of the “attention merchant”, a term coined by American academic Tim Wu.

As a global craft of communications, journalism undoubtedly will take the shape of time, but the observations of the recommendations report will remain as integral pillars for Lebanon’s media enterprises.

The recommendations cover six interrelated areas:

- Ownership and corporate position
- Revenue structures and policies
- Readership development and community building
- Physical and employment security of writers and staff
- Digital transformation and digital strategy
- Ethical issues and journalistic codes

The recommendations of this report aim to establish a viable media action plan, offered as a value proposition to international stakeholders like media-focused I-NGOs, as well as local groups such as industry-related associations and public servants. As a result, the report takes into consideration three factors:

A) Gaps between the practices of local media and internationally acknowledged best business and journalism practices

B) Characteristics of Lebanon-based media organizations which are rooted in a culture of media and business alignment of media with regional counterparts

C) The restraints and barriers born out of three years of socio-economic disaster
Recommendations

Ownership and corporate position

The media sector is primarily composed of small-to-medium enterprises (SME) held in private ownership, structurally resembling the other sectors in the Lebanese economy. The sector is fragmented along lines of communal belongings and publication languages, which appear to act as barriers against market power concentrations.

Regarding corporate structures, focus should be aligned on the implementation of boards, creation of advisory committees for small and micro-sized ventures, and on the adoption of governance and transparency standards to make Lebanese media enterprises more attractive on capital markets, if desired.

1. Media enterprises should adjust their business models to incorporate long-term sustainability strategies such as reliance on renewable energy.
2. Media enterprises should become more transparent to investors and the public by disclosing revenue sources and dependencies.
3. Media enterprises of all sizes should create advisory committees of independent business, tech, and journalism experts.
4. Media enterprises with 10 and more employees should revise the relations between ownership, business management, and editorial leads. The positions of chair and managing director in a privately held media enterprise should be held by separate individuals, and the position of the managing director should be divided from the position of the editor-in-chief. The editor-in-chief should not be an executive in an external enterprise or consultancy.
5. Media enterprises above the size threshold of a medium enterprise (50 and more employees) should appoint a board of directors, which is diverse in terms of age, gender, and qualification.
6. Owners and management of media enterprises should implement internal surveys and assessments of enterprise efficiency, employee satisfaction, and communication between staff and management.
7. Media enterprises should endeavor to access funding that enables them to invest in up-to-date hardware, office management and workflow systems, publishing software that is adequate and fully licensed (not in violation of intellectual property rights), and adequate cyber defenses to protect the enterprise and affiliated journalists against cyber terrorism.
8. Media enterprises should collectively develop co-working spaces for journalists and digital media startups, while developing a voluntary code of best business practices for the Lebanese media enterprise sector.

Revenue structures and policies

In the absence of economies of scale in the Lebanese media markets, and due to structural changes in the revenue streams of media; business models and revenue structures have become defunct, leaving organizations in a fragile state.

This fragility has become more pronounced due to the vanishing of advertising revenue during 2020, when a combined crises of a health pandemic and economic fallout impaired advertisers. Changes in access to funding and revenue strategies of media enterprises have to be accompanied by adjustments of legal and incorporation standards. We recommend:

9. Media enterprises should explore the viability of crowdfunding and crowd-investing approaches to financing of individual stories, larger reports, and their entire organization.
10. Media enterprises should develop strategies that will make them eligible to apply for renewable energy funding by international or local investors and climate funds.
11. Media enterprises should diversify their sources of revenue and activate approaches that utilize digital analysis and data mining tools, and advertising vehicles such as programmatic advertising.
12. Media enterprises and communication industry stakeholders should update their advertising codes of conduct to avert conflicts of interest and misrepresentations of advertorial messages as editorial content.
13. The overhaul of the Code of Commerce and introduction of a social enterprise category of business establishments should include a provision enabling the dedicated not-for-profit social enterprise incorporation of media enterprises that meet a set of content requirements and public service criteria.

Readership development and community building

- 14.** Media enterprises should enhance their customer experience and substitute low-value mass marketing methodologies with community building and high-value branding.
- 15.** Media enterprises should create readership acquisition and retention incentives.
- 16.** Media enterprises should review existing marketing and branding strategies, revise and update them by upscaling their branding and marketing team or enter into partnerships with qualified external providers.
- 17.** Media organizations should provide public access to impartial ombudsmen and women who readers and interviewees can call upon in case of disagreements over coverage.

Physical and employment security of writers and staff

- 18.** Media laws should mandate minimum safeguards and insurances for coverage of working journalists and freelancers on assignment.
- 19.** Beyond the provisions of the Lebanese National Social Security Fund regulations, media enterprises should provide insurance coverage for employees such as health, retirement, and social insurance.
- 20.** Media enterprises with ten and more employees should create continued education and training programs, and internship opportunities.
- 21.** The provision of journalism training should be organized and the requirements, legal protections, and benefits of media membership and journalist identification has to be clarified. Equal access to journalist credentials has to be guaranteed and safeguards against discrimination have to be implemented.

Digital transformation and digital strategy

- 22.** Media enterprises should research and implement their digital development and innovation plan on company level.
- 23.** Digital transformation of media enterprises should be supported by access to finance for the required hardware, software, and training (see recommendation number 7).
- 24.** The media industry organizations and communication industry stakeholders, such as journalists and publishers' syndicates, advertiser associations, and relevant public sector entities should collaborate in designing a digital media development framework and support infrastructure, including co-working spaces (see recommendation number 8).

Ethical issues and journalistic codes

- 25.** Create and communicate a journalistic code of conduct and an employee code of conduct, formalize codes if they have been practiced informally, and collaborate on a universal code of conduct for the media industry in Lebanon.
- 26.** Media organizations should protect their staff against bribe-taking and corruption by providing living wages and support their journalists by monitoring compliance with codes of conduct.
- 27.** To uphold ethical journalism is a responsibility for each member of a media enterprise.

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<https://www.executive-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Media-Development-Action-Plan.pdf>

Of elephants and hot potatoes



A reshuffle of state-owned enterprises and assets can harness economic viability

Lebanon is a wealthy country. In principle. It has all sorts of assets – land, water, industry, skilled workers and competitive professionals, a deep education system, touristic and cultural treasures, seasonal agricultural outputs and the related agro-industry, and so forth. Some of the country's assets are well known to the point of hyperbole, such as the trade-link location at the crossroads of cultures and the marvelously sized external economic network of expatriates.

Beyond – for a small country sizeable – their number and complexity, Lebanon's assets have stories that are as disturbing as they are particular. Some publicly controlled assets, for example in telecommunications, are more tangible and quantifiable than others but have underperformed under state tutelage. Other intangible ones, such as the culinary culture and the ability to attract visitors, have shown vacillating performances in reflection of regional and international factors. While the tale of domestic transportation assets has been dominated by informality and confu-

sion over ownership and strategy (see story page 36). Some important human and natural assets could be newly commoditized, but possibly at costs to society that would negate any real benefit from doing so. Other publicly held assets, like electricity production (the default example), have been held captive to partisan interests which blocked their development. Some assets, such as water, have not only suffered decades of state tutelage and politically polluted management but also have barely been assessed in economic terms.

The societal value of the most notoriously unequal assets held in Lebanon, namely the financial assets, has been stifled. From state gold reserves to working people's retirement savings, legal stipulations for a full generation have restricted the usage of such assets to the people's disadvantage. Capital markets have been frozen dreams. While the concentration of private deposits and their deployment in unproductive investments, such as luxury real estate, has been allowed without significant attempts

at putting them at least in part, to more productive or equitable use. All of this was happening for more than two decades before the crash of the economy. Since the onset of the currency crisis in late 2019, impairment of GDP has exacerbated the detriments that stem from extreme concentration of financial assets in the remaining (and very large) pockets of private wealth.

In this landscape littered with politically stranded, abused, and underdeveloped assets amidst an encroaching swamp of poisonous inequality, nobody disputes that the land of the cedars is far less affluent than it was just two years ago. (No wonder: printing money and burning reserves on subsidies are two of several great recipes for financial mayhem that have recently been used to excess in the Lebanese fiscal and monetary kitchen.)

Delivering another confirmation of this economic destruction, the World Bank on July 1 carved a depressing financial marker into its global totem pole of "country classifications" by Gross National Income

(GNI). On the 2022 edition of this list, Lebanon is classified as a “lower-middle income country” in a politically correct lingo which encodes the country’s economic degradation in a catchy, albeit simplistic, term.

“For the eleventh consecutive year, Lebanon’s real GDP per capita fell in 2021, and the country also experienced sharp exchange rate depreciation. Therefore, Lebanon, an upper-middle-income country for almost 25 years, now moves to the lower-middle income group,” notes the entry in the official World Bank Blog.

The downshift in Lebanon’s economic assessment comes with a number: \$3,450 GNI per capita for 2021 as of a July 1, 2022 estimate. The year-on-year drop from \$5,510 GNI per capita brought Lebanon below the institution’s upper/lower MIC dividing line of \$4,255. However, the reclassification is that of a sub-tier: Lebanon is still part (and not near the bottom) of the middle-income countries (MIC) that comprise the bulk of countries in the World Bank’s taxonomy. Numbering well over 100, MICs are the home of more than two thirds of the global population and are sub-categorized according to GNI/capita as upper and lower MICs – in what miraculously turns out to be roughly even proportion.

LONG COMING REMINDER OF THE NEED FOR ACTION ON ASSETS

This reclassification had been expected for more than a year. However helpful, meaningful, or counter-productive the classification may turn out to be, morphing the dry data into policy discourse as indicative of the self-identifications and behaviors of the country’s economic actors highlights our strategic question: how to make better use of Lebanon’s assets?

Also, besides portraying the assets question as an emergency issue

in the context of Lebanon’s needed economic rescue, the World Bank classification is an urgent reminder of the need for a new asset utilization strategy. Even more so considering the World Bank’s observation of 11 consecutive years of contractions in Lebanon’s real GDP.

Three elemental choices of a 21st century political economy are state control, regulated markets with a dominance of private firms, and a mixed economy where private and public interests are pursued through a combination of socialized public mandates and capitalist private ownership rights. Discussions to plot a course for publicly held assets, having been conducted against the background of Lebanon’s free-wheeling mercantile mindset and entrepreneurial zeal, have been tilted towards a system of private markets or a mixed economy solution.

The default solution under the logic of markets is radical privatization of public assets. The radical opposite, massive nationalization and central planning of the economy, has profoundly lost its appeal during numerous such experiments. One solution, where state ownership of assets is maintained but elements of private enterprise are secured, is the proposition of the sovereign contracting out services through licensing, concessions, and royalty agreements. The licensees and concessioners pay upfront fees, royalties, and taxes during the life of their contracts. A similar and frequently chosen solution with elements of a mixed economy is corporatized state-owned enterprises (SOE), meaning SOEs that are operating according to the practical wisdom of governance, rooted in markets and competition. Finally, and in comparison with SOEs,

is a public private partnership or PPP; a less state-affirming solution under the mixed economy model but with many existing sub-models, such as build-operate-transfer (BOT).

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CENTER-RIGHT SIDE OF THE STATE-MARKET EQUATION

As befitting a democracy, Lebanon has proponents of full privatization, fans of models that retain state ownership and advocates of PPPs. Private industry tends to be in the first camp. “I would go for full privatization of public services,” Salim Zenni, the president of the Association of Industrialists, tells Executive.

To Zenni, the highest plateaus of local efficiency are scaled by the achievements made in the private sector. “I would like to privatize because of the inefficiency of the public sector in Lebanon. [This inefficiency]

■ The World Bank classification is an urgent reminder of the need for a new asset utilization strategy

is so endemic that there is no way for [any sector] to be profitable if it is not run by the private sector,” he reasons.

Having encountered too many needless costs, their optimization would be a much-needed benefit of privatization of state services for industrial companies, he adds, referring to high public sector fees for conducting trade through Lebanese ports as an example. “In both imports and exports, industrialists are invoiced for services that are not needed. Compared to the quality of these services, both are overpriced,” he complains.

Industrialists have for many years been facing issues with infrastructure, communication, and the supply of electricity, along with absence



Casino du Liban is majority-owned by a government-controlled company, Intra Investment Company

of state policies. Yet, Zenni says, they have not been deterred, adding that state involvement is not helpful even if it was coming through protectionist measures. “We industrialists have the capacity and capability of competing and this has shown in the past two to three years. What is needed at this stage is to bring down the industrialists’ cost, so that they can compete locally and internationally.”

Khaled Zeidan, an experienced investor and banker, acknowledges that privatization is a contentious issue in Lebanon, but attributes this to misconceptions circulating in the country before the adoption of a privatization law 22 years ago, during the term of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. “People say no [to privatization] without understanding what they are rejecting,” he says.

In his view, the privatization law of 2000 has been structured in a good way. The work of the Higher Council for Privatization (HCP, later augmented to include a mandate for public-private-partnerships) since that time has likewise been organized well, he says, and widespread arguments over privatization today are driven by the same mentalities as they were then. “In my opinion, you have those who understand the real value proposi-

tion for the country – but [for whom privatization] is in contradiction to their own objective of clientelism and nepotism,” Zeidan argues, who is the chairman and general manager of Beirut-based financial advisory firm Capital EE.

“Then there are those that are being fed leftist point of views through the media. Why are we suddenly no longer in favor of a clear, transparent process? You sell 49 percent [of a publicly held asset] to investors and retain majority ownership by the state. You sell according to specific rules and regulations and use a process that is managed by an international investment bank or similar. I think simply that there has been a

■ “What is needed at this stage is to bring down the industrialists’ cost, so they can compete locally and internationally.”

huge amount of misinformation that has trickled into the consciousness of the general public.”

For academic and businessman Fouad Zmokhol, the best path to be trodden under the current circumstances is the one of private sector involvement, in which state ownership of a public asset remains intact. “Per-

sonally, I am in favor of BOT, because BOT will keep ownership of the state. It can give the private partner 15 or 20 years but will revert to the state after,” he says, adding wistfully: “And one hopes that by then, a lot will have been achieved and the state will have been improved.”

However, Zmokhol, who wears two hats as dean of the faculty of business administration and management at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) and as President of the Association of Lebanese Business People in the World (RDCL World), cautions that there are two main issues standing as obstacles to privatization, PPPs, or BOT projects.

Firstly, any investor into the Lebanese market today would not look so much at a project’s promise of return and its intrinsic risks but examine the worst-case scenario. This is based on the knowledge that an investment in Lebanon can be lost; not over bad investment strategies or wrong management but because of sovereign and political risk.

According to Zmokhol, assessments of project risks are made worse by the chaotic state of the judicial system. An additional factor against investor involvement is the current inability to predict rational return expectations considering the country’s currency instability and competing parallel currency rates.

“Given these two main issues, I do not see any investment appetite in the short term. But things can be different after financial rates return,” he says, before elaborating that the third risk factor is the political reality of Lebanon. Since the end of the civil war in the 1990s, the state has been under the sway of a “gang”: people that were involved in the conflict and remain in power with no indication that they will ever relinquish it (as one can argue has been demonstrated in the latest elections and political “negotiations” thereafter). “Taking those three [barriers against investment] into account, I unfortunately don’t see any appetite to invest in the coming years,” Zmokhol repeats.

Zeidan points out that Lebanon’s market economy has continued to function despite a three-year shrinkage of the economy, which in his view was substantial, but not as bad as presumed by international observers or as expressed in high-level economic ranking numbers. According to him, the bulk of the economy has moved into informality, the size of which institutions such as the World Bank cannot gauge. “The only problem now is to bring credit back, and how to do that. This to me is the biggest challenge. Deposits and Eurobond subscriptions were sources of inflows but both are no longer there. [Access to finance] has to be an essential component of any restructuring plan.”

Besides great implications for the banking sector, such as the need to create specialized banks and also draw in international banking players, the finance aspect of any reform and rescue operation is crucial in matters of privatization, along with the activation of PPPs and SOEs as economic drivers. On the other hand, according to Zeidan, local banks would not contribute to the sale or activation of public assets as lead investors, given that investment needs of large projects would be beyond their means. Instead, they would likely be constrained to roles of conduits.

“If for example [a globally active investment bank] would decide to be involved in the financing of an oil block exploration, specialized funds and regional players would want to get involved, and most probably also some Lebanese banks that take small stakes in a syndicated arrangement,” he says. “To act as agents in PPP and SOE projects you do not need commercial banks but solid, specialized investment and specialized banks across the country. [For this] we need to build new pockets of funding, which were previously ignored.”

NUANCES TO BOOT

Within their views that can safely be seen as residing on the center-right side of the socialist-capitalist balance in matters of society and state, the three experts discuss the vast complex of privatization, SOEs, and PPPs in nuanced ways.

Zenni for example shows himself convinced that investments into telecommunications assets (see special report of May 2022) would not only be suitable for large, internationally active operating groups as strategic partners. “The big players will come, and it will be difficult to compete

against them [for winning any telco tenders],” he concedes. However, he emphasizes that open competition on tenders and not political stipulations under joint ventures should involve local shareholders. “We as Lebanese

■ Zeidan points out that Lebanon’s market economy has continued to function despite a three-year shrinkage

companies are all over the world, having acquired telecom licenses and operating networks. Why should we not be capable of doing that in Lebanon?”

Albeit Zenni’s acceptance list of solutions for the improvement of public services in Lebanon starts with full privatization, it does not end there. “My opinion: go private, but if the decision is not to go private, PPP is 100 percent better than public [ownership and operation]. [Going] private is better than PPP and PPP is better than public,” he elaborates. On the issue of capital markets and listing of companies, he says that he recognizes the importance of a functioning local capital market, but would prefer listings on international securities exchanges over waiting for an opening of a real capital market for the local



Lebanon's government holds a monopoly over the tobacco industry



economy. "I will not sit doing nothing just waiting for the Lebanese capital market to open," he says.

Despite voicing serious doubts about the viability of continued operations of state-owned enterprises and sectors, and also about the possibility of attracting partners for PPPs, Zmokhol explains that from his perspective as a business leader, the situation of Lebanese enterprises and publicly held sectors requires "keeping the headline issues in mind," while thinking as if there are partners interested to enter into projects like electricity generation. Even if those might be in the ideation phase and need further data requirements before concrete steps can be taken. "It is good to have a discussion over SOEs and develop new ideas, [but] implementation would involve many stages where you have to put at least some dates and a strategy, and guarantees," he says.

"Noting that fundamental principles of PPP have evolved greatly, there is a lot of research that should be done from the academic side of the PPP proposition," adding his perspective as an academic. "The law that we have on PPP is basic, and in my view was much more political than actively implemented. According to the research that was done at USJ, the [PPP] law leaves many questions on the issue of governance open. The

main issues as far as doing academic research and policy research on PPP, would be governance, management, and [exit options]," Zmokhol opines.

Zeidan on his part puts emphasis on the view that in order to have viable concessions, operator contracts, or a PPP in projects – anywhere from new hydro-power and renewable energy to a port or running a casino – the structure of the project should initially be led by an international agency and also have a local partner as co-lead. In case of a listing, shares would have to be issued locally, he says. All this cannot proceed without a functioning and trustworthy financial sector. But it begins with adoption of a clear vision. "We need to reimagine the banking sector in a way that serves the economy which we want to build," he advocates.

The mental picture that emerges is that of a never-ending political economy discourse overlaid with the surreal image of a very practical dilemma. In the latter regard, in one side of an imagined hall of resuscitation and new strategy for the economy, are the political, oligarchic, and other, elephants, all with their history of self-interests and narrow group

interests which have been pursued at the expense of public interest. On the other side of the same hall, resides a pit full of very hot PPP, SOE, and privatization corporate potatoes which are all different: assets that can deliver benefits to society but need management, governance, regulation, mind-set, money and activation.

The barriers against the latter are humongous: barriers that are finan-

■ "We need to reimagine the banking sector in a way that serves the economy which we want to build."

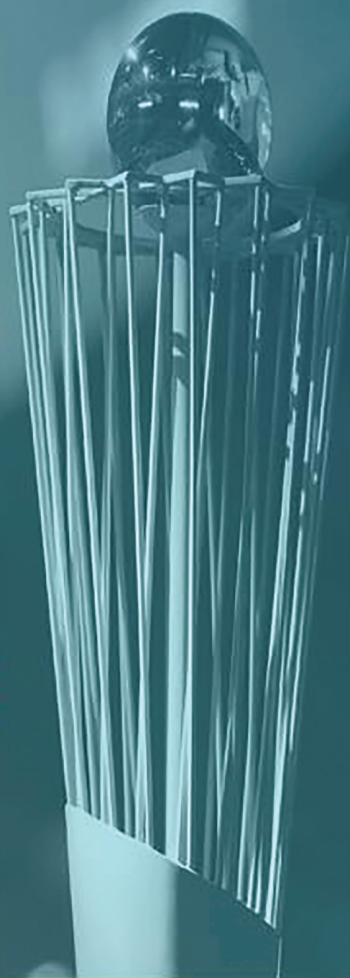
cial, and barriers that are structural because even the existing SOEs are not transparent and do not have a culture of efficiency and productive collaboration. Add to that the voids in regulation, legislation, oversight, judicial processes and institutions, plus the absence of infrastructure and basic supplies, which PPPs and SOEs would need and that privatized companies also could not do without.

The elephants, however, are part of the polity, and they need to be brought into productive political order, while the hot potatoes need working solutions: the sooner, the better. ■

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Can public transport go “public”?



A poor structure, wasted public funds and free market excesses have depleted Lebanon's transportation sector

The realm of ground transport is in upheaval. Increased need for affordable commutes to and from work is rooted to one side by higher fuel costs and on the other side by overall consumer price inflation and extreme cost-of-living hikes. People need to be economically active to earn a living, but if they cannot get to work or commuting to work costs too much, the economy becomes stifled in yet another way.

Enter the public transport system. A combination of climate issues, lifestyle changes wrought by Covid-19 lockdowns, and now this year's alarming fuel price rises have been pushing many countries to rethink or boost established people mover systems.

In Germany this spring, the parliament approved a plan to temporarily cut transportation costs to ease the burden of the increasing global energy prices. Dubbed “9 for 90”,

the 9-euro ticket can be used across Germany with all city and regional transport for a period of 90 days. The costly initiative – 2.5 billion euros was allocated by the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure – sold some 21 million tickets between May and early July.

The 9-euro ticket and a parallel gasoline tax relief in the European economic powerhouse were designed as a stop-gap measure against swelling transportation costs and as an initiative to change mainstream commuter behaviors. But numerous other countries, notably smaller European Union members with visitor-friendly policies, have also been scaling up their public transport strategies. In Malta, public transportation will be free of charge from October, in a move to encourage better use and reduce congestion on the roads. Over in Luxembourg, public transport is provided at zero cost for citizens and

tourists alike, setting a striking example of a country with free mobility.

THE REALITY OF AN INFORMAL TRANSPORT SECTOR

On the contrary in Lebanon, public transportation is practically nonexistent as a good provided by state, province, or municipality. The country's current multifaceted crisis has triggered once again a debate over whether the economically crucial sector of ground transport should be reconstituted along old public bus and train operators, or newly designed in a public way.

In the absence of an efficient public transportation system, Lebanon has long relied on private passenger service solutions. Private cars serve as the key vehicle for mobility, leaving the sector vulnerable to negative energy shocks.

Periodic efforts of the bureaucratically endowed railway and public

transport authority, known locally as the Office des Chemins de Fer et des Transports en Commun (OCFTC), manage to operate some public buses with the OCFTC logo in Beirut and its hinterland.

But in reality, low-income commuters, cost-conscious students and an ecologically-minded minority of Beirut urbanites have to resort to the entrepreneurial system of shared service taxis, or private bus and mini-bus operators, to avoid the luxury expense of an exclusive taxi.

While for a long time the system comprised of ad-hoc service taxis (a “step to the curb if you want a ride” system) and unreliable private bus schedules, it generally met the transport needs of people without their own cars.

Yet inevitably, the free market spirit of the mass transportation sector translated into excesses of aggressive driving alongside incalculable safety risks which disadvantaged orderly, OCFTC operated buses.

The latter at some politically opportune moments got support from public figures, which seemed to last as briefly as it was shallow, but then those buses quite literally started to fall apart while seeing less and less usage.

Riding private new or used cars became the go-to option. They were deemed safer, more practical, more socially desirable, and thanks to bank loan offers, became more accessible too. In addition, subsidized fuel prices at the pump, and the slump in oil prices to around \$50 per barrel between 2015 and 2020, boosted Lebanon’s private car craze.

However, the dilapidated state of public transport cannot be attributed solely to Lebanon’s love affair with personal wheels, or the government’s populist policies in which they transferred international oil price falls onto the consumers – a move criticized at the time by visiting International Monetary Fund delegations.

In reality, it stems from the frag-



mented and overlapping tasks designated to various governmental and institutional authorities, and the lack of coordination among these entities. This was highlighted by a Lebanese American University report in 2014, titled “Sustainable Transport; Grouped Publication”. Weak management, low levels of accountability and inter-ministerial friction were natural consequences of this absolute chaos, points confirmed in the National Environmental Action Plan issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Environment in 2005. Today, instead of striving to become sustainable, the sector seems to have reached a point of no return and struggles to stay functional.

This mal-organized situation is causing significant economic losses, and the elevated cost of transportation is impacting citizens’ mobility, according to the transport economist and planner Dr. Mazen Omran. Skilled workforce is not well-linked to employment locations and students

are not appropriately connected to schools and universities, Omran says. He also believes this is impacting productivity rates and human capital formation. Even worse, the whole

■ Riding private new or used cars became the go-to option. They were deemed safer, more practical, more socially desirable

economic activity is paralyzed; taking a toll on already sinking government revenues according to Ziad Nasr, the head of the Railway and Public Transportation Authority (RPTA).

THE RAILWAY SECTOR: TIME FOR A REVIVAL?

The railway network was originally established in the 1890s mainly to link Beirut and Tripoli to Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Europe, through the efforts of local and French businessmen. On June 6, 1956, the Lebanese state regained ownership of the railroads under the name “Chemin de Fer de l’État Libanais” (Lebanese



State Railways). Then on April 14, 1961, the Office des Chemins de Fer de l'État Libanais et du Transport en Commun de Beyrouth et de sa Banlieue (Lebanese State Railway and Public Transportation Authority for Beirut and Suburbs) was formed under Decree 6479. Its name was later changed to what we know today, Office des Chemins de Fer et des Transports en Commun.

However, like most of Lebanon's post-civil war infrastructure, the railway service suffered great losses and its operations gradually declined until it ceased completely in the early 1990s. After that, many parts of the railway were encroached upon by buildings or highways.

The OCFTC, a public institution established in 1961 under the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, remained the sector's management authority. A semi-independent legal identity with financial and administrative autonomy, the OCFTC is formed of two departments: the Railways Directorate and the Bus Transport Directorate.

As opposed to public perception, there are no employees in the Railways Directorate, Nasr tells Executive: "Policymakers tend to think that there is no need for employees unless the train stations are fully operation-

■ As opposed to public perception, there are no employees in the Railways Directorate

al." Nasr argues that the creation of a new public transport system requires both local human resources and international input.

"The planning on all levels requires skilled staff," Nasr says, before adding that there is a major need for international technical guidance to build capacity. On top of technical assistance from foreign institutions, involvement by the private sector is also a must, according to Nasr. Either in the form of public-private partnerships (PPP), build-operate-transfer (BOT) or foreign direct investment (FDI); to share risks and enhance productivity, provided

there is political stability.

Earlier this year, caretaker Public Works and Transport Minister Ali Hamieh discussed with a French transport company, Alstom SA, the restoration of three railways under a BOT contract. Potential rail projects for freight or public transport have been repeatedly brought up at different moments since they became inactive some 30 years ago.

Under the latest attempt to rebuild rail infrastructure and bring some relief to the roads, the first suggested rail line would link Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport to Abboudiye on the northern border with Syria, while passing through the ports of Beirut and Tripoli. The second would connect the airport to the Masnaa border crossing, and the third would function from Riyak in the Bekaa valley to the Syrian city of Homs.

"The revival of the railway sector is a must, but it requires a feasibility study that takes into account the new economic and urban realities and needs," Nasr says. "The priority will be given to the coastline connecting Beirut and Tripoli ports." In February this year, Hamieh announced that Spain will be financing a comprehensive master plan for the 407-kilometer-long railway, in a bid to revive it.

BUS NETWORK: A FEASIBLE OPTION?

Earlier this year, on May 23, France offered 50 buses to Lebanon to support the rehabilitation of the road sector, as per an agreement between the French and Lebanese Public Works and Transport Ministers signed on March 10 at the Grand Serail in Beirut. This grant comes on top of a prior initiative by the French shipping company CMA CGM which repaired 45 public buses damaged by the Beirut blast, as per a statement by the company.

Asked about the status of the

French buses, Nasr explained that various operational obstacles are still in the way. Fuel oil suppliers and spare parts distributors request cash payments in fresh dollars, while public institutions are legally obliged to meet their financial obligations in Lebanese Pounds. “Exceptional times need exceptional measures,” he says.

But supplier demands aside, the work morale and room for performance of the 150 employees in the directorate remains questionable, given that they are earning a monthly salary worth \$45 on average. Currently, 6,400 buses and mini vans with legal plates are operational, while illegal plates amount to double this number, Nasr says. They operate without specific schedules and do not use dedicated lanes. In addition, these

■ 6,400 buses and mini vans with legal plates are operational, while illegal plates amount to double



buses compete over the same lines in the cities, while they are almost inexistent in remote areas, rendering their services inefficient. As well as this, the vehicles do not undergo regular maintenance, posing a serious safety threat.

THE LEBANESE TRANSPORTATION SECTOR: A NEED FOR THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC REBOUND

If Lebanon's economy is to rebound, the transportation sector should be at the core. Omran says the sector is not close to topping the list of urgent PPP projects or privatization discussions, and emphasizes that a transport policy should be agreed upon irrespective of politics. “Jumping between transport projects that are politically driven without an overarching transport policy will not get the country anywhere,” he says. “The transportation sector can play a monumental role, specifically in the current unprecedented economic crisis; if public transport is promoted and implemented, as it provides a real alternative and cheaper option to private cars.”

By Omran's estimate, several hundreds of millions of dollars are required to create public transport choices to meet the needs of people and enterprises, because the current road and rail infrastructure are not suitable for any transport scheme. “Private finance via the World Bank, European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development should have a role to play, but without a clear strategy it would be challenging to attract any PPP.”

Various research studies published in international academic journals confirm that countries with good infrastructure attract more FDI. As a matter of fact, transport infrastructure that includes components such as roads, runways, ports, airports, and railways, among others,

contribute to decreasing the cost of doing business, and subsequently enhancing FDI.

However, the nature of public transport is undergoing fundamental changes; reflected by the current planning of infrastructure and mass transit projects. The arrival of digitized private transport along with the avalanche of ride hail apps is a cautionary tale on the importance of designing public transport in long-term social and sustainable manner, particularly in light of a recent investigation into Uber, which revealed lobbying and falsifications as it expanded out of the United States.

Drone deliveries and driverless trucking systems, in addition to new remote working traditions, have to be integrated into the negotiations of decision makers. In Germany, for instance, public transport is highly organized, but also involves endless regulations and interlaced public, private, and privatized operators. As such, allowing for ride-share taxis a few years ago required an overhaul of the law, while initiating a summer solution like the nine-euro ticket needed the buy-ins of states and massive bureaucratic adjustments.

By contrast, the arrival of ride-hail apps to Lebanon did not visibly disrupt the existing sector. Lebanon's massively informal public transport sector and absence of state capacity to manage it, in addition to the technical alertness and entrepreneurial drive of its innovators, such as entrepreneurship hub tech workshops, could mark a perfect starting point to engineer new modes of public transport. The development of such modes, as PPPs or otherwise, are urgently needed to avoid a worsening of this integral sector. What is more, if successive governments had taken precautionary actions, less investment would be needed today. Although, according to Nasr, it is better late than never. ■

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■ **AD Ports Group** and the **Red Sea Ports Authority** have signed a term sheet and a head of terms agreement for major port projects along Egypt's coastline on May 5.

■ The **Lebanese Transparency Association** – No Corruption (National Chapter of Transparency International) launched the “Lollar – Currency of Corruption” campaign in D Beirut in Karantina, during a media briefing event in the presence of representatives of local, regional and international NGOs, audio visual and online media, as well as journalists, bloggers, social media influencers and key opinion leaders from various media platforms.

■ **Rebirth Beirut** opened its art exhibition at its headquarters in Gemmayze, entitled Rebirth Art Exhibition, between 5-14 May, where it displayed paintings and drawings by four Lebanese artists: Fady Chammas, Mona Nahleh, Tatiana Stephan and Jessy Tabet.

■ **Salesforce**, the global leader in CRM, announced that it has been ranked the #1 CRM provider by the **International Data Corporation** in its latest Worldwide Semiannual Software Tracker.

■ The board of directors at **Aafaq Islamic Finance**, announced the appointment of Hisham Hammoud, as the new CEO of the company.

■ **Asha Middle East**, a Dubai-based homegrown fashion house fusing Western flair and Middle Eastern tradition into Abaya design, launched the first-of-a-kind Abaya collection using Spanish blends of durable, anti-crease, high-end furniture fabric.

■ Thirty-two students from eight private and public schools across Lebanon celebrated Europe Day, as this year marks the **European Year of the Youth**. The

contest, which covered such topics as art, literature, history, geography, and sports, took place at the **Pierre Abou Khater Amphitheater** in Beirut. The day was an occasion for students to gain insights into the **European Union's** institutions and evolution, as well as the 27 member states that make up the union.

■ On May 29, **In Action Events**, in partnership with the **Municipality of Beirut** and **CD Global Associates**, organized a street fair in Gemmayze to remind the Lebanese people that Beirut can still be cheerful regardless of the circumstances it is going through. Gemmayze street was filled with music, artists, designers, crafters, and other local businesses, which created a joyful atmosphere and displayed the energetic Lebanese spirit and the unique talent of the Lebanese people.

■ The **University of Balamand (UOB)** and the **Union of Arab Banks (UAB)** signed a memorandum of understanding on May 11, to provide union members with exclusive access to the newly launched human resource certified online program. The MOU was signed by Dr. Elias Warrak, President of UOB and Mr. Wissam Fattouh, General Secretary of UAB.

■ **Dubai Holding Entertainment** and the UAE's first and only hospital dedicated to treating children and adolescents, **Al Jalila Children's Specialty Hospital**, announced the launch of the Happiness Programme to help inspire fun, joy, learning and happiness among children at the hospital on May 11.

■ On the occasion of Mental Health Awareness Month, which fell in May, **Spinneys**, in collaboration with **Embrace** association, organized a workshop as part of the annual 'Flower Festival', in its eighth edition. Within the framework of Spinneys' activities and work which supports community safety and green

initiatives, the workshop was held on May 12, at Spinneys' in Hazmieh, with the presence of journalists and social media influencers.

■ **The Emirates Group** released its 2021-22 Annual Report which shows strong recovery across its businesses. Data returns to profitability, and significant revenue improvements were reported across both Emirates and **dnata** as the Group rebuilt its air transport and travel-related operations, which were previously cut-back by the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ **United Nations** Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Joanna Wronecka, congratulated Lebanon on the conduct of parliamentary elections on May 15 which saw the Lebanese people exercising their democratic right to select representatives and make their voices heard.

■ With a shared vision that all children deserve access to education, the **LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital** and **Myschoolpulse** NGO joined forces to ensure that hospitalized children have access to school programs. The partnership was signed on May 11 in the presence of Mr. Sami Rizk CEO LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital, Mrs. Lara Hage, MySchoolPulse deputy manager and others.

■ **Mastercard** and **OPay** announced a strategic partnership to grow the cashless ecosystem and advance digital financial inclusion for millions on May 19.

■ The **World Health Organization** representative for Lebanon, Dr. Iman Shankiti and the **Italian Ambassador** for Lebanon, Nicoletta Bombardiere, signed an agreement, on May 19, at the Italian Embassy in Beirut worth 1,616,000 euros. This project will contribute towards supporting and strengthening of public health systems.

■ On Thursday, May 19, the **Yale Lebanese Alumni Association** joined forces with leading Lebanese NGO **Bassma** to help feed the hungry in Beirut's most impoverished areas.

■ **Emirates**, the world's largest international airline, was named year as the official airline and premium partner of Roland-Garros 2022, for the tenth consecutive year. The premier clay court event took place from 22 May to 5 June at Stade Roland-Garros. This year, Emirates will also be celebrating a significant milestone in France as the airline marks 30 years of operations at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

■ **Philip Morris International Inc.** (PMI) released its third annual Integrated Report, which included an updated statement of purpose, a new environmental, social, and governance (ESG) framework, as well as detailed information about PMI's strategic vision, performance, governance, and value creation model. The content was informed by a formal sustainability materiality assessment conducted in 2021.

■ **Sky News Arabia** launched a new digital platform, covering breaking business news, and providing economic analysis and in-depth reporting for Arab speakers across the globe.

■ **Kia Corporation** and **Rafa Nadal** collaborated to launch 'Kia Clubhouse', a new initiative aimed at making tennis more accessible and inspiring the next generation. The inaugural event took place in Paris on May 25, with 18 children from the local organization Fête le Mur and six children from the tennis club Gennevillais. In line with Kia's ethos of 'Movement That Inspires', the children were chauffeured in a fleet of Kia vehicles, including the company's first dedicated all-electric model EV6 and the brand's most popular SUV model Sportage.

■ The number of enquiries by Dubai residents and visitors registering interest to buy real estate units tripled following the government's April announcement laying down the new UAE visa rules,

according to real estate brokerage **Union Square House**. The new visa regulations will come into effect in September 2022, making the UAE a second home for many expatriates.

■ In the crypt of Saint Joseph Church in Beirut, **Banque BEMO** launched an art initiative, the "Rotating Art", in partnership with **Commercial Insurance** and Beirut-based art dealer **Gabriel Rizkallah**, in the presence of a large audience, namely the bank's family and friends, as well as artists and media.

■ As part of its activities aimed at restoring life to Beirut, specifically Gemmayze street, and supporting local innovations in the country, **Spinneys** participated in "Aa Tareeq El-Gemmayze" festival created by **In Action Events** with the **Beirut Municipality** and "**S.D. Global**" through "Souk El Beit." By taking part, Spinneys promoted local inventions and supported small businesses by giving thirty creative men and women a platform to display and market their products.

■ **Genesis** was announced as an official manufacturer partner of the **Gran Turismo World Series**, an online global motorsport championship. As an official partner, Genesis will be competing in the championship with the Genesis X GR3 and Genesis G70 GR4 concept vehicles for the Manufacturer's Cup.

■ A compassionate approach combined with innovative technology solutions has the potential to address the financial needs of persons with disabilities across the Middle East and Africa, according to the latest white paper from **Mastercard**, published on June 1.

■ **Sky News Arabia Academy** announced a new course schedule that includes its most popular training and workshops to date, as well as a new selection of exciting and innovative courses. The most popular include TV presenting, mobile journalism, video editing and digital and social media. The Academy also introduced a new selection of courses focusing on 'Creativity', including

graphic design, motion graphic design, promo producing, creative directing, and art directing.

■ **L'Oréal Liban** launched its philanthropic program "Beauty For a Better Life" in Taanayel, and opens its third training center in cooperation with Kayany Foundation.

■ As a historical landmark that stood in the eye of the storm many times, and as the emblem of Lebanon's hospitality industry and its mythical phoenix, the **Phoenicia Beirut** announced on June 6 that it is reopening the Phoenicia Residence in July and the hotel in October.

■ **Inkript**, a digital security solutions provider operating in the Middle East and Africa region and a subsidiary of **Resource Group**, obtained a letter of approval from VISA for its biometric payment card built on the ZwiPe Pay platform.

■ **VMware** Inc. announced significant enhancements to its unique lateral security capabilities to help customers achieve strong security for both modern and traditional applications, across multi-cloud environments. Ahead of RSA Conference 2022, VMware introduced Contexta, VMware's full-fidelity threat intelligence capability that observes the breadth of VMware's network, endpoint, and user technologies. With Contexta, VMware is reframing traditional security analytics with enriched threat intelligence to enhance its security and management portfolio.

■ **PwC Middle East** launched its latest MENA Women in Work Survey 2022: "Young Women, Powerful Ambitions" to highlight the career aspirations of young women, the challenges they face across the Middle East and North Africa region, and the key measures needed for employers to enable women's potential in workplaces.

■ Strengthening its model line-up and continuing to build on its SUV dominance across the region, **Nissan** introduced a new 9-speed automatic transmission to the Middle East, offering customers a

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host of benefits and improved driving experiences on June 8. Making its debut in the recently launched all-new 2022 Nissan Pathfinder, the new high efficiency, quick-response automatic transmission delivers on customers' needs in the region.

On June 9, **UNICEF** and the **Embassy of Japan** in Lebanon handed over the supplies warehouse in Karantina to the **Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)**. Following the heavy damage caused by the Beirut explosion in 2020, the warehouse was rehabilitated and expanded to ensure MOPH has a functional central facility capable of supporting the national efforts to improve maternal and child health.

CIBL for Women celebrated the completion of a two-year collaborative project entitled "Support and Accelerate Women's Inclusion" (SAWI). The project was completed in partnership with organizations such as **Apotheox Business Services** in Algeria, **Warsha Consultancy and Development** in Bahrain, **Women Empowerment Organization-WEO** in Iraq, **Business and professional Women Amman -BPWA** in Jordan, the **Lebanese League for Women in Business-LLWB**, **Economia in HEM** in Morocco, and **Democracy for All** in Tunisia. It aims to pioneer employers from the banking, healthcare, higher education, and STEM sectors.

The **European Union Election Observation Mission EOM** hosted on June 15, at the Mövenpick Hotel in Beirut, a ceremony in which it donated items, materials and equipment that were locally purchased during the mission, to Lebanese non-governmental organizations.

On June 20, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, together with the Minister for Social Affairs Hector Hajjar and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Najat Rochdi, launched the **2022-2023 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan** at the Grand Serail in Beirut, Lebanon.

The Digital Humanities Center at the **University of Balamand** launched its virtual museum under the name "Morphe" devoted entirely to showcasing Lebanese works of art and culture virtually, making them accessible to a wide universal audience.

Mastercard and the Saudi Esports Federation (SEF) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote Saudi Arabia's billion-dollar gaming industry. Mastercard and SEF will collaborate on a range of innovations, including Metaverse and Augmented Reality activations, Non-Fungible Tokens, gamers and fans' loyalty solutions, and a gaming virtual Mastercard card.

Rebirth Beirut restored the beat of life to Saint Nicolas' historic stairs after lighting it to complete the "Light up Your Street" initiative launched by the association in May 2022.

In light of the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon, data from assessment studies conducted by organizations revealed that 3.3 million people are in need. In fact, 2.2 million people, including the Lebanese, migrants, and Palestinian refugees are facing food insecurities, while 393,000 are suffering from gender based violence, 334,000 need child protection and 172,000 need access to education (Increasing Humanitarian Needs in Lebanon, OCHA, 2022). However, as none of these studies reflect the needs of adolescents and youth, particularly girls and women, **Plan International Lebanon** conducted a detailed needs assessment and gender analysis to complement the existing research.

By organizing the first "For Women in Science" ceremony since Covid-19, **Foundation L'Oréal and UNESCO**, on June 30, celebrated the 15 recipients of its International Awards from 2020, 2021 and 2022, and the 30 Interna-

tional Rising Talents awarded in 2020 and 2022. After two consecutive cancellations of the event due to the public health situation, this year's ceremony was particularly celebratory.

UNICEF launched national consultations for its next Country Programme with stakeholders in Lebanon on June 28.

Genesis Motor Europe revealed its Electrified GV70 at this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed in partnership with **Mastercard**, on June 29.

BLAST has partnered with **AD Gaming** – a pioneering gaming and e-sports initiative – to bring its prestigious global e-sports tournament, the BLAST Premier World Final, to Abu Dhabi for the first time later this year, as part of a landmark three-year partnership, announced on June 30.

UNICEF, in partnership with "**Souk El Tayeb**", launched "AHLAN", a network of community-based social enterprises that aims at creating sustainable and local businesses and providing opportunities for vulnerable youth, females and families within their communities to meet the increasing demand in the agro-tourism sector. Ahlan will include four small scale restaurants "Ahlan bel matbakh", 2 guest homes "Ahlan bel beit" and 4 farmers' shops "Ahlan bel deken".

TotalEnergies Marketing Lebanon presented awards, on June 30, to 18 school students who won the **VIA Creative** contest at a ceremony held at the **Sursock Museum**. Launched by TotalEnergies Marketing Lebanon, in collaboration with the **National Road Safety Council (NRSC)** and the **Ecole Supérieure d'Ingénieurs de Beyrouth (ESIB-USJ)** earlier this year, the VIA Creative contest aimed to raise awareness on pedestrian safe behavior among school students. 

EVENTS

CONFERENCES

	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT	WEBSITE
LEBANON			
31 Jul - 4 Aug	WORKFORCE PLANNING AND BUDGETING Elite Events	info@elite-events.org	www.elite-events.org
1 Sep	THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE SYMPOSIUM Royal Tropical Institute	communication@kit.nl	www.kit.nl
22-24 Sep	INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON MATERIALS, ELECTROCHEMISTRY AND ENVIRONMENT Lebanese University	+961 1612830; rsabeh@ul.edu.lb	www.ul.edu.lb
20-21 Oct	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EFFICIENT BUILDING DESIGN Ashrae	+961 3050515; a.elbitar@premiuemec.com	www.lebanese.ashraechapters.org
UAE - DUBAI			
26 Jul	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL, FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND BIO-TECHNOLOGY IRF Conference	+918 763630137 info.irfconference@gmail.com	www.irfconference.org
8-12 Aug	EXECUTIVE MINI-MBA IN OIL AND GAS MANAGEMENT The Management Centre	cs@themanagementcentre.com	www.themanagementcentre.com
15-16 Aug	GLOBAL 5G CONFERENCE Falcon Business Research	+919 596222227; events@fb-research.com	www.fb-research.com
26-27 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HEAT TRANSFER AND FLUID FLOW ISER	+917 606986241; info@iser.co	www.iser.co
27 Aug	GLOBAL WOMEN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE Berkeley Middle East	club@berkeleyme.com	www.club.berkeleyme.com
27-29 Aug	REX FUELS' GLOBAL BITUMEN, PETRO PRODUCTS AND PETROCHEMICAL CONFERENCE Rexfuels Management Pvt Ltd	+919 987097546; conferences@rexfuels.com	www.rexconferences.com
18-22 Sep	OIL MOVEMENT, STORAGE & TROUBLESHOOTING Euromatech Training and Management Consultancy	+971 44571800; info@euromatech.ae	www.euromatech.com
3-6 Oct	THE FUTURE SUMMIT Datamix	+971 43326688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
UAE - ABU DHABI			
2-3 Sep	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY Researchfora	+918 895188531; info@researchfora.com	www.researchfora.com
7-8 Sep	MENA POWER PROJECTS CONFERENCE GM Events	+971 45687800; info@gmevents.ae	www.gmevents.ae
3-6 Oct	THE FUTURE SUMMIT DATAMATIX GROUP	+971 43326688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
6 Oct	CORPORATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS SUMMIT DATAMATIX GROUP	+971 43326688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
7-8 Oct	INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP Dome Exhibitions	+971 26744040; info@domeexhibitions.com	www.domeexhibitions.com
26-27 Oct	MIDDLE EAST WASTE MANAGEMENT DATAMATIX GROUP	+971 43326688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
31 Oct - 3 Nov	ADIPEC Society of Petroleum Engineers	+971 44575800; registrationdubai@spe.org	www.spe.org
22-24 Nov	FINTECH ABU DHABI Abu Dhabi Global Market	+971 23338888; info@adgm.com	www.adgm.com
SAUDI ARABIA			
10 Aug	DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION SUMMIT SAUDI ARABIA Exito Media Concepts Pvt Ltd	+918 049522392; enquiry@exito-e.com	www.exito-e.com
28-29 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY Researchfora	+918 895188531; info@researchfora.com	www.researchfora.com
29-30 Aug	WORLD FINANCIAL INNOVATION SERIES Tradepass	+971 65755789; info@tradepassglobal.com	www.tradepassglobal.com
6-7 Sep	MENA INFORMATION SECURITY CONFERENCE Virtuport MEA DMCC	+966 559951934; info@virtuport.com	www.virtuport.com

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

EVENTS

CONFERENCES

	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT	WEBSITE
6-8 Sep	SAUDI INFRASTRUCTURE EXPO dmg :: events	+971 44380355; info@dmgevents.com	www.dmgevents.com
14-15 Sep	IDC SAUDI ARABIA CIO SUMMIT IDC MEA	+966 500198046; djaarah@idc.com	www.idc.com
15-16 Sep	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Academics World	+917 077656338; info@academicsworld.org	www.academicsworld.org
10-11 Oct	ICIS MIDDLE EASTERN BASE OILS & LUBRICANTS CONFERENCE ICIS	support@icis.com	www.icis.com
8-9 Nov	FINNOVEX SAUDI ARABIA EXIBEX	+971 585518437; info@exibex.com	www.exibex.com
9-10 Nov	HR TECH SAUDI SUMMIT QnA International	+971 43885545; info@qnainternational.com	www.qnainternational.com
BAHRAIN			
10-11 Sep	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Academics World	+917 077656338; info@academicsworld.org	www.academicsworld.org
3-4 Oct	ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABLE ENERGY EVENT Sustainable Energy Authority- Kingdom of Bahrain	+973 1781 0733; info@isee.bh	www.isee.bh
10-13 Oct	BAHRAIN TECH STARTUPS @ NORTH STAR Worksmart for Events Management	+974 1771 7200; info@worksmartbh.com	www.worksmartbh.com
10-14 Oct	BAHRAIN PAVILLION @ GITEX Worksmart for Events Management	+974 1771 7200; info@worksmartbh.com	www.worksmartbh.com
27-30 Nov	MIDDLE EAST MAINTENANCE & RELIABILITY CONFERENCE Bahrain Society Of Engineers	+973 17727100; conferences@bse.bh	www.mohandis.org
KUWAIT			
24-28 Jul	BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT Invest Center	+961 71371746; info@investtrainingcenter.com	www.investtrainingcenter.com
20 Sep	ATD KUWAIT SUMMIT ProMedia International	+965 22462212; info@promediakw.com	www.promediakw.com
28-30 Nov	TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION MENA UNIVERSITIES SUMMIT Times Higher Education	communications@timeshighereducation.com	www.timeshighereducation.com
EGYPT			
27 July	CX TRANSFORMATION SUMMIT Phoenix Business Intelligence	+91 7259298786; ms@pbi-events.com	www.pbi-events.com
12-13 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL SCIENCE ISERD- Malaysia	+918 455026354; info@iserd.co	www.iserd.com
4-6 Sep	EGYPT INTERNATIONAL SECURITY EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE dmg :: events	+971 44380355; info@dmgevents.com	www.dmgevents.com
20-21 Sep	SEAMLESS NORTH AFRICA Terrapinn	+971 44402500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
16-19 Oct	CAIRO WATER WEEK MWRI	+002 35449417; rcService@mwri.gov.eg	www.mwri.gov.eg
20 Oct	GTR AFRICA Global Trade Review	events@gtreview.com	www.gtreview.com
5 Nov	EGYPT ECONOMIC FORUM Smart Vision	+022 7988000; info@smartvisioneg.com	www.smartvisioneg.com
6-7 Nov	INTELLIGENT CITIES EXHIBITION & CONFERENCE ROOT Technologies	sales@root-technologies.com	www.platforms-root-technologies.com
10-11 Nov	WORLD CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY IFERP World	+918 895188998; info.iferp@gmail.com	www.iferp.org
12-13 Nov	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ECONOMICS FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING AcademicsERA	+919 692200892; info@academicsera.com	www.academicsera.com

	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT	WEBSITE
7-18 Nov	UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE European Commission	info@oppla.eu	www.ec.europa.eu
15 Nov	WORLD BIODIVERSITY SUMMIT World Climate Foundation	info@worldclimatefoundation.org	www.worldbiodiversitysummit.org
OMAN			
12-13 Jul	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RECENT ADVANCE IN ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY International Academic of Science Technology Engineering and Management	+918 280862844; info@iastem.org	www.iastem.org
28 Jul	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FINANCE, BANK & ECONOMICS Research Foundation	+918 870915303; info@researchfoundation.net	www.researchfoundation.net
12-13 Sep	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Academics World	+917 077656338; info@academicsworld.org	www.academicsworld.org
26-28 Sep	OMAN HEALTH EXHIBITION & CONFERENCE Connect	+968 24660124; info@connectthroughus.com	www.connectthroughus.com
5-6 Oct	ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF FINANCIAL AND BANKING PERSPECTIVES Oman College of Management & Technology	+968 24051000; omancollege@omancollege.edu.om	www.omancollege.edu.om
17 Oct	IFN OMAN FORUM REDmoney events	infoevents@redmoneygroup.com	www.redmoneyevents.com
17-18 Oct	GLOBAL FORUM ITEMS International	items@items.fr	www.items.fr
14-15 Nov	MIDDLE EAST GCCM OMAN Carrier Community Limited	info@carriercommunity.com	www.carriercommunity.com
14-17 Nov	UFI GLOBAL CONGRESS UFI-The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry	+971 043317180; mea@ufi.org	www.ufi.org
QATAR			
9 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RECENT ADVANCES IN ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE Advanced Research Society for Science and Sociology	+918 895188998; info.arsss@gmail.com	www.arsss.org
10-11 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL SCIENCE International Academic of Science Technology Engineering and Management	+918 280862844; info@iastem.org	www.iastem.org
7 Sep	CYBER SECURITY SUMMIT: QATAR Exito Media Concepts Pvt Ltd	+918 049522392; enquiry@exito-e.com	www.exito-e.com
27 Sep	IDC QATAR CIO SUMMIT IDC MEA	+971 564145986; smahadiwala@idc.com	www.idc.com
10-11 Nov	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-EDUCATION, E-BUSINESS, E-MANAGEMENT AND E-LEARNING The Institute of Research Engineers and Scientists	+917 606986371; info@theires.org	www.theires.org
23-24 Nov	RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT SUMMIT Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics/Management International Organisation	secretariat@rwmconference.com	www.rwmconference.com
IRAN			
10-11 Jul	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING Academicsera	+919 692200892; info@academicsera.com	www.academicsera.com
11-12 Aug	INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Academics World	+917 077656338; info@academicsworld.org	www.academicsworld.org

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

EVENTS

EXHIBITIONS

	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT	WEBSITE
LEBANON			
13-16 Oct	E-MOTOR SHOW ECOSOLUTIONS	info@e-motorshow.com	www.e-motorshow.com
UAE-DUBAI			
11-14 Sep	METAWEEK ICOholder	info@icoholder.com	www.icoholder.com
13-15 Sep	HYPERMOTION DUBAI Messe Frankfurt Middle East GmbH	+971 43894500; info@uae.messefrankfurt.com	www.ae.messefrankfurt.com
18-21 Sep	THE BIG 5 SOLAR dmg :: events	+971 44380355; info@dmgevents.com	www.dmgevents.com
27-29 Sep	WATER, ENERGY, TECHNOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENT EXHIBITION wetex.ae	+971 45151460; info@wetex.ae	www.wetex.ae
19-20 Oct	FOREX EXPO DUBAI HQMENA	+971 504380264; info@hqmena.com	www.hqmena.com
25-26 Oct	FORGING A FOOD-SECURE FUTURE Informa Connect - Middle East	+971 44072500; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
9-10 Nov	EDEX MENA Informa Connect - Middle East	+971 44072500; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
14-15 Nov	MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT SUMMIT 2022 Terrapinn Pty Ltd	+971 44402500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
15-16 Nov	HR SUMMIT & EXPO Informa Connect - Middle East	+971 44072500; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
15-17 Nov	PAPERWORLD MIDDLE EAST Messe Frankfurt Middle East GmbH	+971 43894500; info@uae.messefrankfurt.com	www.ae.messefrankfurt.com
22-24 Nov	AUTOMECHANIKA DUBAI Messe Frankfurt Middle East GmbH	+971 43894500; info@uae.messefrankfurt.com	www.ae.messefrankfurt.com
UAE-ABU DHABI			
5-8 Sep	SOUR OIL & GAS ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY Dome Exhibitions	+971 26744040; info@domeexhibitions.com	www.domeexhibitions.com
20-24 Sep	INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE AND INVESTMENT SHOW Dome Exhibitions	+971 26744040; info@domeexhibitions.com	www.domeexhibitions.com
7-8 Oct	CITIZENSHIP EXPO Dome Exhibitions	+971 26744040; info@domeexhibitions.com	www.domeexhibitions.com
27 Oct - 3 Nov	ADIPEC dmg :: events	+971 44380355; info@dmgevents.com	www.dmgevents.com
SAUDI ARABIA			
13-15 Sep	INTERSEC SAUDI ARABIA Messe Frankfurt Middle East GmbH	+971 43894500; info@uae.messefrankfurt.com	www.ae.messefrankfurt.com
19-20 Sep	SAUDI EVENT SHOW Informa Connect - Middle East	+966 599552201; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
2-3 Nov	SEAMLESS SAUDI ARABIA 2022 Terrapinn Pty Ltd	+971 44402500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
7-9 Nov	BIOFACH SAUDI ARABIA 1st Arabia Tradeshows & Conferences	+966 920020025; info@1starabia.com	www.1starabia.com
14-17 Nov	THE PCIC MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE AYM Events Limited	+442 032397519; asis-me@aym-events.com	www.asis-me.org
22-24 Nov	SAUDI HORECA / RIYADH Hospitality Services	+971 585098057; info@hospitalityservices.me	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb
BAHRAIN			
12 Sep	ARAB INTERNATIONAL CYBERSECURITY SUMMIT Bahrain Tourism & Exhibition Authority	+973 17558800; info@btea.bh	www.btea.bh
10-13 Oct	BAHRAIN TECH STARTUPS Worksmart for Events Management	+975 17717200; info@worksmartbh.com	www.worksmartbh.com
11-13 Oct	RECSCO ENVIROSPILL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION iCONEX W.L.L	+973 17402889; marketing@iconexgulf.com	www.iconexgulf.com

	ORGANIZERS	CONTACT	WEBSITE
25-26 Oct	SPE MIDDLE EAST ARTIFICIAL LIFT CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION Society of Petroleum Engineers	+971 44575800; spedub@spe.org	www.spe.org
9-11 Nov	BAHRAIN INTERNATIONAL AIRSHOW Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications	+973 17337878; pr@mtt.gov.bh	www.mtt.gov.bh
21-23 Nov	HORECA SAUDI Hospitality Services	+971 585098057; info@hospitalityservices.me	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb

EGYPT

21-23 July	LIFT CITY EXPO ACT - Advanced Creations for Trade Fairs and Conferences	+202 3699 48 93; info@act-exhibitions.com	www.act-exhibitions.com
26-28 Aug	INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION FOR LED TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS International Trade Expo	+202 24125142; info@ite-eg.com	www.ledmiddleeast-expo.com
28-29 Aug	THE SOLAR SHOW MENA Terrapinn	+971 44402500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
3-5 Sep	PAPER MIDDLE EAST Nile Trade Fair	+202 26712287; info@nilefairs.com	www.nilefairs.com
4-6 Sep	PHARMACONEX Informa Markets - Egypt		www.informa.com
20-21 Sep	FUTURE FACTORY SHOW EGYPT Convergent Global	+971 45813633; hello@convergent.group	www.convergentglobal.com
18-20 Oct	MEDITERRANEAN OFFSHORE CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION I E S Srl International Exhibition Services	ies@ies.co.it	www.ies.co.it
24 Oct	SMART VISION INVESTMENT EXPO Smart Vision	+201 222688770; info@smartvisioneg.com	www.smartvisionexpo.com
17-20 Nov	EGYPT INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTER International Fairs Group	+202 25264499; info@ifg-eg.com	www.mactech-eg.com

OMAN

12-13 Sep	FUTURE TECH EVENT Muscat Expo LLC	+968 24788476; info@muscat-expo.com	www.muscat-expo.com
12-14 Sep	MIDDLE EAST DESIGN & BUILD WEEK Connect	+968 24660124; info@connectthroughus.com	www.connectthroughus.com
12-14 Sep	MIDDLE EAST MANUFACTURING & TECHNOLOGY EXPO Connect	+968 24660124; info@connectthroughus.com	www.connectthroughus.com
24-26 Oct	PROJECT OMAN IFP	+961 1511977; projectqatar@ifpqatar.com	www.ifpexpo.com

JORDAN

12-15 Sep	STONEJO SHOW 2020 Golden Gate Exhibitions	+964 65658501; info@jordanfairs.com	www.jordanfairs.com
12-15 Sep	INTERBUILD JORDAN FAIR 2022 Golden Gate Exhibitions	+964 65658501; info@jordanfairs.com	www.jordanfairs.com
27-29 Sep	HORECA JORDAN Hospitality Services Golden Gate	+964 65658501; info@jordanfairs.com	www.jordanfairs.com
16-17 Nov	MENA ICT FORUM The Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan	+962 65812013; info@intaj.net	www.intaj.net

IRAN

24-27 Jul	INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE, BANK & INSURANCE EXHIBITION Banian Omid Exhibition Management Co.	+982 174501000; info@banian.ir	www.banian.ir
21-24 Sep	IRAN TELECOM INNOVATIONS Fairtrade Messe GmbH & Co. KG	+496 22145650; info@fairtrade-messe.de	www.fairtrade-messe.de
19-22 Oct	IRAN HVAC&R Namanegar Int.	+982 188203020; info@nni.ir	www.portal.nni.ir

SYRIA

26-30 Oct	INTERNATIONAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT EXHIBITION Arabian Group For Exhibitions And Conferences	+963 114433444; info@agexhibitions.com	www.agexhibitions.com
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QATAR

19-20 Sep	UNIVERSITY EXPO QATAR Informa Connect - Middle East	+966 599552201; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
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LAST WORD

By Gabriel Ferneine

Lighting up Beirut with the power of solidarity

Electrifying experiences of a community-based initiative

Have you been surprised recently by a street in your neighborhood being lit up for more than an hour at a time?

Perhaps you have felt a little safer when walking on a street which had been shrouded in darkness for the past 15 months? The story of this tiny but noticeable change in our capital's nightly cityscape is the story of Rebirth Beirut. This story is worth your interest because it tells of a concrete improvement in our urban quality of living.

Nowadays, it is a must for a self-respecting, sustainability-focused organization in Lebanon to be non-profit, completely independent, non-political and non-confessional. Once a civil society organization or non-governmental organization (NGO) – or a socially active organization by any other name – begins to acquire credibility through its actions, being transparent becomes a precondition for further success.

In today's social and economic environment of overwhelming needs on every level, local initiatives connecting the community and the private sector can create a strong impact. If they activate the power of community solidarity with the private sector to provide a tangible good, alongside a concerned public agency, such as municipal authorities, it can help rebuild sustainable economic activity.

Applying these principles has allowed Rebirth Beirut to succeed beyond our hopes. Within record time, we were able to organize the return of street lights to parts of Beirut. Just a month after we celebrated "Throwing the switch back on" for Gouraud (Gemmayze), Pasteur, and Mar Mikhael streets on May 22, 2022,

the initiative was in action on a total of 16 streets. We are a step closer towards the ambitious goal of reinstalling safety to pedestrians and motorists through lit streets during the night, across the Beirut municipal area.

Founded in 2020, Rebirth Beirut began as a relief NGO after the Beirut blast. In September 2021, we decided to take the initiative forward to a city-scale NGO with the aim to bring back the lights of the city. As soon as we launched our initiative, in which we connected local generators to Gemmayze's LED-equipped poles (previously installed through a USAID grant), people noticed and began to realize that we can all make a difference by lighting up our communities.


Some of the streets on our project roster include around Rizk Hospital and Sassine Square, as well as the thoroughfares of Alfred Naccache Street, Charles Malek Avenue, and Independence Avenue in Achrafieh. We intend to extend this coverage soon to some of the main streets in Koraytem, as well as Bliss Street, neighborhoods full of commerce and student life, and the Ain el Mreisseh Corniche, from St. Georges Bay to the lighthouse.

Our mid-term ambition for this fast-growing initiative is to cover the entire territory under the authority of the Municipality of Beirut, where Rebirth Beirut has been authorized by the city's governor to feed electricity into lamp posts. We also have special plans for illuminating and landscaping the entrances to the city, in partnership with young architects. It is a dream to achieve all this within a six-month time frame.



But even if it takes more time, it will be worth every effort invested by community members and private sector companies, including diesel cost incentives to generator operators, who donate power to enable the lighting of the streets.

As proven by the experience of shops and restaurants in the Gemmayze pilot project, the return of streetlights means small stores stay open longer, restaurants enjoy better business, and touristic hotspots are brought back to life. It displays how there is not just an improvement to safety when there is light, but also an improvement to economic life.

We are aware that this lighting solution, though it is made possible by the amazing solidarity of community members, only covers surface wounds. It cannot substitute for solutions such as large-scale public-private partnerships with long contractual horizons. Our overriding goal is Beirut's economic revival, which incorporates many more potential initiatives, in areas such as waste removal and recycling. Yet, the lesson of our recent project is how partnerships between the community and the private sector can quickly bring back light, bring back hope, and bring back activity. 

Gabriel Ferneine is founder and president of NGO Rebirth Beirut

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NEW INTERIOR




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