LEBANON REFORESTATION INITIATIVE

U.S. FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The Lebanon Reforestation Initiative (LRI) has planted more than half-a-million native tree species on more than 700 hectares throughout all regions of Lebanon.

The project has also dramatically improved survival rates of planted tree seedlings – on average between 70-90% after three years, compared with a previous national average of about 25%.

As a part of the LRI project, the U.S. Forest Service has developed and implemented models of effective community engagement that ensure sustainable landscape restoration projects are supported locally and directly benefit communities.

The program has also developed a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based, web-mapping platform that allows national policy makers, forestry practitioners, the private sector, and other donors to identify and coordinate priority areas for landscape restoration nationwide, and that provides critical biophysical and national reforestation data previously unavailable publicly.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

As Lebanon faces increasingly acute pressures from a growing refugee population and attempts to meet the rapidly expanding needs of its own people, the country's natural resource base is being stretched to the breaking point. Ensuring social harmony and preventing the country's remaining forests from destruction by wildfire and timber harvesting from excessive population pressure are but two of the most pressing concerns that impact the future stability of the country. Expected negative impacts of climate change in the region forewarn of growing disruption to water resource availability, desertification, and the potential for significant forest cover loss. These pressures will only accentuate already growing conflicts over natural resource use and management.

The Lebanon Reforestation Initiative (LRI), a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the U.S. Forest Service, was established in 2010 to undertake an ambitious program of technical assistance and institutional support on sustainable forestry practices and wildfire management in economically depressed and environmentally degraded regions of Lebanon. LRI has transformed the way native trees are grown and planted in Lebanon and assisted diverse communities throughout the country to restore more than 700 hectares of communal forest lands by planting more than half-a-million native trees. Through these reforestation activities, LRI established successful models of community-based landscape restoration, public-private funding mechanisms, and community wildfire prevention and management.

While landscape-scale reforestation is the main entry point for the project, it offers an array of crosscutting socio-economic benefits in underserved areas of the country and in all types of diverse sectarian communities, especially those hit hardest by the country's refugee crisis. Taken together, these expected benefits constitute a brighter future for Lebanon, for its forested watersheds, and for the continued harmony of communities dependent upon their natural resources.

The U. S. Forest Service is embarking on a new phase of LRI that promotes long-term sustainability of communities by achieving not only environmental and natural resource objectives like enlarging Lebanon's green cover or restoring degraded watersheds but also rural development and stability imperatives that

Photos courtesy of Lebanon Reforestation Initiative staff