



Sustainable Livelihoods Focus on the poor: Selected findings from the consultation process

How the poor perceive poverty

The consultation process investigated the ways that the poor themselves define poverty and its characteristics. Many see their poverty mainly as the absence of income: *There are people who are rich. They earn money and have a lot of property. And there are people who have nothing, like me.*” noted Abu Badi.

Others describe poverty as a complex mix of material and non-material deprivation. They talk about the importance of tangible assets: a house, transport, equipment to work, having many different jobs in one household. Employment is often seen as linked to the attainment of formal educational qualifications: *“We are either construction workers, cab drivers or street vendors. We hardly have any blue-collar employees or university degree holders. You can count the number of educated people on your hands.”* (young man, al-Natheef)

The poor talk about the intangible aspects of poverty: lack of social status, and limited social connections. Social isolation can occur when families are too poor to join in community celebrations: A young man in Dayr al-Kahf commented: *“The dignity of a man is based on his ability to repay the debt of social events.”*

Poverty is also perceived as an inability to influence decisions and to have a voice: *“We are poor. Who would listen to us? If they do, our views will be received with ridicule because we are not educated.”* notes a woman from al-Natheef. People express their despair at the cycle of poverty that impacts their children. A woman from Dayr al Kahf noted: *“My children are always telling me that they are sick and tired of living in such terrible poverty and they truly wish they had never been born.”*

Escaping poverty through education

The poor DO want to escape their poverty situation but lack access to sufficient resources to enable them to develop strategies of full self reliance. The most valued resources is access

to education: *“I was fortunate to pursue my education. As a result, I feel the value of it”* said one young woman in Dana. Despite their poverty, some parents are willing to invest scarce resources in their children’s education if they feel it improves their prospect of employment. *“Though we don’t have enough income, I get help from a special English teacher to improve the children’s language skills, although it is an extra expense”*, said a widow on an army pension from Sakhra. Poor people express regret when they are unable to send their children to school: *“I know that God will one day punish me for not sending all my children to school.”* said one mother. Poor parents note the hidden costs of access to education such as fees, transportation, books and lunch. *“Education is for better-off people only”*, asserted a woman in Dana.

Poor parents have good ideas how to improve the quality of education:

- Involve parents in their children’s education
- Open up school resources to the whole community
- Adapt schooling to meet local needs
- Give priority to basic education (rather than to tertiary)
- Prioritise recruitment of local staff
- Provide scholarships for poor families

Many of these issues are addressed under the Education Reform Programme (ERfKE) but it might take time for the benefits to reach the poor.

The poor and health

For poor people, ill-health is a part of life. Nutrition levels are falling and many households among “the poorest of the poor” in South Shooneh depend upon bread, sugar, tea and tahina (sesame paste). A woman from Dayr al-Kahf noted: *“When my children crave meat we buy them a can of sardines or we get them meat every two weeks. But the portion we buy only allows each child to have one bite.”*

National Human Development Report 2004

Launch briefing: Focus on the Poor

Five of Abu Munir's eleven children suffer from severe mental and physical disability. Abu Munir has taken a loan and is buying a small piece of land where he and his family intend to plant almonds and olives.

"In this way my children can live a healthier lifestyle. They'll lose some weight by working on the land and, most importantly, they can have jobs while remaining within a family atmosphere with both their parents who understand their condition."

Abu Munir, Sakhra

Disability and chronic sickness often lead to poverty, but some households, like Abu Munir find ways of coping

The poor value access to local health centres, but want the quality of service to be improved and adapted to meet local needs. Those without health insurance note that they are vulnerable. The government aims to ensure coverage for a target of 90% of the population under the 2004-06 Economic and Social Development Plan.

Housing and the poor

Nearly all the poor talk about the importance of housing for their well-being. Houses provide security, shelter and privacy and are a form of insurance that can be rented out to generate income in times of crises.

The quality of housing is important for health status and overall well-being. Poor households in urban areas talked about housing of low quality, badly constructed, in poor repair, damp and with inadequate ventilation. They also complained of over-density: "*Endless matchboxes*" causing unhygienic conditions and contributing to ill-health. The expectations of these respondents were small. "*A window*" or "*fresh air*" were the main needs expressed. Overcrowding can be accompanied by high rents. As one respondent noted: "*We are nine people sharing two rooms for JD70 (\$99) a month.*"

Managing transition

The poor note that they are struggling against the impact of a range of economic, political and social shocks. They note the rise in the cost of living, especially price rises for essential items like fuel and water, which results from policies enacted under structural adjustment. The poor all noted the importance of access to cash: "*In the old days, our homes provided us with everything*

"We have been living in this house for 20 years. We pay JD60 a month in rent. However, as our financial situation has deteriorated we are unable to pay our bills. So we have started collecting water in containers.

"As for the electricity, we pay it irregularly depending on our financial situation. We risk spending some time in complete darkness."

we needed, including meat. But now we have to buy the lot, even water." said a woman from Sakhra.

Some among the poor feel that their strong social ties are eroding as a culture of "everyone for himself" ("*kul wahid yi'qul allahum nafsi*") emerges. One poor householder in al-Natheed remarked: "*Change in the economic situation in the area has affected social relations tremendously. Brothers cease to meet when their income declines... need tends to change people. They become selfish and materialistic.*"

In all communities, the poor noted that they rely on connections (*wasta*) to facilitate procedures and access entitlements. Some referred to *wasta* as a "*magic wand*" promising job opportunities, access to loans, cash assistance from NAF and access to better, discounted health services. One poor villager from Dana concluded: "*Without wasta, we cannot live!*"

Family networks are still considered an important means of accessing money but in some communities people reported that this practice is changing. A woman from al-Natheed noted: "*I prefer to ask strangers for help because they are discreet, as opposed to relatives who would brag about how helpful they were when you were in need. I borrow money from my neighbour. Although my brother lives next door to us, I would never approach him to lend me money.*"

In more traditional rural Bedu (semi-nomadic) communities like Feynan in Dana, however, people still look to their family for support. A young man in Feynan noted: "*My brothers live all around me. We share our happy and miserable moments.*"

Jordan is undergoing a period of intense social and economic transformation and it is essential that the poor also benefit from gains that are being made. The 2004-06 Economic and Social Development Plan addresses many of the needs of the poor through investment in health and through reform of the education sector in order to improve the quality of education delivered.

The current programme of public sector reform will benefit the poor if it ensures that services are delivered efficiently and effectively and if they are tailored to meet local needs. Much could be done to improve the situation for the poor if they had more information about the existing services to which they are entitled and if they had the resources to claim them. Civil society organisations should play a more active role in ensuring that the poor can, in fact, build on the assets that are available.