

Swiss Cooperation in Lebanon

Bekaa Water Management Programme

Bekaa Valley, Lebanon



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

Context

The Bekaa Valley hosts a total population of approximately 1 million (555,000 Lebanese, 376,000 refugees). Due to the strain on the Bekaa's already fragile infrastructure resulting from the influx of refugees, the population is experiencing growing social tensions. However, the underlying factors behind the water scarcity are not only related to the Syria crisis, but are the result of longstanding mismanagement and powerful parallel systems within the water sector that weaken effective public services.

While more than 90% of the households in the Bekaa have access to water supply services, only approximately 1/3rd are registered as customers at Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE). The refugees' communities receive water through private water trucking companies, which in many instances does not fulfil the national standards of drinking water.

The BWE, a regional arm of the Ministry of Energy and Water, has the mandate to provide water and sanitation services and is responsible for all tasks related to water quality and quantity.

Update

The current economic, political and sanitary (covid-19) crisis has further aggravated the shortcomings of the water sector:

- The collection rate of the BWE is decreasing due to the deteriorating economic situation in the country, and the current devaluation of the local currency. Financial resources available to the BWE are decreasing.
- Purchasing imported material (spare parts, consumables) has become increasingly challenging for the water establishments because of the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira. This endangers the continuous operation, and the maintenance cycle of water services.
- Qualified staff leave the country, in search for future perspectives.

Lesser rainfall and snow due to the climate change jeopardizes the water resources in the Bekaa.

Programme Description

By improving the technical operation and management of BWE infrastructure, water resources will be better protected and energy consumption reduced. The improved management and technical operation of BWE combined will contribute to equitable access to safe water and improved wastewater treatment services for Lebanese and Syrian refugees. This will lead to an improved context where Lebanese and Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley can benefit from safe, affordable and equitable access to well-managed drinking water and sanitation services, while at the same time resulting in less water-related conflicts.

The Bekaa Water Management Programme works along the triple nexus between Humanitarian Aid, Peace Promotion and Development Cooperation, addressing institutional, managerial, technical and social challenges (at BWE). Although the programme is implemented through humanitarian aid, it has a strong focus on technical cooperation and on conflict sensitivity and a long-term vision to sustainably improve access to water.

The Bekaa Water Management Programme is designed along two complementary components:

- 1) Improved Organizational Management, and
- 2) Improved Infrastructure and Resource Management

The outcomes result from improved institutional and operational capacity of the BWE, and from sustainable and equitable access to safe water and wastewater services. The programme takes into consideration the activities of other BWE partners, e.g. UNICEF contributing a corporate communication strategy and International Committee of the Red Cross supporting the development of water resources maps and increasing BWE's resilience.

With a view to reduce tensions between stakeholders and clarifying responsibilities among local actors, the programme also brings Unions of Municipalities together with BWE.

Programme results until 2021

Switzerland has installed two photovoltaic systems for water pumping stations. Approximately 14'000 people in the Bekaa are benefiting from a continued water supply despite major electricity cuts. In these areas, the Programme has eliminated the Bekaa Water Establishment's dependency on the state grid power supply (Electricité du Liban) and on fuel for generators, saving scarce financial resources and reducing CO₂ emissions.

Switzerland provides essential consumables for the BWE's drinking water laboratories to mitigate risks related to water-borne diseases for more than half a million people, in addition to essential consumables to control the effluent quality of the major four wastewater laboratories in the Bekaa region.

Programme duration	Budget	Partners (Direct Action Programme)
2020–2023	CHF 3'000'000	Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE), Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW); Unions of Municipalities, Municipalities, Water Committees.

Further information

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The photovoltaic systems provided by Switzerland to water pumping stations in the Bekaa.