

# **Making Lebanon Resilient**

**Achieving Disaster Risk Reduction  
in the Arab States:  
Good Practice Country Brief**



**UNISDR**

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

# **Making Lebanon Resilient**

## Achieving Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab States: Good Practice Country Brief

This country brief is a product of a regional exercise commissioned by UNISDR-Regional Office for Arab States with support and facilitation from the Disaster Risk Management Unit of the Lebanese Government and UNDP Lebanon. The views expressed in the paper do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations. The paper aims to briefly capture efforts on disaster risk reduction in Lebanon and is not meant to be inclusive of all the risk reduction work in the country. This paper complements other relevant reports and studies on risk reduction in Lebanon as well as the National Progress Report on the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) produced biannually by the Government of Lebanon. First printed in October 2012.



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## Preface

In 2012, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), through its Regional Office for Arab States, in partnership with national disaster risk reduction (DRR) focal points, UN partners and other stakeholders in selected countries launched an exercise to compile country briefs that capture DRR good practices from the Arab region.

Documenting good practices from the Arab Region aims to improve stakeholders' understanding of the critical entry points needed to develop and integrate disaster risk reduction into national strategies, policies and programmes. The country briefs will demonstrate how high-level advocacy, knowledge exchanges, capacity development, technical cooperation and partnerships can enable countries to make steady progress towards achieving their national disaster risk reduction goals, despite challenging political and economic contexts.

This country brief summarizes Lebanon's efforts in planning for greater disaster resilience. In past years, the country has learned a great deal from its history of disaster response and recovery experiences. It is now planning to implement a more systematic disaster risk reduction agenda by institutionalizing measures for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. The country is also taking steps to strengthen and coordinate its capacities for disaster response and recovery.

Lebanon's country brief identifies three entry points which are driving Lebanon's disaster risk reduction momentum: a) political will and leadership; b) local collaboration; and; c) regional and international partnerships. In a relatively short period of time, since 2009, these entry points have helped lay the foundation for a comprehensive, popular and collaborative disaster risk reduction agenda. Lebanon's experience also illustrates that maintaining continuity in risk governance is critical to building resilience.

This country brief acknowledges progress made on advancing the disaster risk reduction agenda nationally and locally in Lebanon, but also points out that there remains much to be done, especially amidst the emerging nexus of political and economic challenges Lebanon faces today. Capacities, resources, knowledge and technical know-how for DRR need to be strengthened and channelled down to local levels of governance. DRR strategies, policies, plans and programmes need to be implemented. Laws, regulations, decrees and ordinances need to be enforced. Public, private, regional and international partners and donors need to be committed and systematically engaged. Investments need to be boosted in raising awareness on disaster risks, impacts and prevention measures.

As Lebanon embarks on this journey of building its resilience, it is hoped that this country brief will provide timely insights into Lebanon's opportunities, challenges and aspirations.

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## I. CONTEXT

Lebanon's commitment to adopting a disaster risk reduction (DRR) approach<sup>1</sup> can be attributed to its unique political history, geography and topography. The on-going regional conflict and the influx of refugees, internal sectarian strife and the displacement of populations, unplanned urbanization, poor public infrastructure and services, increasing unemployment and poverty, coupled with recurrent natural hazards (snow storms, floods, landslides, drought, forest fires, earthquakes) and risks (sea level rise, seismic and tsunamis) serve as constant reminders of the nation's pronounced, complex vulnerabilities.

Although the country has a wealth of experience in collaboratively responding to localized, recurrent and cumulative disasters, systems and capacities to coordinate a response to intensive, occasional and high-impact disasters have been found lacking. This gap is especially manifested in the historical absence of a designated national agency that could facilitate the coordination of efforts of Ministries, departments, agencies, local authorities, civil society partners and the scientific community.

Lebanon has been planning for greater disaster resilience for over a decade now. In the aftermath of major storms in 2002-2003 and the major forest fires in 2007-08, disaster response and coordination was found to be generally weak and ineffective. Subsequently, some efforts to systematize coordination of disaster management actions through the High Relief Committee (HRC) were initiated<sup>2</sup>. The objective then was to expand the HRC's scope by strengthening its mandate and capacities to effectively coordinate disaster preparedness, response, relief and recovery actions.

In 2005, the global endorsement and adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)<sup>3</sup> offered Lebanon for the first time a blueprint to systematically plan, implement and coordinate a DRR approach that includes disaster prevention, mitigation, response and recovery actions.

However, a range of political, economic and administrative challenges, particularly the onset of the 2006 war, made it difficult to adopt DRR priorities and all related institutional reforms were stalled. Meanwhile, various domestic and international disasters in 2008, 2009 and 2010 served as a reminder of the urgent need to develop capacities and dedicate resources for effective disaster planning, response and coordination.

As 'Lebanon's DRR Timeline' in figure 1 below shows, since 2009, regional and international partnerships forged through the ISDR system, have contributed to strengthening Lebanon's resolve to implement a comprehensive, popular and collaborative DRR agenda. In particular, high-level political advocacy, capacity development initiatives, participation in international and regional forums and exposure to DRR practices from other countries have each contributed to creating Lebanon's national and local DRR momentum in a relatively short period of time.

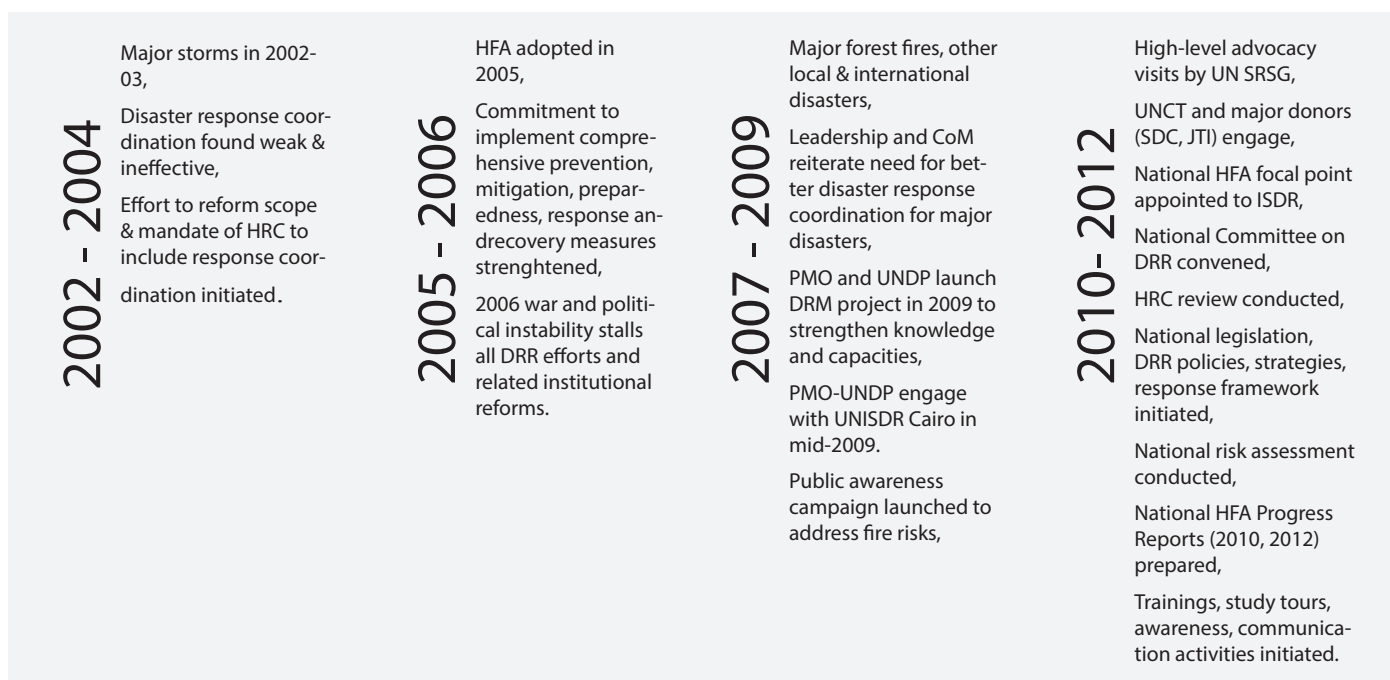
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unisdr.org/who-we-are/what-is-drr>

<sup>2</sup> The HRC was appointed in 1977 with the limited objective of organizing response and recovery operations, managing donations, allocating funds to departments for relief operations, and maintaining a database of the donations received and distributed.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unisdr.org/2005/wcdr/intergover/official-doc/L-docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf>

Figure 1: Lebanon's DRR Timeline



## II. ENTRY POINTS and DRIVERS

As Lebanon embarks on building its resilience, it will be important to understand the entry points that 'drive' progress in order to appropriately invest in them and use their influence to further the country's DRR agenda. While each country has a unique DRR context, these entry points serve as a useful reminder of the universal importance of fostering strong national and local leadership, collaborative societies and experience-driven learning.

Lebanon's DRR experience can be attributed to three critical drivers: political will and leadership, local collaboration and, regional and international partnerships. As the narrative below demonstrates, these drivers are enabling the country to achieve strategic direction, momentum and visibility for its DRR agenda at all levels.



Figure 2: Drivers of DRR Progress

## a. Political Will and Leadership

*The right messages were disseminated through the right political institutions. This enabled DRR to become part of the high-level agenda in Lebanon.*

Since 2003, sustained political interest and commitment from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers has given the issue of DRR national visibility and reinforced its importance to all relevant line Ministries and decentralized authorities.

In 2009, PMO, supported by UNDP, formulated a 'Strengthening Disaster Risk Management Capacities in Lebanon' project (2009 – 2012), with a five-fold objective:

- Establishment of a Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Unit,
- Development and implementation of a national strategy and systems for DRR,
- Development of national and local capacities for DRM,
- Raising public awareness on DRR,
- Integrating gender equality initiatives at the national and local level.

Through this on-going project, the PMO has created a firm foundation for Lebanon's efforts in building resilience. Concretely, establishing a Disaster Risk Management Unit within the PMO has made it possible to adopt a strategic vision for DRR early on. The project's high-level positioning has also facilitated prioritized planning and coordination of critical DRR measures to be implemented at the national and local levels and across sectors.

The PMO recognizes that DRR implies a long-term commitment for which mobilizing the participation and accountability of sectorial Ministries, decentralized authorities, Parliamentarians, and political parties is critical. A National Committee for HFA/ DRR is regularly convened by the PMO and makes for an excellent example of integrating DRR related efforts of diverse entities at the national and local levels across sectors. Moreover, institutional coordination by the PMO is more likely to ensure continuity in risk governance, irrespective of political leanings and changing manifestos. In fact, the activities of the DRM Unit have been given a high priority by successive Prime Ministers.

It is expected that the technical role of the DRM Unit will be greatly assisted with the proposed creation of a National Disaster Management Commission (or agency) to replace the High Relief Committee (HRC) and to act as a strategic coordinator and facilitator of disaster risk reduction and management actions for the country.

*People in Lebanon have a strong sense of civic responsibility and collaboration – most often formed in response to a political vacuum.*

## b. Local collaboration

Owing to its turbulent political history and the near absence of governance and public services, especially in the peripheries, the Lebanese have cultivated an admirable zeal for collaborative action. This unique social characteristic provides a fertile entry point for gaining momentum in the implementation of local DRR initiatives in Lebanon.

For instance, local responses to small-scale disasters in the recent past have demonstrated willing collaboration between first responders, local authorities, public services, civil society and communities. However, in the absence of national and decentralized coordinating mechanisms and standard operating procedures, local collaboration is often spontaneous, ad-hoc and sometimes chaotic.

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DRR related engagements at the local levels are now working to channel collaborative energies to create more efficient and accountable structures for disaster risk management with standard protocols for first responders, local authorities and public service providers. Such collaboration has been greatly aided by participation in regional and international campaigns such as UNISDR's Global Campaign on Making Cities Resilient. Participation in this global campaign has demonstrated 'quick win', high-impact and visible DRR actions across at least 250 municipalities and 5 municipal unions in the country.

*There is great willingness to learn from other country's experiences and bring the best to Lebanon.*

### **c. Regional and International Partnerships**

A partnership between the UNISDR's Regional office for Arab States and UNDP Country Office in Lebanon began in 2009 to support DRR actions in Lebanon. This partnership has been described as critical for solidifying Lebanon's DRR vision and commitments. This partnership facilitated exposure to global good practices and lessons learnt, participation in the Global Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction, the regional campaigns and networks for DRR, trainings in establishing and developing national disaster inventory system, and training on assessment of progress nationally and locally on DRR as well as reporting on the Hyogo Framework for Action, have each provided the appropriate messages, tools and methodologies required to adopt a systematic DRR agenda.

UNISDR-UNDP partnership in the Lebanese context has given political visibility to DRR and supported coordination of the DRR agenda at the highest institutional levels. UNISDR facilitated three visits by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction (SRSG) - in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively. The SRSG's visits have emphasized the importance of global policy agendas and regional instruments in shaping Lebanon's national DRR agenda (including the Hyogo Framework for Action 2015, recommendations of the Global Platforms for DRR, and the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020 respectively).

Furthermore, UN-Habitat, UNICEF and WHO have been working with their respective national counterparts from line ministries on integration of DRR measures across the various sectors. The specialized UN agencies support has facilitated technical guidance and targeted initiatives on risk assessment related to informal settlements, schools and hospitals. In specific, UN-Habitat efforts focus on providing guidance on integration of DRR in urban planning and will move towards local planning processes. UNICEF invests in increasing awareness through education system and enhancing DRR capacities and knowledge for school safety measures where 25 most vulnerable schools were targeted around the country. WHO developed guidance material on health emergency preparedness and response, trained hospitals operating in the country on the Hospital Safety Index and supported 27 hospitals in conducting safety self- assessment exercises.

The international community in Lebanon (including UN agencies, World Bank and donors such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) has provided critical support in the conceptualization and initiation of a multi-stakeholder and multi-thematic DRR agenda for the country. The support provided by the UN agencies and donors led to concrete results in the areas of capacity development, public awareness raising and national risk assessment. There is widespread recognition that as implementation of national and local plans begins, it will be essential for the implementation phase to engage a different and wider group of donors and regional and international institutions. This diversity will bring new kinds of know-how and expertise to Lebanon.

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### III. DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AGENDA

Entry points and DRR drivers identified in the previous section help explain how Lebanon has been able to build a firm foundation for its future DRR progress over a relatively short period. This section will assess the key characteristics of Lebanon's emerging DRR agenda and identify areas that are likely to contribute towards building Lebanon's resilience in the near future.

#### A Comprehensive Agenda

Taking guidance from the HFA's five Priorities for Action<sup>4</sup>, Lebanon's DRR agenda is positioned to be comprehensive. It emphasizes a vertical integration of DRR from the highest political levels down to the decentralized level. It emphasizes a horizontal integration of DRR across relevant sectors including health, education, media and private sector engagements. Through the implementation of a 'Training Strategy' it is focused on developing sustainable institutional and local capacities for DRR; and is working to ensure that gender considerations are integrated across all DRR actions<sup>5</sup>.

Partners and stakeholders committed to building Lebanon's resilience recognize that a comprehensive DRR agenda will require a long-term engagement with dedicated political will, capacities and resources to support sustained implementation. Instances of how Lebanon demonstrates this long-term commitment are evidenced by an investment in processes, capacities and institutions, with a focus on outcomes.

The creation of DRM institutions, focal points and task forces including, the PMO's DRM Unit, the National Committee on DRR with representatives from Ministries, agencies, municipalities and national societies, creation of the National Response Task Force and National Response Plan, the creation of a new law on DRM to reflect coordination structures and mechanisms are all laying the foundations for a sustained and comprehensive agenda.

Lebanon's 'Training Strategy for DRR' will, in many aspects underpin the DRR agenda's successful implementation over the longer term. It covers three areas - crisis management, disaster mitigation and prevention, and public safety. The focus is on developing the capacities of Ministries and national departments, Mohafza, Kada and Municipal governments at the local levels, support to specialists such as engineers, architects, builders and contractors, the media and students at school and university is also envisaged. This effort makes the capacity development strategy widely applicable and the DRR agenda sustainable.

#### A Popular Agenda

Lebanon's DRR agenda is positioned to become popular as it continues to capture the interest and commitment of the highest political level, local authorities and communities. The country's unique political history and isolating geography make its commitment to developing greater resilience entrenched in the nations' psychology. Conversely, one has to be mindful that the legacy of conflict has influenced risk perceptions and inhibited the development of a proactive culture of disaster prevention.

While commitment to DRR at the highest political levels was initially challenging, it was successfully achieved by disseminating the right messages through the right political institutions. As a result, DRR enjoys a wider popularity than it would otherwise have gained in such a short period of time.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/hfa>

<sup>5</sup> Lebanon's National HFA Progress Report 2009-2011, and current preparation of 2011-2013 includes details on activity implementation and progress. The 2009 2011 report is available here: [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/19726\\_Ibn\\_NationalHFAprogress\\_2009-11.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/19726_Ibn_NationalHFAprogress_2009-11.pdf)



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In 2011, an inclusive Communications Strategy for DRR was developed by the PMO and UNDP. It underscores the importance of popularizing DRR by designating it essentially as a 'people-based approach'. The Communications Strategy is engaging key stakeholders – DRR decision makers (national and local authorities), the media, the general public and educational institutions. Its vision is to induce a behavioural change towards DRR whereby the country sees a perception shift from engaging in a culture of disaster response management to embracing a culture of disaster prevention and preparedness.

However, a couple of challenges should be recognized. The state and local authorities feel constrained by the lack of resources and the restricted allocation of DRR resources, particularly for prevention and mitigation actions. Second, the limitations in the risk perceptions of people in general could prevent the popularization of the DRR agenda. Due to past years of conflict and strife, people exhibit a bravado attitude of 'we can live through anything'. That said, no stakeholder consulted in Lebanon questions the usefulness of the DRR approach - the need is felt although implementation may remain a challenge due to a number of factors.

## **A Collaborative Agenda**

Even in its early stages of DRR implementation, Lebanon is unique in implementing a highly collaborative DRR agenda. The National Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction serves as a good instance of national and multi-sectoral coordination. The Committee is convened by the PMO, under the auspices of the Prime Minister and as a proxy function of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. The National Committee has been formed to enable horizontal/ multi-sectoral and vertical coordination between Ministries, agencies, national societies, NGOs and UN agencies working on DRR related activities. It facilitates regular interactions between the members and enables them to work together in support of institutional DRR mandates and goals. One of the primary outputs of this group has been the development of biennial National HFA Progress Reports<sup>6</sup> (2009-2011 and currently, 2011-2013).

At the local level, collaboration within and among municipalities is one of the hallmarks of Lebanon's DRR momentum. In fact, the municipality is the only level of decentralized governance that is helping to realize visible DRR results in the absence of a strong national institutional coordinating agency or mechanism. Collaboration between international-regional-national and local levels is well demonstrated by municipal participation in the UNISDR Global Campaign on Making Cities Resilient. The campaign has raised awareness, mobilized action and garnered the commitment of local authorities and service providers in Lebanon.

Mount Lebanon is a good example of the results demonstrated by effective collaboration for this campaign. Multiple stakeholders across Caza El-Matn's 51 municipalities have been mobilized to adopt the DRR agenda. A disaster management committee has been established to plan and coordinate prevention and mitigation efforts, a disaster operations center has been established to coordinate response and recovery actions<sup>7</sup>, emergency vehicles have been provided especially to remote villages to aid their evacuation in times of disaster, bi-monthly trainings are conducted for municipality staff on relevant topics, civil society groups are actively involved in mobilizing and training communities, religious groups are involved in addressing community members. Engineers, doctors, professors, social welfare workers among others, are all represented in the district disaster management committee on a voluntary basis.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/19726\\_lbn\\_NationalHFAprogress\\_2009-11.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/19726_lbn_NationalHFAprogress_2009-11.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> In the absence of a National Operations Center, the district decided to open one up at the local level to serve as a model. This serves as an example of creative collaboration at the local level, in spite of the delays in adoption of frameworks and mechanisms at the national level.

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There is also important work being done by NGOs, science, research organizations and most recently, the private sector.

The Lebanese Red Cross works effectively to support the local administration, civil society groups and communities to prepare for, and respond to disasters in a timely manner. It has made significant contributions to developing the capacities of local authorities and communities in responding to, and managing localized disaster impacts. It is one of the most 'counted on' network of volunteers at the local level, in times of disaster.

The Association for Forests, Development and Conservation (AFDC)<sup>8</sup> has made important contributions to working at the grassroots to collect data, conduct research and analysis on forest fires over the past decades. It surpassed the challenges of organizing mechanisms, coordination structures and defining a clear agenda for preventing forest fires at the national level to begin direct research, analysis and implementation at the local level. As a result, the forest fire prevention and response strategy is the most comprehensive methodology for tackling a specific hazard in Lebanon. In fact it is intended to serve as a model for developing other hazard-specific strategies in the country.

With respect to its work on seismic risks, the Center for Science and National Research (CNRS) has developed research partnerships with a number of countries in the Mediterranean region and currently has a seismic monitoring system. A new project is focusing on Beirut, in partnership with the municipality of Beirut and the "Ile de France" region. The aim of this initiative is to develop a risk map for Beirut, on the basis of which scenarios and response plans can be developed, and local public knowledge can be built.

Most recently, private sector involvement is picking up. For instance, as part of the 'Get Airports Ready for Disasters' (GARD) initiative, DHL, Civil Defence, the Army and UNDP are conducting drills for the readiness of the capital's international airport. Such engagement will prove to be extremely important in the future, as the private sector accounts for a majority of investments in the national and local productive sectors. The UNISDR private sector advisory group has provided feedback and guidance on how to engage multinationals, small businesses and corporates in Lebanon.

## IV. CHALLENGES

Lebanon has made remarkable progress in adopting a comprehensive, popular and collaborative DRR agenda in a relatively short period of time. However, it is evident that the country has a long way to go in achieving resilience, and is mindful of its many challenges ahead.

At the national and political level, one of the greatest challenges that Lebanon continues to face is one of political instability and economic uncertainty. In view of this reality, it will be important to reiterate Lebanon's commitment to providing continuity in risk governance. That is, irrespective of political changes, risk governance should remain a priority down to the decentralized levels. Beyond the likelihood of continued political challenges, Lebanon will possibly face its greatest hurdle in the enforcement of laws and decrees, implementation of plans and strategies, and mobilization and allocation of resources, if DRR know-how and institutional capacities are not developed on a priority basis.

The issue of raising DRR awareness and developing capacities is fundamental to implementing DRR measures across sustainable development initiatives. Lebanon's focus on the education sector and the health sector will also soon have to include public infrastructure, real-estate development and building construction.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.afdc.org.lb/home.php>

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General lack of progress at the local level has been attributed to delays in clarifying national institutional mandates, coordination structures and resource allocation. Local challenges mainly center on a lack of awareness, technical know-how and capacities to implement DRR measures. Implementation capacities are weak in the public sector and thus, enforcement of building codes and standards are difficult to implement and enforce.

Also, public memory of certain kinds of disasters is not very fresh so it is difficult to sensitize people to risk. For instance, the last major earthquake was more than 60 years ago so many do not take possible future risk seriously. As a priority, Lebanon needs a greater awareness of risks, impacts, and prevention and mitigation strategies.

Lebanon's challenge will be to maintain the national political momentum, spirit of local collaboration and resourcefulness of international partnerships while finding other relevant entry points that could contribute to making its DRR agenda sustainable.

## V. WAY FORWARD

There is a clear recognition by the Government of Lebanon and the UN system partners as well as bilateral donors for the need to ensure a long-term commitment to DRR within a sustainable development context. Moving forward, 10 key actions will need to be prioritized for Lebanon to implement its DRR agenda in a sustainable, outcome-oriented and participatory manner:

1. Institutional mandates to be clarified and budget lines to be allocated to designate responsibility for the implementation of DRR strategies, policies, plans and programmes at the national, local and sectorial levels.
2. Laws, regulations, decrees and ordinances should be enforced and regulated to ensure implementation of national, local and sectorial plans and strategies.
3. A national coordinating agency for DRM to be appointed and assume the central coordinating and facilitating functions for all DRR related actions in the country.
4. Comprehensive national DRR plans and strategies to be developed to reach down to the local levels (governorates and municipalities).
5. Research for DRR (systematizing the assessment of disaster and climate risk trends, and urbanization patterns) to be prioritized and sustained with regional and international collaboration.
6. A risk-sensitive land use plan to be developed and used by all relevant sectors and compliance with urban planning, construction and site development regulations to be enforced.
7. Extensive awareness campaigns and preparedness drills to be conducted, with robust media participation. Awareness in schools (through curriculum), hospitals and residences to be prioritized and to be supported by the national Red Cross society.
8. Capacities, resources, knowledge and technical know-how to be effectively developed and efficiently channelled, especially among 'first responders' – communities, civil society groups, local authorities and service providers. Capacity development for disaster response will also include establishment of a much-needed National Operations Center.
9. Twinning, partnerships, alliances and knowledge networks between cities and municipalities within the country, as well as with other countries in the region and globally, to be fostered and encouraged.
10. Public, private, regional and international partners and donors to be encouraged and motivated for stronger commitment and engagement and to provide access to timely resources and project grants, regional and international good practices, technical know-how and expertise.



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