

Lebanon International Orthodox Christian Charities

Summary of Findings

School feeding for approximately 22,000 students began in October 2001. International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) received 27,000 metric tons of wheat to support the GFE program, including 20,000 tons of hard red winter wheat and 7,000 tons of northern spring wheat. IOCC sold the commodities and used the funds to provide meals to 22,000 of Lebanon's poorest children. Additionally, an education program focusing on civics, nutrition, and the environment was initiated. Baseline survey data from the 20 sample schools show minimal increases in attendance and enrollment. However, information gathered from focus groups with school directors indicate that enrollment, attendance, and attentiveness increased after the school feeding program started.

Teachers and parents also report that school feeding has had a positive influence on the children's attitude, behavior, and concentration. Introduction of a new curriculum made it more difficult to assess the impact of the program on children's performance compared with last year. The program is expected to start feeding again in November 2002 and will continue through the entire school year.

Country Overview

As a result of 25 years of civil war and other strife, Lebanon suffers from economic instability and lacks significant resources to implement major development initiatives. The civil war severely damaged the Lebanese economy, leaving a public debt of 160 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁷⁹

In Lebanon, major income disparities exist, and unemployment and poverty are widespread.¹⁸⁰ Levels of development vary among provinces. In one province, for instance, the poverty level is 60 percent; in another, only 14 percent.¹⁸¹ The poverty disparity is reflected in school enrollment levels. School enrollment in one well developed province is 96 percent for primary school-age children, while only 55 percent in a less developed province.¹⁸²

According to the Ministry of Education, the overall enrollment rate by gender at the primary level is 98.4 percent for girls and 98.3 percent for boys. However, greater disparities between genders exist in more impoverished areas, particularly in the south,

¹⁷⁹ Human Development Report 2001, Beirut, 2001.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

which is heavily populated by Muslims. In addition, as children get older, girls drop out at a faster rate than boys.¹⁸³ This is primarily due to early marriages and the distance to schools.

There is no comprehensive index of malnutrition levels in the country, although some qualitative research has shown evidence of malnutrition in areas outside of Beirut. The overall prevalence of moderate and severe stunting is 12.2 percent¹⁸⁴, whereas the prevalence of moderate and severe wasting is 2.9 percent.¹⁸⁵

Commodity Management

IOCC received 27,000 metric tons of wheat to support the GFE, including 20,000 tons of hard red winter wheat and 7,000 tons of northern spring wheat. All of the wheat was monetized, and the process was a complete success.

IOCC sold the commodities for a higher price than estimated. As a result, an additional \$237,000 was made available to the project. IOCC advertised the commodities in three popular newspapers, and representatives were invited to attend the bid-opening session. The highest bid was accepted, and the entire shipment was sold prior to the commodities arriving in country. The purchaser agreed to pay the total value of the commodities upon presentation of shipping documents to the bank that opened the letter of credit. This procedure eliminated the need to have USDA appoint a surveying company to confirm the receipt of the commodities. It also saved IOCC from waiting until the commodities arrived in country to get the 60-percent balance of the proceeds in installments over four months, as previously planned. The total of \$3,547,250 was received.

Project Overview

The goals of IOCC's GFE program are to provide a nutritious school lunch for 22,000 of Lebanon's most vulnerable school children and to distribute educational materials to increase the children's awareness of health, civic, and environmental issues.

The following table shows major criteria for measuring program success, implementation status of the project, and comments on project activities.

¹⁸⁴ Partners for Development-Civil Group. A Situation Analysis of the Nutrition and Health Status of Elementary Students in Public Schools in Lebanon. Report submitted to International Orthodox Christian Charities, Beirut 2001. Stunting is defined as a low height for age and is indicative of long-term malnutrition.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Wasting is defined as a low weight for age or weight for height and is indicative of short-term malnutrition.

Criteria for Measuring Success	Status	Comments
Monetize 27,000 metric tons of wheat.	Completed.	Proceeds exceeded projections by \$237,000.
Provide daily school meal to 22,000 children.	Began Oct. 1, 2002; finished June 8, 2002.	Feeding completed for one full academic year.
Provide workbooks to 22,000 children.	Completed.	Workbooks and lessons increased knowledge of health, civic education, and environmental issues.
Provide school stationery to 22,000 children.	Completed.	Agenda, pencils, erasers, calendars, rulers, and specially designed educational illustrations were distributed.
Conduct teacher workshops to introduce material.	Completed.	Teachers are primarily responsible for introducing the education component.
Conduct baseline survey at beginning of the program.	Completed.	Data is presented in tables to follow.
Conduct post-test at the conclusion of the first year.	Completed.	Data is being analyzed.

Meals distributed by IOCC to children followed a 10-day menu cycle. Meals averaged 430 calories, with a calcium content of 372.5 mg and an iron content of 4.95 mg. Juices distributed were fortified with vitamins C and A, and iron. Discussions with parents, teachers, and administrators revealed positive reactions on the effect of the program on the nutritional status of children. The following is an example of GFE meal menus.

Sample Menus				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday/Saturday
French bread, Halloumi cheese, unsweetened orange juice	White muffin, whole milk	French bread, yellow cheese, unsweetened pineapple juice	Chocolate cookie, whole milk	Arabic bread with thyme, oil, unsweetened orange juice

Sustainability: Efforts toward sustainability need to be addressed. Currently the sustainability of the program depends on continued USDA support. The program needs to be more fully integrated into the educational system. IOCC intends to identify resources to sustain the program.

Monitoring and evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation is the responsibility of both USDA and IOCC. USDA's local monitor is a nutritionist based at the University of Balamand. The monitor regularly consulted with the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Education, as well as with USDA during the development and analysis of the matrix and the data. The local monitor is responsible for collecting quantitative and qualitative data on 20 sample schools.

IOCC and USDA's local monitor developed a matrix from which to select the 20 sample schools. The schools were selected based on geographical location and gender. Schools were selected at random, with a minimum of two schools selected from each cell except for the two cells where only one school was represented.

Project Impact

Enrollment: Baseline survey data from the 20 sample school show minimal enrollment increases. However, information gathered from focus groups with school directors indicate that enrollment increased after the school feeding program started.

School registration occurred before parents' became aware of the program. But many parents tried to enroll their children once they knew food would be provided. A school director in Borj el Brajneeh reported that a mother "begged" him to transfer her child to the school, in spite of the lack of vacancies in the school.

Attendance: Factors that impact school attendance in Lebanon include:

- Cold weather.
- Participation in family agricultural work.
- Family commitment to sending children to school (this is particularly an issue in the northern part of the country).
- Educational progress, such as whether or not the student passed to a higher level during the indicated year, stayed in the same level, or left the school.
- Additional days taken off from school after holidays. For example, if Thursday is a holiday, many students are absent on Friday, too.
- Availability of proper clothing, books, or transportation.

Focus group participants noticed an increase in the attendance rate compared to last year. They believed that the meal presented an incentive to students to come to school, as food was not always available at home, especially for breakfast. In some rural areas, the possibility of having a daily snack made parents send their children to school instead of taking them to help in agricultural work. Teachers reported that in some cases, students who were not feeling well would come to school, attend the first classes, and take their meal and go home. Even students who are known by their teachers to be unmotivated have demonstrated better school attendance, something teachers attribute to the provision of food at school.

Average Attendance for Girls										
	Nov.		Dec.		Jan.		Feb.		Average	
	00-'01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02
Beirut										
Pre-school	96.3	94.3	94.8	90.4	90	91	87.2	92.2	92.1	92
Grades 1 to 4	97.4	97.9	97.8	95.3	94.9	94.9	94.2	96.2	96.1	96.1
Grades 5 to 6	99.1	98.3	98.6	97.2	97.5	96.3	96.2	97.8	97.9	97.4
North										
Pre-school	95.9	94.5	91.1	87.2	90.9	89.8	89	88	91.7	89.9
Grades 1 to 4	98.1	97.3	97.5	94.8	96.5	95.8	97.1	96.1	97.3	96
Grades 5 to 6	98.7	98.9	98.8	96.5	97.7	98.2	97.9	97.9	98.3	97.9
South										
Pre-school	98.4	97.9	97.2	96.7	97.5	96.6	96.2	96.4	97.3	96.9
Grades 1 to 4	98.8	98.9	98.4	96.8	97.9	98.1	97.9	98.2	98.3	98
Grades 5 to 6	98.6	98.9	98.6	97	98.4	97.3	97.8	98.6	98.4	98
Average Girls	97.9	97.4	97.0	94.7	95.7	95.3	94.8	95.7	96.4	95.8

Average Attendance for Boys										
	Nov.		Dec.		Jan.		Feb.		Average	
	00-'01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02	00-01	01-02
Beirut										
Pre-school	94.5	94.7	90.9	87.6	90.8	90.1	84.8	90.8	90.3	90.8
Grades 1 to 4	96.8	97.2	96.5	93.3	94.7	94.4	93.6	95.15	95.4	95
Grades 5 to 6	97.6	98.1	98.2	97.2	96.5	95.9	95.5	96.4	97	96.9
North										
Pre-school	96.1	92.6	92.9	87.6	91.1	91.4	89.7	90.1	92.5	90.4
Grades 1 to 4	98	97.2	97.9	94.7	95.4	96.2	94.7	95.7	96.5	96
Grades 5 to 6	98.9	98.9	96.1	95.2	96.7	97.6	96.6	97.4	97.1	97.3
South										
Pre-school	97.3	98	95.5	96.9	95.6	95.5	95.6	94.2	96	96.2
Grades 1 to 4	98.3	98.5	98	98.2	97.8	98	97.9	98.4	98	98.3
Grades 5 to 6	98	98.9	97.6	98.3	97.1	98	97.3	97.3	97.5	98.1
Average Boys	97.3	97.1	96.0	94.3	95.1	95.2	94.0	95.1	95.6	95.4

Several examples illustrate the effect of school meals in primary schools. For instance, Mrs. Salma, mother of an 8-year-old boy participating in the program, reported that she heard her son talking to his cousin and inviting him to join his school because, as he said, “In our school we have tasty food everyday.” Another mother reported that her child told her he wants to go to school because of the food.

Performance: Teacher observations indicate that the school feeding program helped children to:

- *Increase motivation.* Students who were previously reluctant to participate in class activities are now leading class activities. In the past, teachers noticed that certain students would not raise their hands in class to answer questions. Now, most hands in the class are raised, particularly in the class following the distribution of the meals.
- *Concentrate better.* Teachers report that students now appear more focused. Students are asking questions that indicate a grasp of the classroom material. Teachers report that after the children have their meals, lessons can cover more difficult material, and the children grasp the material more quickly. According to one teacher, the children “are brighter and I can see a gleam in some of their eyes.”
- *Achieve higher grades, possibly due to less absenteeism.* Teachers report that the children are performing better on exams, are attending school more regularly and appear more cheerful now that there are meals in school.
- *Be more energetic.* Teachers report that after meals are served, there is a burst of energy in the classrooms. Activities are now much more “owned by the students,” and the kids are more energetic.

School directors and teachers highlighted the impact that the food has on the final three sessions of the school day. After the break, students used to feel tired, unable to concentrate and, most importantly, hungry. This year, with the implementation of the program, these three hours became very productive hours as students still have the potential and strength to work.

In addition to the meal provided by IOCC, the educational component of the program played a significant role in improving student performance. An educational booklet introduced *Noor and Noora* increased students awareness in civics, the environment and health. Many parents reported seeing the effect of this educational component at home. A mother of a 6-year-old girl said that her daughter pasted a note “Do not waste water” above the tap in the kitchen and a second note “always turn the light off before leaving the room” over light switches. Another mother said that her 7-year-old daughter taught her about the importance of brushing teeth.

Other project achievements: Prior to the GFE program, many children did not drink milk or, if they did, it was hot milk with sugar. Through the visits of Captain Milk, sponsored by Tetra Pak to promote milk consumption, almost all children now drink milk. Parents reported a beneficial effect of the feeding program on the general condition of their children. A mother shared that her child was underweight and unable to accept food in

the morning. During the past three months she noticed a significant increase in weight. A father reported that his thin daughter is now encouraged to eat with her friends, which is improving her nutritional status. Other administrators and teachers reported that “students are healthier,” especially kindergarten children. Teachers added that children acquired good eating habits that will have long-term effects on their nutritional status.

Most school administrators indicated that GFE promoted equality among students, which further attracts children to school. The director in Tarik El Jadidah, School for Girls, indicated that the program reduced the feeling of inferiority felt by students when their classmates brought cheese sandwiches each day, while they could not afford a meal. Parents also indicated that their children consider school as a second home and their teachers almost as mothers and fathers. According to some teachers, GFE fosters a sense of belonging among students.

Other project achievements include:

- Local non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) were developed, in particular Al-Kafaat, a local Lebanese NGO that works toward incorporating handicapped children into society. IOCC was instrumental in increasing the local capacity of Al-Kafaat.
- School development was strengthened by exploring small grants to improve school construction. IOCC would like to further explore the possibility of providing small grants to schools to assist with classroom improvement, educational resources and other infrastructure enhancement initiatives.
- A relationship was strengthened with the University of Balamand to further develop creative educational approaches to increase the performance of children. The development will focus on creative educational materials that will serve to educate the children about proper nutrition and diet. IOCC and the university are now exploring interactive exercises to incorporate into the next school year to increase performance.
- Stronger links were created between the local community and school directors by arranging community sessions where community and school needs were discussed and plans put in place to address those concerns.

Unanticipated Outcomes

- IOCC is working closely with Tetra Pak’s Captain Milk milk-promotion program to increase the awareness of the importance of calcium on bone development and the benefits of drinking milk.
- The Lebanese Ministry of Education worked closely with IOCC to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the program. On many occasions, representatives from the ministry accompanied IOCC to school sites. The ministry was instrumental in providing training in nutrition issues.

- Christian and Muslim children strengthened their relationships through the GFE program by participating collectively in cross-religious educational sessions and city-wide fairs. Now the bonds between Muslim and Christian students are stronger, as evidenced by them playing together in the schoolyard and eating their meals together at the same table.
- The program promoted the feeling of equality, which increased students' self-confidence and esteem. Teachers reported that children feel equal now that all of them receive the same meal. Before, those children who could not afford meals at school felt inferior.

Lessons Learned

Involve community members early. Including community members can assist in the sustainability and the success of the program. In addition, the community itself benefits from the program. Community involvement in implementing school feeding programs can increase communication among parents and teachers, directors, and others; provide parents a chance to become more aware of what goes on at school; help increase the value of education and the school for parents and the community; and encourage parents to register their children in school and ensure attendance.

Educate children quickly about the importance of drinking milk. At the beginning of the program, IOCC monitors faced many complaints over the acceptance of milk by children. Children are not used to drinking cold, unsweetened milk. After the visit from “Captain Milk,” who explained the importance of drinking milk, the acceptance of milk increased significantly. In the future, the program would like to strengthen its relationship with the “Captain Milk” initiative and use some of these techniques and strategies for impacting attendance, enrollment and performance.

Plan appropriately and have a contingency plan if school is closed unexpectedly. At the beginning of the program, more educational materials were reproduced than required. IOCC ensured that distribution was tailored to the correct pattern. On rare occasions during unexpected strikes, some schools were closed and meals that were prepared were not distributed. To overcome this problem, IOCC arranged alternative feeding locations with nearby institutions when meals had already been prepared. Also, occasionally, a school would unexpectedly open, and meals were not prepared. To address this contingency, IOCC asked school directors to provide notification of the opening or closing of the school well in advance.

Ensure proper oversight of the meals and develop a standard checklist for quality assurance. A few schools reported minor problems with some of the meals. Occasionally a meal or two was not wrapped completely, and there was difficulty in opening juice or milk cartons, and errors were made in printing expiration dates. IOCC immediately contacted the catering NGO's and the situation was corrected and not repeated. It is recommended that a nutritionist monitor the progress of meal preparation weekly. In the future, a checklist will be completed prior to the meals being transferred to schools.

Best Practices

Targeting is essential to success. Best practices include the following:

- Prior to implementation, survey the prevalence of malnutrition in selected areas.
- Integrate appropriate micronutrient supplementation in meals according to results of surveys.
- Survey communities in disadvantaged areas about their acceptance of school feeding and extent they benefit from it.
- Integrate community members, parents and students in the implementation of the program.
- Mobilize community and concerned governmental and non-governmental bodies to endorse the program for future sustainability.
- Increase the variety of meals and engage a nutritionist to monitor the nutritional component of the program.

Next Steps

- The results of the post-test administered by the University of Balamand are being entered into the database, and comparisons between the pre-and post-tests will soon be available.
- The questionnaires administered by IOCC to assess the feeding component of the program are currently being processed and analyzed. Results are expected this summer.
- IOCC is preparing the school-feeding program for the following year. The number of schools chosen to participate will depend on the budget allocated to Lebanon. The same schools that were participating in the program during 2001-2002 will also participate during 2002-2003.
- The University of Balamand is currently brainstorming ideas with other nutritionists, educators and the local monitor to suggest to IOCC the educational component for the following year. IOCC will discuss the educational program in June and plan for its implementation.
- During July, IOCC is arranging training for the monitors on effective monitoring, evaluation and communication.
- In September, IOCC members will resume preparation of school feeding for the 2002-03 school year.
- Feeding is scheduled to start at the beginning of November 2002. It is preferable to start feeding after all students have been registered and settled. Since many students continue registering during October, the feeding program will begin in the following month.

GFE in Action

Nawal Darwich is a fifth grade student from Elementary Haret Hreik 2 public school in Beirut's suburb. She lives with her parents and four siblings in a two-room apartment. Her father works as a driver, and her mother is a housewife. Nawal says that IOCC has taught her healthy eating habits. She now drinks milk with no sugar and enjoys the meals that are provided. The *Noor and Noora* booklet (educational component of the program that raises awareness on health, environmental and civic education topics) taught her how to behave properly and fairly with people and how to be hygienic, something she was not aware of before. Her parents appreciated and encouraged the implementation of such a program and hope it will be extended for future years. Nawal said that she hopes one day to become a doctor to cure all sick children.

Hussein Mahmoud Saghir is a fourth grade student from Al-Laylaki public school in Beirut's suburb. He lives with his mother and father and six siblings in a three-room apartment. His father is a daily worker without a permanent, stable job, and his mother works at home and takes care of her children. Hussein said that the school feeding and education program helped him concentrate more in the classroom, especially in the last three hours of the day after the break. He likes all the meals distributed and find them delicious. He also likes milk and juice. As for the booklet, he says that it raised his awareness about the environment. He said "My parents liked this new idea and told me to ask the school director if the program is going to be implemented next year in order to register my siblings in my school." He wants to become a teacher.

Ali Lakis is a fourth grade student from Elementary Bourj Hammoud 1 public school. He lives with his father and four siblings. His mother died when he was two years old. His father is a daily worker. According to him, the school feeding and education program is very important, especially in providing breakfast – something that he did not have before. His favorite is the cheese sandwiches. The two characters *Noor and Noora* taught him to eat healthy foods. He dreams of becoming a famous writer.

Yemen

Adventist Development and Relief Agency

Project Overview

The objective of this program is to improve school enrollment and retention and to reach a minimum 85-percent monthly attendance rate for 30,000 school-age girls in primary grades one through nine. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) will accomplish this goal through the distribution of 4,500 metric tons of wheat flour and 500 tons of refined soybean oil as take-home rations to 30,000 female students who attend public schools in poor regions in the Taiz governorate of Yemen.

The food being provided to the girls and their families will enhance their chances of starting and continuing school, even beyond the traditionally early age that girls assume adult roles through marriage or full workloads. The value of food aid in the form of take-home rations is twofold: (1) it contributes to the household income; and (2) it gives status to the girl who can enhance the family's well-being in a very substantive way.

The take-home rations will consist of one 50-kilogram bag of wheat flour and one four-liter jug of soybean oil. Beneficiaries will receive three allotments of rations distributed every three months during the school year. The agreement was signed Aug. 6, 2002. Implementation of ADRA's one-year program will begin in January 2003.