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# **Ensuring Accountability in Reconstruction and Reform Efforts in Lebanon: Phase Two Key Informant Interviews Report of Findings**

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**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed herein should be attributed to the authors and not to the American University of Beirut

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A powerful explosion at the Port of Beirut (PoB) on August 4, 2020, left Lebanon, already facing an unrelenting torrent of crises, with a serious humanitarian crisis. The explosion claimed more than 200 lives, more than 6500 injured, and left over 300,000 Lebanese homeless. Based on the Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment conducted in August 2020, through a joint initiative of the World Bank Group (WBG), in cooperation with the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), it was estimated that damages ranged between \$3.8 and \$4.6 billion USD and losses ranged between \$2.9 and \$3.5 billion USD.

In response to the disaster, international and regional actors have joined efforts to assist Lebanon, sending medical food donations and rescue teams to Beirut to tend to urgently needed relief. On August 9, 2020, an international support conference pledged almost \$298 million in immediate relief aid and the EU set its mapping system to support Lebanon to assess the damage and plan for reconstruction. Recognizing the endemic corruption and mismanagement as core factors leading to the blast, international actors have called for strong transparency and accountability reforms for the Lebanese government and state institutions to regain the trust of its people and supporting countries. In addition, due to the major discontent of the Lebanese people towards their government, many Lebanese are demanding that money and aid in the form of food, medical care and housing be channeled only through trusted local organizations.

Several recent reports and documentaries have questioned the transparency and accountability of international assistance related to the PoB explosion. There are claims that millions of dollars have been misused or wasted due to corruption. In order to fill this information gap, the American University of Beirut (AUB)<sup>1</sup> conducted a data collection exercise that included (1) field surveys<sup>2</sup> with 650 aid beneficiaries in the PoB area over two rounds. The first round was conducted in April 2022 for 250 beneficiaries and the second round in October 2022 for 400 beneficiaries, (2) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 50 experts in the field, whereby 25 were conducted in the first round (March-April 2022) and another 25 in the second round. This report presents preliminary findings from the KII sessions from the second round, which were carried out as part of the project led by AUB and the Transparency International Lebanon (TI LB) and funded by Transparency International: "Ensuring Accountability in Reconstruction and Reform Efforts in Lebanon (EARREL)."

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<sup>1</sup> The AUB project team is composed of: Dr. Leila Dagher, Dr. Ghina Tabsh, Ola Sidani, and Oussama Abi Younes.

<sup>2</sup> Findings from field surveys are presented in a separate report.

The project aims to ensure greater accountability and transparency of humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts, particularly for those most affected by the Beirut port explosion. It will do so by better equipping local civil society and journalist networks in their roles as watchdogs, by supporting state actors to improve government reforms and manage crisis in transparency, and by equipping citizens to monitor and report corruption, particularly in areas of Beirut most affected by the explosion.

In the next phase of the project, the team will triangulate and contextualize the data collected via different methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of the data. The final report will subsequently present further examination of the aid process in the aftermath of the PoB explosion, and the tools best suited to strengthen and sustain the fight against fraud, waste, and abuse of international aid.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology that was developed and implemented during the KII stage of the project, including: (a) the KII guide and IRB approval; (b) the sampling strategy; (c) the data collection process, including the challenges and limitations; and (d) the data cleaning process.

### A. Developing the KII Guide

The package submitted to the Institutional Research Board at AUB on November 20, 2021, included the IRB application; the consent script, the email invitation script, and the KII guide (see Appendix A). The guide was developed by the AUB team to facilitate the gathering of the desired information from a representative sample of key informant interviewees. The informants are individuals who have had an intervention role in aid disbursement in the PoB area. An extensive literature review conducted by the team informed the design of the data collection tools, in terms of themes and specific questions. The goal of the KIIs was to solicit in-depth information about the aid process from experts who have first-hand knowledge about the topic. After several rounds of revisions, the IRB granted approval on February 16, 2022.

### B. Determining the Target Sample

In round two, the team compiled a list of over 67 potential experts to interview, out of which 25 individuals were actually interviewed in this second round of KIIs. During the selection process, the team prioritized diversity and inclusiveness to gain a more holistic picture about the aid process. Consequently, the 25 informants came from diverse backgrounds and different capacities, including government representatives, donors, the UN agencies and related entities, international NGOs, local NGOs, microfinance institutions, aid alliances, investigative journalism, and main humanitarian organizations. The names (and all identifying information) of all the interviewees shall remain anonymous and undisclosed in the report as per AUB IRB rules.

### C. Data Collection Process

The AUB research team emailed invitations to participate in the KIIs to all 67 initially identified key informants. This was followed up by calls to schedule the interview. Recruitment faced some challenges as the target participants were drained by the number of interviews and surveys they had been invited to participate in post-explosion, on top of very long working hours in many cases. Through an extensive process of snowballing, referrals, and extensive follow-up, 25 informants agreed to participate. The interviews were held face-to-face or online, depending on the geographical location of the participants and their availability. The interview session typically lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, during which the facilitator asked informants a series of customized questions (see Appendix A). The vast majority of interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Data collection was carried out between the months of September 2022 and January 2023.

#### **D. Data Cleaning and Analysis**

All interviews were recorded and stored on a shared drive. The recordings were then transcribed; with the help of NVIVO if the whole interview was conducted in English, or otherwise manually transcribed. The transcripts were then reviewed by one of the team members and finally validated by the enumerator, to ensure the quality and accuracy of the information.

As for the data analysis and report writing, the content analysis approach is used. Using content analysis, the team was able to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of specific words, themes, or concepts.

### III. MAIN FINDINGS

In this section, we provide the collective input from all 25 interviewees, segregated by themed categories: relevance and effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, transparency, social cohesion and conflict prevention, and impact and sustainability. We also present the interviewees' thoughts about the national coordination process, challenges faced, and adaptive management in response to new information and changes in context. The findings from this round corroborate those from the first round, especially with regard to relevance and effectiveness, efficiency, and social cohesion and conflict prevention. The newly added information is in the accountability and transparency sections, especially when it comes to the Government's initiative known as "The Donor Coordination Platform." However, it has been highlighted that the practices that took place after the explosion are a good example of implementing the localization agenda as laid out in the Grand Bargain agreement, by making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary.

#### A. Relevance and Effectiveness

Describe the aid process following the PoB Explosion (the type of aid given).

Immediately after the blast, the majority of the respondents indicated that their NGOs or associations called for an urgent emergency response meeting to set up a quick plan for intervention. The main players in the aid process were the private sector, individuals, neighborhood initiatives, local NGOs, INGOs, Lebanese diaspora, international donors, and humanitarian organizations, in addition to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF). The municipalities had a very modest contribution, blaming the highly bureaucratic process, and thus diverting any aid donation they received to UN Habitat.

The speed of the response varied based on the form of aid that each entity could provide. For instance, the medical and food responses were the fastest, followed by shelter, and then came cash, coupons, WASH/hygiene kits, in-kind donations, psychosocial support, and then renovation responses. Aid disbursement can be studied over three phases; the first phase is the immediate response (right after the blast), phase two is the intermediate response based on a quick needs assessment via surveys, and phase three is the longer-term response based on a more planned type of assessment.

During phase one, many volunteers, including private citizens, neighbors, and friends, rushed to transport the injured from the streets to hospitals, clinics, and medical centers both inside and outside the Beirut district. At this stage, the aid was in its pure humanitarian form, as people from different nationalities, religions, and neighborhood rescued each other in a very spontaneous reaction. The Red Cross had the most professional team in the field to transport the injured, but the number of injured was enormous, so many other entities sent volunteers with basic instructions (though with no medical background or training) to support those in pain or in need of help. In parallel, people were trying to locate their missing family members via individual initiatives and WhatsApp groups.



In addition, in phase 1, comfort food was also provided by several aid providers. Food supply included hot meals, sandwiches, and drinking water. There is no doubt that the food support was very necessary, especially in this phase, however there was an over-supply according to the interviewees. What is even more painful during this phase is that citizens, households, and businesses had to sleep on their doorsteps to protect their assets and belongings from theft. The only national body in the field was the Lebanese Army, that helped mainly to secure the explosion area in the port, yet there were no security measures to protect the affected real estate properties (houses or businesses) or other types of assets such as cars and personal items.

In phase two, aid providers started to organize the staff, set plans for assessments, and started acting accordingly. In this phase, all types of aid were provided. Medical and food responses were the fastest, followed by shelter, then came cash, coupons, WASH/hygiene kits, in-kind donations, psychosocial support, and then renovation responses. Renovation assistance ranged from the fundamentals, such as quickly repairing a window or door, to complete renovations. As expected, heritage buildings received a lot of attention from national and international NGOs. In fact, heritage buildings received more attention and funding than households or businesses. As a result, the proportion of heritage buildings that were reconstructed far outweighed the proportion of houses and businesses that received reconstruction assistance.

Phase three is still ongoing and mainly provides for reconstruction and social and psychological support. Throughout the aid process and until the present, there have been several incidents of work duplication, whether in terms of needs assessment or in terms of aid support, and lately in terms of aid evaluation. Unfortunately, the community suffers from survey and interview fatigue, and this included beneficiaries and key informants.

Furthermore, many interviewees reported having been told by the beneficiaries that they had filled out several surveys but did not receive any support whatsoever.

#### Describe the aid process during PoB Blast (how was the aid channeled).

Almost all the aid was channeled directly through the aid players that were mentioned above and not via the government. In addition, the government did not play a visibly active role in pain alleviation during the PoB blast and had no coordination role either. The Lebanese government has a crisis management plan, yet it was never put into effect in terms of effective action plan, training, or execution.

#### Describe the aid process during the PoB blast (how were the beneficiaries determined).

Each aid provider had a different modality of identifying beneficiaries depending on the area of intervention, the time of intervention, and the type of aid.

The NGOs that already operated centers in the affected areas found it easier to identify and reach out to beneficiaries. In many cases, victims turned up at these centers that are well known in the area and are trusted by the community. However, those who have no presence in the areas of intervention had to put more effort into building a mobile, visible center and making themselves known to potential beneficiaries.

Other dynamics also played a role in the approach to identifying beneficiaries. For instance, in phase 1 of the provision of medical and food support, beneficiaries were identified on the field and approached to be offered help. Furthermore, aid providers resorted to one or more of the following approaches:

- establishing quick response corners to be visible for anyone in need of help in the affected areas,
- setting up hotlines to respond to the beneficiaries' needs,
- creating WhatsApp groups for outreach,
- starting their own lists of recipients and spreading the word through word-of-mouth,
- using the needs assessments to build a database in order to support victims,
- interviewees were aware of several initiatives for referrals between the aid providers, mainly between the NGOs or the INGOs.

Describe the aid process during PoB explosion (any collaborations).

The interviewees stressed the absence of any proper coordination mechanism. During the aid disbursement process and as the need emerged, some aid providers coordinated among themselves to refer beneficiaries who needed support for services they did not provide. However, all coordination initiatives were done on an individual level or between small alliances among NGOs that shared the same vision. Other types of coordination processes emerged, such as the ones by OCHA and the Lebanon Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF), which were designed as collaborative processes based on the participation of the government, civil society, the private sector, as well as development partners.

▪ **Internal coordination**

To boost effectiveness, the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) established an internal cash coordination group. The group included the Disaster Management Sector (DMS) and other relevant sectors in LRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), and Partner National Societies. The group served as much for information sharing as for actual coordination. The Lebanese Armed Forces also tried to assist in the coordination process, especially in organizing the reconstruction efforts, by dividing the affected areas into six zones (K, O, L, M, N, P) and assigning areas in those zones to different NGOs. The LAF also performed geo-mapping.

The ISF also had a role post the blast. Both the LAF and the ISF were conducting damage assessment exercises, resulting in duplication of work due to a lack of coordination and weaknesses, even though there was a forward emergency room. Moreover, and according to the key informants the community was not aware of the role of each entity, which contributed to the confusion and chaos.

- **External coordination**

LRC's coordination with external actors was initially strong as they took the lead on the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) in coordination with UNHCR and OCHA.<sup>3</sup> LRC realized that it did not have the required capacity to lead the coordination and that this was complicated in terms of its role as an auxiliary to the government. External stakeholders reported that they would have liked LRC to play a greater role in joining the humanitarian coordination to the Lebanese Government's/the LAF response. Furthermore, there were discrepancies in the perception around LRC's participation in coordination forums, where LRC essentially felt that coordination had been done to the extent that it was beneficial and necessary. In contrast, external KIs reported a gap in LRC's participation in coordination structures. The latter's perception may be related to concerns around LRC sending different people to each coordination meeting and LRC hence not being able to assume the expected role in those meetings.<sup>4</sup> The Cash Task Force (CTF) was one of these coordination platforms where LRC could have played a stronger role. Finally, they opted out of CTF meetings as they felt that discussions continuously centered only on the issue of dollarization, whereas LRC had made a final decision much earlier in the response. Furthermore, CTF meetings often had more than 50 actors participating, which for LRC, made the meeting agendas and discussions even less relevant.

The key interviewees in this round indicated that those coordination efforts didn't lead to actionable plans. A major drawback to the absence of a national crisis management team and the absence of a national coordination unit was the emergence of numerous NGOs that were visible in the field, yet had no previous experience dealing with disasters. As a result, many of them conducted assessments and then disappeared; some set up hotlines but never replied, or the numbers were disconnected. No doubt, this reflected negatively on the reputation of NGOs, not to mention the confusion. Many beneficiaries did not know whom to trust or whom to talk to. The excessive number of NGOs created a general sense of chaos.

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<sup>3</sup> IFRC. (2020). Emergency Plan of Action Operation Update Lebanon /MENA: Beirut-Port Explosions.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.lb/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LRC-BPE-CVA-response-External-Evaluation-report-Sep-2021.pdf>

With respect to renovation-related aid, were there any measures/criteria taken to ensure that the property was inhabited or if there were any MoUs put in place between CSOs and owners to protect the rights of the tenants for example?

All the interviewed aid providers who supported renovation projects followed measures and criteria manuals that allowed them to identify eligible beneficiaries. Nonetheless, the criteria varied widely from one aid provider to another, in many cases it was based on the size of renovation and on the needed budget. In addition, some aid providers had criteria lists from donors to comply with.

Renovation included households, businesses, and heritage structures. The interviewees indicated that MoUs or agreements were signed with the beneficiaries, most of those agreements bind the beneficiaries to receive aid from the provider they signed with, and by the end of the construction, they signed a completion of work form. Moreover, it has been noted that many beneficiaries were aware that many NGOs were offering aid and waited for a better offer.

The bright side of the story is that most of the international donors requested from the implementing partners and NGOs a local construction firm, preferably based in the affected area. This condition was meant to economically support the businesses in the area as well. So aside from the direct benefit to the beneficiaries, the local contractors also benefited from the aid process, and overall, this generated income for many families.

On a different note, the key informant interviewees who were involved in aid renovation were asked if the renovation had negative side effects on the beneficiaries. Some answered that the scope of renovation that they conducted did not by any means improve the value of the property, but rather made it fit to live in. Others, who were also helping with legal issues regarding rent disputes, mentioned that the aid intervention managed to help avoid legal issues. Others, who were working on heritage buildings, noticed that some assets were already purchased from the original owner, and hence it was inevitable that the beneficiaries would be asked to leave the building. There were different scenarios encountered, but clearly, the issue of old rent contracts needs to be resolved urgently irrespective of the aid intervention.

Overall, when asked if this crisis has set the groundwork for a coordination mechanism, the answer was no. If another crisis takes place, the aid providers have developed their own crisis management plans based on the blast intervention, but at the coordination level, the same type of chaos will unfortunately be witnessed again.

## **B. Efficiency**

### Is the action adequately monitored by implementing partners and other key stakeholders?

Monitoring the aid disbursement process varied from one donor to another. A few relied solely on the reporting done by the implementing partners. Some carried out thorough field visits in addition to the desk reporting, while others conducted selective field visits in addition to the reporting. Similarly to the first round, all the respondents in this round of interviews indicated that they have their own reporting systems, and in addition to that, they comply with the donor's reporting criteria.

In the perception of the experts, an aid provider is considered honest and credible when all verification documents and reporting information, including reconstruction pictures, beneficiary lists, invoices, contractor lists, supplies, inventories, performance indicator tracking sheets, and more, are available and well communicated with the donors.

### Do you have any feedback and complaint response mechanisms?

Not all aid providers have feedback and/or complaint mechanisms. For those who do, it is accessible through their websites, but none of the interviewees mentioned that it was used by PoB explosion beneficiaries. Some aid providers had follow-up mechanisms with their beneficiaries that allowed them to extend additional help to those in need, either themselves or by referring them to others who could.

### How long (on average) did the beneficiaries have to wait to receive the required aid?

There was a large discrepancy regarding the time duration between requesting the aid and receiving it, especially with different aid providers. The difference depends on the type of aid interventions; for example, medication, food, WASH, and shelter were relatively quick within the same week of the blast. Others took much longer, such as cash, coupons, in-kind, and reconstruction. Therefore, the duration ranged from immediate to very long. Some beneficiaries are still awaiting the renovation support that they were promised. As indicated by the NGOs, this delay is primarily from the donor's side.

In sum, the existence of aid duplication, the fact that some beneficiaries asked for aid and never received it, the presence of several fraud cases (see section above on renovation aid), and the lack of proper coordination affected the level of efficiency considerably. All interviewees agreed that things could have been more efficient had there been a crisis management plan, a shared database, and a proper coordination mechanism. However, without the aid intervention during the blast, nothing would have been done, and the situation could have been much worse.

## C. Accountability

Do you apply formal guidelines and procedures to assist in identifying, monitoring, and dealing with potential conflicts of interest with potential suppliers/procurement agents? If so, how does the IP proceed in cases of conflict of interest?

Most of the local NGOs working closely with international donors have built formal guidelines and procedures to assist in identifying and monitoring conflicts of interest with potential suppliers, which has helped them avoid any such cases. They make sure that the suppliers do not know the initial budget. They launch a public call for quotations and select the supplier that offers better service and prices.

How was the privacy and protection of beneficiaries respected when receiving the aid and during communications?

All interviewees confirmed that the lists of beneficiaries were not disclosed or shared unless there was a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with a referral partner or the donors. Many of the local NGOs indicated that donors did not request name lists but rather lists of services with coded beneficiaries to maintain the confidentiality of the names. In addition, in case pictures are needed to document the events and activities, the implementers requested consent forms be signed. Furthermore, one of the informants from an international NGO indicated that only in case the beneficiaries benefit from humanitarian services other than sensitive issues such as GBV or the like, then sharing contact lists for referrals or creating a database is allowed.

Do you still communicate with the beneficiaries? If yes, for what reason?

Many NGOs are still in contact with their beneficiaries, either because they have initiated a trust relationship with them or to offer further support, especially in terms of psychological support. Some renovation projects are still ongoing, hence, the aid providers are still in touch with the beneficiaries.

Do you have any feedback and complaint/grievance response mechanisms?

The participants in this round indicated that they have a feedback and complaint/grievance response mechanism. Those who received complaints had them mainly due to delays in services. Another complaint was relevant to the quality of the renovation or another type of extended renovation that was not part of the signed MoUs or agreements. Others, namely local NGOs who did not have an agent, indicated that the beneficiaries call them by phone or send them emails, or some of them rely on the donor's complaint response mechanism, which means that the beneficiaries are informed of the grievance mechanism using the links or contacts of the donor (INGO in this case).

In general, the interviews show that there were mechanisms and tools to collect feedback to improve in the future. There was an upward accountability mechanism whereby the implementing partners reported to the donors. However, the downward accountability towards the public was incomplete.

## D. Transparency

### How was the disbursement process explained to the recipients?

Most informants indicated that the beneficiaries are informed of the eligibility and selection criteria when they apply. At the beginning of the application, NGOs specify the selection and scoring process.

### Traceability: To what extent were you able to trace the aid (being able to “follow the money” through the transaction chain from donor to crisis-affected people)?

Regarding traceability, interviewees indicated that internally, each aid provider could trace the aid “following the money” through the transaction chain from donor to crisis-affected people. Money was transferred directly from international donors, the diaspora, and crowdfunding platforms to the implementers’ bank accounts in Lebanon. The implementers distributed the cash directly to the suppliers via new bank transactions or OMT or Cash United. As for the beneficiaries who were to receive cash assistance, whether household or business, the money was transferred via OMT or Cash United to overcome the banking system limitations. Irrespective of the method of delivering the money, invoices, and receipts are collected and made available for reporting. Yet, other aid providers, some embassies, for example, limited the follow-up to the stage of the local implementing partners and not to the end beneficiary. They select their local partners after vetting them and mainly work with reputable NGOs. The selection criteria were not necessarily made public.

Further, some international NGOs indicated that they have an ultra-managed online platform to track humanitarian aid funding in Lebanon. However, the organization-specific platforms don’t give a holistic picture of where aid is going and who’s receiving it to obtain the needed transparency and accountability. The funding was directly transferred to the NGOs and local implementing partners and not through the Central Bank of Lebanon. One of the main reasons to avoid channeling via the Central Bank is the fear of losing the value of the funds via the exchange to Lebanese pounds (LBP), especially since the bank rate (3,900 LBP and 8,000 LBP)<sup>5</sup> is way less than the actual market rate. So, to avoid any loss and to maintain accountability, the local NGOs/partners were encouraged to process their transactions in dollars. It is also important to note that our informants indicated that during humanitarian aid assistance, channeling the money directly to the partners and not via the Central Bank is a common practice by UN agencies, not only in Lebanon. Thus, it is the standard practice and not due to widespread corruption practices in the Government.

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<sup>5</sup> The exchange rates for withdrawals from bank deposits that were in effect during 2021-2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-central-bank-sets-new-rate-withdrawals-dollar-deposits-2021-12-09/>

### Do you publish aid intervention-related data/reports regularly on your website?

Most of the aid providers have already published the aid intervention-related facts, including on-site pictures and reports, on their websites while maintaining the beneficiaries' confidentiality. In the case of published pictures, the NGOs indicated that consent forms had been signed by the beneficiaries to post their pictures.

### Did you report or share any information publicly? With donors? Partners? Working group? Forward Emergency Room (Lebanese Army)?

All implementing partners and local NGOs participating in this study indicated that they report all the work to the donors or INGOs. Some of the implementing partners who formed consortiums or worked with other partners and NGOs were collaborating closely and reporting to each other. However, the frequency and mechanism varied from one group to another based on the internal agreements and the type of aid disbursed. It is important to remember that the context of those interviews was the modality used during the PoB Blast, which was in crisis mode. Thus, the response modality varied from on-the-spot and urgent to longer-term. Hence, the reporting modality changed accordingly. For instance, during the first two weeks, when the injured were being moved to hospitals, food, and medical toolkits were being distributed, and debris and glass were being removed, little tracking or reporting was done. Later on, when the type of support needed was taken to a different level, such as renovation, cash assistance, business support, or continued in-kind support, the implementers started working in a non-emergency mode. They were able to abide with best practices in logistics, paperwork, workplace organization, and reporting.

What was highlighted in this round (and missed in the phase 1 of the interviews) is the initiative undertaken by the government known as "The Donor Coordination Platform." The platform is based on the Impact Platform built for the COVID-19 crisis and was launched two weeks after the blast. The platform aims to show the transparency of the aid by creating a platform that can be accessed by all its members (government, parliament members, INGOs, Local NGOs, and implementing members). The members are given login credentials and can update the platform with the support details they are offering, including financial information, and the donation source. The public can also access the dashboard (see Figure 1) and view relevant statistics. Interviews with the Government and the IT personnel in charge of launching this platform revealed that little response was received from the NGOs, the implementing partners, and especially Embassies that refused to collaborate with the Government. Further interviews with the NGOs and INGOs revealed that the outreach process to market this platform was weak; most of the implementing partners, NGOs, and Local NGOs are unaware of this platform. The platform is still active<sup>6</sup> but has not been updated since the Government of Dr. Diab stepped down.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dcp.pcm.gov.lb/#/>



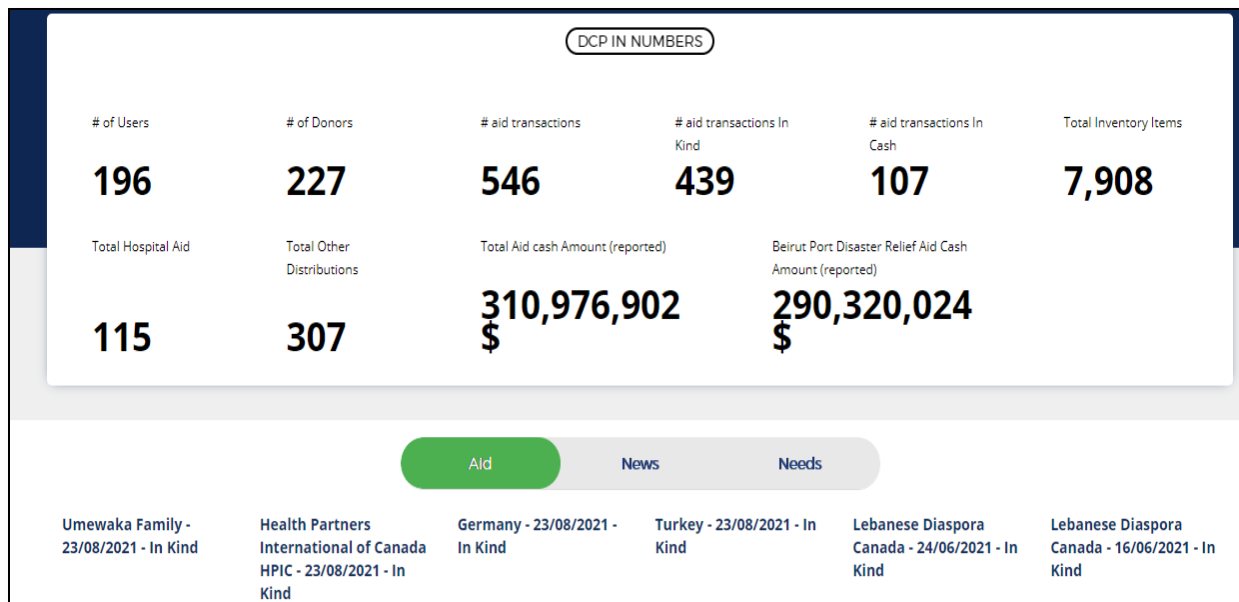


Figure 1. A Snapshot of the Donor Coordination Platform Dashboard

Our team of researchers extended the interviews to members of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) team of the UNDP/Effectiveness Group and has been leading on partner country engagement and use of the IATI data. The international platform includes Lebanon, however, with no critical data. They also mentioned that it is tough to incentivize the partners (donors, INGOs, and NGOs) to fill, use, and continuously update the platform if there are no binding terms or reasons. The process requires time and effort from the partners to ensure the sustainability and credibility of the information posted.

#### Exclusion or Absence of the Government?

Further input from different sources clarified that the absence of the government's role post-Beirut blast goes back to several reasons, including:

- The government was forced to resign a couple of days after the blast.
- Given the economic crisis, the government had a limited budget.
- The international community (under direct orders from many headquarters) gave immediate orders to their entities not to cooperate with the government due to perceived inefficiency of the Government, due to corruption, and due to international political agendas.
- Unwillingness of the NGOs to cooperate with the government, given its weak position after the 2019 riots.

All these factors taken together led to depriving the Government of resources, power, and the means to take action in the immediate period after the blast.

## E. Strengthening Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention

### ▪ Social Relationships

To some extent, the aid intervention intensified the quality and quantity of social networks and collaborations among aid givers. However, these initiatives were limited in scale to small initiatives and alliances and collaborations. This crisis revealed a complete absence of the role of the government. There is no evidence that the aid intervention improved the levels of acceptance of diversity or tolerance for others.

### ▪ Connectedness

When asked whether the aid intervention strengthened the feeling of belonging to the place (village, state, country, etc.) or to a group (gender, ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.), none of the interviewees had a clear-cut answer. Had the explosion taken place during normal times and not during a crisis, the answer could have been yes. However, given the situation, the explosion and the aid intervention did not play a major role in connecting people.

### ▪ Orientation Towards the Common Good

Without any doubt, and as explained earlier, the aid intervention enhanced the Lebanese ability to be socially responsible mainly during the immediate response phase. Some aid providers and contractors acted in the best interest of society by trying to maximize the support and attain good quality material (in-kind, kits, food, reconstruction material) at very good prices to serve as many people in need as possible. In contrast, quite a few (specifically contractors) took advantage of the situation to maximize their own profits at the expense of the beneficiaries.

### ▪ Equality

How to address the issue of equality, equity, or fairness is controversial. While many aid players served the society honestly, attempting to be as fair and equitable as possible, others did not. On one hand, the assistance provided made a huge difference in the lives of many. On the other hand, it made others feel left out, especially since many Lebanese find it difficult to ask for help. As a result, many were left out only because aid providers did not reach out to them. Others asked for help and did not receive it. Some areas didn't receive the needed aid compared with other similarly affected areas due to sectarian factors or resistance from the political parties dominating the areas.

In sum, the answers concerning the effect of the aid intervention on strengthening the social cohesion and preventing conflict varied considerably between one interviewee and another. However, there was consensus that during phase 1 (immediate response), there was evidence of solidarity and spontaneous collective action to provide relief among the Lebanese, foreigners, and immigrants. As time progressed, and in view of the lack of transparency and the perception of unfairness and inequity in the aid process amid a severe financial crisis, new tensions were created, leading to new types of gaps among the neighborhoods and areas. It is important to note here that the impressions about the impact of the PoB explosion on social cohesion cannot be separated from the impact of the economic and financial crisis that has placed many Lebanese people under a lot of pressure, not to mention that many have already lost their jobs due to the crisis. So, the blast came on top of existing hardships, with which people were barely coping.

On a separate note, the local NGOs received funding and empowerment, paving the way to implement the Localization agenda as set forth in the Grand Bargain agreement, making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary.

## **F. Impact and Sustainability**

Many beneficiaries still receive aid, and the NGOs are extending their projects to support the people in the explosion areas. Yet, it is essential to highlight that the need for extended support is not independent of the economic crisis. Therefore, aid intervention activities are still in progress, particularly for cash assistance, psychological support, and reconstruction. Additionally, many NGOs have focused on entire neighborhoods to revive the whole area and help enterprises return to work and become self-sustaining businesses. This second round of interviews, six months after the first one (and more than two years after the explosion), indicated that many implementing partners and beneficiaries are still awaiting renovation support due to funding delays associated with bureaucracy and logistics on the donor's side.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This report presents preliminary findings from the second round of Key Informant Interviews conducted by AUB as part of the project led by AUB and TI LB and funded by Transparency International: "Ensuring Accountability in Reconstruction and Reform Efforts in Lebanon (EARREL)." The project aims to ensure greater accountability and transparency of humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts, particularly for those most affected by the Beirut port explosion.

For this purpose, the assessment carried out had two main objectives: (i) validating the findings of the field surveys, and (ii) providing key information about the ongoing aid process.

The interviews with 25 key informants that the AUB research team conducted with representatives from the Lebanese Government, NGOs, INGOs, United Nations agencies, and other stakeholders, for the most part corroborated the findings from the field survey.

Overall, the PoB post-explosion aid from international and national players did have a role in alleviating the pain of the disaster; however, it didn't rise up to the reform phase despite the reconstruction projects that several NGOs held. The conclusion that our research team came to from interviewing key people from different backgrounds was that the impact of the aid was affected by the lack of strategy, which led to a misplacement of the large influx of money that many Lebanese people do not see it reflected in the affected areas. The lack of a national coordination entity that would set a clear plan of roles and actions, that is, the absence of a Central Command Unit entrusted by the people and the international society, led to chaos in the aid disbursement processes, to the duplicity of work among aid providers, to the emergence of pop-up mushroom NGOs that collected input and information from the people and then disappeared. That reinforced the current lack of trust in the government and the NGOs.

This research showed that the lack of faith consists of three layers. The first layer is the lack of confidence of the international society in the Lebanese Government. The second one is among the local NGOs and the competitiveness between them. The third layer is the people's lack of trust in the Government and the NGOs. Last but not least, this round of interviews unveils that the aid disbursement process was not solely driven by the principles of Do No Harm (impartiality, humanity, neutrality, and independence); when it came to the practice, many factors interfered with the aid disbursement process including strategic, political and economic concerns which led to some biases in the aid distribution such as duplicity of aid, some areas had numerous NGOs helping around and others were left without significant support. Moreover, the Lebanese national entities were available such as the ISF, the LAF, and the diplomats, however, the municipality's role was completely absent. On the one hand, many international players did want to exclude the Government from the aid channeling process; on the other hand, the Government lacked the tools, means, and trust to act. Thus, the need for a national entity to handle the coordination process to ensure proper and continuous aid reporting and compliance to attain transparency and accountability towards the donors and the people, was a recurring statement in many interviews.

## **A. Challenges**

Aid providers faced several challenges while supporting the community:

- Lack of national coordination.
- Exclusion and absence of a caregiving government.
- In spite of the existence of a national risk management plan, very few people know about it and it has never been implemented.
- Difficulty gaining the trust of the community.
- Working in areas where they don't have offices.
- Working in an environment of complete chaos.
- Some NGOs did not have the expertise nor the capacity to manage large funds.
- Lack of training on how to act in a crisis situation.
- Too many aid providers and a lack of professionalism.
- Competing with aid providers that took this intervention as an opportunity to market themselves.
- Challenges related to creating incentives for donors and aid providers to report on platforms especially if they have their own.

## **B. Suggestions and Recommendations**

- There is a serious need to launch a national crisis management unit, whose task is to manage and contain crises and coordinate any aid intervention process, including but not limited to beneficiary, aid provider and donor databases, to avoid aid duplication and achieve better efficiency. This entity must be well-known to local and international actors, reliable, and credible to be able to get all the players to abide by the rules, regulations, coordination terms, and reporting terms.
- There is a need to create a designated list of aid providers that contains information about types of aid and hotlines accessible by the public.
- Aid providers need an incentive to collaborate and to abide by humanitarian needs; hence, it is very important to create this incentivizing system. This highlights the importance of an aid tracker that allows all aid providers as well as the public to follow up on aid to make informed decisions, gain trust in the aid process, and achieve more transparency.
- Having a single source for databases and identifiers could help extend the reach to more people and make the whole process more inclusive.

## V. APPENDIX A

### Semi-Structured Interview- KII Guide

#### I. General Information

Interviewee's Name.....

Interviewee's position.....

Name of the organization.....

Main donor/source of funds..

Did you perform a mapping exercise? In partnership with other parties? Or otherwise, did you rely on mapping outcomes of others.....

#### II. Relevance and Effectiveness

Describe the aid process after the PoB explosion (the type of aid given).

.....

Describe the aid process after the PoB explosion (how the beneficiaries were determined).

.....

Describe the aid process after the PoB explosion (any collaborations, any referral mechanism).

.....

Describe the aid process after the PoB explosion (how was the aid disbursed). How was financial tracking performed?

.....

With respect to renovation-related aid, were there any measures/criteria taken to ensure that the property was inhabited or if there were any MoUs put in place between CSOs and owners to protect the rights of the tenants for example?

.....

Did you have to amend any existing rules and regulations in order to expedite aid?

.....

#### III. Efficiency

Describe the monitoring system in place.

.....

In case of aid type (renovation or conditional cash) was there any backward coordination mechanism for follow up post-disbursement?

.....

Was there a hotline/helpline? Please describe.

.....

How long (on average) did the beneficiaries have to wait to receive the required aid after first contact?

.....

**IV. Accountability**

Do you apply formal guidelines and procedures to assist in identifying, monitoring, and dealing with potential conflicts of interest with potential suppliers/procurement agents? If so, how does the IP proceed in cases of conflict of interest?

.....

How was the privacy and protection of beneficiaries respected when receiving the aid and during communications?

.....

Do you still communicate with the beneficiaries? If yes, for what reason?

.....

Do you have any feedback and complaints/grievance response mechanism?

.....

**V. Transparency**

How was the disbursement process explained to the recipients?

.....

Traceability: To what extent were you able to trace the aid (being able to 'follow the money' through the transaction chain from donor to crises-affected people)?

.....

Do you publish aid intervention-related data/reports regularly on your website?

.....

Did you report or share any information publicly? With donors? Partners? Working group? Forward Emergency Room (Lebanese Army)?

.....

**VI. Strengthening Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention**

**A Social Relationships**

Do you believe that the aid intervention strengthened the quality and quantity of social networks/collaborations among aid givers?

.....

Do you believe that the aid intervention strengthened the levels of trust in state or non-state actors?

.....

Do you believe that the aid intervention improved the levels of understanding and acceptance of diversity (tolerance of other groups)?

.....

**B Connectedness**

Do you believe that the aid intervention strengthened the feeling of belonging to the place (neighborhood, village, state, country, etc.)?

.....  
Do you believe that the aid intervention strengthened the feeling of belonging to a group (gender, ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.)?  
.....

**C      Orientation Towards the Common Good**

Do you believe that the aid intervention strengthened the Lebanese people’s ability to be socially responsible?  
.....

Do you believe that the aid intervention players were acting in the best interest of our civic life?  
.....

**D      Equality**

Did you use any equality criteria or indicators?  
.....

How inclusive (ethnic, religious, handicapped, women) were you in the process?  
.....

**VII.    Impact and Sustainability**

Is disbursement/assistance still ongoing?  
.....

Are you still receiving requests for support? Do you use any referral mechanisms?  
.....

Aid for businesses: did the assistance contribute to the economic recovery of the business?  
.....

**VIII.   Challenges and Adaptable Management**

What challenges did you face and how did your organization overcome them? (HR skills and training, access to resources, etc).  
.....

What would you do differently?  
.....

Any lessons learned?  
.....

Would you like to add anything else?  
.....