

Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training

Creating a more developed and equitable society

Women's Economic Empowerment in Rural Lebanon

BACKGROUND

After nearly half century of civil war and foreign occupation and the possibility of conflict-relapse closely looming, divisiveness in politics and religion as well as regional violence has come to define much of what is Lebanon. The effects of this history are particularly acute in the Beqaa Valley - located adjacent to the Syrian border, housing a diverse array of rival confessional groups - between the tightly clustered Christian and Muslim populations.

Within a context of sectarian tensions, though only 12.7 percent of Lebanon's population resides in the Beqaa, they account for 17.2 percent of the extremely poor, with the overall presence of poverty at 29 percent. Furthermore, a study by the UNDP indicates that, in the Baalbek-Hermel region of the Beqaa, over 65 percent of the households fall under the poverty line;¹ while the economic-activity among females in those poor families constitutes only 12 percent of the total labor force of those in poverty.² Thus, the standards of living—which include inclusion and participation, in addition to economic wellbeing—for women of the Baalbek-Hermel region remain in a constant state of irregularity and insecurity.

The delivery of tools and skills that would support the growth of micro-enterprise among women in the Baalbek-Hermel region will not only address the issue of poverty reduction, but will also empower women of rural Lebanon to claim a stronger position in the household, the community, and in the development of their country. This approach to women's social and economic empowerment will lead to the sustainable and effective development of this region.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST) initiated this project to provide business training and education for women in Baalbek-Hermel, giving them the tools to generate income and the awareness to make informed decisions for both themselves and their families. The objective is to improve their economic livelihoods by increasing their participation in the

¹ The poverty range reflects monthly incomes between 332 USD and 652 USD with household size of, on average, 5 members with 50 percent of the regions population controlling only 20 percent of the income. <http://www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/regionaldevelopment/baalbeck/baalbeck.cfm>

² *ibid.*

local-economy. The program will focus on building women's capacity in ICT with a concentration on developing business skills and knowledge—tools, which will enable them to start their own entrepreneurial venture.

The project will provide this special training to 80 women between the ages of 20 and 40 at the LOST training centers in the Beqaa region. Through the provision of IT, Communications, and Micro-Enterprise Management courses, expert counseling, and potential linkages to micro-finance institutions, LOST will enable women to:

- Become active members of the labor force, well aware of their employee rights
- Be self-confident and well-versed in advocacy and negotiation techniques
- Design and develop marketable and scalable models of enterprise

Project funding will cover trainer fees, course materials, and transportation support to enable the most economically disadvantaged participants to attend classes.

CAPACITY STATEMENT

Founded in 1998, LOST works to meet the educational and cultural needs of local civil society outside of the university setting, offering Beqaa Valley residents' education lessons in English, computer skills and conflict management. LOST has administered over \$1 million USD in community transformation and infrastructure projects granted by USAID, Mercy Corps, Canada Fund and others. In 2010 LOST partnered with Bridging the Divide (BTD) to build their organizational capacity through technical assistance, seed funding, and global renown. During the summer of 2010, LOST implemented a BTD youth pilot project, called the "Academy of Peace" with \$16,000 USD in funding. The project incorporated youth from Sunni, Shia, and Christian areas in order to break down barriers between groups and empower participants to use arts, social media, and communications technology to start dialogues on issues of peace and justice. In addition to youth initiatives, the women's empowerment projects at LOST have, to-date, included: counseling seminars, basic IT training, and English courses as well as business-skills development programming. LOST hopes to capitalize on its past successes to further economically empower women in rural Lebanon.

MISSION & VISION

LOST is a non-profit organization aiming to raise public awareness, especially among youth. It seeks to contribute to the social and economic development of the communities of Baalbek and Hermel, Lebanon by enhancing local capacities and increasing community participation. LOST hopes to create a more developed and equitable society, providing access to transformative skills and tools that would reduce poverty and eliminate exclusion. Its programs are intended to help, train and educate local residents, be they women, young adults, or children.