

Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction after the Port of Beirut Blast

Fadi Nicholas Nassar



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This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Introduction

On 4 August 2020, the Port of Beirut blast devastated the city and country within a context of concurrent crises. Against the backdrop of a significant shortage in essential public services, the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic and financial meltdown, and the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis, the port blast presented an emergency setting that necessitated a multifaceted response that could respond to the urgent needs of those most impacted by the blast and work to restore public confidence in public institutions and the wider social contract amidst such protracted and pervasive state failure. It is in this environment and with that objective that a process known as the Lebanon Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) would emerge, established by the World Bank, European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN).

Through the combination of a nationwide survey of 1,201 respondents and 18 focus group sessions totaling 111 civil society organizations (CSOs) from Lebanon's 9 sub-governorates, of which the two focus groups allocated to the Beirut Governorate focused on CSOs who were involved in the 3RF process, this report aims to highlight: 1) public perceptions regarding aspects of the port blast and economic crisis, as well as on recovery, reform, and reconstruction; 2) CSO assessments on the experience of the 3RF, to help inform recommendations for improvement and lessons learned for the nationwide expansion of the 3RF.

I Methodology

Nationwide Survey

LCPS designed a nationwide survey, with 1,201 respondents, which was carried out by ARA Research & Consultancy (a Lebanese-led data collection company). The interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face) across the entire country. It targeted Lebanese citizens based on randomized sampling intercept interviews, i.e., by stopping individuals and asking them to participate in the survey on the spot.

The sampling methodology employed in this study was designed to ensure that the sample used is representative of the Lebanese population in terms of age (+18), gender, geographical region (governorate), and sects.

Due to the absence of an official census, an establishment survey made by ARA has been used for this survey. This establishment survey

was designed with the primary purpose of estimating the population and its geographical distribution within Lebanon. It places a high emphasis on the place of residence, as it is a key factor in segregating the Lebanese population into different groups.

The research focuses on the Lebanese population taking Lebanon as their permanent place of residence.

All governorates and kada (districts) are covered without any exclusion. Their respective weight is based on the percentage of the number of residing households in each kada and its respective governorate.

The traditional governorates in the sampling were replaced by seven divisions to enhance the sampling framework. This modification was prompted by the update of the National Survey of Household Living Conditions, which provided a more accurate depiction of the population distribution in Lebanon. These newly defined divisions are as follows: Beirut, Mount Lebanon (excluding South Suburb), South Lebanon (South Suburb), North Lebanon, areas more affected by 2006 war, areas less affected by 2006 war, Bekaa.

In the above distribution, Mount Lebanon Southern Suburb was separated from the rest of Mount Lebanon. This was a crucial adjustment, as one of the kadas within Mount Lebanon, called Baabda, is highly populated and very heterogeneous in terms of sects. Similarly, the study update provided a more homogeneous breakdown of the South and Nabatiyeh governorates. The new divisions were called 'areas less affected by 2006 war' versus 'areas more affected by 2006 war.' These new repartitions were used as they constituted more homogenous clusters.

The margin of error in this study is between 2% and 4%, at a confidence level between 90% and 99%.

Focus Groups

Focus group discussions were face-to-face sessions that used direct and interactive subject discussions. A total of 18 focus group sessions were conducted across Lebanon, consisting of 2 groups in each of the 9 governorates. Each focus group consisted of 5 to 8 participants, totaling 111 participants across the 18 focus group sessions. The focus groups were conducted with CSO representatives. Exceptionally, the 2 focus groups allocated to the Beirut Governorate focused on CSOs who were involved in the 3RF process: Consultative Group Members and Working Group Members. The 18 focus group sessions were held over a period of 2 weeks from January 16 to February 1, 2023.

II Background

Port of Beirut Blast and the 3RF

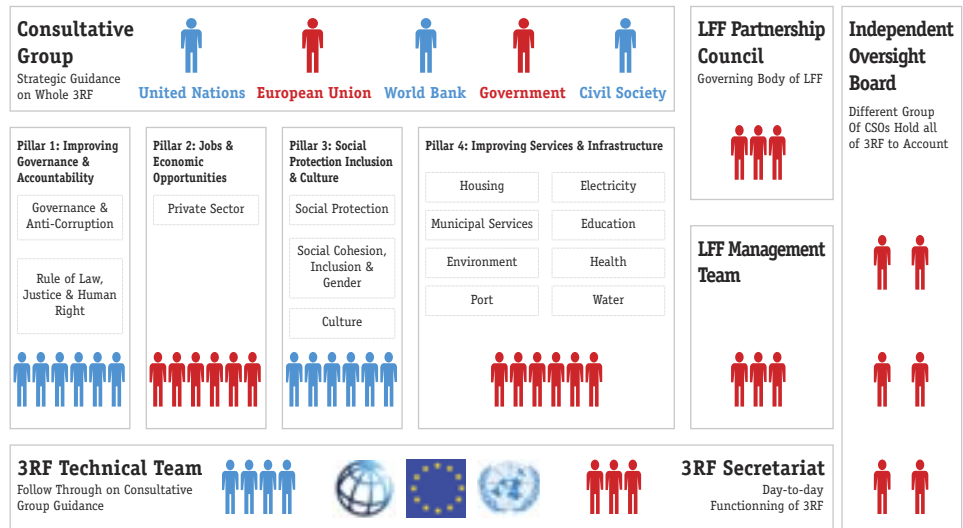
The Beirut port explosion caused substantial material, structural, and psycho-social damage, which Beirut and Lebanon are still working to repair. Amidst a context of concurrent crises—including the Covid-19 pandemic, the Syrian refugee crisis, the economic and financial meltdown, and social unrest—the port of Beirut blast added a new layer to the compounded crises in Lebanon.

In response to this emergency setting, the World Bank, the EU, and the UN began work on the 3RF that aimed to bring together international stakeholders, the Lebanese government, and civil society organizations to chart a people-centric approach to reform, recovery, and reconstruction.

Against the backdrop of a massive deficit of trust in state institutions, the 3RF originally aimed to balance restoring public confidence in public institutions, but also bring in civil society organizations to safeguard against elite capture and mismanagement, as well as foster a more inclusive approach to reform, recovery, and reconstruction.

The 3RF, launched on 4 December 2020, for an 18-month period, centered residents in its response, particularly those most affected by the blast that killed 200 people, injured around 6,500, and left around 300,000 people homeless (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). The 3RF's design incorporated a structure that includes a secretariat, a consultative group, an Independent Oversight Board, and working groups. A 3RF Technical Team and Secretariat also assist with everyday activities such as coordination, monitoring, and oversight.

3RF Structure



Consultative Group and Independent Oversight Body

The Consultative Group, consisting of the Lebanese government, CSOs, donors, and the private sector, is a key component of the 3RF, as it largely informs the 3RF’s strategies. The Consultative Group is supported by the Independent Oversight Body (IOB), which is led by five civil society organizations and is responsible for accountability, monitoring, and transparency during the 3RF’s implementation.¹

¹ Originally it was led by six CSOs, but TI-LB left in February 2023.

Tracks and Strategic Pillars

The 3RF is divided into two channels. Track 1 focuses on the urgent needs of affected and vulnerable communities, as well as small businesses harmed by the Beirut blast, while Track 2 focuses on longer-term reform and reconstruction challenges and objectives. The 3RF is also based on four strategic pillars: 1) improving governance and accountability; 2) jobs and opportunities; 3) social protection, inclusion, and culture; and 4) improving services and infrastructure. (World Bank Group, European Union in Lebanon, and United Nations in Lebanon 2020).

Although the 3RF model was originally developed in response to the Port of Beirut blast, the ongoing concurrent crises in Lebanon have positioned the 3RF as a potential framework and reference for a larger nationwide recovery and reform process (with, of course, reconstruction being more particular to the Port of Beirut blast.)

Results: Nationwide Survey

The results from the nationwide survey offer critical insight into the perceptions of the Lebanese public on the three dimensions of the 3RF process—recovery, reconstruction, and reform—as well as on the implications of the crisis and Port of Beirut blast. It first explores key perceptions related to the economic crisis and its implications, then dives into perceptions regarding evaluating responsibility for the crisis and the response to it, then offers insight into perceptions on reform and recovery, and ends with a synthesis of these findings that it presents as key takeaways.

Economic Crisis and Its Implications

Nearly four years since its onset, the financial and economic crisis has severely hit the vast majority of Lebanese people. The results of the survey show that 70% of the respondents who were picked through a randomized sampling earn less than 6 million Lebanese pounds per household per month, which is equivalent to 140 US Dollars at the black-market FX rate at the time the poll was conducted. Consequently, the financial crisis forced households across the country to implement drastic changes to their lifestyle.

Notably, 58% of respondent households had to reduce consumption of lighting, heat, and water, between 51% and 53% had to reduce food consumption, reduce visits to family and friends, reduce social outings and gatherings, and stop or postpone buying necessary clothing, and 43% had to postpone or skip doctor visit after falling ill. These results are consistent with other data collected throughout Lebanon's crisis that make clear the multidimensional state of poverty and depreciating quality of life in the country.

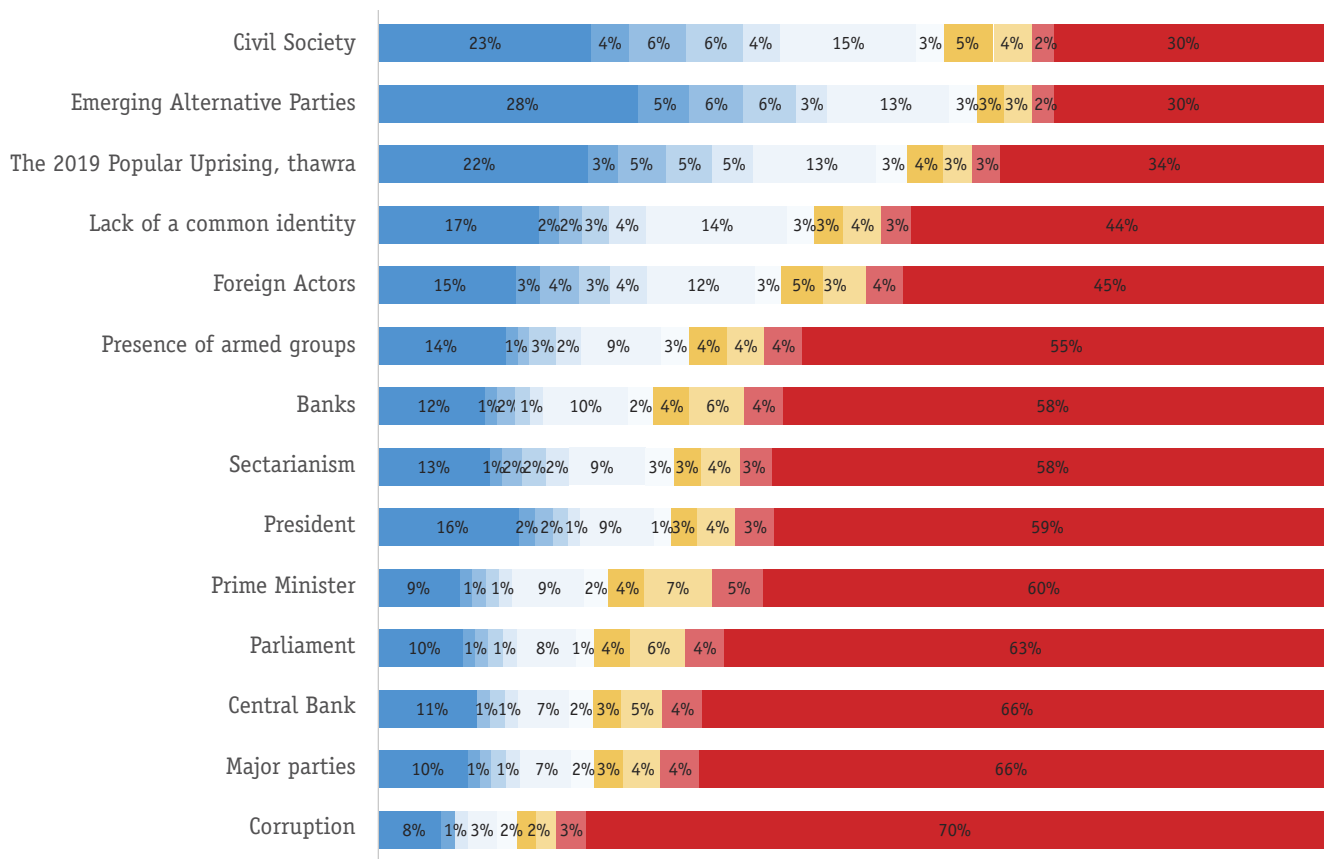
Evaluating Responsibility and Response

When asked to weigh factors and parties responsible for the crisis from a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being most responsible and 0 not at all, 79% of respondents rated 'corruption' as the most responsible for the crisis, followed by 'major Lebanese parties' and 'Central Bank' (66% each). On the other hand, the least responsible for the crisis were 'civil society' and 'emerging alternative parties,' with only 30% rating them as most responsible. Still, in juxtaposing opposite sides of the scale (those giving a score of 0 or 10), it is worth noting that more respondents (30%) held civil society most responsible than not

at all (23%). Similarly, 30% held emerging alternative parties most responsible versus 28% at none at all.

As a whole, the frequency of responses allocating each actor or factor a score of 10, ranking it as most responsible, suggests a collective alienation of respondents to all stakeholders involved in some way with the crisis and its recovery. To be clear, while respondents certainly hold some actors, like major parties, or factors, like corruption, most responsible, the responses still show relatively low levels of perceptions that any actors or factors are not responsible at all.

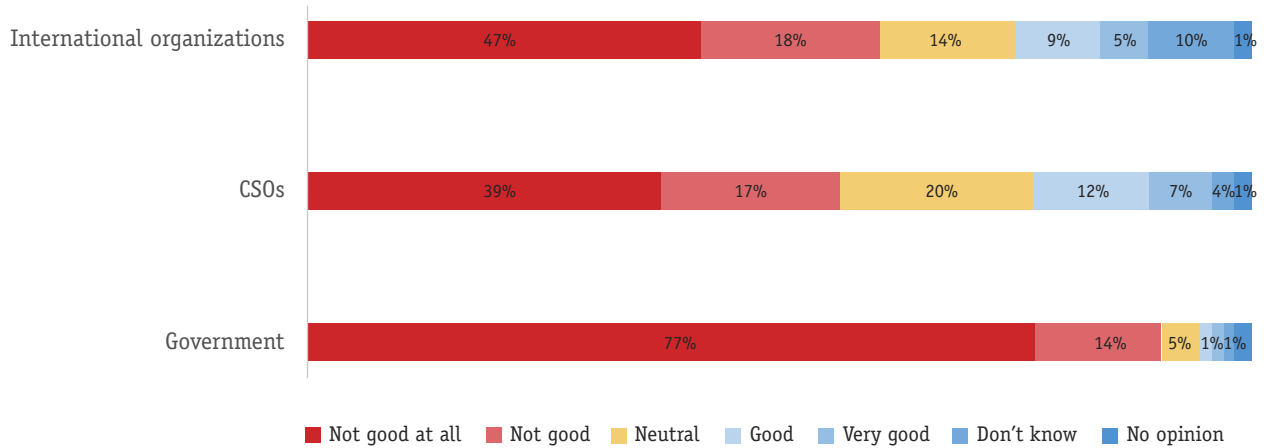
Graph 1 Parties responsible for the crisis



Q9 How much do you hold the following parties responsible for the crisis, rate it on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not responsible at all and 10 is most responsible

Base: Total sample, 1201

Graph 2 Evaluation of the response to the crisis

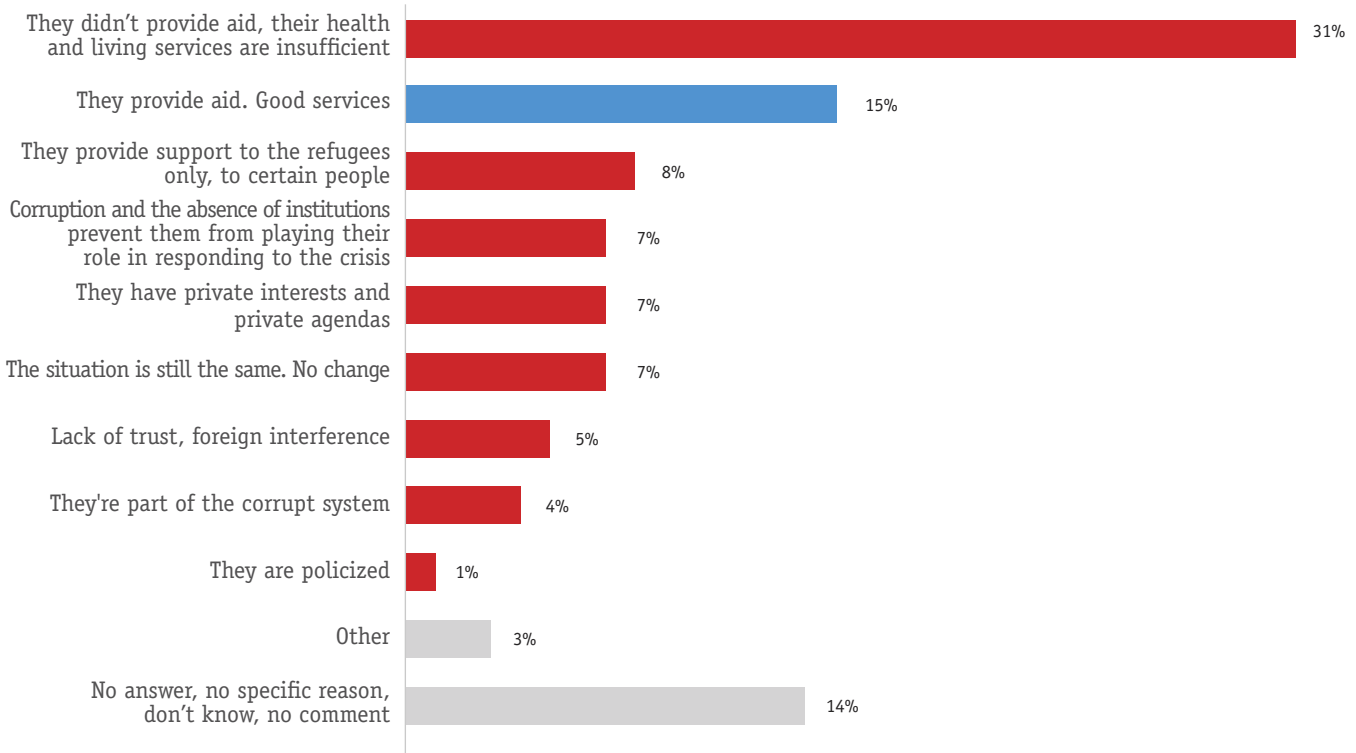


Q10-11-12 How would you evaluate the response of the following entities to the economic crisis since 2019

Base: Total sample, 1201

Respondents also had particularly unfavorable views of the government's response to the crisis, with 91% of respondents perceiving the government's response as either 'not good at all' or 'not good.' In other words, less than one in ten respondents did not have a negative perception of the government's response to the crisis, and only 2% evaluated the government's response to the crisis as 'very good' or 'good.' Although to a lesser degree, respondents also had relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with the response of international organizations (like the World Bank and United Nations) to the crisis. Indeed, 60% of respondents considered their response to the crisis as 'not good at all' or 'not good,' and only 14% as 'good' or 'very good.' Similarly, a majority of respondents have a negative assessment of CSO response to the crisis, with 56% of respondents describing their performance as 'not good at all' or 'not good,' and only 19% as 'very good' or 'good.'

Graph 3 Reasons for the given evaluation of international organizations' response to the crisis



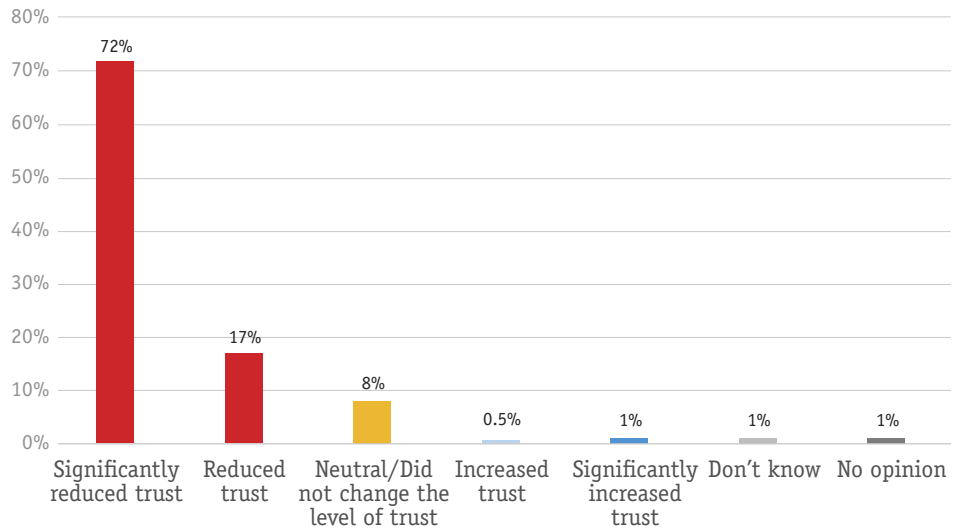
Q12b Please explain why you have evaluated the International Organizations' response to the crisis as such. (open ended question)

Base: 1,064

It is worth noting that when asked for the reasons for the given evaluation of the responses regarding the response of international organizations, the main reasons given were related to the provision or lack of aid.

In addition to having high levels of dissatisfaction with the government's response to the crisis, 89% of respondents expressed that the government's response 'reduced' and 'significantly reduced' their trust and confidence in the government.

Graph 4 Trust and confidence in government

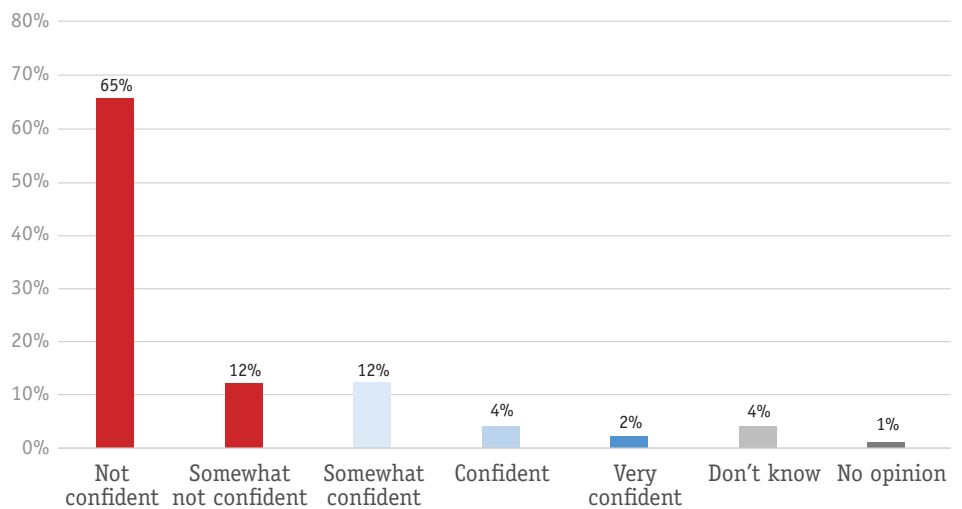


Q20 How has the government's response to the economic crisis since 2019, affected your trust and confidence in it?

Base: Total sample, 1201

In turn, a vast majority of respondents (77%) are not confident or somewhat not confident in the government's ability to resolve the crisis, and only 18% are either somewhat confident, confident, or very confident in the government to resolve the economic crisis.

Graph 5 Level of confidence in a new government to resolve economic crisis

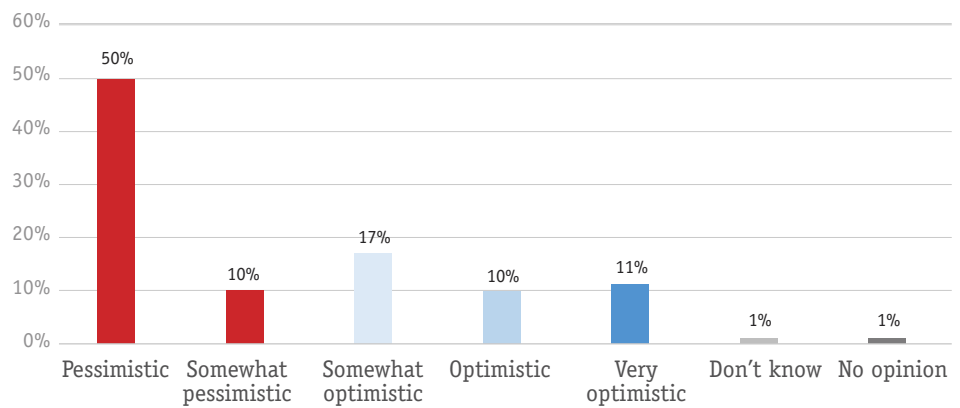


Q14 How confident are you in a new government being able to resolve the economic crisis?

Base: Total sample, 1201

On a more general level, 60% of respondents expressed that they were pessimistic or somewhat pessimistic about the future.

Graph 6 Perceptions about the future



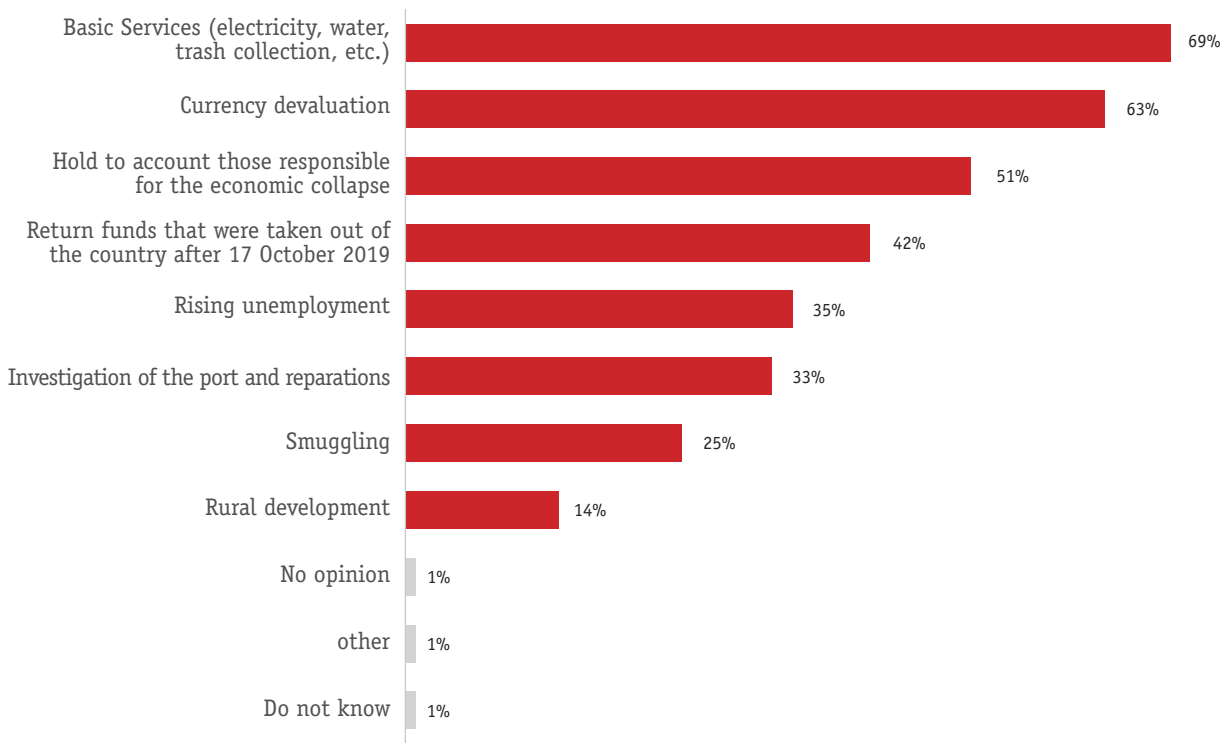
Q8 In general, are you optimistic or pessimistic about your future?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Perceptions of Reform and Recovery

When asked about what reforms may make a difference in their lives, 60% of respondents said that the reforms of the power sector would make a difference in their life, followed by the independence of the judiciary law (44%), and the implementation of a national anti-corruption strategy and commission (43%). Gaging their perceptions on sectors to be prioritized in the reform process, 79% of respondents want the government to prioritize the health sector, followed by the education sector with 56%. Basic services, currency depreciation, and holding those responsible for the economic collapse were the three main economic issues to be prioritized this year.

Graph 7 Economic issues to be prioritized



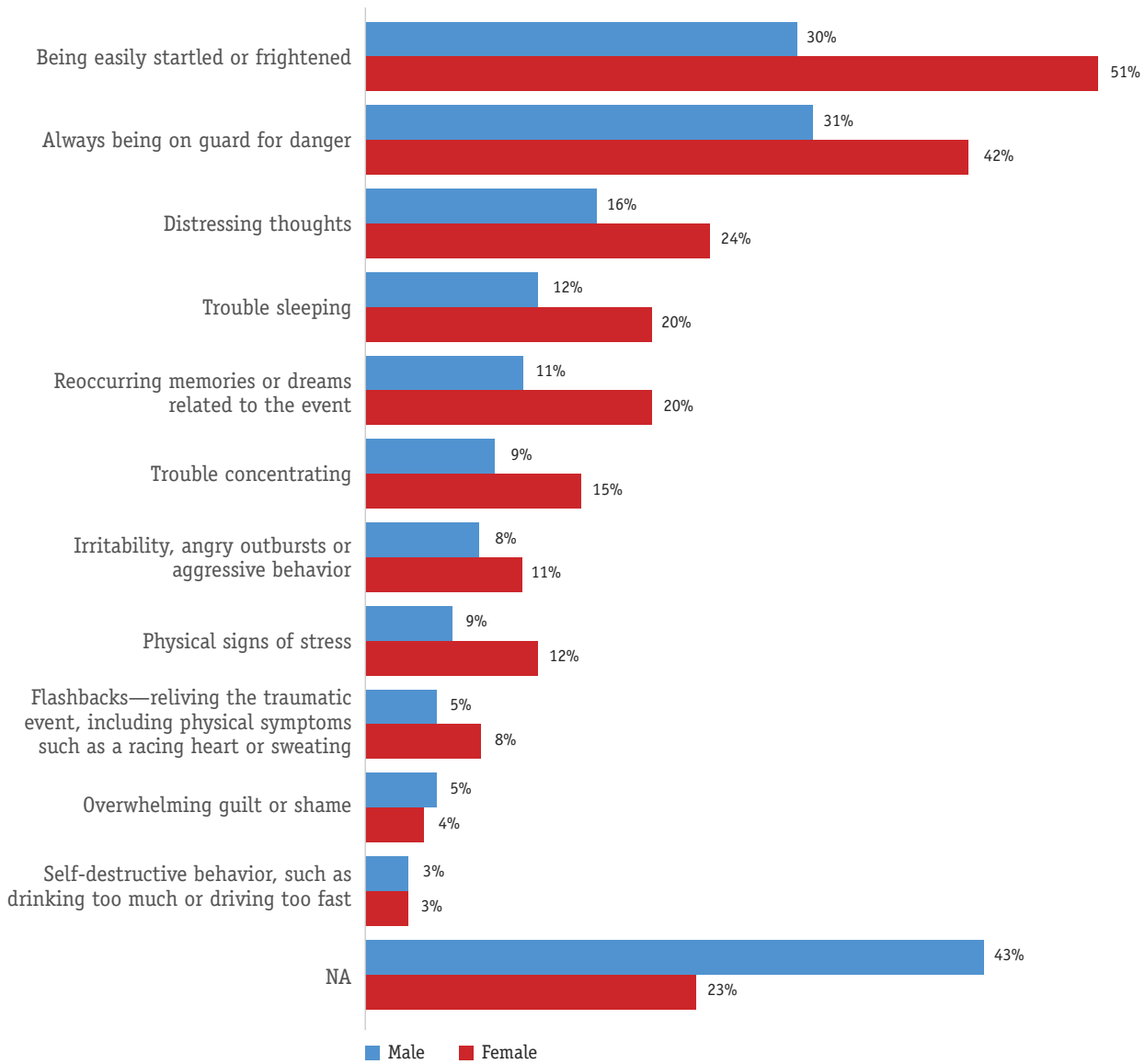
Q13 What are the economic issues you want to see the government prioritize this year?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Port of Beirut Blast

The results of the poll make clear the lasting psycho-social impacts of the Port of Beirut blast. 40% of respondents are easily startled or frightened since the blast, 37% are always on guard for danger, and 20% have distressing thoughts. When this data was broken down by gender, 43% percentage of male respondents did not respond, suggesting potentially higher levels and pointing to the gendered dimensions and stigma of mental health in Lebanon.

Graph 8 Health impact of port blast by gender



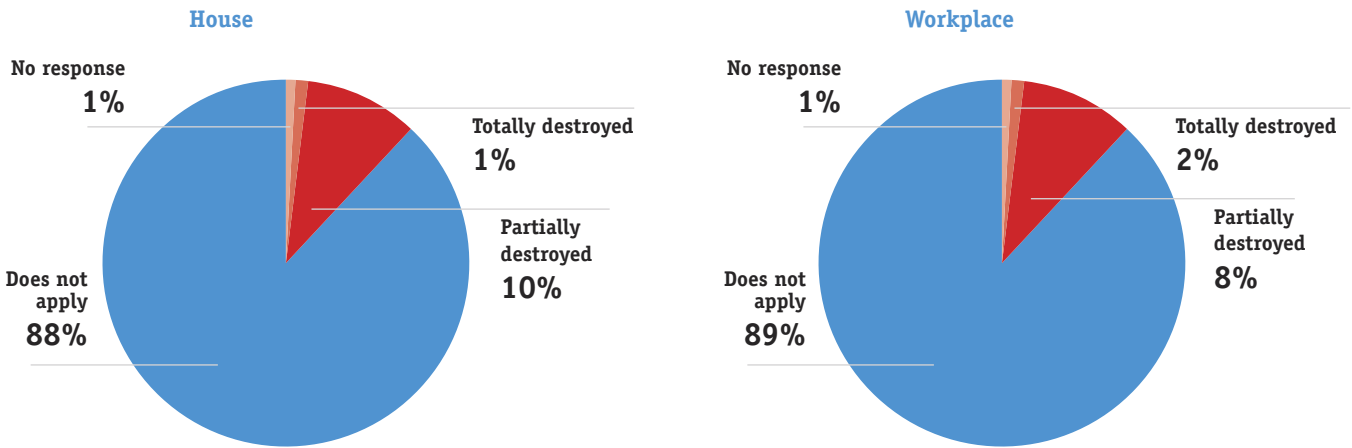
Q25 Have you experienced any of these physical or emotional responses since the Port of Beirut Blast that you would attribute to the blast

Base: Total sample, 1201

Additionally, the sense of safety in the country of 88% of the respondents was affected by the blast, highlighting the national—not just Beirut-centric—impact of the blast on perceptions of safety in the country. This data helps illustrate the significance of the blast beyond its material and physical damage.

On a more material level, as the survey was nationwide, 11% of respondents had their house partially or totally destroyed by the blast, 10% had their workplace partially or totally destroyed, and 17% had their neighborhood damaged.

Graph 9 Impact of port blast on housing and workplace



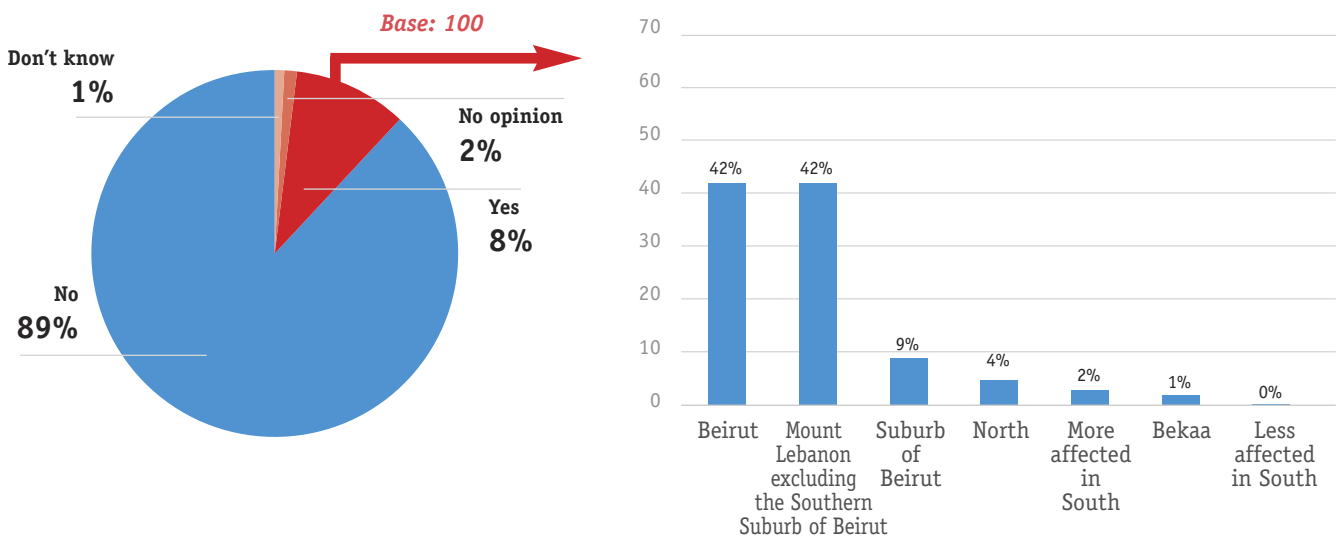
Q27 Was your house destroyed or partially destroyed due to the blast?

Q28 Was your workplace destroyed or partially destroyed due to the blast?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Only 8% of respondents who reported having property damaged had someone from the government visit their house after the blast, and 1% had the government give them assistance, of which the majority was financial aid (83%).

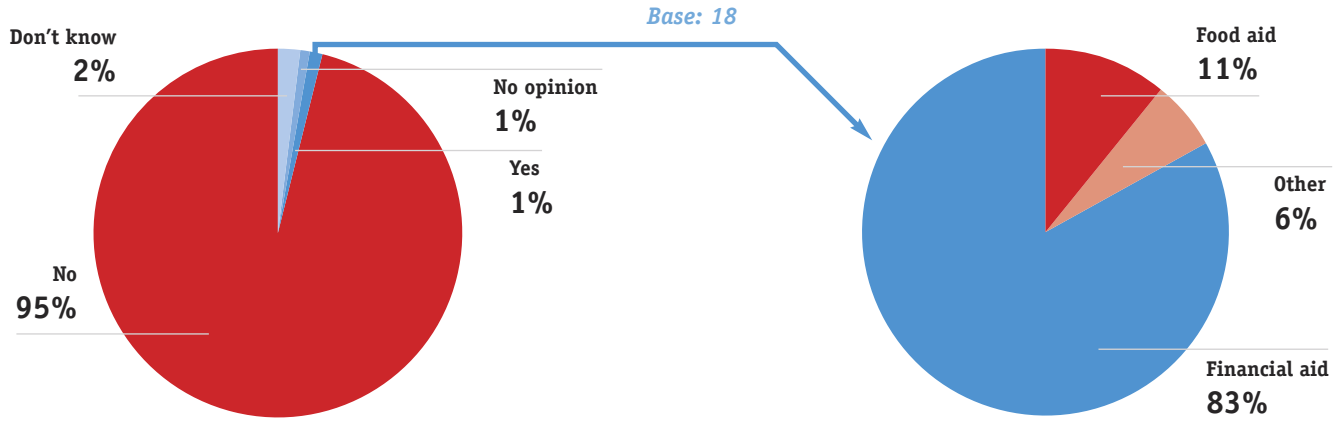
Graph 10 Government response after the port blast



Q30 Irrespective, if you had damaged property, did someone from the government visit your house to assess the damage (municipality workers, police, army)?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Graph 11 Government response after the port blast



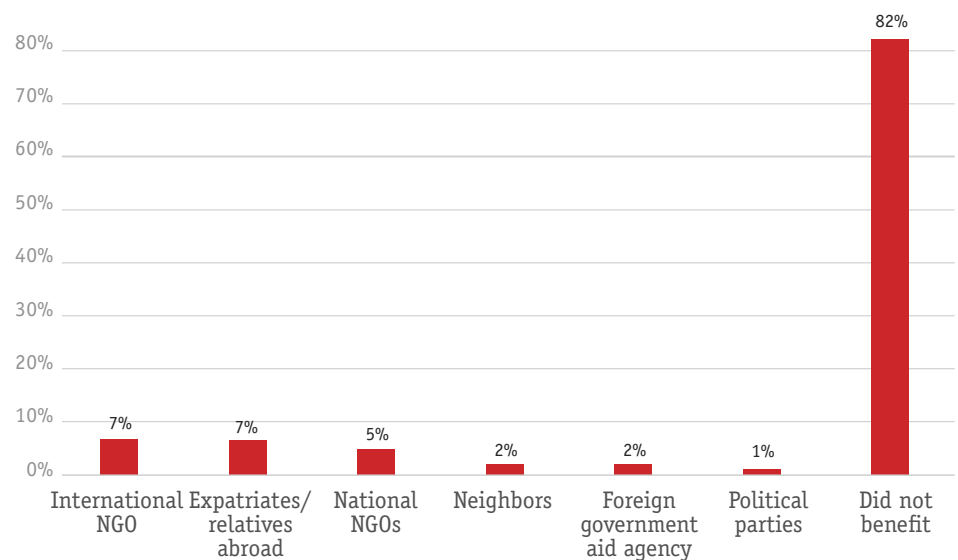
Q31 Did the government give you any assistance?

Q31b What kind of assistance did you get?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Overall, regarding assistance from non-governmental actors, 82% of respondents did not benefit from the non-governmental response, 7% benefited from international NGOs, 7% from expatriates, and 5% from national NGOs. Only 1% reported benefiting from political parties.

Graph 12 Non-governmental response after the port blast



Q32 Did you benefit from nongovernmental responses?

Base: Total sample, 1201

Main Takeaways

The results of the poll offer 5 key takeaways:

- *The financial crisis looms large, deepening the vulnerability of the wider public and deteriorating the overall quality of life in the country.*
- *The government's response to the crisis has largely undermined public confidence and trust. The respondents also have largely negative perceptions of most stakeholders involved in aspects of reform, recovery, and reconstruction.*
- *The Port of Beirut blast significantly affected perceptions of safety in the country, and the lingering psycho-social impacts underscore that any assessment of the blast cannot focus exclusively on material and physical damage.*
- *A small minority of respondents who had property damaged by the blast were visited by a government official, and even fewer received assistance. The vast majority of respondents did not benefit from any kind of assistance.*
- *The vast majority of respondents have overall pessimistic outlooks of the future and lack confidence in the government's ability to resolve the crisis.*

III Focus Groups Results

Focus group discussions (FGDs), detailed in the methodology section, were designed to help assess the implementation strategies of the 3RF framework and the subsequent challenges and opportunities for people-centered recovery. The results of the focus group discussions offer insight into the effectiveness of the 3RF's immediate response following the Beirut port explosion, the experience of the 3RF, the 3RF in sub-governorates, the Consultative and Working Groups, pathways for improvement, and lessons learned for the 3RF's expansion nationwide.

The effectiveness of the 3RF in the immediate response to the blast

The emergency context in the immediate aftermath of the Port of Beirut blast presented considerable challenges for the 3RF that focus group discussions drew attention to. First, FGDs noted challenges in tracking and pinpointing the flow of aid against the backdrop of widespread support and international aid flowing in after the blast. More specifically, delays in establishing the 'Emergency Body' by the Lebanese army undermined efforts to trace the influx of aid and

assistance, obfuscating if donations fell under the 3RF or part of another program.

Adding to this confusion would be the general overlap between the three response programs. As one FGD participant noted, ‘There are three response programs in Lebanon. It’s a mess that complicates the fund’s reporting. For example, for education, there is an education component under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) for Syrians and the host community, and also under the Emergency Response Plan (ERP) for Lebanese, Palestinians and migrant workers, and also under 3RF for development in education.’²

Alongside the general confusion that hindered the response to the blast, FGDs drew attention to limitations in the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA), which served to assess the damages and needs and thus inform the future 3RF process. According to the Consultative Group, the 3RF particularly overlooked certain aspects of the provision of health services, and the assessment report was rushed and lacked critical information and details. As one discussant explained, ‘The loss was assessed with a focus on premises only, and did not include the loss of personnel who provide the medical services (doctors, nurses) who were killed, injured, or left the country.’

Underscoring the link between the RDNA’s blind spots and the shortcomings in the subsequent response, one discussant noted: ‘Based on a rapid needs assessment, they all agreed to do a rapid response and rebuild Karantina Hospital and the Primary Health Care Center. A 700-page multi-disciplinary report was written. It was decided to build three rooms to serve people in a short time, but they failed to notice the medical equipment and supplies. We had to go to ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), not to the government, for medical equipment supply.’

Experience with the 3RF

Overall, FGDs contend that the 3RF was ‘important but not efficient.’ These discussions focused on five key dimensions—the program design, aid allocation, aid disbursement, transparency of the 3RF, and the 3RF structure.

Program Design

Generally, FGDs expressed an unequal relationship between the 3RF Donors and the civil society organizations in the Consultative Group.

2

For more on the LCRP and ERP, see: <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/press-releases/launch-2022-lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-government-un-and-partners-appeal-us-32-billion>, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100856> and <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-emergency-response-plan-2023>

Expanding on this perceived imbalanced dynamic, FGDs explained that local CSOs and their needs assessments were not sufficiently consulted in the design of programs. Limited engagement with CSOs led to a loss of resources, either through duplicate work or on projects that did not align with local assessments of the needs of affected communities or individuals.

In turn, projects were perceived to be largely directed through a top-down approach, with donors at the top and local CSOs at the bottom, and at times imposing more abstract and generalizable principles that were not always feasible in Lebanon's context. As one discussant explained, 'You cannot bring a solution that was successful in Ukraine and apply it in Lebanon.'

A shared perception in the FGDs was concern that international donors lacked a clear stance towards CSOs and their role in the 3RF. More explicitly, FGDs explained that, at times, it appeared as though donors were engaging with CSOs as a tool to exert pressure on the Lebanese government, rather than recognizing the importance of their role: 'The 3RF has used civil society to pressure the Lebanese state to pass some reforms at the level of policies and the fight against corruption. In return, they will give the state money for development.'

Building on this concern, one discussant explained: 'However, we did not have a role in the negotiations, even though we are in the Consultative Group. It is essential for us to know what has been discussed, put on the table, or hidden, so that we can see what is happening... It is our role to monitor and do consultation.'

Aid Allocation

The 3RF funding instruments allocated \$52,000,000 in aid to serve four pillars: 1) Improving governance and accountability, 2) jobs and economic opportunities, 3) social protection, inclusion, and culture, and 4) improving services and infrastructure.

The funds allocated for the humanitarian, relief, and infrastructure sectors are significantly larger than those allocated for governance. One key theme that emerged in FGDs on aid allocation was not so much the discrepancy between these two pillars, but rather that the allocation of funds was done without consultation with the Consultative Group, despite it being a component of the 3RF and its particular insight on local needs enhanced by the CGs proximity to those close on the ground. As one discussant put it: 'We are informed on how

funds have been assigned later, which made us feel like a ‘decorative presence’ in the 3RF.’

Aid Disbursement

To date, financial aid was only disbursed to B5, the program that covers MFI (Micro Finance Institution) and startups in the private sector, by granting up to \$3,000 for small businesses. Furthermore, only a part of the B5 program has been implemented so far, and only half the fund was received, largely due to payment delays from donors and the Kafalat bureaucracy.³

Unpacking the impact of the Kafalat bureaucracy in delaying aid disbursement, one discussant recalled that: ‘One of the donor’s conditions is to ‘empower women’ through training. It has been 2 months and we are still waiting for Kafalat to understand how to apply for the training.’

Aid disbursement has clearly been impacted by challenges in the 3RF funding, which appears to be largely hindered by Lebanon’s political crisis. To clarify, a portion of the 3RF’s financial assistance is reliant on reforms that can only be implemented by the government. Nonetheless, Lebanon is a state without a president, a caretaker administration, and a parliament lacking legislative powers.

Transparency of the 3RF

FGDs drew attention to several aspects of funding that impacted the transparency of the 3RF. FGDs noted that the amount of funds received under the 3RF, how these funds were spent, and the modalities of funding NGOs were all ambiguous. As one discussant explained, ‘It is understood that the 3RF hasn’t introduced itself as a funding instrument but as a reference. However, the funding instruments were not provided by the donors to link it to 3RF. The donors should apply the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals), put the requirements, and then link it to the 3RF in order to do integration.’

Regarding the particular funding of NGOs, FGDs noted that while ‘direct’ funding can be monitored, ‘indirect’ funding is not traceable (cascade funding), as these funds are only reported by the ‘big’ international NGOs. Explaining this, one discussant noted: ‘We do a project for an international NGO, then they ask us to put the logo of a certain embassy... Would you please tell us where the fund is?’ Building on this, another discussant emphasized: ‘We don’t know how the 3RF is informing the donors...’ Others pointed out that some of the donations

3
For more on the Kafalat, see:
<https://www.kafalatb5.com/>

for the Emergency Rescue Plan (ERP) were put under the 3RF, although they do not fall under it.

3RF Structure

Confusion and concern over the transparency of the 3RF brought forward critical discussions on its structure. FGDs revealed a general confusion over the 3RF's structure, particularly for the Working Groups. FGDs also revealed that an organigram of the 3RF was requested several times to better understand the structure, hierarchy, and to know which CSOs are involved in the 3RF and under which Working Group, but had yet to receive a response. To be clear, as of April 2023, an organigram has been used to outline the structure of the 3RF.

FDGs still revealed a more pervasive and long-lasting confusion with the 3RF's structure, underscoring a wider pattern of challenges in communication. 'It's chaos,' one discussant stated, 'our NGO asked for the 3RF structure from the beginning, and we haven't received it until now.' Highlighting the prevalent confusion over the 3RF structure, even from those participating in it, one discussant pointed out that: 'There are CSOs in 3RF who have no idea what the 3RF is about.'

The 3RF in Sub-Governorates

The awareness of the 3RF outside Beirut was poor. Only a few CSOs (5 out of 103 participants outside Beirut) heard of the 3RF, although the majority of the interviewed CSOs took initiative and volunteered in Beirut after the blast, providing a diverse range of services. Among these five CSOs, some were invited once to a large meeting to join the Working Groups, and then were never contacted again.

A discussant of one of these five CSOs expressed that: 'There is ambiguity around the selection of NGOs in the 3RF, as it is currently unclear how the working groups were chosen. Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding their plan and their achievements so far, as they have not shared their data and statistics.'

Building on this theme, another noted: 'The channel of funding was not clear... It wasn't clear to us as a local NGO how we should apply to get directly awarded by the 3RF. We asked about the process and templates, and application forms during the discussion session, but there was so much ambiguity around it. We didn't understand how the money and support were channeled.'

Consultative and Working Groups

FGDs on the Consultative and Working Groups focused on the sectorial meetings, and brought forward feedback from the health, energy, anti-corruption, and education sectors. FGDs clarified that sectorial meetings were taking place, yet noted that the frequency of these meetings varied across sectors. FGD participants in Beirut stated that meetings in some areas, such as health, social protection, and alternative energy, were reasonably regular, however meetings in others, such as transparency and anti-corruption, became far apart, and meetings in the education sector have completely stopped. Participants largely perceived these meetings as generally unproductive and failing to generate positive outcomes.

Expanding on the personal cost brought on by the perceived lack of productivity of the meetings, one participant noted: ‘We are putting our ideas, efforts, time, and even money from our pockets to attend these meetings... but nothing is happening. We cannot continue like that.’

Feedback from Health Sector

The input from the health sector indicated both ongoing difficulties and successes. On the one hand, there has been no agreement on the agenda, yet participants have noticed an improvement in the convergence of ideas. A general roadmap appears to have emerged, and efforts to control and avoid work duplication are progressing. Notably, a strategic plan for health will be launched soon, managing a balance between securing funds for direct health services and establishing a strong base that can provide health services. Still, duplicate work in the health sector is a big concern that will be addressed through a platform that will identify which projects are being carried out and by whom, in order to decrease wasted resources and increase cooperation.

Feedback from Energy Sector

Discussions are currently taking place between a group of local professionals in alternative energy, and major donors like USAID, EU, and World Bank to agree on an agenda for the sector. A new approach on energy solutions is being proposed, which differs from the solutions proposed by the Ministry of Energy and Water. The main areas of focus are alternative energy, solar systems, and waste management. The primary challenge noted in the FGDs is the reduction in financial aid to Lebanon.

Feedback from Anti-corruption Sector

This sector is served by a group of ten CSOs. The agenda points and minutes are put together by a secretariat. CSOs do disclose information about their projects. However, because there are no funds to draw upon, it is unclear how this group will collaborate. Collaboration between civil society and ministries is essential for digital transformation, which is being positioned as a critical anti-corruption milestone. As one discussant explained: ‘We need a special fund to push for digital transformation...the tools are there, and we have the expertise in both NGOs and the public sector. We also need to protect these employees in the public sector as they are ‘insiders’ in the state and can be experts on this project.’

Feedback from Education Sector

Despite several meetings, minimal progress resulted in the education sector being ‘closed’ for now. One discussant explained: ‘We provided the 3RF with all data...They informed us later that education has been ‘put on the shelf,’ as they have other priorities. Then they stopped answering our calls.’

IV Recommendations for Improvement

The status quo between the 3RF and the civil society organizations is fostering skepticism and alienation among the CSOs in Consultative and Working Groups. As one discussant, reflecting on the implications of this alienation, put it: ‘We have started to lose faith in the 3RF response.’ The concerns raised that CSOs were invited to participate in working groups, yet later were never contacted again, risks cementing the perception of tokenization of CSOs and may deepen their alienation.’

Better Communication with Principles

There is an urgent need for a centralized, transparent, easy-to-access platform to share relevant information. Notably, this could work to ensure clearer and more frequent communication between the Consultative Group and the 3RF principles. Meetings need to be held more regularly, as they are currently far apart, often leaving the consultative group in the dark about updates.

Clearer Strategy and Methodology

There should be more clarity in the plan for achieving the 3RF goals. The consulting NGOs and the donors should establish an implementation schedule with deadlines. A bottom-up, community-based approach would help restore confidence, trust, and participation from CSOs.

The strategy (new mandate) should also be clearly circulated through a citizen outreach and engagement plan, which had already been assigned with resources to the World Bank. On another note, the action plan and set implementation schedule and deadline should be based on the sector-specific priorities identified within the working groups. The milestones should also be linked to key performance indicators (KPIs), although at the macro level, which each working group could flesh out as relevant to their priorities. This would make the role of the IOB much more effective when assessing the progress compared to preset and agreed targets.

More Contribution to Decision-making

CSOs should take part in all discussions and negotiations on the 3RF, as they are competent, knowledgeable, and sensitive to societal demands and the wants and needs of affected and vulnerable communities. One key finding, though, is that CSOs generally lack capabilities for coordination and strategic networking, and advocacy. This recommendation should be coupled with the commitment of CSOs to engage in capacity development initiatives aiming to enable them to have more empowered seats on the table. Another layer to increased participation is a wider outreach to new CSOs, with potential prospects that BINA is currently identifying.

Faster and More Flexible Financing

The ability to unlock funds, reallocate funds, and receive guidance on funding instruments are key areas that require improvement. One pragmatic way to circumvent potential challenges surrounding such a sensitive issue is to have the 3RF create a space for international organizations and CSOs to identify relevant funding sources that are tailored to the sector priorities. This would complement the EU's structured dialogue, and the World Bank's Lebanon Financing Facility (LFF), but could also expand to further donors under the 3RF framework.

Identify ‘Champions’ within Public Institutions

Identify existing individual and institutional ‘champions’ within the government who/which could partner with the 3RF non-state actors in pushing for reforms and programming, without having to rely on high-level decision/policy-making in the current political deadlock.

A Sharper Stand Toward the Lebanese Government

The 3RF must effectively respond to state obstruction and particularly press for the implementation of e-governance and digital transformation to effectively respond to pervasive corruption and elite capture.

Using Local Expertise

The 3RF must balance working with domestic and international NGOs. Given their in-depth understanding of the challenges the country is now experiencing and their ability to offer practical technological solutions, more actively engaging local CSOs and centering local experience would increase efficiency.

Enhancing Transparency

The 3RF must enhance all aspects of transparency in its dealings with NGOs, including selection, funding, progress, monitoring, communication, etc. Adopting the Lebanese Transparency Association’s (LTA) Transparency Hearts³ and the Code of Good Practices on Transparency in Monetary and Financial Policies (MFP)⁵ can work to enhance transparency and strengthen accountability in the process.

Enhancing Administration

There is room for improvement at the 3RF administration level. A clear structure of the 3RF, including the objectives of each working group, a reconsideration of the number of working groups to reduce inefficiencies,⁶ more frequent and consistent meetings, and regular updates on the activity of different working groups must be communicated. The Secretariat must also have an impartial coordinator to set the agenda and minutes. A small but dedicated fund for the 3RF administration will help respond to the strained capacities of the respective CSOs participating in a crisis context.

4

For more, consult: <https://transparent-hearts.org/aboutus>

5

For more information, refer to: <https://www.imf.org/external/nfp/mae/mft/code/index.htm>

6

By the time of this report’s issuance, the rationalization of the Working Group had been completed.

Enhancing Inclusiveness

Different issue-based task forces, where local and international NGOs are both available, ensure the liaison between the public and the CSOs per sector, and trickle up to the Working Group level will go a long way in enhancing inclusivity within the 3RF.

Increasing Awareness and Visibility

A dedicated website that showcases the 3RF's goals, structure, plans, partners, funding, projects, accomplishments, and calls for proposals will promote visibility and enhance awareness of the 3RF.⁷

7

By the time of this report's issuance, the 3RF website has already been launched. The website also includes the 18-month progress report of the recovery phase:
<https://www.lebanon3rf.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/3RF-Progress-Report-Jan2021-Jun2022.pdf>

The LFF progress reports are also on the 3RF website:
<https://www.lebanon3rf.org/lebanon-financing-facility>

Lessons Learned for the 3RF's Expansion Nationwide

FGDs pointed to a collective desire to see a successful, but fair and inclusive, expansion of the 3RF nationwide. To help contribute to such a process, two key lessons were outlined:

Monitoring Transparency and Impact Assessment

Transparency and impact evaluation can be tracked via an online platform where local CSOs post their policies, reports, and project assessments. This portal will also allow funders to track the implementation of initiatives and the disbursement of funding in real-time. Additionally, the 3RF can assign a percentage of the funding towards establishing an efficient auditing system, including training for staff to ensure its successful implementation.

As one discussant outlined: 'In terms of monitoring, the local NGOs can develop an accounting and auditing system that conforms to international standards, in collaboration with the 3RF, by creating a system that is both efficient and effective.' A key prerequisite for the monitoring of the 3RF is to establish Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound (S.M.A.R.T) KPIs. The role of the IOB here should be enhanced, while sector-specific monitoring tools should be put in place and transferred to Working Group CSOs.

A More Inclusive Approach to Selecting CSOs and Distributing Funds

When it expands across the country, the 3RF will likely confront a variety of hurdles, including approaching the proper CSOs, distributing funds in the right places, overcoming political obstacles, and outreach. One critical area in which the 3RF can avoid excluding smaller, more

local, CSOs as it expands nationwide is by revisiting its selection criteria—avoiding explicit requirements like past experience managing large funds that exclude a vast majority of local CSOs and disproportionately advantage international NGOs. Relatedly, bureaucratic preference for the format of bids needs to account for language barriers.

V Conclusions and Implications

The 3RF continues to serve as a reference for recovery, reform, and reconstruction amidst a context of concurrent crises in Lebanon. As results from the nationwide poll indicate, the vast majority of the Lebanese public has been hard hit by the crisis, and the longer the crisis persists and the quality of life deteriorates, the confidence in all stakeholders involved in recovery, reconstruction, and reform—albeit with a particular emphasis on the government—will deteriorate.

Indeed, the Port of Beirut blast and the ongoing economic crisis are significantly affecting overall public perceptions of safety, outlooks for the future, and trust in the government’s ability to lead a way out. The survey also pointed to the negligent governmental response following the Port of Beirut blast, as only a minor fraction of respondents who had property damaged by the blast were visited by a government official, with even fewer receiving any assistance.

Overall, the vast majority of respondents did not benefit from any kind of assistance. It is worth stressing that the protracted state of the crisis and, indeed, the particular absence of reform or recovery risks deflating public confidence in any reform or recovery materializing.

In response to the particular ability of the 3RF to help respond to that mantle, the FGDs draw attention to gaps in the 3RF’s initial and overall efficiency that, if addressed, can help ensure a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable 3RF process, particularly as it expands nationwide.

1. One key area of improvement is the limited channels and flow of communication with local CSOs, who are particularly equipped to accurately assess and respond to the needs of affected and vulnerable communities. Failing to respond to communication gaps will continue to lead to a loss of resources and funds that would otherwise be directed to those most in need.
2. The 3RF must also adopt a clearer implementation time-bound plan

and unlock funds. Data from the nationwide survey points to the distribution of aid being the main criteria by which respondents evaluate the performance of international organizations like the World Bank, UN, and the EU.

3. Enhancing transparency on issues of NGO selection and funding will work toward reestablishing trust and confidence in the 3RF process among CSOs.
4. The nationwide expansion of the 3RF is necessary as long as the funds are used effectively. Although there are numerous barriers to expansion, these can be overcome by strengthening the 3RF's administration and transparency.
5. Amidst pervasive and protracted state failure in Lebanon, the role of CSOs is critical. However, they cannot be a supplement for public institutions and services, nor do they have the capacity or authority to do so. The 3RF cannot succeed if it does not effectively respond to state failure or state obstruction.
6. Identifying the major areas of need in a nationwide expansion is complicated by the collective weight of the crisis and its widespread impact across sectors, industries, communities, and regions. Meaningful engagement with local CSOs and a bottom-up approach that centers local expertise will help ensure more accurate responses. In turn, incorporating the Working and Consultative Groups in all decision-making aspects will go a long way in ensuring more accurate, inclusive, and effective nationwide expansion.
7. When it comes to expansion, the 3RF should focus on what already exists, such as projects developed in recent years but not yet operational, or legislation enacted but not yet implemented.

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