

FORESTRY POLICY ASKS

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon's forestry sector is rarely included in economic discussions. However, the sector has a long history of sustainable job creation and, if formalized and developed properly, has a huge potential in creating jobs and developing local economies, especially in rural areas.

Overall, 25% of Lebanon's surface area is covered by either dense forests or other wooded lands. Although highly dominated by unstructured business activities, today the sector provides job opportunities for hundreds of thousands of families, including among others more than 25,000 individuals working yearly in seasonal reforestation work; around 50,000 individuals in forest management, pruning and harvesting activities; more than 6,500 beekeepers; 30 registered tour operators and hundreds of local rural tourism guides; around 100 pine processing facilities; thousands of herb and medicinal plant collectors; hundreds of charcoal producers; in addition to the recent development of composting, briquette and pellet production as well as essential oil extraction that is engaging a large number of youth.

Lebanon's forests sequester carbon yearly for an estimated value of \$14 million and reduce air pollution and health bills by around \$2 million. Rural tourism calculated in 4 forest nature reserves only amounted in 2020 to \$15 million and is experiencing a positive trend since then. Forest honey production is generating yearly revenues of around \$25 million and pine nut production is estimated at around \$1-2 million/year.

The sector is however facing serious setbacks starting from the lack of data and absence of business registration and reporting, leading to a major underestimation of the sector's actual and potential contribution to the local economy. Technical skills and formal education in the sector are also still lacking which affects the sector's ability to develop. Most of the current activities happening in Lebanon's forests are illegal, including overharvesting, illegal logging, unregulated grazing, and illegal quarrying activities, in addition to the unmanaged forest fires, all of which are leading to loss of resources on different levels, some of which is irreversible. Administrative challenges are also hindering the sector's development, such as the lack of a final survey for more than 40% of Lebanon's lands, and the division of authority between several ministries that delays and complicates the decision-making process.

Yet, there have been serious efforts to move the forestry sector forward. Current forestry actors are working hard on developing national guidelines and improving the technical know-how, engaging youth in the sector, highlighting the positive role of women, and mobilizing communities to understand the value of this precious resource. Innovative start-ups have been developed by youth and have shown several success stories that are promising for future economic development in the sector.

POLICY ASKS



POLICY ENVIRONMENT:

- Conduct a final review of the latest forestry law document (Ministry of Agriculture) and have it enacted.
- Devolve responsibility for forests to a standalone semi-autonomous directorate that allows it to manage public forests, generate its own funds to cover forest protection, fire prevention, restoration, and management efforts.
- Develop a carbon offset calculation and reporting standard for Lebanon's private sector.
- Disseminate decree no. 167 that allows for tax reduction for companies conducting green activities and update it in a way to include more types of activities related to forestry, to incentivize the private sector to engage further in forestry activities and help meet Lebanon's Climate Change Convention Commitments and create a healthier living ecosystem in the country.



INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Create a national forestry database and a proper reporting system for all forestry stakeholders to generate data that can: 1) showcase the actual sector's contributions to the GDP; and 2) guide decision making processes on gaps and improvements.
- Finalize the official surveying of all lands (Ministry of Finance) and particularly areas surrounding natural reserves and forested areas to reduce conflicts and have clear land ownership for all plots to facilitate management and restoration efforts.
- Lobby for the deployment of forest rangers that is currently stalled with the government.



ACCESS TO MARKET:

- Formalize businesses in the sector to allow for easier and wider access to market and promote Lebanon's nature-based products such as our unique quality pine nuts on the international scene.



BUSINESS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:

- Develop higher education programs in forestry at the universities and/or technical schools to start graduating skilled individuals in the sector and enlarge and diversify the pool of technical expertise..



ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY:

- Highlight the successful innovations in the sector (such as wood pellets and pellet stoves, medicinal and aromatic products, essential oils, and soaps) and encourage investments that can lead to large scale businesses with high levels of employment and high quality production lead to increased exports and economic growth.