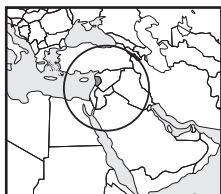## ■ LEBANON

No guarantees, no security

Political, institutional, and psychological factors have led to the loss of any sense of security due to the lack of official and public legal and institutional guarantees. NGOs will not be able to face the challenges without the participation of other major civil society groups such as political parties, trade unions, and the private sector.

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
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The evaluation of the attainment of human security, whether for populations, communities, or individuals, requires a complex analysis of a number of interrelated factors. In the case of Lebanon, these factors are interlinked in a complex scheme, for the Lebanese tend to base their evaluation of their current and future situations on comparisons with periods of the past, most notably the period between 1975 and 1990,[3] and the period between 1990 and 2000.[4] These periods witnessed tremendous threats, from both individuals and groups, to the human security of Lebanese citizens.

The main obstacles to human security

The following political, institutional, and psychological factors lead to the loss of a sense of security due to the lack of legal and institutional guarantees, both official and public, that are expected to ensure the preservation of and respect for citizens' rights and sense of security.

Socio-economic obstacles

- Lebanon is witnessing changes similar to those taking place in the rest of the world, which can be summarised in the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the shrinking of the middle classes. This is accompanied by economic stagnation, an increase in poverty and unemployment, mainly among the young, as well as a rise in public debt that is affecting current and future economic prospects. A national study published in 1998 classified the resident population according to five levels of living conditions (very low, low, intermediate, high, and very high) using a nationally constructed Living Conditions Index (LCI). According to the LCI, 7% of households had very low living conditions, and 25% had low living conditions. A na-

tional survey is currently being carried out that will provide up-to-date and more accurate estimates of the incidence of poverty. However, it is expected to show that the situation has worsened between the mid 1990s and the present, due to economic regression in the late 1990s.[5]

- Since the end of the civil war, consecutive governments have been adopting market-oriented policies and inappropriate taxation systems that are increasing the prices of local production compared to foreign, regional, and international imports. This is leading to the weakening of national decision-making especially regarding agreements related to trade, investment, and competition and is causing social and economic instability. Poverty is leading to the expansion of urban slums around the major cities, as well as to the rise in delinquency and fundamentalism in urban areas.

- According to 2001 figures, national unemployment is close to 12%; however it rises to 20% among male youths and 30% among female youths, between the ages of 15 and 24.[6] It is worth noting that figures will exceed these levels if unemployment definitions take into consideration hidden unemployment and the hopelessness of finding jobs, which is widespread in developing countries.

- All of the abovementioned factors are reflected in alarming trends of emigration among Lebanese families.[7]

Uncompleted national reconciliation

The civil war ended in Lebanon in 1990 with the signing of the Ta'if Agreement,[8] designed to set the basis for social and political reconciliation in the country. National reconciliation resulting from this process

has not been completed, however, as there is significant mishandling of the problem of sectarianism, which was one of the main causes of the civil war. The prevalence of national policies and political structures promoting sectarianism are evident in the increasing involvement of sectarian leaders in the country's political, economic, and social processes.

Precarious national security

The troubling situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon,[9] who are deprived of their essential social and economic rights, as well as the rights to own property and employment in skilled professions,[10] is adding to the complexities of coexistence in Lebanese society. Unemployment among the Palestinian community in Lebanon is reaching extreme levels and thus transforming the camps where most of the Palestinians reside into areas with inhuman living conditions and a sanctuary for delinquents. Consequently, national security is facing accumulating factors of instability and internal volatility that could represent a major threat that the Government cannot control.

Internal political process

- The system of patronage and clientelism that was consolidated in the post-war period within religious, feudal communities, business sectors and warlords has acquired a quasi-institutional character closely linked to the political process. Members of parliament and the Government tend to be wealthy, well-connected businessmen and traditional community leaders, responsible for the powerful militias and political factions that emerged during the war.

- This goes in parallel with the spread of corruption which affects the livelihood of all Lebanese citizens as it has reached all sectors vital to the country's social and economic systems. Indeed, sectors like telecommunications,

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1   Center for Developmental Studies (MADA).

2   Arab NGO Network for Development.

3   The end of the Lebanese civil war.

4   The end of Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon.

5   *Mapping of living conditions in Lebanon*, UNDP and Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998. MDGR, Lebanon, November 2003.

6   Université St Joseph, "L'entrée des jeunes libanais dans la vie active et l'émigration", 2003.

7   *Ibid.* Nineteen per cent of Lebanese families are eager to migrate, while 30% of Lebanese families are willing to send at least one member of the family abroad (the rate is 40% among the young and 60% among unemployed youth).

8   The agreement to end the civil war in Lebanon was signed in the city of Ta'if in Saudi Arabia at the end of 1989.

9   The number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is estimated to be 200,000 (the registered number in UNRWA records is around 350.000). Most of them live in 12 refugee camps and 45 gatherings. *Difficult past, Uncertain Future: Living Conditions Among Palestinian Refugees in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon*. Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science, Report 409, 2003.

10 *Ibid.* These jobs require membership in professional associations, which is not given to foreigners.

health, electricity, water and education are manipulated according to the personal interests of the politicians in power. The serious levels of corruption are undoubtedly hampering the achievement of sustainable development, of which human security is a vital part.[11]

Institutional insecurity

In addition to the injustices resulting from the breakdown in political processes, the legal system itself contributes to the culture of injustice and human insecurity on several levels.

- Corruption has reached the heart of the legal system, with the obvious and frequent interventions by politicians in the work of judges and the courts making citizens distrustful of the legal system in the absence of guarantees and respect for their political and civil rights. A serious implication of mistrust is the participation of citizens in the corruption cycle, through systematic practices of bribery and cronyism, which undermines the work of the justice system and therefore threatens other citizens' security and right to justice. One of the most serious cases of fraud was the annulment of Gabriel El Murr's election to parliament (with 42,000 votes) during the 2002 by-elections for political reasons. The Constitutional Council nominated the third placed candidate, who had only won 4,000 votes, as the elected member of parliament.

- The poorly designed and undemocratic electoral system serves the authorities' interests. In addition to the bias shown by the electoral authorities, the electoral law in practice leads to skewed representation in parliament and a sense of separation between government and voters. Furthermore, the law consolidates the network of patronage and clientelism rooted in Lebanese political culture.

- The weakening of groups that can put pressure on the Government and push for change, like professional associations, trade unions, and political parties, results in low levels of public participation due to the lack of potential or opportunity for change. Indeed, under the pretext of national security, professional associations, student movements and lobbying groups are infiltrated by security agents who keep track of their activities and terminate their actions when it is deemed necessary. Some trade union leaders and journalists have been taken to court, and young activists from opposition groups are frequently arrested and interrogated and judged in military courts.

- The question of participation and inclusion is an issue that, on a cultural-institutional level, is vital for achieving and sustaining human security. The post-war Ta'if Agreement has failed to ensure the participation and inclusion of certain opposition groups in the political process. Indeed, Lebanese youth and women are still marginalised and excluded from the political system.

External factors

Lebanon has not yet escaped the obstacles introduced by war and conflict, since it belongs to a region that is still suffering from the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which lies on the southern borders of Lebanon, and from the implications of the United States' occupation of Iraq. This regional situation partly derives from the aggressive global economic and social policies towards developing countries in general, and towards Arab countries, including Lebanon, in particular. It is also partly the result of the political and ideological agenda of the current "war on terrorism". These factors have significant implications for Lebanese citizens, including political, social, and cultural pressures and reactions that could lead to social conflicts and security threats for both the individual and the community. This situation is likely to limit the potential for travelling and working abroad, including in Arab countries, which are expected to create opportunities for Lebanon both at present and in the future.

What is the Government doing about these threats?

Policies implemented by the post-war governments cannot be held exclusively responsible for the security deficit affecting Lebanese society. Indeed, the issues discussed above are all structural problems relating to the construction of the modern socio-political system. What post-war governments are accountable for, however, is the way they tackled these problems and the fact that their policies only served to deepen these security problems.

The historic strategic political relations with Syria that were originally conceived to neutralise Israeli aggression in the region are now undermining the viability of the current political system. The Ta'if Agreement has further consolidated Syria's vital role in Lebanese politics, which has proved controversial on several levels.

First, in economic terms, close-knit and unilateral relations with Syria have negatively affected the fulfillment of Lebanon's projected financial role in the region. This has partly contributed to the economic crisis that has deeply affected the agricultural sector. In parallel, the privileges that Syria has acquired within Lebanese political affairs have marginalised the opposition and increased its exclusion from political life. These privileges have also slowed down the national and social reconciliation process that has yet to take place in Lebanon.

At the level of the economy, the governments that opted for open-market policies were forced to increase public debt, which rose to USD 35 billion (around 1.7 times GDP), and real GDP stagnated while

real per capita income declined. This situation led to a meeting being organised for borrower countries in Paris at the end of 2002, where the so-called Paris II Agreement was signed. Paris II imposed conditions requiring Lebanon to extend the privatisation process, reduce public expenditure, mainly in social sectors, and increase revenue, in order to consider restructuring the country's debts. The conference asked the IMF to monitor the implementation of this agreement. The first follow-up report presented by the IMF mission to Lebanon in July 2003 mentioned the slow process and steps taken by Lebanon.

What are NGOs doing about these threats?

NGOs are not able to face the challenges without participation by other major civil society groups such as political parties, trade unions, and the private sector. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the unconstructive role of the private sector, particularly the banking and trade sectors, which have attempted to benefit from the current economic crisis in order to increase their profits through high interest rates on much needed credit.

On another level, the political opposition and trade unions have lost popular support and effectiveness due to three main factors. First, the opposition's lack of a clear vision and strategies; second, the oppression and limitation of freedoms and democracy exercised by the Government; and third, the role of Syria in Lebanon and the ongoing effects of the civil war (1975-1990) which weakened political movements and undermined trust within civil society.

Lebanon has many NGOs relative to the size of the population, which are increasingly expected to be more efficient and active in facing the above mentioned obstacles to security. It is worth reviewing the principal actions recently taken by some NGOs to tackle current challenges.

On a political level, much effort was made to create a coalition of election monitors to evaluate an electoral system that remains unrepresentative of the diversity of political currents on offer, particularly within the opposition. In addition, NGOs and civil society have been active in monitoring and pressuring governments on their frequent breaches of human rights, while proposing a new penal law designed to protect social and political minorities currently excluded from the political system

On an economic level, NGO networks (like ANND members) also worked together to monitor the Government's economic policies especially in relation to the EU, the World Bank and the IMF. Internal economic policies are also on the agendas of many NGOs and research centres that regard the budget proposals, and privatisation and open market policies adopted by the Government as factors behind the escalating poverty and unemployment levels.

Finally, environmental issues, which are a vital part of the goal of sustainable development, are on the agenda of many NGOs concerned with the problems of deforestation, solid waste and water mismanagement. ■

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11 Some examples: throughout 2003 and at the beginning of 2004, the Government faced three major conflicts related to corruption, all of them involving high officials: the privatisation of an electricity company, a mobile phone company, and fraud and money laundering in Al-Medina Bank. This was denounced in the media, and is a source of conflict within the Government itself.