

# Focus on Lebanon

Lebanese are good at memorization and respond well to highly visual hands-on training. **BY JEAN ABINADER**

**R**ecent political events will have a great impact on training opportunities in Lebanon since they affect the perceptions of international donors and companies currently providing most training programs. The first is the election of the country's president, filling a vacancy that existed for almost three years. It took two months for the selection of the coalition cabinet, whose ministers oversee government disbursements, including funding for training programs and coordination with international donors.

## FIND OUT WHO'S IN CHARGE

As in Jordan, many training projects are driven by the need to provide stability to the large number of Syrian refugees in the country and the communities that host them. This has resulted in extensive aid directed toward

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humanitarian assistance with attention to vocational and technical training, from very basic construction, health, and public works projects to higher skilled electrical, IT, mechanical, and other market-needed jobs. The needs are there. Donors are working with local groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement projects, but the general disarray in the government and the large number of refugees living in the country rather than in camps have made it challenging to organize and manage programs that both train and place refugees. And this doesn't address the security situation in the border areas with Syria.

In this sensitive environment, it is recommended that training organizations and consultants who may engage in a donor-funded or government program pay close attention to who's in charge as the new ministers and their mandates

sometimes overlap, which may cause delays and confusion in project implementation.

## SEEK LOCAL INTERMEDIARIES

Generally speaking, whether training Syrians or Lebanese, the challenges start with the reality that some refugees are better educated than unskilled Lebanese workers. It is critical to have local intermediaries who can help guide you through the minefields of politicians wanting to do right by their constituents while treating Syrians appropriately. That said, Lebanese from urban areas—which are 88 percent of the country—may be bi- or trilingual, creating opportunities for Training of Trainers (ToTs) that should be considered in designing projects.

Lebanese are good at memorization and respond well to highly visual hands-on training. A historically more liberal society, Lebanon does not exclude women from health and social services industries. In addition, many entrepreneurs are women, which can be a benefit in broadening the downstream opportunities for traditional cottage industries, innovative educational offerings (the demand far outweighs the supply for K-12 education), IT small business applications, micro-finance and micro-lending programs, and warehousing and distribution of agricultural and scaled technologies such as solar applications for farming and residential use.

## PRIVATE-SECTOR TRAINING

In the private sector, training opportunities will depend on how rapidly the new government begins distributing its limited national budget, the perception of risk and stability by investors and funders, and stability in both external and internal markets. Since Syria was Lebanon's key trading partner, any calming along the border will bring quick benefits to local farm communities.

The nemesis of corruption always hangs over business in Lebanon. From the smallest procedure to obtain a license or permit to competing on government contracts, having knowledgeable local support will go a long way to doing business there. **■**



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