

Enabling Environment of the Water-Energy-Food Nexus

COUNTRY PROFILE - LEBANON



1 MACRO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

- Starting on October 17, 2019, country-wide anti-government protests, condemning, harsh economic conditions and failure of governments to provide basic services such as water and electricity, the Lebanese economy as well as the banking sector has been on a free fall and is on the brink of full collapse.
- On March 9th Lebanon did not repay a \$1.2bn Eurobond, the first sovereign default in its history, noting that Lebanon succumbs to one of the highest debt-to-GDP ratio in the world.
- Moody's Investors Service, one of the big three credit rating agencies, lowered Lebanon's issuer rating to a C – the lowest rating possible on July 27, 2020.
- The Banque du Liban (BdL) announced that lending and deposit rates, both previously in double digits, will be cut to 5% on US\$ and 8.5% on local currency to ease pressure on declining foreign currency reserves and help debt-burdened companies.¹ To note that new lending by commercial banks in Lebanon is currently minimal to non-existent.
- Recent protests reflect public anger over many years of electricity and water shortages, as well as the government's failure to manage the country's waste and economic crises. This presents an opportunity for the private sector to intervene and address public sector shortcomings.
- BdL launched in 2014 the "Circular 331." initiative to finance and guarantee funds that are investing in Lebanese start-ups. While Circular 331 has been effective in promoting investment into Lebanese start-ups, its future remains questionable amidst the current political instability.
- Lebanon's real GDP growth is projected to sharply drop to -19.2 percent in 2020, while the rate in 2019 is -6.7 percent, according to the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor. Lebanon's macroeconomy has been assailed by crises, beginning with an economic and financial crisis, followed by COVID-19 and the explosion at the Port of Beirut.¹
- Unemployment rate as a percentage of the total labor force in Lebanon has been decreasing since 2013 to reach 6% in 2019 yet increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic to 6.6% in 2020.²
- Women unemployment rate in Lebanon reached 9.81 percent compared to 10.17% in 2017.³
- As of 2020, Lebanon has a score of 54.3 in the Ease of doing Business Indicator, ranked at 143.⁴
- On Getting Electricity Indicator⁴ Lebanon scores 62.7 and is ranked at 127.⁵
- Protecting Minority Investors Indicator Lebanon scores 44.0 and is ranked at 114.⁴
- Lebanon score for the Registering Property Indicator is 59.4 and ranked at 110.⁴

- Going into its third year of severe economic recession, Lebanon faces its worst and hardest depression ever since the end of the Lebanese Civil War that went on for 15 years. Between the Syrian refugee influx crisis, street protests, COVID-19 pandemic, dangerous depletion of resources, Beirut port explosion on August 4th, 2020, protracted absence of a functional cabinet and overlapping economic, financial and social crises, Lebanon grapples to survive on the edge of collapse.⁶
- Lebanon has the world's highest number of refugees per capita. The country hosts around 500.000 Palestinian refugees, 500.000 migrant workers from different nationalities and 1.5 million Syrian refugees of whom about 78 percent lack legal status (UNHCR) and 89 per cent live below the extreme poverty line.⁷
- In 2020 Lebanon ranks 145 out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, index measures reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Low female economic participation (26.3% women vs. 76% men) impacts growth.⁸

1.1 COVID-19 Mitigation Measures & Responses

- In Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic added to an already existing economic recession. Rather than expanding and conquering new markets, SMEs in Lebanon were thus mostly concerned with maintaining their export or supplier activities or even basic company survival. By July 2020, total exports declined by 5.2 % from the value registered in the same period last year. Imports declined by 50 %, leading to a significant drop of the country's trade deficit.⁹
- The Lebanese government has launched a 797-million-dollar stimulus package to cover the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic. The package is supposed to help daily workers in the public sector, support the health sector and farmers, and give small industrial enterprises subsidized loans to stimulate the national industry.¹⁰
- The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) developed a COVID-19 investment and export guide, detailing the technical requirements and procedures for the production and the export of COVID-19 related medical and sanitary products.⁹

2 POLICIES AND TRENDS IN THE WATER-ENERGY-FOOD NEXUS

2.1 Agriculture

- In 2018, the agriculture sector generated around USD 1.8 billion or 3.2% of Lebanon's GDP.¹² In the same year, the agri-food sector was the largest contributor to the industrial sector output accounting for 38% of industrial output.¹¹
- The agri-food sector has an estimated size of \$1.6 billion USD and has grown at a CAGR of 9.5% over the 2010 and 2018 period.¹¹
- There are around 1,245 agri-food companies constituting the largest share of total industrial firms in Lebanon, with 48% located in Mount Lebanon Governorate.¹¹
- Around 20 to 25% of the active population has some activity in agriculture on a full time or part time basis, including seasonal family labor. 11.4% of total employment or around 63,616 workers are engaged in agricultural activities.¹²
- The main agricultural products can be broadly categorized into six factions: (i) vegetables & edible vegetables, (ii) fruits, edible fruits & nuts, (iii) live animals & animal products, (iv) unmanufactured tobacco, (v) cereals including cereal seeds and (vi) coffee, tea, maté & spices.¹¹
- In 2018, top produced crops included potatoes (387,791 tons) followed by tomatoes (300,157 tons) and cucumbers and gherkins (151.558 tons).¹¹
- In Lebanon, the share of food and beverages industry in exports is about 17.3%.⁹ Coffee grasped the largest share of total crop exports with 11.7% of the total, followed by fresh or dried grapes (7.6%) and fresh or chilled potatoes (7.6%).¹¹
- Arab countries remain Lebanon's main export markets for agricultural products, accounting for 77.8% of total exports in 2019, including KSA (22%), Qatar (17%) and Syria (12%).¹³
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- In 2018, the agri-food sector was the largest contributor to the industrial sector output accounting for 38% of industrial output and generating 2.9% of the country's GDP.¹⁴
- USAID worked with the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in Zahle, Tripoli and Saida to upgrade the certification, capacity and quality of three Lebanese agricultural laboratories and agricultural product development plants. Each of these three laboratories is now ISO 17025 certified enabling agri-producers and processors to test new products, ensure product safety and receive an internationally recognized seal of approval.
- Women constitute around 35% of the total agricultural labour force, mainly an informal role as part of the family-related labour. Women in different agriculture value chains are highly involved at the

production and processing levels, with very marginal roles in marketing through the women cooperatives. They have limited access to technology mainly because they carry out activities as dictated by superiors, such as planting or harvesting manually, in a traditional way, without the use of technology.

- The Chambers of Commerce in the different regions outside the capital provide different business development services, within the framework of sporadic projects, such as trainings and market information for some sectors. Women intending to start their own businesses in rural areas cannot access technical training on business management due to the absence of rural incubators that serve rural communities and encourage women entrepreneurs.¹⁵
- See Annex 3 for additional information on incentives for agribusiness.
- See Annex 4 for main crops in Lebanon and incentive zones for agriculture.

2.2 Water/Energy

- The annual net exploitable surface water and groundwater resources, water that Lebanon can technically and economically recover during average rainfall years, are estimated at 2.080 km³, consisting of 1.580 km³ of surface water and 0.500 km³ of groundwater.¹⁶
- The agriculture sector in Lebanon uses almost 60% of water withdrawals. Municipal use accounts for 29 % meanwhile Industry for 11%.¹¹
- It is estimated that 700 million m³ of water per year is used for hydropower, with direct restitution to the natural river course.¹¹
- Lebanon has a commitment to scale up the use of renewable energy technologies to meet 30% of its total energy consumption.¹⁷ As of 2020, total installed renewable energy power capacity amounts to 350 megawatts (MW), including 286 MW from hydropower sources, 7 MW from landfill and 56.37 MW from solar power.
- In Lebanon, several energy efficient Internet of Things (IoT) start-ups are solving the problem of regular blackouts in the light of recent economic turmoil.¹⁸
- Solar PV is an already established sector in Lebanon and the Government is working towards signing Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with the private sector for the construction and operation of utility-scale solar PV farms.¹⁹
- The Central Bank of Lebanon had launched the initiative: National Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy Action (NEEREA), a financing mechanism to boost Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, and green buildings. This tool provides a wide range of soft loans through commercial banks with long repayment periods, grace periods and low-interest rates.¹⁷ The NEEREA initiative and other financing schemes funded by IFIs and DFIs have been put on hold and are no longer into effect.

3 THE SME ECOSYSTEM

- The M/SMEs in Lebanon represent 95% of companies and 50% of employment.²⁰
- Lebanese SMEs have significant hereditary and a family-centred approach to owning and managing businesses. Moreover, business owners often value unrestricted control over their companies more than they do higher profits and finding the least expensive form of finance (e.g., cheaper capital in the stock market).²⁰
- According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Lebanon has one of the highest densities of established business owners, not only in the MENA region, but even globally.¹⁵
- Lebanon SMEs have access to a highly educated workforce that exceeds the average Upper Middle-Income countries, according to the World Bank.¹⁵
- Lebanon does not have a dedicated export strategy, however, the Ministry of Industry's Integrated Vision for the Lebanese Industrial Sector 2025 sets out to increase industrial exports by cooperating with Lebanese delegations abroad, export marketing and promotion, compliance with standards, import as well as export facilitation, and enhanced coordination of relevant authorities, including the customs administration and Ministry of Public Work and Transportation, Ministry of Economy and Trade, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Finance.⁹
- Matchmaking services, a local supplier database as well as capacity building support to local firms offered by the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). IDAL supports exporters' participation in international fairs and exhibitions, organizes trade missions to potential target markets in cooperation with Lebanese embassies abroad and provides access to studies on regional and global markets of interest to exporters and technical assistance and training on international requirements.⁹
- Trade statistics import and export regulations, tariffs, company search and outsourcing opportunities are provided by the Trade Information Center at the Ministry of Economy and Trade upon request.
- Microcredit institutions in Lebanon provide micro and small loans for start-ups, employees, and micro-entrepreneurs. These institutions aim at improving the social, cultural, economic, health and livelihoods of rural Lebanese by providing, in addition to financing, various types of assistance.²¹
- Prior to the current crisis, Subsidized loans aimed to support start-ups and SMEs operating in key sectors such as: industry and agriculture. These loans were characterized by several benefits such as: government subsidies and lending rates as well as relatively longer repayment period.¹⁵
- Prior to the current crisis, The Central Bank of Lebanon (BDL) has been focusing on stimulating private sector investments and is providing in this respect incentives targeting productive sectors. The purpose of this strategy is to lower the cost of borrowing and encourage investments in sectors such as tourism, agriculture, industry, IT, education, and environment.¹⁵

- Prior to the current crisis, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) supported the Lebanese private sector by providing a financial package of USD 100 million to Société Générale de Banque au Liban (SGBL), a leading bank in Lebanon, for on-lending to SMEs and to support export and import activity.²⁰
- Women entrepreneurship is largely untapped in Lebanon. Female founders of start-ups in Beirut amount to 18.82%. Moreover, 51% of women owned businesses seek a loan and 17% get it.²²
- Enterprises led by women have developed less favourably than those led by men. A sample survey of nearly 3,000 micro and small enterprises (8 percent of them led by women) shows that those run by women are mostly crowded together in the trade sector, tend to be very small, experience tougher competition than men's businesses, and achieve profitability only two-thirds that of men. Women make very little use of business support services and face more difficulty with taxes and tax administration, and with customs duties.²³
- The Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) was a six-year project under the U.S. Government's Feed the Future initiative. By facilitating 211 public-private partnerships and generating \$140 million in sales by Lebanese farmers and companies, LIVCD strengthened the agriculture and agro-processing sectors and supported Lebanese products to become more competitive in both domestic and international markets. The project started with comprehensive and consultative evaluations of potential value chains for project interventions, to identify constraints and pinpoint windows for development opportunities.²⁴
- Annex 1 shows the enabling actors and stakeholders for growth in the field of WE4F.
- Annex 2 shows list of incubators and accelerators for growth related to WE4F.
- Annex 3 contains the tax profile for Lebanon.

4 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE WEF NEXUS

Opportunities	Challenges
- Supportive Government: The sector benefits from financial support, export promotion, and technical assistance from the government. This support is mostly provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon, the Lebanese Agricultural Research Institute and Kafalat. - Incubation Support: Agrytech, the first incubator and accelerator supporting innovation in the agriculture sector was set-up in 2018 and provide business coaching, technical & financial assistance and industry connections to companies operating in the agri-tech sector. - International Treaties and Agreements: Lebanon's exports benefit from favorable export terms and access to external markets thanks to a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements most notably EU-Lebanon Association Agreement, EFTA, GAFTA and others. - Qualified Labor Force: Lebanon boasts a world-class education system with one of the most educated labor force in the region. Top Lebanese universities are offering different degrees in the agriculture field, with 2% of total enrolled students (4,210) are engaged in higher education programs in agriculture, fishing and veterinary sciences. - Large and diversified agriculture land: Lebanon has the largest agriculture land share from its territory in the Middle East at 63%, supporting the development of a competitive agriculture processing sector. - Support Women led Business: The social and business perception of women in leadership positions as being less corrupted and less politically biased, in addition to the high educational levels of young women, can be used to women's advantage in encouraging them to apply for jobs at managerial levels and other types of jobs they feel qualified for. Furthermore, the high return rates of loans by women and the percentage of success in women-led businesses are also encouraging factors to build upon and are promising in terms of women's better access to resources and control over benefits.	- Instability: In politics, operations, electricity and supplies, security, and roadblocks. - Retention of quality employees: difficulties in attracting quality employees and retaining them. - The conflict in Syria had a significant impact on the agriculture and food sectors in Lebanon. The disruption of trade routes to the GCC and Iraq is having a drastic impact on the country's export of agricultural products to these lucrative markets, particularly exports of fresh produce (mainly fruits and potatoes). - Access to finance: Major constraint for 41.5% of firms in Lebanon²⁵ noting that today foreign direct investments, and bank lending are minimal to non-existent. - Uprisings and economic crisis are making management more conservative in the Lebanese market. - Subsidized electricity and fuel remain a key barrier for higher adoption of solar and wind power. Should the subsidy stop; this challenge will turn into an opportunity as to further promote Renewable Energy Technology (RETs) penetration. - Access to markets increased production costs & uncertain output quality.²⁶ - low capitalization (around US\$ 11 billion) and trading volumes at the Beirut Stock Exchange is one of the key barriers to SME growth - Currency Devaluation/import dependent country: the instability of the Lebanese currency is setting constraints on the overall market regarding importing raw materials, paying salaries and overall business management.

ANNEX 1: ENABLING ACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS FOR GROWTH-RELATED WE4F

Sector	Name	Relevance to WE4F
NGOs/CSOs or Policy Advocacy Groups		
Water-Food	Near East Foundation	– Helps communities use water resources more efficiently– harnessing nonconventional water resources, such as rainwater harvesting, spring catchment, and wastewater reuse; introducing water-efficient crops and farming practices; and adopting improved irrigation technologies.
Food	Care	– CARE works with local authorities to improve water supply and sanitation infrastructure for refugees and host communities, and we meet their most basic and pressing needs, including sustainable livelihood opportunities and economic self-reliance
Food	Agrytech	– Accelerator for startups with disruptive innovations in the Agri-food sector.
Governmental Organizations and Regulatory		
Water-Energy	Ministry of Energy and Water	– Allocation of water – Providing Permits for wells – Regulation of water bodies – Electricity Production – Setting feed-in tariffs for Solar and Wind Energy
Food	Ministry of Agriculture	– Provides extension services for farmers – Setting the cropping pattern for the country
Financial & Technical	Ministry of Economy and Trade	– Support SMEs with financing and technical support
Financial & Technical	The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL)	– IDAL is the national investment agency entrusted with promoting investments to Lebanon in growth promising sectors (Agriculture and Agro Industry) by providing a set of incentives and services. IDAL is also entrusted with export promotion services.
Water-Food	Ministry of Environment	– Sets the conditions and standards on how to use pesticides and wastewater disposal, and to define the guidelines for plants and animal protection
International Bodies and Agencies		
Energy-Food	UNIDO	– Support SMEs in growth in the Industrial and Agriculture Sector
Water-Food	WFP	– Food Security Projects
Water-Energy-Food	GIZ	– Funding programs in collaboration with government bodies
Water-Energy-Food	World Bank	– Funding programs in collaboration with government bodies
Water-Energy-Food	USAID	– Grand challenges focused on the nexus

Water- Energy- Food	SIDA	– Funding programs in collaboration with government bodies
Water- Energy- Food	EBRD	– Green Economy Financing Facility to SMEs'

ANNEX 2: INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS FOR GROWTH RELATED WE4F

Name	Support
BeryTech	– Incubation, Training, Networking and Mentoring. – Mentoring Access to Markets. Innovation Management VC Funding
Speed@BDD	– Equity, Training, Networking, Mentoring. – For Agriculture, Agro Industry, Industry, Information Technology, Media, Technology, Telecommunication.
BIAT	– Access to Finance. Incubation. Business Counseling. Mentoring. Training.
Bader	– Financing. – Networking. Competitions and Trainings.
Endeavor	– Networking. Mentoring. Access to Finance. Customized Programs.
Lebanon for Entrepreneurs LFE	– Encourage financial institutional sources. – Support research and development. – Assist technology entrepreneurs with the resources they need to start and grow their businesses. – Identify internet infrastructure gaps. – Prepare, review, and lobby for legislation and regulations that spur SME growth.
Wamda	– Research and development. Networking.
Flat 6 Labs	– Funding. Mentorship. Training. Perks & Services. Legal Support Office Space. Networking & Exposure.
Tripoli Entrepreneurs Club	– Research and Development. Improve Export Opportunities
Startup Megaphone	– Workshop. Networking. Development.
Amideast Entrepreneur Institute	– Entrepreneurship Trainings. Online Workshop platform. Networking.
SouthBIC	– Incubation. Access to Market Funding. Networking. Mentoring. Training.

ANNEX 3: TAX PROFILE & INCENTIVES TO AGRI-FOOD ENTERPRISES²⁷

Financial Year: 1 January – 31 December²⁸

Currency: Lebanese pound (LBP)

Residence: A company is resident when it has a permanent establishment in Lebanon.

Basis of Taxation: Companies are taxed on the net profit of income derived from Lebanese sources.

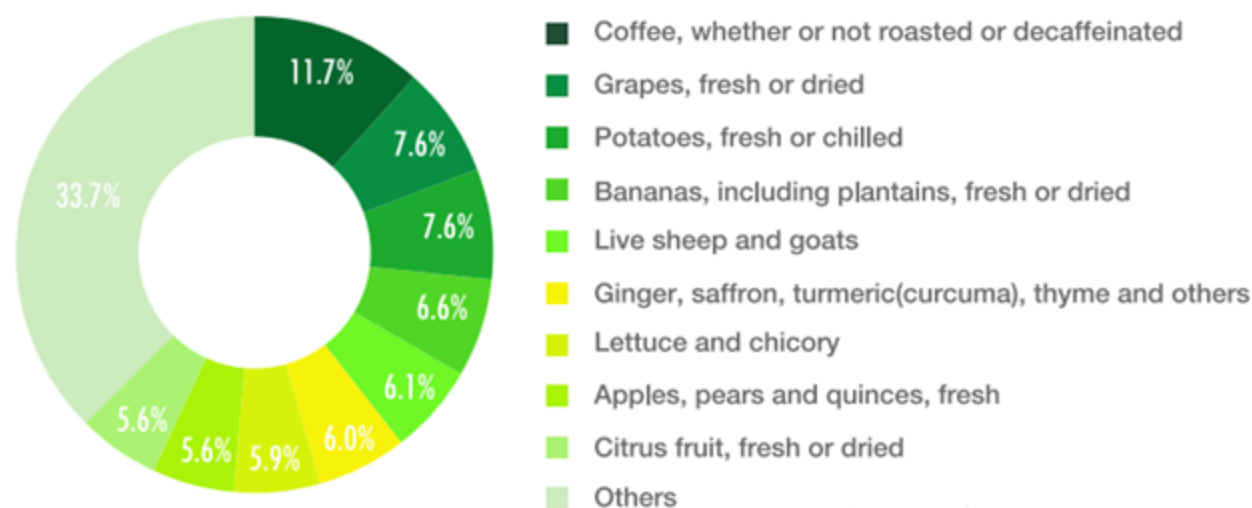
Consumption Taxes (As Value-Added Tax)	11%
Corporate Income Tax rate	17%
Corporate capital gains tax rate	15%
Branch Tax Rate	25.3%
Payroll tax is levied at progressive rates	2% to 25%
Built property tax is levied on rental income from Lebanese real property	4% to 14%

- 50% Exemption on Corporate Income Tax generated from exports (Law 2014).
- Up to 100% Exemption on Corporate Income Tax for 10 years for existing and new industrial projects subject to certain criteria (Investment Law No.360-see below).
- 100% Exemption on Corporate Income Tax for 10 years for industrial projects located in rural and underdeveloped areas (in the south of Lebanon, Bekaa, Nabatieh and Zahle). Refer to Ministry of Industry for full list of towns that are subject to this law (Law 2000 and 2002).
- 100% Exemption on Corporate Income Tax for a duration of 10 years for projects located in specific Industrial Zones (in Zahle, Jbeil and Nabatiyeh-Decree 11991).
- 100% Exemption from Taxes on Project Dividends for up to ten years (Investment Law No.360).
- Up to 50% Reduction on Work and Residence Permit Fees regardless of their category (Investment Law No.360).
- Facilitation in obtaining work permits of all categories provided that the project benefiting from the Package Deal Contract preserves the interests of the local labor force through employing at least two Lebanese nationals for each foreigner and registering them in the National Fund for Social Security (Investment Law No.360).
- Up to 50% Reduction on Construction Permit Fees related to the buildings to be constructed and needed for the execution of the project benefiting from the provisions of the Package Deal Contract. (Investment Law No.360).
- 100% Exemption from Land Registration Fees at the Real Estate Register and from fees needed for annexation, sub-division, mortgage and registration of lease contracts at the Real Estate Register for projects benefiting from the Package Deal Contract. (Investment Law No.360).

- Exemption from the obligation of including Lebanese natural and legal persons in the Board of Directors in Joint Stock companies (Investment Law No.360).
- 2% Custom duties on machinery, equipment, spare parts and building material imported for the setting up of new industrial firms.

ANNEX 4: INCENTIVES ZONES FOR AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Zone	Eligibility Criteria	Incentives
A	Minimum Investment Requirement is USD 1.5 million	100% Exemption from corporate income tax for two years provided that the company's shares are listed in the Beirut Stock Exchange. In this case, the effective negotiable shares should be no less than 40% of the capital of the company. - Work permits for various categories, exclusively needed for the project, provided that at least two Lebanese nationals are employed for each foreigner. All employees should be registered with the National Social Security Fund.
B	Minimum Investment Requirement is USD 1 million	50% reduction on corporate income tax and taxes on project dividends, for a period of five years. The reduction shall be applicable as soon as excavation works for the project commence, in accordance with the provisions of the Law. - Work permits for various categories, exclusively needed for the project, provided that at least two Lebanese nationals are employed for each foreigner. All employees should be registered with the National Social Security Fund.
C	Minimum Investment Requirement is USD 0.5 million	- A 100% exemption from corporate income tax and taxes on project dividends for a period of 10 years. The exemption shall be applicable as soon as excavation works for the project commence, in accordance with the provisions of the Law. - Work permits for various categories, exclusively needed for the project, provided that at least two Lebanese nationals are employed for each foreigner. All employees should be registered with the National Social Security Fund.



Source: Lebanese Customs, 2020

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