

Issue Brief

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Cohort 2: Promoting local ownership and building capacities for conflict prevention

Which Change and Through Whom?

Promoting Local Ownership and Capacities for Conflict Prevention in Lebanon

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Setting the ground

The end of violent conflicts in many countries does not necessarily correlate with the establishment of peace. For societies to transition from a wartime to a peaceful context, a lot of work is needed, building state institutions or at the interpersonal and intercommunal levels. Countries experiencing conflict or those in transition must make the necessary investment at the local and national level and build capacities to make a successful transition. In this Issue Brief, the concepts of change and transition from a peacebuilding angle are considered in the case of Lebanon. More specifically, how local and national actors contribute to a more inclusive, cohesive and peaceful society is analyzed in two specific case studies which illustrate two different approaches. The first case study is about the Mechanisms for Social Stability (MSS) launched and implemented by local actors in communities hosting Syrian refugees. MSS is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Lebanon and aims at empowering local authorities and local actors in conflict prevention.

The second case is the work of a group of ex-fighters from the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) known as the Fighters for Peace (FFP). This initiative, also supported by UNDP, aims to support Lebanese overcome the legacy of the past and thus contribute to building a more peaceful present.

Both are contributing to help communities become more inclusive, cohesive and peaceful. While looking at the two cases, comparisons will be drawn between the two approaches and the following questions answered: What are the advantages and limitations of each approach in relation to the national peace building process? To what extent should UNDP be supporting both (or only one) of the approaches?

Lebanon at a Glance

Prior to the conflict in Syria that started in March 2011, Lebanon experienced several violent shocks over the past few years which have exacerbated tensions among different groups, as well as between Lebanon and Syria. These shocks include, but are not limited to the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005 and the series of political assassinations that followed, the Israeli war on Lebanon in July 2006 and clashes between March 8 and March 14 movements in May, 2008). These tensions are linked to deep-rooted historical divisions and the relative geographical and cultural isolation of identity groups from one another. Many in Lebanon are still suffering from the legacy of the past with the ‘non-closure’ of the country’s 1975–1990 civil war chapter. With the eruption of the Syrian crisis, Lebanon has witnessed an influx of refugees through its northern and eastern borders, spreading across the country.¹

Relations between Lebanese and Syrians who recently entered the country are under strain due to many dynamics including: economic competition over communities’ limited resources, access to basic services and to the support provided by the international community; social and cultural stereotypes and prejudices held by the two communities of each other; and, political factors linked to the positions held by Lebanese and Syrians regarding the Syrian conflict. Perceptions are further complicated in light of the history of the Syrian regime and the Syrian army, who were, among others, key players during the Lebanese civil war (from 1976 and officially until 2005). Many Lebanese do not easily differentiate between Syrian refugees who have arrived in Lebanon fleeing war in their country and the Syrian regime itself.

¹ UNHCR estimates this number to be 1,011,366 (as of June 2017) registered, more than 30% of the total Lebanese population, the highest number per capita of any recipient country (this is adding to the already existing 350,000 (unofficial number) Palestinian refugees who started arriving to Lebanon in 1948.

Addressing this conflict in Lebanon requires a comprehensive and systematic approach. This should consider both the root causes of conflict in the country (mainly Lebanon's troubled past and the relations between Lebanese factions), as well as the more proximate causes (with the Syrian crisis and the implications on both Lebanese-Lebanese and Lebanese-Syrian relations).

In the following sections, we look at the MSS and FPP examples.

1. Case Study 1 – The Mechanisms for Social Stability:

Since 2013, UNDP Lebanon has been responding to the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, and more specifically on the vulnerable communities hosting high numbers of Syrian refugees. The response mainly through the Lebanon Host Support Programme (LHSP) is focusing on supporting national actors, both at the local and national levels, in three areas: access to basic services, livelihoods and social stability. This programme has been designed with and approved by Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the lead ministry in the response to the Syrian crisis. MSS, the third output of the LHSP programme, are considered today to be one of the pillars of MoSA and UNDP Lebanon's response to the Syrian crisis. The overall objective of these mechanisms is to enhance relations within communities by providing safe and common spaces for the local groups to discuss their fears in public.

This includes opportunities to suggest strategies to address those concerns through building the conflict prevention capacities of local authorities and actors. The MSS methodology includes conducting a participatory conflict analysis for the localities targeted with identified local groups including all sectors and sections of the local community. It also includes developing the strategies in each locality based on conflict analysis results. It also includes contextualised strategies based on the conflict analysis of each locality and plans to implement them with local actors through various means. Since the end of 2016, and based on MoSA's request, UNDP commenced an intensive training programme for MoSA staff at the national and the local levels. These were based in their Social Development Centres (SDCs) all over Lebanon and focused on the MSS methodology in order that they can lead the process themselves within a few years.

Mechanisms for Social Stability as a model for a nationally owned peace building process²

As per the concept of sustaining peace, MSS are about 'stimulating and facilitating the capacity of societies to self-organize so that they can increase their ability to absorb and adapt

to stress.³ Below are a few elements of a locally owned and locally led mechanism.

- MSS are made to empower local leaders and local actors to work on prevention tools and not only respond to conflicts. Local actors and local authorities are coached on how they can strengthen the factors that foster peace, linking to their own contexts and their own analysis of local conflicts. The mechanisms' core idea is to support local governance structures and local actors to respond to the challenges they must face constantly: currently it is about the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon; tomorrow it could be about something else.

- The locally-led mechanisms are linked to the national government, i.e. to MoSA at the central government level, consistent with the view that "[p]eace can be most effectively sustained when it is conceived as a public good for which the State is responsible".⁴ Thus, conflict prevention and conflict transformation should be clearly at the core of the mandate of public institutions. More important are the linkages these committees are making with both the local governance structures – being specifically linked to the local municipalities – and also the national governance structure. Through the involvement of MoSA staff at the local level who report back to the central level in the MSS processes, the central level has access to the local level. These relationships and structures contribute to being better informed about the dynamics on the ground, which can be reflected in policy design and better state responsiveness to crisis and conflicts. The involvement of a Government entity in the MSS is an assurance that there is a formal buy-in from the government linked to the social stability agenda in general and to the role of local actors in promoting and establishing locally led infrastructure for peace building. In addition, Ministry staff themselves are going through a process of changing their own attitudes and behaviours' so that they can lead by example. This relates to the rhetoric of empowering governance and undertaking "change from inside". This is exactly the aim of 'Infrastructures for Peace' which have "the potential role to provide linkages between local and national levels and between the government sector and civil society".⁵

- Widening the participation of local actors in local governance processes and building trust between authorities both present at the local level but with different reporting lines or competencies (e.g. municipality and MoSA SDCs) and other local actors. This contributes to improving the sense of citizenship, in this case among Lebanese, which is key for building a cohesive, inclusive and peaceful society. Local actors, who are normal citizens playing different roles in their society, are encouraged to support their local authorities in conflict prevention and crisis management.

² These lessons are based on several field observations throughout the implementation of the MSS in more than 70 municipalities between 2014 and 2016. They are also based on a series of consultations, brainstorming sessions, workshops with UNDP colleagues, key experts, other international and national organizations representatives and UNDP consultants.

³ Cedric de Coning, 2016, "From Peace Building to Sustaining Peace: Implications of complexity for resilience and sustainability", In Resilience, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

⁴ Mahmoud and Makood, 'Sustaining Peace: What Does it Mean in Practice?', in IPI 5 Op. cit, p.23.

At the core of the mechanisms' "spirit" is the idea that conflict prevention and peacebuilding are shared responsibilities of all citizens and stakeholders. Municipalities, as locally elected bodies, are not expected to manage their own day to day tensions or to come up with innovative ideas to respond to tensions or to work on a longer-term approach to transform conflicts by themselves. People living in the community are also expected to play that positive role.

- Addressing conflicts while looking at their root, proximate and intermediate causes contributes to a better understanding of the issues at stake and therefore better designed responses.

Limitations of the Mechanism for Social Stability

- These mechanisms do not have executive powers. Their role is rather an advisory one. They are here to facilitate dialogue, provide advice, raise awareness, and mediate in some cases. However, they cannot go too far in their agendas since they are constrained by the national Government policies which can in some cases go against conflict sensitivity rules. To what extent can these bodies or structures challenge the existing status quo and have a real impact on existing policies? For example, can a local peace committee alter a municipality's decision to impose curfews on Syrian refugees? Or can a local peace committee transform the society it is operating within into a fully inclusive one?

- In addition, and in most of the cases, these committees have been initiated by international organizations, or by national organizations with donor funding. Here it is pertinent to ask the extent to which these locally led, locally established peace committees or infrastructures, can keep working once donor funding stops.

- Local peace committees are not fully successful in dealing with all types of violence at the local level, especially those dependant on external factors (whether at the national, regional or international levels). As one author puts it, "[t]hey are defenceless in the face of the deliberate use of violence by external actors. There should be no delusion in this respect that these committees cannot enforce peace but they can support the social reconstruction of a society and thus prevent violence".⁶

- MSS and similar mechanisms are not easily measurable and thus it is more challenging to assess their impact.

Case Study 2 – Fighters for Peace:

Historical narrative and collective memory is a crucial topic to be tackled in order to be able to set the foundations for a sustainable peace. In Lebanon, which has endured 15 years of civil war, there has not been official work by the Government on the legacy of the past. Reconciliation is defined as a process "through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future"; looking at the past in a way that allows

people to see it in terms of "shared suffering and collective responsibility" may help to restore confidence.⁷ For some Lebanese, the influx of Syrians refugees into Lebanon, who had to flee their country at war, is a source of fear, linked to their own memory of the war. This fear is also linked to demographic factors (e.g. the majority of Syrians being Sunni) in a country where sectarian divisions continue to be a major issue. Lebanese would also tend to draw parallels between the Syrian refugee influx and the Palestinian refugee influx. They fear that Syrians would stay permanently in the country, in the same way that Palestinians have. This in many ways explains the negative reactions of segments of Lebanese society towards the former. The different perceptions of history in Lebanon and particularly of the Lebanese civil war are still a major cause of tension in the country, within and between the different political and sectarian groups.

A pre-requisite for Lebanon to be able to move ahead as a cohesive, inclusive and peaceful society under a common national identity will be to deal with past issues – issues that many Lebanese are still avoiding. In the absence of the will to raise such issues at the level of the national Government, specifically linked to the historical narrative and address their implications on the present and the future, UNDP has been supporting a number of NGOs and CBOs in their efforts to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation. The experience of ex-fighters, who were active during the civil war, and who decided to turn the page and contribute to civil peace in Lebanon is crucial in this context. Because of their own experiences of, and reflections on war, they have a certain authority, and thus the power to convince others that war is never the solution.

In this context, UNDP decided in 2014 to support the newly established group of ex-fighters, who decided to gather under an NGO called "Fighters for Peace" (FFP). This group, established in 2014, gathers a number of ex-fighters from the Lebanese 1975-1990 civil war who used to belong to the major opposing political parties and who belong to different religious sects. FFP's objectives are to reach out to youths and to generations who experienced the war and convey the following messages: that war has a cost and it is a heavy cost; our perception about the "other" as evil is not correct; that no matter what causes or values we are supporting, it does not justify resorting to violence and killing the other although these values may be manipulated to legitimize war; and, that retention of critical thinking as rational individuals is crucial and not to be drawn to what is perceived by the community or the leader as being correct. NGO members have been sharing their personal stories in order to advocate for non-violent means of resolving tensions. UNDP's support to this group also included developing a website which serves as a platform to virtually archive civil war stories as lived and experienced by normal citizens.

⁶ In Odendaal, op. cit. p. 133

⁷ Bloomfield, David 2006. On Good Terms. Clarifying Reconciliation. Berghof Report No 14. Berlin: Berghof Research Center. Available at www.berghof-conflictresearch.org.

How the 'Fighters for Peace' Contribute to Sustaining Lebanon's Peace Process

- FFP are addressing root causes of conflicts in Lebanon, by looking more specifically at the past and addressing the legacy of the civil war, which is key for any peacebuilding process.

- They are contributing to the oral history gathering process for Lebanon, and contributing to overcoming its violent and traumatic past and learning from it. "The objective of teaching histories is to promote reconciliation and ameliorate past harm".⁸ By passing on their stories to the new generation and collecting and documenting their own testimonies and those of others who lived through the war, they are contributing to the writing of history.

- They are working to transform conflicts mainly with the young generation who did not live through the civil war, and who might be tempted to engage in violent conflicts (as per some testimonies FFP gathered from their sessions). Many children and youth are exposed to negative ideals and attitudes from their parents who personally went through traumatic experience during the war. Anecdotal evidence has shown that youth who were eager to resort to violence if the circumstances allow, changed their minds after hearing the stories and testimonies of ex-fighters. These youths were able to relate to the language used by the ex-fighters. They heard familiar terminology which is different to the usual peacebuilding language.

- By gathering in one organization, these ex-fighters who used to belong to different political parties and sectarian groups and who used to fight each other, are demonstrating examples of unity and respect of differences to the current generation. They are showing that political and sectarian differences are not a reason for disagreement. Most importantly they are sharing a message that wars leave only losers, at least the Lebanese one did.

- They have been able throughout the years, to attract more ex-fighters (the number of members doubled in two years), who were either afraid to join (especially when most of the parties they used to represent are still in power today). Widening this circle is expected to leave a larger impact upon potential beneficiaries of their work.

- They were also able to identify insiders, who still have good connection and access to their identity based communities, and work inside their own communities on transforming people's mindsets and advocating for peace.

- They might have less power but they also might have more interest.

Limitations of the "fighters for peace":

- Working on change from outside might have less impact since it is not directly linked to the decision makers and results might not have the chance to be translated into policies.

- Awareness raising activities are less able to be measured and thus it is more challenging to assess their impact.

- Unless they are linked to the local level, such initiatives have less influence on local peace processes.

- Such initiatives depend on donor funding and thus their sustainability is at stake.

Concluding recommendations

This Issue Brief has considered two different cases of peace structures in the case of Lebanon, one which has the full buy-in of the Government and one which does not. It is evident from this analysis that, although both scenarios have strengths and weaknesses, support can be provided to both in parallel as follows:

Working at the sub-national level with local authorities is necessary, especially in contexts similar to that of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. In such cases, municipalities are at the forefront of the crisis, the impact of which is felt at their local level more directly than at the national level. At the same time, violence is produced when destructive alliances between local and national levels are established. These same alliances are needed to produce and sustain peace. Local conflicts, especially when left unresolved can largely impact a peaceful situation at the national level and contribute to destabilizing it.

Initiatives should also be linked to the national level. This is a prerequisite for sustainable interventions and for contributing to change from inside. Efforts should be undertaken to transform these sub-national initiatives into policies at the national level.

These mechanisms should not be bound to donor funding cycles. Rather, they should be seen as ongoing efforts and ideally undertaken through and funded by national policies. Although developed as ad-hoc mechanisms to respond to a specific crisis, there is a real opportunity to introduce change at the policy level and advocate for embedding these mechanisms into broader systems and government channels.

Designing an exit strategy at the beginning of a process cycle and with local actors is key to ensuring the sustainability of the action, e.g. capacity building.

Implementers should admit that local peace infrastructures are less expected to resolve tensions and reduce violence.

⁸ Elizabeth A. Cole, "Introduction: Reconciliation and history education", in *Teaching the violent past*, ed. Elizabeth A. Cole, 1-28

Rather, they work on preventing violence and thus on the cultural change process and sustaining a peaceful environment.

In relation to the already defined activities of international organizations including the UN, local ownership “is not seen as an ultimate goal or vision [...] but as a practical strategy for action”.

Work undertaken on oral histories and memories through civil society organizations, should not be expected to fill all gaps present, nor pretend that past traumas are completely dealt with, i.e. there is a need to acknowledge that psychosocial work is needed.

The support of UNDP to groups such as FFP, although not operating through the formal government channels, contributes to the transformation of conflicts and the culture of war and/or peace that exists. Issues of truth and reconciliation have huge political significance and it is beneficial when a civil society organization is filling a gap left from the lack of formal truth and reconciliation efforts (due to sensitivities).

UNDP's and other organisations support for nationwide-led initiatives contributes to the reconciliation process, by opening the debate and discussing violent pasts, in order to find ways to overcome them.

Reaching out to youth at risk, who have also been engaged in recent fighting, can contribute to efforts to prevent violence, in the way that FFP has done in Tripoli in Northern Lebanon and other areas.

About the PDA Fellowship:

UNDP's Oslo Governance Center in partnership with the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme has established a PDA Fellowship Programme in 2016 consisting of several cohorts, each involving between 4-6 PDA's and/or PDA like conflict prevention specialists over a period of two weeks. The Fellowship Programme involves guided reflections to help draw out the Fellows' experience on pre-identified conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues.

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Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

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The Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) is one of six UNDP Global Policy Centres, established in 2002 and working since May 2015 with a renewed mandate. It is part of the UNDP Governance and Peacebuilding Cluster in the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) and works closely with its New York based Headquarters and other relevant UN and UNDP units strengthening the overall analytical and learning ability in the area of Governance and Peacebuilding. It supports policy development and applied research with an overarching focus on democratic governance and peacebuilding in crisis, conflict and transitional contexts.

Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention

Since 2004, the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Department of Political Affairs have partnered to strengthen support to the UN's work in building national capacities for conflict prevention. Often times, such support is extended through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (or PDAs), a growing cadre of UN staff who support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams adapt and respond to complex political situations and to develop and implement strategic conflict prevention initiatives and programmes.