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A roadmap for
an equitable
post-disaster
response

OCTOBER 2022

REBUILDING BEIRUT

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ABOUT BEIRUT URBAN LAB

The Beirut Urban Lab is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research space housed within the American University of Beirut. The Lab produces scholarship on urbanization by documenting and analyzing ongoing transformation processes in Lebanon and its region's natural and built environments. It intervenes as an interlocutor and contributor to academic debates about historical and contemporary urbanization from its position in the Global South. The Lab works towards materializing the vision of an ecosystem of change empowered by critical inquiry and engaged research, driven by committed urban citizens and collectives aspiring to just, inclusive, and viable cities.

ABOUT COLUMBIA WORLD PROJECTS

Columbia World Projects (CWP) is a university-wide initiative established in 2017 to bridge scholarly knowledge and real-world action. With the goal of achieving the greatest possible impact on pressing challenges of our time, CWP mobilizes Columbia University's scholars, researchers, practitioners, and students to identify and implement interdisciplinary solutions to complex societal challenges in partnership with targeted change agents, such as policymakers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and corporations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disaster response and recovery in Beirut and beyond affords an extraordinary opportunity to imagine and implement processes that distribute opportunity more equitably, prioritize inclusion of community groups in governance, and strengthen the capacities of the state. None of these goals are easily achieved. To get them done requires political processes and accountability mechanisms grounded in a shared set of values and commitments to tangible action.

After Beirut's port blast of August 2020, the Beirut Urban Lab, Columbia World Projects, and Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation convened six meetings with some 120 experts drawn from academia, community organizations, government, international government agencies, and the private sector – including responders to earthquakes in Constitución, Chile, and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and reform-oriented recovery efforts after tsunamis in Aceh, Indonesia and Sendai, Japan and mass evictions in Cape Town, South Africa, and Lagos, Nigeria. Focused on the immediate challenge of Beirut, these experts presented hard-won

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knowledge from across the globe and important innovations developed over the course of their response and recovery work.

The attention, care and reflection of the participants in this process yielded a wealth of insights – as well as calls to action for Beirut and the global agenda for disaster response and recovery. The four principles below emerged out of careful reflection over specific actions for Beirut. As documented in each action area of the report, and summarized below, they call for an urgent and radical reorientation of the work of recovery.

1. **Orient all recovery and reconstruction efforts to strengthen long-term state capacity. Recovery and reconstruction must help assemble a scaffolding for sustained inclusive and equitable governance.** As most disasters have a spatial focus, this scaffolding can be incubated in a coordinating body with authority and oversight powers over the impacted area. In Beirut, this could be a port authority entity able to require transparency and accountability (see recommendation 2.1 of this report), or sets of formalized practices for daily coordination that aim to empower and engage components of the government as well as communities, cultural brokers, arts organizations, and other groups with knowledge and interest who are often left out of formal decision-making (recommendations 1.1;1.2;1.4; 4.2; 5.6). Well-negotiated financing can significantly prioritize long-term governance and equity (2.5). Investments should prioritize works that strengthen local public systems, such as tendering (1.4, 2.3). Immediate initiatives can also work towards large-scale change by empowering a trusted civic organization or state entity to manage a donor coordination forum, track and make public delivery mechanisms, and involve state actors (1.3; 4.5).

2. **Embed meaningful community engagement across all arenas of planning and implementation.** Experiences of successful mechanisms to structure inclusive processes have advanced rapidly in the past decades. Immediate actions of recovery and reconstruction can pilot these ways of working such that they support democratic and inclusive governance over decades to come. Planning and implementation after disasters should work towards long-term 'participatory infrastructure'. In Beirut, this report details how implementing inclusive planning strategies that incorporate resident and neighborhood knowledge, participatory engagement, and collective decision-making will improve the quality of investments and strengthen community resilience, particularly in housing, heritage, and public space (3.1, 4.1).

3. **Prioritize programs and policies that benefit low-income residents and that work towards more equitable and integrated urban systems.** Proven innovations in social and spatial policies in urban areas leverage changes in spending and laws to increase opportunity. While the report's recommendations emerged out of discussions specific to Beirut, they are applicable to urban areas more generally. They include vacancy taxes to reduce speculation in land and housing (3.2; 4.4), financing for phased construction (3.4; 4.2), tenant protections such as eviction freezes (3.3) land trusts and cooperative housing (3.5), and retrofitting heritage buildings to also serve immediate social functions (4.4). Infrastructure investments should prioritize projects that attempt to redress past harms to marginalized communities, including through green infrastructure (2.4) and parks and roads that knit together previously severed areas, such as neighborhoods to the port area (2.3). Investments should also prioritize labor-intensive approaches to facilitate job creation (1.4, 2.3) that also build skills and economic empowerment (1.4, 4.2).

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4.

Spend money on the ground, in coordination with civic initiatives. After disasters, networks of self-help often emerge, strengthen, and deliver key services. This energy deserves respect, coordination and investment. In Beirut, the creativity and sophistication of ground-up efforts was particularly notable. Going forward in Beirut and beyond, neighborhood-scale investments can leverage and strengthen these existing initiatives and civic capacity more broadly (3.1; 4.1). Doing so will also result in more meaningful physical improvements, such as squares and plazas (5.1) that in turn can further build community ownership (5.2; 4.1) as well as spaces of memorialization (5.5). Spatially-grounded local investments can overlap with zones of equity-oriented regulatory innovations (1.7) and, when successful, can ideally spread and scale to other neighborhoods (5.4; 1.7).

INTRODUCTION

TWO YEARS AFTER THE BEIRUT PORT BLAST, RECONSIDERING THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE CITY

Sudden-onset disasters displace an average of 25 million people from their homes each year.[1] The immediate devastation often falls hardest on historically disadvantaged communities who disproportionately live on vulnerable sites and in inadequate housing. After disasters, unequal resources to prompt rebuilding deepen these inequities, flowing faster and in greater sums to groups already privileged by income, wealth, economic opportunity, race, ethnicity, and political support. Post-disaster frameworks, even after huge expenditures are made to rebuild affected regions, rarely result in fairer systems or tangible improvements to the position of underserved communities. Disasters – and efforts of immediate response and long-term recovery – discriminate.[2]

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These challenges compound in the global South, where cities often lack frameworks for immediate disaster response as well as state capacity to rebuild equitably. This report attempts to address both deficits. Centering on the explosion that devastated Beirut, Lebanon's capital city, on August 4, 2020, this report establishes a framework to connect short-term response and repair of a fractured city to systemic changes that go far beyond 'recovering' an unequal status quo. This report instead addresses entrenched inequities in an effort to sustain greater support for underserved communities and to strengthen state capacity to respond to ongoing crises.

The report emerges from a series of six meetings convened by The Beirut Urban Lab, Columbia World Projects, and Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation with some 120 experts drawn from academia, community organizations, government, international government agencies, and the private sector. While focused on the immediate challenge of Beirut, these experts drew from a range of disasters and presented hard-won knowledge from across the globe.

Participants in these meetings introduced important innovations that had been developed over the course of their response and recovery work. These experiences are largely absent from post-disaster literature. We highlight these innovations and identify prospects for replicating or even scaling practices.

Participants included responders to earthquakes in Constitución, Chile, and Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Some gained experience in shaping reform-oriented recovery efforts after tsunamis in Aceh, Indonesia, and Sendai, Japan, or, in other cases, mass evictions in Cape Town, South Africa, and Lagos, Nigeria. Still others worked in post-conflict settings, including Baghdad, Iraq, and Kabul, Afghanistan. The convening brought these experts – and others – to hold sustained discussions with partners from Lebanon's academic institutions, civil society, and government. Together, the full group assessed vexing issues that became evident in the post-disaster setting, encircled the issues from a range of perspectives, raised new insights into the challenge, and identified fresh possibilities for recovery efforts.

CONTEXT IN BRIEF

The Port blast, set off by 2,750 metric tons of improperly stored ammonium nitrate, rocked Lebanon on August 4, 2020, devastating the capital city, Beirut. The explosion killed more than 200 people and wounded over 5,000. A damage assessment led by the World Bank in the month following the blast found that over 130,000 housing units sustained some level of damage and that 300,000 individuals endured short-term or long-term displacement. The blast also wreaked havoc on local businesses, institutions, and vital physical and social infrastructure.

The shockwaves from the explosion caused wreckage across a six-mile radius and caused catastrophic damage to homes and shops located in the neighborhoods adjacent to the harbor. Older buildings and those with informal additions were severely damaged, even when distant from the explosion site. A survey conducted by the Order of Engineers and Architects in Lebanon (OEA) that covered 2,509 buildings showed that more than half sustained minor damage, while 323 (12.9%) were under risk of full or partial collapse. The survey counted approximately 100 buildings with heritage characteristics that were impacted by the explosion, half of which were at risk of collapsing.

Buildings observed with broken glass in 2022. Source: Beirut Urban Lab
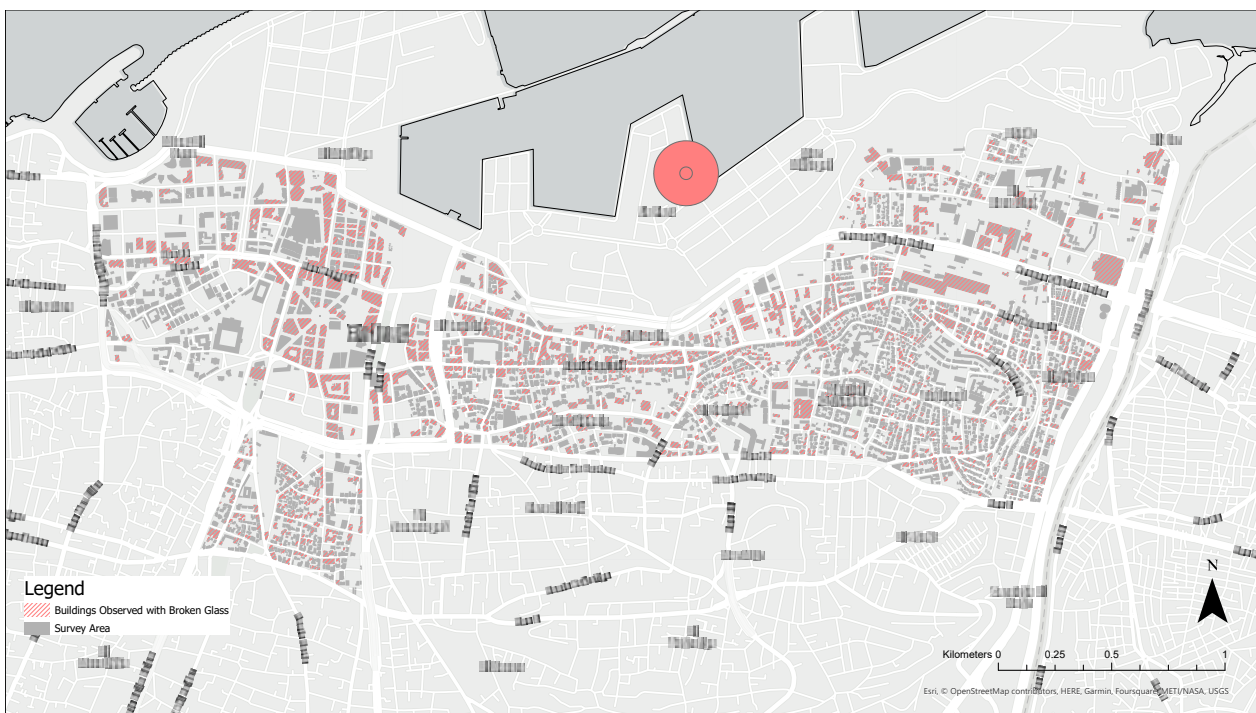
The first response to the disaster involved thousands of volunteers. Most mobilized as part of civic associations, religious groups, political parties, or social movements. Others flocked spontaneously to the areas surrounding the blast. A shared sense of woundedness prevailed: numerous Lebanese citizens interpreted the blast as not just a failure of the state, but a direct attack of the state against its people.

The two years following the blast have included a series of staggering challenges that have hindered efforts to propel Beirut's recovery, demonstrating that the concept "post-disaster" is frequently inappropriate, as initial social and economic harms are compounded by cascading events in already stressed scenarios. The Lebanese government, formed in the period following the 2019 October protests, resigned in August 2020, leaving Lebanon without an empowered government for over a year after the blast. In this leadership void, two competing agencies claimed to lead the recovery process. A small unit of the Lebanese Army (the Forward Emergency Room) was formed to coordinate the recovery effort led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), while the sitting government championed Law 194 that formed a commission to officially plan and lead the recovery. The Army unit did its best without proper funding or planning expertise, and the commission never met. The municipal government played only a minor role in the recovery preparations. All public agencies charged with leading the reconstruction process lacked popular support; none could secure the trust and support of international organizations.

Further complicating prospects for recovery were the outbreak of the COVID-19 and Lebanon's financial meltdown. Over the past two years, Lebanon's unemployment skyrocketed above 40% and extreme poverty rates rose to 40%,[3] while the Lebanese pound (Lira) collapsed. In this period, the Lira's value fell by 90%, leading to soaring inflation even as the economy – dependent on Beirut's port – contracted, resulting in one of the most severe recessions in recorded history.

These challenges, new in some ways, also reflect 15 years of civil war (1975-1990), the adoption of neoliberal economic policies as pillars of a nominal post-war reconstruction – in which more funds were removed from public coffers than invested – enormous refugee influxes, ongoing sectarian tensions, and deepening class inequalities. Many underlying conditions – such as widespread elite capture, the weakening of democracy and popular sovereignty, the brittleness of laws unsuited to the complexity of a starkly unequal society, the surging numbers of displaced residents – long preceded the explosion and have made rebuilding more urgent and more complex.

Layered atop entrenched inequalities and disinvestment, the blast – following patterns of disasters worldwide – exposed and compounded deeply unequal topographies of urban life. Yet it also sparked an incredible bubbling of civic initiative, innovation, and ideas for how to rebuild the area along new, more inclusive contours that can pattern social and economic life in Beirut, Lebanon more broadly and hold potential for cities globally.

This report presents potential paths for more inclusive recoveries in post-disaster settings, grounded in the experiences of Beirut. In addition to providing momentum for community-led efforts, the report offers crucial pathways for making decisions and taking action in a context in which state capacity is limited and public agency commitment has been largely lacking. The report proposes an approach that simultaneously encourages

local civic leadership while bolstering state capacity. Rather than present a vision for reconstruction that would wrest responsibility from the state, this report offers a constructive approach to strengthening public administration and the role of state agencies, while also providing possibilities for greater oversight by civil society working in partnership with government.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report takes stock of the framework and approach to post-disaster reconstruction that was adopted in Lebanon over the past two years in the aftermath of the port blast. The report contrasts the previous two years of activity in Beirut against an array of post-disaster recovery practices, drawn from across the globe that seek to mitigate long-standing harms and exclusions in the course of recovery efforts.

The sections of the report detail specific entry points to the reconstruction agenda in Beirut and include many likely global parallels. Across the cases explored, a unified message emerged: rebuilding necessitates a systematic inventory of inequities of opportunity – that often go back decades – as well as compiling prospects for more equitable processes and outcomes. Rebuilding has the potential to spark systemic restructuring, not just of sites affected by the blast, but of longstanding societal and property arrangements toward fairer and more inclusive cities.

The recommendations within this report focus on the area impacted by the blast and prioritize approaches with potential to spark change more broadly across the national context. The recommendations reflect core ambitions proposed by participants at these convenings to advance inclusive practices and strengthen Lebanon's policy and governance in the post-disaster period and beyond. They include:

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1.   **Develop a narrative for the recovery: There is a need to rally communities, public agencies, and other actors around a story that lifts collaborative practices and helps bridge pre-existing divides.** Such a narrative should bring forward a recovery plan for the city that would go beyond humanitarian relief or the silos of development projects (e.g., heritage, housing, port) to put forward an ideal for the city that infuses hope in recovery among diverse stakeholders.

2.   **Design institutional scaffolding that helps recovery processes move forward and curtail corruption, while also centering public agencies and the necessary strengthening and long-term role that they should play.** Such efforts must include actions to prevent the tendency of foreign aid to deepen cycles of sidelining and undermining government capacity and furthering the over-dependency on non-governmental agencies and international donors. Similarly, acknowledging the deleterious effect of aid capture by the political elite to entrench clientelistic and corrupt practices must be followed by action. To begin, institutional reform can prioritize localization by building the capacity of the few effectively operational public institutions.

3.   **Foster synergies between public, private, and non-profit actors as a prerequisite for an effective and inclusive post-disaster recovery.** The recovery process needs to capitalize on the current capabilities of each of these sectors, and it needs to set a clear regulatory framework through which both private and non-profit actors can intervene.

4.   **Take explicit measures to protect and support the most vulnerable and underserved communities.** Too often, pre-existing systems produce entrenched corruption, inertia, and, as a result, abet elite capture of funds intended to support public goods and communities. In some instances, this goal requires lifting administrative burdens for those seeking access to funds or services provided by government and international organizations. Fulfilling this ambition requires more

transparent and accessible administrative procedures that, in their absence, create barriers for historically underserved and vulnerable communities. In other instances, new laws need to be issued to secure greater protections for underserved communities through, for instance, protecting renters or establishing equal protections for older, heritage buildings often inhabited by under-resourced families and communities.

5. **Integrate investments in collective functions, civic spaces, and public amenities as a critical element of any post-disaster recovery.** There is a need to involve the recovery of housing and businesses within larger societal goals that foster collaborative practices, communal activities, and a notion of collective belonging in the affected neighborhoods.

6. **Prioritize community engagement, including the co-creation of systems intended to provide support to affected communities and the co-governance of systems that distribute funds and opportunities.** This recommendation aspires to build on Beirut's existing strengths in civil society organizations on the ground and emerging digital platform innovations. Recovery processes need to be localized to include meaningful ownership by impacted populations in order to deliver reconstruction outcomes more efficiently and equitably. Community engagement and civic participation must be prioritized throughout the recovery process to build trust between residents and other parties active in recovery efforts, address inequitable power dynamics, and create comprehensive, community-driven understandings of place-based interventions to guide reconstruction priorities.

7. **Offer opportunities to adopt policies that reinforce long-term stability.** Lebanon's regulatory infrastructure, historically compromised by internal administrative conflicts, has engendered an inadequate emergency management response threatening to undermine post-blast recovery efforts. Given histories of government corruption in Lebanon, local and state regulatory frameworks require oversight and

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transparency mechanisms along with the strengthening of state capacity to work toward the public good. Simultaneously, it is vitally important that state capacity not be further eroded by putting the burdens of recovery efforts entirely on NGOs.

8. **Scale local innovations introduced by community organizations. Scaling should be supported in two directions.** Horizontal scaling identifies innovations introduced in other sites and contexts and proposes to introduce similar practices in Beirut. Vertical scaling involves identifying innovative practices introduced by organizations working in Beirut and embedding them in policy or proposing that government agencies work to sustain and replicate these practices more widely across the city.

9. **Support data collection, analysis, and publication to build accountability mechanisms into reconstruction efforts.** At present, reconstruction efforts are vexed by insufficient and untrustworthy data sets. International organizations and government agencies have an opportunity to gather data, identify inequities in the distribution of money, goods, and services that will become evident in data analysis, and publicize findings to heighten accountability and build trust.

10. **Prioritize justice and accountability as a pillars of good governance and a prerequisite for a successful recovery.** This includes accountability about the circumstances that led to the explosion and decisions that aggravated its impacts.

The remainder of the report brings this focus to five action areas: (1) governance, (2) housing and land use, (3) the port, (4) heritage preservation, (5) and activating public spaces while fostering civic and social infrastructure. In each action area, the report offers recommendations made by meeting participants specific to these areas. Recommendations encompass the work of international organizations, government agencies, professionals and community-based groups participating in reconstruction and recovery efforts.

ACTION AREA I:
GOVERNANCE

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BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CHALLENGES

The explosion at the Port of Beirut was the result of political decision and indecision; the damage resulting from the blast is an exceptional example of routine public neglect. Administrators and senior officials in Lebanon's government knew of the thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate at Beirut's port since 2014. Institutional disagreements between different actors about responsibility resulted in warnings of extraordinary risk going unheeded for six years.

Rather than a new phenomenon, dysfunctional governance has deep political roots in Lebanon, going back at least to the country's civil war (1975-1990). Donor agencies, in the wake of the civil war, provided tens of billions of dollars of loans to support rebuilding the country's most vital public infrastructure, such as major public buildings, transit systems, electricity grids, and water services. Corruption is widely recognized to have diverted these public funds to private interests.[4]

Business elites with strong ties to political parties were awarded lucrative rebuilding projects, privileging sectarian interests in the

process. The politicization of reconstruction contributed to disparities in the quality of, and access to, infrastructure across regions.[5]

The reconstruction also prioritized private real estate development projects rather than public infrastructure, further enriching elites. In this manner, the post-civil war recovery, led by corporate investment, pursued an urban development strategy largely premised on speculative real estate ventures at the expense of a redistributive and people-focused reconstruction.[6]

The aftermath of the explosion has further widened divisions between residents of the city and the politicians who allegedly represent them – a disconnect that came to the fore during the October 2019 uprisings. These politicians, many with deep connections to armed sectarian groups, over the years have devised a set of strategies and tactics that reproduce the sectarian political system that makes up the Lebanese state. Some of these strategies include politicizing the country's judiciary through regular interference, most recently evidenced by the investigation of the port explosion, which resulted in four politicians charged

with criminal neglect who, in turn, sought to remove the judge from the case. They were never arrested.[7]

Another strategy focuses on gerrymandering electoral laws that could otherwise allow for a transition of power, as revealed in the May 2022 parliamentary elections. Other strategies include co-opting or violently repressing opposition groups. As such, the political system that facilitates persistently poor governance gets regularly reproduced, benefits powerful actors, and continues to operate in a context of inadequate accountability.

This legacy heightened the challenges of responding to the 2020 disaster. State institutions were largely absent during the relief and recovery operations. The public commission formed by Law 194 in the aftermath of the blast met only once and never took up its chartered responsibility. On the ground, the Higher Relief Council (HRC), the agency tasked with emergency responses, was noticeably absent. The Beirut Forward Emergency Room (FER), a special unit organized by the Lebanese Army tasked to coordinate relief and register rebuilding

efforts, was deemed illegitimate by many civil society groups, some of which refused to work with the FER, citing widespread dissatisfaction with the militarization of donor coordination.

In the aftermath of the post-blast period, civil society groups expressed scant confidence in public agencies and institutions. The international development community shared this distrust and turned to NGOs to mobilize emergency response and reconstruction efforts following the blast. Since the Israel/Lebanon/Hezbollah conflict of 2006, to use the terminology of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the forced displacement of over one million Syrians to Lebanon in the wake of Syria's civil war, local and international NGOs have played an outsized role in emergency aid, relief, assistance, and ongoing support to Lebanon's most vulnerable communities. While a robust infrastructure developed by a cohort of UN bodies[8] has laid the groundwork for relief distribution, an inadequate level of cooperation remains between and among groups and initiatives. Even with UN support for coordination, relief efforts have been duplicative and disjointed, contributing to widening inequalities of access to relief supplies among the blast's victims, especially the most vulnerable.

NGOs cannot readily fulfill the role of the state even as the state lacks sufficient trust to coordinate an international response. This dilemma haunts every aspect of the recovery process, a fact put in stark relief over the past two years. As one participant bluntly said, this contributes to a long-term cycle that further weakens government ability: "NGOs are competing with, rather than supporting, the development of state capacity."

Acknowledging Lebanon's shaky political environment, the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank established the Reform-Recovery-Reconstruction Framework (3RF) in 2020, an institutional platform funded by a multi-donor trust fund (the Lebanese Financing Facility), slating $2.584 billion for recovery in tandem with key governance reforms and reconstruction projects. The 3RF established a steering committee, a technical team, and a secretariat as well as a consultative group including civil society organizations selected through an open call, and an independent

oversight body, with membership drawn from civil society organizations. Financially, the 3RF relies on a two-phase strategy, building first on financing from humanitarian sources and in-kind support from Lebanon to support recovery and urgent needs ($584 million). The second phase supposes progress made on macroeconomic stabilization and governance reforms, allowing concessional loans and private financing towards reform and reconstruction ($2 billion). The institutional and financial plans remain undeveloped in the absence of trusted and effective public agencies that would place people's needs and interests at the center of decision-making[9].

The Lebanese experience raises at least four core questions about this recovery process that remain unanswered:

What theory of change might guide the recovery process, one which addresses the governance of the recovery, while maintaining sufficient flexibility for adaptive management and reorganization?

How can resources be allocated in ways that avoid further weakening state institutions through circumvention, while ensuring accountability and limiting corruption in the long term?

How can funds and decision-making be channeled to competent national actors in order to strengthen localization and ownership of recovery processes, avoiding expensive foreign consultants and omission of local knowledge?

How can international organizations and governments foster coalitions that include community, non-profit, local, and national actors, and private agencies, and how might international actors support such coalitions through the configuration of collaborative institutional processes?

The guidance outlined below offers insights from a community of global disaster management experts on fostering state responsiveness and accountability in recovery contexts while tempering the influences of corrupt interests. It is based on the premise that despite a weakened state capacity, a successful recovery and reconstruction effort ought to include the active involvement of state institutions and public agencies to improve immediate and long-term post-disaster conditions.

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RECOMMENDATIONS: GOVERNANCE

1.1 Design a viable institutional process that enhances localization and ownership of the recovery and protects from corruption without undermining the goal of strengthening the administrative capacity of government.

There is a need for a common understanding of what the recovery seeks to achieve, developing a common strategic framework and defining the roles of the various actors within it. While governance may often take diminished priority in post-disaster recovery experiences, in Lebanon – where trust has eroded and public actors were blamed for the blast and its effects – the design of a recovery involving local communities, professional actors, and governmental agencies is critical to moving forward in a fair manner, even if challenges will be dealt with in piecemeal fashion. There is an opportunity to use the recovery as an incremental strategy to address bigger issues that plague the country, including overlapping crises and failing governance.

If reconstruction is led largely by private actors, there is likely to be fragmentation of the recovery response at every level of the recovery. Participants warn of a common mistake of post-disaster recovery work in which parallel systems are created, one led by a small group of NGOs and another by international organizations, both undermining critically-needed processes of building state capacity and the efforts of existing public agencies and organized communities. This weakens citizen-

state relations and leads to less accountability.[10] There is a substantial literature on the deleterious effects of aid in undermining state capacity, drawing on precedents across Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Contexts where interventions led to the "NGOization" of governance yield only long-term failures.

Instead, participants urge the establishment of an institutional framework that ensures local leadership drives reforms – what is referred to as "localization." This should include members of key civil society, faith-based organizations, and social media channels, along with traditional NGOs, even as it is crucial to build a larger coalition that brings together private sector and public sector actors.[11] Participants further proposed that coalitions reach out to reformers beyond the political elite and that they might productively include civil servants in order to institutionalize reform efforts in bureaucracies, generating lasting political infrastructure for reconstruction processes.

One participant distills the role of an institutional framework that builds local leadership and state capacity in the following manner: "What we need is citizen and institutional oversight over these processes. This is not a sort of a wishy-washy body that you create and put in place as window dressing, but an organization or an entity that is validated by international donors and international actors, that is actually tasked with auditing, with making sure that plans are in place, making sure that the money is spent right, and has an international reputation." This declaration, when coupled with a human rights framework to ensure accountability and the participation of government officials, including career government administrators, finds broad support from all attendees.

In addition to building state capacity for reconstruction efforts, this approach will increase the probability that positive reconstruction efforts spill into related sectors. Accountability in reconstruction activities, one participant notes, can have ripple effects. Transparency in procurement, for example, by agencies making their purchases and beneficiaries visible online, can create a multiplier effect. Other NGOs and government agencies might feel pressure to adopt similar practices, building public confidence in decision making and in the distribution of opportunity, limiting the possibility of elite capture and hoarding.

1.2 Adjust and Adapt. *Implement adaptive management strategies to ensure that recovery efforts are durable and locally responsive.*

Participants recommend adopting adaptive management models with the capacity to assess the performance of partners' recovery commitments. An independent monitoring or advisory group, validated by international donors serving as auditors, could conduct real-time analyses of local resources and vulnerabilities to help implement strategic reform-oriented interventions. For instance, to quickly address fragile conditions, institutional capacities could be strengthened by using metrics such as poverty headcount or population index to identify urgent needs. Adjustments to implementation strategies could instantaneously follow to improve the progress of underperforming recovery priorities.

Introducing a community integration mechanism is vital to designing a robust adaptive management plan. Participants suggest that civil society can play a role in three respects. First, civil society might jointly determine reconstruction priorities, with government agencies, and co-create an overall plan for rebuilding. Civil society might then help complement government efforts by delivering this aid via local organizations to communities inadequately served by government efforts. Finally, civil society might provide a service of evaluative checks and balances, where information and assessments on the first two elements are transparent and readily available. In combination with specific recommendations of support from the donor community, aid delivery can be reinforced through accountability measures that assure beneficiaries' needs are met.

1.3 Simplify funding and donor coordination processes. *Recalibrate disjointed donor practices through donor forums and aid tracking technologies.*

Participants urge simplifying donor coordination in response to disjointed, diverse, and unreliable aid delivery mechanisms. Creating a donor coordination forum can strengthen recovery responses by consolidating donor intelligence and establishing clear, reliable, and monitorable practices. Hosting regular fora could align disparate donor priorities, eliminate redundancies, address delivery delays, and resolve blind spots. Participants suggest that donor meetings led by a trusted civic organization, with involvement from state actors, could enable recovery actors to collectively monitor the effectiveness of delivery mechanisms while cultivating alliances in support of governance reform.

"What we need is citizen and institutional oversight over these processes...actually tasked with auditing, with making sure that the plans are in place, making sure that the money is spent right."

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1.4 Invest in Public Works. Promote systems-building approaches by identifying labor-intensive recovery approaches that benefit community livelihoods.

Experts agree that donor communities are apt to make further investments in specific reconstruction efforts that demonstrate tangible progress. Structuring recovery frameworks around the employment of community members can channel recovery funds to local actors and allow communities to access further funding as projects advance. Reigniting the economic livelihoods of affected populations can produce benefits across society and generate buy-in for large-scale public-private reconstruction initiatives that provide funding to underserved communities.

Reconstruction practitioners advise beginning recovery intervention efforts by rebuilding physical infrastructure before turning attention to institution building plans. Accessing recovery funds through public works projects creates opportunities for local actors to shape community benefits by leveraging donor funding to support recovery objectives. As projects deepen, attention may shift to institution-building priorities at which time financing may be less reliable or available. By acting early, the recovery's physical reconstruction may set precedents for engaging and uniting donors around equitable development plans and processes. To facilitate investment in public works, participants endorse a systems-building approach to help increase the capacity of local government and actors and balance the distribution of humanitarian aid with structural reform. A systems-building framework requires developing the capacity of local authorities to obtain and manage the distribution of increased program funding for infrastructure projects. When designed with community input on spending priorities, recovery plans can empower local authorities to create accountability mechanisms that can restructure the systems and relationships that govern the allocation of funds to local governments. The combination of systems and capacity building, restructuring and improvement, and the right incentives can create cultures of accountability and transparency. [12]

Turquoise Mountain, an organization focused on cultural preservation projects in conflict regions, led a community regeneration project in the old city of Kabul. Working with community leaders and state officials, Turquoise Mountain rebuilt a district of nearly historic buildings by reviving traditional craftsmanship skills and creating job opportunities for artisans. A phased, neighborhood-by-neighborhood development approach was adopted, enabling the gradual implementation of a comprehensive plan that made investments across a range of sectors from infrastructure, health, education, training, and employment. Turquoise Mountain's engagement approach is deliberately incremental, shaped by long-term goals, with constant adjustments to the plan made depending on the outcomes of the initial rollout and variations within each neighborhood. The organization's commitments in Afghanistan continue under the Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture – an economic development initiative equipping the next generation of artisans with workforce and business development skills.

1.5 Scale Recovery. *Develop recovery plans that underscore multiple scales of engagement and infrastructure.*

Participants encourage recovery actors to embrace scalable intervention approaches, structured in partnership with donor networks and impacted communities on the ground, to restore material losses and protect the well-being of the most disadvantaged members of society.

To swiftly and efficiently scale recovery operations from initial engagement with local community-based groups, those involved in the reconstruction process are advised to begin their efforts through staggered interventions and adjust steps to meet the varying challenges of local crisis conditions. For instance, international donors and community-based organizations might devise development structures featuring consultations with residents and other stakeholders, open decision-making that draws on community input as well as expert

sector-specific guidance, publicly accessible financial records, and various mechanisms for accountability that can respond to needs at scale. Consequently, development actors would have the opportunity to implement iterative strategies that are inclusive and responsive to different contexts and reconstruction timelines.

Initially, working with smaller community-based groups often yields more significant results and enduring benefits relevant to affected populations. Successful efforts can be piloted in new contexts by larger actors with the resources to test prospects for scaling across contexts, adapting programming in the course of scaling, and building learning platforms in order to assess which interventions succeed in which contexts, thereby adopting a model of adaptive and iterative scaling.

1.6 Develop an information clearinghouse. *Build capacity to assess interventions, communicate needs to government and international development agencies, and develop planning structures for rebuilding.*

Data – in the form of impact assessments, participant surveys, journey mapping, and other tools that allow for rigorous assessment of the reconstruction process – should be housed in an information clearinghouse. Thoughtful data collection can also give voice to residents who are not otherwise connected to organizations. As one participant observes, "Much as Lebanon's NGO sector is impressive, many NGOs remain more representative of elites and their perspectives. While I am not certain that we can create institutions to bring citizens in, we can use different mechanisms to consult them at different stages in the process: when defining priorities, designing interventions and monitoring results. This could be as simple as ongoing polling, the results of which are made available not only to donors but to the public. Focus groups and community meetings have also been used even in countries where resources pale in comparison with Lebanon."

A clearinghouse that collects, houses, and disseminates data from multiple sources is a crucial institution in any reconstruction process for several reasons. It gives visibility to stakeholders' preferences. It allows stakeholders – whether community

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organizations or project-affected people – to gain visibility into the range of work underway and the longer-term goals. Additionally, an information clearinghouse sends the right signals to donors, demonstrating oversight and rigorous evaluation of interventions. The clearinghouse also provides an opportunity to start building necessary planning structures where they might be absent by pointing up gaps in infrastructure for the reconstruction process. Finally, a clearinghouse can help create both a learning platform and contribute to the refinement of reconstruction plans, allowing for continuous adaptation of work by various development agencies and organizations.

1.7 Consider piloting regulation and policy innovations in the blast area and surrounding neighborhoods. *A spatially-designated zone can enable responsive equity-oriented regulation and policy reforms in housing, land, and infrastructure.*

Several planning experts endorsed rebuilding the blast site as a "zone of equity experimentation," in which progressive and innovative policies could be put in place and tested with an eye toward wide-scale adoption. While 'special zones' have often been implemented problematically in cities elsewhere to streamline growth for privileged networks, they are an established planning tool with newer and more equity-oriented adaptations. Often operating autonomously as sub-districts within cities, these zones are sometimes termed 'innovation districts.' When carefully structured – and paired with governance and participation efforts, ideally – they can provide spatially-bounded arenas to pilot regulatory and policy shifts to support innovations in housing, land, and redevelopment as recommended in the action areas 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this report.

ACTION AREA II:
PORT RECONSTRUCTION

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BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CHALLENGES

The blast leveled a pier in the Port of Beirut, resulting in the eventual collapse of grain silos, severely affecting this economic engine of both the city and the entire country. Reconstructing Lebanon's most important sea and shipping access point will directly and simultaneously impact connectivity across Beirut, regional and global shipping and commerce, and the governance and management of the port itself. It also provides an opportunity for reconsidering the economic model that has driven the development of the port into essentially a container terminal (75% of the port activities), as well as reimagining city-port relations, given that the port was severed spatially and economically from Beirut and operated independently for the past three decades.

Reconstructing the port is an opportunity to reimagine it as more than a container terminal - and chart to a new connection with the city.

The port, serving as a container terminal largely disconnected physically from the surrounding neighborhoods, stands in contrast to the tight historical relation between the city and its port. Over several millennia, Beirut's growth had coincided with the expansion of its port and maritime trading activity. During Ottoman rule in the 1800s, Beirut gained in stature and strategic importance partly because of rapidly increasing cargo passing through the city's port.[13] At the turn of the 20th century, the port's expansion helped bring about a harbor district in Beirut. New shops and restaurants, public walkways, and tram lines collectively made the area a destination while also facilitating social and spatial connections to other parts of the city and other cities along the coast and internally. These connections, in turn, brought about outgrowths tied to port-related commerce. While such entanglements continued through the first half of the twentieth century, these conditions changed in the 1940s and 1950s. As the French Mandate period (1920-1943) came to an end, authorities fenced off adjacent neighborhoods to secure the port. At the same time, the two tramway lines that ran through the port, which offered residents

access to the harbor area, were discontinued. Thus, as Beirut continued to grow – as the capital city of a newly-independent Lebanon – connections between the port and its surrounding neighborhoods, districts, and residents grew increasingly attenuated. While segmenting the urban fabric from a critical economic hub, these disconnections arguably helped facilitate the port's expansion and new operations and services.

After 1990, disconnections between the port and its surroundings were exacerbated by the economic strategy adopted by the port authorities, on the one hand, and the modalities of redevelopment of core districts in Lebanon's capital city, on the other. At the time of the explosion, the Port of Beirut processed 82% of Lebanon's imports and exports. Moreover, Beirut's port handles 98% of all container traffic operating through Lebanese ports, a concentration that is likely to be maintained given the strategic deep-sea level advantage that the port retains over all other ports in the country. Over the last three decades, and accelerating in the last 15 years, the port has increased such container handling services. These are also known as transshipment services – or the intermediate

shipping and transportation of goods from one destination to another – in which goods are transported on one vessel and reloaded onto a second vessel in order to access shallow-water ports.[14]

Spatially, Beirut's post-war reconstruction materialized in three different urban strategies in the areas surrounding the port, all of which were disconnected from the port spatially and economically. First, the redevelopment of Beirut's Central District, southwest of the port, was led by a private company, Solidere. The new downtown bore virtually no resemblance to the city's historic core, as luxury developments supplanted archaeological remains and urban ruins and real-estate strategies trumped spatial considerations for connecting Beirut back to its port and seafront. (The first pier of Beirut's port falls nonetheless under the jurisdiction of Solidere.) At the same time, areas south and east of the port – Gemmayze and Mar Mikhail – were subject to gradual gentrification that altered the social and spatial makeup of both areas. Meanwhile, other areas that are primarily industrial zones, including Karantina and Medawar, have long housed lower-income residents

from historically vulnerable communities, including Armenian and Palestinian refugees, and were the sites of tragic massacres during the civil war. These neighborhoods continue to be heavily militarized and underserved by public institutions. Throughout this period of uneven growth, the port remained an economically prosperous and financially lucrative site, but almost no economic benefits spilled over to the surrounding neighborhoods (in contrast to the city's historic development). The few proposals to reconnect the port to its surroundings were ignored, including a 2008 study proposing to transform the first basin into a passenger terminal for visitors.

Making changes sought by activists and the community to the port have proven enormously challenging, in part due to the management responsible for overseeing the port. Since 1993, the Port of Beirut has been managed by a temporary administrative committee, the "Temporary Committee for Management and Investment of the Port of Beirut." This oversight body with broad fiscal and budgetary powers was appointed to temporarily manage the port's operations. Sitting under the Ministry of

Public Works, the "Temporary Committee" houses various institutions responsible for everyday port governance, including customs officials, General Security and the Lebanese Armed Forces, shipping lines, and trucking interests. This governance model has outlived its provisional mandate; the commission's current membership has served by appointment since March 2002. Calls to replace the "transitional commission" with a permanent governing body representative of Lebanon's collective interests have grown louder.

In 2018, the transitional commission put forward a new Master Plan for the port. The plan called for expanding container facilities, upgrading cargo spaces, and replacing deteriorating warehouses – including Warehouse 12, the site of the August 4, 2020, explosion. The plan recognized the need to upgrade the port's outdated infrastructure. More recently, the World Bank – in partnership with the Minister of Public Works – commissioned a study for a legal framework to organize the management of the port. It also commissioned a national port masterplan for Lebanon that would clarify the position of the Beirut port in the national economy. However, as of March 2022, no components have been executed or adopted. Instead, the port commission continues to operate on an ad-hoc basis while sections of the port management have been delegated to a multi-national company without an official bidding system.

In February 2022, a global group – CMA CGM Group – was awarded the contract to manage, operate, and maintain the Port of Beirut's container terminal for a 10-year period starting in March 2022. The contract includes the modernization and digitization of processes. Given the centrality of the containers' terminal to the port's revenues[15] and its importance for Lebanon's vital imports, a recovery of the containers' terminal restores a vital element of the port, even as it maintains the pre-2019 model of a port independent of the city.

Beirut's port is one of the most critical sea access points along the Eastern Mediterranean and, more broadly, in the Middle East. Increased port capacity has helped to facilitate links and working relationships with more than 50 ports across three continents and import-export

arrangements with 300 additional ports worldwide. Geopolitics over the last decade has intensified its critical position. Beirut's port competes with other regional ports, especially in offering transshipment services. However, a host of geopolitical considerations make Beirut a preferred port of call. With the onset of the war in Syria eight years ago, the Port of Beirut experienced a jump in traffic and concomitant revenues.[16] Regional and global powers have key political-economic interests in rebuilding Beirut's port, as do multinational corporations domiciled in these states. Regional and local political-economic interests will thus only intensify and will have to be navigated throughout its reconstruction. These efforts are enormous and are sure to determine the port's future and all who live with it for decades to come.

The consequences for Lebanon's recovery and economic activity are far-reaching. Moving forward, a people-centered transformation at the port can contribute to bettering the economic and social realities of Beirut. Such intervention would favor an economic model in which activities can spill over to the city, generating employment and income redistribution opportunities for surrounding neighborhoods. Yet any transformation must contend with a long-standing governance model that has privileged the financial interests of an elite few over the needs and demands of the wider public. It should also introduce environmental considerations, to-date missing from the discussion of the port development and recovery. Additionally, the cost of rebuilding the port after the August 4 explosion may reach hundreds of millions of US dollars,[17] requiring that international and regional economic interests play an outsized role in its rebuilding, which requires building safeguards into planning and administering the future port.

Several critical questions are raised about the future development of the port and the direction it will take during the recovery process:

What opportunities and risks are posed by various funding options for the reconstruction of the port?

How can local control of the port be maintained given the need for foreign investment? Are the tools for local control drawn from legal, economic, or community-governance models?

How can the development model of the port reverse the ruptures generated between the city and its port over the past fifty years, so that the port recovery serves as catalyst for a more widely distributed economic opportunity?

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RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Establish a transparent and effective regulatory committee.
Create a permanent port authority with a clear vision of how the port should function, including controlling port activity, working with the private sector, and planning for the future.

The success of the port recovery will depend on the reorganization of its governance model to increase public oversight, secure competence, and limit corruption. This will require the design of a new port law which will grant autonomy to port management, to provide some distance from the political establishment and the city council. Advocates of commission reform point to examples of equitable port authority structures such as those advanced by the European Sea Ports Organization and the Associated British Ports to help restructure the Port of Beirut's governing agency. As several participants point out, any revisions to the port's governance structure will impact operations in the long term, including passing port laws, stakeholder management, and stewardship of the port's operations and finances. A newly-formed port authority could also determine the extent to which the municipality of Beirut participates in decision-making.

Participants warn that reforming the port's governance structure will need support from actors financially and operationally invested in the port's redevelopment. And beyond the immediate financial and operational stakeholders, additional participants and

guardrails are necessary to avoid the risk of port development sidelining inclusive development goals. The reconstruction model, for the Port and its adjoining area, should bring forward values such inclusion and redistribution,[18] as agreed upon by many participants.

Strong and engaged regulatory commissions can develop clear strategic goals and objectives that guide external development. Participants highlight the importance of an oversight commission's role in regulating and enforcing the port's activity and investing in infrastructure that will strengthen social and economic prosperity.

Strong regulatory committee work requires understanding and holding accountable entities that facilitated damage to the port's financial, physical, and infrastructural ecosystems. Accordingly, participants highlighted the demands of the coalition of local stakeholders demanding an

independent investigation of the port explosion. This demand was recurrently echoed by the UN including a call the secretary general in December of 2021, that cited its importance for parties claiming a stake in the recovery, including those who will use the port, those who do business in the area, and the blast victims. Therefore, the independent investigation should consider strengthening social relationships alongside economic development to achieve sustainable and just outcomes.

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2.2 Redesign the port's economic framework. *The port's reconstruction must address the country's inflation by considering alternatives to consumption-driven economic models.*

Since the explosion, advocates have called for a reconceptualization of the port's economic model to support more equitable and fairly distributed revenue streams. The port's 2018 Master Plan understood the urgency to reimagine the port's business model; included were proposals for transforming the first and second basins – where a military base is currently located – into a passenger terminal for visitors. In addition, the World Bank and the Ministry of Public Works commissioned a study in winter 2020 to develop a national port strategy for Lebanon that would identify the relative roles of the main national ports and their relation to each other. Stakeholder interests, including those of terminal operators, shipping companies, and sources of foreign capital will weigh heavily on the port's redevelopment priorities, given Lebanon's underdeveloped infrastructure and regional competition from port operators in the eastern Mediterranean.

Participants warn of exacerbating the current staggering inflation crisis by accepting reconstruction aid. Experts therefore recommended building coalitions that bring together economists, urban planners and designers, and think tanks to rethink

Lebanon's deteriorating economic model. Lebanon's current balance of trade is skewed dramatically toward imports: 38% of GDP is sustained through imports and only 5% through exports. As one participant observes of Lebanon's current trade practices, "It's a model that's designed to favor a very thin class of business interests that basically hold import licenses and exclusive agencies – a tiny minority that benefited enormously over the past few decades from a currency peg that grossly overvalued the local currency, the lira, effectively subsidizing imports and penalizing exports, resulting in this overwhelming reliance on consumption rather than production."

Port administrators and investors should explore reconstruction agendas to reduce Lebanon's economic vulnerabilities. Any future plans for reshaping the Lebanese economy toward a fairer set of outcomes will continue to rely on trade. Investments in expanding port capacity will be crucial to this transition, which needs to prioritize increased exports. This, in turn, requires renewed focus on producing goods for export and building capacity for production. Reconstruction efforts should consider designing broad-scale revenue-generating strategies that connect local and regional transportation networks, support economic growth opportunities in the hinterland, and strengthen port-based industrial activities.

2.3 Utilize port redevelopment to catalyze economic activity and job creation.

Participants acknowledge that the port might not be economically viable in the absence of containerized transshipment, making jobs and other activities dependent on the port vulnerable. However, the port cannot be understood as a transportation system alone; its recovery and redesign require thinking at the most expansive scale of impact. As several participants note, transshipment networks can catalyze other economic activities facilitated by industrial shipping. Participants advise looking at economic opportunity, particularly job creation, as a key performance indicator of the port's reconstruction. Before the blast, the port supported nearly one thousand direct jobs and vast economic opportunities sustained through informal networks anchored by the Port of Beirut.

Participants emphasized the importance of devising plans for reconnecting the neighborhoods surrounding the port to the water, in line with successful approaches championed by other Mediterranean cities in the past two decades such as Barcelona and Genoa. Given that the areas where the blast occurred adjoin relatively shallow waters and had been used exclusively for warehousing for

decades, they present excellent opportunities for recreational and tourist activities that would reconnect Beirut to the port and the seafront and regenerate economic and social activities needed for these urban quarters. Reconnecting the severed areas requires a strategic vision to enable synergies and interactions between the port and the neighboring areas.[19] The port's reconstruction must be attended by urban revitalization (and vice versa).

2.4 Use the port area to showcase green infrastructure. *Build on existing plans and proposals to demonstrate how health and sustainability can be centered in construction and redevelopment.*

Beirut's post-disaster context also presents a unique opportunity to set the stage for deeper investment in equitable and sustainable infrastructures. Beirut's recovery from the port blast presents a space to build back more sustainably by prioritizing green infrastructure in the port area – from urban forestry and green roofs to passive building design and land conservation – as a central tenet of post-disaster reconstruction. The challenge is to dislodge notions of green infrastructure as an extraneous or ancillary value and instead frame post-disaster recovery scenarios as opportunities to advocate for environmental justice in the port area and the related neighborhoods. Equity ought not to be a concern disconnected from sustainability narratives. When crafting public appeals, participants recommend emphasizing green infrastructure's direct benefits of improving public health and long-term ecological and economic sustainability.

Several green projects already are in the pipeline, waiting for funds. Some proposals were fully elaborated prior to the blast and had been granted official approval. This includes the "Plan Vert" and "Liaisons douces," the first comprehensive document that presented a vision toward greening the city, making it pedestrian friendly, and connecting otherwise isolated neighborhoods. Other proposals following the blast have been put forward by civil society, stakeholders from universities, and designers. This includes the ambitious Fouad Boutros Park, a proposal that would connect neighborhoods along a greenbelt, integrate gardens and historic buildings into a single connected public site that provides both green space for recreation and gatherings, while creating a space to house civic and social infrastructure. The proposal for the park is in many ways a distillation of a majority of the recommendations that make up this report. The reconstruction process offers an opportunity to fast-track the development of these projects.

The challenge is to dislodge notions of green infrastructure as extraneous and instead frame post-disaster recovery scenarios as opportunities to advocate for environmental justice.

2.5 Collaborate with Reformers.
Ensure that external investment is willing to support reform in the Lebanese government.

Recovery stakeholders must work toward repairing the fragility of the port's governance. Identifying collaborative international partners, NGOs, and redevelopment investors is key to building an environment that supports regulatory reform. Some participants observed that when combined with strong and equity-oriented planning frameworks and well-negotiated lending terms, foreign investors can bring tremendous opportunities to reconstruction scenarios even as other countries investing in ports have sometimes reduced overall capacity, in part to favor their own ports in a competition for global trade. This is particularly the case for investors with appetites for high-risk investment in ports, such as China, France, and Saudi Arabia.

Under the right conditions, foreign investors can introduce cheaper and more efficient technologies and approaches to accelerate development goals. As other participants warned, however, haphazard foreign investment could disturb complex local dynamics of simmering conflicts and deepen indebtedness, where urban redevelopment and infrastructure projects across greater

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Beirut remain central arenas of contestation between sectarian groups.[20]

Among the challenges to developing strategic partnerships is ensuring that foreign investors are willing to support reforms that can improve long-term governance. For Beirut, in particular, participants urge collaboration with partners who possess deep competencies working in conflict scenarios. As noted by several participants, foreign engagement can prove problematic in the absence of robust regulatory frameworks, given investors' decision-making based on growth forecasts and global business development strategies. An investor's position can aggravate local stressors when rebuilding plans lack frameworks to address broader vulnerabilities in conflict-ridden scenarios. One participant, citing experience in negotiating investments in deep water ports in states with low capacity for developing mega infrastructure projects on their own, suggests that it is crucial to insist on a strategic environmental assessment. This approach can open up space for mitigating harms to vulnerable communities without explicitly engaging complex political dynamics between different sectarian groups.

In Beirut, sectarian tensions, corporate interests, and economic vulnerabilities intersect and permeate all sectors of society, creating conditions for vast conflicts of interest. Bringing recovery plans to fruition requires partnerships with investors holding conflict management expertise to ensure responsive decision-making amidst fluid and dynamic local settings. At the same time, participants emphasized that the port reconstruction financing model must not incur additional loans on future generations.

ACTION AREA III: HOUSING AND LAND USE

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BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CHALLENGES

Beirut's blast caused widespread damage to housing. Rice University's **Beirut Recovery Map** estimated that about 12,000 buildings (or 46.8% of Beirut's housing stock) were affected by the explosion. A **damage assessment** led by the World Bank in the month following the blast found that half the housing stock in districts surrounding the blast was affected, with some 14,000 units destroyed and over 130,000 units needing repair. Low-income housing units bore the brunt of the damage, as blast damage was heightened as a result of overdue maintenance. Repairs to existing housing stock were estimated to require $1.875 billion in new investments.[21] Aside from the urgency of repair, activists and residents alike expressed concerns that the disaster would precipitate land sales for desperate homeowners and accelerate an already acute set of speculative real-estate practices. The prospect of reconstructing the city's historic core mirrored an alarming precedent since it effectively replicated the opportunity posed by the post-civil war reconstruction to enact massive property (and wealth) transfers.

Two months after the blast, the Lebanese Parliament passed **Law 194**, a stop-gap law that established protections for tenants and owners. The legislation introduced a handful of temporary concessions, including freezing evictions for tenants and owners who default on rent or mortgage payments. Law 194 also freezes property transactions in the areas directly surrounding the blast zone for two years and requires landlords to allow tenants to return for a year of residency. The law identifies a unit of the Lebanese Army (FER) as the lead coordinator of the post-disaster process, as part of a recovery committee that brought together directors from several public agencies. The committee, however, remained inactive. Only the army's FER intervened in coordinating the allocation of repair zones for non-governmental organizations (alongside UN agencies) and in distributing compensation, to the extent that funds are available. In practice, only a small percentage of the allocated funds were effectively distributed to date. While this law is widely regarded as an urgently needed initial step taken by Parliament, legislators **missed an opportunity to establish definite processes for** the modality of the recovery. Despite **ongoing advocacy for amendment and expansion**, the temporary law is slated to expire in the fall of 2022.

The repair of homes affected by the blast proceeded in a decentralized modality through which every household was treated as an individual unit. As of spring 2022, the BUL sample of eight clusters (432 units, 87 buildings) showed that more than 40% of the units in the areas affected by the blast remained vacant. Furthermore, no overarching housing and land use plan has been established for the blast area. Instead, most housing repairs for personal residences are conducted through one of two modalities.

Households with access to funds in foreign currencies have independently rehabilitated their apartments, having lost hope for compensation through reconstruction funds.[22] Since the fall of 2020, many local and international NGOs have expressed support for the repair of middle and low-income apartments. Despite some coordination efforts by UN bodies and especially the FER, most NGOs worked individually with coordination severely lacking. These NGOs have either conducted the repairs themselves (using their own teams or hired teams), or

they have funded households who took charge of the repair processes. Two years after the blast, more than half the apartments in the areas directly affected by the blast have been listed as "fixed." Yet there are serious inconsistencies in the levels and modalities of repair. There was, for example, no clear standard for what constitutes a "repaired apartment," or whether repair works would cover only doors and windows, or if they extend to painting or furniture.

Most NGOs adopted a lump-sum budget per unit, which meant that apartment repairs varied considerably with the more severely affected units remaining worse off. NGOs also worked at the scale of the individual apartment, therefore often neglecting shared building amenities (e.g., building entrances, stairwells, elevators, façades). There were also no consistent guidelines for who is eligible for help, with many Lebanese NGOs opting to prioritize Lebanese citizens over migrant workers or refugees. Conversely, a handful of NGOs opted to intervene on a cluster of buildings and repair an entire block. Eventually, differences in the modes of operation generated inequities across households and neighborhoods, reinforcing the sense of injustice among the more neglected households. Worse, the largely individuated process of post-disaster recovery led to competition among households for who will attract more NGO aid, undermining the collaborative processes witnessed in the aftermath of the blast.

The "Open House" resource center for recovery plan information and collective decision-making processes.

Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck the coastal city of Constitución, Chile, in 2010, private actors working to rebuild the coastal city constructed a recovery resource center in the city's main square to help guide residents through the recovery process. The "open house" offered residents the opportunity to view plans for the recovery, join meetings to voice concerns about reconstruction, and participate in collective decision-making processes. The community engagement process helped to scope the recovery process, including clarifying which state agencies and firms were involved in the design and reconstruction of housing, and yielded ongoing feedback from community members. Introducing participatory infrastructure such as a recovery resource center to address the land use plan helped foster trust and transparency between residents and non-local actors. In response, private actors reported that the "open house" mechanism allowed them to garner crucial information from area residents not typically available through official state channels. As one meeting participant remarked, "without the opportunity for holistic knowledge sharing, recovery planning would have approached reconstruction by answering the wrong questions." While there was room for improvement, the process nudged broader discussions in Chile around participatory planning.

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The following questions were identified as critical challenges to be considered in the post-disaster recovery:

What innovations in reconstruction management can support inclusive approaches extending beyond disaster recovery scenarios?

How can the expansion of affordable housing become a central goal of reconstruction planning efforts; what precedents exist for safeguarding a housing sector sensitive to predatory financialization schemes?

How can disaster-based policy concessions be retained beyond the recovery phase, and what can be gleaned from experimental housing precedents that seek to improve the lives of vulnerable populations?

The breadth of the rebuilding effort presents opportunities to compel government leaders and development actors to introduce overdue policy reforms that fortify constitutionally protected housing rights and create opportunities for innovative re-imaginings of land and housing. Arriving at tentative answers to these questions can help to lower barriers to access of housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LAND AND HOUSING

3.1 Prioritize Participatory Infrastructure for Land and Housing Planning.

Even two years after a disaster strikes, as in Beirut, creating participatory infrastructure in which civil society and stakeholders collaborate on recovery efforts can close knowledge gaps and reconcile divisions among parties on the ground.

Participatory processes facilitate inclusive housing and land use reform in post-disaster settings. While participatory processes require time and effort, global studies underscore how it can accelerate recovery efforts, generate more equitable outcomes,[23] and provide accountability.[24]

As one participant, drawing on the example of an earthquake recovery effort, observed, it is crucial to create a structure for listening to community priorities before identifying possible recovery responses to a disaster. As the participant observes, "participation was crucial not only to get from the people an answer, but mainly to frame the right question. If it was not for participation, we would have answered the wrong question."

Additionally, successful community resilience frameworks recognize the importance of acknowledging existing community-led plans and informal decision-making practices to aid recovery efforts. Accordingly, humanitarian aid agencies are encouraged to identify pre-existing community plans, when they exist, and establish a baseline understanding of former conditions and envisioned transformations. This is especially crucial in places lacking centralized planning institutions, like Beirut, whereby necessity, residents may have informally implemented neighborhood plans.

Drawing on experience responding to the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, which fell unequally along the lines of existing poverty and segregation, one meeting attendee noted that extant community plans, formalized in consultation with local NGOs and municipal agencies, allowed local and international actors to identify and prioritize the needs that communities themselves articulated. As one participant observes, speaking of a post-recovery effort following the devastating hurricane, "Planning matters significantly. And one of the lessons that we've learned

… is that you don't necessarily want to start from scratch. And communities more often than not have previous plans in place. So, you start with that. You start with those kernels, with those seeds of planning that were already in place." Through a series of neighborhood audits, organic planning processes that predated Hurricane Maria recovery efforts were revealed, thereby creating opportunities for aid agencies to reinforce community visions by implementing formal planning structures not accounted for through informal approaches. Further, achieving robust community participation through a collaborative rebuilding framework was thought to send encouraging signals to members of the donor community with the capacity to dedicate additional funding towards rebuilding efforts.

Building on that impulse, the Beirut Urban Lab championed an effort of community building that developed participatory design interventions in Karantina, the most impoverished neighborhood affected by the blast. The design proposals have so far materialized in a community center and in the redesign of some of the neighborhood streets.

While Lebanon's housing policy safeguards the rights of property owners, few legal frameworks exist to extend protections to renters. Advocacy platforms, such as resident-based associations, have consistently demonstrated positive outcomes in bolstering the political capacity of vulnerable communities, such as the post-earthquake recovery of Gölcük, Turkey, in 1999.[25] Resident-based coalitions have proven effective in reducing renter vulnerability by articulating renters' rights, strengthening communication between tenants and property owners, improving property maintenance and living conditions, and, at the macro level, ensuring that community equity gets factored into planning processes. In Beirut's post-disaster conditions, legally registered associations offer community leaders expanded opportunities to represent a cross-section of disaster victims while elevating the bargaining power of individual citizens through collective action and representation.[26] By working with legal aid organizations or through supportive advocacy networks, residents can establish formally recognized associations to negotiate with the state and humanitarian organizations,

monitor restitution measures, and stake a claim in long-term planning processes.

Mobilizing Beirut's diverse and often divided populations toward building place-based coalitions requires broadly appealing narratives that underscore common social, political, and economic goals. In addition to advocating for housing rights, connecting residents to recognizable concerns – like financial instability and government corruption – may prompt engagement from community groups that have not previously found alignment. Diverse resident coalitions could play essential roles in long-term recovery strategies, as local leaders often remain embedded in their communities well after international actors and donors reduce their presence in reconstruction schemes.

3.2 Adopt Pro-Affordable Housing Vacancy Taxes. *Incentivize land use for inclusion, minimizing land opportunism, by implementing a vacant land and unit tax to incentivize the expansion of the housing sector.*

Beirut's home vacancy rates remain high across all neighborhoods surrounding the blast-affected areas, with nearly 25% of properties sitting empty. To increase the supply of housing, participants proposed to combat speculative development practices by adopting vacancy laws that would tax empty housing units now fully exempted from municipal and property taxes. It is noteworthy that by exempting vacant housing from paying taxes, Lebanon's policymakers incentivize speculation against the recognized best practices of other cities around the globe. Thus, municipal and state governments have successfully enacted increasing vacant land taxes over the past few decades, including major urban centers such as New York City, Seoul, and Vancouver. Often, taxes are paired with inclusive regeneration processes to rethink possibilities for making creative use of vacant land.[27] In examples

provided by participants with knowledge of tax policies in Peru and Vancouver, proceeds from these taxes went directly to the construction of affordable housing, a provision that the Lebanese government should replicate, given the magnitude of the housing crisis.

Without reform, policy measures encouraging land vacancy, particularly those exempting empty apartments from municipal and property taxes, will continue to exacerbate Beirut's housing crisis. The current regulatory framework attracts foreign investment in real estate that often sits vacant. The Lebanese government has passed laws allowing developers to make price adjustments on land before taxes are imposed. This business environment incentivizes developers to invest in real estate with confidence that Lebanon's public policy provides for the circumvention of tax payments on speculative land acquisition.

Timely action to pass a vacant land tax is critical as are other interventions that could reduce the artificially inflated land gap that results from intensifying land exploitation factors over the past three decades (e.g.,

2004 building law). Currently, without a legal framework to combat vacant and abandoned properties – or to protect the rights of residents to stay in place – titleholders are incentivized to demolish buildings and let them sit empty until motivated by favorable development conditions. Introducing a vacant land tax aligns with previous local initiatives. The Public Corporation for Housing has voted on and agreed to a series of reforms to the housing sector, including a tax on vacant land across the entire country.

Vacancy laws that tax empty units and parcels could reduce speculation and help fund affordable housing construction.

3.3 **Reinforce tenant protections against evictions.** *Continue to freeze evictions for tenants, regardless of their legal status.*

The process of obtaining housing – and the rights around housing – matters to displaced households in post-disaster settings more than any specific architectural form or urban location.[28] Meeting participants advocated for the extension of eviction moratoriums and housing subsidies for the most vulnerable individuals displaced by the blast. While these steps offer critical assurances to support Beirut's housing sector in the immediate post-disaster period, temporary mandates only act to delay the collapse of the housing sector without committed policy reforms.

While Law 194 freezes evictions and extends legal rental agreements, residents without formal housing contracts, many of whom are migrant workers and refugees, have no protection from evictions. In the current permitting process, property owners and landlords control property repairs and benefit from reconstruction entitlement programs that reimburse self-managed construction on a per household basis. Tenants who may wish to undertake repairs have no power or compensatory support to do so without authorization from landlords. Imbalances in the permitting process along with recovery aid tethered to property ownership facilitate

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the displacement of vulnerable tenants by incentivizing opportunistic landlords to evict residents, particularly in multi-unit dwellings, in exchange for a greater share of a property's assessed recovery aid. Participants advocated for government intervention to preserve right-to-housing protections for all and the extension of eviction bans regardless of the legal or social status of tenants.

3.4 Adopt a Phased Housing Recovery. *Embrace incremental construction and strategic planning.*

Resources to rebuild housing are rarely sufficient in post-disaster contexts. For Beirut, participants advocate that actors on the ground embrace incremental construction, a phased approach to reconstruction offering property owners the flexibility to rebuild homes based on long-term growth forecasting. Incremental, or owner-driven rebuilding, has been endorsed by the World Bank for its flexibility and cost effectiveness, noting that it provides "the most empowering, dignified, sustainable, and cost-effective reconstruction approach in many types of post-disaster situations."[29]

Incremental construction was a key recovery strategy in response to the catastrophic damage caused by the 2010 earthquake and tsunami in Constitución, Chile. The Chilean government, together with international actors, implemented a reconstruction plan that prioritized the distribution of aid to projects with high levels of difficulty for owners and renters to complete themselves (e.g., structural repairs, construction requiring

large scale equipment and machinery); and projects requiring high-level coordination (e.g., projects requiring complex connections to essential services or special permitting and sites with high-density populations).

Residents thus had the opportunity to take ownership of project completion. As one participant highlighted, "the question of incrementality… takes into consideration expansion that will happen anyhow, [residents] can customize something that would have been impossible to do at a centralized level." In the process, residents invested in assets that appreciated and built household wealth, unlike most social housing, which depreciates immediately upon completion of construction. When provided with information on vendors and contractors, families helped reignite the local economy by engaging workers from the area's local construction industry. This model of government investment supplemented by individual expenditures alongside open-source housing blueprints can and should be adopted in Beirut.

3.5 Encourage the adoption of tools and policies that can improve community-driven land trusts and cooperative housing structures. *Create opportunities for novel housing and financing approaches to arise.*

Financial mechanisms supporting recovery efforts in Beirut remain stalled and poorly coordinated due to bureaucratic mismanagement, thus disrupting the allocation of aid to repair residential properties and small businesses. Further exacerbating instability are longstanding policies benefiting property owners threatening the return of displaced tenants and the vitality of Beirut's central neighborhoods. While entrepreneurial residents – particularly those with access to financial and social capital through private resources and expatriate networks – are initiating urgent property repairs, such limited remedies do not address exclusionary housing policies and practices. Faced with Lebanon's fractured political environment, investing in alternative housing and financial models, including Cooperative housing and community land trusts, is recommended to

strengthen the housing sector and repair social ties over the short and long term.

Although widely advocated and rarely taken up, Cooperative Housing and Community Land Trusts offer models containing valuable tenets to achieve unmet social and structural needs. Core values such as collective decision making, collaborative development, and shared community equity, common among Cooperative Housing and Community Land Trust arrangements, were underscored by housing advocates as scalable points of entry that offer pathways to adopt inclusive housing and financialization models.

Cooperative housing models provide opportunities for shared ownership of housing that is uniquely controlled and managed through a membership-based association to realize a commonly shared set of economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations.[30] Similarly, community land trusts can play a vital role in stabilizing affordable housing for vulnerable populations. Land trusts are designed to ensure land stewardship by members of

a place-based community through novel ownership agreements managed and maintained by a non-profit corporation.[31] While community land trusts are adaptable to various community configurations, their primary value is to ensure long-term housing affordability. Whether undertaken by affinity groups or as a precedent for state-led efforts, exploring the adaptability of alternative housing models can offer relief to Beirut's urgent housing crisis. Precedents from Puerto Rico and Chicago were mentioned to illustrate methods of empowering vulnerable populations through collective ownership and resource-sharing frameworks.

ACTION AREA IV:
BUILT HERITAGE

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BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CHALLENGES

The explosion at the Port of Beirut severely affected the urban heritage of Lebanon's capital city. The districts surrounding the port, including the city's historic core and adjacent extensions, absorbed the brunt of the blast. Based on an assessment conducted by the World Bank, EU, and UN in the weeks after the explosion, at least 652 public and private buildings of heritage value were damaged. These buildings date back more than a century, from the late-1800s through the 1930s, many representing the unique form of early modern architecture that emerged in Lebanon in the late Ottoman period.[32] According to an **assessment report from the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects**, 92 of these structures are at a high or medium risk of collapsing. At least 30 of the worst affected heritage buildings are threatened with immediate demolition.

The urban neighborhoods most affected by the port explosion have distinct histories and patterns of urbanization. Rather than monumental buildings or exceptional features, the heritage value of these neighborhoods rested on their existence as dynamic urban quarters that reflect the historical and contemporary transformations of the city,

as well as a mode of living or lifestyle. It is important to understand heritage not as a set of buildings to reflect an ossified moment in time or of unified design. The existing heritage in Beirut's historical district is "living," subject to evolution and adaptation. It is essential to keep it as such both to allow for its continued usage and the multiple histories and values that inform heritage in Beirut.

A main challenge facing the protection of the city's heritage – before and after the port explosion – is the regulatory framework that widens the rent gap across the city in ways that render heritage preservation almost impossible. Regulations that govern the preservation of historical buildings and landmarks are deficient. Criteria for what constitutes a heritage site is lacking, as is support or subsidy to property owners whose property is classified as "heritage".

Lebanon's sole preservation framework dates to 1933, enacted during the French Mandate, and it only protects buildings constructed before 1700. Since the Taif agreement of 1990 that marked a formal end to 15 years of civil war, activists, architects, and urban practitioners have struggled to protect the

city's heritage. These coalitions advocated for several heritage building classifications, but all attempts to holistically preserve the urban fabric or specific urban clusters have failed given powerful property interests that resist classifications seen to go against the interests of landowners. Accordingly, only individual heritage building classifications have been successful, and these are the subject of recurrent negotiations and reclassifications.

These discrete classifications have left unchecked the demolition of large swathes of the city's heritage sites. In parallel, several heritage preservation draft laws have been submitted to the parliament, none having been formally approved. Whether there will be political support for this measure and sufficient endorsement for a law to pass remains to be seen, given the strength of the real-estate lobby.

On the other hand, the urban regulations that govern property and building development, particularly the 2004 building law that exponentially intensified building rights, considerably increase the incentive to demolish older buildings. Equally important, an old rent control regulation dating back to the pre-civil war period maintains a

disproportionate influence over many heritage buildings and those residing in them. The rule incentivizes landlords and owners to demolish their property to benefit economically from the lots, rather than repair them.

Consequently, during the past two decades, as a result of decay and teardowns, the number of heritage buildings in the city have been reduced by 20%, and many more threaten to collapse due to the lack of maintenance. Since the port explosion, the role of heritage protection in the recovery process has received significant attention from academics and urban practitioners, public sector officials, and international organizations. The Directorate General of Antiquities, the City's Governor, the (now former) President of the Order of Engineers and Architects, and a handful of architects have all played a critical role in surveying and assessing damages, in the process amplifying calls for the rehabilitation of the city's heritage. Their intervention included an ad-hoc decision to protect buildings of historical value even when they were not officially classified as such.

Following the blast, local architects formed a coalition, the Beirut Heritage Initiative (BHI), to coordinate heritage recovery efforts. In this regard, along with the Fondation de France, BHI published a restoration manual to serve as a technical guideline for the rehabilitation of Heritage buildings. Political and legal actors have intervened by seeking to amend laws governing the redevelopment of destroyed areas, principally Law 194. Meanwhile, international actors like UNESCO have committed to raising significant resources to rebuild Beirut's most affected districts, with attention to culture and heritage. UNESCO has funded a study – "Identifying Cultural Heritage Attributes in Beirut Blast Damaged Areas," led by Howayda al-Harithy, one of the Urban Lab directors – to identify heritage layers. A follow-up study is currently reviewing urban regulations in order to protect these layers. Moreover, the World Bank has recently approved a $13 million dollar package to repair structurally damaged buildings that hold special cultural and social value, an initial, though inadequately funded, commitment for urban heritage protection. This support comes in a context in which discussions of heritage are tightly connected to a potential economic recovery plan where the city's cultural assets could serve as economic levers for a future development strategy.

From the discussion, five core questions emerged:

How can we make sure that heritage protection is framed as a project that acknowledges residents' aspirations and protects their livelihoods, rather than one that monumentalizes buildings and delays recovery?

How might it be possible to build a coalition to support heritage preservation in ways that counter decades of real-estate intensive interests in the built environment?

To what extent should we memorialize disasters in the restoration of heritage sites?

What institutional capacities and what degree of coordination is needed to pursue comprehensive and integrated modes of heritage preservation that link protection to economic incentives?

How do we build social infrastructure into preservation to bring together disparate communities?

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Empower Communities through Representational Heritage Recovery. *Develop a broadly representational heritage recovery plan by encouraging participatory planning approaches.*

Meeting attendees with expertise in preservation called on reconstruction stakeholders in Lebanon to invest in heritage recovery responses that support citizen empowerment as a priority of cultural management programs. Recognizing local heritage assets – from undesignated sites of local significance to intangible social histories and customs – requires adopting innovative cultural management practices that engage diverse stakeholders from outside the field. In response, meeting attendees advocate for what they described as essential in heritage regeneration work:[33] implementing inclusive planning strategies that incorporate community knowledge, participatory engagement, and collective decision-making to strengthen community resilience and ensure local cultural resources receive protection on par with historically designated landmarks.

Such a move includes the possibility of redefining heritage toward including what communities articulate as heritage, what they deem important to the memory of places and the imagining of its future. This recovery should include a process by which people can participate in defining what constitutes

heritage, so that it is not simply the projection of disciplinary definitions. Such an effort expands heritage to include spaces of shared memory, places of significance which might not rise to the level of historic significance, and spaces that store the social practices of a community.

To achieve meaningful community participation, experts stressed the importance of identifying and working alongside the intended beneficiaries of preservation initiatives to meet recovery goals and promote enduring stewardship practices. Accordingly, cultural managers recommended designing accessible community-specific processes with local stakeholders, including asset identification and mapping,

documentation and interpretation, and long-term strategic planning. As reported by heritage managers, making investments in community-based planning approaches can benefit residents and small business owners who would be otherwise left out[34]– and yield more complex interpretations of historical processes – revealing layers of social dynamics, religious histories, economic relationships, and territorial interventions that deepen understanding of cultural heritage and animate connections to sites of living memory.

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Rebuilding Haiti's Gingerbread Houses.

Preservation experts working in Haiti following the Port-au-Prince earthquake in 2010 emphasized how the reconstruction of the Gingerbread Neighborhood was aided by a diverse coalition of local stakeholders. Coordinated by a consortium of NGOs, the recovery response invited local homeowners, artists, and artisans to work collaboratively with international institutions and local authorities to conserve a neighborhood of uniquely Haitian architectural heritage known as the Gingerbread Houses. Through regularly held meetings joining over 200 residents in a series of capacity-building initiatives and educational programming, community members had the opportunity to provide input on the cultural significance of landmarked buildings while learning enduring skills that support heritage stewardship. As a program manager relayed, "elevating the role of community in the recovery process instilled a sense of pride and hope in the neighborhood, which was critical to managing the post-disaster response… what people needed most was hope, employment opportunities, training – rebuilding lives."

4.2 Promote Skills-Building and Economic Empowerment. *Tie heritage restoration and rebuilding efforts to capacity-building opportunities.*

Heritage professionals in Beirut encourage government leaders and NGOs to expand capacity building projects, such as workforce development programs that train workers in construction trades and native building techniques. The reliance on traditional material and technique helps to integrate capacity building in heritage restoration as an economic opportunity for low-income workers who simultaneously contribute to sustainable building construction. This is a model that has been used to extraordinary effect elsewhere by organizations ranging from the Aga Khan Foundation to the Turquoise Mountain Foundation.

Through reconstruction efforts led by NGOs, citizens are restoring local buildings with neighbors and encountering, defining, and repairing heritage. Reviving skills such as stonemasonry, carpentry, and ironwork ensures the authenticity of conservation efforts by restoring the continuity of cultural knowledge in artisanal building practices and fluency in local material specificity.

Tying heritage restoration to workforce training programs can relieve Beirut's widespread unemployment and open pathways for

vocations in construction and preservation. The widespread destruction resulting from the past decade of conflict in Syria has left a shortage of skilled labor to rehabilitate the untold numbers of damaged structures, including homes and public buildings. Building on decades of government and NGO experiments, the Aleppo Heritage Fund developed a heritage conservation program focused on women's empowerment to alleviate this disparity. Participants hone technical trade skills to restore historic buildings. Knowledge gained from such programs supports the recovery process while building the necessary skills for individuals to pursue rehabilitation projects independently. Training programs such as these cultivate essential knowledge, allowing for generational stewardship of heritage assets that can lead to long-term employment opportunities and improved livelihoods.[35] Moreover, workforce retraining supports the construction industry, which has experienced prolonged labor shortages throughout the region.[36]

Expanding community capacity can also make use of the ecosystem of informal aid that supports economic empowerment. Ideally, funding in a post-disaster environment would be provided and guided by a strong

and accountable state apparatus. Given the ongoing delays in receiving assistance from government sources, everyday citizens have turned to community support channels to finance urgent building repairs. Individuals, non-profits, and small businesses underserved by recovery support programs have sought out crowdfunding vehicles to underwrite self-managed restoration projects. Crowdsourcing campaigns have demonstrated success in providing aid to micro- and medium-sized enterprises. *Ad hoc* campaigns benefitting single-household projects have raised support as high as $80,000. More robust efforts undertaken by small businesses and nonprofits have yielded upwards of $1 million. Informal financing structures such as crowdfunding, mutual aid, and peer-to-peer lending can be made more accessible by sharing technical materials that outline the ecosystem of funding platforms and guide crowdfunding engagement practices and the implications of receiving funding. Others suggest **rebuilding-sensitive housing improvement financing** when there is repayment capacity. While not advised as a long-term financing strategy, broadening the landscape of available funding opportunities is considered a viable tactic to support urgent recovery needs.

4.3 Identify Trusted Associates and Cultural Brokers.

Participants recommend engaging cultural brokers to help mediate processes between experts and community members. Coined by cultural anthropologist Richard Kurin, "cultural brokers" are actors – individuals, academic institutions, advocacy organizations, and other intermediaries – who interface between stakeholder institutions and community members to bring mutual interests into focus. They are often employed at small scales, especially in post-disaster contexts, ensuring that local voices are represented, resources remain accessible, and community rights are protected. Cultural brokers are instrumental to communities and institutions in heritage situations. Through the provision of cultural and linguistic translation services, they help minimize conflict by making processes and objectives legible to all parties. Cultural brokers can facilitate long-term community empowerment by sharing the knowledge and tools necessary for vulnerable populations to engage in dialogue and negotiation with established institutional forces.

Beirut has the benefit of an often underutilized and misunderstood "cultural broker" in the form of universities. Beirut's

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vibrant academic institutions work with artists, collectives, local NGOs, and local religious institutions and can help contribute to a stronger local civic ecosystem. International organizations should prioritize partnerships with these institutions in the process of undertaking heritage restoration.

4.4. Locate Opportunities to Promote Multiple Goals, Including Restoring Housing and Building Social and Civic Infrastructure.

Investigate opportunities for development and policy reform to incentivize heritage restoration while promoting community-oriented goals.

Public policy can and should tie heritage protection, and attendant legislation, to broader social goals. Rather than incentivizing restoration, Lebanon's present real estate tax code supports development practices that favor demolishing property for economic gain, as detailed in the previous section. Heritage consultants recommend devising amortization vehicles that depreciate real property values as an incentive for heritage development. Introducing amortization terms could support the need to create stabilizing environments, by requiring property owners and developers to honor their obligations through fixed time-bound schedules as a means of fully capturing the value of investments. As one meeting participant remarks, "issuing disincentives on land speculation is the simplest way for

governments to show investment in their preservation initiatives. In the context of Beirut's recovery, calling on government leaders to issue selective development terms might be easier for achieving preservation goals than offering generous funding packages to real estate developers."

For community stakeholders, clarifying available funding sources and their terms can guide heritage financing strategies. Mapping the landscape of heritage financing, from micro-level aid to major capital and public funds, would allow community leaders to coordinate areas of synergy in alignment with social goals. Such approaches also help target areas around which to develop disincentives, namely, areas where the erasure of social memory or threats to sites of local significance might emerge. Heritage consultants recommend that local actors explore opportunities for rededicating funds made available for other public uses – schools, hospitals, and community facilities, among others – that can support conservation efforts. As one participated observes, "there is never money to preserve heritage buildings, but there is always money to build a school, to build a health clinic, to create

other community facilities, and it would be a great thing if anybody from the conservation community can help redirect some of those funds into retrofitting and adaptive reuse of a historic building [while also using the site for other social functions]."

Local groups are encouraged to explore funding opportunities allocated for public facilities that could support the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, allowing historic buildings to serve practical purposes – such as embedding a community health clinic (for which there might be funding) within a heritage site (for which there is very little funding) – while preserving social memory and instilling a sense of community pride. As one participant noted from experience in Indonesia, incorporating community material inside sites of memory can foster a sense of connection: "we started with a museum that allows people to *attach themselves* to the site, to narrate something of their daily life […]: think about photographs, maps, marking of maps in the museum that people could re-attach themselves to a landscape that had been devastated."

Another important multidimensional goal brings the recovery of the port and its relation to the city as an important aspect of heritage approaches. Beirut's unique history rests on its position as a port city, connected globally to other anchors around the Mediterranean through its historical trades. This can occur on many levels. At the spatial level, it can translate into urban design strategies (see also port section and public space sections), through which the historical interdependence of the port and the city is recovered. Socially, it may entail initiatives that invite city dwellers to recover the "port city" through commemorating networks of historical connections.

4.5. Consider Established Guidance from Local and International Organizations.

Leverage local and international heritage development policy frameworks to guide Lebanon's post-disaster heritage recovery.

The Beirut context represents a moment in which an urban-scale reconstruction event may be strengthened by policy recommendations established by local and international agencies to balance cultural heritage, social equity, and economic development. Accordingly, Lebanon's governance and heritage sectors are encouraged to adopt policy recommendations emerging from UNESCO's 2017 Warsaw convention, "The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery." The convention set forth updated practices for the recovery and reconstruction of cultural heritage in post-disaster contexts. Recommendations emphasize that cultural heritage recovery frameworks "should not be considered in isolation from other broader social, economic and environmental issues in the context of post-conflict or post-disaster recovery and reconstruction policies and plans."[37] The doctrine explicitly calls for addressing property title issues alongside social justice.[38] Adopting a people-centered approach considers what access means more fulsomely in a broad and diverse urban context, where cultural heritage is not monolithic. A rights-based approach should work towards identifying cultural rights and recognizing

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their holders to ensure that cultural stakeholders are informed and consent to decision-making.

Participants advise the adoption of state and municipal legal frameworks that protect cultural heritage. In 2017, the Lebanese government ratified a legal proposal to preserve the heritage of specific urban districts – the Law of Built Heritage. The law remains, pending discussion and approval by Parliament. The Law of Built Heritage allows for the protection of buildings and districts, using Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as its primary tool for heritage protection. Many urbanists in Lebanon have criticized the law, seeing TDR as an inadequate and problematic policy. These critics insist that public authorities have other policy tools at their disposal, such as revoking "building rights" (FAR, or density allowances), a move that existing urban laws in Lebanon permit. Thus, TDR becomes an unnecessary policy fix to a problem that requires a more holistic solution that accounts for the city's wider urban fabric. Currently, new studies are underway to further consider the feasibility of the implementation of the TDR rule by

identifying "receiving areas" and related mechanisms.

To overcome mistrust in institutions and opaque top-down decision-making processes, local actors must work with government and NGOs while maintaining the freedom to criticize and denounce misconduct in practice. Beyond the Lebanese military, attendees identified the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) as an active public agency in the field, coordinating between various heritage reconstruction stakeholders and processes. As the recovery process moves forward, the DGA – an agency entrusted with the protection of Lebanon's national patrimony – represents the only heritage institution within the Lebanese government engaged in the reconstruction process. Therefore, the DGA should serve as a key actor to help coordinate community input and decision-making.

ACTION AREA V: ACTIVATING PUBLIC SPACE

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BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CHALLENGES

The blast severely affected an already diminished infrastructure of public spaces. Beirut lacked open green spaces and active public areas even before the blast. The city features only a handful of officially-designated public parks, all of which suffer from significant disinvestment. The Plan Vert de Beyrouth, a study conducted with the support of the French Region Ile de France to map and enhance the city's infrastructure of public squares and open areas in the city, found that Beirut had less than one square meter of open space per capita – well below the World Health Organization's recommended ten square-meters per capita. The neighborhood squares that exist, moreover, are largely neglected; some have been left to deteriorate while a handful of others are locked, blocking public access, and go unused.[39] Consequently, the infrastructure of public spaces consisted essentially of sidewalks and shared ad-hoc areas, many of which were rendered unusable by the blast, and many remain to-date cluttered with debris and scaffolding.

Despite their poor conditions, even limited public spaces provide vital shared spaces, and they are often cited by residents as a priority

in the rebuilding effort. This is evidenced through studies of six neighborhoods affected by the blast that was piloted in Fall 2020 by the Beirut Urban Lab, in partnership with the NGO ACTED. The studies found that residents consistently mentioned street corners as spaces of social gathering, at least as often as public squares and other amenities. Street-level practices ultimately speak to the social-spatial conditions within specific areas of the city, or the enmeshment of social relations and public spaces, and how each informs, influences, and mediates the other. They show how informal activities contribute to the vitality of neighborhood life. For instance, after the port explosion and amid the ruins of their homes, some residents of the Karantina district – an area directly fronting the port and that was heavily damaged – gathered in alleyways; children in the area continued to play football in the debris-strewn streets.[40] Such examples of street-level socializing indicate a persistent need for local initiatives that cultivate social-spatial interaction and place-making.

The effects of the blast compounded the derelict condition of public spaces.

Looking back to the past decades, four interrelated trends eroded public and civic spaces – and their related activities – in Beirut's center. First, public agencies have deprioritized and neglected public parks and plazas. Second, and in parallel, the intensive financialization policies of the last decade that sought to attract foreign capital through lucrative real-estate incentives led to astronomical increases in land prices which often force out and erode cultural institutions and initiatives related to the arts. Third, both state and private militarized security have shrunken Beirut's shared and open spaces, particularly since 2005, and considerably restricted the potential of its streets and neighborhoods to act as ad-hoc social spaces in which communities could gather across social divisions.[41] Fourth, the privatization of shared areas, including the city's seafront, is further accelerated by social and governance norms that place the practices of leisure and the arts within the private domain, whose key actors are generally seen as better cultivators of culture than public actors or institutions. Since the 1990s, Beirut has also witnessed the proliferation of privately held open spaces, particularly in shopping malls. The

Accelerated implementation of community infrastructure in Medellín.

After years of drug-related violence in Medellín, Colombia, city executives worked directly with communities to restore the city's human and material losses. Designing a recovery strategy demanded the aid of multidisciplinary teams working with community members to tackle problems of health, education, labor, and security, among others. Accordingly, the mayor's administration built a task force composed of innovative thinkers and problem-solvers from architecture, public health, math and science, education, and law, to construct resiliency programs that would support the development of enduring communities.

Rapid assessments and quick actions can be effective ways for the recovery funds to reach vulnerable communities. For Medellín's political leaders, dressing the city's physical and psychic wounds was crucial for a citywide recovery. Government officials canvassed neighborhoods across the city, listening to residents, local organizations, the business community, and others on how best to strengthen communities and rebuild trust in government and institutions. City officials understood that rebuilding communities meant that teams needed to work quickly to demonstrate the impact of recovery planning efforts. The city accelerated the implementation of reconstruction programs, giving early and sustained attention to those affected most by critical challenges, allowing communities to witness immediate improvements to their lives.

Attempts to nourish civic life in Medellín over the mayor's four-year tenure focused on underserved areas and produced assuring outcomes for restoring individual dignity and rebuilding community hope.

consequences of these trends have been dire and attenuate public amenities.

Despite the pressing need for more public space, the first year of the post-disaster recovery concentrated almost exclusively on shelter recovery, prioritizing homes in a largely individualized form. In the absence of public agencies to act as custodians of shared spaces, NGOs and civic groups largely worked with individual households. The outcome was an extended sense of urban disarray that contributed to the loss of a sense of place and belonging, reported by many residents who refrained from returning even after their apartments were repaired. In the second year after the blast, NGOs paid closer attention to gardens and parks, with several organizations investing in targeted interventions on public space. The Beirut Urban Lab survey in June 2022 found that a total of 18 interventions had been completed by NGOs on public space, and another eight were being planned.[42] Moreover, an ambitious plan seeks to turn the expropriated area for a planned highway into a city-park that goes through the heart of the neighborhoods affected by the blast and pedestrianizes substantial sections of the neighborhood. It currently serves as a

pilot coordinated between the Beirut Urban Lab and partner NGOs.

As Beirut continues to recover from the port explosion, the need grows urgent to reclaim civic life and the spaces facilitating public assembly. The examples here source ideas from creative communities about reconfiguring civic relationships to promote collective healing. Rebuilding the commons will necessitate strong alliances and the adoption of new engagement models to help stimulate the transformation of the public sphere and the development of civic identity. The intersections between politics, art, and the commons will thus likely drive future efforts to activate public space in Beirut. Rebuilding the commons – and the civic and social infrastructure that public space sustains – is now a priority. Beirut's parks, streets, sidewalks must be recognized as critical investments, along with the assemblies of people, activities and organizations that fill them with protests, art and imagination, joyous exchanges, and serendipitous encounters across social divisions.

From the discussion, four core questions emerged:

How can interventions on shared and open spaces work to bring together residents, public authorities, and community groups in order to support the process of collective, urban recovery that recognizes and overcomes social divisions and distinctions in the neighborhoods?

How can we establish custodianship over public spaces to ensure that spaces designed or invested now by NGOs remain accessible and well-maintained for the community at large?

Can these efforts be sustained and scaled through public agencies?

How can the design of open and shared space account for the fractured nature of society, the diversity of communities, and the tensions that exist between them?

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Build Civic and Social Infrastructure Using Investments in Physical Space. *Prioritize reconstruction approaches that work towards repairing the social fabric.*

Investments to restore fractured social and civic relationships are the foundation to engaging in transformational change at the urban scale in post-disaster scenarios. Participants shared practical approaches emphasizing five action areas for reconstruction leaders to focus efforts: assessing community needs, rebuilding public space, building collaborative interdisciplinary teams, accelerating timelines, and prioritizing the most vulnerable.

Inclusive processes – in which community members co-create solutions to the problems they face alongside experts from a range of domains and decision-makers – can help unlock action in public space.

In the context of Beirut's recovery, tending to underserved communities, particularly those suffering from severe poverty, violence, and households threatened by displacement, should be prioritized to reinvigorate the city's wellbeing. The Beirut Urban Lab's assessments and community-driven interventions in Karantina, one of the poorer neighborhoods, offer a tangible model for mobilizing change in a way that is grounded, targeted, and effective.

Building belonging in Nairobi through the arts.

In Nairobi, the week-long festival Nai Ni Who (Who is Nairobi?) engaged over 60,000 residents through performances, walking tours, art installations, lectures, parades, and more. The festival framework made city-wide public participation possible, touching diverse populations from everyday citizens, university students, artists, business leaders, and city planners. Nai Ni Who's impact exemplifies a community mobilization process that helped shape a more profound sense of belonging and cultivate greater participation in civic processes.

5.2 Respect bottom-up arts initiatives. *Allow arts to catalyze the recovery of social-spatial-political relationships.*

Beirut's imaginative and innovative arts community can help drive formal investments that are grounded in neighborhood knowledge engagement. Projects that stem from these types of initiatives will be more lasting and transformational to neighborhood residents. Such projects also will likely be better connected to long-term activities, participants advise. The alternative, when non-native and state actors impose rapid top-down change, will fail to enable the potential of urban sites as true "spaces of hope."[43]

Arts-driven initiatives can respond to sensitivities of what is 'public' or shared in fractured societies. In 2013, Nairobi's GoDown Arts Centre sought ideas to mark the 50th anniversary of Kenya's independence. The arts organization gathered publicly-generated ideas for celebrating the capital city's diverse urban populations. The public call drew excitement, despite early proposals that lacked broad representation of Nairobi's over 3 million inhabitants. Given lingering traumas stemming from segregation policies enforced during the city's colonial period, widely-felt experiences of exclusion left many Nairobi ambivalent about embracing a collective urban identity. Residents' feelings of

alienation compelled GoDown Arts Centre to conceive a program format permitting more complex representations of social identities.

As one participant associated with the festival observes: "We reflected again on conversations … where this idea of identity and belonging kept coming back. Who owns the city? Whose city is it? What is the history of the city?" The participant continued, "And we came up with what seemed to be a crazy idea which was, how do we make a presentation to encourage neighborhoods … to curate weeklong festivals where they interrogate the question of belonging in the city, and identity in the city, by celebrating aspects of their neighborhood that they felt represented them."

Identifying the best public engagement tool was critical to achieving short-term programming objectives and envisioning community mobilization impact. Program administrators selected a festival format where communities could self-organize weeklong explorations of urban identity and citizenship. Adjusting the program framework to center community voices gave rise to more profound questions of identity and belonging.

As a GoDown Arts Centre administrator noted, the festival framework "opened up a space for discourse on the city," revealing issues of inaccessible civic participation, unequal service provision, economic disparities, segmentation, and continued segregation.

Leveraging arts organizations as leaders can activate spaces in ways that enable longer-term civic practices and identities. Beirut, a city divided across multiple social fault lines, might find new opportunities to build social solidarities and cohesion through community-driven arts programming at a city-wide scale.

A South African museum's memorialization of tragedy.

Cape Town's District Six Museum stands as an enduring memorialization initiative designed to support trauma-affected populations. The residents of District Six – a once vibrant, ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood – were forcibly removed in the mid-1960s under South Africa's urban Apartheid policies in order to make way for white residents. The museum provides an opportunity for residents to prompt reflection on the displacements and to reclaim the right to this land.

Motivated by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the museum invites former residents to activate educational displays by contributing testimonials of life in District Six. Visitors engage in educational content through oral testimonies, documentary evidence, and audio-visual materials enlivened by former residents' memories of a dynamic community destroyed by Apartheid. By centering conversations around the social dimensions of communities, the museum's pedagogy challenges institutional frameworks, power dynamics, and the custodianship of memory. Meanwhile, policy frameworks such as South Africa's Land Restitution Act of 1994, which seeks to resolve land dispossession claims due to forced removals, have helped shape the museum's founding vision of reactivating neighborhood life by restoring legal rights to former inhabitants. In the process, the museum memorializes through a reparative justice framework, by envisioning real and imagined possibilities for former residents to return to the neighborhood. The museum combines memorialization, mourning, and land rights as a complex public memory initiative.

5.3 Facilitate Community-Driven Activation of Vacant Plots. *Identify and work towards transforming abandoned and vacant lots.*

To overcome government inaction over deficiencies in public space, community stakeholders should consider reclaiming public liabilities – vacant lots, highway underpasses, and other residual or abandoned areas – for community use. In an ongoing study of vacant lots across Beirut, the Beirut Urban Lab identified 1,640 unbuildable vacant parcels of land – 80% of which are privately owned – in addition to 1,045 public lots, 80% of which are currently empty.[44] These parcels of land are unable to meet basic building regulations due to their limited size or unusual shape and are thus deemed unbuildable. As a result, the study proposes that vacant lots offer opportunities for upgrading neighborhoods and introducing much-needed community infrastructure, including open spaces. Activating dormant sites for use as gardens, arts venues, parks, and spaces of assembly provides opportunities to rebuild civil society at a crucial moment in Beirut's recovery process. Legal changes, or formal shifts, to planning documents can recognize these benefits and help prevent the fear of eviction or police action: precedents in many medium and large cities in the U.S., such as in Philadelphia, have inventoried and advocated around community usage of vacant plots.[45] While not a sustainable solution, seeking alternatives to address deficiencies in public space could urge governments to turn liabilities into permanent assets with support from community members.

5.4 Promote Scalability.

Identify opportunities for scaled interventions; advocate and support work demonstrating that systemic change can emerge from working in interstitial spaces.

Local actors are actively exploring varying implementation scales to activate the public sphere and rebuild social infrastructure, even as they are without significant support from any state agencies. A separate public entity charged with public space management and activation is common in other cities and helps to enable scaling of initiatives. An agency charged with promoting local arts efforts and activating public spaces should be established in Beirut.

Participants also promoted piloting public engagement projects through small yet scalable interventions. They cited opportunities hidden in legal and budgetary frameworks to support community building. For example, Beirut-based curatorial collective TAP (Temporary Art Platform) found municipal support, through funds earmarked for seasonal public displays, for a short-term artist residency program aimed

at creating social impact. A month-long art initiative brought together a group of diverse residents living in a Beirut suburb to discuss issues affecting their daily lives. As a result of scrutinizing bureaucratic regulations, TAP's art installation complied with ambiguous municipal codes governing city beautification funds and public space uses. Finding innovative uses for public funds buried in onerous municipal zoning codes helped TAP set a precedent for simple, citizen-led activism with wide-reaching impact, through its replication across towns in the Greater Beirut area.[46]

Meeting participants also encouraged expanding the definitions of public space beyond buildings and physical space as post-disaster contexts can pose challenges to public assembly. For Nigeria's Port Harcourt residents, radio emerged as the preferred space to engage with the 19,000 community members forcibly removed from their homes under the state's violent 2009 urban waterfront redevelopment scheme. Characterized by mass evictions and wide-scale demolition, the event's urgency spurred immediate action by local artists in consultation with area residents to

establish a radio platform combining music programming, legal education, and technical assistance to help community members represent themselves in eviction proceedings. Piloting a radio-based community engagement strategy also enabled investment in a forthcoming media and service provision center that will aggregate a set of community-managed infrastructures, including security, sanitation, urban gardening, and others.

5.5 Memorialize the Disaster While Centering Transitional Justice Approaches. *Ground memorialization in participatory approaches where residents' empowerment is at the forefront of efforts.*

Engaging community actors in memorialization efforts affords an opportunity to narrate how traumatic events are interpreted and recognized in official records. Those most affected by the disaster must help drive decision-making on activities that shape public memory and its preservation. Ensuring that memorialization initiatives depict the experiences of affected communities in a multi-sectarian city requires broad representation from those affected by the explosion. Institutions must be careful not to singularize the narrative of memory and acknowledge the multilayered, pluralistic nature of the city's long-term memory.

Memorialization can be healing as well as generate spaces for imagined futures and tangible urban policies. Any memorialization in Beirut should hold similar ambitions, not least by providing displaced residents with an opportunity to make claims on land that they

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inhabited but also allowing those who lost loved ones to commemorate the disaster. In Beirut, the silos at the port, which are highly-visible permanent structures, have been at the heart of the conversations about heritage preservation as a memory of the catastrophe. In the past two years, efforts to classify the silos as heritage sites have notably been undertaken by a coalition of the victims' families. They faced resistance from public officials who claimed – despite scientific evidence to the contrary – that the silos constitute a threat to public safety and need to be brought down. Conversely, numerous architects and city dwellers have pointed to the role the structures could play in the port redevelopment through the arts and a publicly-accessible space of remembrance.

More generally, physical spaces, temporary installations, and intangible practices can provide opportunities for memorialization. One set of participants proposed lifting laws restricting use of now-empty and damaged storefronts to host micro-memorials[47] and performances focused on Beirut's challenges to activate these spaces while shaping consciousness of the events and their impact, especially on communities that have been most neglected in the recovery conversation.

5.6 *Recognize the importance of arts organizations in the reconstruction process and provide direct support and funding for the work they are asked to undertake.*

As arts organizations take on an increasingly vital role to renewing Lebanon, international organizations, community groups, and local government cannot lean on the arts for work to address national trauma, to build community, and renew public space without providing funding to meet soaring demand for the work of the arts. As a participant observed, "It seems that every time we encounter catastrophe, the demand on the arts increases exponentially. How many tasks do we have for the arts now? We're going to have to build memory projects. We're going to have to build institutions and public spheres. And it becomes really overwhelming when one thinks about the neglect of the arts at one level and the increasing demands placed on the arts to engage in the catastrophic world that we're living in."

VI.
LOOKING FORWARD

Disaster response and recovery in Beirut and beyond affords an extraordinary opportunity to imagine and implement processes that advance social equity, prioritize inclusion of community groups in governance processes, and strengthen the capacities of the state. None of these goals are easily achieved. They require political will powering a framework that champions these values and establishes commitments to the tangible steps required to manifest this agenda. The attention, care and reflection of the participants in this process yielded a wealth of specific insights, as well as a call to action in Beirut and the global agenda for disaster response and recovery. As documented in each action area, and summarized below, these next steps represent an urgent and radical reorientation of the work of recovery.

1. ORIENT ALL RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN LONG-TERM STATE CAPACITY.

Energies to recover the physical and economic environment of the city can, and must, also generate scaffolding for government processes to work better and more fairly. In contexts where government coordination is low, this could manifest in a coordinating body with authority and oversight powers over the impacted area. In Beirut, this could be a port authority entity able to require transparency and accountability (see recommendation 2.1 of this report) or sets of formalized practices for daily coordination that aim to empower and engage components of the government as well as communities, cultural brokers, arts organizations, and other groups with knowledge and interest but who are often left out of formal decision-making (1.1; 1.2; 1.4; 4.2; 5.6). Well-negotiated financing can emphasize long-term governance and equity (2.5); investments should prioritize works that strengthen local public systems, such as tendering (1.4, 2.3). In line with advocating for large-scale change, immediate initiatives can also work towards this goal, for example, by empowering a trusted civic organization or state entity to manage a donor coordination forum, track and make public delivery mechanisms, and involve state actors (1.3, 4.5).

2. EMBED MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS ALL ARENAS OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION.

Residents and civic groups typically possess the most intimate knowledge of the response and recovery work in any post-disaster context. Building long-term 'participatory infrastructure' inside of recovery processes – especially those of housing, heritage, and public space in Beirut – catalyzes these energies and builds capacity for future efforts. In Beirut, this can mean implementing inclusive planning strategies that incorporate resident and neighborhood knowledge, participatory engagement, and collective decision-making. Such actions, in Beirut and beyond, will improve the quality of investments and strengthen community resilience (3.1, 4.1).

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3. PRIORITIZE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES THAT BENEFIT LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS AND THAT WORK TOWARDS MORE EQUITABLE AND INTEGRATED URBAN SYSTEMS.

Recovery funds and regulatory shifts provide an opportunity to address current and historic inequalities and must be intentional and ambitious. In Beirut, immediate arenas for action include implementing the following: vacancy taxes and schedules to reduce speculation in land and housing (3.2, 4.4), financing for phased construction (3.4, 4.2), tenant protections such as eviction freezes (3.3), land trusts and cooperative housing (3.5), retrofitting heritage buildings to also serve immediate social functions (4.4). Infrastructure investments should start with those that attempt to redress past harms to marginalized communities, including through green infrastructure (2.4) and parks and roads that knit together previously severed areas, such as neighborhoods to the port area (2.3). Investments should also prioritize labor-intensive approaches to facilitate job creation (1.4, 2.3) that also build skills and economic empowerment (1.4, 4.2).

4. SPEND MONEY ON THE GROUND, IN COORDINATION WITH CIVIC INITIATIVES.

Small and spatially-bounded initiatives require time and commitment to establish, but can powerfully facilitate partnerships, accountability, and impact. In Beirut, neighborhood-scale investments clearly can leverage and strengthen existing initiatives and civic capacity (3.1, 4.1), which frequently result in more meaningful physical improvements, such as squares and plazas (5.1) that in turn can build community ownership (5.2, 4.1) as well as spaces of memorialization (5.5). Spatially-grounded local investments can overlap with zones of equity-oriented regulatory innovations (1.7) and, when successful, can ideally spread and scale to other neighborhoods (5.4, 1.7) and, as this report details, provide the seeds for similar innovative responses in post-disaster settings in diverse geographies worldwide.

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ENDNOTES

1   **Since 2008. "Disasters and Climate Change"** *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, **www.internal-displacement.org/disasters-and-climate-change**

2   **A 2019 UN analysis of 'spatial hotspot' data by Columbia University and World Bank data identify how vulnerable urban populations live in areas more likely to be impacted by disasters worldwide. Gu, Danan.**

3   **"Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021)"** United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Policy Brief no. 2, September 2021.

4   The Council of Development and Reconstruction (CDR), a state institution established in 1977 as the implementation arm of the Prime Minister's Office, was tasked with identifying and allocating international donor funds to a host of projects. Instead, the CDR effectively bypassed all central public agencies and ministries, reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office. The CDR's direct contact with the Prime Minister's Office was seen as "more efficient" as it avoided traditional bureaucracy. The CDR, however, became involved in large-scale projects marred by deep corruption and eventually became one of the public institutions where protestors regularly assembled during the October 2019 uprising.

5   Sanchez, Daniel Garrote. "Perpetuating regional inequalities in Lebanon's infrastructure: The role of public investment." Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Policy Brief no. 36, December 2018.

6   The Solidere project, the post-war reconstruction of Beirut's downtown, is the most egregious example of these processes. Solidere is the name of the real-estate company established in 1991 to organize the post-civil war reconstruction of Beirut's historic core, which had become a no man's land during the 15 years of civil war. The company was granted ownership over the entire area, including public property. Individual property claimants saw their ownership turned into company shares, with little recourse to refuse the process.

7   In December 2020, the judge leading the blast investigation, Fadi Sawan, charged four politicians—including the caretaker prime minister—with criminal neglect. The politicians responded by seeking to have the judge removed from the case, forcing him to suspend his work to respond to their efforts.

8   These include the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

9   For more on the 3RF-supported institutional reforms, see Bloemeke, S. (2022) **Post-Disaster Recovery Governance, Aid Architecture, and Civil Society's Participation: The Case of Lebanon's Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF)**. Masters Thesis submitted to the Center for Arab. and Middle Eastern Studies, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, American University of Beirut.

10 For more on this, see Moss, Todd J., Gunilla Pettersson Gelander, and Nicolas Van de Walle. "An aid-institutions paradox? A review essay on aid dependency and state building in sub-Saharan Africa." Center for Global Development working paper 74 (2006): 11-05 and Andrews, Matt, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock. "Escaping capability traps through problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA)." World Development 51 (2013): 234-244.

11 For more, see Bloemeke 2022, op.cit.

12 Critics caution that the recovery strategies can be hard to untether from unsavory political dynamics, even at the local level. Experts signal caution about the expected impact of implementation strategies, particularly those requiring deep governance reform, given that unaccounted actors can hold strong influence and thwart progress. In contrast, incentivizing investment strategies devoted to improving localized fragility indicators can condition stakeholders to address challenges across the spectrum of vulnerability while incrementally transforming institutional capacities.

13 Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, pp. 109-128.

14 According to the PoB website, container traffic increased from, 200,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (EU) in 2004 to 1.22 million TEU in 2019, at the time of the economic crisis. This volume has dropped sharply with the explosion and the financial crisis.

15 75% of the PoB revenues come from the container terminal operations. See Port of Beirut Assessment. USAID, February 15, 2021. **https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/EXTENDED-USAID-MEG-POBAssessment.pdf**

16 Abu-Nasr, Donna. "Syrian war helps Port of Beirut boost Lebanese economy." *The Daily Star*, 29 August 2013.

17 Should the whole port area and related infrastructures be included in the reconstruction project.

18 Several participants insisted on the need to avoid repeating patterns established by the post-war reconstruction of Beirut's historic core by a private company (Solidere).

19 The need to "stitch back the city with the port" was recurrent in many of the participants' remarks.

20 Bou Akar, Hiba. *For the War Yet to Come*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018.

21 *Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment*. World Bank, August 31, 2020. **https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/beirut-rapid-damage-and-needs-assessment-rdna---august-2020**

22 It is noteworthy that to-date, most insurance companies have not repaid the high-end, severely damaged households, claiming that insurances don't cover terrorist attacks and that they had to wait for the result of the investigation. As a result, many high-end buildings remain unrepaired.

23 Chandrasekhar, Divya, Yang Zhang, and Yu Xiao. "Nontraditional participation in disaster recovery planning: Cases from China, India, and the United States." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 80, no. 4 (2014): 373-384.

24 Dhungana, Nimesh. "Doing civil socity-driven social accountability in a disaster context: Evidence from post-earthquake Nepal." *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 4 (2020): 395-406.

25 Ganapati, N. Emel. **"Rising from the rubble: Emergence of place-based social capital in Golcuk, Turkey."** *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 27, no. 2 (2009): 127-166.

26 The Beirut Madinati campaign, emerging from the 2015 "You Stink" movement, offers a local example of a successful effort to mobilize civil society across sectarian divisions.

27 Kim, Gunwoo, Galen Newman, and Bin Jiang. "Urban regeneration: Community engagement process for vacant land in declining cities." *Cities*, vol. 102, 2020.

28 Davis, Diane E. "Refugees, resettlement, and the territorial correlates of resilience." In Howayda Al-Harithi (ed.), *Urban Recovery*, Routledge, 2021, pp. 35-64.

29 Jha, Abhas K, Jennifer D. Barenstein, Priscilla M. Phelps, Daniel Pittet, and Stephen Sena. *Safer Homes, Stronger Communities: A Handbook for Reconstructing After Natural Disasters.* World Bank, 2010, pp. 93.

30 "Cooperative identity, values & principles." *International Cooperative Alliance*, **https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity**.

31 "What is a Community Land Trust?" *Center for Community Land Trust Innovation*, **https://cltweb.org/what-is-a-community-land-trust/**.

32 Saliba, Robert. "Looking east, looking west: provincial eclecticism and cultural dualism in the architecture of French Mandate Beirut." In Nadine Méochy & Peter Slugglett (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives /Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, pp. 203-215. Brill, 2004.

33 See: **Icomos' 2017 'Delhi Declaration' calling for a people-centric, culture-specific approach** where preservation must foreground "inclusive democratic community engagement processes" Delhi Declaration of Heritage and Democracy, https://**www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/GA2017_Delhi-Declaration_20180117_EN.pdf** ; Smith, Laurajane, Anna Morgan, and Anita Van der Meer. "Community-driven research in cultural heritage management: the Waanyi women's history project." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 65-80; Hodges, Andrew, and Steve Watson. "Community-based heritage management: A case study and agenda for research." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 6, no. 3 (2000): 231-243.

34 See, for example: Moriera, Monica. "Gobiernos Participativos para la sostenibilidad de los centros históricos" and Hanley, Lisa, and Meg Ruthenburg. "Los impactos sociales de la renovación urbana: el caso de Quito, Ecuador." In Ferando Carrión M. y Lisa Hanley (eds.), **Regeneración y revitalización urbana en las Américas: hacia un estado estable. Quito: FLACSO-sede Ecuador** (2005) (in Spanish).

35 Additional examples include the Aga Khan Trust For Culture's Historic Cities Support Programme, a development initiative offering planning assistance, job training, and financial support to restore the cultural and socio-economic vitality of the Muslim world.

36 In addition, the provision of rehabilitation guidelines' toolkits to restore built heritage can be very useful. Following the Beirut port's blast, many initiatives were done by local and international NGOs in that direction.

37 *Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage.* UNESCO and National Heritage Board of Poland, 2018, **https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1826**.

38 Text from *Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* on engaging Communities: "Decisions on recovery and reconstruction should follow people-centered approaches and fully engage local communities and, where appropriate, indigenous peoples, as well as other relevant stakeholders. Recovery and reconstruction should enable people to connect to their heritage, identity and history. In reconstructing heritage, consideration should be given to social justice and property titles and a rights-based approach should be applied, which would ensure full participation in cultural life, freedom of expression and access to cultural heritage for all individuals and groups, including refugees and internally displaced people, where relevant. In this regard, it is important to identify cultural rights and their holders in every reconstruction programme, and to ensure their prior and informed consent to key decisions…" *Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage.* UNESCO and National Heritage Board of Poland, 2018, **https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1826**.

39 By way of example, a study of the public square in Ramlet el Bayda found that the residents in the area had hired private security to ward off users of the nearby park, citing possible undesirable uses of the open space. See Cheaitli Naseraldine, Abir. "Addressing fear in public spaces: Design solutions for the Ramlet El-Bayda park." Master's Thesis. Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 2018.

40 Mazraani, Dana, Luna Dayekh and Mona Harb. "Why Socio-Spatial Practices Matter to Urban Recovery." *The Public Source.* 2 December 2020. **https://thepublicsource.org/why-socio-spatial-practices-matter-urban-recovery**.

41 Fawaz, Mona, Mona Harb, and Ahmed Gharbieh. "Living Beirut's Security Zones: An Investigation of the Modalities and Practice of Urban Security." *City and Society* 24, no. 2 (2012), pp. 173-195.

42   These include the rehabilitation of five playgrounds/parks, the design of five new public spaces, one sidewalk expansion, and four artwork and art installations.

43   "Spaces of Hope," in urban theorist David Harvey's terms, are social-spatial arrangements rooted in collective wellbeing and the advancement of human potential. Any intervention by a non-native actor, including state actors, must be informed by the accumulation of responsible knowledge that is context-based, site-specific, and derived from direct engagement with constituents. Moreover, actors must create responses with awareness of their actions' near- and long-term implications. See: Harvey, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

44   The Recovery of Beirut – Activating Public Space. American University of Beirut and Columbia University, January 27, 2021.

45   Drake, Luke, and Laura J. Lawson. "Validating verdancy or vacancy? The relationship of community gardens and vacant lands in the US." *Cities* 40 (2014): 133-142.

46   To ensure that artists, communities, and local stakeholders understand the challenges and opportunities of activating public space in Lebanon, TAP developed a comprehensive tool guide with legal and administrative resources for engaging in the public sphere. See, Abi Khalil, Amanda, Nayala Geagea, Sasha Ussef, and Amahl Khoury, editors. A Few Things You Need to Know When Creating an Art Project in a Public Space in Lebanon. Beirut, Temporary Art Platform, 2016.

47   Or larger ones; see the "Belleza y Felicidad" collective , described to some extent in English in *Fernanda Laguna: The Path of the Heart* edited by Rosario Güiraldes. Drawing Papers 148. The Drawing Center, Institute for Studies of Latin American Art. March 2022. https://issuu.com/drawingcenter/docs/03.07.22_dp148 run out of a former pharmacy storefront to host multiple decades of documenting and memorializing femicides in Buenos Aires.