

# International donors bear responsibility in prolonging Lebanon's woes by flawed foreign aid strategy: new report

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International donors must rethink how they provide development aid to countries like Lebanon, a new report from LSE IDEAS, The London School of Economics' foreign policy think tank, has found.

According to the report, authored by Valentina Finckenstein, Associate at LSE IDEAS, Lebanon serves as a warning example of how international aid can do more harm than good, if not implemented effectively.

Within the report, Finckenstein suggests that the historic readiness of international donors to come to the aid of the Lebanese government has created the wrong incentives.

She says that easy availability of international support has enabled the government in Lebanon to avoid making real reforms, delayed the financial crisis and played an important role in maintaining an entrenched political system of corruption.

Finckenstein calls into question the assumption that Lebanon is unable to function simply because it lacks the resources. It is a common narrative which is frequently applied by political players seeking international assistance. Despite having a young, highly educated population, Lebanon has long failed to increase its domestic productivity, and struggles with a dwindling economy. It also fails to provide numerous public services to its population, and the capital provides no more than six hours of electricity daily. Yet, according to Finckenstein, Lebanon possess more water than any other Middle Eastern country, is strategically located, and maintains good international relations with most key global players.

According to the report, on the road to Lebanon's recovery following the Beirut explosion on 4th August 2020, as well as the government's historic mismanagement, the international community must take a new strategic direction when looking to provide foreign aid.

The report outlines four priorities for providing international aid to Lebanon:

In order to see to proper domestic reforms and governance improvements, donors must permanently recalibrate their relationship with the Lebanese state. Sovereign donors and international organisations have the responsibility to play a more diligent role in the funding and assessment processes of their projects.

Prioritise direct humanitarian aid and abstain from convoluted development projects. Donors must find ways to bypass political elites by working with and through NGOs.

Improving coordination and knowledge sharing between donors themselves. In creating platforms to promote greater collaboration between donors themselves, this will help to both set and pursue consistent development goals.

Increase consultations with civil society. Lebanon's young, educated, and politically active civil

society is the country's greatest resource. In order for any foreign donors to have any hope of success, they must do more to engage with and learn from the Lebanese people themselves.

Valentina Finckenstein, author of the report, says:

"Foreign aid has kept the corrupt government afloat by providing resources for its clientelist system. For decades, Lebanon's leaders have reached for aid instead of change when financial instability looms. This band-aid solution has allowed political elites to stave off imminent collapse, while also sticking to what they excel at: stalling reforms."

Link to the report, How International Aid Can Do More Harm Than Good: The Case of Lebanon:  
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/updates/international-aid-lebanon>

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