

Beirut seminar looks at deficiencies in water management

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BEIRUT: The challenges facing the of **Energy and Water Ministry** are no secret: "Lebanon faces significant challenges in water quality ... and by 2020 will be faced with water scarcity," said Deputy Head of Mission for the Embassy of Greece in Lebanon Emmanuel Kakavelakis.

The official made his opening statements at the first seminar to assemble stakeholders of the water sector in a dialogue concerning the country's water management strategy on Friday.

Held at the Monroe Hotel in Beirut on the premise of presenting the outcome of activities conducted with the Mediterranean component of the European Water Initiative (MED EUWI) in Lebanon, the invitation-only full-day seminar targeted about 100 representatives of key stakeholder groups to listen and voice their concerns.

"Perhaps part of the problem is that we Lebanese don't know how to work together," retorted Director General of Hydraulic and Electrical Resources Fadi Comair, after debates became lively. "Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is about awareness and realizing how we can work together ... and I invite all of you to participate," he said.

In addition to allowing for constructive discussion during the seminar, the ministry said it would allow participants a two-week window to submit any concerns, questions, data, or comments to the ministry regarding their views on the direction water management planning in Lebanon should take.

This participative approach is one pillar of the ministry's commitment to launching IWRM, a process that promotes dialogue, coordination, and cooperation among stakeholders in the development and implementation of action plans.

In Lebanon, this approach is particularly appropriate, as responsibilities for effective water management cross over several ministries, such as the ministries of Environment, Health, Industry, and Interior.

During discussion sessions, it also became apparent several times that communication across experts and organizations is not always comprehensive; several connections were made between participants as experts were matched with projects of common interest.

Although Lebanon is the most water-abundant nation in the region, its infrastructure, or lack thereof, have let much of this national treasure go to waste. "Eighty percent of Lebanon's freshwater resources are now polluted," asserted Adnan Melky of the Global Environment Facility within the United Nations Development Program.

In an urgent effort to put Lebanon's water sector back on track, the ministry launched a national dialogue on water in 2005. After renewing the 10-year plan (2000-2010) to encompass an IWRM approach for 2008 to 2018, the ministry is now entering the first phase of revising its strategy by forming a high-level task force that will work with an advisory Multi-Stakeholder Forum for ongoing consultation.

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