

Challenging traditional notions of poverty

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A high-level launch event convened by United Nations Development Program under the auspices of the U.N. High-Level Political Forum is taking place Wednesday, July 17, in New York, following the publication of the 2019 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index data report “Illuminating Inequalities,” which was released on July 11. The Multidimensional Poverty Index provides a comprehensive and in-depth picture of global poverty in all its dimensions at the regional, national and subnational levels, revealing inequalities across countries and among the poor themselves. The data generated by the index challenges traditional notions of understanding rich and poor. Jointly developed by UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at the University of Oxford, the 2019 Global MPI offers records for 101 countries, covering 76 percent of the global population. It also monitors progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 1, to end poverty in all its forms.

The “Illuminating Inequalities” publication foretells poverty trends by monitoring the advancement of data coming from 10 middle- and low-income countries.

The new data indicates that circumstances for the poorest 40 percent of the world are changing rapidly in a more favorable direction than those just above them. It provides an understanding of the challenges of those residing in extreme poverty moving in and out of vulnerable circumstances.

The report explains that the incidence of multidimensional poverty in countries ranges widely, revealing “massive internal inequalities.” It highlights a drastic discrepancy among the poor. Furthermore, one in three kids across the globe was discovered to experience poverty, as opposed to one in six adults. That implies that nearly half of the world’s poor are children.

The 2019 MPI emphasizes “child poverty” as the spotlight of the year. Across the studied countries, half of those classified as multidimensional poor are children under the age of 18, and a third of them are under the age of 10. Results also showed that children suffer more heavily from the implications of poverty than adults and are more probable to be deprived of essentials such as clean water, sanitation, appropriate nutrition and education.

The fresh global poverty snapshot recognizes the traditional concept of poverty as outdated. It shows that defining countries as rich or poor is an oversimplification of their socio-economic status. It indicates that two-thirds of the 1.3 billion people who are classified as poor reside in middle-income nations and live with vast inequalities within themselves and between populations of other nations. Inequalities are obvious even under the same roof. The report recognizes the need to understand the different methods of experiencing deprivation among individuals and looking at where these individuals live, in order to battle poverty effectively. Only then will strategies to reduce poverty be efficient.

The index paints a new picture about people experiencing poverty in different intensities. Described beyond just income, poverty is inclusive of a range of indicators such as poor health, low quality of schooling, lack of physical safety, low empowerment, unavailability of work and the threat of aggression and violence.

All in all, the report and its underlying indicators give a more comprehensive picture of poverty and provide an indication of where it is possible to target policies that can address the dimensions in which people are deprived, whether it is education, health or other aspects that could enable people to be lifted out of poverty if investments are made. This year, many countries witnessed a significant reduction in all 10 deprivation indicators, yet each in a different way.

Thus, it is important to ask: If we take a closer look at how people experience poverty every day in Lebanon, can we claim that we have a precise understanding of the problem in the country?

Poverty is not an incident; it is a pathway. Economic conditions in Lebanon continue to grow more complex. There is an unceasing and complicated effort to enhance the country’s living circumstances. About 30 percent of Lebanese people are considered to live in poverty, according to a study undertaken by the UNDP’s 2016 Rapid Poverty Assessment in Lebanon. That number drops as low as 16 percent in Beirut, and in some rural regions it rises to 36 percent, which is an evidence of the wide inequality and developmental imbalances between urban and rural.

Today, an increasing number of Lebanese people live in extreme poverty, 8 percent of them living on less than \$2.50 per day, or \$75 per month. As a result of lack of social security programs, many households are pushed into debt for hundreds or thousands of dollars to cover unforeseen costs such as medical charges. And the figures become even more alarming. As illustrated by the UNDP study, the population of Lebanese who are considered poor reside on less than \$4 per day, or \$120 per month, struggling to make ends meet for rent, food, and health care. Moreover, approximately 300,000 are regarded highly poor and incapable of meeting their fundamental nutrition requirements. The poverty rate increased by 61 percent between 2011 and 2016, according to the World Bank.

Lebanon hosts around 2 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees. While many refugees are living in extreme poverty in Lebanon, the World Bank estimated that some 200,000 additional Lebanese were pushed into poverty as a result of the

Syrian crisis, adding to those already poor. An extra 250,000 to 300,000 Lebanese nationals, most of them unqualified adolescents, are projected to have become unemployed. Furthermore, females, alongside children, are often the most affected by poverty.

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