Peacebuilding and Social Stability Challenges Faced by Municipalities within a Context of Ongoing Crises in Lebanon

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Acknowledgments

Disclaimer

While the team made all efforts possible to cross-check information and reproduce only accurate facts and events, this does not overrule the possibility of inaccuracies or oversights, for which ALEF expresses hereby its regrets.

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Introduction

Since 2019, Lebanon has been actively witnessing a multilayered socioeconomic and political crisis. Years of mismanagement, corruption and political deadlocks have culminated in an explicit financial collapse in 2019. As the economic reality became more explicit, the COVID19 pandemic began to further exacerbate the situation, followed by the Beirut Port Explosion in 2020. Lebanon thus found itself in an unprecedented multilayered crisis which had a ripple effect into all dimensions of the Lebanese society.

ALEF - act for human rights has worked closely on the responsibilities of local governments in the protection, respect, and fulfilment of human rights. As duty bearers, local governments become even more central in the life of citizens and residents in Lebanon at times where policy-making at the central level is crippled by political deadlocks and inability to fulfil obligations. The fragile stability in the country has been further undermined by the multi-layered crisis, exposing local governments to further step-in and resolve needs of communities under their jurisdictions. Municipalities exposed to a diverse social fabric require further actions to be taken, discontent, unmet needs, misinformation, and perceptions of insecurity are exponentially magnified in diverse communities – either those hosting refugees or those with multi-sectarian groups. In this context, there is compelling necessity to design rights-based solutions to address the numerous problems citizens, refugee and migrants face in Lebanon, solutions that take into account Lebanon's specific challenges resulting from this acute humanitarian, developmental and financial crisis, and that involves relevant actors in decisions that affect the lives of those living in Lebanon, becomes a necessity in the survival of rule of law at all levels of governments.

In order to better understand the challenges faced by local governments, at the frontlines of community relations, ALEF conducted series of semi structured interviews with various stakeholders from municipalities across Lebanon to assess the current state of local authorities. To do so, ALEF selected several municipalities across Lebanon based on their diverse demographic composition to assess the impact of the ongoing Lebanese crisis on the administrative and governance levels. Such criteria include the religious and sectarian diversity of the locality, the size of the municipality, the willingness and capacity of the municipal council to function. The selection criteria were established to ensure that the sample of chosen municipalities and towns represent the Lebanese landscape and demographic in its broader diversity, thus ensuring that the findings of this report are accurate and represent to the best of ALEF's ability the Lebanese community. ALEF has contacted and interviewed representatives of the following municipalities: Chadra, Jermnaiya El Ram, Aamaret El Baykat, Ghazaleh, Halba, Qorneh,

Beino Qboula, Wadi El Haor, Hrar, Aarka, Aaydamoun Chekhlar, Kobayat, Saadnayel, Riyaq, Ferzul, Ein El Delbe, Dekwaneh, Jbeil, Chiyah, Chtaura, Qab Elias, Sfarai, Jezzine, Batroun, and Aley. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following questions used for guiding the conversation:

- Are you aware or do you know of any tensions present in your town?

- Do you think these tensions are affecting/affected by interreligious relationships?

- What was your position regarding these tensions?

- What do you think is the role of the municipalities in such situations related to coexistence?

- What do you think is needed for you to be able to tackle these issues properly?

- Do you have any concrete plans/strategies in case any clashes occur?

- Do you cooperate with the neighboring towns to find solutions to the tensions?

- Do you perceive additional threats now that the elections are getting close?
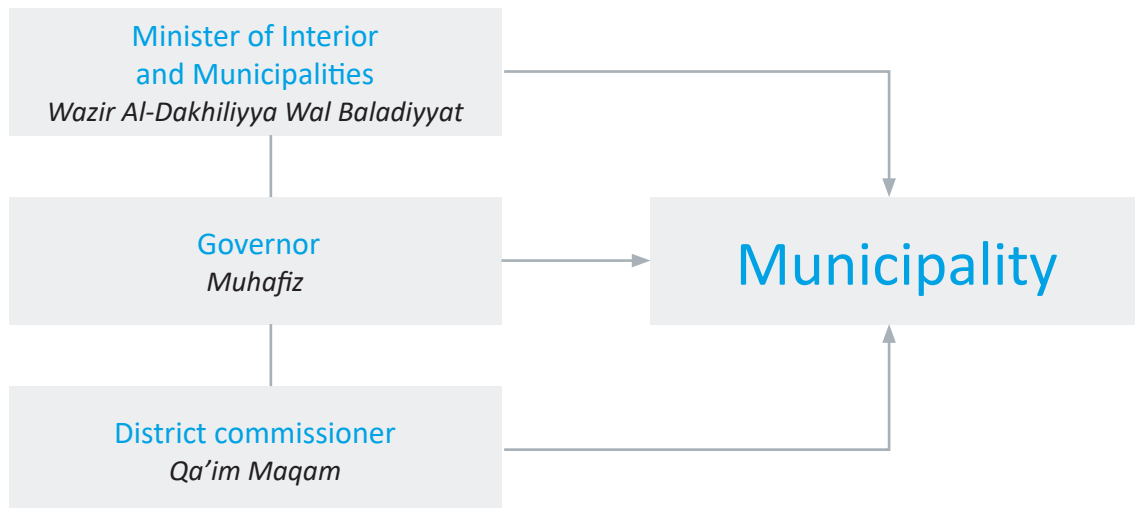
Lebanon's Local Governance System

Following the unfolding of the Lebanese financial crisis in 2019, local, national, regional, and international developments have further undermined the Lebanese government's capabilities and racked up bureaucratic burdens. Accordingly, the manifold collapse of Lebanon and its ramifications are most evident and seen at the local level as they pertain to the needs of local communities throughout the country. Lebanon's administrative system is divided into governorates (Muhafazat), which are further divided into districts (Qada'). Local government in Lebanon is divided into three levels: municipal, district, and governorate. There are nine governorates in Lebanon, namely Beirut, Akkar, Baalbak-Hermel, Beqaa, Mount Lebanon, Jbeil-Keserwan, Nabatieh, North Lebanon, and South Lebanon. There are also twenty-five districts with a total of 1,108 municipalities[1]. A governorate and its districts are directly controlled by the central government. The Muhafazat and Qada' are responsible for implementing the national government's, and its ministries', policy objectives, directives, and decisions, both on the local and national levels. Since they are entirely formed and appointed by the central government, they do not have legal personality or independent authority.

The Lebanese municipal system is considered the focal point of administrative decentralization, regional development, and the first line of engagement of the Lebanese citizens in political life. As per the Lebanese administrative system, the municipality is the smallest unit in the bureaucratic division established in Lebanon. As promulgated by the Municipal Act Decree law no. 118[2], a municipality is founded in a populated area with more than 300 of its original residents registered in the civil status records and whose annual self-generated revenues are approximated above 10,000,000 L.L. Title two, chapter 1 of the Municipal Act mentions that a municipality has a council that acts as the decision-making body. This municipal council is a legitimately elected body for a six-year term in office whose size and number of members is entirely dependent on each municipality's registered population. Additionally, Chapter I, section 2 stipulates several instances in which the municipal council is dissolved, including the annulment of municipal elections, the resignation of the municipal council, or failure to submit declarations of illicit enrichment. Moreover, since municipalities are autonomous legal entities, they enjoy certain extents of both administrative and financial autonomy vis-à-vis the central government.

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1 Presidency of the Council of Ministers Central Admissions of Statistics. About Lebanon: THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON. Retrieved from http://www.cas.gov.lb/index.php/about-lebanon-en

2 Government of Lebanon Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (1977, June 30). Municipal Act. Retrieved from municipal_act_eng.doc (live.com)

As such, the municipality is able to take specific decisions, address certain issues, and implement projects within their jurisdictions without referring to the central government. For instance, the municipal council overseas matters and concerns specific to its town, as the authority and jurisdiction of this administrative body extends to all matters of public interest and concern. Their reach includes setting and balancing the budget, collecting fees and taxes, establishing, or maintaining various public utilities, amenities, and infrastructure such as sanitation, water management, public lighting, local transit, and the maintenance of public spaces such as streets and public gardens. Nonetheless, most of the municipality's functions are contingent to the supervision of upper administrative bodies the municipality is subject to. In Lebanon, the municipality answers to the district commissioner (Qa'im Maqam), the governor (Muhafiz), and to the Minister of Interior and Municipalities (Wazir Al-Dakhiliyya Wal Baladiyyat). Thus, although the municipality does enjoy certain levels of autonomy, it is under the constant interference and supervision of the aforementioned governmental structures.

Minister of Interior and Municipalities *Wazir Al-Dakhiliyya Wal Baladiyyat*	
Governor *Muhafiz*	Municipality
District commissioner *Qa'im Maqam*	

Trends and Analysis

Throughout the conducted interviews, all municipalities shared strong common denominators concerning the immense struggles and pressures they are facing. Nonetheless, the scale and level of impact and distress each town is facing clearly differed from one municipality to the other. On a systematic level, all municipalities irrespective of their size or geographic location, were affected as they had to cope with the ongoing crises on a day-to-day basis, promptly adapt to the changing Lebanese governmental, political, social, and economic scenes, all while swiftly having to adopt new ways of governing and administering their duties in order to ensure their continuity and sustainably.

All municipalities without any exception were foundationally challenged by the multitude of crises Lebanon is going through. The main crosscutting challenges are as follows: socioeconomic deterioration, access to and provision of services, political deadlocks, refugee hosting and dissolution of municipalities.

Socioeconomic Deterioration

Municipalities were unanimously concerned and struggling due to the current crisis, which rendered them incapable of fulfilling all responsibilities. Thus, municipalities have been forced to prioritize and choose which services and needs are essential to their towns. Doing this was highly discretionary, and often stemming from immediate needs, often resulting in unstructured use of resources that further undermined long-term planning. In all the interviews conducted by ALEF, matters related to sustaining salary disbursement along with continuation of main service provisions were on top of challenges. It is worth noting that issues prioritised by municipalities do not include the full fledge obligations they have under the Municipal Law (i.e., do not necessarily include education, health, labour etc). The most redundant issue highlighted in the interviews was waste disposal and waste management. The repercussions of the 2015 garbage crisis, and the reliance on smaller resources to manage the waste management of the municipality was highlighted as the key resource draining service.

Most of these issues are outcomes of long-standing inefficient system of relations between the periphery and the central government. Since 2019, the central government did not provide all municipalities with their allocated shares of public funding. As a result, municipal duties have

been reduced to the prices of a soaring black market, in addition to the stark devaluation of the Lebanese Pound. Ferzul's municipal president stated that the municipality used to receive 400,000USD per year, but now they receive 255,000,000 L.L (equivalent to USD6538 if 1USD =39000 LBP), barely enough to cover gas costs that is usually used for municipality police cars and other municipality related commuting. This is further compelled by the loss of municipal funds deposited in commercial banks. This has led to many municipalities reporting their increasing reliance on international organizations for assistance to cover their most basic expenses. This trend was reported in Jezzine, Qab Elias, Chtaura, Ferzul, Sfarai, and Kobayat. With most receiving grants and assistance from UNDP, USAID, the FCDO, and the UNHCR to compensate for the absence of public resources. In Ein el Delbe, the mayor reported to ALEF that the main challenge for the municipality is that all its funding and revenues are collected in Lebanese Pound, resulting in continuous decrease in the value of the revenues, and more difficulty in covering expenses. This in his opinion represents a main hinderance facing municipalities all over Lebanon. Hence, the increasing financial pressures on municipalities even regarding fulfilling their basic and minimal duties constituted a burden that could not be carried by all local authorities.

In Kobayat, the mayor announced that all development projects have to be halted indefinitely due to shortage in resources. Rayak also reported a similar concern, a municipal member told ALEF "We are unable to collect garbage from the roads due to the soaring prices of diesel and its severe shortage". There is a replication of this phenomenon in the overwhelming majority of the municipalities interviewed, as this issue has dominated headlines since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict reconfigured the global oil market[3]. Municipalities are facing severe hardships due to the fuel shortage as well as the soaring Lebanese Pound exchange rate, which consumes an enormous amount of their budgets.

In municipalities that are still able to sustain themselves, one of the most significant factors is the individual efforts, initiative, and leadership of mayors and council members. the mayor and president of the union of the Jezzine municipalities, attributes his ability to maintain the basic services of Jezzine to his personal connections within the Lebanese diaspora, which has provided some financial assistance to the municipality to maintain basic services and assist vulnerable families in Jezzine. According to him, his company has digitalized the municipal records and services for the first time in Lebanon, making Jezzine the first municipality to rollout e-government tools. As a result of a solid structure and the personal initiative of the municipal president, Jezzine is one of the municipalities that has been able to be more resilient to the impacts of the crisis and provide continuity for its obligations.

The same pattern can also be observed in Sfarai, whose president also has a business background, which reflects in his management style. In Sfarai, the mayor said, there are also many hardships related to providing the town's necessities, but the municipality is still able to maintain itself and perform its duties. He stated that he operates much of his municipal work from his company to alleviate the municipality's administrative costs, and by doing so, he cuts any unnecessary expenses that would otherwise be borne by the municipality.

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3 AlJazeera (2022, March 8). Lebanese fearful as fuel and wheat shortage deepens. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/8/lebanese-fearful-as-fuel-and-wheat-shortage-deepens

Political Deadlocks

On another level, as the government decided to postpone the Lebanese municipal elections to go through with the parliamentary elections, all of the municipal officials interviewed either expressed their discontent with the extension of their mandate or were indifferent as they expected it. For instance, there are municipalities such as Jezzine, Sfarai, and Chtaura that expected the mandate renewal but were not happy with the Government's decision. On the other hand, in Saadnayel, Aley, and Riyaq respondents showed clear dissatisfaction with the renewal of the municipalities' term. The municipalities unsatisfied with the renewal of their term expressed a clear discontent since they view that they were obliged to continue their work and sustain themselves even though the government neither granted them more privileges to adapt and deal with their challenges, nor were they being given the required financial allocations from the central government.

Refugee Hosting

With the start of the refugee crisis in 2011, an increasing flow of Syrian refugees were hosted across the Lebanese territory, particularly in the Bekaa and Aakar governorates. UNHCR reports in terms of refugees per capita and per square kilometre, Lebanon continues to host the most refugees in the world, with the Government estimating 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 13,715 refugees of other nationalities.[4] The highest numbers are hosted in the Bekaa, North Lebanon and Beirut.[5] These areas are also considered to be amongst the most vulnerable localities in Lebanon.[6]

Additionally, tension factors are reported to exist within Intra-Lebanese relations and between Lebanese and Syrian relations. These tensions vary from socio-economic differences, political and sectarian conflict (that has however declined in its weight and occurrence), competition over lower-skilled jobs – especially between host and refugee. Other factors would be cultural differences, political situation, and unfair aid distribution.[7]

Interviews with municipal stakeholders reflected that the refugee crisis has overstretched municipal capacities and services. In Saadnayel for example, where refugee populations outnumber local residents and other residents[8] of the town only one garbage disposal truck was needed prior to 2011. Since the increase in the town's residents after the refugee crisis, the municipality reported that the town has now three garbage disposal trucks, requiring three times more resources from the municipal budget, while collection from Lebanese citizens

4 UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. UNHCR Lebanon at a glance. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance

5 Operational Data Portal Refugee Situations (2022, December 31). Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved from https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71

6 Relief Web (2022, October 28). Lebanon: Inter-Agency Coordination - The 332 localities in Lebanon that host the highest number of displaced Syrians, Palestinian refugees, and deprived Lebanese – 2022. Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/map/lebanon/lebanon-inter-agency-coordination-332-localities-lebanon-host-highest-number-displaced-syrians-palestinian-refugees-and-deprived-lebanese-2022

7 Operational Data Portal Refugee Situations (2019, October 3). UNDP & ARK, Regular Perceptions Survey of Social Tensions Throughout Lebanon, Wave VI (August 2019). Retrieved from https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/71599

8 UCLG The Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Government (2013). Syrian Refugees Report Turkey-Jordan-Lebanon. Retrieved from https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/syrian_refugees_report._uclg_middle_east_working_group_1.pdf

remained the same. "This is just one example of how the Syrian refugee presence in our town is an immense burden on our municipality and the residents of Saadnayel," the interviewee added. Since the Lebanese state and Lebanese society's livelihoods and quality of life have declined rapidly, these burdens have intensified and are increasingly triggering tensions between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugee communities. Riyaq's municipal police stated their growing displeasure with Syrian refugees since they consider their stay to be "funded by the town and its residents."

While the refugee crisis has increased pressure on municipal services, it has also increased aid and assistance to many municipalities historically withdrawn from governmental development actions. the municipality of Dekwene could be one of the clearest examples of such dichotomy. On one hand, the mayor of Dekwene requests from Syrian refugees residing in its jurisdictions to sign pledges of return to Syria while also be one recipient of international development aid.[9] Such acts are blatantly unlawful, as firstly, the enaction of such measures does not fall under the jurisdiction of a municipal body. And secondly, such acts violate both Lebanese laws and international conventions and treaties to which Lebanon adheres.

Dissolution of Municipalities

As the country is experiencing one of the worst economic crises since the mid-19th century[10], it would have been predictable that not all municipalities would be able to successfully navigate these turbulent times and sustain their operational presence. Unfortunately, out of the several municipalities ALEF intended to interview in the 'Akkar region, eleven municipalities were dismantled and dissolved. In order to gather further information on the impacts of such dissolution, ALEF representatives conducted a number of interviews with such municipalities. A civil servant in the governor's office in Akkar, confirmed the dissolution of the following municipalities in Akkar: Chadra, Jermnaiya El Ram, Aamaret El Baykat, Ghazaleh, Halba, Qorneh, Beino Qboula, Wadi El Haor, Hrar, Aarka, and Aaydamoun Chekhlar He mentioned that the main reasons these municipalities were dissolved was either because of the current escalating pressures on municipalities, or due to political or personal rivalries. For instance, in the case of the municipality of Chadra, and although its council is mostly politically associated with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), it was dissolved because of a personal conflict between individuals who both belong to the FPM. Overall, and according to Al-Akhbar, as of 9th of March 2022, there were 85 municipalities that have been completely dissolved.[11] Following a dissolution, the functions of the municipal council are therefore transferred to the direct management and supervision of the Muhafiz (Governor)[12] or the Qaem Maqam (District Commissioner). In such cases, it becomes increasingly hard for the governor's office to be able to pertain for the specific needs of each and every town on a day-to-day basis. It was also indicated that the substantial burden the addition of the eleven municipalities to the mandate of the governor's office.

9 Al Modn (2022, June 08). Dekwaneh municipality forces Syrians to sign a pledge to return. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3o2vYx9

10 The World Bank (2021, May 31). Lebanon Economic Monitor, Spring 2021: Lebanon Sinking (to the Top 3). Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/lebanon-economic-monitor-spring-2021-lebanon-sinking-to-the-top-3

11 Al-Akhbar (2022, March 09). The extension of the municipalities as the indifference of the authority continues. Retrieved from https://al-akhbar.com/Community/332331

12 Governor or Muhafiz: Lebanon is divided into nine governorates (muhafazah). Each governorate is headed by a governor (muhafiz)

Under the current circumstances, it is most important to highlight the impact dissolved municipalities have on the towns and their residents. Apart from not having local representation, as municipalities are dissolved and directed under the authority and administration of the Muhafiz or the Qaem Maqam, the probable inability of these entities to manage, identify, and attend to the specific needs of the towns entrusted under their jurisdiction impedes for instance the town and its residents' rights of accessing certain services, as was clearly reflected in the case of Akkar's dissolved municipalities. Moreover, most of the time the transfer of authority does not address the underlying causes for the dissolution. The transfer might still alleviate the requirement for day-to-day management, however neither the rising tensions, nor the financial challenges are addressed in this transfer. ALEF is particularly interested in whether this transfer allowed for more effective administration and whether any correlation exists between reduction shift of authority and reduction/increase in nepotism.

Disparities in Faced Challenges

Considering that all Lebanese towns are struggling to maintain their provisions and duties, there is an obvious disparity between towns and municipalities. In the town of Chtaura, for example, taxes were raised on businesses by the municipality. In an explanation made by the municipal treasurer, they decided to increase taxes solely on businesses because the town is a financial and business hub for the Bekaa region, and because they thought businesses would be able to tolerate the taxation, while residents of Chtaura couldn't. Similarly, the municipal president of Batroun used the same strategy when he stated that Batroun's municipality receives the majority of its revenues from businesses. He clarified his decision by affirming that he knows the character of his town and its strongholds, and that the businesses profiting from Batroun as a tourist destination ought to contribute to the maintenance of the city. This isn't the case for the vast majority of municipalities. For example, the municipality of Aley, the fourth largest city in Lebanon is striving to maintain its provisions. Aley's municipal council member expressed the difficulties the municipality is facing to sustain itself and stated that they are working on creating for themselves elements of self-sustainability in hopes of being able to address all the needs of the town. Similarly, in Saadnayel, the municipality could not increase taxes on its residents since they wouldn't be able to handle this burden. But on the other hand, the need to create a revenue stream is imminent, the municipality took initiative and demanded the residents to pay their outstanding taxes since the municipality only had 10% of its taxes collected. It was specified that the residents were responsive to his call, and by engaging the local community and affirming its responsibility, the municipality was able to collect much need resources.

Another disparity factor worth mentioning is that some municipalities that host large numbers of Syrian refugees are in critical need of developmental projects and support, as is the case of Qab Elias, Riyaq, and Saadnayel. While a number of municipalities mentioned receiving aid from international donors and organizations such as the UNDP and USAID, some have not been given the same form of support. On the other hand, knowing that municipalities currently are heavily dependent international development and diasporic funding, there are municipalities, such as Chiyah, were to share their data and perspective on any gain or return resulting from their attempts to receive aid and support.

Quasi-stable Security Situation

Apart from the rising tensions between the Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities in certain regions in Lebanon such as Riyaq, Saadnayel, and Qab Elias, the interviewed municipalities haven't specified any prominent rising tensions between the Lebanese communities and factions. The reported and observed tensions between people was attributed to the increase in the daily pressures as the vast majority of the Lebanese people lost their social and economic stability they once had. Hence, most people nowadays are living in a constant state of instability and uncertainty, and that has an impact on the broader social dynamic and interactions of people. Additionally, in light of the renewal of the municipalities' term in office and the dissolution of many others, it has been noted that there might be some tensions present on the local level of governance that are of a political and/or personal nature. Nonetheless, there weren't any identified instances in which rivalries escalated to overt clashes as a result of the dissolution of a municipality as was clearly stated in all the cases of 'Akkar's eleven dissolute municipalities. On the other hand, other municipalities such as the municipality of Chtaura for instance, did not specify any kind of tensions present in their town. Chtaura's municipal officials attributed this to the general nature of the town that is centered around a working and business environment that does not harbor any type of tension or sectarian fueled conflicts.

Further, municipalities remain a key player in local problem-solving to this day, yet their ability to do so is highly dependent on the character of their councils and their presidents, their influence on and proximity to their citizens. In Riyaq, for instance, the municipal president rarely intervenes in personal conflicts between individuals. While in Kobayyat, the mayor plays an important role in resolving conflicts in his town and region. Concerning the security situation of towns, tensions were most prominent between both host and refugee communities which are present in large and substantial numbers as was the case in Riyaq. The towns of Saadnayel, Riyaq, and Qab Elias have reported conflict between Syrian refugees, but no overt and extreme clashes have been reported between the communities. Municipalities reported intervening either by sending their own police officers to resolve the clashes or by calling on the responsible authorities such as the Internal Security Forces. Additionally, all municipalities have identified the need to have municipal police who can maintain the overall peace and security of their towns and intervene in conflict resolution to stop disputes from escalating. Due to the ongoing crisis, many municipalities, such as Ferzul and Sfarai, do not have municipal police, and in many other municipalities, the size of their police force has declined. Lebanon's financial downfall has overtly accentuated this alarming pattern, pushing employees out of the public sector, and forcing municipalities to enforce budget cuts in many necessary operational areas and intervention areas.

In addition, as the elections were held in May, there were no stated threats or dangers. In fact, most municipalities, especially those near the periphery of Lebanese regions, reported that this election did not cause societal tensions. It is attributed by the interviewees to the fact that the parliamentary elections took place in times of multifaceted distress. As concerns about their livelihood and subsistence rise, people are recusing and withdrawing from political participation. This parliamentary election had less impact on society than previous ones, according to most municipalities. Kobayat's municipal president noted that only close circles of political parties were excited by the elections and satisfied with the results. Observed phenomena regarding this election have also been noted in many municipalities. Due to the decline of political parties' ability to provide services and financial assistance, their popularity and reach declined as well. The absence of political parties, especially in an election season, was particularly evident in municipalities in the periphery of Lebanon, such as Riyaq and Qab Elias, as this wasn't the case in previous election cycles since political parties rallied heavily to gain the periphery of their voters. The lack of enthusiasm reported by municipalities in regard to the elections is closely related to the lack of mobilization of traditional constituencies by political parties.

It was identified by all interviewees as extremely important and pivotal that municipalities take a leading role in situations and matters related to coexistence and maintaining peace and harmony between communities, especially in the current Lebanese context. It has also been identified that the municipal government's role in this regard is highly dependent on the municipality's mayor and the character and politics of the municipality as a whole because policies and practices that are perpetuated by the local government are directly and eminently related to social relations and societal dynamics within the community. To promote and encourage inclusion and coexistence between all factions present in society, municipalities should work on short- and long-term solutions to prevent tensions from rising and escalating. The municipalities have indicated that strengthening their presence and role during times of crisis is crucial to maintaining and reinforcing their role as focal points of political and societal stability that greatly impacts the wider Lebanese national context.

Recommendations

- Any structural reform to the public administration in Lebanon has to redefine the role of local governments to strengthen its role in community issues and re-center its role in the governance of local affairs.

- Donors, UN Agencies, and the World Bank engaged on structural reforms in Lebanon should work on enhancing the role of local governments as a central actor and catalyst for reforms and change, particularly to maintain proximity of services and relations with state institutions and ensure stability at the local and sub-national levels.

- Actors involved in reform discourses should prioritize increasing the operational freedom of local authorities in order to respond to the needs of their towns by developing and implementing public development programs. Central authority should act as a regulatory body for such policy programs ensuring compliance with regulations and public finance.

- Authorities should streamline and eliminate the administrative bottlenecks that impede the operation of municipalities.