



Completion Report: COVID-19 Emergency Food Distribution in Lebanon

Project Location: Tripoli, Greater Beirut, and Chouf region, Lebanon

Project Timeline: August – September, 2020

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Total Expenditure: 25,000 USD

Total Participant Count: 5,500

Context/community changes

The economic, political, and health crises discussed in the project proposal only worsened over the course of the project period. Lebanon continues to suffer from its worst economic crisis in a century. In recent months, Lebanon has seen exponential inflation which has made purchasing basic necessities nearly impossible for even formerly middle-class families. Since October, the Lebanese Lira has depreciated by 350% on the informal market,¹ and in the month of June alone, the Lebanese Lira lost 60% of its value.² This rapid devaluation is especially impactful in Lebanon because it is highly reliant on imports in all sectors. A recent report estimates that Lebanon relies on imports for 65-85% of its food,³ and most imported goods must be purchased with USD. The devaluating currency has directly impacted Lebanese traders' abilities to purchase and import necessary goods, including wheat, fuel, diapers and other infant supplies, and medicine. As a result, food prices have skyrocketed. The World Food Programme estimates that the price of basic food parcels increased by 160% in Lebanon from October 2019 to July 2020. In June 2020 alone, the cost of food baskets increased 23%.⁴ In June and July, the dollar crisis also led to severe food shortages across Lebanon.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO), "COVID-19 Emergency Appeal: Lebanon," July 17, 2020. World Health Organization (WHO), "COVID-19 Emergency Appeal: Lebanon," July 17, 2020.

² Liz Sly, "The lights go out on Lebanon's economy as financial collapse accelerates," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-lights-go-out-on-lebanons-economy-as-financial-collapse-accelerates/2020/07/19/3acfc33e-bb97-11ea-97c1-6cf116ffe26c_story.html

³ David Wood, Jacob Boswell, and Sami Halabi, *The Empty Plates and Pockets of Lebanon*, May 2020. <http://www.thinktriangle.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Going-Hungry-The-Empty-Plates-and-Pockets-of-Lebanon.pdf>

⁴ World Food Programme (WFP), "Beirut Port Explosion: Impact on Key Economic and Food Security Indicators," August 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000118691.pdf>



During the project period, there was also a significant spike in coronavirus cases in Lebanon. After the lockdown measures were relaxed in early July, new coronavirus cases began to increase at an alarming rate. From July 1 to August 1, reported cases of coronavirus in Lebanon nearly tripled -- from 1,788 cases on July 1 to 4,730 on August 1.⁵ According to the Ministry of Health, a cumulative total of 12,698 cases have been reported – 507 cases on August 24th alone.⁶ In response to these alarming numbers, the Ministry of Health renewed its “General Mobilization” and imposed new measures to limit the spread. These measures included a 6 pm curfew and a general lockdown was imposed from July 30-August 3 and from August 6-10. Even before the explosion, business and restaurants opposed the lockdown because of the added pressure it would put on businesses that are already struggling to survive; the explosion only added to these fears. As a result of public pressure, the lockdown was ended early, curfew was extended until 10 pm, and restaurants were allowed to reopen at limited capacity.

By far the most impactful change to the context for this project was the devastating August 4 explosion at Beirut’s port. Current estimates are that over 190 people were killed in the blast, with some 7,000 injured. Hundreds of thousands of Beirutis were left homeless after their homes were destroyed, and even more are living in homes that sustained significant damage. The chief economist at Lebanon’s Bank Audi has stated that “The damage exceeds the capacity of Lebanon to sustain in the short to medium term. Losses of the Beirut explosion are estimated at no less than \$5 billion according to most conservative estimates.”⁷

The explosion also severely impacted Lebanon’s economy and supply chains because of its location at the port of Beirut, which handles 80% of Lebanon’s maritime shipping traffic.⁸ The port has been severely limited in how much cargo it can receive, thus limiting both the amount of food that can be imported through the port of Beirut and material aid that can be received. As previously mentioned, Lebanon relies on imports for most of its foods, and so the inability to receive imports has exacerbated food shortages across the country. Additionally, the explosion destroyed Beirut’s grain silo, which stored wheat, corn, and barley. 15,000 tonnes of grain were burned up in the explosion.⁹

⁵ Worldometer, “Lebanon Coronavirus,” accessed August 6, 2020.
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/lebanon/>

⁶ Lebanon Ministry of Public Health. <https://www.moph.gov.lb/en/Media/view/38103/1/monitoring-of-covid-19-infection-in-lebanon->

⁷ Osama Habib, “Port blast further stifles Lebanon’s economy,” *The Daily Star*, August 5, 2020.
<https://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2020/Aug-05/509900-port-blast-further-stifles-lebanons-economy.ashx>

⁸ WFP, “Beirut Port Explosion.”

⁹ Ellen Fancis and Maha El Dahan, “After blast, Lebanon has less than a months’ grain reserves,” *Reuters*, August 5, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-security-blast-wheat/after-blast-lebanon-has-less-than-a-months-grain-reserves-idUSKCN251190>



Outside of Beirut, the impacts of the explosion were felt as well. According to the World Food Programme analysis, “Spiraling food inflation rates combined with strong currency depreciation and displacement of nearly 300,000 inhabitants are main risk factors affecting the purchasing power of households.”¹⁰ Many families have been displaced due to the explosion and are now living outside of Beirut, especially in the nearby Mount Lebanon area. This influx of residents has put an additional strain on communities who were already struggling. According to the World Food Programme, 34% of those who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic live in Mount Lebanon.

Additionally, the needs of Lebanese people (economy, COVID, unemployment) did not end on August 4. The economy continues to suffer and prices are skyrocketing, but many of the NGOs who were providing aid to these communities have shifted their resources to Beirut to respond to the blast. Lebanese people living outside of Beirut are still in need of assistance, but there is less aid available as the attention of NGOs is concentrated on the most impacted areas of Beirut.

In mid-August, after the explosion, some towns in southern Lebanon saw an escalation of tensions between Sunni and Shiite communities. These escalations can be attributed to a variety of factors, but the added pressures of economic insecurity and hunger certainly added to the pressures which caused simmering tensions to emerge into outright conflict in these areas. In these areas, it is especially important to continue providing aid because it can alleviate these contextual pressures.

Activities Report

Procurement

In June, a tender was sent to several known suppliers previously known to FDCCD. FDCCD checked quality and quantities of products based on what was needed and eventually selected three vendors from whom to purchase food parcel items. During the tender process, the biggest obstacles encountered were procuring the needed quantities of items. Across Lebanon, people have been struggling with major food shortages for months. Before the explosion, the economic crisis and lack of access to US dollars severely limited vendors’ ability to purchase and import food items. After the explosion, acquiring these items became even more difficult because large parts of the port of Beirut were not operational and could not receive and distribute imported goods.

After they were selected, vendors packed and distributed parcels to each of the distribution sites, for distribution by local partners.

¹⁰ WFP, “Beirut Port Explosion”



Identifying beneficiary families

FDCD partnered with local charity organizations in each identified community to identify beneficiary families and distribute food. These local partners (LPs) are all well-established in their respective communities and have longtime strong relationships with FDCD. The LPs also represent a variety of confessional backgrounds (Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze, and Christian).

In total, there were 7 distribution sites across Lebanon, which each distributed food parcels to 150-200 families. The locations were:

- Southern Lebanon – Chouf region
- Mount Lebanon and Greater Beirut
 - Kesserwein, Mt. Lebanon Region
 - El Metn, Mt. Lebanon Region
 - 2 sites in Beirut
- Northern Lebanon (Tripoli Region)
 - Douniye
 - Akkar

FDCD worked with LPs in each location to identify beneficiaries. Each LP maintains their own records of families in need, which was then filtered based on FDCD's criteria. Families were notified by local partner organizations.

Distribution

Partner organizations oversaw the distribution process. Each month, families have the choice to come to a set location to pick up their food parcel, or the local partner will coordinate to deliver their parcel to their home, depending on preference and ability.

FDCD worked closely with its partners to ensure proper COVID-19 prevention measures were observed to protect the health and well-being of volunteers and beneficiaries. Before and during distributions, FDCD emphasized to our local partners the need to be vigilant about hygiene and social distancing measures, including wearing masks and washing hands often. Field workers and volunteers were also given clear instructions about providing verbal information about COVID-19 to beneficiaries while distributing food parcels and informing beneficiaries about the leaflet and hygiene items included in each food parcel.

Two distributions occurred: the first during the third week of July and the second during the second to third week of August. Exact distribution dates varied by location. The second food distribution was delayed in August due to a few factors at some distribution points for several reasons. First, the general lockdown that lasted from July 30 to August 3 limited mobility. Second, the response to the August 4 explosion. Third, distribution was delayed in response to the escalating tensions in the region (see "community changes" for more details) but resumed once tensions had de-escalated and partners determined the situation to be safe.



Outcomes and Impacts

In total, two 2,200 food parcels were distributed to 1,100 families.

The contents of the food parcels were determined by recommendations from the World Food Programme for basic food parcels, based on nutritional needs and local customs. Each food parcel contained:

- Rice, flour, and bulgur
- Lentils, chickpeas, and fava beans
- Tuna and canned meat
- Tomato paste, oil, salt, and sugar
- Two hygiene items (bleach, multipurpose soap)

Along with food items, parcels included hygiene items and information about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The included leaflets were largely image-based, which was beneficial for many beneficiary families who are illiterate. Volunteers also gave verbal information about COVID-19 to families to ensure that the information was communicated and understood.

Long-term and indirect impacts

Stabilize food consumption and lives of families. Allow them to allocate resources to other needs, including school supplies, medicine, transportation.

These project activities indirectly impact the larger communities in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Every family who employs better hygiene practices (e.g., washing hands and surfaces regularly, following advice in the informational leaflet) improves the likelihood that the virus will not spread in their community.

The vendors from whom we purchased the food parcels and hygiene items are also positively impacted indirectly. In these small ways, we are supporting local business during the economic crisis in Lebanon.

Next Steps

While the food parcels and hygiene items distributed helped ease the burdens on families for the months of July and August, the need for aid in Lebanon is still present and growing. The GDP of Lebanon contracted 13.9% in 2020, and is predicted to contract another 2-3% in 2021. The World Bank estimates that economic recovery in Lebanon will not even begin until 2022. Prior to the explosion, the World Bank estimated that 45% of Lebanon's population are poor or extremely poor, and these numbers are expected to rise. Because of COVID and the economic crisis, nearly 1 in 3 Lebanese is unemployed, and 1/5 saw salary reduction. The jobs and income lost in 2020 – because of the Coronavirus pandemic, economic crisis, and August 4 explosion – will not be recovered quickly. At the same time,



the value of the Lira continues to be extremely low and unstable, and with the resignation of the Government of Lebanon in August, there is not a concrete plan for recovering from the economic crisis. The governor of the Central Bank has also warned that they only have enough foreign currency reserve to continue government subsidies of wheat, fuel oil, and medications for 3 months.¹¹ These subsidies stabilized the prices of bread and fuel in Lebanon so that they continued to be affordable during the economic crisis. The end of these subsidies will mean even less food security for already vulnerable families.

Because of this, we anticipate even greater need in the coming months. Currently, FDCCD is working with our local partners to determine the types of aid most needed in their communities and what types of interventions will be most impactful. However, it is clear that the question is not *if* more aid will be needed, but *how* and *when* we will be able to distribute this aid.

¹¹ Osama Habib, "BDL's subsidy program to end in three months: source," *The Daily Star*, August 20, 2020. <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2020/Aug-20/510583-bdls-subsidy-program-to-end-in-three-months-source.ashx>