



UNITED NATIONS

الشرق
المتوسط

ESCWA

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN LEBANON

SHORT VERSION

MAY 2016

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or official positions of the United Nations or its officials or Member States or any of the organizations referred to in the report.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or any of the above-mentioned organizations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Statistics and data provided in the report are provisional and do not necessarily imply official endorsement.

References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

Symbols of the United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

Photos: © UNHCR / Andrew McConnell. (p.14, 17, 29, 32, 61, 63, 71, 72)

© Shutterstock (p.9, 16, 19, 22, 24, 50)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present report, authored by Mr. Sami Halabi and Mr. Nizar Ghanem, Co-Founders of Triangle Consulting, is the result of extensive research and analysis conducted between March and April 2016. Not only the document, but also the research design and methodology benefitted from the generous technical advice and expertise provided along the way by Prof. Hala Ghattas from the American University of Beirut.

The authors would like to thank Ms. Denise Sumpf (Officer-in-Charge/First Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Governance and Planning Section, EDID, UNESCWA) for the substantial contribution in terms of overall navigation during the strategic review and the effective management of the project throughout. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge the continuous support and substantive contribution of Mr. Issa Sanogo (Deputy Country Director, WFP), Ms. Marion Cezard (Programme Policy Officer, WFP), Mr. Mohamad Marji (Programme Policy Officer, WFP), Mr. Bruno Minjauw (Resilience and Liaison Officer, FAO), Ms. Pardie Karamanoukian (Food and Security Coordinator, FAO) and Dr. Karim Eid-Sabbagh (Network Administrator, London School of Economics' Leverhulme Project: Agrarian Questions in the Arab World).

The authors appreciate the general support received from colleagues at UNESCWA and WFP towards facilitating access to data and to key stakeholders from various governmental and non-governmental agencies. In particular, the authors wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by Ms. Sarah Joseph, Mr. Vladimir Isaila and Ms. Kristine Najjar in terms of supporting data collection as well as Ms. Layal Issa's contribution to the preparation of the final two workshops in April 2016 that concluded the strategic review. Special thanks to Ms. Typhanie Cochrane for the overall design of the report.

Last but not least, the authors would like to thank all partners for their time during interviews and/or for their feedback during the validation workshops.

FOREWORD

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set Zero Hunger as one of the world's major development goals. As countries around the world step up efforts to achieve their individual targets, Lebanon is also working towards the implementation of the Agenda 2030 under particularly challenging circumstances caused by the spill-over of several regional crises.

The Government of Lebanon and its concerned Ministries together with national and international partners are collaborating to address the country's food security and nutrition challenges and to progress towards the implementation of Agenda 2030's sustainable development goals.

In their support, and to study the current situation with a view towards enabling the prioritization of policy reforms, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) joined forces to commission an in-depth analysis of the country's food security and nutrition context.

This comprehensive Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lebanon builds on existing studies and research on food security and nutrition in the region and was conducted in a participatory manner giving a voice to numerous stakeholders. It aims to support and broaden the ongoing discussion on how to increase food security and on what needs to be done by all involved stakeholders to reduce long-term vulnerability and improve overall nutrition in Lebanon.

The discussion makes a case for economic, social and environmental policies that require greater integration and cooperation among many public, private and civil society institutions in Lebanon in order to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture."

On behalf of ESCWA and WFP, we hope that the findings and recommendations of this Strategic Review will be helpful to the Government of Lebanon and the international community to make the most of their efforts in addressing the existing gaps and reach SDG2 by 2030; a goal that both Lebanon and its people can achieve.

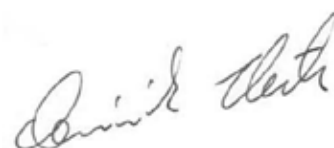
Mohamed Moctar El-Hacene

Director Economic Development
and Integration Division,
UNESCWA



Dominik Heinrich

Country Director and
Representative WFP



ABBREVIATIONS

AUB	AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
ARDP	AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
BDL	BANQUE DU LIBAN
CAS	CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF STATISTICS
CDR	COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION
DGCB	DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CEREALS AND BEETROOT
EAA	EUROPEAN UNION ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT
EFTA	EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT
ESCWA	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
FAO	FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GAFTA	GREATER ARAB FREE TRADE AREA
GDP	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
HACCP	HAZARD ANALYSIS CRITICAL CONTROL POINT
IPCC	INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE
SDG	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
LARI	LEBANESE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
LIBNOR	LEBANESE STANDARDS INSTITUTE
FGD	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS
IDAL	INVESTMENT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF LEBANON
INGO	INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
ICARDA	INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN DRY AREAS
IYCF	INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING
LCRP	LEBANON CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN
MENA	MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
MDG	MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
MOA	MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
MOAS	MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE STRATEGY 2015-2019
MOE	MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
MOET	MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND TRADE
MOF	MINISTRY OF FINANCE
MOSA	MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS
MOPH	MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH
MOWE	MINISTRY OF WATER AND ENERGY
NEO	NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICE
NSSF	NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY FUND
NWSS	NATIONAL WATER SECTOR STRATEGY
OCHA	OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS
OECD	ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
PACM	PUBLIC AUTHORITY FOR CONSUMER MARKETS
SDCS	SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNHCR	UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
UNRWA	UNITED NATIONS RELIEF WORKS AGENCY
VASYR	VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON
WB	WORLD BANK
WFP	WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME
WTO	WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 25th 2015, Lebanon adopted Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which comprise of 17 development goals that aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Among those goals is SDG2 which, through five targets, seeks to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.” While malnutrition is presently not a grave concern for the small Levantine nation, ensuring the dimensions of food and nutrition security (availability, access, utilization, and stability) are sound has, at times, proved difficult.

Known for its mercantile history, Lebanon’s markets are one of its lifelines: up to 80 percent of the country’s food needs are imported in any given year. Being market savvy, however, comes with both blessings and drawbacks. Since the end of the civil war in 1990, the political tempo has been high; governments have come and gone and policy has been fragmented, not least with respect to food and nutrition security. Tax bases have remained low while successive governments have adapted to spending requirements through borrowing, mostly from local banks. The political turmoil has resulted in economic growth not keeping pace with rising debt which now stands as one of the highest in the world compared to GDP. Partially as a result, social safety nets remain underdeveloped and the poverty rate has remained at around 30 percent.

The official unemployment rate was 11 percent before the arrival of Syrian refugees, yet unofficial estimates place the figure at twice that amount. Between 2011 and 2015, the size of the labour force is thought to have increased by about 50 percent due to the influx of Syrian workers. As a result, youth unemployment is estimated to have increased by 50 percent since 2011, while unemployment among

Syrians who are active in the labour market is estimated at 30 percent.

Lebanon’s markets never fully opened up to benefit from free trade because, among other factors, key market reforms such as those related to regulating competition and intellectual property never materialized. As a result, Lebanon has a consumer market typified by low concentrations of suppliers together with exclusivity rights and little to no market regulation. As of this writing, Lebanon is still working to pass the legislation required to enter the World Trade Organization.

Heavily indebted, Lebanon is also import dependent on the very foods that it consumes the most, such as bread and other cereals. And while it can maintain a reasonably sufficient supply of food, economic access to food and nutrition creates a raft of issues, especially during price shocks.

In 2007/2008 commodity prices sky-rocketed; food and nutrition security in Lebanon faltered. The government responded by re-introducing subsidies on wheat, bread and flour that it had been phasing out, but the effects on economic access to food were still enormous. In 2008 alone average food prices in Lebanon rose by 18.2 percent and have only recently begun to enter negative territory. The Lebanese felt these prices hikes both in their wallets and their bodies.

As a result of the 2007/2008 price shocks, it is estimated that, on average, micronutrient levels for eight key vitamins and minerals in the Lebanese population fell between 16.3 percent (Calcium) and 2.8 percent (Vitamin C). These reductions were registered at elevated levels in urban areas, where over 80 percent of Lebanese reside. Naturally, the ability of the poor to afford food in this context was also affected. Between 2004 and 2011, the amount of money required to attain minimum caloric needs in one year had risen by

75 percent to around USD 987. Indeed, economic growth and food inflation boomed from 2008 up until 2011, when over one million poor food insecure Syrians arrived in Lebanon seeking refuge from the conflict raging next door.

While all this was taking place, the Lebanese proved resilient, primarily through the workings of private initiatives, government efforts as well as support from the country's comparatively large and wealthy diaspora. The country was able to rely on its markets, its diaspora and its local agricultural production which provides Lebanon with food sufficiency in most fruits and vegetables.

LIKE THE VALLEY IS THE LAND

Once the bread basket of the Roman empire, Lebanon's Bekaa valley remains its largest agricultural area by surface area and production volume. Perhaps fittingly the valley also embodies the ailments of the agricultural sector. Since the 1950s and 1960s households who lived an agrarian life in the valley for generations began to migrate either to Lebanon's cities or to join the ranks of the diaspora. Haphazard construction continues to eat away at arable land which could, potentially, be used as a source of life for Lebanon's needy.

Like the valley, the agricultural sector has also been left behind. According to different estimates, agriculture has fallen from as high as 23 percent of economic output at the end of the last civil war to make up only 4 percent of GDP today. At the same time, agriculture is thought to account for up to 25 percent of employment in the country and up to 80 percent of economic output in rural areas. Agricultural workers are also the poorest workers of any employment sector with around 40 percent of farmhands considered poor, a double burden for the Bekaa valley which hosts the largest proportion

of Syrian refugees than any other region of Lebanon, many of whom also work in the agricultural sector.

According to different estimates, agriculture has fallen from as high as 23 percent of economic output at the end of the last civil war to make up only 4 percent of GDP today.

This dour situation, however, masks the agricultural sector's true potential. Around 37 percent of land in Lebanon can be cultivated while current agricultural area is estimated to be just 231,000 hectares, with only half irrigated. Seed diversity is greatly limited while farm holdings remain relatively small and fragmented. Large irrigation projects have floundered and are beset with technical issues while the ability of the government to respond is again limited by financial constraints. At present, the Ministry of Agriculture's budget totals around 0.5 percent of its overall allocations and, without proper funding and technical capacity, the ministry has not been able to offer appropriate extension services to small farm holders. As a result small farm holders do not greatly benefit from information on good agricultural practices, access to research and finance, or a well organised cooperatives sector.

A CRISIS OF NUTRITION AND DISPLACEMENT

After half a decade of dealing with a population influx equivalent to 25 percent of its native population, the Lebanese and the refugees they host have been suffering. The poverty rate among nationals is thought to have risen by around 4 percent to reach some 32 percent of Lebanese while around 70 percent of Syrian refugees cannot meet their basic food needs.

Competition for jobs has increased and wages have been falling due to increased supply of Syrian labour, particularly in low-skilled casual employment. Thus, Syrian refugees are almost completely dependent on food aid, provided primarily by the WFP's cash-for-food voucher programme at participating stores. Indeed, only 11 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were food secure in 2015, a figure which has fallen from 32 percent in 2013.

The Lebanese fare relatively better, but they too are starting to show signs of widespread food and nutrition insecurity. Before the crisis, among certain segments of Lebanon's population (for instance in the South and Bekaa) almost half of those surveyed exhibited forms of food insecurity. Now, due to lack of money and resources, 49 percent of Lebanese have reported being worried about their ability to source enough food, while 31 percent say they were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food over the course of a year.

On the other side of the nutrition spectrum, diets are changing and the Lebanese are moving away from micronutrient-rich diets towards Western diets which are higher in energy, sugar, and fats. The change in diet has resulted in a higher incidence of obesity, which has increased to 10.9 percent for six to 19 year olds and 28.2 percent in adults. The risk of rising obesity remains very real given that, on average, men are more overweight (72.8 percent) than women (59.4 percent). This has increased the risk of other chronic diseases emerging and resulted in deepening poverty due to competing demands on food and healthcare expenditures among both refugees and Lebanese citizens.

HAMSTRUNG RESPONSE

Unaided, Lebanon could not have coped with the arrival of some 1.5 million refugees in the country. The international response to the refugee crisis has helped the country manage and, as of 2015, the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations have embarked on a joint-plan known as the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), which is part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. The LCRP aims to improve the resilience of Lebanon to the crisis by assisting both the Lebanese and its refugee populations with a wide range of interventions that cover food security, but also employment, infrastructure development and institution building.

49 percent of Lebanese have reported being worried about their ability to source enough food, while 31 percent say they were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food over the course of a year.

This cross-cutting assistance is greatly needed as only around 60 percent of wage earners are covered by the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), Lebanon's largest social protection organization. The other 40 percent of the working age population are either unemployed, self-employed, work in informal sectors or in sectors which are not covered by the labour law such as agriculture and domestic labour. Healthcare is covered by the Ministry of Public Health as long as it has funds available. Patients must provide out-of-pocket payment that reaches up to 15 percent of the total cost of treatment. Most Lebanese who are not covered by some form of official insurance rely on remittances to cover the costs of healthcare as well as education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the onset of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis, the achievement of SDG2 has become less of an objective and more of a necessity. With an additional one million food insecure refugees to feed and hundreds of thousands of more Lebanese below the poverty line, if a food price shock similar to 2007/2008 were to occur today, the effects would be devastating for food and nutrition security in Lebanon. So while global food commodity prices remain relatively low, now is the time to implement the much needed reforms needed to bolster food and nutrition security.

The first step to resolving any issue—not least food and nutrition security—is to define the problem within the local context. Lebanon cannot respond to food and nutrition security without a clear, comprehensive, multi-stakeholder Food and Nutrition Security Strategy which defines the parameters of response. In tandem, Lebanon will also need to work to transition its current system of social support through subsidies into targeted social programming that eventually leads to the establishment of a universal nationally-defined social protection floor.

Given Lebanon's mix of refugees and host community residents, responsibility for funding such programmes cannot fall on the government alone. International institutions and agencies must continue to support Lebanon to handle so many refugees, both Palestinian and Syrian, while offering technical support to Lebanon in order to improve its social safety nets. Ultimately, working towards facilitating the end of the conflicts that sustain refugees' presence in Lebanon should underlie all efforts.

While Lebanon cannot be self-sufficient in food and nutrition in the foreseeable future, it certainly can become more food sovereign if mechanisms and policies related to food and nutrition security are institutionalized, applied, and monitored. Becoming more food sovereign and achieving SDG2 will entail strategic choices about which local food sectors and products offer the most sustainable and long-term food and nutrition security outcomes, while also enhancing Lebanon's ability to source and access affordable and nutritious food through imports. This will also mean that the country needs to develop and implement a strategy to rationalize local production with trade policy in a manner which is sustainable, especially with regard to supply chains, natural resources (particularly water) as well as associated monetary and opportunity costs.

A country so well endowed in the region with the means to sustain life should not ignore the blessing it possesses. Indeed, the fundamental causes of agriculture's retreat will need to be addressed if Lebanon is to achieve greater food and nutrition security or SDG2. The country already has a comprehensive strategy on which to build this response in the form of the Ministry of Agriculture Strategy 2015-2019. The strategy already entails eight Courses of Action which, if implemented based on national priorities, can prove essential to reaching SDG2 targets.

Without land, no agricultural revival can take place in Lebanon. Thus haphazard construction and the lack of land-use planning must cease and the National Land Use Master Plan should finally be enforced. Lebanon has also drafted a National Water Sector Strategy and needs to work diligently towards its implementation to realise many SDGs by 2030. In terms of food safety, the institution of the farm-to-fork principle will be essential towards ensuring that local agricultural

products can be safely consumed and marketed, both at home and abroad. But without the effective implementation of the new food safety law, these much needed reforms are at risk of remaining ink on paper.

In terms of the refugee crisis, the LCRP already provides the framework to mitigate its negative effects on Lebanon, and its tenets should be supported by the international community. At the same time governmental and non-governmental actors also need to focus on providing the most vulnerable with the means to purchase food and self-subsist. Yet, because evidence shows that refugees are, by a significant degree, the most food and nutrition insecure, the interventions that target them will need to be more heavily focused on alleviating that insecurity. Specifically, Lebanon needs to make good on its commitment to relax working restrictions for refugees in ways that allow them to increase their food and nutrition security as well as comply with Lebanese policy. In turn, the international community should respond by increasing financial support to the country. In parallel, the Lebanese also require interventions that take into account their right to food and nutrition security as well as thriving livelihoods and social mobility.

On a more macro level, it is recommended that employment opportunities form the core of Lebanon's poverty alleviation programmes, for both residents and refugees. The coverage under the current labour law needs to be expanded in order to extend existing social safety nets, increase labour market formalization and, in turn, raise tax revenue to fund that process. Indeed, one of the most essential institutional initiatives to provide food and nutrition security to all people in Lebanon is, and will remain, a deep reform of the social protection regime. Existing institutions such as the NSSF and MoPH health

facilities obviously need to be bolstered. However, more immediately the relatively nascent National Poverty Targeting Programme needs to be continually supported and upgraded. Eventually the programme should be streamlined into a unified benefits system, which provides a nationally defined social protection floor to cover all Lebanese citizens in a manner which directly relates to food and nutrition security.

CONCLUSION

Food and nutrition knows no colour or creed, and neither should any considerations to provide these basic human rights. Given its generosity in hosting over 25 percent of its population as refugees, Lebanon deserves to achieve the SDG goals and abolish hunger once and for all.

Lebanon is past the point where not taking action is an option and the potential for Lebanon to achieve SDG2 is there, as are many of the plans, strategies and resources. All that remains is the political will to put aside considerations that have long hindered the ability of Lebanon's people to achieve the food and nutrition security they deserve.





6. OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Food and nutrition security situation in Lebanon today stands at a crossroads. Improving the availability, access, utilization and stabilization dimensions of food and nutrition security as well as realising SDG2 by 2030 presents Lebanon with a formidable challenge. Add to this the effects of the world's largest and most protracted refugee crisis, and the ordeal of responding to food and nutrition security becomes more pressing and essential than ever before. Because Lebanon has such well-functioning supply chains it has proved itself able to adapt to food supply requirements of its resident and refugee populations. Yet, everyone in Lebanon should consider what would transpire if a food price shock similar to that which took place in 2007/2008 were to occur with over 1.5 million more mouths to feed and hundreds of thousands of people having fallen below the poverty line since the onset of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis.

To shield Lebanon from the adverse effects of such a price shock, it is imperative that everyone in the country work towards greater food security and nutrition outcomes which not only focus efforts on responding to the effects of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis, but also address long-standing issues such as employment, social protection and development.

DEVELOP A KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

The first step to resolving any issue—not least food and nutrition security—is to define the problem at hand within the local context. Lebanon can no longer afford to operate its response to food and nutrition security without a clear, comprehensive, multi-stakeholder Food and Nutrition

Security Strategy (FNSS). Already, there are multi-stakeholder bodies such as the Food Security Sector Working Group coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, but these efforts are still limited in scope and sufficient power to affect the changes required to address the situation.

What has become essential is the adoption of an integrated FNSS that addresses the four dimensions of food security as well as their linkages to poverty, agriculture, social safety nets and development. Consequently, programmes and interventions need to target the causalities of food and nutrition insecurity in a multi-level and multi-sectorial manner, as well as transition the response from a needs-based approach to rights-based one.

Lebanon has such well-functioning supply chains it has proved itself able to adapt to food supply requirements of its resident and refugee populations.

Yet, in order to best address issues of food and nutrition insecurity, Lebanon needs to have a reasonably accurate reading of its poor, its labour market, its resources and its population. In practice, that means Lebanon will need to seriously develop nationally-defined tools for measurement and evaluation of food and nutrition security outcomes that are based on the globally-recognized definition and dimensions of food security. Just as importantly, Lebanon, and donors who support the country, will also need to develop the country's statistical capacity to identify and target those affected by food and nutrition insecurity at the individual and sub-group level. A number of essential studies will need to be conducted to establish benchmarks, and then to track progress and challenges. The following list of suggested studies (Figure 31) is by no means extensive but is indicative of what is needed to develop an evidence base for action against hunger in the country.



1. NATIONAL POVERTY SURVEY
2. NATIONAL NUTRITION AND FOOD CONSUMPTION SURVEY
3. NATIONAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SURVEY
4. NATIONAL LABOUR FORCE AND HOUSEHOLD CONDITIONS SURVEY (INCLUDING INFORMAL LABOUR)
5. TIMELY ECONOMIC OUTPUT REPORTING (SUB-SECTOR SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS)
6. COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENT SURVEY (WITH COMPETITION METRICS)
7. TIMELY INDUSTRIAL SURVEY (PARTICULARLY IN THE AGRO-FOOD INDUSTRY)
8. ESTABLISHMENT OF A LEGALLY MANDATED FARMERS REGISTRY
9. WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SURVEY
10. POPULATION VULNERABILITY STUDY

Figure 31: Recommended Food and Nutrition Security-Relevant Studies

INSTITUTE A SOLID SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Lebanon should work to transition its current system of social support through subsidies into targeted social programming that eventually leads to the establishment of a universal nationally-defined social protection floor. Given Lebanon's population mix between refugees and host community residents, responsibility for funding such programmes cannot fall on the government alone. While it is clear that Lebanon cannot shoulder the burden of its refugees on its own, the country will also need to commit to funding social safety nets by transitioning away from subsidies and reforming the tax code. Regressive taxes need to become the exception rather than the norm because Lebanon can ill afford to continue to place higher relative tax burdens on people with lower incomes. Instead, Lebanon needs to gradually introduce more progressive taxation and increase the tax base by fostering formalization in the labour market.

At the same time, international institutions and agencies must continue to support Lebanon to deal with their refugees, both Palestinian and Syrian, while offering technical support to Lebanon to build its social safety nets. Ultimately, working towards facilitating the end of the conflicts that sustain refugees' presence in Lebanon should underlie all efforts.

A BALANCED POLICY

An integral part of Lebanon's overarching food security strategy will be its ability to strategically manage its trade, agricultural and environmental policies. To affect policy reform, Lebanon will need to adopt a view to increase food and nutrition access and availability while also working to improve utilization and smoothen out volatility to price and supply shocks. While Lebanon cannot be self-sufficient in food and nutrition in the

foreseeable future, it certainly can become more food sovereign if mechanisms and policies related to food and nutrition security are institutionalized, applied, and monitored.⁴¹⁰

Becoming more food sovereign and achieving SDG2 will entail strategic choices about which local food sectors and products offer the most sustainable and long-term food and nutrition security outcomes, while also enhancing Lebanon's ability to access affordable as well as nutritious food that Lebanon's population needs to subsist. What this also means is that the country will have to develop and implement a strategy to rationalize local production with a trade policy that is sustainable, especially with regard to supply chains, natural resources (particularly water) as well as associated monetary and opportunity costs.

A food and agriculture market where imports are constrained to a limited or exclusive number of players or one where value chains that greatly favour sellers over producers and consumers is unlikely to produce the kind of outcomes that Lebanon needs to achieve SDG2. However, a functioning market that encourages healthy competition among locally produced and imported food can.

For consumers to access food products at cheaper prices, markets need to facilitate the introduction of reforms that result in the maximum number of importers bringing in the same products, especially in input markets. Doing so will reduce market concentration, increase supply, place downward pressure on prices and facilitate more flexibility in trade with the outside world. Increasing food supply from imports will also require a revamp of Lebanon's import capacity and logistical competitiveness, given that costs of importing food are significantly higher than that of the region.

At the same time, opening up to new food importers will also need to take place in tandem with the increasing productivity and competitiveness of Lebanese agricultural products through moving value chain contributions towards producers, something which falls in line with the Ministry of Agriculture Strategy 2015-2019 (MoAS) Course of Action II.

Opening up the food market to more foreign competition without increasing the competitiveness of the local agricultural sector from the bottom-up is likely to prove detrimental to Lebanon's food and nutrition security by making the country even more food import dependent, and thus vulnerable, to food price shocks caused by import inflation. Thus, the lifting of additional trade restrictions on food and food products, specifically ascension to the WTO, must be considered in light of the local price and supply scenarios. Before that decision is made, Lebanon will need to pass a raft of draft legislation to even be eligible to join the WTO. Principal among these laws will be the draft competition law which aims to regulate markets, institute a competition authority, and prevent oligopolies as well as price fixing.

SECURING THE HOME FRONT

One of the striking paradoxes of food and nutrition security is that the food insecure first reduce their consumption of micronutrient-rich foods such as fruit and vegetables, which puts them at risk of micronutrient deficiency as well as chronic disease, while these same products are abundant in Lebanon (See Section 5). As such, Lebanon should work on identifying and incentivizing strategic local production sectors—which are most likely those where Lebanon is already self-sufficient—and reducing vulnerabilities in foods where the country is dependent.

To assist the most vulnerable to feed themselves, officials should also consider relaxing restrictions on asset holdings that can allow refugees to engage in family farming activities and produce food to feed their households. Already, refugee response actors have begun to launch pilot projects in this vein such as community kitchens and micro-gardens.⁴¹¹ However, these efforts should go further to include permissions by the government to allow refugees to construct non-permanent structures and grow micronutrient-rich fruit and vegetables as well as breed or rear poultry and livestock. By the same token, these efforts will need to be scaled up alongside inspection and monitoring regimes such as veterinary services and animal vaccination drives to prevent disease transmission. In tandem, relaxing restrictions on refugee work, particularly in agriculture, should also take place to improve food and nutrition security and support the agriculture sector.

One major option that should be seriously considered are mechanisms to enhance its import risk management and store larger quantities of import dependent products. Wheat, sugar and other import dependent products can be stored and managed through price band schemes which smoothen out shocks, even if they push up prices marginally as a trade off.⁴¹² In addition, the establishment of a rotating grain reserve that integrates private sector involvement is also an option, given that the bulk of milling capacity in Lebanon resides in the private sector. In tandem with increasing quantities, Lebanon should also work to enhance the quality of its aging storage facilities.

Any excess supplies that result from this strategy should be used to reduce the price of cereal-based staple foods, particularly bread. Buying strategic amounts of food commodities on future markets with supply guarantees may also prove effective in estimating prices and quantities, even though it does carry inherent market pricing risks.⁴¹³

Lebanon should also work on diversifying its sources of wheat, which currently is sourced from one region, namely the Black Sea region.⁴¹⁴ While there is no evidence that diversifying Lebanon's procurement portfolio has a tangible effect on price risks, it can prevent Lebanon from over-reliance on one source of wheat.⁴¹⁵

Better import risk management could utilize a set of methods such as updating procurement strategies, instituting future trade agreements, and pursuing more efficient tendering processes.⁴¹⁶ By harmonizing safety standards and phytosanitary control with international standards, Lebanon could speed up the tendering process, which has been seen to reduce the overall cost and freight charges of wheat prices.⁴¹⁷

A CULTURE TO REVIVE

A country so well endowed in the region with the means to sustain life should not ignore the blessing it possesses. Indeed, the fundamental causes of agriculture's retreat will need to be addressed if Lebanon is to achieve greater food and nutrition security or SDG2. The country already has a comprehensive strategy on which to build this framework in the form of the Ministry of Agriculture Strategy 2015-2019 (MoAS). The strategy already entails eight Courses of Action which, if implemented based on national priorities, can prove essential to reaching SDG2 targets.

Without formal structures, no sector can thrive. That is why Lebanon needs to pass an existing law which formalises the country's existing farmers' registry. Once farmers are identified, it becomes possible to target them with social, health and agricultural services. At the same time, a farmer's registry bolsters phytosanitary traceability by being able to identify which farmers are engaged in un-sanitary practices. The MoA already possess the centres to provide

extension services (MoAS Course of Action IV) and plans to improve small farm holder livelihoods through access to finance (MoAS Course of Action II).

In the short term, poor small farm holders should be offered conditional cash transfers (CCT), which have been proven to have impact on poverty and achieve wider development objectives.⁴¹⁸ The conditions for this transfer should necessitate that small farm holders qualify for the NPTP, register with the MoA, join a cooperative as well as a future agricultural credit union (planned by the MoAS). The combination of these interventions should create momentum for greater formalisation of the sector, extension of social safety net services and greater fiscal contributions from taxes. For this CCT to be effective, small farm holders must also be able to organise and negotiate effectively to increase their market power. A review and re-issuance of the cooperatives law should be seriously considered as a first step towards facilitating this process. The law will also need to make certain to close loopholes that can politicise the establishment of agricultural cooperatives as well as legally establishing the finance criteria and funding mechanisms that are currently regulated by the MoA.

As farmers become more organized and able to access extension services, their costs of production should fall. However, a reduction of their baseline costs should also be addressed, especially in light of lower material inputs from Syria. To support lower production costs, Lebanon should increase its investment in seed multiplication projects operated by LARI, which can develop varieties adapted to the Lebanese climate that also increase yields. Once local adapted varieties are produced, LARI's existing research infrastructure should be integrated with MoA extension services in order to target farmers and increase impact.

RAIN AND SOIL

Without land, no agricultural revival can take place in Lebanon. Thus haphazard construction and lack of land use planning must cease. Lebanon has already passed a National Land Use Master Plan into regulation, but has not taken the initiative to survey and enforce zoning. Without this essential reform, no strategic decisions can be feasibly made over the long term on how to allocate land to agricultural use in order to increase production in key crops. As a result, economies of scale will likely be sacrificed to continuing environmental degradation as well as alterations to natural ecosystems and landscapes that Lebanon is famous for.

Because Lebanon is projected to witness a decrease in precipitation and increased risk of droughts, action must be taken to minimize climate risks to agriculture. As such, Lebanon needs to institute a mutual fund for insurance against natural disasters as a preventative measure (MoAS Course of Action V). The fund should be used to counter volatility in production as well as protect small farmers from severe weather fluctuations and natural disasters.

Without water, there can also be no agriculture, especially as Lebanon's water resources dwindle. Like the MoAS, the country has already drafted a National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS) and needs to work diligently towards its implementation to realise many SDGs by 2030. Delays in implementing the necessary legal and institutional reforms envisaged under Law No. 221 of 2000 need to be addressed by redoubling efforts to create institutional certainty and coordinate implementation amongst relevant actors.⁴¹⁹ Specifically, coordination between Ministry of Energy and Water and the CDR should be enhanced to move beyond institutional bottlenecks and political bickering.

The manner in which water is used to grow crops will also need to be completely revamped and reorganized according to the NWSS in order to achieve SDG2 targets and maintain sustainable use of Lebanon's water resources. Instead of only adopting decades-old strategies as the standard bearers for irrigation projects, more focus needs to be placed on integrating localised solutions and management with overall strategies through, among other water conservation strategies, formal Water Association Boards which reflect the existing informal arrangements that are already in place.

Usage of clean irrigation water will also need to be the starting point for a complete overhaul of the food safety sector in Lebanon. The institution of the farm-to-fork principle will be essential towards ensuring that local agricultural products can be safely consumed as well as marketed at home and abroad to add value across the agricultural value chain. The urgency of this matter is reflected in the issuance of a relatively new food safety law and the MoAS's first Course of Action. Yet, without ardent implementation of the law, these much needed reforms are at risk of remaining ink on paper.

SAFE AND EMPLOYED

Market and agricultural reforms are essential to bring down food prices, increase food supply and provide greater economic access, but these can only go so far in producing food and nutrition security outcomes. In parallel, governmental and non-governmental actors need to focus on providing the most vulnerable with the means to purchase food and self subsist. In line with the Government of Lebanon's policy, a balance should be struck between food and nutrition security interventions that target Lebanese citizens and refugees. At the same time, interventions

for refugees will need to be targeted towards which type of refugee is receiving assistance, be they Palestine refugees from Syria or Lebanon or Syrian refugees.

Because evidence shows that refugees are, by a significant degree, the most food and nutrition insecure, the interventions that target them will need to be more heavily focused on alleviating that insecurity. At the same time, the Lebanese also require interventions that take into account their right to food and nutrition security as well as thriving livelihoods and social mobility.

International organizations working on the Syrian refugee response should continue to branch out from their humanitarian objectives in order to achieve wider development outcomes for Lebanon, the Lebanese and everyone who lives in the country—particularly with regard to food and nutrition security. As essential food security programmes are replicated by government actors (specifically the National Poverty Targeting Programme), these programmes also need to integrate elements which bolster local economies and the market power of smaller producers.

One of the most essential institutional initiatives to provide food and nutrition security to all people in Lebanon is, and will remain, a deep reform of the social protection regime. Existing institutions such as the NSSF and MoPH health facilities obviously need to be bolstered. However, more immediately the relatively nascent National Poverty Targeting Programme needs to be continually supported and upgraded. Indeed indications are that the political will to do so is growing and this should continue over the short- and medium-terms.⁴²⁰ However, NPTP means testing must be strengthened in order to reduce exclusion and inclusion errors which can reach up to 70 and 36 percent, respectively.⁴²¹ Adopting a longer-term

view, benefits offered under the NPTP should be streamlined into a unified benefits system, which provides a nationally defined social protection floor to cover all Lebanese citizens. That said, any unified benefit package should contain a built-in element which directly relates to food and nutrition security.

On a more macro level, it is recommended that employment opportunities form the core of Lebanon's food and nutrition security programmes, both those which target residents and refugees. To do so, Lebanon will need to institute Active Labour Market Programmes, which address the existing skills mismatches between the employment demands of the market and education outcomes. Programmes that focus on those who are least employed, namely women and the youth, are recommended. Also, the coverage under the current labour law should be expanded in order to extend existing social safety nets, increase labour market formalization and, in turn, raise tax revenue to fund that process.

The LCRP already provides the framework to mitigate the negative employment effects of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis on Lebanon. In its first year, among other achievements, 970,000 vulnerable Lebanese, Syrian and Palestine refugees have received food assistance, 10,000 individuals have been enrolled in rapid income generating activities and 164 new micro, small and medium enterprise/cooperatives have been established.⁴²² While these achievements are commendable, the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis necessitates that the international donor community place more focus on these type of interventions, particularly with regard to transferable skills which refugees can employ when they return to their home countries. Again, a complementary gesture by Lebanon to gradually relax restrictions on refugee labour in selected sectors is advisable

to support employment that produces food and nutrition security for refugees.

Already, community service projects are improving host communities in the country and local authorities are embracing of the idea of these activities being targeted at local infrastructure projects.⁴²³ Indeed, under the LCRP nearly 200 municipalities have received capacity building and human resources support through some 156 community and municipal projects aimed at reducing pressure on public resources and job competition.⁴²⁴ Building on these successes, both governmental and non-governmental actors need to prioritise their responses based on their mandates and feed into the development and funding of rapid-income generating activities that target food and nutrition security outcomes as well as win-win situations for Lebanese and refugee labour in a complementary fashion.

An effective way to create these win-win outcomes would be to implement programmes which increase fruit and vegetable production through Lebanese agricultural cooperatives whose constituents are small farm holders. These cooperatives could also employ Syrian farmhands, and facilitate direct access to market through stores which participate in cash-for-food programmes.

A focus on combating micronutrient deficiencies is essential, in addition to a heightened emphasis on combating obesity as consumption transitions from the traditional Lebanese/Mediterranean diet into one that is rich in sugar, fats, and processed foods. What this will also require is a focus on healthy lifestyles and interventions, which target awareness raising on the effects of obesity and widespread unhealthy weight gain among the population.

Through programmes such as school meals, food consumption patterns can be veered in a

direction that positively affect nutritional outcomes. However, these results will be limited if healthy lifestyles and eating practices are not fully integrated into Lebanese education curricula (for both Lebanese and Syrian children) and extended to parents so they also contribute to nutritional outcomes and prevent chronic diseases.

Focusing on child nutrition will also need to incorporate actions to ensure children receive adequate nutrition and monitoring during the first 1,000 days of life. The work being conducted to implement the National Programme for Promoting and Supporting Infant and Young Child Feeding, and a law that regulates the marketing of infant and young child feeding products and tools (Law 47/2008) needs to be supported to promote optimal infant feeding practices. This should be implemented and monitored in an integrated manner which targets continued prevention of child malnutrition, and focuses on the first 1,000 days of life. Furthermore, the institutionalisation of acute malnutrition case management into the health care system is positive and capacity to deal with incident cases of under-nutrition needs to be maintained.

The Ministry of Public Health's Non-communicable Diseases Prevention and Control Plan (2016-2020) already includes elements to strengthen institutional capacity, develop prevention standards, research and monitor outcomes as well as implementation of key interventions such as the Healthy Schools and Healthy Cities initiative.⁴²⁵ Ensuring equitable access to these preventive and curative services will be essential to protect the food insecure from falling into vicious cycles of chronic disease, deepening poverty and further exacerbation of food insecurity.

SUCCESS OVER INTERESTS

Food and nutrition knows no colour or creed, and neither should any considerations to provide these basic human rights. For all its generosity in hosting over 25 percent of its population as refugees, Lebanon deserves to achieve the SDG goals and abolish hunger once and for all. But the country will not be able to do so without the participation and inclusion of all parties concerned, be they government, private sector or civil society. To a large extent, all of these actors have developed the frameworks, platforms and strategies required to achieve SDG2, if implemented.



Lebanon is past the point where not taking action is an option and the potential for Lebanon to achieve SDG2 is there, as are many of the plans, strategies and resources. All that remains is the political will to put aside considerations that have long hindered the ability of Lebanon's people to achieve the food and nutrition security they deserve.

