

## **Lebanon VNR**

### **Agenda 2030 and SDGs**

#### **Main Messages**

Lebanon is a high middle-income country with a democratic political system, a liberal economy based on entrepreneurship and largely relies on services, and a society characterized by cultural diversity and openness. Following the election of a new President in October 2016 and the formation of a national conciliation government in December 2016, the Government's engagement towards Agenda 2030 accelerated, while adopting a localization approach. A National Committee to oversee the roll-out of the SDGs was formed chaired by the Prime Minister. In addition to representatives from all line ministries, this committee also includes civil society and private sector representatives to generate wide ownership of the agenda. Thematic groups have been formed along "4Ps" together with a statistical task force. The initial focus of the committee has been the VNR and a national website for SDGs was created and populated. Three workshops to raise awareness on SDGs, promote inclusion, and launch VNR preparations were conducted. Regional consultations with civil society also took place. In addition, a parliamentary committee on SDGs was established.

Lebanon's past performance on the MDGs was mixed, with the country still facing development challenges, including on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. The situation was highly exacerbated by the impact and spill-overs of the Syria crisis. While Lebanon has shown exceptional solidarity by temporarily hosting 1.5 million displaced from Syria, this has come at a high cost, compounding pre-existing development challenges, and stretching Lebanon beyond its limits.

Today Lebanon's political scene has found a promising equilibrium. Domestic political unity coupled with support from the international community made it clear that Lebanon's political and economic stability are essential, including for the overall region, and need to be preserved. This was demonstrated during the ISG meeting, and the three conferences in support of Lebanon that followed.

**"People"** are at the core of the government's focus. Poverty rates, already high before the Syrian crisis, have worsened since then. The communities hosting the majority of displaced lack the resources and capacities to address the increased demand on public and social services. This has not halted the government's efforts towards creating a better environment for all through

pursuing national programs that enhance social assistance packages for the most vulnerable Lebanese (such as the National Poverty Targeting Program), and to provide education for all through the Reaching All Children with Education Program. Despite the challenges, many positive developments have taken place in Lebanon's health system with improved quality of services and coverage. Women's rights constitute one of the cornerstones of the government's approach; while gender parity scores positively in education, efforts are intensified to improve women's participation in political and economic spheres.

With "**prosperity**" in mind, but also with "people" at the core of its thinking, the government presented to the CEDRE conference its Vision for Stabilization, Growth and Employment, outlaying its plan to spur economic growth, create decent jobs and provide a conducive environment for private sector investment in the medium to long term. Consultations around the vision with relevant stakeholders, including civil society, took place. At the core of this vision is an ambitious Capital Investment Plan (CIP), outlining priority infrastructure projects to support the recovery of economic growth, as well as sectoral and structural reforms. The potential of projects to contribute to meeting SDGs was one of the selection criteria for the CIP. At the same time, the budgets of 2017 and 2018 were passed and are projecting a decline in the deficit through a number of fiscal measures.

Meanwhile, the government is striving to ensure a better "**Planet**" for its citizens. Water and air pollution together with solid waste management, remain the main impediments to environmental sustainability and are addressed in a medium-term infrastructure investment plan covering water, waste water, solid waste, transport, electricity, telecom, as well as tourism and industry. The government's sectoral strategies on water and electricity aim to increase the share from renewable energy.

The government is cognizant that none of the SDGs can advance without "**peace, justice, and strong institutions**", through cross sectoral efforts along the public sector modernization and good governance initiatives currently underway and the access to information law voted last year. Improving government statistics will definitely constitute a crosscutting reform that facilitates mapping SDGs and targets and will ultimately serve to improve policy making.

The parliamentary elections held in May 2018 and the subsequent government formation will constitute new grounds for taking forward the government's medium-term vision while covering all dimensions of sustainable development, with well-chosen priority challenges to be tackled.