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Peace Building in Lebanon Project

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EDITORIAL

The UN Family, in tight cooperation with the Lebanese Government and international partners, has worked on developing the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) for 2015-2016. The new plan reflects a shift in the response to the Syria crisis – it focuses on Lebanon and the Lebanese and aims to increase assistance to vulnerable communities hosting the displaced Syrians and to strengthen municipalities and other public institutions.

The plan will strive to achieve three objectives: ensuring humanitarian assistance and protection for the displaced Syrians and the most vulnerable Lebanese communities; strengthening the capacity of national and local service delivery systems; and reinforcing Lebanon's economic, institutional, environmental and social wellbeing.

The LCRP includes many initiatives aimed at mitigating tensions between Syrians and Lebanese among which are initiatives such as the joint news supplements published by the UNDP "Peace Building in Lebanon" project. This same project is also building the capacities of local communities to deal peacefully with tensions by setting up local peace building mechanisms and initiatives at the community level.

It has also been working on enhancing the capacities of teachers, non-governmental organizations, and media outlets on crisis management.



OFFERING A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN BEIRUT'S SOUTHERN SUBURBS

“The relationship between development and peace building is integrated and interconnected”, according to the prominent trainer Mr. Ali Chahine, who sums up the responses of the participants to his question: “What is the relation between development and peace building?”

This was part of the joint meeting for the municipalities of Beirut's southern suburbs organized by the UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project with the financial support of the European Union. The joint meeting took place on the 9th of December involving the municipalities of Chiyah, Haret Hreik, Forn Al Chebbak, Borj El Barajneh, Ghobayreh and Mrayjeh. Representatives from each municipality and local actors discussed their crisis management mechanisms.

“This project gives the municipality a high ability to face the conflicts and resolve them in a better and scientific way”, said Hajj Ahmad Mohammad Hatoum, Vice President of the municipality of Haret Hreik. “The whole municipality team would be able to analyze and solve the problems faced by the municipality from a new logical perspective”, he added. Municipal council members, local NGOs representatives, municipal police department representatives, social workers, as well as heads and members of social development centers, have already participated in trainings organized by the “Peace Building in Lebanon” project between July and October 2014, on “Conflict Analysis, Crisis Management and Mediation”. As a result of these workshops, the participants

prepared their presentations and discussed them in the meeting in a positive and fruitful interaction. They shared their expertise in similar problems they suffer from and discussed means to solve them.

The municipalities of Haret Hreik, Forn Al Chebbak, Borj Al Barajneh and Ghobayreh developed strategies to resolve conflicts related to their local communities, respectively: electricity generators, lack of parking lots, clustering of garbage in the streets and harass on public places. As for the municipalities of Chiyah and Mrayjeh, they discussed the problem of the youth that stay in the streets all day and night, in addition to the drop out phenomenon spread among them.

“The training we received is comprehensive and ideal as it offers a new way of thinking on how to deal with conflicts and resolve them”, said Mrs. Lidya Abou Daher, Director of the Social Development Center in Forn AL Chebbak.

It enables the municipalities on the long term to view conflicts from a new perspective and to actually try to solve them”. This process gains an additional importance today with the rising impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon in general and on the host communities in particular.



MUNICIPALITIES FROM AKKAR TRANSFORMING THEIR CONFLICTS INTO MECHANISMS FOR SOCIAL STABILITY

As one of the main host countries, Lebanon is suffering from the impact of the influx of the displaced from Syria who took refuge in many of its villages and rural areas. Conflicts between Lebanese and Syrian displaced, among Syrians themselves, and Lebanese themselves are rising as a result.

There are many causes for these conflicts. Some of them are linked to unemployment, lack of resources, poverty, women abuse, and dropout of education in addition to increase in crime and other concerns. These causes were discussed in a retreat organized by the UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project in partnership with Beyond Reform and Development, on the 13th and 14th of December in Chekka, Northern Lebanon.

With the financial support of the UNHCR, 50 local authorities and local actors (including teachers, doctors, business men, civil society activists, etc.) from the municipalities of Akkar cluster (Halba, Bebnine, ‘Akkar Al’Atiq and Berqayel) and Akroum cluster (Mashta Hassan, Mashta Hammoud, Kfartoun, Qenia, Al Sahleh and Mounseh) sat together to transform the results of a previous conflict analysis conducted with them into potential solutions and mechanisms for social stability that will be implemented in the near future. These mechanisms for social stability tackle socio-economic, socio-cultural and security issues. Putting together local authorities and local civil society actors to think about crisis management solutions and mechanisms for the good of their communities was another highlight during this retreat.

“The good thing about this retreat is that we are discussing and analyzing the conflicts and offering relevant solutions”, said Ms. Rayan Al Fawwal, project coordinator of the Lebanon Relief NGO. “The municipalities usually view NGOs and local actors as their competitors and would refuse their help, but through this retreat, they had to think together as active citizens of the possible solutions for crisis management, and agree on the role of everyone in any mechanism that will be put in place”, she added.

In this retreat, participants adapted a Human Rights approach regarding the Syrian displacement, discussed alternatives to curfews in their villages and suggested prevention measures for conflicts.

“We welcome Syrians in our area since we’ve experienced war and displacement”, said Mr. Adnaan Al Khatib, Mayor of Al-Sahleh.

Participants even thought of ways to include the Syrian women in the cultural and social committees already existing in many villages.

“The participation in such activities is without doubt introducing new conflict transformation and prevention strategies to the municipalities”, said Mr. Hamza Al-Ahmad, Mayor of the municipality of Mashta Hassan, who also stressed on the importance of shedding light on positive stories in the relationship with the displaced from Syria. “Media can play a major role in covering this issue”.



CENTRAL BEKAA MUNICIPALITIES COOPERATE WITH THE LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY TO DEVELOP CRISIS MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS FOR THEIR SOCIETIES

For the first time, participants from Central Bekaa sat together to discuss the conflict dynamics they are facing as a result of the Syrian displacement, think of potential solutions to the different challenges, and come up with a crisis management plan. Representatives from municipalities, organizations, stakeholders and social workers from Zahle, Bar Elias, Majdel 'Anjar, Ta'alabaya, Sa'adnayel and Terbol took part in this session organized by the UNDP "Peace Building in Lebanon" project, with the financial support of the DFID, on the 9th and 10th of December in Chtaura Park Hotel.

"The workshop opens a wider vision than the project itself; it is an invitation for the municipalities to communicate with the local civil society on the long term and cooperate with them for the good of the town", expressed Mrs. Nisrine Maita, President of the Economic and Social Board in the municipality of Bar Elias.

After a long discussion between municipal representatives and local actors, each group came out with new suggestions and a proposed mechanism on how to deal with socio-economic, cultural, and security challenges. These challenges became even more important today with the rising pressure and tensions posed by the impact of the Syrian crisis on these communities.

One of the many suggestions was the establishment of a Social and Economic Committee inside the municipality, with the participation of members of the civil society to deal with economic and social problems, from getting new ideas to planning, and finally fulfilling them.

This retreat comes after a series of meetings that were held individually with each group of the municipalities on one side and stakeholders and organizations on the other side. Afterwards, each group would be discussing internally, with the support of the UNDP, the proposed mechanism at each municipality level.

"This program is unusual and special since it is dragging the municipalities away from their usual positions, to view the civil society in a different way and communicate with them to find a common ground, and come up with sustainable solutions", said the social worker, Nader Zeineddine. "It is a perfect opportunity for the municipalities to come out of the traditional frame in dealing with conflicts, and be open to change and new techniques", he added.

By the end of the day they were all eager to go ahead with their plans to the extent that they said: "We should start working the moment we get out of this retreat".



SOUTHERN MUNICIPALITIES AND NGOS DISCUSS MEANS TO LESSEN THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS ON THEIR COMMUNITIES

The UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project in cooperation with “Beyond Reform and Development” and with the financial support of the UNHCR, gathered representatives from local authorities, mayors and municipalities’ members, with the local civil society, NGOs and stakeholders from Ghazieh, Sarafand, Borj El Chemali, Al Baysariyyeh, Al Khiyam, Cheba’a, and Al Hibariyeh in South Lebanon, in a two-day retreat on the 20th and 21st of December 2014 to discuss mechanisms for social stability. This retreat re-gathered both municipalities and local civil society actors, after they had analyzed conflicts at their local level during other meetings, to think together of the solutions that can be implemented.

“This retreat is essential for the southern localities because it breaks the misperception people have regarding the displaced from Syria and enables them to discuss openly with other NGOs and municipalities”, said Ms. Layla Serhan, President of YNCA.

The participants suggested long-term plans to deal with the current situation and the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on their communities to prevent any future conflicts. One of their suggestions is to establish a Social and Economic Committee representing both the local civil society and the local authorities since socio-economic issues were identified as the main triggers of conflicts. The committee would develop plans gathering innovative and new ideas from the whole community, and mainly the youth.

They also suggested establishing a common socio-cultural committee composed of Lebanese and Syrians. This committee would organize activities for the youth and it would enhance the communication among them. This committee would also be focusing on monitoring human rights violations and shedding light on positive initiatives that foster dialogue. “We share the same ambitions and we exchanged thoughts and expertise. We communicated together to find solutions to the conflicts”, said Mr. Safi Nassif, Vice president of the municipality of Cheba’a. “The suggested plans are smooth and flexible, and can be accomplished”, he added.



WADI KHALED MUNICIPALITIES SETTING UP A “MUNICIPALITIES’ PACT” TO BETTER MANAGE THE CRISIS

The “newly established municipalities” of Wadi Khaled had to face the consequences of a huge influx of displaced Syrians with little resources and expertise. They had to cope with the challenges related to the increasing pressure on their existing weak infrastructure, basic services and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the municipalities of Wadi Khaled had to manage twice the size of their original population on all levels.

In two retreats organized by the UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project with the financial support of the Department for International Development (DFID)-UK from the 14th to the 16th of September 2014, and from the 28th to the 30th of November 2014, mayors and members from all eight municipalities of Wadi Khaled, ‘Amayer, Hisheh, Bani Sakher, Khat Al Petrol, Al Fard, Al Moqaibleh and Al Rama, discussed their concerns, suggested recommendations and action plans and worked on the elaboration of the “Municipalities Pact”, which is in their views a local response to the current crisis. The document was the fruit of many consultations and discussion sessions during the previous months and was

also built on a process initiated by the UNDP in late 2012. The document states the needs of Wadi Khaled’s area in all sectors and the solutions for all their problems. It also includes a communication plan that would serve as an advocacy tool for the municipalities to raise their concerns to the relevant parties: the international community, the relevant ministries, the central government and the media (mainly to change the misperception regarding Wadi Khaled).

“With this document, municipalities will be able to establish a full organized vision of any future movements to be done that will help both Lebanese and Syrians, and communicate better with ministries and organizations”; said Ahmad Al-Ali, member of Al-Hisheh municipality.

This opinion was also reiterated by Dr. Bassam Khaled, mayor of Al ‘Amayer who believes that this document reflects Wadi Khaled’s aspirations and hopes for problems to be solved and challenges to be faced.



OFFERING A NEW MEDIA PERSPECTIVE ON DEALING WITH THE SYRIAN CRISIS

With the increasing impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, and amid the endless waves of internal and external crises, there is an urgent need to objectively address and manage the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. In this context, the UNDP Peace Building in Lebanon project sheds the light on these repercussions trying to create an alternative speech to the one used by most media outlets regarding the displaced from Syria.

The sixth issue of the joint news supplement saw the light on the 8th of December 2014, funded by Japan. It gathered contributions from both Lebanese and Syrian journalists on social stability.

The supplement discusses several topics such as the relation of Syrians with Beirut and the story of Beirut and its construction workers. It also highlights the anti-racism battle that activists are leading in Lebanon. Moreover, the supplement tackles the humanitarian considerations which have disappeared between March 8 and March 14 divisions; it tells the story of Yamen, from Aleppo and describes the Syrian episodes in the writer's Lebanese-ness.

"I chose to talk about my own experience and relation with Syria in this supplement because in my opinion it can reach more people", said Bissan El-Sheikh, Lebanese journalist from Al-Hayat newspaper.

The supplement is distributed with Annahar and As-Safir newspapers. The translated version appears in the Daily Star newspaper. This is in addition to its distribution to all ministries, embassies, municipalities, media outlets, universities, and NGOs in Lebanon.

"This supplement offers a new perspective on dealing with the Syrian crisis. It is a "civilized" media work. It is a reference rather than a newspaper that we often throw away the next day. I believe that most of the NGOs working in the peace building field, have kept copies of the 6 previous issues", said Mr. Fadi Abi Allam, President and Executive Director of the Permanent Peace Movement.



JOURNALISTS AND ACTIVISTS SHARE OPINIONS ON THE JOINT NEWS SUPPLEMENT

“In a meeting with some journalists from different media outlets, we discussed the issue of the supplement. We all agreed that the latest two issues are far better than anything published in all national newspapers in relation to the Syrian crisis. Newspapers have their own agenda, and political affiliations. This supplement is free of these chains. You feel that it is floating. It has its own freedom to talk about refugees, their dreams, their aspirations and fears too”.

That’s what journalist Loyal Haddad said when asked about her opinion on the joint news supplement during a discussion session organized as a follow up to the release of the sixth issue, on the 17th of December 2014 in Dar El Mussawir in Hamra.

The “Peace Building in Lebanon” project gathered journalists who participated to this issue to discuss their articles and share opinions with participants on upcoming issues and means of dissemination.

The session was extremely interactive where many writers, experts in peace building, journalists, activists, heads of

NGOs, Syrian and Lebanese social workers and activists, and university teachers, shared new ideas and suggestions for future supplements. In addition, they offered constructive criticism on several issues.

Ahmad Mahfouz from the “Decostamine Initiative” hoped that in the upcoming issue, the displaced Syrians can be given a voice to write about the situation they are living and reflect on it.

For Riad Issa, from the “Volunteers without Borders” NGO, “The media scene actually needs to discuss the topics of the supplement and the importance of writing from an anti-racist perspective. The session is very important to share different ideas from several points of views”.

The supplement can be downloaded from the below link:
http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/6th-issue-of-the-joint-news-supplement/



PROMOTING SOCIAL STABILITY BETWEEN THE LEBANESE AND THE SYRIAN YOUTH THROUGH VIDEO PRODUCTION

The Image Festival Association - Zakira, launched a project in cooperation with the UNDP, and the financial support of the LRF-Germany to support the Syrian and Lebanese youth promoting social stability through video production. The aim of the project is to build the capacity of 30 Syrian and Lebanese young people aged between 18 and 24 years living in West Bekaa, mainly in Marj and Mansoura, by providing video and editing training courses through a series of workshops.

The project also aims at launching a dialogue among the youth, pushing them to share their stories, and thus share their history and present. This project will help the youth develop 15 short videos entailing stories from five to seven minutes in length, covering aspects of the Syrian refugee communities living in Lebanon, as well as stories from the neighboring Lebanese host communities.

CREATING SAFE AND PEACEFUL SPACES TO ENHANCE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The Youth Network for Civic Activism (YNCA) launched a project called "Ashkal Alwan" (shapes & colours) with the financial support of the UNDP, to promote social stability among the Lebanese and Syrian youth through trainings, artistic activities and theatre.

The project aims at building the capacities of 5 Lebanese youth groups in Marjeaoun and Hasbaya, and enabling them to play an effective role in their local communities. These groups will be contributing to the creation of "safe and peaceful spaces" for other local identity groups to discuss their concerns openly, and enhancing mutual understanding of the different "other", and more precisely the displaced Syrians in South Lebanon. The YNCA is organizing artistic activities, such as painting and decoration of tents, cultivating vegetables inside plastic tires, planting trees inside refugee camps, and converting tires into garbage containers in camps. As a part of the project, the YNCA is preparing a theatre play that conveys peace building and conflict resolution messages. For this purpose, a series of workshops was organized to create a theatrical scenario that deals with the repercussions of the Syrian displacement on their communities.



RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES

Salam LADC launched a project “Nihna Jiran” (we are neighbors) with the financial support of the UNDP, to raise awareness about infectious diseases in the camps and other related health issues.

This project will create a friendly safe space in three different camps in the Beqaa and will contribute to raising the awareness of the refugees and the host communities on specific public health issues among Syrian men and women. In addition, it will promote social stability among Syrians and Lebanese through the participation of local authorities and local NGOs in the project. At the end of the trainings local refugee committees will be established with a specific role for each (logistics, safety and health, emergency and external communication).

PEACE BUILDING AND RECONCILIATION MESSAGES IN BEQAA

The Lebanese Organization of Studies and Trainings had successfully completed a series of draw peace events as part of their “Nihna Ahl” (we are family) project.

The drawings, murals, canvas and banners carried peace building messages and called for reconciliation, tolerance and acceptance, and were spread over a large area of the Beqaa governorate, including Baalbak, Ras Baalbak, Labweh, Ersal and Al Ain. The drawings were jointly painted and completed by painters and artists from the aforementioned areas.



The UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project aimed since 2007 at enhancing mutual understanding and social cohesion in a participatory approach with youth, educators, media, NGOs, municipal council members and mukhtars and local leaders.

In response to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and in order to alleviate the growing tensions in the country, the project works on enhancing the capacities of different society groups from local leaders to educators, media and civil society, on crisis management, peace building and conflict resolution. The project supports these groups in developing both medium- and long-term strategies for peace building.

For more information

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