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LAND TENURE IN LEBANON: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY DEBATES

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Introduction

"Land for those who work it." This popular slogan, heralded by anti-colonialists and anti-imperialists worldwide, as well as by peasant movements such as La Via Campesina and the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, encapsulates a global demand for agrarian reforms that put peasants at the heart of food systems. Yet while global conversations about food production and rural development have had to confront the uncomfortable issue of land tenure, in Lebanon land remains the elephant in the room of national agrarian policy debates.

The question of land distribution and access in Lebanon touches on the very foundations of the country's political economy, which is based on rent extraction, clientelism, and elite capture. A tangle of different land regimes has enabled political and economic elites to continuously convert land into speculative private assets, slowly eroding the social value of land while turning it into a commodity and a source of political power. The persistence of land-based power and elite resistance has historically blocked any meaningful structural reform. In parallel, by preferring donor-driven, technical interventions in agrarian and food policies that avoid the core issue of unequal land access, the Lebanese state functions as a guarantor of existing class structures.

This article argues that reforming land access in Lebanon is the essential structural condition for cultivating a fair and sustainable agricultural system rooted in agroecology. It also proposes specific reformist policies and measures toward that goal. In the current political landscape, redistributive land reform – the transfer of tenure rights to new beneficiaries to provide more equitable access – remains distant. Nevertheless, pragmatic alternatives exist to improve land access to vulnerable communities and safeguard precarious agricultural lands. These include strengthening the use of communal *amiri* lands, protecting agricultural zones from speculation, and activating idle land.

The Roots of Land Inequality in Lebanon

From the Ottoman land regime to the French Mandate, through independence and up to the civil war, Lebanon's history has been marked by a succession of land configurations that profoundly structured power relations and territorial control. During the Ottoman Empire's Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), the land code of 1858 was introduced to centralize and systematize land taxation. It introduced five categories of land: *amiri*, state-owned lands with usufruct rights granted to individuals; *mulk*, private property; *waqf*, lands endowed to religious institutions; *mawat*, uncultivated or remote lands; and *metruk*, lands reserved for collective use such as roads, forests, and pastures. These reforms allowed local elites to exploit the system by registering land in their name often without clear spatial demarcation, thus leading to the accumulation of land in the hands of notables.[1] The number of private property titles, and the area they covered, increased drastically during the Tanzimat period, converting most of the land in Mount Lebanon into *mulk*. This arrangement differed from neighboring regions such as Baalbek and Akkar, which later became part of greater Lebanon in 1920, where *amiri* and *metruk* lands were cultivated under the collectively managed *musha'* system.[2] Thus, from its inception, land governance in Lebanon was heterogenous, shaped by the administrative legacies of its regions.

During the French Mandate period (1920-1943),

1 A. Reza Hoshmand and Dany Abdul Hafiz Doueiri, "The Historical Dimensions of Agricultural Policy in Lebanon", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 4, 1998 (Hoshmand and Doueiri, "Historical Dimensions of Agricultural Policy").

2 Musha' lands are agricultural commons jointly owned by the community and subject to light taxation, as defined in the 1858 Land Code. For more, see Petra Samaha, *Land as a Cash Machine: The Case of Lebanon,* Arab Land Initiative, 2022 (Samaha, *Land as a Cash Machine*).

reforms continued with the establishment of the Régie de Travaux du Cadastre et d'Aménagement Foncière (Department of Land Registry and Development Work) in 1920, aimed at modernizing land administration and ensuring a better distribution and more efficient taxation of property. In the newly annexed regions of greater Lebanon, a land redistribution policy transformed *musha'* lands into private property.[3] The 1930 Real Property Law, a hybrid between the Ottoman and French land regimes, further blurred the distinction between state domains and private holdings, enabling elite capture and fragmenting public land governance.[4] Supported by local elites, these measures facilitated the appropriation of land by a few notables at the expense of collective ownership and land-use rights.[5] In this process, the land registry, far from being a simple technical tool for land management, served as a key instrument in the consolidation of land power and the production of fiscal inequalities.[6] By 1925, a marked concentration of land ownership had taken place in the Beqaa, where nearly 78% of the land was held by a small number of families.[7] This was also the case for Sinay in south Lebanon, which in 1939 was registered as the exclusive property of a single landowner: an influential political figure from the city of Saida whose descendant now sits in the Lebanese parliament.[8] Moreover, even though more than half of the territory was surveyed and added to the cadastral register, many gaps in the Ottoman code were left unaddressed, leaving persistent ambiguities that favored elite appropriation.[9]

After gaining independence in 1943, Lebanon inherited a legal framework full of loopholes and discretionary decrees that allowed the conversion of public lands into private property, undermining the principle of land as a common good.[10] Instead of reforming Franco–Ottoman land management, the Lebanese authorities perpetuated policies that allowed elites to expand their control over land. The lack of a comprehensive cadastral survey, combined with the use of historical archives as proof of ownership, fostered gradual encroachment on public and communal lands.[11] This process, which local elites skillfully exploited, accelerated the speculative appropriation of land to the detriment of traditional collective uses.[12]

The political economy of postindependence Lebanon was completely subordinated to the interests of an economic elite who favored unbridled economic liberalism and was keen on developing an extroverted, tertiary economic sector based on Beirut's role as an intermediary between the West and the emerging oil markets of the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq.[13] In agricultural policy, this approach allowed Lebanon to become an exporter of fruit and poultry to the Gulf markets given their comparative agricultural deficit and growing solvency.[14] However, this export-oriented policy also meant that agricultural workers and agricultural sectors were neglected.[15] Between 1950 and 1974, the agricultural sector went from constituting 20% of GDP and 55% of employment to only 9% and 22%, respectively. By contrast, the

3 Elizabeth Williams, "Mapping the Cadastre, Producing the Fellah: Technologies and Discourses of Rule in French Mandate Syria and Lebanon", in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, 2015 (Williams, "Mapping the Cadastre").

4 Petra Samaha, "When Land Became Property in Lebanon. The Transformation of Land Codes Since 1858 and its Implications on Planning and Public Lands", *Planning Perspectives*, 2025, pp. 1-25.

5 Abdallah Hanna, "The Attitude of the French Mandatory Authorities Towards Land Ownership in Syria", in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, 2004, pp. 457-475.

6 Williams, "Mapping the Cadastre".

7 Hoshmand and Doueiri, "Historical Dimensions of Agricultural Policy"; Williams, "Mapping the Cadastre".

8 Saker El Nour, Cynthia Gharios, Martha Mundy, and Rami Zurayk, "Le droit au village? Concept et histoire dans un village du Sud-Liban" (French), *Justice spatiale/ Spatial justice*, Vol 7, 2015.

9 Samaha, *Land as a Cash Machine*.

10 Samaha, *Land as a Cash Machine*.

11 Samar Farhat, "Sustainable Land Development and Management in Rural Areas: The Case of Kafra, South Lebanon", Master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2022.

12 Tala Alaeddine and Abir Saksouk, "Land Policy and Environmental Justice: The Case of Publicly Owned Properties in Lebanon", *Middle Eastern Cities in a Time of Climate Crisis*, CEDEJ - Égypte/Soudan, 2022, available at https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cedej.8569 (Alaeddine and Saksouk, "Land Policy and Environmental Justice").

13 Fawaz Traboulsi, A History of Modern Lebanon, Pluto Press, 2015, (Traboulsi, A History of Modern Lebanon).

14 Pierre Blanc, *Proche-Orient, Le pouvoir, la terre et l'eau* (French), Presses de Sciences Po, 2012, available at https://shs.cairn.info/proche-orient--9782724612615-page-51?lang=fr (Blanc, *Proche-Orient*).

15 Pierre Blanc, "L'agriculture au Liban: Entre contraintes géopolitiques et retrait du politique" (French), *Maghreb - Machrek*, Vol. 215, no.1, pp. 81-99, 2013, available at https://doi.org/10.3917/machr.215.0081 (Blanc, "L'agriculture au Liban").

contribution of the service sector to GDP increased from 66% to 73% and to employment from 34% to 61% during the same period.[16]

After the civil war (1975-1990), the financialization of land became a defining feature of Lebanon's economic strategy.[17] Supported by remittances from the diaspora and capital from the Arab Gulf states, land and real estate became the main investment vehicle, leading to a drastic increase in land values.[18] The state, weakened by internal conflicts and elite capture, gave way to governance dominated by private interests. This system generated spatial inequalities, the disappearance of agricultural land, and a degradation of public goods, reducing land to a simple speculative asset serving the accumulation of capital by a minority.[19]

The Effects of Land Inequality on Agricultural Labor and Production

Like Syria and Egypt after their independence, Lebanon inherited a situation of heightened land inequality where the power of political elites was underpinned by their land-based power. While this imbalance had been partially resolved in Syria and Egypt by governments pursuing ambitious nationalist agricultural policies, the influence of large landowners remained an obstacle to agricultural development in Lebanon.[20] For example, Syrian land reform in the early 1960s expropriated 80% of the land held by large landowners in the Qusayr border region. This reform granted equal exploitation rights and access to agricultural services to Syrian and Lebanese sharecroppers established on both sides of the border.[21]

In Lebanon, the emergence and expansion of large capitalist farms since the 1950s led not only to the intensification of land inequality but also to a transformation of agricultural labor and the decline of sharecropping, which fell from 25% of the agricultural labor force in 1950 to only 5% in 1970.[22] In search of higher productivity, landowners evicted many sharecroppers, who were forced to migrate to Beirut in search of work. Affecting nearly 20% of the rural population in the 1960s, forced displacement contributed to the creation of a precarious urban proletariat deprived of basic social and economic rights.[23] Others turned to waged agricultural work in difficult conditions and with minimal pay due to the abundance of cheap labor, particularly in the form of Palestinian refugees and Syrian migrants. In 1970, Lebanon had approximately 30,000 Lebanese and 15,000 Syrian and Palestinian agricultural workers.[24]

It was in this tense socioeconomic context that several rural mobilizations against precarious working conditions and unjust tenancy structures took place. Starting in 1968, landless sharecroppers on the Akkar plain revolted against absentee landlords and evictions. In 1970, tenant farmers of Maronite convents in Tannourine and Mayfouq mobilized for fairer crop shares and land distribution. In 1973, tobacco peasants in the south challenged exploitative licensing and pricing policies, demanding better prices and more rights.[25] These mobilizations coalesced into the formation of the national union of agricultural workers, whose congress in 1973 brought together 163 villages. The union campaigned against price hikes of agricultural inputs and the abusive practices of intermediaries. Crucially, farmers also demanded a fairer tenancy code that would facilitate their access to land, as well as their admission to the national social security fund.[26] These peasant

16 Toufic Gaspard, A Political Economy of Lebanon, 1948-2002: The Limits of Laissez-Faire, BRILL, 2003.
17 Samaha, Land as a Cash Machine.
18 Hannes Baumann, Citizen Hariri: Lebanon's Neo-Liberal Reconstruction, Oxford University Press, 2016.
19 Samaha, Land as a Cash Machine.
20 Blanc, "L'agriculture au Liban".
21 Kanj Hamade, Pierre Blanc, Ronald Jaubert, and Myriam Saadé-Sbeih, "De part et d'autre de la frontière libano-syrienne : les mutations de l'agriculture du Haut Oronte" (French), *Confluences Méditerranée*, Vol. 92, no.1, 2015.
22 Traboulsi, A History of Modern Lebanon.
23 William Thomson, Cynthia Gharios and Rami Zurayk, "From silk to concrete: exploring the socio-spatial aspects of the Agrarian question(s) in Mount Lebanon", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 50, no.4, 2023 (Thomson et al., "From silk to concrete").
24 Salim Nasr, "Backdrop to Civil War: The Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism", *MERIP Reports*, Vol. 73, 1978.
25 Rossana Tufaro, "The Intifāḍat Al-Dikhān: Elements of Peasant Conflict in the South of Lebanon on the Eve of the Civil War", *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* XCVI, Vol. 2, no. 4, 2023.
26 Traboulsi, A History of Modern Lebanon.

movements were inscribed within wider demands for socioeconomic change that echoed within the country in the early 1970s. Yet the political system, paralyzed and riddled with internal contradictions and conflicts, proved unable to carry out the reforms needed to confront the crisis.

Today, land remains a central issue of power, resource control, and social justice, revealing the fault lines between landowning elites and marginalized rural populations. Faced with long-standing socioeconomic pressures, compounded by the 2019 economic and financial crisis, small landowners are often forced to make short-term decisions, to the detriment of long-term sustainability.[27] Ineffective and outdated land management policies force farmers to adapt to market trends to ensure their livelihoods or to invest in real estate, leading to a drastic transformation of the Lebanese rural landscape.[28] Moreover, the refusal of successive governments to formalize tenancy contracts for periods longer than a single agricultural season – which would grant peasants the security and stability needed for long-term economic and agricultural planning – reflects the persistence of the land problem in a region where large-scale land ownership remains predominant.[29] According to the latest agricultural census in 2010, 70% of farmers cultivate less than one hectare, while 4% of farms cover more than 6 hectares.[30] The agricultural value chain is composed on one side of large export-oriented agroindustrial farms and, on the other, of small, undercapitalized farms. This dynamic is reflected in the unequal distribution of land tenure: 10% of landowners own 60.6% of agricultural land, and 1% of landowners own 26.5%.[31] Large, absentee-owned estates are typically cultivated with fruit (often citrus fruits or avocados) for export and intensive crops such as potatoes. The largest private farms in Lebanon can be traced to influential politicians across all faiths and political affiliations.[32]

By contrast, half of Lebanon's farms occupy less than 10% of the country's cultivated land. These lands are often farmed traditionally, with limited access to agricultural credit or informal forms of lending. Agricultural production is affected by price fluctuations, intermediaries' margins, high production prices, low capitalization, and the lack of functional cooperatives.[33]

Moreover, most agricultural work remains informal and precarious, outside the framework of the labor code with only 8% formally employed.[34] As a result, farmers and salaried agricultural workers do not benefit from any public health coverage or pension funds. Furthermore, the World Bank estimates that after the 2019 economic crisis, 58% of agricultural households live below the poverty line.[35] The influx of Syrian labor beginning in 1990 at the end of the civil war, and then of Syrian refugees fleeing the war in their country beginning in 2011, exerted additional pressure on the agricultural labor market, opening the doors for exploitation and further precarity.[36] In 2016, the sector employed around 200,000 Syrian workers, both permanent and seasonal, representing 80% of salaried agricultural workers.[37]

27 Abed Al Kareem Yehya, Thanh Thi Nguyen, Martin Wiehle, Rami Zurayk and Andreas Buerkert, "Six Decades of Rural Landscape Transformation in Five Lebanese Villages", *Land*, Vol. 14, no. 2, 2025.

28 Thomson et al., "From silk to concrete".

29 Blanc, *Proche-Orient*.

30 See Lebanese Republic Ministry of Agriculture, *Lebanon National Agriculture Strategy—NAS 2020-2025*, 2020.

31 Kanj Hamade, "Lebanon's Agriculture: Dynamics of Contraction in the Absence of Public Vision and Policies", 2019, available at https://www.annd.org/data/file/files/13%20lebanon%20.pdf (Hamade, "Lebanon's Agriculture").

32 Gherbal Initiative, *Political Figures' Properties*, 2025, available at https://elgherbal.org/political-properties; Hamade, "Lebanon's Agriculture".

33 Hamade, "Lebanon's Agriculture".

34 See FAO & ILO, *Skills Development for Inclusive Growth in the Lebanese Agriculture Sector,* 2020, available at https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/494d5382-9980-4bfb-b81f-afb67bf6c857

35 See World Bank, *Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment: Weathering a Protracted Crisis*, 2024, available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099052224104516741/pdf/P1766511325da10a71ab6b1ae97816dd20c.pdf

36 Nur Arafeh and Mayssoun Sukarieh, "Breaking the Cycle: Toward a New Imaginary of the Food System in Lebanon", *The Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, 2023, available at https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/07/breaking-the-cycle-toward-a-new-imaginary-of-the-food-system-in-lebanon?lang=en

37 Kanj Hamade, "Agriculture as a key to the resilience of Lebanon rural areas to the effect of the Syrian Crisis", *CIHEAM Watch Letter* 36, 2016.

Impediments to Agricultural Reform

Given the decades-long inequalities in land access and the resulting precarious conditions of agricultural work, it becomes pertinent to question why no sustainable solutions or structural reforms in land tenure or the agricultural sector have yet been implemented. Despite some attempts, particularly during Fouad Chehab's term in office in the 1950s, the threat that state-led development and modernization projects posed to the economic and clientelist interests of the political and economic elite made their implementation difficult.[38]

As Mona Harb notes, urban and land-use planning, once conceived as tools for the public good, have been hollowed out and redeployed to reproduce an oligarchic, sectarian political economy in which private property is sacralized and territorial regulation reduced to a technical vocabulary of zoning and expropriation rights, stripped of social purpose.[39]Institutions such as the Directorate General of Urban Planning and strategic frameworks like the Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement du Territoire Libanais (the Lebanese Territorial Development Master Plan) have either been co-opted for sectarian and speculative gains or left wholly unimplemented, reinforcing a political culture where land is understood primarily as a commodity and a vehicle for rent extraction rather than a collective resource.[40]

As a result, the solutions and strategies proposed by the Lebanese state are often donor-oriented, reflecting the hegemony of commercial agriculture and failing to address the sector's key legal and policy issues.[41] The recently proposed seed law emerges from this same logic: behind a technocratic façade of regulation, the draft law introduces a commercialized regime that undermines local seed systems, weakens biodiversity, and opens the door to monopolization by traders and multinational seed companies, effectively extending the commodification of land into the genetic foundations of agriculture itself.[42] Seed registration thus becomes another mechanism for enclosing the environmental commons, subjecting farmers to dependence and deepening the privatization of essential, historically shared resources.[43]

Kanj Hamade identifies four essential reforms toward sustainable rural development that would improve the situation of farmers and agricultural workers in the long-term: formalizing agricultural labor, reforming land tenure, expanding the law regulating cooperatives, and encouraging competitiveness by breaking up monopolies.[44] Focusing on the category of land tenure and access, the following section advances pragmatic yet critical reforms.

Fields of Reform

Several studies have shown the positive links between secure land access and the expansion of agroecological approaches, the improvement of environmental sustainability, and the reduction of poverty and hunger.[45] Crucially, improvements in the conditions of marginalized agricultural producers depend on land reform that effectively rebalances sociopolitical power tied to land ownership.[46] In this context, redistributive land reform represents an important policy instrument, as it addresses both

38 Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*; Albert Turquieh, "Développement économique et planification au Liban: 1958-1970" (French), *Monde Arabe*, Vol. 57 no.3, 1978, available at https://doi.org/10.3917/machr1.057.0072; Blanc, *Proche-Orient*; Blanc, "L'agriculture au Liban".

39 Interview with Mona Harb, from the American University of Beirut, on 26 November 2025 (Interview with Mona Harb).

40 Interview with Mona Harb.

41 Kanj Hamadé, "Lebanon's Food Insecurity and the Path Toward Agricultural Reform", Carnegie Middle East Center, 13 November 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/12/lebanons-food-insecurity-and-the-path-toward-agricultural-reform?lang=en&center=middle-east

42 Magaphone, "The law regulating the seed trade: The war between traders and the government against the 'public environmental interest'" (in Arabic), 29 November 2025, https://megaphone.news/oped/قانون-تنظيم-تجارة-البذور (Megaphone, "The Law regulating the seed trade")

43 (Megaphone, "The Law regulating the seed trade")

44 Hamade, 2020.

45 Colin Ray Anderson et al., "From Transition to Domains of Transformation: Getting to Sustainable and Just Food Systems through Agroecology," *Sustainability*, Vol. 11 no. 9, 2019; Hannah Wittman, Dana James, "Land governance for agroecology," *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene*, Vol. 10 no. 1, 2022.

46 Michael Lipton, Land Reform in Developing Countries: Property Rights and Property Wrongs, Routledge, 2009.

the material need for land access and the structural inequalities of ownership and power that constrain the agricultural sector. Practically, it allows the transfer of property rights from large landowners to small farmers in order to provide more equitable access to land.[47]

However, such policies would go against the interests of a political elite that has historically derived its power from large property holdings. Policy implementation would also face a fragmented governance and a legal framework that favors privatization. By way of illustration, a section of the ruling elite is proposing, through several bills, the privatization of state assets, particularly *amiri* land, as a potential solution to the current economic crisis. These lands compose 52% of the Lebanese state's land with 78% of it in the Beqaa, a critical agricultural region. *Amiri* lands constitute a form of accessible public property, particularly for marginalized populations. Their free use, which is open to non-nationals and transferable on an equal basis, promotes collective land management, breaking with the dominant model of private ownership. In contrast, privatization attempts reflect a clientelist system where land rights are used for political purposes to the detriment of the common good and the real needs of the sector.[48] Privatizing this land risks exacerbating inequalities without truly contributing to resolving the economic crisis or reducing public debt, while further weakening the state.[49]

While fair land redistribution remains the ideal pathway to address structural inequalities in agriculture, Lebanon's political and economic realities make such reforms unlikely, requiring instead alternative strategies to improve land access and equity.

First, practitioners and scholars actively engaged in urban planning advocacy should suggest strengthening the use of *amiri* land.[50] Lebanon should adopt a national policy to protect and expand *amiri*-designated land, which constitute vast tracts of public property critical to agriculture and rural livelihoods across the country. These lands – as seen in Tyre, where 62% of the *amiri* land is used to support over 150 Palestinian refugee families – demonstrate how public ownership paired with secure usufruct rights can sustain food production, protect communities from displacement, and counter land speculation.[51] Under a dedicated legal and administrative framework that clarifies their governance, a nationwide effort should map, safeguard, and where possible reclaim underused state property for agricultural and community use, embedding *amiri* lands as a cornerstone of Lebanon's food security and social equity strategies.

Second, urban planners and advocates recommend improving land-use planning and protection.[52] A major impediment to land access in Lebanon is the lack of efficient land-use planning and protection measures. Many fertile agricultural zones, like the Zahrani plain, are devoid of any formal planning framework, making them especially vulnerable to reclassification for building or tourism projects. This is exacerbated by the failure to implement the Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement du Territoire Libanais, the national master plan intended to protect areas of agricultural significance.[53] The Schéma Directeur must be revised to align with contemporary circumstances, recognizing that certain agricultural regions have been irrevocably lost to urbanization while guaranteeing that all remaining active farmland is explicitly safeguarded under national and municipal strategies. In parallel, the development of a comprehensive agricultural land-use map is needed to provide reliable data on crop distribution, land potential, and infrastructure

47 ESCWA, "Redistributive Land Reform; Redistributive Reform", 27 September 2025, available at https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/redistributive-land-reform-redistributive-reform

48 Alaeddine and Saksouk, "Land Policy and Environmental Justice".

49 Albert Kostanian, "Privatization of Lebanon's Public Assets: No Miracle Solution for the Crisis", Issam Fares Institute, American University of Beirut, 2021, available at https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/research_reports/2020-2021/20210222_Privatization_of_Lebanon_Public_Assets_Research_Report.pdf

50 Interview with Tala Alaeddine, from the Public Works Studio, on 15 September 2025 (Interview with Tala Alaeddine).

51 Nadine Bekdache and Jana Haidar, "Land belongs to those who cultivate it: The rights holders of in Shabriha", *Public Works Studio* 16 July 2024, https://publicworksstudio.com/en/land-belongs-to-those-who-cultivate-it/; Public Works Studio, "Distribution of Private State Property in Tyre City, Borj Ech-Chemali and Aabbassiye", 12 May 2023, available at https://publicworksstudio.com/en/distribution-of-private-state-property-in-tyre-borj-ech-chemali-aabbassiye/

52 Interview with Tala Alaeddine.

53 Interview with Mona Harb; Interview with Tala Alaeddine.

requirements. Such a tool would enable evidence-based planning and prevent arbitrary or politically motivated reclassification of land.

Third, and drawing on Brazil's social function of property concept, some recommend the implementation of regulation that would activate idle or underused land.[54] One example is implementing fiscal penalties for idle land, coupled with incentives for productive utilization, to promote more effective and socially responsible land management. Along the same lines, it is crucial that religious endowment (*waqf*) lands contribute socially through fair leasing for agricultural use when possible or fair taxation. Municipalities also play a significant role in fulfilling the social role of land. Communal lands within municipalities (*metruk*) – historically consisting of threshing floors or pastures – can be mobilized for community farming projects with municipalities overseeing management and redistributing the benefits. By reinforcing national and local planning instruments and linking them to a clear agricultural strategy, Lebanon can reduce speculative pressures, protect its most fertile lands, and ensure that agricultural areas continue to fulfill their essential social and productive functions.

Conclusion

Forged by a long history of fragmented legal regimes and elite accumulation, land dynamics in Lebanon continue to perpetuate patterns of exclusion. Reforming access to land is not only a structural condition for building a fair and sustainable agricultural system, but also a social imperative centered on recognizing and protecting the rights of agricultural workers. This article has proposed three categories of critical policy reform: strengthening the use of *amiri* lands, improving land-use planning and protection, and activating idle or underused land through new regulations.

In concluding this analysis of land reform in Lebanon, it is also important to recognize the nonstate initiatives carving out experimental spaces that expand the horizon of commoning, even when their access to land remains contingent and precarious.[55] Against threats to even further enclosure of land and even seeds, and amid exclusionary state planning, agroecology initiatives such as Buzuruna Juzuruna, Nohye el Ard, and the AgriMovement, have recently emerged centered around agroecology: a comprehensive approach to food system sustainability that integrates research, education, and practice across the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of agriculture.[56] By valuing diverse forms of knowledge and involving all stakeholders of our food systems, agroecology challenges industrial food system power structures through alternative practices and policies. The formal launch of the Agroecology Coalition in November 2025 further politicizes these efforts by articulating agroecology not only as a technical alternative but as a struggle for food sovereignty, democratic control over resources, and rooted in agrarian realities.[57]

In this sense, agroecology initiatives and the new coalition function as reformist yet transformative actors: they contest the commodification of both land and seeds, reclaim agrarian knowledge as a shared heritage, and sketch the contours of a new commons-based paradigm emerging within a hostile political economy. Their practices reveal that while structural reforms remain blocked, alternative forms of land stewardship, seed sovereignty, and collective production continue to materialize in the cracks of the current land and food regimes, suggesting that the political imagination around land can still be rebuilt from below.

54 Gabriel Ondetti, "The social function of property, land rights and social welfare in Brazil", *Land Use Policy*, Vol. 50, 2016; Interview with Tala Alaeddine.

55 Interview with Mona Harb.

56 Steve Gliessman, "Defining Agroecology", *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, Vol. 42 no. 6, 2018.

57 Amani Beainy "Food for all: Launch of a coalition to protect environmental agriculture" (in Arabic), The Legal Agenda, 24 November 2025, available at https://legal-agenda.com/صار-في-أكل-لكل-الناس-إطلاق-ائتلاف-لحم/

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