

From paralysis to performance

Planes, Trains, Boats, and Automobiles

Proceedings of Conference with

Fayez Rasamny

Minister of Public Works and Transport

LeadersClub – by Lebanon Opportunities hosted the Minister of Public Works and Transport Fayez Rasamny for a presentation and discussion. The event which extended more than 2.5 hours, was attended by nearly 100 participants including club members and their guests.

The conference focused on addressing the infrastructure crisis by transitioning from reactive management to sustainable, institutional State-building. Key discussions centered on re-establishing regional trade corridors and expand airports, seaports, and transit infrastructure through private-sector partnerships.

A pragmatic approach was outlined to overcoming severe bureaucratic paralysis and legal bottlenecks within public administration. Leveraging Lebanon's strategic position by expanding the commercial capacity of primary airports and seaports to generate sustainable non-tax State revenues. Emphasis on reviving cross-border transit corridors and modernizing public transport fleets through solar-powered electric buses and private sector operational partnerships.

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Executive Summary



This report summarizes the proceedings and strategic directives presented during the Public Works and Transport conference regarding national infrastructure, maritime ports, Civil Aviation, public transit, and administrative reform. The Public Administration faces severe structural bottlenecks, characterized by obsolete legal frameworks, intense bureaucratic friction, and a critical shortage of operational personnel. Operating within these tight administrative constraints, State policy prioritizes the rapid development of revenue-generating assets, specifically airports and seaports, to align with evolving regional transit dynamics and secure non-tax revenues for the national treasury.

Strategic initiatives focus on expanding commercial capacity at the Port of Beirut and the Port of Tripoli, while re-establishing cross-border rail and overland transit links to Syria and broader Middle Eastern markets. In Civil Aviation, priority is directed at enforcing

safety standards at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport and launching commercial operations at Kleyat René Mouawad Airport through inter-agency coordination. Concurrently, mass transit modernization is being advanced by deploying solar-powered electric buses managed through private sector operational concessions.

Capital investment remains severely hindered by statutory limitations within current procurement legislation, particularly a rigid four-year contract cap on concessions that stalls standard Build-Operate-Transfer models and complex Public-Private Partnerships. Overcoming these institutional hurdles requires comprehensive legislative modernization, target-driven administrative retooling, active engagement with local municipalities, and structured public-private collaboration to deliver essential infrastructure projects and drive sustainable national recovery.

Summary of Key Metric Targets

Metric Parameter	Historical / Baseline	Target / Standard
Port of Beirut Throughput	1.2 Million TEU	2.8 Million TEU
Port of Tripoli Throughput	250,000 TEU	1.8M – 2.0M TEU
Public Transit Ridership	0 Daily Passengers	8,000+ Daily Passengers
Northern Rail Right-of-Way	54 Encroachments	54 Encroachments Cleared
Masnaa Border Upgrade	Unorganized Transit	\$60M Master Plan (250+ Trucks/day)
Civil Service Staffing	15% Operational Staff	85% Vacancy Rate Mitigation
Beirut Airport Safety	High Bird-Strike Risks	91 Pigeon Roosts Dismantled
Kleyat Airport Status	Inactive Facility	Targeted November 15 Launch

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Executive Management and Public Administration Dynamics

Public administration in Lebanon functions under severe structural constraints that frequently disrupt strategic planning and delay administrative execution. Upon assuming ministerial leadership, executive officers encounter a total absence of formal briefing mechanisms, institutional handover procedures, or operational documentation, forcing incoming leadership to independently diagnose ongoing files and establish administrative priorities. The operational reality of the public sector is further complicated by an 85 percent vacancy rate, leaving central ministries operating with approximately fifteen percent of their required human resources. Within the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, daily operations rely on a core cadre of roughly fifteen dependable career civil servants out of thousands listed on paper, as wide scale staff absenteeism and secondary private employment persist due to severe currency depreciation and unviable public wages.



Navigating rigid civil service regulations requires specific administrative mechanisms to maintain operational responsiveness. Because standard public employment laws prohibit the direct termination or replacement of underperforming tenured staff, executive agility is achieved by utilizing interim assignments, known as appointments on an acting basis (or bil-takleef). Appointing competent, previously sidelined career civil servants on an acting basis maintains operational flexibility, as interim appointees stay accountable and work intensely without requiring cumbersome Council of Ministers ratifications that permanently seat personnel. Shielding strategic decision-making from daily political interference requires restructuring executive schedules. Restricting continuous meetings with local political figures, mayors, and parliamentary delegations regarding routine road maintenance and asphalt allocations preserves necessary bandwidth for high-level planning across aviation, maritime domain, and national transport networks.

Civil Aviation Governance and Infrastructure Modernization

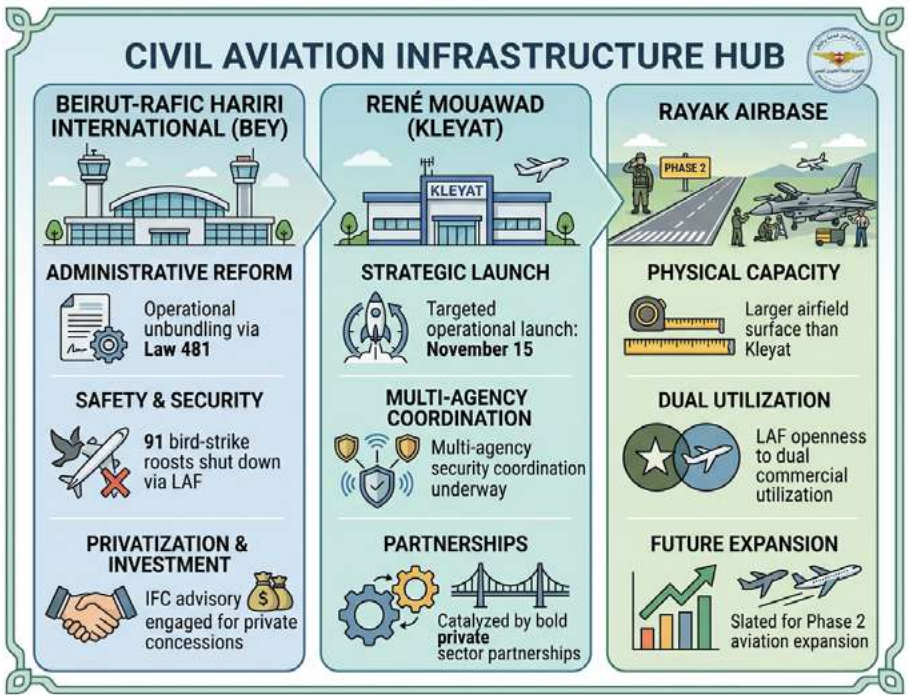
Modernizing Civil Aviation infrastructure requires establishing absolute compliance with international aviation safety regulations and executing structural reforms across State regulatory agencies. Institutional governance in Civil Aviation was fundamentally reshaped by enforcing Civil Aviation Law 481 of 2002, a statute that remained dormant for over two decades following its original enactment. The enforcement of Law 481 establishes a mandatory structural separation between State regulatory oversight and commercial airport



operations, a prerequisite for resuming direct international flight connections, including routes to the United States. Under this framework, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation retains exclusive regulatory authority over safety and airspace management, while commercial airport operations are transferred to a distinct, autonomous operating entity known as 'Beirut Airport Establishment', which possesses the legal flexibility to manage facilities directly or engage specialized international airport operators.



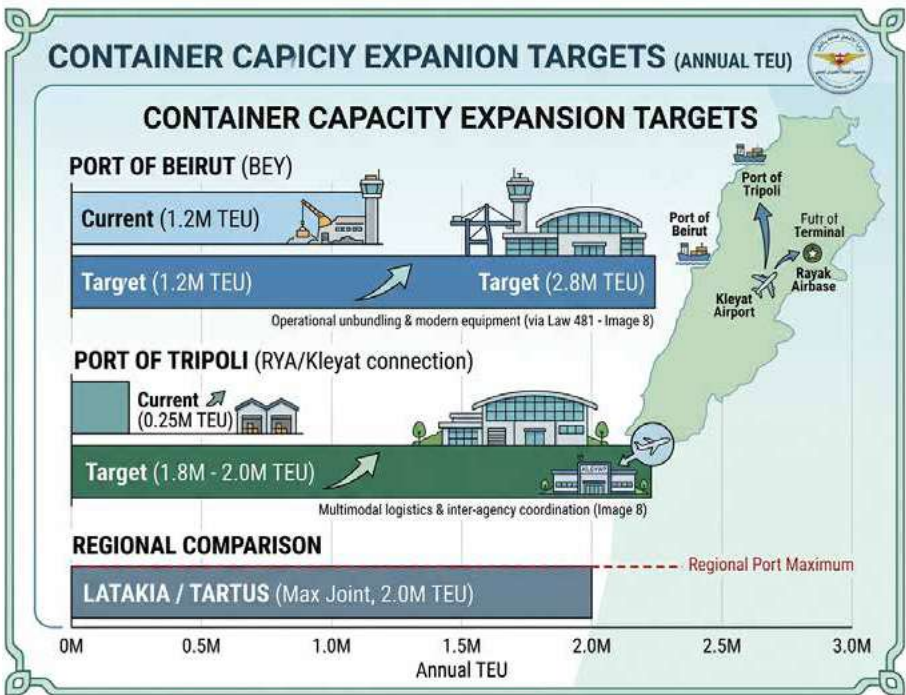
Operational safety at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport has been systematically upgraded by addressing long-neglected maintenance issues and environmental security hazards. To mitigate severe bird-strike risks threatening aircraft during approach and takeoff, State authorities coordinated directly with the Army to dismantle 91 illegal pigeon-trapping roosts surrounding the airport perimeter. Concurrently, the State engaged the International Finance Corporation to structure long-term private operational concessions for airport management.



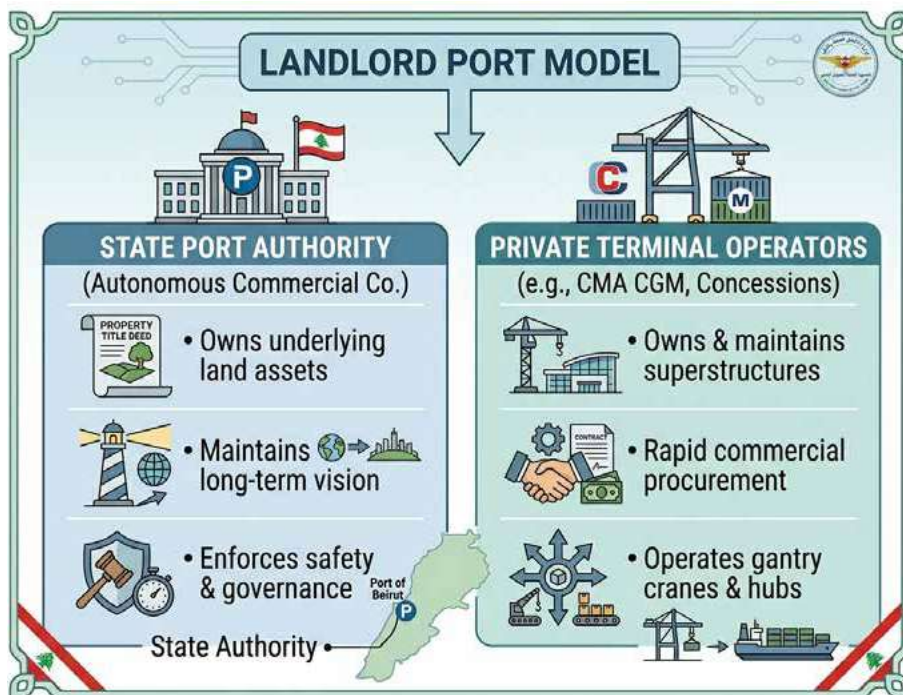
In parallel, targeted efforts are focused on operationalizing the Kleyat René Mouawad Airport to serve as a secondary commercial and cargo hub. Launching flight operations requires inter-agency coordination across seven State security and administrative entities, alongside active collaboration with private sector leadership. Initial commercial flights are scheduled to begin landing by mid-November, providing irreversible operational momentum to draw major capital investments into North Lebanon. Long-term aviation development targets the Rayak Airbase in the Bekaa Valley, an airfield featuring a physical footprint larger than Kleyat. Following strategic discussions with military authorities, Rayak is slated for commercial dual-use development once operations at Kleyat are fully established.

Maritime Seaport Development and Corporate Governance

Maritime ports represent vital revenue-generating assets capable of capturing expanding regional shipping volumes and securing substantial non-tax revenues for the treasury. Operational expansion strategies are currently underway across Lebanon’s primary commercial ports. The Port of Beirut, which currently processes approximately 1.2 million containers annually, is advancing operational master plans to expand throughput capacity to 2.8 million containers. Simultaneously, the Port of Tripoli is expanding its handling capacity from 250,000 containers toward 1.8 to 2 million containers. The combined capacity of Lebanon’s maritime hubs significantly exceeds the maximum projected throughput of neighboring Syrian ports, such as Latakia and Tartus, which together cannot exceed 2 million containers, positioning Lebanon as a dominant maritime logistics hub in the Eastern Mediterranean.



Achieving high operational efficiency requires overhauling port governance models. The Port of Tripoli functions as an autonomous public enterprise (Mu2assasa 3Amma), whereas the Port of Beirut has operated under an interim, temporary committee for over thirty years. To establish institutional stability and transparent corporate governance, a draft law endorsed by the Council of Ministers establishes a permanent statutory corporate framework for the Port of Beirut. This structure adopts the international “landlord port” model, transforming port authorities into State-owned autonomous commercial entities.

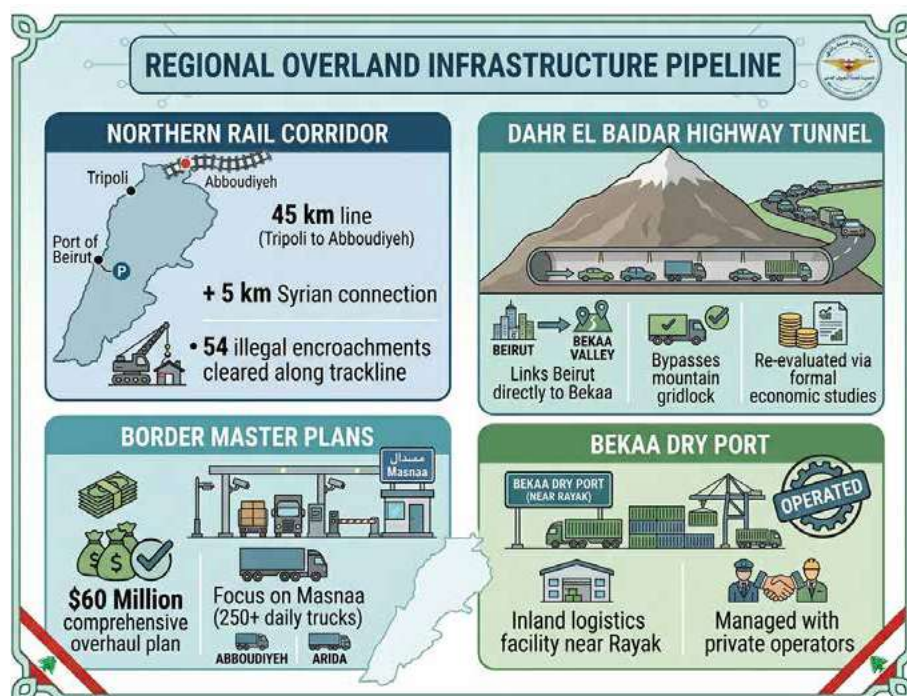


The landlord port model provides the commercial flexibility necessary to maintain uninterrupted operations. For instance, operating specialized container gantry cranes (STS) requires rapid procurement of replacement parts; managing equipment repairs through standard public treasury procedures takes months, risking complete operational paralysis. Autonomous corporate management allows port boards to handle commercial procurements rapidly while preserving State ownership of core infrastructure assets.



Regional Transit Integration and Overland Corridors

Maritime and aviation expansion relies on upgrading overland transport corridors to re-establish cross-border transit trade across the Middle East. Bilateral coordination with Syrian transport authorities has been re-established to create a unified transit front, preventing international trade routes from bypassing Lebanese facilities. This regional alignment has revived plans for cross-border railway infrastructure, specifically restoring the 45-kilometer rail line connecting the Port of Tripoli to Abboudiyeh at the northern border, which links into a 5-kilometer rail segment inside Syria. This modest capital investment connects Lebanese ports directly into the broader regional Syrian, Jordanian, and Gulf rail network, creating an integrated multimodal transit system. To prepare for rail construction, State authorities successfully surveyed and cleared fifty-four illegal encroachments along the historical northern rail corridor, securing public land owned by the Railway and Public Transport Authority.



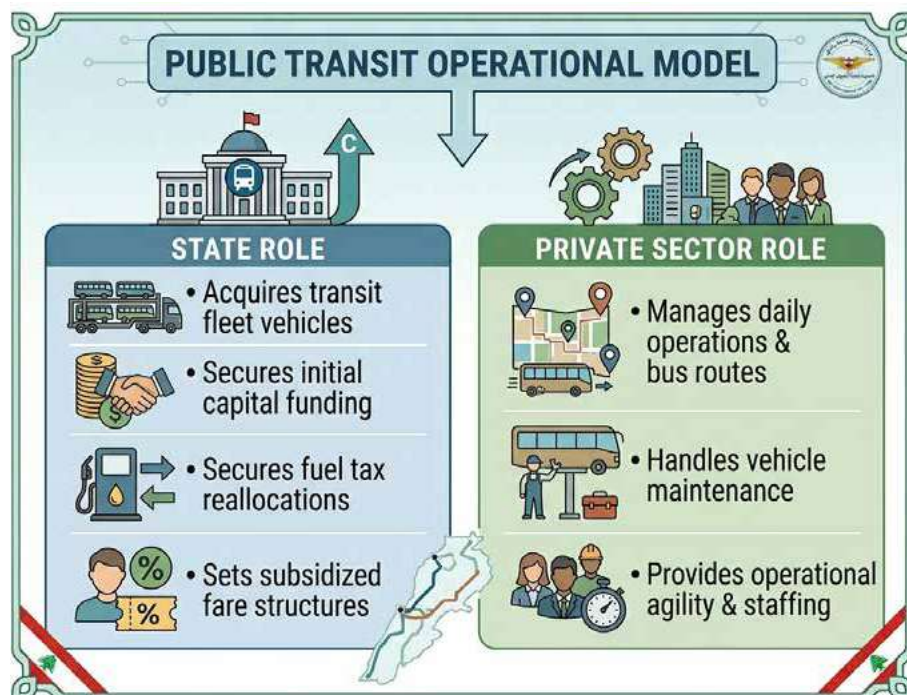
Overland trade capabilities are further supported by major highway tunnel projects and modernized land border crossings. Formal economic feasibility and cost assessments have been updated for the long-delayed Dahr El Baidar highway tunnel, designed to link Beirut directly to the Bekaa Valley and the Syrian border, bypassing severe mountain congestion. A \$60 million comprehensive border master plan has been formulated for the Masnaa land border crossing, which handles over two hundred fifty cargo trucks daily. This master plan incorporates modernized Customs plazas, streamlined processing lanes, and upgraded security infrastructure, with parallel implementation plans developed for the northern border crossings at Abboudiyeh and Arida.

Mass Transit Modernization and Energy Transition

Rapid currency inflation and rising global energy costs have made mass public transit an urgent economic necessity for Lebanese citizens. Recent adjustments adding LL300,000 per 20-liters of fuel generated necessary State liquidity, prompting proposals to reallocate a fraction of these dedicated fuel revenues toward modernizing public transport fleets. The State's public bus fleet previously



depended on external foreign donations. Current mass transit initiatives have expanded public bus ridership to over 8,000 daily passengers, up from zero, by establishing a functional operational formula where the State supplies vehicles while private operators manage daily transport routes and maintenance.

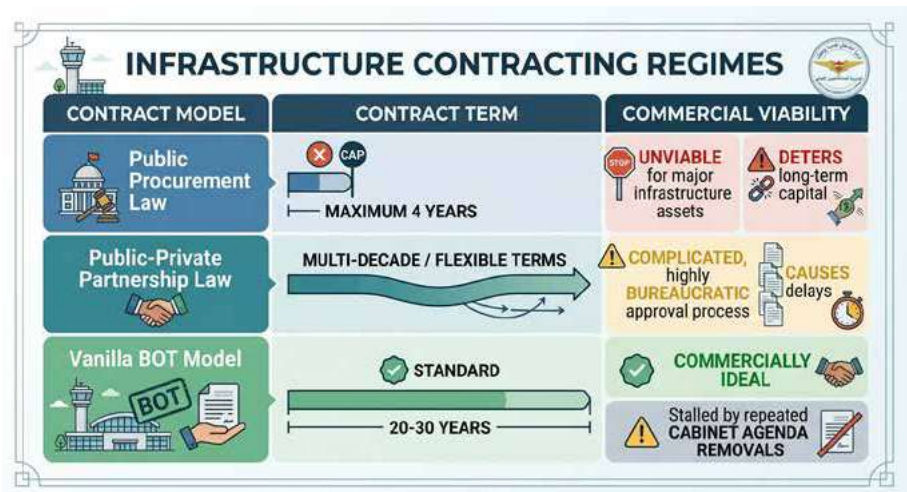


To achieve long-term financial sustainability, the State is advancing a comprehensive project to deploy solar-powered electric buses across Greater Beirut, an urban zone serving nearly two million residents. Detailed feasibility studies indicate that solar-powered electric buses operate at half the cost of conventional diesel vehicles. This drastic reduction in operational overhead enables the government to maintain heavily subsidized passenger fares, providing affordable transport assistance to civil servants and low-income residents while insulating public transit from global fuel volatility. The private sector will participate as a full concession partner in acquiring, financing, and operating these electric bus networks under State oversight.

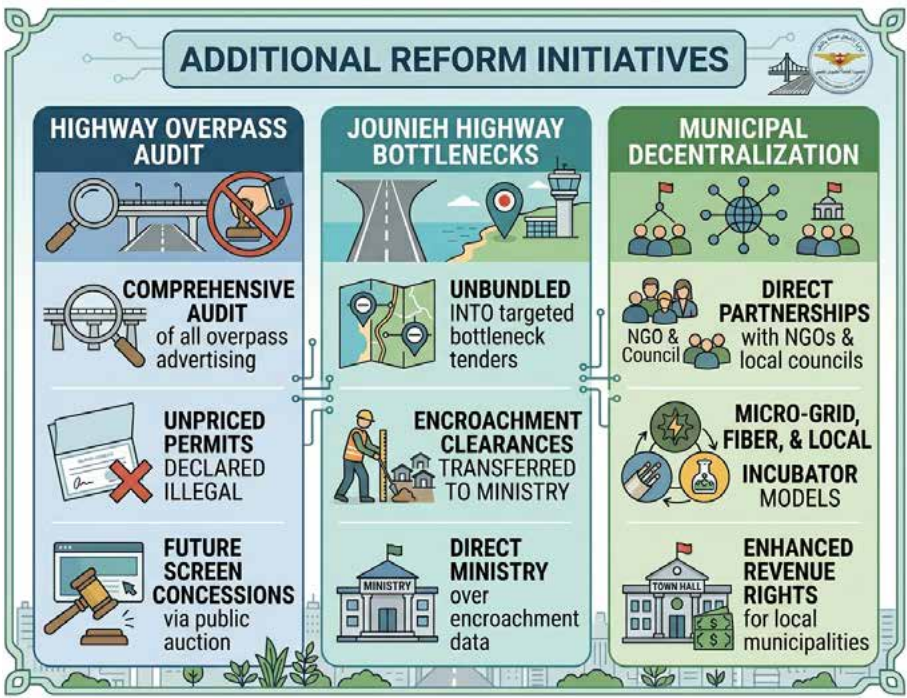
Statutory Barriers, BOT Models, and Legislative Reform

The primary impediment to executing major national infrastructure projects lies in outdated, overly convoluted statutory legal frameworks rather than resource limits or local cartels. Capital-intensive projects across ports, airports, and highway corridors require multi-decade concession models to allow private investors to recoup capital expenditures and earn commercial returns. However, the Public Procurement Law restricts public concession contracts to a maximum term of four years. A four-year contract limit is commercially unviable for major infrastructure developments, preventing private capital deployment across key facilities.



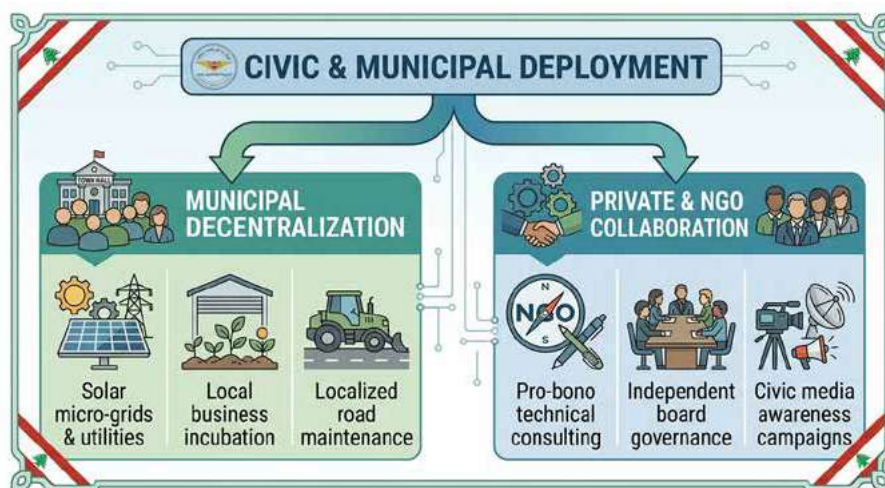


Attempts to bypass standard procurement limits by utilizing the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) law have proven difficult due to the statutory complexity and administrative bureaucracy embedded within the PPP framework. Repeated requests submitted for Cabinet approval to execute standard Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) contracts alongside the Ministry of Finance have been removed from cabinet agendas under the pretext of adhering strictly to the PPP law. This regulatory friction leaves vital infrastructure stalled. Overcoming these administrative bottlenecks requires establishing a dedicated legislative body to overhaul and modernize the legal code, updating foundational statutes that have remained unrevised for four to six decades.



Municipal Partnerships, Civic Engagement, and Public Communications

Given the fiscal constraints of central government ministries, local municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serve as critical operational partners for executing local development projects. Municipalities hold statutory authority to manage local infrastructure; however, their financial resources remain depleted. Direct private-sector partnerships with municipalities enable local communities to implement decentralized development models, including solar micro-grids, local fiber internet, business incubators, and specialized waste management initiatives without relying on central treasury funding. Furthermore, expert private sector professionals can support State administration by volunteering technical expertise, serving on corporate boards, and providing pro bono engineering and architectural designs for public facilities.



Countering public cynicism and online disinformation requires proactive, result-oriented executive communication. Media discourse frequently focuses on administrative scandals and negative reporting, often ignoring substantive infrastructure achievements. Rather than relying on traditional press channels or engaging in social media debates, public sector entities must communicate through official, direct digital channels, delivering transparent, project-based announcements supported by tangible outcomes. Pre-empting public skepticism by presenting fully prepared technical studies, clear execution timelines, and verified operational results ensures accurate public understanding, prevents narrative distortion, and rebuilds civic confidence in State institutions.

