



Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Call for Submissions - Lebanon

Khaddit Beirut
The American University of Beirut
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Lebanon's civil war between 1975 and 1990 ended with an amnesty for war crimes, allowing warlords to become dealmakers and politicians. The result was a social and political system rife with exploitation and the violation of basic rights, marred by corruption, and perpetuated by multiple inequalities. Unfortunately, Lebanon's wealth distribution has been declared as one of the most inadequate by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) with its richest 10% owning approximately 70% of the country's total assets. Unsurprisingly, this is still the case up until now, which underscores the gravity of pervasive losses during one of the world's three worst financial crises. Yet, no plan of equal distribution of losses or mitigation has been taken. It is highly unlikely that any reform measures to lessen the disproportionate impact of loss are being proposed, or even politically supported, given the nearing elections.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) highlights the standard of living for all people regardless of their country of origin, race, religion, ethnicity, and gender. When considering the economic state of Lebanon, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosion played a big role in the current economic crisis. The results of this crisis are staggering from the perspective of the toll it has had on the average Lebanese. The effects are undeniable with the ineffectual government, devaluation of the Lira, debilitation of public infrastructure, and lack of necessities such as food, fuel, and other basic amenities like clean water. This resulted in the near eradication of the middle class and very high poverty rates. With the devaluation of the Lebanese currency, citizens are no longer being offered a livable wage. The resulting challenge is the inability to make a livable wage, which violates Article 23 and Article 7 of the UDHR and ICESCR, respectively, that declare it is a basic right of every person to work under favorable conditions, which must be reasonably guaranteed for the well-being of the individual. Specifically, "equal remuneration for work of equal value", has been denied to the working class in Lebanon. The drastic drop in salary affects the everyday life of people, due to the rising prices of daily goods which do not match it.

The poverty rate in Lebanon jumped from 28 to 55% after the compounded crises occurred. However, the rate has worsened as the Lebanese lira lost more than 90% of its value this year reaching up to 74% when considering the income of the average



Lebanese. This rate is further exacerbated to 82% if deprivation and disparity in health, education, and employment are included as factors.¹

The percentage of those who have the financial capacity to import treatment for their medical needs or send their children abroad for education, has shrunk in the last two years and basic necessities of life are no longer available. Approximately 750,000 families out of one million are living below the poverty line with the average monthly income plummeting from approximately \$450 to \$35 per month, which is below what is considered a minimum wage.²

The Beirut port explosion on August 4th, described by many as the explosion of the century, was an epitome and the culminating result of corruption, negligence, and waste leading us to come together in a moment of tragedy. We felt it was our obligation to work together to break the cycles of misery and corruption that had caused this disaster. The only way to do that was to put our accumulated knowledge and expertise into action and work systematically to establish the foundation for long-term change. As scholar activists, we aim collectively to defeat the cycle of perpetual injustice and inequality.

We founded Khaddit Beirut (the shake-up) the day following the explosion bringing together local experts, activists, academics, athletes, and artists who managed in 100 days following the explosion to develop, based on a clear Vision³ and Mission⁴, a

¹ Multidimensional Poverty in Lebanon, ESCWA, 2019-2021
<https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional-poverty-in-lebanon-policy-brief-en.pdf>

² Lebanon Families Spend 5 Times Minimum Wage on Food, The Daily Star, July 2021
<https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2021/Jul-21/521992-lebanon-families-spend-5-times-minimum-wage-on-food-study.ashx>

³ Vision: Khaddit Beirut aims to co-create local solutions, co-build alternative institutions, co-design best practices, and growth opportunities that ensure the wellbeing and dignity of the inhabitants of Lebanon

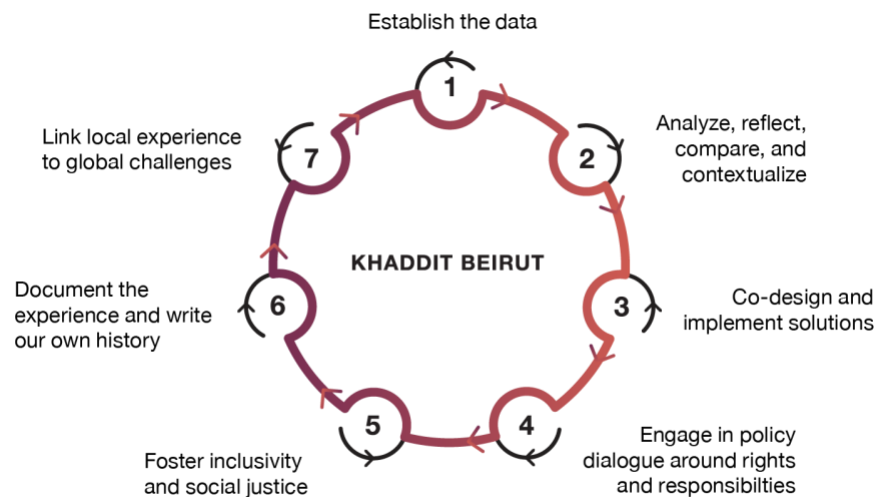
⁴ Mission: As a grassroots initiative, Khaddit Beirut applies an agile, evidence-based, inclusive, and holistic approach driven by local needs, accountable to people, and focused on sustainable solutions in the areas of community health, community education, environmental health, and local business



community-led, evidence-based, and locally driven roadmap for recovery, in the total absence of state support.

While help from international donors has provided generous initial support to the most affected areas after the explosion, we were forced to address the hegemonic and often standardized approach to aid and relief. In Khaddit Beirut we aim to devise and implement solutions that ensure that the voice of marginalized groups, women, migrant workers, refugees, and people living in poverty, are heard, and included in new ways forward through building together an inclusive strategy that empowers them to contribute to solving their own problems.

Soon after the explosion, we came to realize that the economic collapse and the current poor situation is going to affect many aspects of our lives. We decided to focus on the sectors that are vital and basic for any society to survive, and where people's rights have been violated for the past 30 years. Four impact initiatives focusing on health, education, environmental health and supporting small businesses led by experts in the field were formed. Work started by assessing the needs of the community before drafting any roadmap for recovery, and the solutions were designed with the help of a transdisciplinary team whose focus points to sustainable interventions that foster inclusivity and social justice. All based on 7 steps that have been tested by experts' extensive experience in community work, transparency, and accountability way before the blast.





On the education level, Khaddit Beirut adopted six public schools that were affected by the blast. Our survey of their abilities to resume classes online during the pandemic has revealed many layers of poverty, injustice, and inability to cope with the rapid demand of technology. Out of 170 teachers in those schools, 90 were using their phones to conduct their classes through WhatsApp instead of Teams and Zoom. For the students and their families, the case is very similar, as only around 200 students out of 2000 were able to afford electronic devices. The rest were using either their parents or grandparents' phones, and sometimes even 3-4 kids in the same household would use 1 phone. Parents were not able to afford school supplies and tuition as the prices have skyrocketed, and with the pandemic, they couldn't afford buying electronic devices for their kids. Some had to "drop their kids from school not because they could not only pay the tuition, but because they could not afford a laptop", one of the fathers told a school principal. This story was told in one of Khaddit Beirut's General Assembly meetings which led us to forming an intervention called "Their Right to Learn" that provides students and teachers with electronic devices through a computer lab establishment inside the school. Other interventions that included workshops, needs assessment, training and coaching of the principals and schoolteachers are ongoing, to transform schools into community schools.

The health sector is also crumbling due to massive widespread corruption and mismanagement, along with the COVID-19 pandemic that has worsened the state of affairs. During its peak, the authorities immediately issued a warning that there were not enough hospital beds for patients with COVID-19. Soon after, people have lost their right in receiving health care services and access to medications. According to the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), the consumer price index of health services increased by 17.26% in January 2021, with monopoly of most of the needed medication for chronic and acute diseases.⁵ People should either pay in dollars to receive their medication, or have their request rejected. Hospitals were at the verge of closing due to lack of diesel

⁵ Lebanon, Human Rights Watch, 2020

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/lebanon>



fuel which they were not able to afford because of the sharp increase in their prices. The magnitude of the problem called for immediate interventions from all those who can and are ready to help. Khaddit Beirut team decided to step in and help in one of the most marginalized areas present at the heart of Beirut and at the epicenter of the explosion where lies a community in crisis called the Karantina.⁶ The neighborhood has a military base, a public garden, and a governmental hospital that houses a Primary Healthcare Centre (PHC). The area also houses the largest waste dump in the country and several industries. Even before the explosion, the Karantina area was among the lowest socioeconomic neighborhoods in Beirut. Its inhabitants vary by nationality and religion: Lebanese, Syrian refugees and migrant workers, Christians, and Muslims. Although an accurate estimate of its population is not possible, it is estimated to be around 6,000 inhabitants. The currently available healthcare services in that area are none the better. The Karantina hospital and its affiliate primary health care center (PHC), both of which suffered immense damages in the August explosion, have been restored by several international organizations. A preliminary needs assessment after the blast however indicated that residents of Karantina perceive the services this PHC provides as non-commensurate with their needs and not affordable. The latter has been recently addressed when an INGO, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), subsidized all consultations and diagnostic tests for the vulnerable populations for a nominal fee of 3,000 Lebanese Pound (equivalent to 25 US cents). But the inadequacy of services remains unresolved.

A general scan of the Karantina community enabled us to identify and sense a general communal welcoming attitude towards our plans for reform. The community nursing students at the American University of Beirut (AUB) under the supervision of two Khaddit Beirut members started conducting several health interventions in the area. At the same time, professors from Khaddit Beirut held discussions with the ministry of public health (MOPH), in particular its Primary Healthcare Department and the Karantina PHC administration, which opened the doors for the community nursing students to use the Karantina PHC as a service-learning center. The aftermath was the initiation of close

⁶ After Port Explosion, Lebanese Evacuate Their Dreams, The Washington Post, August 2021
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/beirut-explosion-karantina/>



collaborations with the different stakeholders, and a community responsive PHC was established to care for chronic patients in the area including and not restricted to elderlies and most vulnerable members of the community.

On the business aspect, all sectors in Lebanon were badly hit by the triple burden of the explosion, the economic collapse, and the lock down due to COVID-19. As Khaddit Beirut members, we chose to work with the Lebanese Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, once a pride of the Lebanese economy, which witnessed the closure of nearly 50% of its enterprise in the past 2 years, leaving tens of thousands jobless. We first aided around 30 SMEs in rebuilding their brick-and-mortar stores after its devastation following the August 4 blast. Khaddit Beirut members soon realized that this was the tip of the problems. Frequent focus group discussions with the SME owners revealed that the challenges included the high prices of the raw materials, the frequent power cut, the unavailability or expensive price of the diesel fuel, and the migrations of the employees just to name a few. In response, we have designed programs and webinar series to address these issues and explore solutions like franchising and machining, cloud services, and business aggregations.

We understand the magnitude of the problems, we also realize that we need a strong state to build the infrastructure for a sustainable reform. Our framework builds on successful models while contextualizing the solution to disaster zones in countries plagued by bad governance. Khaddit Beirut will bring in the perspectives of activism, advocacy, business, humanities, and social sciences with the aim of developing a new social contract among the local community, academia, public and private sectors. We do hope that the models of support that we have created and tested in education, health, and business-support, based on evidence and high expertise, can be adopted by human rights supporters and the government to help in rebuilding our country fairer and better.