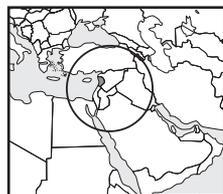


## LEBANON

# What is not counted does not count



Poverty reduction, social protection, and women's empowerment are still not priority items on the Government's agenda. For one thing, poverty has never been directly studied in the country. And Lebanon's high public debt and chronic deficit problems have received more attention than women's human rights and women's low participation in political and economic life.

Arab NGO Network for Development

Zeina Abla and Sawсан Masri

### Overview of poverty

A comprehensive and accurate picture of poverty in Lebanon is not available. Up to now there have been no scientific studies or surveys aimed at measuring and analyzing poverty in the country.<sup>1</sup> The limited data available on poverty is extracted from studies carried out for other purposes by either official institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS), or from the estimates of research institutions and individual experts.

The first of these studies was published in 1998 by CAS on *Household Living Conditions in Lebanon* and provided a significant source of data on households and expenditures. It classified the population according to 9 categories based on their monthly income (earnings from work and other sources) as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Distribution of households based on average monthly income	
INCOME CATEGORY (IN THOUSANDS OF LBP)	PERCENTAGE HOUSEHOLDS
Less than LBP 300 (USD 200), minimum wage	5.8
300-500	13.0
500-800	21.0
800-1,200	21.1
1,200-1,600	13.4
1,600-2,400	12.1
2,400-3,200	5.9
3,200-5,000	4.3
5,000 and above	3.1
Not specified	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

1 The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Central Administration for Statistics are currently implementing the "Multi-Purpose Household Survey", which should provide precise data on poverty, measuring poverty through both Poverty Line and Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) characteristics of the poor, and an updated poverty mapping. The survey results are expected in beginning 2006.

The study did not attempt to measure poverty or set a poverty line; instead, it asked households to estimate the monthly income they believed was sufficient to meet their needs. Basically, poverty was estimated by asking households about their income satisfaction. The response varied according to household size but the national average came to LBP 1,730,000 (USD 1,152). Over 37% of households reported that they had inadequate incomes, in many cases below LBP 800,000 (USD 533).

Another study commonly used and officially adopted by the Government and UN agencies is the *Mapping of Living Conditions in Lebanon* (MLC).<sup>2</sup> The MLC study attempted to measure poverty and study the level of satisfaction of basic needs of households and individuals by adopting the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) Approach.<sup>3</sup>

MLC classified the population into five categories of basic needs satisfaction (very low, low, intermediate, high and very high) according to the Living Conditions Index (LCI). The population falling into the very low and low category are considered poor since their basic needs are considered unsatisfied, so 35% of the population live below the deprivation threshold, 7.09% of whom live in situations of extreme deprivation. MLC also revealed regional disparities between central Lebanon and the peripheral and rural regions (Bint Jbeil, Akkar, Marjaion, and Hermel), where the percentage of population living in deprivation exceeds 50%. Akkar, in the north, is home to the biggest share of deprived people (12.6%). A salient feature of the study is that the major share of deprived population live in urban regions, more specifically in pockets surrounding the country's big cities (Saida, Tripoli, Beirut and Ba'albak).

The most recent of these studies was prepared by the Consultation and Research Institute as an assignment for the Economic and Social Fund

Project funded by the European Union (EU) in 2002. Its purpose was to provide an analysis of poverty and target mechanisms for the project. According to the study, the lower poverty line was estimated by adopting the Least Cost Diet Methodology at LBP 471,000 (USD 314) per month for the average household of 4.64 members and the upper poverty line at LBP 1,172,394 (USD 781) for the same household size. The average varies between districts depending on size and composition of households. Minnieh, followed by Hermel, Akkar, Tripoli and Ba'alback have the highest absolute poverty rates, estimated at USD 365 for Minnieh, USD 357 for Hermel and USD 340 for Ba'alback.

The UBN (Living Conditions Index) and the income indicators of the MLC show similar results. According to the UBN, 32% of the population is deprived while the proportion jumps to between 37% and 43% when using the income indicator method.

Fifteen years after the end of the 1975-1990 civil war it is practically impossible to know if there have been improvements in the living conditions of the population. However from the data available on economic performance and government interventions there are no indications that any significant improvements have taken place.

Lebanon has been suffering from a recession. Economic growth fell from 4% in 1996 to -0.5% in 2000, only slightly rebounding afterwards, but never exceeding 2%.<sup>4</sup> Unemployment rates have also been on the rise from 8.5% in 1997 to 11.5% in 2001.<sup>5</sup> No income redistribution policy took place within this timeframe nor did the minimum wage (USD 200) change. Instead the Government introduced two new taxes for the sole purpose of raising public revenues. The newly introduced taxes are: the Value Added Tax, which is an indirect tax with no effect on wealth and income redistribution (some claim that it is even regressive) and a flat rate tax on income interest which also has no progressive effect. In fact, the government policies during the past few years have focused particularly on containing the high public debt level and chronic fiscal deficit by adopting a range of austerity measures.

2 "Mapping of Living Conditions in Lebanon", 1998. [www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html](http://www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html)

3 The UBN methodology was applied to the raw data obtained from the "Population and Housing Survey", MOSA and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In the absence of data on health, income and expenditure indicators, a set of 11 indicators were selected and grouped into four categories (housing, water and sanitation, education, and income). As a result of the application of the UBN methodology, each household obtained a composite score for the Living Conditions Index which was used to classify levels of basic needs satisfaction.

4 *Country and Market Update 2004 - Lebanon* published by Bank Audi, Beirut 2004.

5 UNDP/MOSA, *Social and Economic Outlook in Lebanon: Prospects and Reality*. Beirut, 2004.

The political framework does not contribute to the creation and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for social development and poverty reduction. Poverty reduction and social protection are still not priority items on the Government's national agenda. Public interventions have always focused on curing the symptoms of poor living conditions through the provision of social services and social care instead of creating sustainable mechanisms for development and poverty reduction.

### Gender analysis of poverty

This overview shows that Lebanon still has no accurate measure of poverty and that existing studies only provide rough estimates. It becomes even more difficult to examine gender aspects of poverty, especially when the household is used as the unit of analysis. Available development indicators should be used to assess women's poverty conditions and determine if progress has been made. The focus should be on whether achievements are sustained and whether women are liable to fall back into poverty when under social and economic pressure.

Lebanon has taken part in the main international meetings on gender equity and ratified the major conventions, from the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), and more recently the Millennium Summit. The Government established the National Committee for Lebanese Women to follow up women's issues in coordination with governmental and non-governmental bodies. A National Action Plan for Women was set up to empower women and challenge social discrimination through a variety of projects. Despite some reservations,<sup>6</sup> this type of involvement indicates the Government's commitment to addressing the challenges facing women and to help them build their capabilities.

Lebanon has been successful in ensuring that women enjoy two of the most basic human rights: health and education. This is a step in the right direction in the fight against the feminization of poverty. Gender bias against women in health and education is almost inexistent. Female life expectancy is 75.1 years in Lebanon while males can expect to live 71.9 years, giving women an advantage of 3.2 years. These life expectancies are at the level of middle-income countries.<sup>7</sup> Lebanon has also made progress towards achieving gender equality in educational achievement. The gender gap in access to education is negligible at all levels. School enrolment rates in 1997 were equal for males and females of all ages up to 16 years, after which female school enrolment was higher for the 16-18 age bracket. At university level, more than half of students enrolled were female. Women also have an edge over boys when considering performance. In 1997-1998 and 2000-2001, boys lagged behind girls at all levels of education.<sup>8</sup>

6 Lebanon entered reservations on Article 9 (2) of the CEDAW with respect to women and men's equal rights in granting their children nationality; on Article 16 regarding equality of rights in rights and family relations; and on Article 29 regarding international arbitration.

7 Selected Gender Indicators, www.escwa.org.lb

8 UNDP/MOSA, *op cit*.

Gender bias, though, must be highlighted when considering needs other than education and health. Using the UBN approach, women account for 54% of people with very low basic needs satisfaction and 51% of people with low needs satisfaction (women make up 50.4% of the population). Women-headed households remain the most deprived, making up 14% of all households.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to examine whether women have been able to turn their capabilities into sustainable achievements, or what Amartya Sen calls "functionings", which can protect them from falling back into poverty. This can be assessed by looking at economic participation rates.

Women's economic participation was 21% in 1997 and rose to 25% in 2001. Despite the progress, economic participation remains very weak when the female proportion of the population and female educational attainment are considered. The low rates may be attributed to obstacles such as wage discrimination and job segregation. The distribution of women workers by sector shows that the majority take jobs associated with their traditional mother/caregiver role (27.8% and 29.4% of women in 1997 and 2001 respectively work in the teaching profession). Women are also assuming fewer and fewer upper managerial positions with the proportion of women in such jobs falling from 13.7% in 1997 to 6.4% in 2001.<sup>10</sup> With the opportunity cost of women's time and domestic work completely ignored, they remain at an economic disadvantage and have fewer incentives to achieving their full potential.

Economic participation definitely increases the potential for welfare and economic security, not to mention its non-material benefits. Yet even as part of the labour force, women have been more vulnerable to impoverishment as a result of the unfavourable macroeconomic conditions which have prevailed since 1997.

During the recession period, job creation was weak leading to a rise in unemployment which hit women more than men. In 1997 female unemployment was 7.2% versus 9% for men, rising to 18.2% in 2001 to almost double the rate for men (9.3%). International migration provided an option for unemployed men, but women migrant workers were much fewer. They were only half as many in the most important age bracket for economic activity (30 to 54 years). Consequently, more and more women were pushed into the informal sector, in this way increasing the incidence of impoverishment.

Since basic services are provided mainly to those employed in the formal sector, low female economic participation rates and the impact of the economic recession keep the most vulnerable women at the mercy of their families and of charities (particularly religious communities) as the only means to secure a decent livelihood.

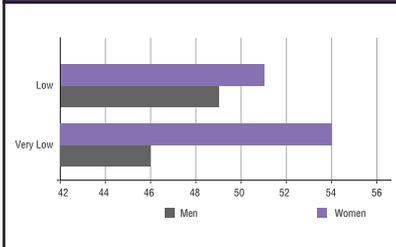
This type of support is influenced mainly by relationships within the household which give the upper-hand to males both legally or in practice. Family laws

9 "Mapping of Living Conditions in Lebanon", *op cit*.

10 UNDP/MOSA, *op cit*.

CHART 1

### Distribution of men and women according to low and very low degree of satisfaction of basic needs



(marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody) are still ruled by religion, a situation which ensures women's continuing dependence on male relatives.

As long as the cultural division of labour within the family and related dynamics are not taken into consideration by policy makers, women will remain more vulnerable to threats and will be unable to enjoy their basic rights. From the moment that men assume the role of income providers and women of family caregivers (a case of unremunerated work), men automatically become the distributors of basic rights and security to family members while women are restricted to being the recipients and depending on the quality of relationships within the household in order to acquire their human rights. Current labour and social security laws continue to be discriminatory, especially with regards to maternity leave, family allowances and income tax, despite positive ratifications made in recent years to ensure complete equity between working men and women.

The patriarchal model and religious identity become entwined with political identity as reflected in the law which still prohibits women from passing citizenship on to their children and husbands. Under these cultural and social norms, women are equal citizens only on paper.

As far as actual participation in political life at the highest levels of decision-making, for the first time in Lebanon's history the cabinet included two women at the end of 2004. This, however, cannot be considered a big leap forward for women's participation in decision-making because both women ministers were filling in for two male politicians. Likewise, only three members of the 128-seat Parliament are women. This might be considered a positive sign were it not that these women's political posts were acquired on the basis of kinship ties to a leading male political figure. The latest statistics on municipal elections date back to 1998 when only 505 women were nominated to run, and 335 actually made it, representing barely 2% of the total 7,704 municipal council members.<sup>11</sup> The relatively active participation of women in municipal work can be explained by the very nature of public work and its link to community development, which fits the stereotypical image of a woman.

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11 Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, "Municipal Elections in Lebanon - 1998", Beirut 1999.



women members than the statutory 33% of all seats. Again, “the Southern states are faring better in promoting leadership compared to Northern States.”<sup>35</sup> In some states there are all-female Panchayats doing commendable work, especially in the field of primary education. However there are serious impediments to women leaders’ work due to illiteracy, patriarchal traditions and restrictions resulting from the social structure. Some of the problems emanate from the reluctance and lack of confidence of governmental officials at higher levels. Fiscal decentralization is the most commonly experienced problem faced by Panchayats.

The new Panchayati Raj institutions have brought women into local governance institutions but political empowerment is unable to flourish because of male-dominated political process, institutions, social structures and norms.

At higher institutional and decision-making levels women’s representation remains extremely limited. A recent ranking of countries according to the percentage of women in national parliament placed India 93<sup>rd</sup> on the list of 185 countries.<sup>36</sup> In the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People) there are only 45 women out of 543 parliamentarians, approximately 8.3%. Out of a total of 242 *Rajya sabha* (Council of States) members, only 28 are women, a mere 11.6%.

## Conclusions

In spite of definite improvements in the status of women since independence, the picture remains bleak. This is especially true with respect to poverty, employment, health care and education. Social and political empowerment has indeed taken place but in the absence of complementary economic empowerment, women remain impoverished and excluded. Development agencies advocate the “creation of an enabling legal, social and economic environment (as of utmost importance) for achieving poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment goals”.<sup>37</sup> ■

35 *Ibid.*

36 Inter Parliamentary Union. “Women in National Parliaments”. 28 February 2005.

37 United Nations. “Poverty in a Globalizing World at Different Stages of Women’s Life Cycle”, 19 November 2001.

## KAZAKHSTAN

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Gender inequality is one of the structural socio-cultural causes hampering development in Kazakhstan. This inequality stems from the legacy of past historic periods along with factors such as a traditional culture with weak democratic values,

paternalistic relations in society, peculiarities of economic activity, dependence on mining industries, weak infrastructure, regional disparities, and unsustainable use of environmental resources. These causes lead to insufficient participation of women in different sectors of society, their exposure to various risks, and a growth in discrimination and sexism.<sup>10</sup>

Kazakhstan has the potential to achieve gender equality by 2015. The issue now is how this potential will be developed and used, how deep the institutional and cultural changes in the society will go, and whether new threats to equality might arise. ■

10 *Kazakhstan: Achievement, Issues and Prospects. A Perspective by the United Nations*. 2004, p. 50.

## LEBANON

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### Conclusion

Lebanon is still far from completing its commitments to the CEDAW due to the large number of violations of women’s rights, both in law and in practice. Even the legal amendments made to reduce gender bias need monitoring mechanisms to ensure their proper implementation. Reducing poverty and poverty feminization are not yet a priority for the Government.

This absence of governmental will combined with an infrastructure which does not cater to women’s needs and rights, assigns non-governmental organizations (NGOs) a major role in this respect. NGOs have made significant efforts in the enforcement of international conventions in Lebanon. The national action plan focused on women’s empowerment through services and activities provided by NGOs, such as private and micro-credit, education, and training.

Although the NGO sector was responsible for much of the progress made in this field, its work remains controversial. In general, the work of NGOs is a micro-effort focused on specific communities. Many NGOs are religious institutions and provide welfare in the form of charity to the mothers, daughters or sisters of men on religious grounds and not as women in their own right. Also due to the large number of NGOs in Lebanon, their efforts are scattered and often overlap. This is compounded by the fact that the priorities of many NGOs are imposed by their funding institutions and are therefore not based on prevailing needs.

Welfare and charity are simply not enough to create sustainable change. Structural changes are required which no actor can undertake alone. The State, which is the only legislator and guarantor

of responsibilities and rights, must provide a suitable environment so that the private sector, civil society organizations, the media, and men and women, can realize their share of responsibility and create incentives that will enable women to change the reality around them and to actively claim their rights as equal human beings. ■

## NETHERLANDS

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### Conclusion

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 we must learn from the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UN MDG Review Summit is the arena for deciding on the relevant issues which have cropped up during other world conferences. The Netherlands is a key player in the preparation phase of the MDG Review Summit and therefore CSOs call on the Government to become a true leader. The emphasis must lie on the following:

- The seven strategies on gender must be incorporated. CSOs demand that these strategies also be integrated into Dutch policies, including those on development cooperation.
- In education world leaders should focus more on countries where girls do not go to school and on situations in which girls are restrained from attending school due to child labour and HIV/AIDS, for example.
- HIV/AIDS has created an unprecedented situation, which needs a strong response. Socially sensitive subjects related to the disease must be openly discussed.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be incorporated into MDG 5 as a new target.
- World leaders should counteract neoconservative forces which promote the ABC Approach and resist abortion, thus hindering the success of MDG 5.
- There are still inadequate funds available to meet the MDGs and therefore the many countries who do not yet meet the set goal of 0.7% ODA should do so as soon as possible. ■