



Dag Hammarskjöld  
Foundation



# Before, during, after:

Sustaining peace in the face of armed  
conflict in West Asia and North Africa

## Foreword

As the second Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Dag Hammarskjöld embodied innovation, integrity and leadership. He stood up to the superpowers in the UN Security Council and defended the interests of small nations, using his good offices to mediate international conflicts and defend the values enshrined in the UN Charter. Faced with a wave of violence and armed conflict related to the Cold War and decolonisation, he remained steadfast in his conviction that the UN was a unique instrument for pursuing global peace, with the organisation representing more than the sum of its members. The changes he introduced there were bold and lasting—including the introduction of peacekeeping operations—making him one of the architects of the UN as we know it today. Sadly, many of the challenges Hammarskjöld faced are still present six decades later, and the multilateral system built to defend internationally agreed norms—with the UN at the centre—is regularly threatened and undermined.

Working in his spirit, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation aims to catalyse dialogue and action in pursuit of a sustainable, democratic and peaceful world, and informs policy on international cooperation, development and peacebuilding. Over the past few years we have been actively supporting the UN in its review of how the organisation works to resolve armed conflict and maintain international security, supporting the process leading up the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace. In debates on peacebuilding, the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region is often underrepresented, perhaps as such discussions may be regarded as premature in a region engulfed by ongoing armed conflicts. Yet we know, and the resolutions recognise, that efforts to build and sustain peace require activities prior to, during and following the end of conflict. Therefore, the Foundation considers it particularly important to recognise the specific peacebuilding challenges of the WANA region and emphasise regional perspectives on sustaining peace in various policy discussions at UN headquarters.

If the UN is to live up to its core mandate of saving future generations from the scourge of war, continued reforms of the Organisation's systems and structures are essential. We hope that the insights and experiences presented in this volume can offer a small contribution to ongoing thinking and discussions on what is needed to implement change in how the UN prevents and mitigates conflict, making the UN more fit for sustaining peace in the WANA region and beyond.

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ISBN 978-91-982875-5-4

Cover photo:  
Adobe Stock Images

Printed by X-O Graf, Uppsala

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation,  
Uppsala, Sweden  
2017

# Introduction

Communities across West Asia–North Africa (WANA)<sup>1</sup> persistently demonstrate resilience by improving livelihoods and engaging in peace efforts, despite instability in large parts of the region due to violence, terrorism, religious extremism and refugee flows. Battle-related deaths in Syria and Iraq accounted for approximately 68 per cent of global levels in 2014.<sup>2</sup> Some 4.8 million Syrians are currently living in neighbouring countries as refugees, with a further 6.1 million internally displaced within Syria.<sup>3</sup> The extreme devastation and human suffering resulting from conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Libya urgently require the international community's attention. As the United Nations (UN) completes an intense process of reflection and debate about needed reforms to make the Organisation more fit for preventing conflict and sustaining peace, understanding what factors, relationships, mechanisms and capacities support local peace and development is vital. This must be the basis for devising strategies for promoting sustainable peace and to make Agenda 2030 achievable in the WANA region.

Following three separate reviews conducted in 2015 on the UN's work on peace and security—a Review of UN Peace Operations (HIPPO), a Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) and a Global Study on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security—parallel resolutions were passed in April 2016 by the UN Security Council (SCR 2282) and the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262).

The resolutions outline a new conceptual framework of sustaining peace, considered ground-breaking for stressing that peacebuilding is an ongoing process that includes efforts to prevent conflict, strengthening reconciliation and resilience during conflict and consolidating peace several years after violence has subsided. The resolutions also call for greater clarity in what is needed in terms of policy and actions by different stakeholders to bring about real change.

To identify practical approaches to resilience and sustaining peace in WANA, and to generate input to policy discussions taking place at the UN and other international fora on the outcomes of the 2015 reviews, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the West Asia–North Africa Institute co-hosted a workshop in October 2016 in Amman, Jordan.<sup>4</sup> The objective of the workshop was to facilitate the engagement of practitioners working in the WANA region on these issues, to identify successful models for supporting local actors in building sustainable peace and to discuss and generate new ideas for how the international community can strengthen cooperation across sectors. Participants included staff from different UN entities, civil society organisations and national government representatives.

During the workshop participants highlighted the need to acknowledge contextual realities that contribute to fragility in the region such as linkages between different conflicts; urged greater recognition of the impact of migration on resilience, including as an opportunity for host countries; and encouraged a rethink of organisational approaches, building on the strength and capacity of local civil society and integrating humanitarian and development approaches in peace efforts. Discussions also focused on the imperative to advance more coherent and adaptable funding and project implementation mechanisms; to promote inclusive local and national ownership, including full engagement of youth; and to support comprehensive strategies towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The thematic papers included in this compilation share deeper insights of select participants on the discussions and issues raised during the workshop, and present context-specific analyses on resilience and sustaining peace in the WANA region.

## Structure of the volume

The first two articles provide a broad perspective of engagement by the international community in sustaining peace and building resilience in WANA. Jos De la Haye begins with a reflection on opportunities presented by the three 2015 UN peace and security reviews for the UN to redefine

its role, actions and instruments for building and sustaining peace, as well as challenges in moving forward with the resolutions. Talia Hagerty and Daniel Hyslop of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) present recent efforts by IEP to create a framework for measuring resilience and fragility, including the Global Peace Index, the Positive Peace Index, and the Youth Development Index. Presenting select data from these indices for WANA they argue, among other things, that the discrepancy between the education, health and well-being provided to young people and their level of political and civic participation has contributed to instability in the region. Unpacking some of the definitional ambiguities around the terms resilience and fragility, they emphasise the critical importance of conceptual clarity and measurable data in generating better strategies for sustaining peace.

The rapid growth of the youth population in the region should be recognised for the invaluable resource it presents. Implementation of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security<sup>5</sup>—which recognises that the participation of youth in peace and decision-making processes can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security—ought to be a critical priority. Efforts to implement SCR 2250 can build on the lessons and experiences of decades of youth engagement in the region. Ma'in Al Shamayleh elaborates on experiences of youth engagement in Jordan, highlighting the connections with the ongoing discourse on preventing violent extremism. Al Shamayleh stresses the need for national strategies for implementing SCR 2250 and encourages the international community to provide financial, technical and logistical support in making this happen. In the following paper Benoite Martin of the Dutch peacebuilding organisation PAX shares insights, including strategies and challenges, from the Kulluna Muwatinun (“we are all citizens”) initiative, a multi-year programme aimed at promoting the participation of young people in building sustainable peace in Iraq.

The sustaining peace resolutions urge the international community to break down the silos between the development, human rights and peace and security pillars of the UN, and to recognise the need to end artificial sequencing of peacebuilding efforts. Speaking from her experience in Yemen, Sawsan Al Refai highlights the importance of balancing immediate humanitarian needs in the form of shelter, food and medical supplies with support and investment in education. She underscores the value of community-led education initiatives in promoting the well-being and resilience of children and youth and urges the international community to provide financial resources for such initiatives. In the final article, Rebecca Wolfe and Dominic Graham offer lessons from Mercy Corps' work in other contexts, including Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and Iraq to draw out lessons for

strengthening the resilience of communities in Syria and elsewhere, mindful and explicit of the need to consider unique contextual factors. They argue that not only is peacebuilding possible before the violence has subsided, but that early engagement through strengthening social cohesion, building governance systems and promoting reconciliation is critical to effective recovery and reconciliation processes once a lasting peace agreement has been reached.

Collectively, the experiences and perspectives presented in this volume can hopefully offer some insights on what is needed to sustain peace in WANA, as well as the relevance of the sustaining peace agenda for the region. Much more is needed to ensure that the findings presented in these articles, as well as those raised in the workshop in Amman, are taken forward and applied. A better understanding of what supports peace and contributes to the resilience of communities is critical. Despite a legacy of multiple overlapping conflicts that date back several decades, communities in WANA have demonstrated a tremendous capacity to endure and overcome conflict, famine and instability using existing structures. Their resilience must be recognised as key for peace in the region.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>WANA, or West Asia-North Africa, is a term for the region preferred by many who consider MENA (Middle East and North Africa) to be outdated and geographically ambiguous.

<sup>2</sup>PRIO, *Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946-2014*, *Conflict Trends*, 2016

<sup>3</sup>UNHCR, *Middle East and North Africa regional summary, 2017 update*

<sup>4</sup>This workshop was the third in a series of regional consultations conducted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation on the UN's new sustaining peace agenda. Previous events were held in Accra, Ghana (April 2016) in partnership with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) and in Kitwe and Lusaka, Zambia (September 2016) in partnership with the Dag Hammarskjöld Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (DHIPS) at Copperbelt University.

<sup>5</sup>SCR 2250 was adopted by the Security Council in December 2015. See [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015))



**Jos De la Haye** leads the UNDP governance and peacebuilding portfolio for the Arab States, spearheading programmatic innovation in the development agenda and taking into consideration challenges at the regional, national and community levels.

Areas of focus include preventive governance under the sustaining peace agenda, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), migration and displacement, preventing violent extremism, political transformations, community resilience and social cohesion. In particular the role of governance institutions, their respective mechanisms and processes are diagnosed and adjusted to make them more accountable and responsive.

Before joining the Regional UNDP hub in Amman, Jos served as Team Leader, Conflict Prevention, with UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) in New York, as well as Peace and Development Advisor in Georgia (2008-10). Prior to UNDP he worked as researcher on governance and peacebuilding at the universities of Leuven and Brussels in Belgium and worked for several international NGOs in Belgium, UK and USA.

*Jos De la Haye currently works for UNDP, but the views presented in the paper are his own.*

## The sustaining peace agenda: Bringing conflict prevention back into the limelight

*by Jos De la Haye*

Like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, the three 2015 reviews on UN peace and security were inspired by the need to strengthen the effectiveness, coherence and relevance of the UN peace and security architecture to make it better 'fit for purpose' and able to respond more effectively to today's complex and interconnected crises.

The sustaining peace agenda, as outlined in resolutions SCR 2282 and A/RES/70/262, identifies sustaining peace as an inherently political process, with emphasis on the notion that peace is much more than the cessation of violence but also something that must be built and consolidated. The new UN Secretary-General António Guterres has placed prevention high up on the international agenda. At the same time, the prevention of conflict is not a result only of diplomatic action. As highlighted in the AGE report, prevention needs to be a comprehensive approach, which for an organisation like the UN means breaking out of existing silos in approaching peace and conflict work and better integrating the UN's three foundational pillars—peace and security, development and human rights—and their respective governance structures.

Interventions should also recognise that the best prevention of conflict, as well as other risk factors that impact societies, is sustainable and inclusive development.<sup>1</sup> In addition to restoring peace after a conflict, necessary investments—in developing access to justice for all and responsive and accountable institutions, in reducing violence, corruption and organised crime—are needed

to ensure that building peace becomes an integrated strategy in ongoing development efforts.

Recognising that a renewed UN approach to sustaining peace is still in the early stages, the following identifies three opportunities and five challenges for consideration in moving forward with the resolutions.

## Opportunities

### 1. The AGE report outlines sustaining peace as “fundamentally concern[ing] reconciliation and building a common vision of society.”

The sustaining peace agenda emphasises a process that is locally owned and led by governments and local actors, including women, youth and traditional and religious leaders, and puts politics and political solutions front and centre, leveraging the UN’s three pillars in a mutually reinforcing way.

The resolutions identify a number of building blocks for the international community to play a supporting role in such efforts. Urging further UN-World Bank (WB) collaboration, clause 20 of the resolutions calls for the institutions to “assist such countries, upon their request, in creating an enabling environment for economic growth, foreign investment and job creation, and in the mobilization and effective use of domestic resources, in line with national priorities and underscored by the principle of national ownership.” This requires sustained support, financially as well as politically, and attention by the international community.

Like the sustaining peace agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>2</sup>, outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognise the need for inclusive national ownership. Ensuring that the 17 SDGs are met for citizens from all sectors and levels of society and not just nations as a whole is crucial. The goals also outline the importance of reducing inequalities within and between nations, underscoring their universality. Goal 16 on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies explicitly recognises that “there can be no peace without sustainable development and no sustainable development without peace.”

**2. The role of women in sustaining peace is strongly recognised.** The substantive link between women’s full and meaningful inclusion in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild after conflict, and the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of those efforts, is also emphasised in SCR 2282 and A/RES/70/262.

### 3. Implementing the sustaining peace agenda calls for better use of current frameworks and structures, recognising needed areas for improvement.

Building on existing frameworks is more feasible than bringing in completely new models. As such the resolutions can be seen as a call for the field-based conflict prevention and peacebuilding community to further invest in and expand the use of tools, procedures and mechanisms that are effective in incorporating a sustaining peace lens to all programming.

Rather than redefining peacebuilding, the resolutions provide more clarity and an expanded scope, reaffirming ideals already set forth by the UN in the 2000s. During the 1990s, peacebuilding was mostly understood in the UN as taking place post-conflict. However, that position changed with the adoption in 2001 of Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2001/15 and the following 2007 Policy Committee decision that defined peacebuilding as aiming to prevent the outbreak, recurrence of and continuation of armed conflict. The sustaining peace agenda is an opportunity for the peacebuilding community and the UN system to build on existing response mechanisms through:

- **Joint conflict analysis and risk-informed interventions.**

The centrepiece of the 2030 Agenda signals a commitment by member states to address the root drivers of conflict, notably social, political and economic exclusion. Two of the tools the UN has at its disposal to engage in joint risk analysis of conflict drivers include: the UN Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA)<sup>3</sup> and the Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA)<sup>4</sup>, a joint initiative by the WB, UN and the European Union (EU) to work with national governments in assessing and prioritising recovery and peacebuilding needs. Their use has resulted in a more coordinated UN response in conflict settings such as Yemen. Such initiatives help to strengthen inter-agency cooperation to identify and support countries in addressing these causes of conflict.

- **Building on pre-existing structures for peace.** Facilitating stability in countries like Iraq and Libya provides opportunity to incorporate traditional and communal mechanisms for peace. Linking local and community-based initiatives to policy dialogues at national assemblies, human rights institutions and public administrative agencies contributes to a more comprehensive peace framework towards a shared vision of society. Stabilising communities immediately after the cessation of hostilities by providing support to local governments and security institutions—including through infrastructure reconstruction, livelihoods assistance and emergency employment—in parallel with needed humanitarian aid, requires creative and long-term thinking. This is particularly important if such immediate and often ad-hoc interventions are to lead to sustained improvements.

- **The use of preventive governance.** Societies need institutions and governance structures that are resilient and can peacefully manage tensions, which might evolve in post-conflict contexts where violence can quickly return. This increases the importance for governance bodies to produce policies that address the harmful exclusion of certain groups.
- **UN inter-agency collaboration frameworks.** Examples include the Joint United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Department of Political Affairs (DPA) Programme on Building Nation Capacities for Conflict Prevention and the Joint UNDP-Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Global Focal Point for the Police, Justice and Corrections Areas in the Rule of Law in Post-conflict and other Crisis Situations.<sup>5</sup> The Human Rights Upfront Mechanism (HRUF)<sup>6</sup>, established in 2013, aims to ensure common analysis and coherent response to human rights violations by UN country teams and headquarters through regular monitoring of human rights situations in countries.
- **Integration of humanitarian and development efforts.** A New Way of Working is outlined in the Commitment of Action signed at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and eight UN Principals and endorsed by the WB and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).<sup>7</sup> The initiative can be described as a context specific approach of working towards collective outcomes, over multiple years, based on the comparative advantages of a diverse set of actors. It blends short-term humanitarian tools that respond to shocks and sudden critical events with longer-term development interventions that systematically mitigate vulnerability and risk. Its key areas include:
  1. predictable, joint situation and problem analysis;
  2. better joined up planning and programming;
  3. empowered leadership and coordination; and
  4. financing modalities that support collective outcomes.

This will require key shifts in the way all actors work on these issues.

## Addressing concerns and challenges

1. **The UN's current organisational structure presents challenges to implementing the sustaining peace agenda.** The holistic vision of sustaining peace has implications on the internal structure of the UN. Regional consultations are crucial as they facilitate dialogue between UN agencies, generating new modalities to advance the sustaining peace concept. The resolutions are very much a call on UN agencies to collaborate

in a more effective manner in directing the development, security and human rights pillars towards the same objectives. The setup of the follow up process to the sustaining peace agenda is itself a challenge, as it is coordinated through both the more technical Peacebuilding Contact Group and the Senior Peacebuilding Group. The Deputy Secretary-General's HIPPO Principals Group has also tasked DPA, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and UNDP ("the troika") to lead preparations for a follow up high level event and draft the Secretary-General's report on sustaining peace, as mandated by the resolutions (SCR 2282 and A/RES/70/262).

2. **The sustaining peace resolutions identify as a critical challenge that "financing for peacebuilding remains scarce, inconsistent and unpredictable."** The international aid architecture needs to be adjusted to support peace efforts. The resolutions call for the international donor community to rethink how UN peace and development initiatives are funded, proposing that new options be devised, including through the possible use of assessed contributions. Additionally, in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing report<sup>8</sup> called for dedicated funds for peacebuilding and conflict resolution under the resilience-building approach, bringing humanitarian and development work on the same path. International aid must adapt to the complexities that a protracted crisis brings with it, including the reality of long-term forced displacement and rapidly changing needs.
3. **In the turbulent WANA region, characterised by protracted conflict and population flows, the debate on how to best support initiatives that integrate humanitarian and development efforts is ongoing and greatly needed.** In November 2015, for example, the Government of Jordan and UNDP developed the Dead Sea Resilience Agenda<sup>9</sup>, which provides a common basis for resilience-based responses across countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. The agenda set down five key principles for aid: increase synergies between humanitarian and development investments and approaches; prioritise the dignity and self-sufficiency of affected populations; reinforce, and not replace, local capacities; generate new and inclusive partnerships; and safeguard social cohesion. Rather than 3-6 months of short-term humanitarian support, these kinds of longer-term structural development responses become an integral part of saving lives.
4. **Undue haste and rigid timelines undermine efforts to support genuine and authentic processes.** The international community is keen to present a timeline at the outset of political transitions or peace processes. As demonstrated in Tunisia, where the constitutional reform process



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD



following the 2010–2011 Jasmine Revolution was mainly driven by the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, and less by an international agenda, timelines often become clear only towards the end of an initiative. Investing in a genuine and nationally-owned process, where dialogue and consultations take place at all levels, is critical to enable social progress and better standards of living. In managing dialogue, peace and development processes, sufficient flexibility is needed for trial and error. Thus, the UN should work according to a risk-informed strategy or roadmap—as opposed to a timeline—developed based on a thorough analysis and able to adapt to changing circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

5. **Supporting inclusive national ownership calls for an appropriate level of accompaniment by international organisations.** Peace cannot be imposed from the outside, just as it cannot be imposed from the inside by domestic elites on citizens that lack trust in their leadership or other groups in society. National ownership goes beyond the development of a national strategy, which in divided societies risks perpetuating exclusion. Genuine inclusive national ownership requires engagement of and a sense of buy-in by a broad base among diverse social groups. As an external party, the UN has to consider how it can work and support countries to facilitate sustainable processes that will be unique in each context.
6. **The WANA region is plagued by a number of protracted crises and active wars.** Operating in the absence of a political peace agreement and in environments where the situation might change from day to day leads to challenges in remaining conflict sensitive<sup>11</sup> and working for peace. The sustaining peace resolutions, as well as the 2030 Agenda—SDG 16 in particular—are an invitation to the international community to develop initiatives that are politically smart and risk-informed and that focus more on ongoing efforts to sustain peace, including prevention in the midst of active violence.

## Conclusion

The link between the SDGs and the sustaining peace agenda is not only about Sustainable Development Goal 16. Different aspects of peaceful, just and inclusive societies are woven into several SDGs. The goals are universal, interlinked and integrated and several targets address violence and the lack of access to justice and inclusivity through, for instance, education (SDG 4); gender equality, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, and effective women's participation (SDG 5); and the development of safe and resilient cities and local communities (SDG 11).

Sustaining peace is ultimately about reducing the risk of lapse or relapse into violent conflict and aimed at fostering the ability and capacity to look beyond crisis management and the immediate resolution of conflicts. The resolutions stresses that sustaining peace is a comprehensive task that should flow through all three UN pillars, in collaboration with various UN agencies, during all stages of conflict, so that not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of conflicts are addressed. The focus and capacity of the UN system to prevent violent conflicts should in particular be increased. UN Member States and the UN system, as well as civil society organisations, need to seize this opportunity for increased collaboration in peace efforts to ensure sustainable peace and development globally.

In the 1990s UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali spoke of preventive diplomacy as “the use of diplomatic techniques to prevent disputes from arising, prevent them from escalating into armed conflict [...] and prevent the armed conflict from spreading.”<sup>12</sup> Along this broader ambition to enhance the UN's moral responsibility and role on the international stage, his successor, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, further stressed the necessity of the aforementioned shift towards a “culture of prevention” notably in two prominent reports published in 2001 and 2006.<sup>13</sup> Continuing this shift in UN policy, a large number of UN bodies, regional organisations and civil society groups today share the concern that conflict prevention must be prioritised. As such, the sustaining peace agenda is much welcomed, as it identifies conflict prevention as at the core of the UN's work on peace and security. In that regard one can say it has the potential to make conflict prevention great again.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>The UN Secretary-General's remarks at the Special Session on “Cooperation for Peace: Tackling the Root Causes of Global Crisis” in Davos, Switzerland, 19 January 2016

<sup>2</sup><https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

<sup>3</sup>Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis, UN Development Group, 2016

<sup>4</sup>Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning, 15 September 2008

<sup>5</sup>For more information on these initiatives see: Issue Brief | Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention and FACT SHEET: Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections, UNDP, 2012

<sup>6</sup>Human Rights Upfront: a summary for staff, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/pdf/english/2016/Human-Rights-up-Front.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>See <http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/5358>

<sup>8</sup>“Too Important to Fail. Addressing the Humanitarian financing gap,” January 2016, High-level panel on humanitarian financing report to the Secretary-General

<sup>9</sup>UNDP Dead Sea Resilience Agenda, November 2015, [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/RDF/DeadSeaResilience%20Agenda\\_05Nov2015.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/RDF/DeadSeaResilience%20Agenda_05Nov2015.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>UNDP Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence A Guidance Note, 2014, EU and UNDP joint publication

<sup>11</sup>Conflict sensitivity is often defined as the capacity of an organisation to understand its operating context, understand the interaction between its interventions and the context, and act upon this understanding to avoid negative impacts (“do no harm”) and maximise positive impacts on conflict factors

<sup>12</sup>A/RES/47/120 A: 91st plenary meeting, 18 December 1992, An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy and related matters

<sup>13</sup>A/60/692 , 6 March 2006, Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide, Report of the Secretary-General



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**Talia Hagerty** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), where she works on applied peace research for positive peace and citizen and gender security. Talia has contributed to a variety of projects at IEP, including the Global Peace Index, the Positive Peace Index, and the Institute's work on measuring Goal 16 for the sustaining peace agenda.

Prior to joining IEP, Talia worked as a consultant and academic researcher in peace economics, collaborating with the business, nonprofit, social enterprise and government sectors on a variety of violence reduction and economic development programmes.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

The authors would like to acknowledge IEP Senior Research Fellows Dr. David Hammond and Thomas Morgan for previous quantitative analyses that informed much of this draft.

# The devil is in the details:

## Overcoming barriers to peace and resilience in West Asia and North Africa

by Talia Hagerty & Daniel Hyslop

The challenge of how to build peace and resilience is not just confined to the West Asia–North Africa (WANA) region. Policymakers around the world are grappling with this ambitious question as the relative peace of the post–Cold War era deteriorates.<sup>1</sup> The world is now at a historic 25-year peak in violence and armed conflict. The year 2015 saw record levels of terrorism, the highest number of global battle deaths in 25 years and the highest number of refugees and displaced people since World War II.<sup>2</sup> The Global Peace Index (GPI), which measures peacefulness using a number of indicators such as intensity of violent conflict, impact of terrorism and homicide rates, shows a consistent deterioration in peacefulness over the last decade.

Intertwined with these complex social and political conflicts are threats and hazards that have the capacity to multiply existing fragilities. These include the changing climate, increased natural disasters, food and water crises, pandemics, migration and persistent economic shocks due to global imbalances and inequalities between the world's wealthiest and poorest individuals. While the world is measurably improving according to development indicators related to health, education and technological innovation, progress has largely been unevenly distributed. These developments give rise to new risks and stressors through increasing societal expectations and strain on political institutions.

Broadly, the impediments to building resilience and sustaining peace are threefold: a) methodological and conceptual, due to the difficulty of defining and measuring resilience, b) bureaucratic, in that much of the international actions towards building resilience lack coordination and are plagued by

short-term thinking, and c) political in that donors simply do not direct enough resources to critical peace and resilience building activities. This chapter first addresses the methodological and conceptual issues, followed by a discussion of bureaucratic and political challenges.

### The current state of the art: measuring resilience

Identifying the root causes of a conflict in a given region or country, as well as what factors contribute to peace, is key to developing strategies for sustainable peace. Yet, there is a general lack of agreement in social science literature on the generalisable drivers of peace and conflict. For example, the 2009/2010 Human Security Report highlighted a number of factors that could contribute to conflict and war, including ethnic diversity, dependence on primary commodities, strength of democratic institutions, level of economic growth and the extent of social grievances. Depending on the context, these can either have significant or insignificant impacts on the likelihood of armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> The ambiguity in the existing literature calls for a new approach.

As such, how do we know if a country, community or individual has become more ‘resilient’? If the drivers of resilience—or fragility—are unclear, improvements towards more resilient societies cannot be assessed. In order to address that question we need to better define resilience and articulate clearer measurements.

Due to the lack of data on relevant indicators, deficits in analytical frameworks and the dynamic and fast moving nature of violence itself, existing tools are not always able to anticipate new outbreaks of violence and dramatic changes in peace and stability. This is evident from prior failures throughout the world, and especially in the WANA region.

A number of crucial indicators of peace and resilience remain uncounted, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, making it much more difficult to understand the complexity of resilience and fragility. For example, data on gender-based violence (GBV), which can be a major product and producer of societal fragility, is unavailable for WANA countries. In addition to missing key indicators, data is often collected only for short-term projects that fail to account for long-term analysis. Datasets therefore often suffer from the same ‘short-termism’ that plagues organisations and agencies. Neither development interventions nor their metrics span the decades needed to affect and observe substantial social change.

Together these factors underscore the need for a paradigm shift away from emphasis on immediate risk or trigger indicators to more predictive risk metrics and longer-term resilience-building frameworks. The factors that give rise to

conflict are unlikely to be eliminated even if they can be predicted. But the risk of outbreaks of violence in the wake of shocks and stressors can be mitigated.

### Defining resilience

Resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’ or to become strong, healthy or successful after a negative event. Applied to peace and conflict studies and the study of the progress of societies, resilience can be understood using the OECD’s definition: “*the ability of households, communities and nations to absorb and recover from shocks while positively adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long term stresses, change and uncertainty*”.<sup>4</sup>

While early research in development studies conceptualised fragility and resilience as “opposite ends of a spectrum,”<sup>5</sup> more recent work has emphasised that fragility and resilience actually “co-exist” and their relationship is complex and dynamic, with changes in one not necessarily leading to commensurate changes in the other.<sup>6</sup> In short, the same country can be simultaneously fragile and resilient, and the factors that build resilience in one context may foster fragility in another.

As an example, while excluded groups are thought to be more likely to use violence, exclusion alone does not increase the likelihood of violence. Other social and institutional realities matter, such as viable nonviolent means to advocate for one’s group or interests (justice systems, etc.) as well as various material incentives that encourage or discourage the use of violence. Whether an excluded group engages in violence is dependent on a variety of social factors (including whether citizens face violence from the state), and even those commonly thought to enhance resilience can lead to contradictory outcomes. For example, democratic institutions have the potential to either align the interests and incentives of the populous and the elite or exacerbate social tensions and extant grievances. Similarly, free flows of information typically enhance resilience, but power imbalances in the production and dissemination of information can exacerbate social divisions.

Given that violence can be seen as a mostly internal shock factor within a social system—excluding forms of inter-state conflict or cross border spill over—by definition a more resilient environment is also a less violent one. Violence can be both the product and producer of fragility and is driven by many different factors and mechanisms. The difference in outcomes between social systems with coexisting factors of resilience and fragility results from both the overall strength of and the mechanisms built into a system. Only by understanding the broader way social systems evolve and the key feedback mechanisms and interactions between different phenomena is it possible to better understand how resilience is eroded or sustained. From there it may be

## BOX 1: Key terms for resilience building

The need for resilience and capacity building is widely understood. Yet there are competing definitions of what these terms mean and how they relate to fragility. The following terms are concepts used throughout this chapter.

**Resilience:** The ability of households, communities and nations to absorb and recover from shocks while positively adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long term stresses, change and uncertainty.

**Fragility:** Fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises or other emergencies.

**Positive Peace:** The presence of the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. Well-developed positive peace represents the capacity for a society to meet the needs of citizens, reduce the number of grievances that arise and resolve remaining disagreements without the use of violence.

**Negative Peace:** The absence of direct violence or fear of violence.

**Conflict:** A disagreement between two or more individuals or groups. Conflict can either be nonviolent or violent and, depending on how it is dealt with, can be either constructive or destructive.

**Risk:** The combination of the probability of an event and the magnitude of its negative consequences.

**Shock:** A shock occurs when a risk becomes reality. For example, a country may be at risk of earthquakes because it lies on a fault line. When an earthquake actually hits, this is called a shock.

**Stressor:** A long-term trend that weakens the potential of a given system and deepens the vulnerability of its actors.

**Risk management:** The systematic approach and practice of managing uncertainty to minimise potential harm and loss.

*Source: OECD, Guidelines for resilience systems analysis, OECD publishing*

possible to shift the focus from predicting outcomes to a model that fortifies societies against inevitable challenges.

### What does the data say about resilience and peace in the WANA region?

According to the Global Peace Index (GPI), the world has become less peaceful over the last decade, as the average country GPI score deteriorated by 2.44 percent. But this global metric masks variation around the world, with the average GPI score in WANA having deteriorated by 14 per cent from 2008 to 2016. WANA saw deteriorations across 19 of 23 indicators and had the largest average regional deterioration on seven of these, including the number of refugees and displaced people, deaths from internal conflict, the impact of terrorism and the level and intensity of organised internal conflict.

Most of these changes are linked to the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and the associated population displacement, expansion of terror tactics and spillover effects from armed conflict. According to GPI data, escalations in internal armed conflicts coincided with increasing perceptions of criminality, higher levels of violent crime, greater government repression, outbreaks of terrorism and widespread population displacement. In 2007, just 0.1 per cent of the Syrian population was classified as refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). This figure rose to an extraordinary 63.2 per cent in 2015. The displaced populations of Yemen and Libya rose from below one percent to 9.3 and 6.8 per cent, respectively. The vast majority of refugees in the WANA region are being hosted in nearby countries which often do not have the resources and capacity to adequately provide for high levels of refugees, creating additional instability in the region.

## Box 2: How are peace and resilience measured?

Peacefulness is a complex concept, and notoriously difficult to measure. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) has pioneered the multi-dimensional measurement and analysis of peacefulness using a variety of composite indicators, or indices.

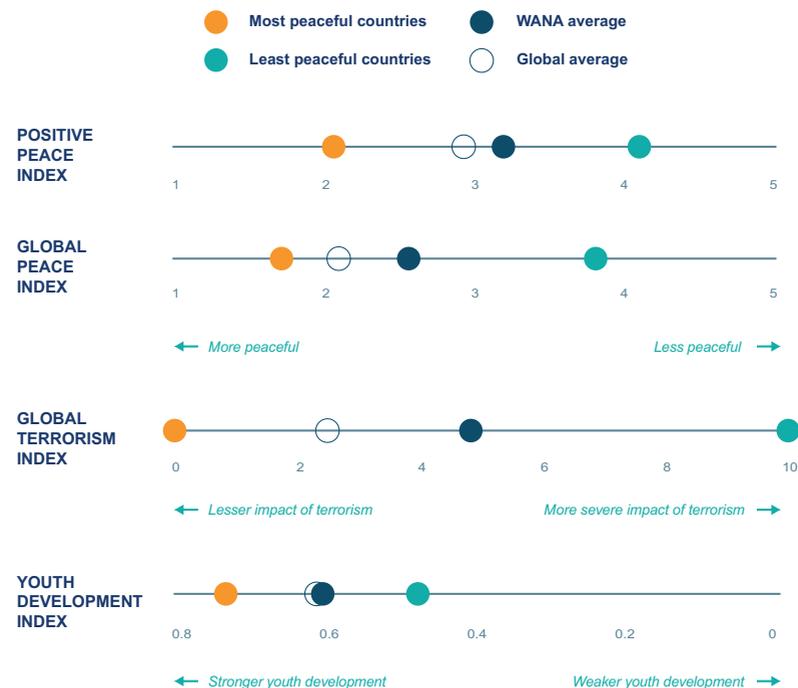
Now in its tenth year, IEP's Global Peace Index (GPI) ranks the nations of the world according to their level of peacefulness. The GPI is composed of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators and covers 163 states and 99.6 per cent of the world's population. The GPI measures peace within a country's borders under the domain of internal peace and its engagement with peace in the world under the domain of external peace. GPI scores range from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most peaceful possible and 5 is the least peaceful.

The GPI measures negative peace, or the absence of violence; IEP also measures the concept of positive peace, or the attitudes, institutions and structures that underpin the absence of violence. The Positive Peace Index (PPI) captures country progress on building the resilience needed to sustain low levels of violence. PPI scores range from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most peaceful possible and 5 is the least peaceful.

IEP's Global Terrorism Index (GTI) specifically measures the violence and impact associated with terrorism. Terrorism is defined as an intentional act of violence or threat of violence by a non-state actor, per the Global Terrorism Database. GTI scores range from 0 to 10, where 0 represents no impact from terrorism and 10 represents the highest measurable impact of terrorism.

The Youth Development Index (YDI), produced by IEP and The Commonwealth Secretariat, measures multi-dimensional progress for young people between the ages 15 and 29. The YDI's five domains cover education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation for young people. YDI scores range from 0 to 1, where 0 represents the lowest and 1 represents the highest level of development and progress for youth.

FIGURE 1: WANA SCORES COMPARED TO THE GLOBAL AVERAGE, 2016 OR MOST RECENT YEAR



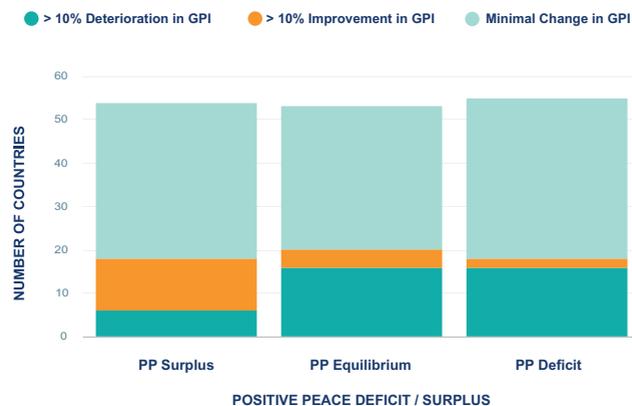
Source: Institute for Economics and Peace

As seen in Figure 1, peace indicators in the WANA region often mirror global averages, for two reasons. First, the increase of violence and conflict in many WANA countries has been so dramatic in recent years that these scores have driven the global average. Second, the region shows great diversity among countries in both factors of resilience and breakdowns in peacefulness. The range of outcomes is especially stark on the Global Terrorism Index, which makes up the impact of terrorism indicator in the GPI; Oman has zero impact from terrorism inside its borders, while Iraq is the most heavily impacted country in the index, with a score of 9.96 out of 10.

### The implications of the positive peace deficit

Collectively, the WANA region suffers from a positive peace deficit in that the region's average positive peace is weaker than its average negative peace, indicating that the social institutions and structures in place are less likely to be able to prevent even the smallest threat or fear of violence (see Figure 1). IEP research shows countries with a positive peace deficit are comparatively more vulnerable to external shocks and run a higher risk of increased levels of violence, thus making them less resilient.<sup>7</sup> As shown in Figure 2, the majority of countries experience only incremental changes in peacefulness. However, of those that experienced a 10 percent or greater deterioration in GPI score—countries became less peaceful—from 2008 to 2016, most had weaker institutions unable to adequately mitigate conflict and violence.

FIGURE 2: GLOBAL CHANGES IN GPI BY POSITIVE PEACE SURPLUS OR DEFICIT, 2008-2016



Source: Institute for Economics and Peace

Historically, countries with positive peace deficits and equilibriums—in which the PPI and GPI scores are relatively even—have been more likely to see an eruption of or relapse into violence. The combination of an already poor level of negative peace and a large deficit in positive peace can represent serious vulnerability. The positive peace deficit in the WANA region is considered both a lack of resilience and a factor for fragility. Poor scores on PPI pillars like *well-functioning government* and *high levels of human capital* indicate deficiencies in the structural and institutional areas needed to absorb shocks and stressors, including social grievances. At the same time, shortfalls in areas like *acceptance of the rights of others* contribute to grievances that drive fragility. The primary example of the largest positive peace deficits in 2008 were Syria and Libya, which both scored very poorly on the positive peace pillars

### Box 3: The eight pillars of positive peace



For complete definitions and explanations of the eight pillars listed above, see IEP's *Positive Peace Report 2016*.

*acceptance of the rights of others* and *equitable distribution of resources* and had authoritarian regimes which enforced negative peace (or the absence of violence).

It is the countries with positive peace surpluses—where positive peace is stronger than negative peace—that show improvements in levels of violence over the longer term. This finding underscores the need for preventative action and long-term resilience-building through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which can help create higher levels of positive peace.

Countries with low levels of positive peace are more likely to see protest movements develop, often a result of existing political and socio-economic grievances. While all countries have grievances, those movements in low positive peace contexts—with weak governance, high inequality, lack of access to information, etc.—are more likely to become violent and test the country's resilience. Libya offers a key example. In 2008, the first year in which positive and negative peace in the country can be compared, Libya had a GPI score similar to the average of all other countries in the world, but a much lower

PPI score. After the Arab Spring and the onset of conflict in the country, the civil war outbreak resulted in a large deterioration in peacefulness, whereby the country rank fell from 57th out of 162 countries in 2010 to 147th in 2011.

Figure 3 visualises the range of WANA country scores on the PPI and each of its eight pillars in 2005, the earliest year of the index. Metrics from 2005 can be regarded as indicative of peace or conflict outcomes (as measured by the GPI score) in 2011 and 2016, as they suggest the underlying negative perceptions of citizens towards government, institutions and structures preceding the region's major conflicts in countries such as Syria and Yemen.<sup>8</sup> Many of the WANA countries improved positive peace over the ensuing decade from 2005, but only Israel and Bahrain maintained or developed, respectively, the positive peace surplus most indicative of sustaining and building peace.<sup>9</sup>

The chart displays the diversity of positive peace strengths and weaknesses across the region. It highlights two key realities for resilience and sustaining peace. First, no WANA country demonstrates a very high level of positive peace across all pillars. This is in contrast to the world's most peaceful countries, which tend to perform very highly on all of the pillars of peace. Israel has the strongest score in the region, but still falls behind most of Europe, the United States, and several Asia-Pacific and Latin American countries.

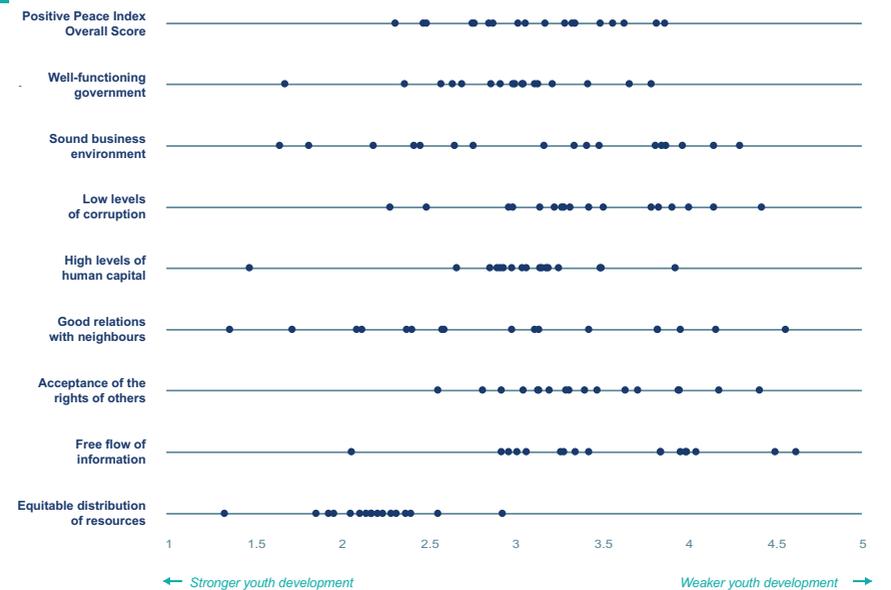
Secondly within the region, many countries face disparities across domains. Variation in the PPI can, in some part, be explained by how a country scores in two domain groupings: Economic and Social Positive Peace Domains (including *high levels of human capital* and *equitable distribution of resources*) and Civil and Political Positive Peace Domains (including *free flow of information* and *good relations with neighbours*). Positive peace deficits are not only concerning because they indicate weakness in the attitudes (respect for diversity, equality, etc.), institutions and structures that can help to sustain peace, but also because they demonstrate the imbalances within a society that can exacerbate fragility.

The most significant breakdowns of peacefulness globally between 2008 and 2015 occurred in countries with a deficit in civil and political domains, whereas countries with deficits in the economic and social domains experienced deteriorations of a lesser magnitude. This finding is consistent with the weaknesses faced in the WANA region. Indicators vary significantly across countries given that several countries with overall weak scores do have some strengths, or vice versa. As shown in Figure 3, several countries in the region score very poorly on the *free flow of information*. On average, this is the region's worst performing pillar. *Good relations with neighbours* shows the greatest regional variation, including some critical weaknesses, especially in Yemen, Iran, Syria, Sudan and Libya.

One of the reasons the tensions that gave rise to the Arab Spring were not broadly anticipated is the discrepancy between civil and political progress in the region and levels of human development and economic growth. These imbalances appeared most stark in the lack of civic and political opportunities afforded to highly educated and connected youth.

Overall, Youth Development Index (YDI) scores in WANA were steady between 2010 and 2015 (the time series measured), underscoring the slow moving nature of development outcomes versus the speed at which perceptions, expectations and the emergence of grievances that give rise to conflict can occur. Scores for education and the health and well-being of young people have stayed consistently high across the region. Although the region performs poorly in employment opportunities for youth, gains were made, as 15 out of 20 countries decreased their unemployment rate. At the same time, country scores for civic and political participation among young people continued to decline from an already low base. According to these measurements, the WANA region has the largest divide between the education, health and well-being provided to its young people and their level of political and civic participation of any region in the world.

FIGURE 3: POSITIVE PEACE COUNTRY SCORES IN WEST ASIA-NORTH AFRICA, 2005



Source: Institute for Economics and Peace

This disparity between indicators is a critical finding, as it suggests that incongruent progress along these domains may be as dangerous as the absence of progress altogether. Advancements made in measuring these indicators is promising, as the YDI, PPI and GTI have all been developed since the Arab Spring. The practical challenges lie in making use of this data within holistic, integrated frameworks for building resilience and sustaining peace.

### **The policy path forward: risk management as a practical entry point for addressing bureaucratic and political hurdles**

Conflict prevention and resilience building are prominent themes across recent UN reform initiatives, from the three separate 2015 reviews on UN Peace Operations, UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) and the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, to the Addis Ababa agenda on financing in July 2015 and the outputs of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, most explicitly in Goal 16, to achieve sustainable development initiatives, and vice versa. The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and the implementation of the New Deal led by the G7+ countries constitutes another positive step forward for addressing peace and resilience, but these efforts require ongoing commitment, monitoring and advocacy.

The 2011 World Development Report (WDR) highlighted that many of the key national level institutions that can reduce the likelihood or threat of violence can take between 10 and 40 years to develop—even for some of the most successful post-conflict states.<sup>10</sup> Positive peace in WANA has improved only an estimated 1.3 per cent from 2005 to 2015, while negative peace has continued to deteriorate. Yet, donor priorities and results frameworks are necessarily predicated on much shorter timeframes due to a need to demonstrate immediate results. Donors cannot wait five or ten years to know whether their interventions are effective or not. But the prioritisation of short-term results can contribute to ineffective programming, often stemming from and exacerbated by lack of coordination and coherent inter-agency strategy, further weakening resilience.

The gaps in resilience-related data reflect both low capacity and political will at local, national and international levels, including among international donors. According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee data for 2013, statistical capacity funding from donors that year was equivalent to 0.13 per cent of official development assistance (ODA). Research by IEP and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) has found that peacebuilding is also a very small proportion of total ODA in per capita terms and

has in fact been falling in the WANA region since 2010. IEP estimates that the fragile states that received more than USD \$500 per capita of ODA over the 2002–14 period received between USD \$1 and \$6 per capita for peacebuilding activities. Meanwhile, the most fragile and conflict-affected settings in fact received more development assistance towards road building than peacebuilding.

These funding allocations are indicative of the priorities and implicit assumptions many donors have of the effectiveness of particular interventions. Data suggests road building or construction of hard infrastructure is perceived to be easier to deliver and show results. But this reveals at least one dangerous assumption: in addition to people, roads transport disease, ideology, illicit goods, financial flows, and arms. The construction and enhancement of roads, for example, becomes a factor for either resilience or fragility based on the pre-existing strengths and weaknesses of the country system—not on the basis of being an important development intervention alone.

One practical entry point for linking these various international efforts and implementing more effective conflict prevention and resilience-building is through risk management. While risk management is an old concept, it is in fact quite radical in its ambition to better coordinate responses to deal with uncertainty. Because risk management is about optimising the level of risk each actor is exposed to, it is a field of praxis particularly well placed to address the informational challenges of working in fragile and conflict affected states. Acknowledgement of how risk management is an important factor to manage fragility was outlined in both the 2011 and the 2014 WDR. The latter specifically called for four tracks of action to reduce risks of violence and fragility by transforming procedures and risk and results management in international agencies and for more pooled funding and administrative capacity and cross-border development programming to better manage and monitor risks.<sup>11</sup> While the UN Development System has recently focused on updating risk management tools, guidance notes and policies, and the OECD is renewing its focus on risk and resilience through measuring fragility, much more is needed.

One of the current challenges to existing risk management practice is the compartmentalising of risk mitigating activities across the UN's development; humanitarian; peace and security; and human rights agencies. Improving risk management platforms and tools and actively linking quantitative and qualitative research on fragility, peace and violence across programmes and institutions is therefore a key pathway for donors to better coordinate and work towards a prevention agenda. By doing so, it may be possible to ensure the incentives of different actors can be better aligned to drive better outcomes for resilience. This has the potential to drive a virtuous cycle: as programmatic risks are mitigated, positive impacts are more likely in the social context in which that programme is working.

## Conclusion

At the time of writing, the UN is currently assessing how to implement its new sustaining peace agenda, which aims to reorient the UN and international system's approach to preventing conflict and violence. It is a shift that demands a change from reactive to proactive, from short-term to long-term approaches and towards a focus on better understanding the strengths and sources of resilience within a society. However, as this chapter has discussed, the study of resilience currently lacks adequate definitional clarity and practical measurements. The interactions of factors of resilience and fragility within a social system are far more complex in reality than either our existing theoretical frameworks or metrics can capture.

This chapter has attempted to outline some of the challenges to a practical resilience framework while also presenting a working concept for resilience measurement through the lens of IEP's positive peace framework. By better understanding resilience, existing assumptions about what does and does not build peace in the long-term are challenged. These theoretical and conceptual issues have direct policy implications not just for the WANA region but globally. Risk management is identified as one practical entry point to support more coordinated, long-term and properly funded international efforts towards building peace and resilience.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this article, peace deterioration refers to a rise in the Global Peace Index, i.e. countries becoming less peaceful. Because peacefulness is measured on an inverted scale, a decline in the peace score is an improvement, i.e. countries become more peaceful.

<sup>2</sup>Institute for Economics and Peace., *Global Peace Index 2016*, Sydney, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Tony Addison, "Human Security Report 2009/2010: the causes of peace and the shrinking costs of war," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* vol. 33 no. 1, March 2012.

<sup>4</sup>OECD (2014) *Guidelines for resilience systems analysis*, OECD Publishing.

<sup>5</sup>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions*. DOI: 10.1787/9789264227699-en.

<sup>6</sup>de Boer, J., *Resilience and the Fragile City. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1), 1–7, 2015, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.fjk>.

<sup>7</sup>See *Global Peace Index Report 2016*, pp66-68

<sup>8</sup>Positive peace also tends to develop slowly, as it is a function of long-term development processes. The largest changes in the region in the lead up to 2011 were an estimated five per cent improvement in Saudi Arabia and roughly a 0.5 per cent deterioration in Syria, which had the fifth weakest positive peace score to begin with.

<sup>9</sup>At the time of writing, Iraq had a slightly better PPI score than its internal GPI score, but both metrics were very poor, indicating a low level of resilience. The evidence is inconclusive as to whether a very small positive peace surplus is sufficient to sustain and build peace at a very high level of violence. It should also be noted that measurements of Israel do not include the West Bank and Gaza, where levels of positive and negative peace are lower. The Palestinian territories are not included due to a lack of complete data.

<sup>10</sup>World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington, D.C., 2011. DOI: 10.1596/978-0-8213-8439-8

<sup>11</sup>World Bank, *World Development Report 2014: Managing Risk for Development*, Washington, D.C., 2014m, DOI: 10.1596/978-0-8213-9903-3



*Ma'in Al Shamayleh is the Director of Institutional Performance Development at the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs in Jordan and has previously worked as Director of Civil Society Affairs. His current work focuses on facilitating greater youth and women's participation in politics and decision making processes within Jordan.*

*Ma'in has previously interned with Search for Common Ground (SFCG), where he led the selection process of all Arabic speaking youth applicants for the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, held in Amman in 2015 under the Patronage of His Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, and sponsored by the UN. Following the Forum, he was involved in shaping the Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security and founded the 2250 initiative in Jordan.*

*Ma'in is currently developing a national coalition in Jordan to provide a platform for dialogue between young people and decision makers and to mobilise partnerships to implement SCR 2250 at the local level. He also serves as a member of the national coalition for implementation of SCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, alongside the Jordanian National Commission for Women.*

## The role of youth in preventing violent extremism: Perspectives from Jordan

*Interview with Ma'in Al Shamayleh*

While development and peacebuilding communities have long recognised the importance of inclusivity in a broad sense, the December 2015 Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security marks the first formal recognition on a global scale that youth participation is vital for the creation of sustainable peace and inclusive societies. A result of joint initiatives over several years by youth organisations, the United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), SCR 2250 highlights the inclusion of youth in peace and decision-making processes as a priority area for the international community, outlining five main pillars for action: participation; protection; prevention; partnerships; and disengagement and reintegration. Parallel resolutions passed in the UN Security Council (SCR 2282) and the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262) in April 2016 on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) further underscore the importance of youth participation.

To explore the issue of youth engagement in the WANA region, a separate session was dedicated to this topic during the October 2016 regional consultation on sustaining peace and resilience building in Amman. In this chapter, Ma'in Al Shamayleh reflects on the conversations from this session, responding to specific questions about efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) and implement SCR 2250 in Jordan.

**Violent extremist groups are increasingly targeting young people in recruitment.**

**What are some of the reasons that young Jordanians join these movements?**

There is no single determinant behind youth in Jordan joining violent extremist groups. Young Jordanians often join these movements due to a combination of factors, which often can vary between different areas of the country. In urban areas such as Amman, unemployment may not be a major factor. In other, more rural areas, unemployment affects a larger number of young people and can play a more influential role. Regardless, unemployment is very rarely the only reason for young women and men to join such movements.

The rise of youth involvement in extremist activities can, however, be attributed to three broader challenges facing the country: 1) political issues such as corruption within state institutions, as well as favouritism and nepotism in recruitment for government positions; 2) economic issues, including high unemployment and poverty; and 3) social issues such as the marginalisation of peoples in certain areas of the country and sectors of society, including rural youth and young women. These challenges lead to frustration, distrust and disappointment with government and state institutions, and can contribute to young people feeling like they do not have a place in society. Families can also influence their children with their own perspectives regarding the state and government or other sectors of society.

Religious factors, while certainly not the main reason, can be an entry point for youth to join violent extremist movements. Religion is often used by extremist groups as a medium through which they set their agendas and recruit new members; the international community often uses religion as a pretext to explain the radicalisation of young people. However, focusing on these religious dimensions ignores the various reasons youth choose to join extremist groups. Many young people in Jordan are keen to change these misconceptions about the relationship between Islam and violent extremism.

**There are approximately 1.3 million Syrian refugees, 2 million Palestinian refugees and 50,000 Iraqi refugees currently living in Jordan, along with refugees from other countries such as Somalia and Sudan. How has the movement of peoples across borders affected violent extremism in Jordan?**

The security situation in neighbouring countries, including Syria, coupled with porous borders and refugee flows, increased the risk of extremists trying to cross into Jordan to create or join sleeper cells in refugee camps or elsewhere in the country. Jordan closed the border in 2016, but it opens the border from time to time under supervision of the UN to allow for the passage of humanitarian convoys. Due to a lack of background information on those entering the country, it can be difficult to differentiate between refugees and

those who are members of or have ties with extremist groups. Those extremists who are able to enter may recruit Syrian refugees or Jordanians.

Of the 657,000 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), only approximately 21 percent live in camps. The large influx of refugees into Jordanian cities can make it more difficult for these refugees to gain employment, find housing, enrol their children in schools, etc., all of which can contribute to them feeling that they do not have a role in society and push them to join violent extremist movements. Many Jordanian youth that I talk to are aware of these challenges and are worried about the rise of extremist groups. It is important to note that for young Jordanians, joining a violent extremist group is often a last resort. They want to participate in and be a part of their community.

**What is needed to address the rise of violent extremism in the region?**

We need to concentrate on coordination efforts between civil society organisations, the Jordanian government and youth. Military efforts to fight extremist groups in Syria and Iraq do not address, and can often contribute to, the ideological reasons for people to join these groups. To address the rise of violent extremism, and in particular the recruitment of young people, greater emphasis is needed on addressing the broader political, economic and social challenges facing the country and youth. This can only be accomplished through coordinated efforts with CSOs and young people, implementing social programmes in parallel with military operations.

Young people want to be engaged and contribute positively to their societies. Yet, their participation in efforts to address violent extremism is currently very limited. They should therefore be given ownership in P/CVE efforts. In this respect, SCR 2250 provides guidelines for young Jordanians to advocate for their engagement and participate in formulating policies related to these issues. In developing a National Strategy on P/CVE, consultations with all stakeholders, particularly youth representatives, are needed.

Educational reform that promotes conflict resolution, peacebuilding and dialogue between various sectors of society can also address the rise of violent extremism. At present, select schools in Jordan provide some classes on this every week. Much more is needed. The government is currently reviewing the education system and looking at ways to integrate peace education into curricula.

**You mentioned the vital role that young people play in addressing the rise of violent extremism. Can you elaborate on how the engagement of youth contributes to P/CVE efforts in the WANA region?**

Given that young people are the main targets for recruitment by extremist groups, youth need to be part of the solution. It is therefore vital to provide positive examples and opportunities for youth in the region. Youth mentors and role models are much more likely than policy makers to be able to convince young people to not join violent extremist groups. Young women in particular have an important role to play in P/CVE efforts, within their families and communities. Youth should be talking to other youth, rather than policy makers talking about youth. These kinds of conversations can take place as part of peace education curricula and community initiatives.

Youth in Jordan are increasingly engaged in volunteer activities and youth-led initiatives at the community and national levels. Youth have initiated efforts to help those in need, from students lacking clothing and books to those affected by the 2016 floods, promoting a more positive image of young people in their communities. Informal channels—from cafes and universities to social media platforms—provide youth with a space for critical thinking and exchange with their peers. Youth-led organisations are also involved in efforts to promote constructive dialogue on violent extremism, as well as awareness raising campaigns on P/CVE initiatives.

Young Jordanians are also participating in formal settings through Government ministries and youth clubs and centres, but these structures are not proving very efficient. There is a general lack of trust in Government, and youth are particularly frustrated that they do not get to participate in policy and decision-making processes.

**According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, Jordanians had a higher perception of corruption in public institutions in 2016 than in 2015. What is needed to build trust between youth and state institutions that would allow for positive collaboration in P/CVE efforts?**

The Government should take the lead in rebuilding trust with young Jordanians by bringing them to the table for dialogue. In addition to listening to and talking with youth, action on the part of the Government is needed through support of and coordination with youth-led initiatives. The Government should also partner and collaborate with CSOs, who already have a lot of knowledge of and experience in P/CVE, including through dialogue and social cohesion efforts. For this to happen, and to push for implementation of the 2005 National Youth Strategy and the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes, political will is critical.

The Government should also take advantage of the generally positive perception among young Jordanians of the security forces, including the military, and

explore ways to cooperate with these institutions in efforts to strengthen trust for policy makers. Young people joined security forces in July 2016 to protest drug abuse; they led a march in solidarity with security forces following the terrorist attack in Karak in December 2016. Allowing space for local communities to have a role in P/CVE efforts is also important in order to send a message to these groups that the Jordanian people do not support violence.

**You pointed out that Jordan already has a National Youth Strategy outlining methods to engage young women and men at the country level. What inspired Jordan to become involved in the process leading to the adoption of SCR 2250 and why is the resolution so important?**

Jordan saw SCR 2250 as an important chance to support the inclusion of youth in general. Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah of Jordan is very involved with this issue and led a Security Council meeting in April 2015 to talk about the role of youth in P/CVE, becoming the youngest person ever to chair a Security Council meeting. Jordan also has become involved with youth engagement because it believes that engaging youth can contribute to regional stability.

Though the leadership in Jordan very much believes in the positive role that young people can play in P/CVE and in their communities more generally, this is not always translated to including youth in policy-making processes. SCR 2250 through its five pillars highlights the importance of youth participation in decision making, comprehensively addressing some of the underlying issues behind the rise of violent extremism. It is imperative that we engage with youth in refugee communities and those vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups, providing them protection from war and violence. If they decide to go back to their home communities, what support do they need to reintegrate into societies in which they may have spent very little time?

As Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah stated before the Security Council, youth represent a “promise, not a peril.” SCR 2250 provides the first global recognition of the role of young people in promoting more peaceful and inclusive societies and, having received unanimous support at the Security Council, it provides legitimacy to national efforts to include youth.

### What are some examples of efforts to engage young people in Jordan and what challenges have arisen?

Given that 2250 is still relatively new and funding is still lacking, there has been little in the way of official implementation of the resolution at the national level. The first UN Envoy on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, is from Jordan and inspired other youth to become engaged in policy making. As a result of the Government lowering the minimum age to run for local councils, it is expected that many young Jordanians age 25 and up will present themselves as candidates in local and communal elections. Yet, young people in general are still not included in formulating policy decisions at the national level.

Civil society and youth organisations are working with young people at the community level, focusing on dialogue and exchange, raising awareness on various issues such as violent extremism and volunteerism. More focus is needed by these actors on implementation of SCR 2250, using it as a tool to promote the inclusion of youth in Jordan. Even among CSOs and youth, awareness of SCR 2250 needs to be increased.

### What is needed to address these challenges and to ensure implementation of SCR 2250 in Jordan and in the region, with youth engaged as partners?

Raising awareness throughout Jordan of what SCR 2250 is and how youth and civil society can use it in their everyday activities is critical. The Government, led by the Ministry of Youth, should take the lead in disseminating information about the resolution. Providing this information to a group of youth ambassadors for 2250, for example, could help spread information to a wider audience as these young people have outreach in diverse communities.

To ensure a more coordinated effort, a national implementation strategy is needed between various public institutions, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. The Ministry of Youth, or other relevant institution, should oversee implementation of such a strategy, ensuring that partner organisations contribute to the five pillars outlined in SCR 2250, based on their comparative advantage. The Ministry of Labour, for example, should cooperate with the private sector to develop vocational education initiatives that can increase the chances of matching skills with labour market needs.

National and international CSOs are already providing training for youth on leadership, dialogue and other skills needed to work in government, as well as knowledge on how policy institutions function. These kinds of initiatives should be expanded to include youth from different sectors and levels of society. They also should be complemented by other initiatives that address



Syrian refugees await the arrival of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his visit to the Zaatari Refugee Camp, located near Mafraq, Jordan. The settlement has grown to house nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees since it opened in 2012. (27 March 2016) Photo: UN Photo

the political, economic and social factors often associated with youth joining violent extremist movements. This could include the provision of job skills, the engagement of religious actors and government reform.

### How can international actors support the implementation of SCR 2250 in Jordan?

International actors, including UN agencies, can support implementation of SCR 2250, as well as P/CVE efforts, in Jordan by providing financial, technical and logistical support. Most importantly, international organisations are able to share experiences and examples from other countries and regional contexts that could be of value in Jordan in ensuring that youth are included in peace and development processes.



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## Engaging youth to combat sectarianism and build sustainable peace: Lessons from Iraq

*by Benoite Martin*

“Kulluna Muwatinun” means in Arabic “we are all citizens”. It may just seem like a simple slogan but it is in fact a programme implemented by the Dutch peacebuilding organisation PAX in Iraq. From 2012 to March 2017, it has focused on preventing and transforming sectarian conflict in the country and a similar programme is still ongoing in Syria.<sup>1</sup> PAX and its partners have through this programme been addressing sectarianism in both countries through an approach that promotes the participation of youth in building sustainable and long-term peace. The programme provides an example of how United Nations Security Council Resolution (UN SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security—which highlights, among other things, the importance of including youth from different backgrounds in decision-making processes related to sustaining peace and development—can be implemented in the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region.

Kulluna Muwatinun focused on empowering a network of youth in Iraq to strengthen their ability to take on an active role as citizens in promoting diversity and solidarity between different religious and ethnic communities. The programme, which sought to mobilise young people ages 18 to 30 from different governorates throughout Iraq and Syria, representing diverse ethnic and religious groups, provided an alternative discourse and promoted concepts of shared citizenship and diversity rather than the predominant “us” versus “them” discourse that prevails in the region. Capacity building strategies were used to mobilise youth, and a space was created for vulnerable young people to express themselves in a safe and open environment. Participants were encouraged to engage with their decision makers in an attempt to advocate for

policies that protect and promote diversity and support further participation of young people in decision-making processes.

This article shares some experiences and insights from implementing Kulluna Muwatinun, drawing particularly on examples from Iraq. The strategies used in the programme are outlined, followed by a reflection on challenges encountered. Finally, a set of best practices for supporting youth engagement and the implementation of SCR 2250 in building sustainable peace in the region is identified.

### **Strategies used to promote youth engagement in addressing sectarianism**

Twenty young individuals were carefully selected to take part in the Kulluna Muwatinun Iraq programme. Selection criteria were based on ensuring representation of all Iraqi governorates, or provinces, and ethnic and religious groups, as well as gender balance.

Youth engagement through the programme was envisioned across two dimensions: first horizontally, with an aim to mobilise more youth to join initiatives and campaigns; and second vertically, with an aim to bring youth voices and perspectives to political and traditional leaders, including local and national government representatives and religious leaders.

The programme envisioned youth engagement with communities across all governorates of Iraq, however, due to security concerns, it was not possible for youth to work in governorates affected by severe violence, such as Anbar. Work in other governorates such as Ninewa and Salahedin was also impossible between mid-2014 to end of 2015 due to severe deterioration in the security situation and military operations occurring in these locations.

In implementing Kulluna Muwatinun, four strategies were used to promote youth engagement in Iraq:

#### **1. Empowering young people through capacity building in project management, conflict resolution and advocacy**

Participants were enrolled in an intensive capacity building effort that brought them together every 5 months for training workshops that engaged them in dialogue on a wide range of subjects, including diversity, human rights and peace processes. These discussions helped them to develop recommendations for policies aimed at achieving equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender and to countering sectarian tensions and violence. They also gained skills in designing and leading awareness and advocacy campaigns, initiating dialogue, collecting and analysing data and

### **Box 1: Promoting religious diversity in Ninewa**

Ninewa province is home to many communities living separately from each other: each village hosts a specific community and opportunities of interaction between communities has severely decreased since 2003 with the worsening security situation. Youth have grown up in a segregated environment and many have developed prejudices towards other communities and religious groups.

After participating in the Kulluna Muwatinun programme, a youth from Ninewa gathered a group of 15 young people originating from different villages and representing different communities: Muslims, Shebbaks, Christians and Yezidis. He obtained a grant to organise field visits to various religious sites within each community. It allowed them to learn about different religious rituals and traditions. Participants also took part in a dialogue session to exchange views and perspectives on the forms of discrimination and rights' violations to which each group is subjected.

The initiative promoted interaction among youth from different communities who would otherwise have few opportunities to meet each other, introduced an understanding of diversity and allowed dialogue to take place, challenging existing prejudices.

writing simple analytical papers. In developing their knowledge and skills, young people gained confidence in their ability to affect change within their communities. They were further encouraged to mobilise other young people by designing and implementing dialogue and awareness-raising initiatives that promote tolerance throughout their respective communities.

#### **2. Supporting youth engagement in dialogue through small grants**

While training workshops were important means to provide theoretical knowledge to youth, opportunities to practice their newly acquired skills proved essential to empower participants. Young people who were engaged in the capacity building programme were therefore awarded small grants to apply what they had learnt. Small grants allowed youth to engage in peer-to-peer exchanges with young people from other ethnic and religious groups, as well as design and organise activities in their communities aimed at raising awareness on the benefits of diversity and countering sectarianism in Iraq. Young people organised numerous initiatives bringing youth from various communities and backgrounds together to share information on other groups

in Iraq, as well as local policies that promote discrimination and sectarianism. By encouraging and giving participants the tools to take on leadership roles, youth developed a sense of ownership over peace and development processes within their communities.

### **3. Mobilising more young people through peer-to-peer dialogue**

While specific young people were engaged in capacity building efforts, mobilising more youth was necessary to present positive examples of multi-ethnic and religious cooperation to a wider constituency. Developing a large network of young people who are committed to promoting diversity and speaking out against sectarian violence is a key aspect in ensuring that an alternative discourse is spread as widely as possible. Peer-to-peer dialogue was the main means through which the Kulluna Muwatinun Iraq programme supported young people as they encouraged their counterparts to join youth-led initiatives. Social media was another means that proved important in reaching out to more youth. The 'We are all Citizens' Facebook page, with more than 17,000 followers, was used to share news and updates of the programme, as well as to discuss key developments in Iraq.

Larger events such as festivals or summer camps also contributed to additional youth becoming engaged in their communities. In the governorate of Missan, for example, a young participant together with his friends organised a three-day festival in a local park to celebrate the traditions and customs of the different community groups living in Iraq. The festival included dialogue sessions, costume and dance shows, a poetry contest, documentary viewings and photo exhibitions. Participants were mainly young people from the city but key community leaders and community members were also invited.

### **4. Encouraging youth to engage with political leaders**

In addition to interactions with peers, programme participants were strongly encouraged to engage with their local government representatives and religious leaders. This advocacy component supported young people in bringing rights' violations and cases of sectarian violence taking place within their communities to the attention of local decision makers. Youth also developed skills to identify local policies that impact negatively on relationships among diverse communal groups and launched a dialogue with their political representatives. This was done in an effort to either influence the implementation of existing policies or advocate for the development of new policies promoting social cohesion.

In the governorate of Ninewa—plagued by sectarian violence—for example, young people formed a youth advisory council, mandated to give a voice to young people from Ninewa on all matters affecting youth, as well as

## **Box 2: Promoting religious diversity in Basra**

The governorate of Basra has historically been home to many diverse religious communities including Jewish, Christian and Mandaean-Sabean groups. Successive waves of violence since 2003 have pushed most minorities to emigrate. However, the numerous religious sites which remain to this day in Basra testify to its glorious diverse past. But the lack of care to preserve and restore the aging cultural heritage is seen as yet another sign that local authorities do not value diversity and the fate of minorities.

Young people in Basra launched a campaign to document the governorate's religious heritage by producing a booklet with information and pictures of religious sites belonging to minority groups, as well as a documentary movie about one church in Basra which is at risk of collapsing. They then approached local authorities, including the head of cultural heritage in Basra, to engage in dialogue on the lack of care and financial support provided to repair these precious religious sites and the importance of safeguarding the heritage of minority groups living in Iraq. As part of the campaign, the group was successful in stopping government plans to destroy an old church that was to be replaced by a commercial building.

proposals to promote peace in the province. The youth advisory council raised the issue of emigration of young people from Ninewa, particularly from minority groups, in search of better opportunities and protection abroad. They conducted a study to better understand the reasons that lead young people to choose to emigrate and developed a series of recommendations. This led to a dialogue with local authorities about how to address this issue and identify possible responses.

## Challenges encountered in promoting youth engagement

The implementation of the Kulluna Muwatinun programme faced many challenges and setbacks, the most serious of which were linked to the security situation: young people in Iraq are living in an environment where efforts to promote diversity, tolerance and peace are generally not welcomed. Spreading and promoting such messages can often be understood as crossing invisible red lines that put youth activists at risk.

In navigating these security challenges, two further barriers to engaging youth in Iraq were encountered:

### 1. Difficulties in mobilising experienced youth to join the programme

Since 2003, young Iraqi activists have been growing up in an environment where concepts of democracy, human rights, equality and freedom are still not realised and where access to and quality of education has constantly worsened. Sectarian thinking is prevalent, especially among young people who have had limited opportunities to meet individuals from different communities. While civil society has burgeoned in Iraq since 2003, its impact remains limited at the community level and only a few young people have had a chance to interact with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Thus, working with youth and attracting them to the NGO sector requires extensive capacity building efforts. Knowledge of peace and development processes needs to be fostered, and numerous skills built among youth to ensure their participation and positive interaction in civil society.

Furthermore, in a society where the concept of civil society and volunteerism are underdeveloped, active young people are often misperceived by their peers as seeking attention and personal benefits rather than working towards the development of the community. They are often the victims of bullying from other young people which leads to discouragement of youth who are striving to make a change.

Kulluna Muwatinun therefore identified the importance of providing extensive training to build the capacity of youth and ensure their meaningful and positive participation in the programme. Kulluna Muwatinun introduced participants to key concepts of peace and diversity and provided training in critical thinking, facilitating dialogue and leadership development.

While building youth capacities requires enormous investments, it proves worthwhile in the long-term. Many young people who have been engaged in the Kulluna Muwatinun programme have been strongly inspired by the work of civil society and have begun careers with civil society initiatives in Iraq on various social and political issues.

## 2. Navigating cultural barriers to youth engagement with local and national decision makers

Iraqi culture emphasises the respect and wisdom of elders. Young people are expected to defer to the advice of elders and follow their guidance rather than question their opinions and decisions. Providing support to youth to engage with decision makers and question their policies challenges these cultural traditions and can therefore be seen as a threat to traditional structures and practices. In many cases, youth have not been welcomed by decision makers and have had difficulty in building credibility among political leaders. Decision makers often disregard the importance of engaging youth and supporting their active participation in policy processes impacting the community.

Additional work to establish acceptance among decision makers of the importance of engaging youth is needed. Young women and men need to be able to demonstrate to policy makers how they contribute constructively to society.

## Best practices identified through Kulluna Muwatinun

From the four years of implementing Kulluna Muwatinun in Iraq, the following best practices can be highlighted as key to promoting youth engagement in building sustainable peace:

### 1. Mentoring active young people to build their self-confidence and develop a larger network of engaged youth.

In addition to the intensive capacity building required for youth to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to engage actively in building peace, developing self-confidence is important. Ensuring close follow-up with young people throughout the design and implementation of youth initiatives, providing advice when needed, has proven critical to maximising engagement of youth. Coaching young people through regular communication, providing guidance and recommendations and offering them a space to address their fears and concerns, has been an important element in facilitating their active engagement over time.

As elaborated above, the programme also provided participants with small grants to develop their own initiatives. Having full responsibility over the decision-making process in implementing their respective initiatives, they developed a larger sense of ownership in peace and development processes taking place in their communities. Proud of their success, they gained additional self-confidence and interest in engaging on a long-term basis in similar activities.



*Youth participate in Kulluna Muwatinun training sessions. Photo: Benoit Martin*

## 2. Developing a positive environment supporting youth participation

The programme has underscored how fundamental it is to develop a positive environment where young people feel welcome to participate in decision-making processes. For youth to take positive steps to maximise their engagement in these processes, emphasis must be put on strengthening their capacity to clearly articulate why and how they should be engaged by local and national decision makers. Experience in talking with government representatives and participating in high-level platforms is also necessary to develop youth confidence in interacting with leaders. Within Kulluna Muwatinun, an initiative enabled young people to conduct simple research through the collection and analysis of data, which was then presented to decision makers. This kind of evidence-based advocacy helped strengthen the arguments of young people when approaching their leaders. The process also improved their communication skills as they developed key messages to present to decision makers.

It is equally important to work with policy makers and local leaders to promote an understanding of the importance of youth participation. Within the programme, several meetings were arranged with high-level decision makers to introduce a culture of youth political participation and facilitate positive dialogue between young people and political leaders. The creation of a youth advisory council to the Ninewa province governing council (see Box 1) is one example of how youth have successfully advanced youth participation in decision making.

## 3. Learning from experiences linked to implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Many lessons in promoting youth engagement could be learned from experiences linked to SCR 1325, which promotes women's engagement in peace-building and reconciliation processes. In Iraq, the Alliance 1325, a network of NGOs working on women's issues, has for the past six years called for implementation of the resolution and has developed a National Action Plan for its implementation, which was endorsed by the Iraqi Government in 2015. Learning from the experiences of the Alliance 1325 would be highly beneficial in pursuing promotion of youth engagement and implementation of SCR 2250 in Iraq.

## Conclusion

As SCR 2250 is still new, few concrete examples of its implementation are available, but the Kulluna Muwatinun approach can offer some insights into how youth participation can be strengthened in Iraq and beyond. Promoting youth engagement in countries like Iraq, where youth participation is not valued and certainly is not part of the local culture and traditions, can take many years. It requires long-term engagement and resources by peace and development organisations and the international community, focusing on strengthening the capacity of and confidence among youth. As the programme in Iraq has demonstrated, their participation is critical to promote dialogue, conflict resolution and social cohesion within their communities.

## End Note

<sup>1</sup>Financial support was/is provided by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union. For more information on the programme see <https://weareallcitizens.org/kulluna-muwatinun/program-outline/>



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## Communities save schools in Yemen: Building resilience through locally-led education initiatives

*by Sawsan Al Refai*

Yemen's civil war has led to the death of thousands of civilians<sup>1</sup> and, as of July 2016, the internal displacement of approximately 2.2 million persons<sup>2</sup>, half of which are children.<sup>3</sup> In March 2015, Houthi armed groups, supported by elements of Yemen's military loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, forced President Abdo Rabuu Mansour Hadi to flee the country. A Saudi Arabia-led coalition composed of a dozen countries subsequently launched an airstrike campaign to restore Hadi's internationally recognised government to power.

As regions controlled by both Houthi armed groups and Hadi government forces are still riven with instability, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance and protection continues to increase, with approximately 18.8 million in need as of November 2016.<sup>4</sup> Local communities, already suffering from high levels of poverty, food insecurity and lack of adequate health and education services before the war started, are now at the brink of a nationwide famine. Yet, until very recently the war has remained largely 'forgotten' and ignored by the international community, and peace remains elusive. A mosaic of multifaceted regional, local, and international power struggles further contribute to a protracted conflict becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle.<sup>5</sup>

Yemeni children, the country's future, are among the most affected victims of this conflict, with approximately 10 million, or 80 per cent, in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>6</sup> More young boys are being recruited into armed groups; more young girls under the age of 18 are being married off by their

families. The number of children suffering from malnutrition is on the rise, and there is little to no access to healthcare. While the statistics are horrific, the available data on disease, injury, and hunger fall far below reality.

Humanitarian aid efforts struggle to adequately meet the overwhelming needs. As of December 2016, 120 national and international organisations, including the United Nations, were working to deliver humanitarian aid in Yemen under insecure and unstable circumstances. More than 5.6 million people have been directly assisted across sectors through the Yemeni Humanitarian Response Plan<sup>7</sup>, which only secured 61.8 percent of needed funding.<sup>8</sup> Yet, efforts are failing to reach all Yemeni citizens in need, including the 14.1 million unable to secure food, the 14.4 million lacking clean water and sanitation and the 14.7 million without adequate healthcare.<sup>9</sup> While airstrikes, ethnic and religious tensions and communal conflicts continue, the humanitarian situation will likely deteriorate, placing a huge burden on aid going to Yemen. As more and more funds go to basic needs such as shelter, food and water, less funding will be available for development initiatives such as education.

### **The impact of war on education in Yemen**

The conflict in Yemen has devastated an education sector already in a state of disrepair prior to the conflict, despite many years of policy makers advocating for greater and equal access and better quality in public education. This was in part due to very difficult security contexts and tight budgetary constraints. Statistics show that in all areas of conflict in the country, regardless of which faction is in control, education infrastructure has been universally targeted by waves of violence as part of intimidation tactics and for other unknown reasons.

Schooling has been disrupted for very long intervals in the past 19 months as armed groups have directly targeted and occupied schools—for shelter or military purposes, displacing students and teachers. Around 3,584 schools have been forced to close, thus depriving around 1.84 million children from access to education in the last quarter of the 2014–2015 school year alone.<sup>10</sup> Today, an estimate 234 schools are completely destroyed, with approximately 2,072 partially destroyed. More than 1,600 schools are unfit for educational use due to conflict-related damages, being used as internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or occupied by armed groups. Furthermore, teachers have resigned as a result of not receiving their salaries since August 2016.<sup>11</sup> This situation has left about 2 million, or 27 percent, of school-age children unable to attend school and in need of support, including approximately 513,000 IDP children.<sup>12</sup>

As armed groups and airstrikes continue to target education facilities, the number of closed schools will likely rise, and the scope of damage and

destruction to the education infrastructure worsen. Government resources are dwindling as a result of the current economic crisis, and policy and decision-making authority is divided between the Houthi dominated north and the Hadi-led south. As the country has become more and more dependent on external funding, many international organisations have withdrawn from Yemen for security reasons.

### **Education falls on the humanitarian aid priority ladder**

Despite the devastating impact that the Yemeni Civil War has had on the country's education system, education is often ignored during negotiations on the allocation of humanitarian aid. Only 18.4 percent of education funding requirements through the Yemeni Humanitarian Response Plan were met in 2016; no funding towards education has been provided for 2017 as of April 2017.<sup>13</sup> One reason why education is not a priority on the humanitarian agenda has to do with the emergency needs of Yemen, including severe food shortages and a lack of shelter, clean water, sanitation and life-saving health services. Many humanitarian actors still perceive access to education as a non-emergency field of work. They also recognise the huge financial, operational and time investment needed to rebuild damaged and destroyed education facilities and recruit staff, books and materials compared to the short-term and relatively limited costs required to fulfil needs in other sectors. While education may not save lives during armed conflict, for many young Yemeni children, school has been their only safe haven, where they have been able to realise their own value as members of society. Even during the heaviest of airstrikes, students continue to go to school and take their national exams to prove to themselves and others that they still experience one tiny aspect of 'ordinary' life.

### **Community work for education: A demonstration of resilience**

The gap between community needs and the support provided by government or de facto power holders and international donors is huge. Local governments find themselves completely paralysed in efficiently and effectively responding to emergencies and fulfilling local population needs. This makes the role of informal actors even more important for communities.

Social cohesion—the willingness of society members to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper and contribute to a collective experience<sup>14</sup>—has been present throughout Yemen's history, in the north and the south. Community activism has traditionally been driven by national and local economic and political circumstances, including the need for education. Studies show that in the 1960s, communities mobilised by collecting money to fund development activities such as building health clinics and local schools and providing financial assistance to migrants and students.<sup>15</sup> In Aden,

where the environment was more progressive, this kind of mobilisation led to the formation of education scholarships.<sup>16</sup> In Hadramout, community-led organisations were governed by powerful families, with some families running and funding over two dozen schools as well as scholarship programmes.<sup>17</sup>

Today, in the absence of a comprehensive and responsive national emergency preparedness and response plan in the education sector, community-led and informal initiatives to respond to the current education crisis have flourished, reflecting a growing understanding among local communities that education is both a right and a demonstration of resilience in the face of conflict. Social media campaigns are launched everyday to collect financial and material resources in response to local food, water and education crises. Host communities have opened up their houses to displaced women and children to share shelter and food, allowing the children to attend already crowded local schools. Several community-led initiatives throughout Yemen prepared for the new 2015–2016 school year by gathering used school books, bags and stationary to re-distribute among poor and displaced children. Local leaders donated open spaces or empty rooms in their residences to be used as learning spaces. Local youth volunteered to teach classes to students whose schools had been destroyed.

Below, five cases of community mobilisation for education in Yemen are outlined. They demonstrate the effectiveness and diversity of community efforts aimed at meeting some of the urgent needs for basic education and compensating for the absence of state services in the midst of ongoing violence.

### **Mosques as alternative learning spaces in Damtt**

When the only school in Al Haqqab district, Damtt, Al Dalea'a governorate, was completely destroyed by an airstrike in late 2015, local mosques offered to receive school children in their vast indoor and outdoor prayer spaces.

Between prayers teachers and students would head to mosques to resume lessons. In addition, some homes hosted students who lived far away from mosques. All 800 students of the school, 410 of which were female, were ensured housing and allowed to resume classes.

Local mosques also played an important role in mobilising local community members to raise funds for rebuilding classrooms. In a few months, more than one and a half million Yemeni Rials were donated by community members, in addition to other funds provided by the local council, to build 8 new classrooms next to the destroyed school.<sup>18</sup>

School Zaid bin Ali is registered as a public school with the Ministry of Education but has yet to receive any operational budget since the war started.

There are no blackboards, books, desks or chairs. Two rooms with no windows or doors make up the classrooms, and mere rocks placed in the ground function as blackboards. This school was intended to serve the local communities in Al Hayma District in Sana'a governorate, but was completely forgotten when war erupted in early 2015. Most importantly, no teachers had been recruited. Three local youth initiatives, using members' personal resources, conducted regular field visits to document needs at the school, meet community leaders and distribute school books, school bags and stationary.<sup>19</sup> Through awareness raising campaigns on the right to education and lobbying of local opinion leaders such as mosque preachers and sheikhs, these young leaders mobilised local communities to fund operational costs and part-time teachers for the school. Because of local volunteer efforts to keep the school running, it continues to be operational.

### **The education observatory**

The Education Watch Interactive Platform is the culmination of efforts among Yemeni activists stranded outside of Yemen who wanted to monitor the impact of war on education and help communities rebuild education infrastructure in the aftermath of war. The platform's phone application, developed using local resources under the umbrella of the National Foundation for Development & Humanitarian Response (NFDHR)<sup>20</sup>, allows users to report damages to education facilities in their local area, as well as issues such as the lack of books, displacement of students or absence of teachers. It also gives users the option to support school renovation projects, as well as students resuming their education. Several cases have already been reported in many governorates throughout Yemen. Verified data is disseminated on NFDHR's website and Facebook page<sup>21</sup> and shared with education stakeholders during education cluster meetings. For example, community members have reported cases in which schools have been seized due to the lack of security in the area or used as military camps. NFDHR staff documents and brings these cases to the attention of local education offices, who, depending on how active they are, engage in efforts to address these issues.

### **Yemeni Coalition for Education for All**

The Yemeni Coalition for Education for All<sup>22</sup> is composed of over 95 non-governmental organisations (NGO) working in and for education throughout Yemen. Following the start of the conflict, many members ceased their activities, but the coalition continued to mobilise communities to support the return of students to schools in the 2015–2016 school year, despite the continuation of violence. By getting local leaders from different political parties, including armed groups, to sign a code of conduct—referred to as the “Black Shame”—agreeing to cease the targeting of students and school and university buildings, the organisation was able to encourage families to send



*Zeid Bin Ali school resumed operations with the support of local youth. Photo: Mohammed Abass 2016*

their children back to school. The document was also shared by media to ensure that parents and local actors were aware of the situation. The real impact of whether this document has actually reduced targeting of schools remains to be examined. However, it is clear that the code of conduct has encouraged the return of local students to schools.

### **Education for peace, peace for education**

Local community initiatives demonstrate that despite the urgency to meet basic needs such as food, shelter and water, local communities still believe in the value of education. There are many other examples than the ones presented above that are not yet documented. Local communities have demonstrated diverse and innovative practices to keep as many children as possible in class and to support their education through traditional and alternative learning spaces—even if this means they are taught in a few square meters of shade

under a tree. Such engagement has also proved fruitful in keeping these spaces safe from armed conflict.

Many of these initiatives have been successful in reintegrating vulnerable and displaced children. They also serve as reliable and timely sources of data on the scope and intensity of damages to Yemen's education infrastructure. Community leaders have used their status and own networks to generate temporary funding pools to cover school operational costs. Some community leaders have covered teacher salaries by providing direct cash instalments or food baskets to formal or volunteer teachers and/or providing lodging in their houses, local mosques and other public areas to ensure that education processes can take place. Local youth have been key in mobilising community leaders and parents to allow children to attend school once again. Nationwide and local "back-to-school" campaigns led by sporadic yet vibrant youth movements successfully collected books and uniforms and distributed meals to children as an incentive to re-enrol.

Unfortunately, youth and community-led initiatives are not necessarily sustainable. Handicapped in the face of unpredictable and fierce airstrikes, entire communities may be displaced by the conflict. Local leaders may run out of funds, which may further contribute to efforts being halted. Local efforts also face a lack of permanent funding and rely heavily on volunteer work, further contributing to challenges in implementing long-term projects. To maintain their small-scale operations, community-led initiatives therefore require financial and technical support and capacity building on how to make their interventions sustainable and gender and conflict sensitive to the greatest extent possible.

### **The way forward**

Recognising the impact and value of community initiatives would mean that credible local actors become part of planning, monitoring and evaluation processes at local, national and international levels. Civil society and youth representatives should be regularly included in education meetings, and coordination loops between the Ministry of Education, donors and international actors and civil society organisations put in place. They should also be allowed into forums where humanitarian needs as a whole and education needs more specifically are discussed and debated. Community leaders should be encouraged to use their access to and familiarity with local contexts to collect data on education needs and identify opportunities for mobilising local resources to meet these needs. More support by international humanitarian and peace and development initiatives is required to ensure that local actors can efficiently collect and document evidence from the ground.

Humanitarian actors should invest more time and resources into locating relevant community-led initiatives, identifying patterns and drawing conclusive lessons learned and best practices for how to provide them support. Financial and technical backing by international governmental and non-governmental organisations to local community initiatives is crucial. It is time for humanitarian actors to recognise that education is not only a development need, but should be a core component of humanitarian response. Educational opportunities provided through collective community efforts may not be widescale, high quality, or even sustainable, but they can be used to mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict on children and should be considered as tools for enhancing local community resilience and peacebuilding.<sup>23</sup>



School girls in Yemen. Photo: Adobe Stock Images

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Al Jazeera, *Death toll in Yemen conflict passes 10,000*, 17 January 2017

<sup>2</sup>OCHA, *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen*, November 2016

<sup>3</sup>UNICEF, *Yemen Situation Report*, February 2017

<sup>4</sup>OCHA, *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen*, November 2016

<sup>5</sup>European Council for Foreign Relations, *Mapping the Yemen Conflict*, April 2017

<sup>6</sup>For more data on information presented in paragraph see UNICEF, *Falling Through the Cracks: the children of Yemen*, March 2017

<sup>7</sup>UNICEF, *2017 Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen*, January 2017 ; OCHA, *2016 Revised Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan*, August 2016

<sup>8</sup>Financial tracking services, *Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2016 (Humanitarian response plan)*

<sup>9</sup>OCHA, *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen*, November 2016

<sup>10</sup>World Bank, *Dynamic Damage and Needs Assessment for Yemen*, 2016 (Internal Document)

<sup>11</sup>Statistics presented by Ministry of Education in Local Education Group Meeting, Beirut April 2017

<sup>12</sup>OCHA, *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen*, November 2016

<sup>13</sup>Financial tracking services, *Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2016 and 2017*

<sup>14</sup>Dick Stanley, *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, Vol. 28, No. 1, *Special Issue on Social Cohesion in Canada (Winter, 2003)*, pp. 5-17

<sup>15</sup>"Sons of al-Madhhajis" was a prominent village group that had branches in Hujariyya, Taiz, and Aden

<sup>16</sup>Carapico, Sheila. *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in modern Arabia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998

<sup>17</sup>R. B. Serjeant, 1962, "Historians and Historiography of Hadramawt," BSOAS

<sup>18</sup>Education Watch Update- October 2016. [www.nfdhr.org](http://www.nfdhr.org)

<sup>19</sup>Three local youth initiatives called Jassara, Yemen will Triumph, and National Foundation for Development & Humanitarian Response work on assessing education damages and responding to local education needs through community mobilisation.

<sup>20</sup>[www.nfdhr.org](http://www.nfdhr.org)

<sup>21</sup>Facebook Page: @educationwatch

<sup>22</sup>Yemeni Coalition for Education for All (YCEA) is a member of the Arab campaign for Education & Global Campaign for Education. More on their website: <http://www.arabcampaignforeducation.org/city-5-en.html>

<sup>23</sup>Sawsan Al Refai, *Global Partnership for Education*, *Civil society's efforts to revive a war-ravaged education system in Yemen*, September 2016



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## Creating peace out of ashes: Building resilience in Syria

*by Rebecca J. Wolfe & Dominic Graham*

After nearly six years of war, over 400,000 lives lost<sup>1</sup> and countless injured, 6.1 million displaced internally and another 4.8 million displaced across borders, the hope for a Syria that can rise from utter destruction appears bleak.<sup>2</sup> Syria's human capital has been decimated by death and a significant brain drain. Approximately 2.8 million children are out of school<sup>3</sup> and 9.4 million people food insecure.<sup>4</sup> The traumatised state of the country raises the question of who will build a new Syria when the violence ends. The warring parties continue to destroy roads, hospitals, schools and other critical infrastructure. Within the first three years of the conflict, development in Syria regressed by 35 years<sup>5</sup>, and the conflict is estimated to have cost \$275 billion overall.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these daunting statistics, the conflict will end. How Syrians recover from this shock and rebuild in a way that prevents future conflict, is critical for Syria's resilience—its ability to return to and surpass pre-war development levels. Furthermore, how Syrians begin now to lay the foundation for more inclusive governance and reconciliation<sup>7</sup> will reduce the time it takes to rebuild when the fighting eventually stops.

This article covers the following topics: the importance of peacebuilding in fostering resilience, particularly in conflict-related crises; using lessons from Mercy Corps' engagement in other contexts to illustrate some of the roles international actors can play in strengthening resilience and reconciliation; what international actors can do in the post-conflict reconstruction process; and the limitations of applying these lessons in the Syrian context.

### **Conflict, resilience and peacebuilding**

As manmade crises like Syria's become more protracted and overburden the international humanitarian system, there is a sense of growing urgency to find ways to prevent and lessen the duration of such crises, while minimising the suffering of civilians when these crises occur. In essence, we are trying to answer two questions. First, how do we prevent a conflict from happening in the first place? Second, if it does happen, how do we help people better cope with the impacts of that conflict?

To date, much of Mercy Corps' research on the connection between resilience and peacebuilding has examined whether peacebuilding interventions helped people better cope with natural disasters, such as the 2009 droughts in the Horn of Africa. In Ethiopia and Uganda, we found that in areas where Mercy Corps had engaged in strengthening local conflict management systems, people had higher food security than in areas without these initiatives, likely because of improved overall security that allowed people to access different sources of food.<sup>8</sup> In Somalia, people with inter-clan ties (i.e. higher social cohesion) were also found to have had higher food security during the drought than people without these ties.<sup>9</sup> These inter-clan ties gave people access to resources beyond those of their own group.

Because of increased resilience capacities in some communities, such as local conflict management systems and stronger social networks across inter-communal divides, the drought in the Horn of Africa did not create an excessive strain on resources, which might have led to protests and conflict. In Syria, which has a history of one minority group controlling much of the resources in the country, a drought in 2011 and the resulting food shortages did spark protests, which then escalated into the current violent conflict that remains unresolved today.<sup>10</sup> The Syrian government has for decades held centralised power, discouraging the development of local resilience capacities, which not only contributed to the outbreak of conflict, but also made it more difficult for people to cope once the conflict did erupt.

While from Mercy Corps' research and experience we know how peacebuilding promotes resilience during a natural disaster, less is known about how peacebuilding interventions help strengthen resilience capacities during con-

licts, in part because conflict destroys the social fabric that helps people cope with and recover from these crises. Whether the conflict falls along sectarian divides or is between communities and the government (or, likely, both), violence erodes trust and instills feelings of anger, protection and revenge. Therefore, the cooperation needed to help people cope with and recover from the conflict either never existed, or if it did, it has now eroded. In the case of Syria, although it does not have a strong history of violence between ethnic and religious groups, various identity groups live in segregated enclaves and a majority of people have felt excluded from mainstream society. The conflict has further eroded the relatively weak social fabric, fortifying barriers to Syria's recovery. Peacebuilding interventions that can prevent further erosion of relationships across groups and begin to rebuild them will leave Syrians on a stronger footing once the conflict ends.

Using programmatic examples and related research from other contexts, we extrapolate some lessons that can be applied to build resilience through peacebuilding interventions in Syria.

### **Peacebuilding and resilience during an ongoing conflict**

Until more recently, peacebuilding and resilience interventions typically have been considered more appropriate for implementation after a conflict has ended. Understandably, in the midst of a crisis, life-saving aid is paramount. However, when we delay addressing the underlying causes of a conflict, suffering increases. Not only are more people likely to suffer when conflict continues without a solution, but even when it ends, people affected by the violence suffer more because they do not have the capacities to rebuild. Consequently, Mercy Corps has looked for ways to implement peacebuilding and resilience interventions earlier in crisis situations, either by incorporating components of such interventions into its humanitarian programmes, or by conducting peacebuilding and humanitarian interventions simultaneously and in the same geographic areas.

### **Improving local governance capacities to respond to community needs**

Humanitarian programming in Syria largely is and should continue to be implemented through local partners and councils. While the structure of the local councils will likely change after the conflict ends, the people who make up these councils and are active in civil society more generally will likely have leading roles in rebuilding Syria and the future government. Therefore, building the capacities of these future leaders to govern in a more participatory and inclusive manner is seen as an important opportunity. Partners are developing their organisational and management capacities to provide humanitarian assistance through:

- a learning-by-doing approach, in which partners implement projects inside Syria;
- intense technical, organisational, and financial support; and
- availability of online capacity building resources that can be accessed by the wider Syrian humanitarian community.

### **Strengthening social cohesion**

Most humanitarians are careful to not exacerbate conflicts through distribution of aid (i.e. Do No Harm). However, using humanitarian aid as a way to address protracted local conflicts is less common. Since elites often gain support by taking advantage of grievances that manifest themselves in conflicts at the local level, resolving these disputes is an important way to minimise mobilisation and reduce the potential for eruption or escalation of violence. For example, in one of Mercy Corps' humanitarian programmes in Yemen, where tribal conflicts—particularly over land—have existed for centuries, villagers in the Haymah Dakhliyah district decided to use the distribution of aid as a way to bring the village together. They agreed to hold distributions and education sessions across lines of division. Even more surprisingly, they agreed to leave their guns at home. The hope is that by rebuilding trust between villagers, local level outbreaks of violence that prolong suffering and limit the area's development can be prevented when the larger conflict between the Houthis and the government—backed by a Saudi-led coalition—ends.

In the Central Africa Republic, in the midst of a civil war, Mercy Corps set out to rebuild social cohesion along cleavages being reinforced by conflict, and therefore limit the impact of violence. We worked with Muslim and Christian community leaders and youth to strengthen peacebuilding skills and foster connections across groups in the country's two biggest cities, while also providing life-saving assistance. As a result of the programme, over 200 militia fighters were disarmed, communities forged mutual pacts for peace and reconciliation, and, when violence again reared its head, these communities were able to defuse it quickly and prevent more bloodshed.

### **Be explicit about peacebuilding goals**

There is an assumption that improving development outcomes will lead to peace. However, research on this connection remains weak. For example, in Helmand, Afghanistan, Mercy Corps implemented a successful vocational training programme which led to the employment of up to 80 per cent of the graduates. Yet it had little effect on attitudes related to participation in violence, and few of the economic outcomes were related to support (or lack thereof) for political violence.<sup>11</sup> A key lesson from this initiative and others is that in promoting peace, projects need to address the drivers behind people engaging in violence and explicitly include activities to mend the fissures in society that lead to conflict.

### **Negotiating local ceasefires and humanitarian access**

Since 2010, Mercy Corps has worked with a national partner in Iraq, the Center for Negotiation Skills and Conflict Management, to resolve disputes non-violently, benefiting over 5 million people so far. The Center, established in 2010 with support from Mercy Corps, has trained and maintains a nationwide network of 350 mediators that have brokered deals to ensure the safe return of Sunnis to their communities after Shi'a militia expelled them at the height of sectarian conflict in 2006. More recently, the network has led efforts to persuade provinces wary of terrorist infiltration to shelter Sunnis and Yezidis fleeing Daesh, also known as IS or ISIL. Just as building social cohesion in the midst of crises can reduce the impact of conflicts, evidence from Iraq has shown that even at a time of great strife, it is possible to forge agreements that reduce suffering and demonstrate that cooperation is possible during and post conflict.

### **Peacebuilding and resilience post-conflict**

A major lesson from reconstruction efforts, including South Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq, is that development gains alone will not bring sustainable peace. The injustices and grievances that led to conflict and were then exacerbated during the conflict need to be reconciled so that groups can cooperate to manage future shocks and stresses. Moreover, it is during these post-conflict transitions when the risk of relapse into violence is highest.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in addition to continuing to apply the lessons elaborated above, Mercy Corps considers that once conflict ends, it is critical to help people rebuild trust and relationships that enable them to interact peacefully in a fluid and transitional environment.

### **Inclusive service provision**

In Syria, prior to the recent violent conflict, an expanding population and drought had reduced available resources, which in turn diminished the government's ability to provide adequate services across the country. This contributed to a perception of government inadequacy, which created grievances that drove much of the initial stages of the conflict. Research conducted by Mercy Corps in Iraq has found that when people perceive that services are improving, they are less likely to support armed opposition groups.<sup>13</sup> Understanding these connections, relationships between governments and diverse communities should be strengthened to help rebuild societies and prevent conflict from spilling over into new areas. After the war in Kosovo, for example, Mercy Corps worked in an inclusive manner with municipalities to provide services to Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in order to strengthen reintegration and reconciliation processes. The government worked with both groups to prioritise reconstruction projects such as sewage systems, community centres



*Damaged building in Syria. Photo: Adobe Stock Images*

and schools that would be of mutual benefit. A similar model is being applied today in Lebanon, where, to prevent conflict from spilling across borders, Mercy Corps is working with municipalities to provide inclusive services to host communities and Syrian refugees. The aim is to reduce the likelihood of host communities blaming refugees for a scarcity of resources, which could breed tensions between groups, as well as grievances towards the government.

#### **Building government capacity to manage democratic transitions**

The process of transition after conflict, involving reconstruction and reconciliation, is rarely smooth. Groups that once controlled resources need to find a way to share power. Consequently, there is a risk that some of the stresses common in these transitions could devolve into conflict. Myanmar is an example of a country that to date has begun the transition from an authoritarian to a more democratic state, though one in which the military still retains political power through the constitution. To help that process, Mercy Corps is working with government, ethnic non-state actors and civil society at multiple levels to increase information sharing and strengthen inclusive decision making and conflict management mechanisms. These efforts have enabled local authorities, both formal and non-state, to respond to community concerns, in a manner that is perceived as fair, legitimate and accountable. The enhanced opportunity of civil society representatives to participate in the development of their country has bolstered confidence in local authorities and the peace process, thereby easing the transition to democracy during this fragile period.

#### **Promoting reconciliation**

Concurrent to physically rebuilding Syria, long-term reconciliation efforts will be critical to addressing the grievances and traumas inflicted during the war. A key lesson from South Sudan is that there was little focus on reconciling the various tribes within the newly formed country, as many international actors were focused on the North-South divide. Two years later, conflict erupted, demonstrating the dangers of ignoring historical tensions. As part of Mercy Corps' work in Kenya to prevent these kinds of divides from erupting, Kalegin and Kikuyu community members, including youth, discussed the 2007-08 election-related violence to understand each other's perspectives. These dialogues complemented projects to rebuild destroyed infrastructure so that people could see tangible gains from cooperation. As a result of these efforts, 86 per cent of participants surveyed reported that they were more willing to interact with people from other ethnic groups compared to 37 per cent before the programme.

### **Concentrate on both the social and physical aspects of reconstruction**

It is important for reconstruction efforts to not only think about the physical infrastructure, but also how to rebuild the social fabric of communities. Community driven development programmes, designed to restore social fabric through communal small infrastructure projects, rarely lead to improved social cohesion and governance.<sup>14</sup> The criticism of these initiatives is that the focus tends to be on implementing the physical project rather than the process of bringing people together. We had a similar experience in Jordan, where we were working to reduce conflict and build social cohesion between host and refugee communities by having them work together to decide on local activities to implement. While the infrastructure projects reduced tensions related to resource scarcity, there was little change in social cohesion. Consequently, we have adapted the programme to have more focus on the social elements—hosting community events and building infrastructure, such as playgrounds, that bring people together.

### **Connecting local peace initiatives to wider efforts**

While local peace initiatives are essential in building social cohesion and ensuring that long-standing grievances are not used to catalyse violence in the future, it is equally critical to develop agreements and policies that reach a broad spectrum of the population and that promote reconciliation at the national level. In Ethiopia, Mercy Corps supported government and traditional institutions in the negotiation and development of the Negelle Peace Accord, which helped increase security from Moyale in the south to Arero in the north. Local officials and community groups subsequently identified the Accord as instrumental in allowing for more peaceful co-existence. In Uganda, Mercy Corps is a member of a task force that directs and coordinates the development of a national peace policy. In this role, Mercy Corps shares lessons learned from local peace initiatives that can be scaled up to the national level. The final draft of the policy is currently under review by the cabinet before it is sent to parliament.

### **Challenges in applying lessons learned elsewhere to the Syrian context**

In applying these lessons learned from Mercy Corps' programming in other conflict and post-conflict contexts, it is important to contextualise and recognise the unique dimensions of the the Syrian conflict. In doing so, the following factors should be considered.

#### **Political versus communal conflicts**

Initially, the conflict in Syria can be described as a predominantly political conflict, rather than sectarian. Many of the lessons elaborated in this article were developed working in contexts where conflicts were intercommunal, where local divides were often manipulated by political elites to garner

support, and often there was a degree of violence regardless of national politics. In the case of Syria, the violence was state-sponsored from the start, making work at the communal level less likely to impact the overall conflict dynamics. Additionally, even before the conflict, it was rare that various groups lived together. It will be difficult to build social cohesion between the various groups as they have become even more segregated during the violence.

#### **Intensity and scope of the conflict**

Most of the conflicts cited above were localised in nature, where there were pockets of stability and the majority of the population was able to remain in their homes. The extent of the destruction in Syria in terms of people's lives and infrastructure means the scale of reconstruction is something the international development community has rarely seen since WWII. Being able to manage expectations of communities as reconstruction progresses will be incredibly hard; this is often difficult even when the conflict is of a smaller scale. If people do not see the changes they hoped for quickly enough, new grievances could build and lead to renewed conflict.

#### **Fluid coalitions of militias, non-state armed groups, and violent extremist groups**

Complicating the situation is the fractured nature of the opposition, made up of numerous parties that are not unified, as well as constantly changing coalitions among the different armed groups. Exacerbating this complexity exponentially is the involvement of violent extremist groups, mainly Al-Nusra and Daesh, who control territory and whose philosophies make reaching a peace agreement extremely challenging. Consequently, because of the inability of the government to control the various factions, as not all may sign on to a peace agreement, a certain level of violence may continue even after the 'war ends,' perpetuating feelings of insecurity. In such circumstances, people may resort to violence to protect themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Setting the foundation for reconciliation and reconstruction now—in the midst of intense conflict—in Syria poses extreme challenges. However, not preparing in advance for the next phase will only extend the suffering of the Syrian people. The lessons presented above illustrate a road map for how, through peace and resilience building, such as social cohesion, conflict management systems and inclusive governance structures, we can prevent future conflicts and support Syria's development in the years ahead.



*Syria, Damascus, September 2013. Photo: Adobe Stock Images*

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hudson, John. "UN Envoy Revises Syria Death Toll to 400,000." *Foreign Policy*. April 22, 2016. Accessed November 21, 2016

<sup>2</sup><http://www.unocha.org/syria>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid

<sup>4</sup><http://www.fao.org/emergencies/crisis/syria/en/>

<sup>5</sup>USAID. *Ending extreme poverty in fragile contexts*. January 28, 2014

<sup>6</sup>Charles, Frances, Nina Nepesova, Isis Sunwoo, Emma Wanchap. *The Cost of Conflict for Children: Five Years of the Syria Conflict*. World Vision and Frontier Economics. March 2016

<sup>7</sup>We are using the term 'reconciliation' in the common sense of rebuilding fractured relationships, not how the Assad government is using it with regard to 'reconciled' areas.

<sup>8</sup>Kurtz, Jon and Katherine McMahon. *Pathways from Peace to Resilience: Evidence from the Greater Horn of Africa on the Links between Conflict Management and Resilience to Food Security Shocks*. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps. 2015

<sup>9</sup>Kurtz, Jon *What Really Matters for Resilience*. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps. October 2013

<sup>10</sup>Polk, William. "Understanding Syria: From Pre-Civil War to Post-Assad." *The Atlantic*. December 10, 2013. Accessed November 12, 2013

<sup>11</sup>Kurz, Jon. *Does Youth Employment Build Stability?* Mercy Corps. 2014

<sup>12</sup>Mansfield, Edward D. and Jack Snyder. "Turbulent Transitions: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War in the Twenty-first Century", In *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*. Crocker, Chester A., Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, (eds.), pp. 161-176. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2007

<sup>13</sup>Proctor, K and Tesfaye, B. "How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism," Mercy Corps. December 2015. <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/investing-iraqs-peace-how-good-governance-can-diminish-support-violent-extremism>

<sup>14</sup>King, E. *A critical review of community-driven development programmes in conflict-affected contexts*. International Rescue Committee (IRC), London, UK / Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada (2013), pp 55

## **Before, during, after: Sustaining peace in the face of armed conflict in West Asia and North Africa**

Despite a legacy of multiple overlapping conflicts that date back several decades, communities in West Asia–North Africa (WANA) have demonstrated a tremendous capacity to endure and overcome conflict and hardship. Yet, large parts of the region continue to face instability due to violence, terrorism, religious extremism and refugee flows, and a better understanding of what supports peace and contributes to the resilience of these communities is critical.

This volume seeks to enhance this knowledge by offering some pertinent and practical insights directly from the WANA region on what is needed to sustain peace. In six different papers, authors from the United Nations system, local and international non–governmental organisations and research institutions reflect on valuable lessons from their work, as well as the relevance of the UN’s sustaining peace agenda in the region.

Collectively, the texts tell the common story of the need for unending work towards peace. From Iraq to Yemen and from Jordan to Syria, we see that sustaining peace is an ongoing process, something that can and should be addressed before, during and after conflict.



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