

JUNE 2021

BULLSEYE

A CASE STUDY FROM
BEIRUT ON DRIVING
GOVERNANCE REFORM
IN TIMES OF
UNCERTAINTY



Beirut Office- Headquarters
1146, Bazerkane Street,
Beirut Central District, Beirut,
Lebanon.
t +961 81 353525
e info@sirenassociates.com

Amman Office
Khalaf Wshtai Building,
93 Al-Madina Al-Monawara Street,
Al Rawabi,
Amman,
Jordan.

Belfast Office
Registered Office
t +44 (0) 2892677710



About Siren Associates

Siren Associates is a UK registered not-for-profit company with headquarters in Lebanon, and offices in Jordan and Northern Ireland. We specialise in public sector reform, empowering organisations to become more responsive to the needs of communities. We support clients through the process of strategic change, combining organisational development expertise with a client-centred approach.

Since 2019, we have been involved in a comprehensive programme working toward enhancing the Lebanese government's accountability and governance, while fostering opportunities for increased and more constructive engagement between the public administration, civil society and Lebanese citizens, with the ultimate aim of renewing the social contract.

This programme, funded by the British Embassy Beirut, takes a holistic approach toward institutional reform, involving control agencies, legislative oversight and civil society. It works on the assumption that change cannot only be prescribed by the street, but also has to come from within the state.

This is the story of our successes, shortcomings, and goals for the future.

مجلس الوزراء التفتيش المركزي

Central Inspection: an oversight cornerstone

Lebanon's oversight and control system is a complex network that spans the legislative, executive and judicial branches. It aims at ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, and optimising the performance of the public administration. The executive oversight and control mechanisms revolve around four main bodies: the Court of Audit, Central Inspection, Civil Service Board, and Higher Disciplinary Council - all attached to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Established in 1959, as part of President Fouad Chehab's administrative reform effort, Central Inspection was attributed the mission of monitoring and controlling public administrations, public institutions and municipalities by way of inspections and investigations.

It was also tasked with verifying compliance with applicable rules and regulations through three main and complementary functions: (1) offering advice on the restructuring of the public administration and the improvement of its work methods and procedures; (2) coordinating joint actions between public administrations; and (3) supervising public tenders.

After promising beginnings in the sixties, the next decade witnessed a concerted political effort to reverse the Chehabi reforms, resulting in a decline in the roles and powers of oversight agencies, including Central Inspection. This decline deepened during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). After several post-war rehabilitation attempts, the recent turn of events brought these agencies back to the forefront, but the damage was already done.

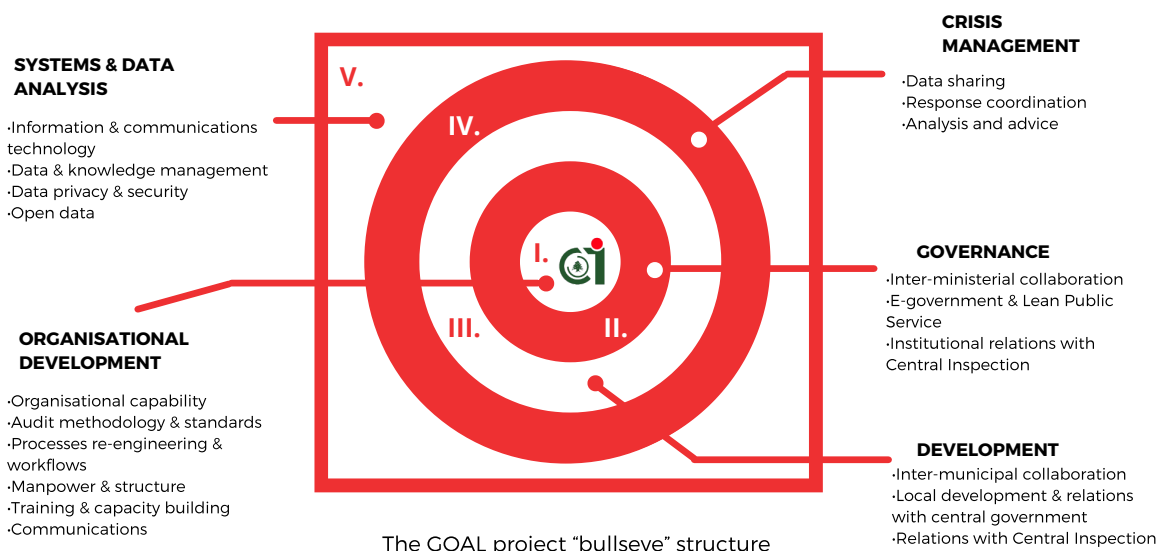
The GOAL project: back to the future



In post-war Lebanon, oversight became a synonym of compliance rather than performance. It focused mostly on sanctioning unprotected low rung bureaucrats and lower grade civil servants, rather than assessing and monitoring the performance of the public administration as a whole.

Siren Associates' Governance, Oversight and Accountability in Lebanon (GOAL) project came with a new and precise approach to remedy this problem: enhancing oversight agencies' work standards, providing them with the right toolbox for their work, rallying political support around them, and helping them in regaining popular trust.

From inception, the project was grounded in three main components: organisational development, governance, and development. It had two supporting components: crisis management, and systems and data analysis. This structure naturally reflected the slogan originally bestowed upon Central Inspection by President Fouad Chehab, "Oversight, Development, Advice", and gave the project a rationale around working "back to the future."



The GOAL project "bullseye" structure

GOAL's most visible output, however, was a disruptive digital platform that embodied all of the project's components. Created halfway through the project, the Inter-Ministerial and Municipal Platform for Assessment, Coordination and Tracking (IMPACT) was designed to gather precise data, address local development needs and inform decision-making at the national level. It additionally presented itself as a tangible solution that citizens could experiment with to engage with state institutions, helping to restore their faith in public service.

IMPACT: the project's nerve centre



<https://impact.gov.lb>

IMPACT is the first e-governance platform in Lebanon. Created in March 2020, it connects various state institutions, allows multi-directional communication, enables users to enter data about specific issues, facilitates coordination among different stakeholders, and provides data for evidence-based policy decisions.

Created shortly after the first national Covid-19 lockdown decision, IMPACT was initially built to facilitate remote administrative work and the crisis response to the pandemic. It started out as a digital tool set up by Central Inspection, with technical support from Siren, to help connect municipalities to the Interior Ministry when tracking Covid-19 related cases, needs and decisions at the local level. The idea was to better inform the central government about people's real needs across Lebanon, so that it might formulate a better adapted response to them.

Today, IMPACT is no longer only a Covid-19 response tool, but has become the centrepiece of Central Inspection's audit arsenal. As a government-wide digital platform, it connects municipalities, ministries, public institutions and civil society.

The platform has significantly driven inter-agency collaboration and pushed traditionally antagonistic state institutions together to collaborate on issues of national importance. This has occurred even among the most resistant or reactionary political forces, which have now seen and become reliant on the added-value that IMPACT provides.

This success defied expectations and encouraged officials to see technology as a key enabler for addressing the country's crises. For example, through IMPACT, the government organises people's mobility in periods of Covid-19 related lockdown and curfew, relying on it to access data about local risk levels, and using it as the interface for citizens and institutions to request mobility permits. Through IMPACT, residents also register for Covid-19 vaccines, while authorities use it to monitor the vaccination process and the distribution of vaccine stocks across the country.

GOAL IN NUMBERS

14 ministries, **1,077** municipalities and **1,500** mukhtars collaborating on the platform
+1,850,000 vulnerable individuals mapped in one month
+230 government buildings mapped in two weeks to assess damage in the aftermath of the Beirut Port blast
+520,000 Covid-19 cases tracked since March 2020
+1,130 towns and villages mapped through a cross-sectoral survey on rural local development

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

2014% increase in followers on Central Inspection's official Twitter account
+54,700 profile visits in April 2021 alone
1,700,000 impressions since the beginning of the year
40 articles and media reports on the IMPACT platform since the beginning of the year

Data security

IMPACT is the most comprehensive, nation-wide, online data collection operation conducted collaboratively by ministries and municipalities in Lebanon.

The platform itself is one of the leading examples of public sector transparency in Lebanon and is further complemented by a supporting website that gives the public access to the non-sensitive data gathered through IMPACT.

The wealth of data collected allows Central Inspection to detect shortcomings and performance failures in the public sector, but there are also unprecedented responsibilities associated with handling citizens' personal information and private data.

Never shy of a challenge, Central Inspection was one of the first public bodies to commit to and share a privacy policy in line with the highest Lebanese and international standards. As such, all the required technical measures have been taken to ensure the safety and security of the data, and protect it from unlawful and politicised access.

With Siren's support, IMPACT became the first governmental platform to publicly share terms of use that explain where data is collected, who owns it, and the conditions around how it is used, processed and retained. As a result, access to information through the platform is limited across the public sector, in line with the respective regulating legal framework of each institution.

"The boundaries between professional life and personal life disappeared [through the project]. I was writing software that was impacting my town's families in need, my neighbour's mobility permits, my grandparents' vaccination access ...

We were taking feedback from the news, and learning about the specifications for the next deliverables from public officials' declarations on TV. Every line of code had a human being, a neighbour, a relative or a family member behind it."

GOAL team member

The back-kitchen: ingredients of success



The success of the GOAL project owes a lot to the solid working relationships between Siren, Central Inspection and the British Embassy Beirut. Internal and external factors also played a role in its success.

On the internal front, Siren built a team with the right mix of talent, pulling together a young and diverse group of research analysts, policy consultants and software engineers. We used a project management approach that values flexibility over static plans, and introduced processes that encourage effective team collaboration and strong internal communication. We also recognised that staff understand their own workloads better than anyone else, and so gave them the freedom to prioritise their tasks as they saw fit.

At all times, we did our best to remain flexible and responsive to the emergent demands created by a highly volatile operating environment, finding workarounds to remove blockages. Risk taking was calculated and informed by constant research and real-time monitoring, and all changes to the project plan fell within the framework of project's overarching strategy, which kept end objectives clearly in sight.

The digital tools embedded within IMPACT also helped to remove political logjams by taking discussions to a technical level, with data and analytics forcing otherwise antagonistic stakeholders to discuss concrete solutions to pressing issues, rather than engage in polemics and bluster.

Partnering with Central Inspection was another factor that was essential for facilitating change and driving reform. The decision to partner with Central Inspection was taken based on a comprehensive stakeholder mapping of the Lebanese public sector, with supporting political economy and legal analysis.

Despite being one of Lebanon's worst performing, least visible and poorly supported state institutions, Central Inspection's mandate and leadership made it the clear favourite to spearhead a reform effort addressing the root causes of decay in the public sector, namely, the lack of transparency and oversight, and outdated audit methodologies.

On the external front, this effort was reinforced by a solid network of partnerships that grew around Central Inspection to ensure support for it as it drove change. This network ranged from ministries and government entities, to civil society actors and the general public. As the project gained momentum, it also attracted competent, reform-minded civil servants, who were spurred on to act as champions of change and back Central Inspection's reform efforts. By leading by example, Central Inspection is therefore gradually transforming behaviour within the public sector, setting a precedent in terms of transparency and access to information, while promoting the use of digital tools and workflows to enhance efficiency and accountability.

Finally, the collaborative and trusting relationship between Siren and Central Inspection enabled a thorough understanding and awareness of Central Inspection's needs. Critically, ownership of problem identification and solution generation remains in the hands of Central Inspection, guaranteeing local buy-in to the change management process and promoting the long term sustainability of the reforms enacted.



Conclusion: a most virtuous cycle

Conventional wisdom in Lebanon is that elite capture of state institutions makes the latter ineffective, with politicians often seen as the civil servants' patrons. Stakeholders (both local and international) operate with this assumption in mind and approach the relation almost exclusively through the prism of clientelism.

Although clientelism has been, and remains, a powerful force within Lebanese politics, events of the past year and a half have demonstrated that pockets of reform exist within the state and warrant our collective attention.

An increasingly antagonistic relationship between the political elite and public administration has emerged, and clear examples of transformational change exist that should not be ignored. Recognising that these civil servants hold an incredible amount of institutional memory and administrative capacity, and recognising also that reformist elements within the administration are under increasing pressure, it is essential that well-targeted opportunities be sought out and pursued to support the change champions who are spearheading an internal push against the current political status quo.

"I have been going to [one particular] ministry for inspections for years, but always felt weak and powerless. When I started using IMPACT dashboards and data analytics, and for the first time in my 20 year career, I started to feel I am an inspector that is respected and that has the power to enhance the administration's performance."

Central Inspection inspector

Central Inspection has been one such champion. It has played a major role in the success of the GOAL project, and has transformed IMPACT into a key tool in its audit arsenal, making up for understaffing by improving inspectors' auditing capacities. In return, the platform ensured higher visibility for Central Inspection and strengthened its standing as a champion of change in the public sector.

Today more than ever, support to Central Inspection is a strategic investment in Lebanon's viability, and can be considered a long-term, sustainable approach to building the country's resilience in the face of its current challenges. The GOAL project has put in place a most virtuous cycle and paved the way for a powerful and inclusive Lebanese system of checks and balances in government - a system that is leveraging partnerships with young talents in the country, that is built on iterative action and research, and that is responsive to change.

The future of the GOAL project is about broader governance, oversight, and control within the Lebanese public administration. It entails collecting more data, boosting administrative and financial audit, reaching out to the Civil Service Board, and building an active partnership with the Lebanese Parliament.

One year after IMPACT's first line of code was written, the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Industry, Displaced, and Environment; the Presidency of the Council of Ministers; the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces have all operated on IMPACT. All municipalities, mukhtars, and hundreds of thousands of citizens also used the platform.

"We have the will and legitimacy to play our role and complete our oversight mission, but we never had the tools and weapons to fight for our dreams, until GOAL and IMPACT came along."

Central Inspection staff member

The growth of the platform has been exponential, providing a unique opportunity for change from within the administration. Reactionary forces have been trying to undermine IMPACT and the Central Inspection leadership, but more importantly, reformist stakeholders have joined the movement for change. With GOAL cruising ahead, the small team of twenty-five consultants may well become a team of five million citizens shaping the future of their country.

For more information about the project, you can visit the below links:

- Siren Associates' corporate [website](https://sirenassociates.com) - <https://sirenassociates.com>
- Siren Analytics' corporate [website](https://sirenanalytics.com)- <https://sirenanalytics.com>
- Central Inspection's official [website](https://cib.gov.lb)- <https://cib.gov.lb>
- IMPACT Open Data official [website](https://impact.gov.lb)- <https://impact.gov.lb>



@impact_gov



@impact_byci

Version 1.1 June 2021