

Press Release



IRAQ HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY



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Iraq, World Bank Launch Survey for Poverty Reduction

AMMAN, Jordan, January 25, 2009: The Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation of Iraq unveiled today (January 25, 2009) the Tabulation Report of a Socio-Economic Survey that will ultimately help shape a comprehensive policy to reverse the social and economic misfortunes of a country that once pioneered development in the Middle East.

The Tabulation Report, launched at a news conference in Amman, is the first component of the three-phased Household Survey and Policies for Poverty Reduction (HSPPR) project, which was begun in 2005 through a technical and organizational partnership with the World Bank. The tabulation report provides the data that will be used to identify the causes of poverty.

The HSPPR project is being guided by the Poverty Reduction Strategy High Committee – a group of highly committed representatives from various line ministries spanning social and economic sectors, and including members of Parliament, representatives from the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Prime Minister’s Office and Iraqi academia.

The second phase of the project will analyze the extent and causes of poverty in Iraq. The analytical work is well underway and is expected to be completed in spring. It will describe the poverty line formulated by the High Committee and analyze the causes of poverty.

Under the third and final component of the survey, the High Committee will develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy – an essential tool for coordinating the efforts of the various ministries and prioritizing the assistance provided by the World Bank and other donors.

“The present accomplishment represents a highly productive technical partnership between the Government of Iraq and the World Bank,” HE Ali Ghalib Baban, Minister of Planning and Development, said of the work. “We now have a solid foundation ... to devise a national poverty reduction strategy.”

The survey is a collaborative effort that brings many local institutions, such as the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology and the Kurdistan Region

Statistics Organization, together with the World Bank. It is the first income and expenditure survey to cover the entire Iraqi territory since 1988.

“This is a tremendous achievement in many ways: Iraq now has a comprehensive and up-to-date socio-economic data base, which Government institutions, research centers and academia can use to better understand the extent, spatial distribution and determinants of poverty,” said Hedi Larbi, the World Bank’s Middle East Director. “This is important for the formulation of well-informed policies to improve the living conditions of the Iraqis.”

Iraq’s human development indicators that once ranked at the top have now dropped toward the bottom in areas such as secondary-school enrollment and child immunization, where Iraq now ranks lower than some of the poorest countries in the world.

“Twenty-five years ago, Iraq was widely regarded as the most developed in the Middle East. People came to Iraq from across the region seeking the best in university education and health care,” noted Ritva Reinikka, Director of the World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa Department for Social and Economic Development, in the foreword remarks of the Tabulation Report. “Since then, Iraq has been the only Middle Eastern country whose living standards have not improved.”

Ms. Reinikka attributed the negative conditions to years of wars, embargo, and general instability, which have “undermined social well-being and imposed tragic suffering across the entire social spectrum.”

The survey covered about 18,000 households, or a total of 127,000 individuals. More than 300 fieldworkers were deployed in a logistically difficult and often dangerous environment to produce the survey, which examines the prevalence of issues normally exposed anecdotally in the media.

The report shows that Iraqi households suffer from several environmental problems which are often associated with health problems. Open sewers are common even in highly urbanized governorates such as Baghdad and Basrah. And, although more than 99 percent of the population is connected to the electricity grid, nearly 80 percent rely on costly generators, due to continued frequent interruptions in power supplies, a shortage that is more pronounced in urban, rather than rural, areas. The report also shows that the vast majority of Iraqis continue to rely on the food ration for a large share of their food consumption.

On the issue of security, the report shows that while some parts of the country continued to suffer from high risk of violence, other parts remained relatively secure.

But for the team working on the survey, the effort was fraught with physical danger and rather costly. On August 2, 2007, Louay Haqqi, Operations Director of the Iraq Socio-Economic Survey, was brutally assassinated on his way to work. Literally, he gave his life for the survey. Yet, there can be no greater testimonial to his sacrifice than the determination with which the team recovered from the shock, fear and grief and went on to complete this extraordinary work in his honor.

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