

Tomorrow's success depends on today's reform

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Achieving reform is about driving change. It is linked with responding to inquiries such as: What type of economy do we have to build going ahead? What are the resources for development and prosperity we need to promote? What are the new resilience models that will prevent or respond to future crises? Furthermore, more critically, what social protection and prevention policy measures do we have to take today to arise against those difficulties and build a strong social order?

Concentrating on aspects of reform is particularly timely. The crisis Lebanon is witnessing has already led to changes that will shape people's lives for years to come.

The new government talks have started dependent on the "French-supported reform plan," as the Prime Minister-Designate Saad Hariri said. The plan brings together a unified agenda of structural economic, social and governance reforms.

The French Paper records four areas that need prompt consideration: humanitarian assistance and social protection, a plan to address the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, reconstruction after the Beirut Port blast, governance and economic reform. It also incorporates more points regarding electricity reform, telecommunications, the judicial system, security, financial audit and the International Monetary Fund. The road map demonstrates the groundwork for a reform, recovery and reconstruction plan, rebuilding trust for a better future for all Lebanese citizens.

Today, the economic and financial emergency that incorporate a currency crisis, extremely high inflation rates, a struggling public sector and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will not only fuel the compression in financial movement, but will also compound poverty rates which were assessed by the World Bank Group at 45 percent of the populace prior to the blast. Any effort for reconstruction will necessitate both the rebuilding of damaged buildings and infrastructure frameworks and the reformation of governance structures.

This reality highlights the importance of consolidating interventions that address the social protection requirements of individuals, especially the poor and the most vulnerable.

Lebanon needs a guiding vision to handle the challenges. The scene in Lebanon has changed extensively since last year. The adoption of a "Grand Strategy" is the appropriate means policymakers need to craft sectoral and territorial national strategies to propel the country's advantages.

There is both craftsmanship and science behind planning strategies. Today, like never before, the Lebanese government needs to set extensive and comprehensive building blocks in defining and executing a guiding national vision influencing the building and implementation of thematic, sectoral and territorial national strategies.

National strategies are sets of strategic and long-term objectives that express interests and national values in dealing with a matter of public policy and serve as the cornerstone of policy-making processes.

Strategic planning is an intellectual process, with clearly defined outputs, ends, methods and means, to serve a national purpose. It assists in achieving political immunity within the framework of fluctuations, complications and concerns. It clarifies the ambiguity of the strategic environment, its scope of influence, and its time horizon.

Government strategic planning flourished in the late 1960s and this coincided with the flourishing of the evidence-based public policy principles with the increase in the level of the complexities of the economic, political and social realities in all disciplines. The purpose of the strategy is to translate the goal and national interests into strategic evidence and indicators.

Government strategies vary drastically from those of the private sector, because they need public political agreement as a primary pillar for actualizing them.

Strategy is defined by Lawrence Freedman as the “art of creating power -- while it is undoubtedly a good thing to have, it is also a hard thing to get right.” This understanding underscores the innovative part of good strategies: getting more out of a circumstance than might have been normal by the prevalence of power. However, the difficult task is the production of power and applying it innovatively.

The world is facing many complex, multi-dimensional and often crosscutting challenges. To address the challenges of reform, strategic planning exercises need to become more viable, productive, credible and enduring.

Lebanon has adopted many international agendas and developed related strategies that support maintaining human rights, social stability, and economic prosperity while reducing vulnerability and supporting sustainable development. The achievement of reform based on economic, social and governance transformation requires a strategic approach, which is both long-term and coordinated in joining different development measures with the goals being addressed. It entails connecting long-term vision to medium-term targets and short-term activities. It involves linkages across sectors, so that there would be a planned way to deal with advancement and nexuses among local, national and global policies and development efforts; and an authentic partnership between government, private sector, trade unions, academic institutions and civil society organizations. The cycle includes situation analysis, developing policies and action plans, implementation, monitoring and regular review. In addition, the cycle involves institutionalizing a process for consultation, conciliation, and consensus building on societal priorities. A participatory approach emphasizes advancement toward sustainability targets as opposed to creating a "plan" as an end product.

According to Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, “Our success tomorrow depends on our ability to make reform happen today..

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