



*The Equity Diamond:* National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.  
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*, **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

*Two reports by the Lebanese government and the United Nations Development Programme indicate progress made and timidly refer to weaknesses and defects. This paper prepared by the non-governmental sector, complements those reports by highlighting the gaps and problems neglected or considered only briefly in the government report.*

A general problem in evaluating implementation of the Copenhagen commitments stems from their integrative and comprehensive nature. An evaluation of government performance has to start with the following basic question: Do government

## PROGRESSING WITHOUT STRATEGIES

policies and strategic options address the crux of the action programme, which calls for development options centred on people and society as opposed to surrendering to the mechanisms of profit-making and market logic? All ten Copenhagen commitments reflect one basic commitment to prioritise people over profit.

Lebanon has witnessed several positive steps related to the Copenhagen commitments, but this progress did not occur in the context of a comprehensive development strategy. This is not to say that the changes occurred without connection to the ideals of the Summit. The concept of sustainable development is present in the work of UNDP and of NGOs who played a fundamental role in following up the commitments and making use of them to develop their own programmes. The scope of the work of all parties remains limited, however, because of the lack of a national strategy for social development.

## IMPEDIMENTS TO DEVELOPMENT

NGOs agree with government in defining several impediments to development in Lebanon:

*First*, continuing Israeli occupation of South Lebanon constitutes a comprehensive violation of all human and social rights. Lebanon is resisting this occupation by all available means, but the responsibility for implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 425 is a regional and international charge.

*Second*, the Summit emphasised the responsibility of the world community for creating an international environment suitable for development at the level of economic relations and technology and know-how transfer. There is no significant improvement since 1995 at this level. Government discourse seems to support present-day globalisation as if globalisation does not harm Lebanon's interests.

*Third*, Lebanon still suffers from the effects of the 1975–1990 civil war; economic and financial imbalances; and shrinking resources available to development. The slowdown of growth, the accumulation of public debt and the budget deficit are the most prominent factors squeezing finances for internal development.

## ENABLING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The holding of village and municipal elections in 1998 after a 35 year cessation was an extremely important step that rehabilitated the concept of local government and citizens' participation in running their own affairs. Difficulties encountered were related to competency issues and to the government's tendency to link municipalities with the ministry of interior rather than promoting their independence.

In 1999, the present government abrogated a 1993 ban on demonstrations. But it imposed severe conditions on licensing of demonstrations, which limits the positive effect of the abrogation.

Several practical measures to fight corruption and bribe-taking resulted in some officials and politicians being sent to courts. The measures are controversial because they are not comprehensive. Following the positive shock they caused, the administration has responded by becoming slower and less efficient.

## ERADICATION OF POVERTY

The government's acknowledgement that Lebanon faces a serious problem of poverty is a first step and prelude to treating the problem. Progress has been made with regard to statistics and analytic studies. A national plan to improve living conditions and fight poverty is currently being prepared.

However, the elimination of poverty has wider dimensions:

*First*, disparate and uncoordinated interventions are not incorporated into the framework of a long-term vision. There are no clear objectives or specific time indicators. We believe that the first step must be formulation of a national anti-poverty plan.

*Second*, the minimum wage has not been raised to provide the basic requirement in accordance with proposals mentioned in the Lebanese report to the Copenhagen Summit. This point is of great importance. Studies show that low income is the most prominent and sharpest aspect of poverty in Lebanon.

Social security policies and public health services are incapable of meeting the needs of all Lebanese people. Only 42% of the population is covered by health insurance or social security. The least covered are the poor, jobless, elderly, rural population and agricultural workers—those who are most in need.

Efforts toward producing an agricultural strategy fall short of expectations. Agrarian credits, budget allocations for farming, agricultural guidance and marketing services do not reflect a strategy to transform the agricultural sector into an advanced, productive and attractive business.

## FULLEMPLOYMENT

The law governing labour and employment dates from 1946. It was amended in the early 1970s to limit arbitrary layoffs and

provide a degree of protection for trade unionists and again in 1996 to deal with child labour by raising the minimum legal age of employment from 8 to 13 years. Apart from these two amendments, the law is out-of-date.

In 1999, the government issued an official document entitled «The National Strategy for Employment». It is too soon to know whether it is committed to implementing this strategy.

According to moderate estimates, non-Lebanese workers active in Lebanon comprise 50% to 55% of the Lebanese labour force. These workers, from Arab, Asian and African countries, live under non-humanitarian conditions, receive extremely low wages in relation to Lebanese workers, and enjoy no guarantees or insurances. The problem is aggravated by a hostile attitude toward non-Lebanese workers because they compete with Lebanese workers for subsistence jobs. Dealing with the question of foreign labour is considered one of the pressing priorities.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Partial progress has been made with regard to the social integration commitment, especially with regard to displaced persons being returned and steps taken to recognise the special needs of disabled persons. With respect to other social groups, no significant developments have taken place. Relatively positive texts urging participation are not generally coupled with institutions and mechanisms that help put them into effect.

The question of social and national integration is one of the most important problems facing the country after its civil war. These are not sectoral or partial problems. Rather, they affect the dominant dynamics within the social fabric.

***On the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, partial progress was made in 1999 when the government eased restrictions on travel of Palestinians carrying Lebanese papers.*** But this is a marginal aspect of the problem. In general, views on the Palestinian presence in refugee camps are governed by political considerations related to settlement of the Middle East conflict. Modest efforts to separate the humanitarian/social dimension from the political dimension have failed. Relations between the Lebanese and Palestinian non-governmental sectors provide a typical pattern of peaceful and healthy interaction between the two nations, but this is still an exception. At this juncture, political conflicts and tensions override other issues, such as living conditions of camp residents and the civil and social rights of the Palestinians.

On the other hand, a number of basic structural problems remain. After the end of the civil war, the institutions of the Lebanese central government regained their unity, efficiency and roles. Physical barriers to contact in the geographical and economic domains were eliminated. But there are still elements of political and sectarian division, and attitudes of fanaticism and discord are perhaps greater than during the war years. No real effort has been made to eliminate the physical and psychological foundations of the dangerous disparities that eat away the kernel of Lebanon's social and national integration:

- There is great disparity in development levels among provinces. In one province, the poverty level is 60%; in another, 14% of residents are poor.
- Education in Lebanon has taken on a religious character with different religious groups establishing parallel educational curricula. Every religious sect, and even sects within sects, operates integrated educational institutions from kindergarten through university. Curricula in these institutions lack common factors even in the subject matter of history, civic ethics and principles of citizenship. For its part, the government dropped its previous decision to teach religious knowledge as a unified course to all students in government run schools.
- People lack faith in the electoral system of political representation. Youth aged 18 to 21 is still denied the right to vote. Non-religious groups feel they lack representation in a confessionally centred political system. The electoral system depends on majority and not proportional representation, hence excludes many minority groups. The constituency formation allows major electors to guarantee the success of accompanying deputy candidates on their own lists, although these candidates may not really represent the electors of those constituencies.

Conditions pertaining to national and social integration are the same or have become much worse and more dangerous than they were in 1995.

## GENDER EQUITY

In 1997, Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with some reservations. Women's groups are among the most active committees working in the country. Many studies show no real discrimination against women concerning the right to education and health care. But the educational, industrial and economic sectors are still characterised by gender division of labour. No changes have been made in laws that include many clauses unfair to women. In general, there is no coherent government policy on gender equity.

No woman holds a ministerial post, and there are only three women members in parliament (comprised of 128 deputies).

Women's participation in decision-making inside political parties is almost non-existent. The situation in NGOs is as bad. With few exceptions, women are not represented on the boards of business associations and professional orders although women make up a high percentage of the pharmacists, lawyers, journalists and media people. Their proportion among engineers, architects and medical doctors is on the increase too.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In 1998, the government made primary schooling obligatory and free of charge for children up to age 12. But the executive directives for this act have not been issued yet, and no mechanisms to turn it into a reality have been released. Teaching staff is not adequately trained to implement the new curricula that have been in effect since 1997. Quality education is expensive and is not offered as a right to all people equally. The Lebanese educational system provides poor schooling for the poor and very good private schooling for the elite.

Health indicators are more or less reasonable, but the system does not cover the majority of the population and health policies are incapable of providing the necessary services for all people. Medication and hospitalisation still dominate and take precedence over prevention and primary health care. Here, too, one notices great disparity in receipt of health services of good quality depending on economic status.

The total allocation for ministries concerned with social matters varied between 9% and 14% of all the budget appropriations for the years 1995–1999. But these figures do not tell the true story. The government budget in Lebanon is spent mainly on wages and salaries for public sector employees. Thus, allocations do not indicate real spending on development projects. The proportion of the total budget allocated for social development is very low.

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