



Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development

To serve the Church in Lebanon and the Arab World through spiritual, social and educational development

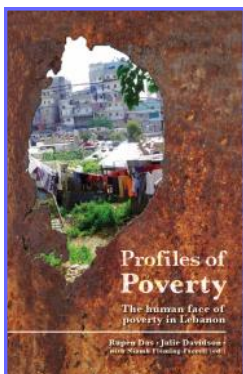
E-Newsletter
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LSESD launches new study

Profiles of Poverty:

The human face of poverty in Lebanon

by Rupen Das, LSESD's Director of Community Relief & Development, and Julie Davidson.



The objective of this study was to understand the dynamics and causes of poverty. We felt that the best way to do this would be to allow the poor to speak and for them to describe their world. In a country where there are heated debates about security, justice, identity and what it means to be

Lebanese, this publication is meant to give the poor a voice that can be heard in the midst of all the other competing voices. While we analyzed and used the available quantitative data, the core of this research was participatory. We wanted to hear the poor describe their world.

What was obvious right from the beginning of the process is that poverty here in Lebanon and the Arab world does not look like poverty in Asia, Africa or Latin America. But it is just as real.

As we listened to the stories about the lives of the participants, we were surprised that their understanding of the problems and challenges they faced were very similar to our observations as we looked into their world. Most felt that they did not have many options to get out of poverty. They felt discriminated against, neglected and outside the social system that the rest of the country lived in. Many talked about the wars and violence that repeatedly destroyed their homes and their livelihoods. The most common emotion mentioned was that they felt that no one cared.

The fact that Lebanon as a whole does fairly well in development indicators such as the Human Development Index and the Millennium Development Goals hides the fact that there are significant pockets of poverty in both urban and rural areas, and among certain ethnic groups.

Yet poverty in a middle-income country like Lebanon is often ignored as the majority of the country is not poor. While many of the surrounding countries have oil and gas reserves, Lebanon lacks such resources and is dependent on service industries, all of which are easily disrupted by political tensions, uncertainty, violence, and conflict. This places severe restrictions on the budget available to the government to address issues of poverty.

However, there are new initiatives on identifying and responding to the needs of the poor. The Lebanese Government has just initiated the National Poverty Targeting Program, which also receives assistance from the World Bank, as well as the Italian and Canadian governments. It is meant to provide assistance to the 8% who are extremely poor.

What makes the face of poverty different in a country like Lebanon is that poverty cannot be addressed only by ensuring access to services and subsidies, or by improving livelihoods and income. These are valuable interventions and will prevent extreme poverty but the poor will still struggle to improve their socioeconomic status enough to enable them to move out of poverty.

Poverty is multidimensional and cannot only be measured by key economic indicators alone. The understanding of social indicators like exclusion and marginalization begin to explain the causes of poverty. The confessional and communal structure of Lebanese society does not allow for social mobility. So while the poor may be able to access education up to a certain level, they are unable to move out of chronic poverty and therefore they continue to remain vulnerable.

(Cont'd on page 2)

“I want a good future for my kids and to build a house. It is too late for me to improve my future so all of the money we save we spend on the kids.”

Resident of Bajaa village, north Lebanon (page 117)

The poor belong to marginalized communities, either geo-graphically isolated in remote parts of the country or socially isolated in pockets in urban areas. They remain voiceless and powerless because those with influence ignore them.

Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate in economics writes in his book Development as Freedom: “Central to the challenges we face in the contemporary world is our idea of an acceptable society”. He then goes on to ask a question that I believe should be at the core of any national agenda. “What can we do to make society more tolerable?”



In Lebanon, an understanding of social justice is essential if poverty in the country is to be alleviated rather than allowed to become even more deeply ingrained. As we have seen events unfold across the Middle East in 2011, exclusion, voicelessness and marginalization are the very traits that eventually lead to social upheaval. Bearing this in mind, Lebanon needs to ask exactly what kind of society it wishes to create and just where do the poor fit into the national agenda.

Rupen Das

Director of Community Relief & Development
LSESD

Launching Ceremony

LSESD’s groundbreaking study of poverty in Lebanon was launched on November 17, under the patronage of HE Wael Abou Faour, Minister of Social Affairs. 250 people came out to the evening event at the American University of Beirut in spite of heavy rain, and notable speakers addressed the audience comprised of community development professionals, government officials, religious figures, students, and others with an interest in poverty issues.



Left to right: Nabil Costa and Rupen Das of LSESD; HE Minister of Social Affairs Wael Abou Faour; Anita Delhaas-van Dijk of World Vision Lebanon; Sawsan Tannoury of Dar Manhal Al Hayat; and Bishop George Saliba, Bishop of Mt Lebanon of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

A significant contribution to literature for Lebanese policy-makers and development practitioners, *Profiles of Poverty* acts as a tool for finding solutions and implementing change for a more just Lebanese society.

The study was undertaken in partnership with World Vision Lebanon and Canadian Baptist Ministries, with additional funding from German Baptist Aid. It is published by LSESD’s [Dar Manhal Al Hayat](#).

Excerpts from Profiles of Poverty

- ◆ *Many within the country see poverty as an embarrassment and actively try to cover it up, though most are not even aware of its extent, much less understand its causes and dynamics.*
- ◆ *All of the causes and consequences of poverty manifest themselves in such a way as to create a downward spiral where each vulnerability or shock increases the chance of a new vulnerability. In turn, each new level of experienced vulnerability heightens the probability of being exposed to new risks.*
- ◆ *Quite concerning is the emergence of another vulnerable group - children. These children are both Lebanese and expatriates and include the children of refugees, prisoners, and migrant workers, as well as children working on the streets and institutionalized children.*

Relief efforts June through August



"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need

but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

John 3:17-18

Other News from Community Relief & Development

Assistance for Syrian Refugees

Humanitarian relief in the north of Lebanon

Over a period of 3 months (June to August), LSESD's Community Relief & Development ministry, with Rahbe Baptist Church and Rev. Shadi Saad, distributed food and hygiene packages on Syrian refugees in 25 villages in north Lebanon, in response to the assessed need.

Almost one third of the LSESD distributions have been for host families (just under 30%) particularly as the level of poverty in the region is quite high, and the education and employment rates are extremely low. Supporting the host-families decreases "host-fatigue" and the need to move refugees into tented camps or communal living options.

We are grateful to have been able to assist over 800 families in that time, and we continue to develop our new relationships in the north, while also looking at potential development projects in the area.

LSESD wishes to thank German Baptist Aid, Canadian Baptist Ministries, British Missionary Society, Baptist World Aid, American Baptist Churches, Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Union of Netherlands, the Baptist Union of Denmark, the Irish Baptist Networks, and the Bavaria Baptist Association. Without their partnership the refugee relief project would not have been possible.

Prayer Requests

Pray for:

- ◇ The Lord's continued guidance so that we may be able to recognize and respond to the needs in our country and region
- ◇ The children and youth in our camps in the upcoming year - including the special needs children in our summer educational programme - that they may be strengthened by His love
- ◇ His wisdom to help affect positive change in the Middle East/North Africa region
- ◇ The impact of the Poverty Study that it may be an instrumental tool not only in raising awareness but also in the design and implementation of community development projects that make a difference