



Introducing the **NEW NAME** of LSESD's
Community Development & Relief Ministry



The Middle East is a region rich in human and natural resources, yet it faces enormous challenges in the modern era. The word *merath* means *inheritance* in Arabic. The biblical understanding of this word teaches us that inheritance is a sign of Sonship and blessing, but also great responsibility. The purpose of MERATH, as the community development and relief arm of LSESD, is to empower communities in the Middle East to reach their full potential as sons and daughters of God. This means aspiring to the blessing of a life free from poverty and oppression, while also working together to steward resources in order to create a more equal and just society. MERATH strives to achieve these goals by equipping community-based organizations to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in their midst. We believe that together, we can revive and thrive!

Has Anything Changed?!

By Kezia M'Clelland



As we entered the Bekaa Valley at the start of my most recent trip to Lebanon, I felt an overwhelming sense of how, two years since my first visit, and almost six years since the start of the Syrian conflict, somehow nothing has changed. We passed row after row of tents whose inhabitants probably anticipated a stay of a month or two until they could go home to Syria again with their families; as we talked with partners I heard again the familiar stories of families still struggling to meet their basic needs, to access medical care, to survive.

If there has been any change at all, it seems that things have got worse, as resources and opportunities continue to diminish, and children who have been through unimaginably difficult experiences still struggle to access the support they need. More than half of all Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are still out of school, and child labour is rapidly increasing, with children as young as six years old working. The situation inside Syria makes peace seem ever more elusive.

And yet, at the same time, if I look at the situation from another angle, I become aware of other changes that have happened gradually, unnoticed. On that first trip to Lebanon back in 2014 when I spent time talking with our local partners, only one or two had projects focusing specifically on the needs of children, although many of them recognised the serious needs they faced.

LSESD's community development and relief arm MERATH now partners with churches and organisations to deliver eight different non-formal education projects reaching 1,000 children who would otherwise be missing out on school in different parts of Lebanon. On a visit to one of these projects on this trip it was

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Clementia Learning Center

amazing to see the impact in the lives of these children and to hear what they shared about how things are different since they have been part of the school. Many children spoke about new things they have learnt, and friends they have made.

The education project has also had a deeper impact on children's wellbeing and how they cope with life, since it gives them a chance to be with other children in a safe place, and with supportive adults they can trust. One seven-year-old boy said that a change in his behaviour was the biggest change for him, "Before I used to behave badly at home and now I don't – I used to beat my sisters but now I don't."



Clementia Learning Center

We have also seen change happen as we have been walking alongside these churches and organisations to provide child protection training and support. It has been immensely encouraging to support the work of Tahaddi, an organisation providing education and medical care in one of the poorest and most underserved communities in Beirut, which includes many Syrian families. In my initial visit to Tahaddi in 2014, one staff member told me that because of the lack of social protection systems and support in Lebanon, 'We feel like we're at the edge of a cliff and we could fall any time.' Every day

Tahaddi's staff are confronted by very difficult situations among the families they work with, which often would be much easier to ignore. And yet they take each case seriously and look for ways to provide support and take action, and we have learnt a lot through working alongside them to develop child protection policies and procedures which take into account the realities they are dealing with and show how they can do their best to respond in these really difficult situations.

Inside Syria too, we now partner with three church-based teams running 'child friendly spaces' for children in conflict-affected areas. While the situation has worsened around them, these teams of young people have made the decision to stay – providing a safe place for children to play and learn, committed to being the people these children can trust and turn to for support. We spent three days with these teams this month, and it was so encouraging to hear their stories of how children's lives are changing; children who would not speak or smile beginning to engage and play again, children who have lost parents or other family members having someone to listen to them.



LSESD - Training workshop for the staff of the Child Friendly Spaces in Syria

One of the Syrian child friendly space leaders said, "I wish that the children we're working with will be in a better place and the war will end. I hope that the love and care we invest in these children will be like a seed and it will grow with them so that there will be something better for the whole world."

When we hear the news from Syria today it's easy to think that nothing has changed – and undoubtedly, the need to pray, act, give and work for peace and an end to this conflict is very real. And yet, I feel privileged to have the chance to work alongside LSESD and these local partners who are bringing change and being a change in the lives of some of Syria's most vulnerable children, and who to me are a sign of the kingdom of God coming in the most impossible of circumstances.

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In a small UNHCR shelter in the middle of town, Lina and her 5 children are smiling and happy as we enter their home. Lina is 42 years old and a single mother of 5. She lives with her sister who also has two children, one of which is the young boy receiving the milk and diapers assistance program run by LSESD's community development and relief arm, MERATH. Her five children are a pair of twins at 16, then 12, 9, 5. With sitting pads in their front room and two stoves they show a very simple existence of a family working to survive month to month. Lina is one of many refugee women-headed households in Lebanon struggling to earn income and keep her children fed from day to day.


The fighting started in Syria in 2011 and in 2012 Lina fled to an Aleppo suburb from her home town just north of the city. She stayed there for two months and then fled the country to northern Lebanon with her family. She stayed there for two years but an abusive relationship at home drove her to leave her husband and join her mother and sister and their kids. Soon after she finally found her own place to

rent for her children and has been living there for two months. She has been fortunate to find employment as a housekeeper up to last month when she had an injury on the job and couldn't work for the time being. When she had the job she was able to make \$330 USD per month to help support her kids. \$100 went towards rent per month and the rest goes to food, clothing, utilities and she still has to use some forms of credit on a monthly basis. She is embarrassed because her children wear the same clothes from week to week and only have one set of clothes. With the loss of the job she is thankful for the provision of the two programs that MERATH is implementing in partnership with the local church in the area — the Food Box Distribution and the Milk and Diapers program for her sister's children. With this assistance she will have consistent food but will likely have to take on debt to cover other household expenses.

Before she fled from Syria life was very good. She lived with her husband and their kids and they were all safe. They had a cherry orchard of 350 trees and

only worked in harvest times to pick and prepare the cherries. They enjoyed their life as farmers and lived in peace. She loved her life in Syria but wouldn't go back since all her family has fled the country because of the war.

Lina is very thankful for the assistance from the church. The food box includes sugar, oil, beans, hummus and other items. Lina says, "Thank Jesus. Give to us. Please do not forget us". The milk and diapers program is very needed and Lina is so thankful that it provides for her sister's son who lives with her. Her sister adds to the support from her own earnings every month to try and provide diapers as much as she can as well. Through the support she has received, her family will hope to make it through until she can find work again. Lina has hope for the future and looks forward to a day when her children can live like other children and be fully provided for. Lina says, "I want life to be 100% different from the life I live right now."



In Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, the MERATH team is implementing over 25 projects for Syrian and Iraqi refugees and internally displaced people through local partners

QUARTERLY UPDATE

July – September 2016

relief@lsesd.org

Education

Over 1000 Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are attending eight informal education programs — 21 educators in Lebanon have been trained for child inclusion

Child Protection

675 children in Syria and 170 children in Lebanon are being provided child-friendly safe spaces to learn, play and feel secure — 21 Lebanese educators and 16 Syrian partners have been trained for child protection

Basic Assistance

Over 300 Syrian and Iraqi households in Lebanon are being provided health care — Over 2,500 households in Syria received water sanitation and hygiene supplies as well as 105 families in Iraq — 525 Syrian refugee households in Lebanon and 60 families in Iraq with infants and toddlers are receiving milk and diapers

Food Assistance

Over 1,900 refugee households in Lebanon, 5,550 households in Syria and 105 households in Iraq received monthly food vouchers or food boxes

Gender-Based Violence

Five partners have been trained on gender-based violence and are promoting gender equality within the Syrian and Iraqi refugee communities



LEBANON

As the school year begins in Lebanon, only half of all primary school-age Syrian children are attending an accredited school. The main reasons for this lapse is due to transportation difficulties, safety concerns, language barriers, discrimination and the unfortunately high rate for child labor. According to the Freedom Fund Report, up to 70 percent of Syrian children from 18 years and younger are being forced to work in hazardous conditions, a majority of which are being paid as little as \$1 a day.

Lebanon is a tiny, densely populated country of just 10,000 square km neighboring Syria. It contains 4.5 million people, 1 out of 5 of which are Syrian refugees, approximately 1.6 million. Syrian refugees — 53 percent of which are children — are taking shelter in neglected buildings, informal settlements and rented apartments, though most refugees will pay rent regardless of their living situation. Over 70 percent of Syrian families are living under the poverty line, averaging \$940 in debt making it difficult to pay for food and clean water. It is a necessity for there to be continuous support in filling the gaps of food and education services for Syrian children growing up under these circumstances. As the year-long garbage crisis worsens in Lebanon, hygiene and sanitation is rapidly becoming an increasingly high priority as well.

SYRIA

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, 11 million Syrian civilians have been killed or fled the country. 6.5 million have been internally displaced and 13.5 million Syrians are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Since the start of 2016, the security situation has deteriorated in the governorates of Northern Syria, forcing increasing numbers of locals to flee, while making it nearly impossible for aid to reach those who are the most affected. Around 10 million Syrians are food insecure.

As a result, 80 percent of Syrian households are struggling to survive due to climbing market prices for food and other subsidies, with many driven to starvation. Because of inadequate support for agriculture-based livelihoods, Syria is in danger of having most of its commercial produce industry completely dissipated. Food production has dropped by 40 percent since 2011. The rate of unemployment for household earners is at 58 percent and continues to rise. Because of renewed fighting in Aleppo, schools have been destroyed, abandoned or occupied. The basic needs in Syria continue to be: access to food, water, electricity and medical supplies.

IRAQ

Since the Iraqi army took back several major cities from the Islamic State, many people are attempting to return home. However, this has led to a situation of increased casualties from explosives left in their homes, keeping the number of internally displaced people in Iraq at 3.3 million. That number is expected to rise with the Iraqi military's plans to take back Mosul from IS. There are constant mass executions, systematic rapes, and other acts of violence and attacks on basic human rights throughout the country. It is estimated that by the end of 2016, over 11 million Iraqis will be in need of humanitarian assistance.

Communities are becoming strained and are close to a breaking point due to the influx of IDPs and refugees. Water, food and infrastructure are often used as weapons of war as IS and the Iraq army often blocks aid to help the 2.4 million Iraqis in need of food assistance. 18 governorates have been affected by conflict. In larger cities like Baghdad, terror attacks have killed up to a thousand people in the past year. Shelter, food, water, emergency relief kits and protection services are growing needs throughout Iraq.

