1. Key development issues and rationale for Bank involvement

Despite satisfactory enrollment rates of the general education system, internal efficiency and quality are low and the use of education subsidies is regressive. While secondary school enrollment rates are 13 points above the regional average, there are problems at the basic education level, particularly in its upper grades. In 2007, net enrollment rates dropped from 87 percent in primary education to 74 percent in grade 9. It is estimated that in 2004 around 17 percent of children of basic school age were out of school, and around 35 percent of youth (ages 14-19) had dropped out. High drop-out and repetition rates account for the system being costly for what it achieves: it takes an average of 22.7 years of investment and a total of US$33,500 to produce one grade 9 completer. In addition, although TIMSS scores in Lebanon improved between 2003 and 2007, they remain both under the overall international average and the average for upper middle income countries. Moreover, the pupil/teacher ratios are among the lowest in the region - 17.1 at the primary level and 8.1 at the secondary level - reflecting a teacher population that is growing at a faster rate than the growth of the student body. Besides these inefficiencies, the current funding regime is inequitable since the mechanisms used for extending public education funds to households are biased in favor of higher income households.

While total education spending in Lebanon currently exceeds 13% of GDP, public expenditure on education amounts to just 2.9%. The overall structure of education sector financing is amongst the most complex in the world, characterized by direct support to public schools, together with a framework of education grants and other payments to public and private sector employees with school-age children, thereby providing families with a clear incentive to send
their children to private schools. Furthermore, given that non-salary recurrent expenditures in public schools are financed by school funds rather than by the central government, the amount of resources available at the school level is highly unpredictable.

*Lebanon has an urgent need to enhance access to public Early Childhood Education (ECE) especially in economically disadvantaged and educationally deprived areas.* Recognizing the importance of ECE on the child’s level of motivation and learning potential in later stages of education, MEHE has established a policy objective to increase the enrollment rate of children 3 to 5 years of age in public schools, as this is also perceived as one of the key reasons why public schools do not get a higher share of the overall enrolment in basic education. Moreover, particular emphasis will be placed on public schools which do not currently provide preschool services for three year old children.

*The share of uncertified contract teachers in primary and secondary education has increased while at the same time the average age of teachers in service keeps increasing.* Unless these issues are tackled upfront, the potential impact of education quality-related investments would be at risk. While initial steps have been taken to introduce teachers to the new curriculum and associated pedagogical principles through the delivery of in-service professional development programs and the development of teacher evaluation tools, a deepening of those needs to take place through a combination of the introduction of professional standards, training, performance assessment, and incentives, coupled with increased efficiency in the deployment of teaching resources. In this regard, MEHE has undertaken an assessment of teacher requirements based on the number of students in each cycle, number of teachers in each cycle, number of sections in each cycle, and number of administrative staff. This analysis identifies that approximately 21% of currently employed teachers are surplus to requirements.

*The newly-appointed GOL is ready to accelerate the implementation of preschool, general and tertiary education reforms.* In its Policy Statement to the Parliament, the GOL committed to tackling long-standing challenges in the education sector related to the teaching workforce and its quality, achieving compulsory basic education for all, enhancing the physical and educational environment for all public schools, enhancement of the Lebanese University, and quality assurance for higher education. These priorities have been developed over the past three years though the National Education Strategy which was completed in 2007. The NES has been detailed into a series of ten medium-term priorities based on a process of consultation with representatives from the executive and senior management levels of the MEHE, and which today is recognized as the baseline document for future planning and investment in the sector, including for donor support.

*The next phase of World Bank support to education in Lebanon will adopt a sector approach* - the key elements of which are the existence of: (i) a MEHE sector-wide strategy (from early childhood education to higher education); (ii) a medium term financing framework; and (iii) a country-led partnership and systematic donor coordination. The proposed Education Reform for Quality Schools (ERQS) project would finance a slice of the overall sector development strategy, taking into account areas which the Bank considers priorities, as well as gaps left unfunded by other donors and/or own government resources. After 10 years of involvement in the education sector, the World Bank has become a trusted partner for the Government and is now leading the
international donor community in its support to the sector. The Bank’s role has been particularly crucial in recent years because of its support – technical and financial – to the process of creating the national education strategy and its operationalization, both financed by the Education Development Project (EDP), which closed on December 31, 2009. With a new Government ready to take up all these ambitious reforms, there is a strong rationale for the Bank to increase its commitment with education in Lebanon.

2. Proposed objective(s)

The proposed Project Development Objectives would be to: (i) enhance and facilitate school learning in general education and improve the school readiness of children entering primary education; and (ii) increase governance and managerial capacity of MEHE, regional education departments and schools.

Preliminary description

Component 1. Early Childhood Education: Promoting school readiness and equal opportunity at the start of General Education

The objective of this component would be to improve the school readiness of Lebanese children through (i) increasing access to quality ECE by upgrading the physical infrastructure of the ECE system (kindergartens and preschool sections in existing basic schools); (ii) enhancing curriculum and learning resource materials for ECE; (iii) initiating a specialized program of professional development for ECE teachers and staff; and, (iv) improving family awareness and active involvement in ECE.

Component 2. Supporting improvements of quality of education through school-based development and teacher professional development.

Building on EDP’s accomplishments in teacher professional development and school leaders, the proposed project would have a school-based approach to education reform and improvement, focusing on key education quality dimensions. This component would create the policy and institutional environment to channel and implement all interventions related to education quality financed by the Government itself and by other interested donors (USAID, AFD and EU). Further, with the support of the Project, the MEHE will strengthen its quality monitoring capabilities with a new agency in charge of the evaluation of school performance.

Subcomponent 2.1. School-based development and improvement. The objective of this subcomponent would be to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at the school level through the adoption of a school-based planning, development and improvement approach led by a School Council chaired by the school principal. This subcomponent would create the necessary incentives and conditions for schools to lead the implementation of other critical reforms such as the Drop-out prevention plan and the ICT in education programs.

Subcomponent 2.2. Teacher Professional Development: attracting, selecting, training, retaining and rewarding effective teachers. The objectives of this subcomponent would be to
(i) upgrade the quality of teaching and learning in Lebanese schools through the development of national teacher professional development standards, enhanced pre-service and in-service professional development for teaching staff, and (ii) rationalize the teaching workforce in Lebanese public schools.

Component 3: Strengthening Education Sector Policy Development and Management

Subcomponent 3.1. National Qualifications Framework. The objective of this subcomponent would be to lay the groundwork for rationalization and harmonization of program structures and articulation mechanisms between the general education, technical/vocational education and higher education streams, and to improve alignment of the education system with the requirements of the labor market. This subcomponent would therefore support national and international technical assistance to enable the Government to establish an NQF. This would be carried out in coordination with the European Training Foundation.

Subcomponent 3.2. Institutional Development. The objective of this subcomponent would be to enhance institutional efficiency and coordination through further revision of the regulatory framework under which MEHE operates, and to establish the operational procedures and accountabilities associated with the adoption of program based budgeting.

Subcomponent 3.3. Education Sector Financing to increase efficiency. The objectives of this subcomponent would be to: (i) further develop the practices and procedures that will enable an operational transfer from line item based sector budgeting to program based budgeting and management; and (ii) revise the budgetary provisions and procedures necessary for effective implementation of the National Education Strategy.

Subcomponent 3.4. Education Management Information System. The objective of this component would be to provide all education sector stakeholders with access to current and reliable data designed to enable the effective analysis of policy options, increase internal efficiency, and enable the targeting of resources designed to improve the quality of learning outcomes.

Subcomponent 3.5. Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation. The objective of this subcomponent would be to ensure a sound management of the project and to establish an operational M&E that provides MEHE senior management with measures of progress towards the achievement of policy objectives and programs. Project implementation would be the responsibility of the relevant directorates within MEHE and the Education Center for Research and Development (ECRD). Coordination, M&E, and fiduciary (procurement and financial management) responsibilities would lie with the Education Secretariat (ESDS).

3. Safeguard policies that might apply

Since the project would finance the upgrading of kindergartens and preschool sections in existing basic schools, OP 4.01 will be triggered and an environmental assessment (EMP) will be prepared.
4. Tentative financing
Source: ($m.)
Borrower 0
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 35
Total 35

5. Contact point
Contact: Juan Manuel Moreno Olmedilla
Title: Sr. Education Spec.
Tel: 202-473-5541
Fax: 202-477-0036
Email: jmoreno@worldbank.org