

Helpdesk Research Report

Impact of external assistance on local-level peace settlements in the Middle East and North Africa

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Question

Identify evidence about the impact of external programmatic support on local-level peace settlements (e.g. the effects of programme support for local governance and basic service provision on conflict reduction, legitimacy or sub-national political settlements). Look at fragile and conflict-affected states – ideally with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). If possible, identify the specific approaches that the literature recommends or warns against.

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1. Overview

Armed conflicts have inflicted massive suffering and material losses on the populations of several MENA countries since 2011 (or earlier). Other countries in the region have had a latent risk of political armed violence. At the same time, local peace settlements in delimited geographic areas have been reached in several of these contexts. Many of these local agreements are widely reported to be vulnerable to adverse political developments, due to action within the localities involved but also from the outside. External support thus carries high risks, as academic and grey literature on aid and conflict emphasises¹.

¹ For the purpose of this query, support was deemed external whether it came from foreign actors (e.g. aid donors) or actors based in the country but outside the geographic locality considered.

What impact has external support for basic needs had on these local peace settlements? Based on a rapid review of the literature, this report presents evidence on positive and negative impact in MENA. In line with the query received, local peace settlements were defined as political agreements among civilian leaders in delimited localities, whereby political compromise led to sustained suspension of armed hostilities². Available knowledge shows that external assistance has had a **mixed impact** on local peace settlements and on factors that directly affects such settlements.

- **Positive impact** includes aid that: extended social development to rural and urban areas in Yemen; tackled fragility through accountable local governance in Yemen; and followed local environmental associations' lead in Lebanon.
- **Mixed or limited impact** was documented in using conflict sensitivity for peacebuilding, and in tackling tensions around aid between host communities and refugees from Syria and Palestine in Lebanon.
- **Cases of failure** include: failing to redress the implications of elite power for local peace settlements (e.g. in Lebanon); sacrificing community participation for quick service delivery in Lebanon; and working from weak local peace settlements in Syria.

Recommended approaches include:

- Taking into account formal and informal power through detailed analysis of context and work with formal and informal power-holders.
- Changing aid practices, for example by valuing process and longer timeframes, leading by example on equity, and using conflict sensitivity for peace.
- Adapting governance work to restrictive conditions (e.g. by framing projects in collaborative ways that don't threaten local powers).
- Enabling civil society through capacity-building, inclusiveness and linkages.
- Supporting gender equality as a goal and a means towards peacebuilding.
- Defusing tensions and competition around aid, in particular between refugees and host communities (e.g. in Lebanon with Syrian refugees).

Typical problems, challenges and risks have included:

- Facing the challenges of working politically in difficult contexts, such predatory politics and aid that is politicised by local and outside actors.
- Dealing with donors' technocratic and political limitations (e.g. donors using blueprints, limiting choice of local partners or ignoring pre-existing local initiatives).
- Lacking gender sensitivity in work for peacebuilding.
- Working with ambiguous boundaries between 'the local' and 'the external' in local processes.

² In this query, agreements that amount to military stand-offs or ceasefires without a political settlement among civilian leaders are not covered.

2. State of knowledge

There are large bodies of academic and grey literature about the impact of external support on conflict and peace dynamics at national level, and about conflict and conflict sensitivity within donor-funded programmes and projects³. Separately, there is a small- to medium-sized body of academic and grey literature on local peace settlements in contexts of war or state fragility. But this rapid review found **limited academic and grey literature** specifically about the impact of *external* support on *local* peace settlements. The lack of assessment on impact is widespread in interventions for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, a World Bank paper confirms (Gaarder & Annan, 2013).

No systematic or meta-review compares knowledge on the report topic across countries and interventions: most knowledge is based on case studies of specific countries or projects. Methods are largely qualitative. Many references note the methodological limitations of their research (e.g. “good enough” sampling), due to the difficulty of conducting research in settings of violence or state fragility.

The literature identifies **little direct causality** between external interventions and local peace settlements. There is more discussion on the impact of external interventions on **intermediate variables**, such as accountability from local authorities or local political settlements, which in turn affect local peace settlements. Many findings are indicative rather than conclusive, and are likely to be context-specific. Some findings are consistent, but others are contradictory or mixed (e.g. on working politically).

References for this report were also selected based on **geography**. The first criterion for inclusion was discussion of cases in MENA. In that region, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen are most researched. A few other references were selected due to their multi-country evidence base. A dozen countries seem to make up the bulk of cases researched globally.

There are also **knowledge gaps on social groups**. Most references fail to disaggregate findings in a systematic fashion by socio-economic class, gender, ethnicity, migration (internal or international), age (e.g. children, youth, and the elderly) and (dis)abilities. Nearly no reference considers the implications of the intersection of these social positions – for example for young women who are poor.

3. Impact of external assistance on local peace settlements

Positive impact

Extending social development to rural and urban areas in Yemen

The donor-backed **Yemen Social Fund for Development (SFD)**, established in 1997, aims to fight poverty and reinforce the social safety net. It has successfully implemented programmes in rural and urban communities throughout Yemen. It “has steadily expanded and scaled-up its activities”, despite the weak state and political unrest (Al-Iryani, De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2013: abstract).

SFD had **effectively prevented, resolved or minimized conflict situations**, according to a 2009 assessment (Al-Iryani, De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2013: 15). Such situations have included rivalries among

³ On the impact of aid on peace in general, see GSDRC topic guides on: conflict; conflict sensitivity; decentralisation and local government; disaster resilience; fragile states; service delivery; sequencing reforms in fragile states; and statebuilding and peacebuilding (<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides>).

community interest groups over the location of projects; political divisions and the politicisation of interventions; tensions over community contributions; conflicts with contractors; and differences with ministries over co-ordination.

Allocating funds transparently, distributing projects throughout the country, pro-poor targeting, and working with communities that had not approached SFD, have been essential (Al-Iryani, De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2013: 16). SFD has upheld clear pro-poor criteria in selecting and implementing projects, to avoid bias and ensure equal opportunities to access resources. It has also strived to ensure transparency at all times, from community committees to contracting and access to its reports and procedures. Local staff and consultants have been instrumental in accessing communities. SFD has worked with local leaders to solve existing problems (Al-Iryani, De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2013: 16).

Al-Iryani, De Janvry and Sadoulet (2013) indicate four factors of success in SFD based on their experience and on impact evaluations. One has been stakeholders' ownership over projects. SFD has benefited from its close relationship with local communities following a demand-driven approach. A second factor has been trust, gained through political neutrality when allocating resources. Third, project funding and operations have been flexible. Fourth, interventions have been relevant and brought tangible impact for beneficiaries' livelihoods. As a result, beneficiaries have strongly supported SFD. The core design of SFD may be replicated in failing states, conflicts and post-conflict transitions, Al-Iryani, De Janvry and Sadoulet state (2013: 20).

Tackling fragility through accountable governance in Yemen

Oxfam has piloted collaborations with civil society to make governance more accountable in Yemen (Fooks, 2013). This DFID-funded programme, called 'Within and Without the State' (WWS), ran between 2011 and 2014. In Hadhramout Valley, Oxfam's WWS supported three civil society networks in engaging with local authorities (Fooks, 2013: 6). It provided training in rights-based development and the role of civil society in governance. It also supported fundraising and organisational development. Further, it helped create committees for mutual coordination between local authorities and the networks. As a result, network members ensured accountability for the allocation of resources (Fooks, 2013: 6).

Based on its 2011-2012 WWS experience, Oxfam states that governance programming in fragile contexts does help to tackle fragility and build stability and resilience (Fooks, 2013: 1). This has proven true even where international actors have to meet basic needs because the state is unable or unwilling to do so. Conversely, failing to strengthen governance may institutionalise fragility. Collaboration with civil society is an appropriate entry point, but is not sufficient to promote "good governance" (Fooks, 2013: 3).

Following local associations' lead in Lebanon

Some support from donors has proven beneficial in promoting indigenous efforts at restructuring power relations between state and society (Doornbos, cited in Kingston, 2012: 341). For example, a 2012 academic review shows the effects of environmental movements on local power relations in Lebanon in the 1990s (Kingston, 2012). In 1998, local municipalities re-emerged with elections. Municipalities challenged local environmental associations that had been active autonomously in their localities. Municipalities and associations had to negotiate their division of responsibility (Kingston, 2012: 342-343). Collaborative co-governance emerged out of this throughout the country. This institutionalised local power relations in the environmental field and stabilised them (Kingston, 2012: 343).

Environmental associations had received assistance from external donors. For many, the assistance did play a role in building up their social and political capital on the ground (Kingston, 2012: 344). However,

associations themselves decided how to use the capital strategically (Kingston, 2012: 344). Collaborative arrangements emerged not out of governance agendas from abroad, but out of the dynamics of local associations (Kingston, 2012: 344). These actors won access to policy-making through hard-fought negotiations, based on their own strategic calculations about political opportunities and resources. Local political actors fought for, won and own these innovations (Kingston, 2012: 344).

Mixed impact and limitations

Taking into account the difference between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding

Conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding are related but different (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009). Making interventions conflict-sensitive does not in itself build peace. Conflict sensitivity will be insufficient for peacebuilding at most levels. Where conflict resolution requires efforts at a higher political level, more robust analyses and strategies are required, and those are typically outside the reach of local-level actors. Conversely, peacebuilding is not necessarily sensitive to conflict (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009: 8).

Tackling tensions around aid between host communities and refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon is widely identified in the literature as a place where aid has been an object and sometimes a cause of tensions and conflicts, especially between the Lebanese and the Palestinian and Syrian refugees. For example, since 2011, international assistance to Syrian refugees has tended to feed into tensions between Lebanese and Syrians (Stamm, 2013).

At the **policy level**, the international aid architecture is managed *around* the Lebanese government, through direct co-operation with non-state actors on the ground. This strengthens the failures of the Lebanese system, such as clientelism and political patronage (Stamm, 2013). In addition, host communities lack the services provided to the refugee population, reinforcing local perceptions of economic injustice (Stamm, 2013).

At the **institutional level**, local communities receiving aid “associate external assistance with political objectives” (Stamm, 2013: 3). While aid agencies proclaim impartiality and neutrality, the distinction between humanitarianism and politics is actually blurred. A myriad of actors work with selected communities based on motives that are not primarily humanitarian (Stamm, 2013).

At the **programme level**, local communities may need support to sustain their hosting capacities (Stamm, 2013). Aid risks incentivising locals to stop supporting refugees, and generating tensions between refugees and hosts (Stamm, 2013). Conflict over humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees has been growing as economic conditions in Lebanon worsen (SFCG, 2014: 8). The Lebanese who suffer economic hardships due to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis have become increasingly unsympathetic towards Syrians. They perceive humanitarian aid directed to Syrians only as discriminatory and unjust (SFCG, 2014: 8). An added problem is that humanitarian assistance has operated “in parallel to rebels, arms and supply chains into Syria” (Stamm, 2013: 3).

At the **individual level**, stakeholders - including aid staff - often have implicit or explicit political preferences or sectarian loyalties (Stamm, 2013).

There have also been tensions between Palestinian refugees and Lebanese populations. A joint UN programme aimed to mitigate them (MDG Achievement Fund, cited in Walton, 2012: 12). It established a positive dialogue between Lebanese communities and Palestinians’ self-governance bodies, the Popular

Committees. It improved participating students' tolerance and their knowledge of peaceful conflict resolution (MDG Achievement Fund, cited in Walton, 2012: 12).

A 2011 evaluation recommended that local actors also participate in defining the content and methodology of activities, to improve ownership and sustainability. As delays threatened to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the programme, quick action to establish the dialogue fora was also needed. Local stakeholders needed to be gathered around the planning and implementation of tangible services (MDG Achievement Fund, cited in Walton, 2012: 12).

Failures

Failing to redress the implications of elite power for local peace settlements

Some authors also ask whether elitist local peace settlements can lead to sustained peace. They suggest shifting the discussion on external interventions from the impact on (elitist) local peace settlements to the impact on broad-based peacebuilding.

Elite capture of local peace settlements

In principle, institutionalising citizen participation at grassroots level could put a check on elites' capture of peacebuilding for their own power, accumulation and status after civil wars (Kingston, 2012: 333-334). Grassroots participation could also improve officials' access to local knowledge, and ultimately provide a broad base of social and political support for a state (Kingston, 2012: 333). Democracy could empower "the unorganised, the poor, and the marginalized" in post-conflict societies (Kingston, 2012: 333).

In practice, even where citizens are involved in locally generated peacebuilding, their involvement is often limited to "symbolic rather than empowered participation" (Kingston, 2012: 334). For example, in Lebanon after the civil war, substantive political participation has been "restricted to the particularistic, elite-based, and coercive shadow networks" that underpin Lebanese polity (Kingston, 2012: 334).

Kingston (2012) investigates to what degree external actors could help counter these dominant trends. He looks at four initiatives on governance in the first decade after the Lebanese civil war: two from local civil society about environment and disability; and two led by foreign donors about community development and grassroots conservation. He finds that donor strategies have been more likely "to facilitate the consolidation and reproduction of elite-based political power", despite their stated support for broad-based, participatory governance (Kingston, 2012: 335).

Policy design and implementation in peacebuilding often ends up working in "technocratic insulation", with a small group privileged over the majority (Kingston, 2012: 339). This often proves counter-productive, because inclusive institutions have a vital long-term role in restoring confidence, stability and predictability (Kingston, 2012: 339).

Ignoring local elites' power (Lebanon)

One example of donors failing to tackle elite capture is Lebanon's three natural conservation reserves, set up from the mid-1990s after requests from the UN and international and local NGOs (Kingston, 2012: 346-347). A stated goal was to promote national reconciliation through an opportunity for citizens to work together. Local NGOs were to manage each reserve (Kingston, 2012: 347).

The most powerful actors were left out of the governance design. But local political elites did not want a stronger national system of conservation, because it would limit their access to lands under their informal influence (Kingston, 2012: 347). In reaction, these local elites took advantage of the porous Lebanese state and “an NGO sector that was no match for their political influence and power” (Kingston, 2012: 347). They used their influence to prevent involvement by and accountability to local communities and environmental NGOs (Kingston, 2012: 348). For example, they created their own environmental NGOs. And they subjected more independent NGOs to “enormous and ultimately successful clientelist pressure”, weakening or even shattering their autonomy (Kingston, 2012: 348).

Local elites effectively reshaped the projects to make them compliant with their interests (Kingston, 2012: 348). The effects on local governance “were disastrous” (Kingston, 2012: 348). Nascent conservation initiatives at grassroots level were destroyed and superseded by the elite-led process. In addition, foreign funding facilitated the emergence of elite-controlled environmental monopolies, instead of promoting collaborative and sustainable conservation (Kingston, 2012: 348). The main political contribution of the project was therefore to promote the re-consolidation of elite-based clientelist networks after the civil war instead of facilitating novel governance (Kingston, 2012: 348).

Sacrificing community participation for service delivery in Lebanon

USAID funded a project to deliver assistance for basic development to 226 villages in the Beqaa Valley between 1997 and 2002 (Kingston, 2012: 345). One goal was to enhance civic participation. Village committees were supposed to decide on strategy, while international NGOs selected by USAID would deliver services (Kingston, 2012: 345). However, international NGO managers took decisions that favoured “the more conservative and restrictive” objective, i.e. service delivery (Kingston, 2012: 346). To do so, they sacrificed community participation, which would have required much more time, energy and dedication to be seriously supported (Kingston, 2012: 346).

International NGOs were under bureaucratic pressure to deliver infrastructure quickly and to spend project money (Kingston, 2012: 346). In addition, few villages had social cohesion, let alone institutions through which the project could work efficiently. Even where they did, NGOs contracted by USAID often chose not to work with them (Kingston, 2012: 346). For example, NGOs bypassed altogether some extremely poor and divided villages. In other places, they collaborated with local “strongmen who could deliver committee ‘consensus’ quickly” (Kingston, 2012: 346). In the few cases where field workers took time to consult with villagers, they “were criticised ‘for spending too much time talking to communities and women’ and were let go” (Crumrine, cited in Kingston, 2012: 346).

Working from weak local peace settlements in Syria

Qualitative research from 2014 on local truces in Syria shows that the truces ended up further entrenching already polarised positions (IRC, 2014: 2). This resulted from the limited humanitarian impact from truces, the difficult negotiations and multiple truce violations. For example, the food aid delivered was significantly insufficient for civilian needs. Very little medical aid reached besieged areas. All this left parties with increased mistrust and uncertainty. The fundamental problem was that the truces were not built on good practice and suffered from a lack of political will for peace from the outset, on part of both government and opposition (IRC, 2014: 2). Truces led to only minimal and temporary improvements in the humanitarian situation in affected communities (IRC, 2014: 2).

4. Recommended approaches

Taking into account both informal and formal power

Donor assistance can be useful when it strategically **works from social realities** (Kingston, 2012: 350). Assistance can then push a challenging, politicised process of broadening out governance. Donors need to “do time-consuming research into local circumstances and power relations”, which can reveal appropriate local partners (Kingston, 2012: 350). Detailed context and power analysis can reveal appropriate entry points, Oxfam found in its WWS programme (Fooks, 2013: 1). Even a weak or unwilling state is not homogeneous. Interest in changing the situation may lie with various levels of governance, departments or individual officials (Fooks, 2013: 1). Power analysis should be informed by multiple sources of information, including formal data and people’s informal knowledge. Participants should revisit it frequently, as “power is constantly shifting in fragile contexts” (Fooks, 2013: 5).

A detailed power in context analysis will be able to reveal where **informal or hidden power** lies, how to target the source of power, and who can influence power-holders (Fooks, 2013: 5). In fragile contexts, power may be held not by the state, but by informal power-holders, such as tribal, traditional, religious, business or elite leaders. They can block change they do not want, or enable it by influencing formal power-holders in the state (Fooks, 2013: 5).

External actors may need to work on **improving the accountability and transparency of local leaders**, to ensure they use their power in the interests of citizens and communities (Fooks, 2013: 5). Building relationships and effective collaborations with informal power-holders is important (Fooks, 2013: 6). Good approaches include better understanding these actors’ context and worldview. Involving them from the start will help build their trust and encourage their buy-in (Fooks, 2013: 6).

Changing aid practices

Valuing process and longer timeframes

The process may actually be as important as the outcome (Fooks, 2013: 7). The process should be of good quality at every stage, from partner selection and planning to delivery and follow-up. This “can build capacity, confidence, trust, participation and transparency among stakeholders”, including partners, communities and powerholders (Fooks, 2013: 7).

Change in fragile contexts is often slow, due to the difficult environment and the time required for high-quality processes (Fooks, 2013: 7). Such change may be slower to produce concrete results and harder to evaluate and justify to donors. But change should not be short-term or measured only by conventional indicators or donor requirements. Good process is important for its own sake and essential to creating an environment where good governance can emerge in the long term (Fooks, 2013: 7).

Aid actors leading by example on equity

Donors can cultivate more equity by exemplifying it (Kingston, 2012: 350). They would need “much greater commitment to the internal functioning” of their governance projects (Kingston, 2012: 350). They must challenge their administrative and political internal pressures, so they free themselves “to take more sustained and informed interest in local political practices” (Kingston, 2012: 350).

Using conflict sensitivity for peace

A number of recommendations for conflict sensitivity are about the local level (see Haider, 2014). In fact, practitioners have occasionally used tools for conflict sensitivity (such as ‘do no harm’ approaches) for peace (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009: 8). Local actors at a local level seem to be the major source of using tools and frameworks for conflict sensitivity to design and implement peace building. In part, this is because locals know their own context well. They can identify, at any time, “which dividers are most likely to cause violence, and which connectors are most important” (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009: 8). This enables them to design development or humanitarian action in ways that best advance peace. Such practices stemmed from local ownership and initiatives for peace, which lead to a greater impact on peace than if external actors had done the same (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009: 8).

Adapting governance work to restrictive conditions

Approaches to governance can also be adapted to restricted contexts (Fooks, 2013: 1). For example, making governance a strand within other work, such as livelihoods, may prove less threatening to governments that are “nervous about the role of civil society” (Fooks, 2013: 1).

Similarly, activities can emphasise constructive engagement rather than confrontation with the state (Fooks, 2013: 1). In particular, in WWS in Yemen, Oxfam approached governance as an issue of social contract between citizens and the state, instead of demand-led advocacy from citizens towards the state. This promoted accountability and good governance (Fooks, 2013: 4). In practice, for example, Oxfam held targeted meetings with key individuals to present evidence or information (Fooks, 2013: 5).

The social contract model has several advantages in fragile contexts (Fooks, 2013: 4). It emphasises the roles and responsibilities of both citizens and governments. It gives each party realistic expectations of what the other can do. Citizens and governments also see that they can build a more effective state by engaging with each other and collectively solving problems. This avoids confrontation or challenge, and helps prevent a backlash from states with authoritarian tendencies (Fooks, 2013: 4-5).

Enabling civil society

To counter national and international outsiders’ tendency to ignore existing local approaches to peace and development, Mac Ginty and Hamieh suggest that outsiders pay attention to the “resources, social movements, connections, experiences, resilience and modes of organisation” of the local area (2010: 61).

Building capacity

External actors might wonder if collaborating with civil society is effective and efficient in fragile and authoritarian states, compared to work on the state, other institutions and space for civil society. Oxfam's experience from WWS shows that working with civil society can indeed be effective in such contexts, particularly with groups representing women, the poorest, and the most marginalised (Fooks, 2013: 3).

Many tried and tested **approaches** from development programming can be adapted to fragile contexts (Fooks, 2013: 6). Examples include: strengthening organisation; raising awareness about rights, responsibilities and governance; skills training in organising and advocacy; mentoring and intensive support for particular groups (Fooks, 2013: 6). Some approaches have proven particularly effective for fragile contexts (Fooks, 2013: 6). For example, working through networks of civil society organisations has proven effective to build capacity, strengthen solidarity and raise the voice of civil society.

In the case of **Syria**, based on in-depth fieldwork inside the country, Turkmani et al. make recommendations relevant to external programmatic support in contexts of local peace settlements (2014: 44-46). They advocate for international actors to engage and empower civil society inside Syria (civil organisations, traditional leaderships, and on occasion local business). This is key to delivering humanitarian aid and providing basic services. Involving civil society leads to the inclusion of civilians' needs in the area considered. Another recommendation is to scale up their presence and engagement. This would include international mediators who can advise local civil mediators and facilitate local deals. Greater presence and engagement by humanitarian and relief agencies has also proven to be an incentive for truces. Syrian mediation teams and monitoring forces, composed of civil society members from all religious and ethnic groups, "could facilitate, observe and assist with the implementation of ceasefires, aid delivery and other humanitarian tasks" (p. 46). International actors could facilitate the demobilization of fighters, their civilian reintegration and their protection from other armed actors.

In addition, the Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria and Peaceful Change Initiative conducted a mapping and dialogue with community-level persons involved in peace initiatives inside Syria in 2013 and 2014 (CCSDS & PCI, 2014). They make the following recommendations, which reflect the local views heard in the consultation (CCSDS & PCI, 2014):

- Local peace resources need capacity-building in conflict resolution skills. Providers of such support need to coordinate better with each other.
- Peace resources also need more support to manage their communities' expectations on results.
- Creating greater connections between peace resources is important to increase their impact. Such collaboration should be built sensitively from the grassroots up.
- Fostering conversations among Syrians about the usefulness of inclusive peace processes is essential, as not all Syrians support engagement across divides.

Facilitating inclusiveness and linkages

John Paul Lederach, a widely cited scholar on peacebuilding, argued that "peacebuilding is not about separating actors but about bringing them together relationally" (cited in Kingston, 2012: 339). He advocated the inclusion of middle-range actors into peacebuilding, to ensure that social integration goes deeper than elite power-sharing. The goal is to sustain their participation and turn dialogue and policy-making into ongoing processes (Kingston, 2012: 339). Inclusive institutions are thus needed to fulfil the need for "a process-structure" (Lederach, cited in Kingston, 2012: 340).

Merely building up capacities in civil society is not enough to have an impact (Fooks, 2013: 3). Oxfam found it necessary to **work with both citizens and duty-bearers** on developing a social contract. In that approach, capacity building takes place not only for its own sake. It also aims to enable civil society "to engage effectively and constructively" with duty-bearers (Fooks, 2013: 3). Promoting positive opportunities for this engagement to happen is also useful (Fooks, 2013: 3).

Oxfam's partnerships with civil society have been **broad**, including community-based organisations and local and national NGOs, but also unions, religious groups, and informal youth movements (Fooks, 2013: 3). Linking such civil society groups to other influential non-state actors and institutions that can support their advocacy was important. Oxfam used its power as a broker to create linkages with the private sector, universities, media, and elite groups (Fooks, 2013: 3).

Supporting gender equality as a goal and a means

A strategic gender review of WWS first recommended that Oxfam strengthen the gender dimension and use all opportunities to tackle gender inequalities in power and participation. Second, Oxfam would need to better understand gender inequality as a driver of fragility and address it as one way to tackle the root causes of fragility. Both approaches would make its programming more effective (Fooks, 2013: 5).

Defusing tensions and competition around aid

Tensions and competition around aid are frequently mentioned risks with outside assistance to places with precarious peace settlements. One common case is **relations between host communities and refugees**. To tackle such conflicts, integrating humanitarian and development aid can balance assistance to refugee and host communities, as is integrating services provided to them - this was done for example in Lebanon. Another approach is to encourage workshops, discussions or regular meetings between host and refugee communities. These may involve training in conflict resolution or peace education. A third approach has been the joint management of environmental resources, to promote co-operation and reduce tensions - this was also implemented in Lebanon (Walton, 2012).

In **Lebanon**, Swisspeace has a number of general **recommendations for aid actors** on such issues, based on a qualitative examination of local, national and international aid actors (Stamm, 2013: 3):

- At the **policy level**: strengthen political dialogue with Lebanese government and “key international and local political figures”. Include actors that are not like-minded. All international assistance must address Lebanon’s fragility. Integrated strategies for human security should work from a broad definition of vulnerability that covers Lebanese communities in a transparent way.
- At the **institutional level**: to achieve impartiality and neutrality, consider political dimensions systematically when selecting areas of operation, programme development, staff, suppliers and donors. Specify how assistance is coordinated with political and religious actors on the ground.
- At the **programme level**: conduct and share tailored conflict analyses systematically. Collect best practices for conflict sensitivity by sector. Screen beneficiaries to monitor field services delivered.
- At the **individual level**: organisations’ leadership must make a personal commitment to ‘do no harm’ principles throughout operations and monitor their implementation.

In addition, Search For Common Ground (SFCG) conducted a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews and focus groups of Lebanese and Syrian in 11 localities. Based on the results, it makes **recommendations for humanitarian and development actors** (SFCG, 2014: 9-11) such as:

- Implement programmes for **economic development and poverty reduction that target both Syrians and Lebanese** in host communities. When doing so, pay attention to regional political differences. In the South, constant coordination with municipalities and political parties, which have communities’ confidence, is essential. In Tripoli, short-term interventions should go through local trusted civil society organisations. Local authorities should be involved and supported so they can eventually address local conflicts. Supporting Syrians’ collective organisation for labour rights is important to improve everyone’s position on the labour market and decrease conflict.
- **Invest in local municipalities, unions of municipalities and regional councils**. This could mitigate rising conflict and humanitarian needs. Humanitarian actors need a general plan and programming to assist local institutions. These should be enabled to take the lead and plan for conflict mitigation, economy development and local security.

- **Empower nascent Syrian engagement and participation** in local institutions. The lack of Syrian representation and community leadership has complicated aid and local conflicts. Greater Syrian involvement can enable dialogue and help solve conflict over resources and services.
- Conduct **community-based campaigns** to promote the social inclusion of Syrian refugees. Campaigns should frame local communities' difficulties as a shared public problem, and include Syrian perspectives on solutions.

SFCG also has specific **recommendations for peacebuilding actors** (2014: 38-39):

- Empower beneficiaries and ensure ownership.
- Encourage Syrians and Lebanese to work together for tangible results rather than simply talk together.
- Create the conditions for people to realise their desire to meet (breaking down stereotypes on Syrians for the Lebanese, and easing the time constraints due to survival activities for Syrians).
- Be conscious of the power dynamics affecting the dialogue between communities.
- Take into account that different political dynamics exist in the South and around Tripoli.
- Build leadership capacities among Syrian refugees to support their self-organisation.
- Take specific gender dynamics into account among Syrians and Lebanese (e.g. hold separate meetings for men and women where necessary).

5. Problems, challenges and risks

Facing the challenges of working politically

Post-conflict politics "are usually more predatory than benign" (Kingston, 2012: 350). Unequal power relations pervade local communities, NGOs and institutions of governance (Kingston, 2012: 350). The various spheres of social and political life have porous boundaries and are connected with power (Jenkins, cited in Kingston, 2012: 350). Yet donors have repeatedly failed to integrate this into their projects, thereby undercutting their own goals in governance. This contributes to the re-consolidation of power relations and entrenches narrow and inequitable governance (Kingston, 2012: 350).

The **politicisation of aid** from within and outside localities can reinforce divisions or clientelism after violent conflicts (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 56). Politicisation raises ethical and practical questions for international aid actors on engaging with non-state actors they may deem illegitimate. Labelling selected aid actors as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' can be counterproductive (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 57).

Donors rarely monitor beyond the funding phase if implementing agencies use '**do no harm**' (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009). They have little knowledge of whether it is actually adopted. Their policies rarely provide any consequences for failing to make programming conflict-sensitive, and rarely penalize activities that have caused harm. Communities also typically have no mechanisms to hold organisations accountable for the negative impacts of projects on local people (Woodrow & Chigas, 2009).

Supporting disadvantaged groups' organising to promote their interests has thus remained a central challenge, as grassroots groups are typically less well organised in the immediate aftermath of wars (Kingston, 2012: 339). In fragile contexts, governments may see traditional advocacy of citizens' demands as a challenge. The state may have neither the will nor the capacity to meet demands (Fooks, 2013: 4).

Dealing with donors' technocratic and political limitations

Donors have increasingly promoted inclusive politics, through governance reform, support for civil society, and community and participatory development. Evaluations from academic and policy sources have yielded common critical insights on this trend (Kingston, 2012: 340-341).

Working from blueprints

Donors' support for indigenous practices can contradict other dynamics prevalent in aid, such as "the standardisation of interventions, the promotion of western norms, and imposing uniform order within states" (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 58). Donors often work with **governance blueprints**, based on implicit models of state-society relations (Doornbos, cited in Kingston, 2012: 340). These models often privilege finding a balance between the public sphere, the private sphere and civil society. However, in practice, one sphere often overpowers others, blurring the boundaries. When donors use models that do not correspond to local realities, they have negative local effect (Doornbos, cited in Kingston, 2012: 340).

Limiting choices of local partners

Donors' use of blueprints also affects donors' **choice of local partners** (Kingston, 2012: 341). Donors focus on delivering assistance in a timely and efficient manner, and they demand the same of their contractors (Kingston, 2012: 349). They are also often under political and geostrategic pressure to give aid, making a more cautious approach difficult. This pushes donors to select partners based on whether they can deliver aid rather than whether they are accountable to local societies (Kingston, 2012: 349).

In addition, donors may not genuinely want to cooperate with politicised partners in civil society that challenge the political *status quo* (Jenkins, cited Kingston, 2012: 341). For example, USAID has searched for "sanitized, nonpolitical" partners in civil society that keep within their sphere of social and economic power (Jenkins, cited in Kingston, 2012: 341). This cautiousness has robbed pro-democracy movements of their force (Jenkins, cited Kingston, 2012: 341).

Ignoring pre-existing local initiatives

International and national elites often end up ignoring pre-existing civic associations and social networks, or even shortcutting them (Kingston, 2012: 341; Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 61). These local initiatives may not be apparent to outsiders (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 61). For example, in Lebanon, Jihad Binaa – the reconstruction arm of Hezbollah – did not attend the coordination meetings the UN chaired during the emergency phase of post-2006 reconstruction. Nor did it engage with the mechanisms for transparency favoured by Western donors (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 61). Kingston (2012:341) argues that this disconnection is also partly because donors want to preserve a post-conflict role for themselves.

Lack of gender-sensitivity in work for peacebuilding

Conflict and fragility affect men and women differently, and a gender neutral approach "will maintain an unjust status quo" (Fooks, 2013: 5). Further, gender inequality is itself a driver of fragility, Oxfam found in its WWS programme (Fooks, 2013: 5). In all fragile contexts, the exclusion of women from public life and decision-making leads to public policies that address the needs of men only (Fooks, 2013: 5).

Working with the ambiguous distinction between local and external

Donors' increasing support for local practices raises the question of how far such practices can still be termed local (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 59). Intrusive international involvement "may jeopardise claims that a process is indigenous" (Mac Ginty & Hamieh, 2010: 59). Distinguishing 'the local' and 'the external', and their respective impact is complicated, a qualitative study on post-2006 Lebanon shows. Specifically, Mac Ginty and Hamieh (2010) looked at an initiative aligned with Hezbollah for rebuilding of housing in the southern suburbs of Beirut, and at food, shelter and cash provision by a movement aligned with Hariri in Tripoli. They find that both initiatives had some indigenous and some non-indigenous components in the origins of the actors, their methodology and their resources.

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About this report

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