



Khaddit Beirut

Breaking the Cycle of Dependency: Kickstarting a Cycle Of Development

Issue 5

This difficult year of 2020 is also the year of renewed focus. Despite the loved ones we lost, the unprecedented turmoil we lived through, and the viral pandemic that raged through the world, our lives and action plans are in perspective. We note, for example, the role Lebanon serves as a global thermostat. Being at the figurative and literal center of the world, subject to the tectonic shifts of the region, it continually projects upcoming changes to the international stage; we have seen that with the Taif Agreement four days ahead of the fall of the Berlin wall, which marked the end of the Lebanese civil war and the Cold War, respectively. Similarly, we were among the first to experience the rise of the neoliberal order in the postwar period, and its demise in the first decade of 2000s, when while the world was shocked by the Great Recession.

Lebanon has experienced a global economic downturn even before its arrival on the heels of COVID-19. The closing of roads, schools, and institutions as part of the non-violent civil disobedience gave us a sense of the lockdown before what the coming of the virus would enforce worldwide. Likewise, the collapse of our national currency spearheaded the demise of currencies on the world stage as the markets observed that governmental institutions apparently print money by whim rather than financial goals. Given these two examples of how trouble ignites around the globe, we are poised to consider how the challenges we face today could prepare us to enter a cycle of sustainable development. While this focuses on the Lebanese situation, its implications—for business, health, education, and environmental sectors in particular—extend worldwide.

At the same time, “sustainable” helps us understand the long-term aspect of development. It is not merely reacting to the context, but preparing for the foreseeable future. COVID-19 shows this effort. Global experts hosted Event 201—a “global pandemic exercise”—as a rehearsal for the possible response to an outbreak of a novel coronavirus a month before the onset of the actual pandemic. Add to this the experience of small



Website: www.khadditbeirut.com
Hotline: 79-121867



Asian nations such as Taiwan and Singapore, which endured prior outbreaks that helped them prepare for COVID-19. Another example of sustainable development was updating the Lebanese building code to help prepare for the major earthquakes that strike the country.

In order to seize opportunities and thrive, we must think not in terms of linear time, but in terms of cycles. Development is then the ability to, while responding to high frequency events, prepare for lower frequency cycles, events which take more time to build up, but are astonishing, or unfortunately explosive, when they finally occur. Years of mismanagement, customs evasion, smuggling, lax control of arms built to a series of events, unfolding on the course of six years, to devastate Beirut in 2020. For Lebanon, it is time to break such cycles.

Let us first consider that a generational cycle is roughly 20-30 years. Think about the highly educated individuals whose employment cycle starts in their 20s and ends in their 60s; then, for Lebanon, we observe a 20-year cycle marking the hegemony of an outside group over the country, from French colonization, through the so-called Golden Age, to the years following the Nakba, the Zionist invasion, and the Syrian mandate. This cycle overlaps with a 10-year cycle for deadlocks in Lebanese politics, between the 1958 revolution to the 2008 coup, and others in between. We note that the latter cycle roughly matches that of the transition of power, with the municipal, parliamentary, and presidential elections as indicators. These cycles highlight the lack of standards and procedures, leaving our quality of life to the whims—rather than the principles—of governors, who seem to rule in much narrower interests than ours. Once we understand the cycles of change, however, it becomes easier to realize their superficial nature, redefine and manage them, and reduce resistance to them as needed. Thus, our mission is to identify a toxicity in our society, acknowledge that it starts (or that we can change it) with us, propose a new model, and identify a course of action to remedy the toxicity. It is time to put our knowledge to work.

We cannot wait for kings to bestow their largesse upon us; neither does simply protesting or demanding bequeathed but withheld services help. First, we are met with swift and lethal ruthlessness. Then we realize that a nonexistent process cannot be improved. This is where Khaddit Beirut has found a point of intervention. Since Day One, our work has complemented those who fought to give their loved ones a dignified burial, while others cleared the rubble and swept tears and streets.



Website: www.khadditbeirut.com
Hotline: 79-121867



Following the response to the August 4 explosion, we have started out with collecting the data and analyzing it. This allows us to build informed responses to crises and conduct comparative studies—in essence, we can then tap the collective experience of our nation and other similarly disaster-stricken nations, promoting long-term, durable systems rather than quick fixes. When a system is in place, people are not as likely to be held hostage to custom and outmoded practices. Systems are dignifying. They do not require someone to sacrifice his virtues for food, or faith for medication.

The solutions are not in the data itself, however, but in the community. By assessing a community's needs, and engaging community members in putting together the standards and procedures needed, we are engaging in the participatory design of our rights, responsibilities, and social contract. From the primary health-care center serving over 6,000 Lebanese in Karantina, through the numerous schools in Mar Mkhayel and Gemmayze, to the nearly 150 small businesses we are working with, we have been able to transform them into attractive, inclusive, and accessible community centers. This is not thanks just to donations, but first and foremost to the commitment of the communities from which nurses, doctors, educators, business professionals, craftspeople, and others have risen to the challenge. Thanks to them, we have been able to put the final strategy to provide dignified and comforting health care, carry out cohort studies for environmental risk assessment, coordinate the efforts of parents, administrators, and teachers to nourish the minds and bodies of students, and mentor local businesses in transforming their operational models.

If this be termed resistance, it is *constructive* resistance, creating change by setting up models and pilot projects that meet established standards and procedures. We want to build a sturdy frame rather than glue together a frail structure; we want to build institutions we are proud of. Most important, we have been engaging public institutions—i.e., public schools, governmental health-care centers—in activating the role of governmental agencies from the ground up.

We are not filling in for the government, but preparing institutional frameworks for secure transitions when appropriate. Our needs as a global society insist that we put in the work, and practice our right to repair and help one another. To dismantle structural injustice, we need to reflect our knowledge in our work, to draft standards, design processes, and build institutions that serve us in equality. We must recall that the structures of





misery are deeply entrenched in our food supplies, our school curricula, our health care, and our urban infrastructure. And then we must break the harmful cycles in these areas.

To the Lebanese diaspora, to our colleagues, collaborators, daughters, sons, sisters, and brothers, we are proud of you. We also remind you of your role. Over 30% of our subject-matter experts at Khaddit Beirut are from abroad. We need your experience and vision as we redesign our institutions and rewrite our social contract. From Lebanese tradespeople spreading the alphabet to the world, to Lebanese immigrants sending missions to Mars, we have a proven track record of overcoming challenges and then transcending them with our achievements. In these frightening times of the destruction of the building blocks of nation-states and the fraying of the democratic social fabric, we have a renewed opportunity to break our malignant cycles and replace them with ones of sustainable development, transforming Lebanon into the pioneering nation that is its destiny.

