



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

Water and Sanitation

Swiss Cooperation Programme Middle East

'It's not the quantity of the
water, but the quality'

Swiss Cooperation Programme Middle East

Switzerland's work in the region focuses on four key themes:

- Protection & Migration
- Education & Income
- Conflict Prevention & Peace Promotion
- **Water and Sanitation**

Switzerland cooperates with partner organisations to implement projects; funds the United Nations (UN) to work on key themes and deploys Swiss experts to support the UN and other partner organisations. These experts are strategically placed to work on topics relevant for the Swiss Cooperation Programme and are part of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

Bekaa Water Management Project

The project was launched in 2016 and aims to support the Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE) in improving the quality of its services to the Lebanese host communities as well as refugee populations. So far, the project has supported the BWE to adopt data-based management in some of its core activities; provide a more equitable access to drinking water due to improved control on the flow of water quantities; build the BWE's capacities in monitoring the maintenance of water and waste-water treatment plants; and deliver safe drinking water to refugee and host communities in the Bekaa Valley through chlorination and protection of critical wells and springs. The project is currently in its second phase and is due to run until 2023.

Centralised system

Urs Hagebau, Project Manager at the Bekaa Water Management Project in Lebanon believes that Lebanon's water shortages could partially be due to its centralised system. "In 2001, the management of the water supply across the country was divided into four establishments covering the Bekaa Valley, Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and southern and northern Lebanon," he explains. "I have been in the water business for many years, but it is rather unusual that water is not managed by the communities." Such a centralised system could contribute to tensions between the municipalities and water authorities. "If water doesn't flow, residents will complain to the municipalities who will put pressure on the service providers of the water establishment," he observes. "I think repairs would be administered a lot faster if the municipalities were in charge. They are closer to the local population and should be more directly involved in the provision of this service."



Bekaa Water Management Project

Switzerland's Bekaa Water Management Project was launched in 2016 with the goal to support the Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE), which is under the umbrella of the Lebanese Ministry for Energy and Water, in providing the host community and Syrian refugees with safe and equitable access to drinking water as well as sanitation services and reducing water-related conflicts. More concretely, Switzerland assists the local

authority in improving the infrastructure and operation of water supply systems and enhancing the maintenance of wastewater treatment plants in villages and urban environments in the Bekaa Valley.

Among other things, Urs and his team support the BWE in installing a compatible data system to monitor the water and energy consumption as well as the cost of transporting the water from the spring to

the system. "No reliable water data was available in Lebanon. The authorities did not know how many cubic metres of water were pumped or how much water, maintenance and operating the systems cost." So far, Switzerland has supported the installation of SCADA data collection systems in 45 of the 250 pumping stations in the Bekaa Valley which have been handed over to the authorities and are fully operational.

"The challenge with these systems is that other donors have also installed collection points for the data which may be of a different kind. My job is to make sure all systems are compatible," he explains. However, it's not Urs and his team who physically install the technical equipment for the water and waste-water



management in the Bekaa Valley as this is done by local contractors. A big part of his and his team's work is to monitor the process, train the local staff, find cooperation partners, apply control processes and facilitate the work of the experts in the field. He also works on promoting dialogue and conflict sensitivity as limited access to water can lead to local conflicts between different Lebanese communities and between Lebanese host and refugee communities.

Improving water management in collaboration with the BWE is not the only way Switzerland strives to help the government improve water supply and sanitation services in the country. "There is a general lack of awareness that water is not an unlimited resource," Urs says. "We hardly get a drop of rain in the Bekaa Valley from April to November, but people still pour



water on the roads in front of their houses to remove the dust,” he says. In order to raise the population’s awareness of the importance and value of water, Switzerland supports the BWE in providing training in water resource protection.

Like anywhere else in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed Urs’ mode of operation, however, it has not been all bad. “Having regular exchanges with our partners was challenging in the past,” he explains. “But with the COVID-19-related restrictions,

I feel that our partners reach out to us more often. I sometimes receive calls from the director of the BWE at the weirdest hours, which is absolutely fine and actually makes me happy. This shows that over the years, the Swiss have managed to build up trust which allows us to move forward, and I have great hopes that the project will help the authorities achieve just that.”

Urs Hagnauer was born in Switzerland in 1955 but spent his childhood and early adulthood in Costa Rica where his parents emigrated when he was five years old. The trained agricultural machinery mechanic started his career at a farm in Costa Rica where he managed the entire agricultural fleet for two years. In 1979, aged 24, he took on his first position in the field of development cooperation working as technical adviser for Helvetas Switzerland in Paraguay. From here on, Urs remained in the development field and worked in countries such as Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Honduras and Nicaragua. Soon after Urs joined the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit in 2018 he took on the position of the Project Manager at the Bekaa Water Management Project in Lebanon. After two years in the Bekaa Valley Urs is now embarking on the third phase of his life which is to retire with his wife in her home in Paraguay.



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