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FROM TENSION TO VIOLENCE:

Understanding and Preventing Violence between Refugees and Host Communities in Lebanon

MERCY CORPS LEBANON
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Executive Summary

Mercy Corps has worked with 27 municipalities in the North of Lebanon and the Bekaa region since 2013 to improve governance, social cohesion and social stability, with the support of the UK, EU, and Regional Development and Protection Program managed by Danida. Mercy Corps defines social cohesion as a state of relationships within a community based on the behaviors, attitudes, levels of trust, and collaboration that promote and foster commitment to and cooperation among the overall community, while social stability focuses on non-violent resolution of conflict. Over this period, Mercy Corps has carried out a number of research initiatives, which have tested the underlying hypotheses which orient social cohesion and stability programming in Lebanon. To date, allocations of programmatic resources in response to the Syrian refugee crisis overwhelmingly focus on increasing access to social and municipal services for Lebanese and Syrians. This is because assessments from multiple organizations identify that worsening living standards are closely connected to rising inter-communal tensions. These assessments assume increased tensions over access to social and municipal services lead to violence; however, they rarely try to understand in more detail how tensions correlate with disputes and violence, or try to understand whether access to different types of services or opportunities has any impact an individual's propensity to use violence.

In order to understand this dynamic in more detail, Mercy Corps carried out a survey of 2,437 households in eight municipalities in North of Lebanon. This survey sought to identify when physical violence occurs – understanding that not all tensions manifest as disputes,[1] and not all disputes escalate into violence – in order to better test the assumption that increased tensions over social service provision will lead to violence.

As a result of this survey, Mercy Corps recommends that social cohesion programmes should deploy a mixture of social services, livelihoods, and social interactions, rather than maintaining the status quo of overwhelming (in terms of allocation of programmatic resources) focus on social service provision. In particular, Mercy Corps recommends increasing investment in employment as the most effective way to promote stability in Lebanon, in communities with high numbers of refugees. The data shows that Lebanese households with no or limited livelihood options and those with poor economic outlooks for the future correlate with being more prone to use violence, while there was no such correlation between social service access and violence.

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KEY FINDINGS

– *Employment is the strongest predictor for reducing inter-communal violence between Lebanese and Syrians;*

– *No relationship between social service access and propensity to use violence;*

– *Municipalities are the most effective dispute resolution actor;*

– *Economic interactions can have positive impact on social cohesion if facilitated correctly.*

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1   Disputes are defined as non-violent conflicts.

The data also indicates that the use of violence is socially accepted, with 49%[2] agreeing it can be justified (70.15% for Lebanese and 27.24% for Syrians), and that verbal disputes do escalate into physical violence on a somewhat regular basis.[3] However, these violent incidents are frequently financial: defending goods/property (38%) and defending livelihoods (33%) being the third and fifth most frequently identified justifications for using violence, exceeded only by defending one's honour (83%) and defending family (50%).[4] Even as drivers of verbal disputes, money and employment are the second and third most frequently identified by 37% and 29% of respondents respectively, while social services was identified by only 13% of respondents.[5] Employment, rather than social service provision, is therefore the most consistent predictor across both the violence and dispute questions.

When resolving disputes before they escalate into violence, programmes often focus on mobilizing and training 'Community Representatives', established or emerging civil society, as well as religious and/or youth leaders to act as conflict mediators, without also linking these actors to municipal conflict resolution mechanisms. In this category, the findings also show that programming is not allocating resources towards the most impactful activities. Specifically, municipalities are overall the most effective inter-community dispute resolution actors based on the success rate, ability of the population to access them, and their capacities to utilize a mixture of mediation and legal responses.

Alongside expanding understanding of why and when verbal disputes escalate into violence, the research also focuses on social cohesion,[6] describing how social service provision and interactions support this goal. Crucially, findings show that it is not only social interactions, but also economic interactions, if facilitated in a mutually financially beneficial and socially positive manner, that can contribute to building social cohesion, an important finding for livelihoods programmes with a stability goal.

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2   The number is likely to be higher accounting for the unease that respondents, especially Syrians, often feel at this question.

3   31.23% of respondents stated that verbal disputes escalated into physical violence 40% of the time (or more frequently). The results for the percentage of verbal disputes that became violent were: 3.73% Always (90%+), 11% Usually (60-90%), 16.5% Sometimes (40-60%), 14.2% Occasionally (20-40%), 54.49% rarely (0-20%). 0.08% refused to answer.

4   'When leaders approve' was the fourth most common response with 36% of respondents.

5   'Personal' disputes are the most common with 47.11%.

6   Mercy Corps defines social cohesion as a state of relationships within a community based on the behaviors, attitudes, levels of trust, and collaboration that promote and foster commitment to and cooperation among the overall community. The mechanism through which social cohesion operates is identification, that is, group members' sense of solidarity within the broader community.

Context

The Governance and Community Action Programme (GCAP), funded by the European Commission, is the third iteration of Mercy Corps' programming in the domain of governance, social cohesion and social stability, and benefits from previous research that tested the underlying hypotheses orienting programming in this sector. Previous Mercy Corps research found that social interactions were more clearly correlated with improved inter-community perceptions and building social cohesion, compared to social service provision which had mixed results.[7] Specifically, while Syrian satisfaction with social services is correlated with notable increases in positive perceptions of Lebanese, Lebanese satisfaction with social services is correlated with only minor increases in positive perceptions of Syrians. In order to respond to this finding, GCAP was designed to include a focus on community engagement events that facilitate such social interactions. At the start of the GCAP program, Mercy Corps integrated additional research into the baseline for the program to further deepen our understanding of community dynamics and how these can impact the theories of change which underpin the program activities, in order to increase the effectiveness of programming in this sector.

Summary of the programme

GCAP aims to empower vulnerable municipalities and communities to mitigate conflict caused by resource tensions exacerbated by the Syrian refugee crisis. GCAP targets municipalities in the region of Miniyeh-Dannieh in North Lebanon as it is one of the most deprived localities, with a high ratio of Syrian refugees per Lebanese residents.[8] Three of the six target municipalities have ratios over the national average of 33% Syrians, with Aassoun being the highest where half of the population is Syrian. Miniyeh-Dannieh is also important to target from a peacebuilding perspective: the periodic Sunni-Alawi fighting in Tripoli frequently spills over into Miniyeh-Dannieh, with its mountains providing a safe haven for insurgents, giving the area a reputation for violence and terrorism across Lebanon.

The GCAP programme has two broad components. The first addresses inter-communal tensions and focuses on de-escalating disputes in order to avoid violence. GCAP's approach is to work with Lebanese and Syrian Community Representatives[9] who: i) identify and design social

GCAP areas of intervention- NORTH LEBANON

- KFARHABOU
- BAKHOUN
- IZAL
- ASSOUN
- SIR ED DONNIYE
- BEQAA SAFRIN

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7   Mercy Corps, 2015, *Social Cohesion and Governance Programming in Lebanon – Testing Theories of Change and Impact Evaluation,* at http://www.urban-response.org/resource/21234.

8   UNHCR, 2015, http://reliefweb.int/map/lebanon/most-vulnerable-localities-lebanon-march-2015.

9   Community Representatives are identified through a process of community nominations followed by interviews by Peace Labs and Mercy Corps. We ensure equal representation between Lebanese/Syrian and women/men, and a representative sample of socio-economic statuses.

service infrastructure projects together with municipalities; ii) design and implement broad community engagement events; and iii) utilize their mediation skills (acquired through trainings) to de-escalate disputes. Concurrently, the second component of GCAP focuses on strengthening the capacity of six target municipalities and the Union of Municipalities so that they are better able to identify and respond to local needs. As such, in order to increase the capacity of municipalities and the Union of Municipalities in addressing the most pressing needs of Lebanese and Syrian populations, and in playing an effective role in building social cohesion between them, the programme works to strengthen their financial and operational capacity, and improve coordination and information sharing processes across local government.

Objectives of the research

The research focused on testing the correlational relationships and underlying assumptions behind the design of the programme, as represented by the Theories of Change (ToCs).

Theory of Change 1: *If municipalities and communities can be responsive to the needs of Lebanese and Syrian refugees by involving them in decision-making processes, then individuals will be less likely to allow grievances over marginalization to escalate into violence.* Research questions related to this ToC aimed to understand how municipal responsiveness and/or involvement in community and municipal decision-making processes impacts social cohesion; the relationship between perceptions of municipal responsiveness and involvement in municipal decision making; and whether social capital[10] has any correlation with propensity to use violence.[11]

Theory of Change 2: *If Lebanese and Syrians have better access to, and satisfaction with, local government social services, then their grievances over resource competition will decrease.* This research aimed to explore a more nuanced understanding of social service provision by analyzing whether there is any correlation between social service access and the types of disputes Lebanese and Syrians engage in, or social service access and propensity to use violence. These questions would thereby help to clarify a central theme of the research of when do tensions manifest as disputes, and disputes escalate into violence.

Theory of Change 3: *If we provide respected Lebanese government, host community and Syrian refugee representatives with skills and information to collectively understand, discuss, plan and deliver solutions to sources of instability between their communities, then tensions between groups will decrease.* The key underlying question behind this ToC is that despite high levels of tensions, host/refugee violence based on economic grievances is uncommon in Lebanon[12] and virtually never escalates geographically.[13] It is therefore important to understand the local capacities and dynamics that are stopping people from resorting to violence, and how these capacities are utilized, for example, whether your success in having actors resolve your disputes depends on your level of social capital. We therefore analyzed which actors are most successful in resolving disputes; whether accessing certain actors is related to having more social capital than others; and which actors' involvement in conflict management is related to higher levels of social cohesion.[14]

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10 Mercy Corps defines social capital as the networks, values, norms, connections and relationships people have that provide for and allow access to services and resources.

11 For further information on the relationship between governance and conflict, please see DFID, 2011, *The Politics of Poverty: Elites, Citizens and States. Findings from ten years of DFID-funded research on Governance and Fragile States*; Anten, Louise, 2009, *Strengthening Governance in Post-Conflict Fragile States,* Netherlands Institute of International Relations; Mercy Corps, 2015, *Investing in Iraq's Peace: How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism.*

12 Of the conflicts mapped by Lebanon Support, found at http://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/map, only a small portion is economic in nature.

13 The few cases of violence between Lebanese and Syrians of a significant magnitude – in terms of threatening stability – were triggered by socio-political issues: the supposed rape of a mentally-disabled man in December 2013, and the rumored support of Syrians for Sunni Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) crossing into Lebanon and attacking the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) since August 2014.

14 We use levels of trust and inter-community perceptions as proxy indicators for social cohesion.

Theory of Change 4: *If Lebanese and Syrians increase the frequency and depth of their social interactions, then perceptions and trust of the other group will improve.* To expand our understanding of how social interactions build social cohesion, we tested whether social interactions that imply higher levels of trust (i.e. children playing together, eating together) are correlated with higher levels of social cohesion. Secondly, we sought to better understand economic interactions and the circumstances that they can have a positive or negative impact on social cohesion, likewise based on previous data that showed that types of economic interactions that are in less regulated sectors, for example Lebanese hiring Syrians for daily labor, correlate with decreased levels of social cohesion – we hypothesize this is because these sectors are more prone to exploitation.[15]

Outline of the document

This document focuses on the propensity to use violence and when violence occurs (understanding that not all tensions manifest as disputes, and not all disputes escalate into violence) as that is the distinguishing characteristic from comparable research initiatives and where its added-value lies in expanding understanding of Social Stability programming. The first part of the research therefore explores the statistically significant correlations between propensity to use violence and employment status, view of household economic situation, governance, education, and age. As inter-communal violence between Lebanese and Syrians is rare (see footnotes 12 and 13), the next section assesses the drivers of disputes, defined as non-violent conflicts, to better understand the differences in the drivers of non-violent versus violent conflict, and thereby ascertain whether a threshold exists that explains why and when verbal disputes escalate into violence. The Dispute Resolution section then follows with an analysis of which actors are most effective in peacefully resolving inter-communal disputes in order to likewise inform where the investment of programmatic resources are most impactful. The penultimate section discusses data on social and economic interactions, and last are the recommendations to improve Social Stability programming.

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15   Mercy Corps, 2015, Social Cohesion and Governance Programming in Lebanon – Testing Theories of Change and Impact Evaluation, at http://www.urban-response.org/resource/21234.
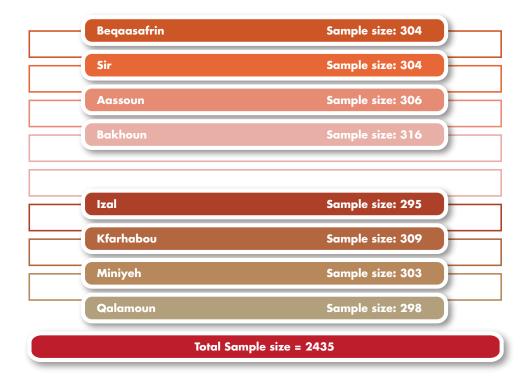
Methodology

Sampling and data collection

The following formula was used to calculate the sample size:

$$n = \frac{Z^2(P \text{x} (1-P)) \text{x} r}{\epsilon^2}$$

- n = sample size;
- z = score of confidence level, set at 1.96 to correspond to 95% confidence;
- p = proportion of the population exhibiting the characteristic of interest, set at 10%;
- r = non-response rate, set at 10%;
- ε = margin of error, set at 5%.

Using this formula, the programme selected the following sample sizes in the eight locations – six treatment, and two control – and the data collection occurred in April and May 2016 by local enumerators who were identified, trained, and supervised by programme staff. The respondents were divided equally between Lebanese and Syrian, and women and men, per location, with a total of 2,437.[16]

Analysis

Beqaasafrin	Sample size: 304
Sir	Sample size: 304
Aassoun	Sample size: 306
Bakhoun	Sample size: 316

Izal	Sample size: 295
Kfarhabou	Sample size: 309
Miniyeh	Sample size: 303
Qalamoun	Sample size: 298

Total Sample size = 2435

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16   Two respondents omitted their location, and three refused to give their nationality, hence the small mismatch between the total sample size of 2,437, the sampling plan, and the number of Lebanese and Syrian respondents.

This is an exploratory, cross-sectional analysis using baseline survey data collected from 1,226 Lebanese and 1,208 Syrian respondents across eight target municipalities, two of which are control groups to be used at the endline for the impact evaluation. The control locations were selected based on comparable ratio of host to refugee community members, socio-economic development, levels of tensions, disputes over access to resources, and the levels of community-based conflict management mechanisms.[17] The inclusion of control groups is vital to attributing changes in the results to the programme, rather than external variables. We use p-values to determine statistical significance, and all data reported in this document is p<0.1 or lower. The analysis of the baseline data used two types of analysis, depending upon the type of question.

Cross-tabulations are used to identify frequency of certain responses, or to compare characteristics between different responses. For example, in identifying which conflict management actors are most commonly used or are most successful, we provide a cross-tabulation of each actor type against the frequency they were chosen and the average success rate of that type. In all cases, the cross-tabulation is separated between Lebanese and Syrian respondents. Cross-tabulations demonstrate the direct relationship between two variables, such as actor type and success. They do not indicate a causal relationship, and the perceived relationship between the two may actually be due to other factors. For example, female respondents may have higher average resolution success levels, and choose a particular type of conflict management actor (e.g. "local government"). In this case, the high success rate of municipal government as a conflict management actor might really stem from women's overall higher success rate. However, this true relationship would be lost in a cross-tabulation of actor type against success rate.

Multi-variate cross-sectional regressions use Ordinary-Least Squares regressions to examine the relationship between two variables of interest, while controlling for confounding factors. Using the example above, a regression allows us to compare success rate and conflict management actor, for each gender category. Similarly, we can control for age, education, and job category. However, since these regressions are purely cross-sectional, they do not prove causation. There may remain unobservable variables not included in our regressions which drive the relationship between explanatory and outcome variables.

Challenges

Three key risks were mitigated against for the research: two around the design and articulation of the questions on violence to respondents, and the third during implementation of the survey.

Questions on the use of violence – a sensitive topic anywhere, even more so in Lebanon's delicate socio-political climate – presented a special problem as people often shy away from discussing their deeper convictions. Part of the problem with asking such questions are that the phrasing can put the mantle of aggressor onto the respondent, who therefore answers in the negative. To address this concern, questions were articulated in a morally more palatable way, for example, using violence to defend one's family from physical abuse, or using violence against an unfair law or regime, thereby placing the respondent in an ethically more favorable position. Through these adaptations, the programme secured 1,189 positive responses on the use of violence, representing 70.15% of Lebanese respondents,[18] which allows for a number of insights into the drivers of inter-communal violence.

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17   Identified through Lebanon Support (http://www.lebanon-support.org/) databases, as well as Key Informant Interviews with stakeholders including security forces.

18   27.24% of Syrians replied (positively) to these questions – this discrepancy was fully expected as across all questions, from inter-community perceptions to satisfaction with social services, Syrians responded more positively.

Considerations on the intention/target of questions on tensions and violence are key in the design of questions in all social cohesion surveys – to be precise about whom the respondent may have tensions or use violence against – otherwise the results will not reflect reality. Considering the multitude of Lebanon's multi-pronged lines of division between communities, all questions around social and economic interactions, perceptions and trust, number and source of disputes, were precisely phrased as between Lebanese and Syrians. After consultations, local stakeholders requested that questions on violence not be phrased this way, and instead the preceding questions which clearly specify that we are looking at Lebanese-Syrian interactions be placed before those on violence, so respondents were already using inter-communal Lebanese-Syrian dynamics as their frame of reference, without the need for the questions to be phrased precisely so. For this reason, there is an inherent assumption that data on propensity to use violence is between Lebanese and Syrians.

Lastly, during the administration of the baseline survey, the reticence of Syrian respondents to answer questions openly was a challenge. This is a longstanding issue in Lebanon, and is comparable to other refugee and internally displaced contexts; therefore, taking into consideration social power dynamics, alongside gender norms, the programme team was careful to match enumerators and respondents by nationality and sex. This ensured that, insofar as possible, people felt comfortable during the interview and not under pressure from authority figures or restricted by cultural norms, such as the inappropriateness of women being interviewed by men.

Use of Violence

Livelihoods, not social services

An important finding is the lack of any statistically significant relationship between social services access and propensity to use violence. This is surprising as the current foundational rationale of the Social Stability sector is that tensions between Lebanese and Syrians are over social service access, as is identified by numerous research initiatives.[19] The logical progression of this rationale is that increased tensions will lead to violence; therefore, by providing social services, tensions will be reduced and inter-communal violence will be averted. In contrast, this study finds that social services are not sufficiently important for people to use violence to address any perceived unfairness in access.

The strongest predictor of inter-communal violence on the part of Lebanese[20] is employment status. Specifically, having full-time employment is correlated with being the least likely to use violence, and having part-time or seasonal employment is correlated with being less likely to use violence, compared to people who are unemployed or rely on assistance from third parties to meet their daily needs. The numbers attributed are 8.5-8.9% and 8.1% decrease in propensity to use violence (on a 1-5 Likert scale) for full-time and part-time employment respectively. It is interesting to note that having full-time, compared to part-time employment, is correlated with only a small decrease in the correlation. Therefore, provided a basic level of livelihoods is maintained through either full-time or part-time employment, escalation to violence should be less likely to occur.

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19   Examples of publications include: Mercy Corps, 2013, *Things Fall Apart; Search for Common Ground, 2014, Dialogue and Local Response Mechanisms to Conflict Between Host Communities and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon;* and International Alert, 2015, *Perceptions and Prescriptions: How Lebanese People View Their Security.*

20   We only have statistically significant correlations for livelihoods from Lebanese, not Syrians.

While current financial situation was not correlated with decreased propensity to use violence, there was a relationship for Lebanese respondents who believe their financial situation will improve over the following twelve months having a statistically significant correlation with a lower propensity to use violence.[21] This data reinforces the finding that livelihoods and money is the strongest predictor for violence in Lebanon. One explanation for the overlap between livelihoods and expected future financial situation is that steadily employed and/or wealthier individuals have more to lose from violence – this corresponds to existing theories on employment interventions and peacebuilding.[22]

The conclusions drawn above are not to say that social services are unimportant, or should be abandoned in favor of focusing exclusively on livelihoods. Social service access is good in its own right and the data did find statistically significant correlation between Lebanese social service satisfaction and improved social cohesion, though unlike previous research which found improvements in perceptions are mainly one-sided of Lebanese by Syrians, GCAP had no statistically significant correlation for Syrians so no comparison can be made. One potential explanation for the discrepancies in the findings on the impact of social service provision on social cohesion outcomes between these studies is that it is mistaken to hypothesize about the Lebanese as a monolithic unit when working to improve social cohesion. Mercy Corps' previous research was in Miryata, Qalamoun, Hermel, and Qasr, and the latter two, Shia towns under 10km from the border, where people experienced the fighting between Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)/Hizballah and Syrian Armed Opposition Groups (AOG) on a daily basis in 2014-5, would have a very different affinity between Lebanese and Syrians compared to Dannieh, which would impact how people respond to programme inputs. The conclusion Mercy Corps draws from the discrepancies in findings is that social services access impact on social cohesion may depend on the area, and at a minimum is important for ensuring that Lebanese perceptions of Syrians do not degrade further; nevertheless, livelihoods should be a more prominent focus of social cohesion programming due to its correlation with reduced propensity to use violence. A key part of this, how to utilize the resulting economic interactions from livelihoods activities to improve inter-community perceptions, is discussed further below.

Governance

Syrian responses to questions on violence were significantly fewer, as detailed above in the Challenges section; however, there was one statistically significant outcome – Syrians feeling that the municipality is active is correlated with being less likely to use violence against Lebanese. For Lebanese, none of the governance questions on municipal responsiveness or inclusion in decision-making processes were correlated with propensity to use violence. This builds on the findings from Mercy Corps' previous impact evaluation which showed that governance[23] outcomes are primarily one sided, improving Syrian perceptions of Lebanese, but not vice versa. This is logical because Syrians do not play a part in the interactions between government and its constituents, so governance outcomes do not impact Lebanese perceptions of Syrians.
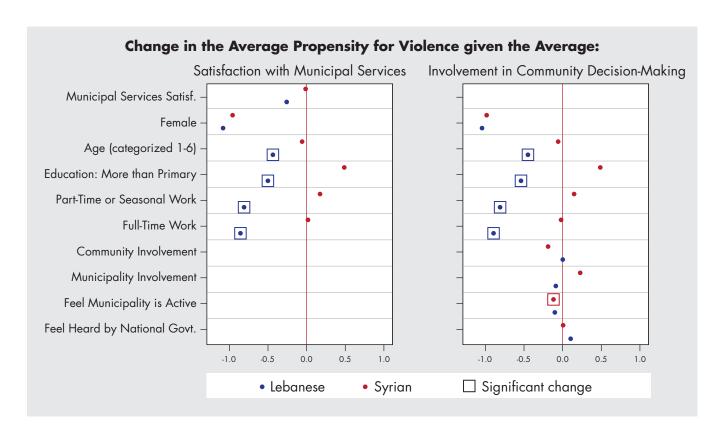
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21   Economic status was measured by how respondents classified their current financial situation, from very bad to very good, as well as what they thought their economic status would be in 12 months' time (from very bad to very good).

22   World Bank, UNDP, ILO, 2016, Employment Interventions and Peace.

23   We use involvement in municipal decision-making processes, perceptions of municipal responsiveness, and perceptions of municipal activeness as proxy indicators for governance.

Demographics

Among Lebanese, age and education are consistently related to a decreased propensity to use violence across multiple analyses. Specifically, older respondents displayed lower propensity for violence, with an increase in each age category[24] related to a 4.3-4.5% decrease of support for violence. Respondents who were educated beyond primary school also displayed a lower propensity for violence, between 5% and 5.4% less, relative to those who did not receive an education past primary. These intergenerational and class divides are important to consider when implementing dispute resolution programming to ensure mediators are representative and that conflict resolution programming specifically addresses younger populations; otherwise the younger and/or less educated can become alienated from non-violence, perceiving it as an unrealistic and impractical approach – outlined further in the Recommendations section below.

Change in the Average Propensity for Violence given the Average:

Satisfaction with Municipal Services — Involvement in Community Decision-Making

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24   The majority of age categories were four years, except for 45-59, and 60+, representing 26.46% of respondents; therefore, correlations with age provide a range of statistically significant data.

Dispute Resolution

Drivers of disputes

This section assesses the drivers of disputes to better understand the differences in the drivers of non-violent versus violent conflict, and thereby ascertain whether a threshold exists that explains why and when verbal disputes escalates into violence. The survey analyzed seven different drivers of disputes: money, employment, housing, personal/family issues, social services, political, and religious. The questions that this analysis was based on focus on reporting of incidences of disputes in communities, as well as disputes in which the respondent has been involved directly, and how often these verbal disputes escalated into physical violence, as well as who was involved in the disputes. The findings show that disputes vary greatly depending on both external circumstances that programmes can address, such as social service provision, and the demographic profile of the respondent. Similarly to the data on violence, there are significantly more responses from Lebanese.

Social services: For Lebanese respondents, satisfaction with social services (on a 1-5 Likert scale) is correlated with a 34% decrease in the likelihood of having disputes over money, a 44% decrease in the likelihood of having disputes over employment, and a 38% decrease in the likelihood of having disputes over housing;

Employment: For both Lebanese and Syrian respondents, being in part-time or seasonal employment is correlated with a 34% less likely to have disputes over money, and for Lebanese part-time or seasonal employment also correlates with being 34% less likely to have housing disputes;

Sex: Lebanese women are 67% less likely to engage in disputes over services, and 79% less likely to engage in political disputes compared to their male counterparts;

Age: For Lebanese, each increase in age category[25] was associated with a 17% increase in engaging in housing disputes; while for Syrians older respondents were less likely to have disputes over employment and politics (a 16% and 33% decrease for every increase in age category respectively);

Education: For Lebanese respondents, those who were educated beyond primary school were 60% more likely to engage in a dispute over money and 63% more likely to engage in a dispute over services; while Syrians who were educated beyond primary school also were 46% more likely to engage in a dispute over money.

The findings for higher ages and education levels correlating with increased rates of disputes are the most surprising because, for the questions on violence, these two demographic variables were consistent predictors of lower propensity to use violence. As noted above, one key difference between the GCAP survey and that of comparable programmes and research initiatives is the effort to disaggregate between tensions, disputes, and violence, understanding that not all tensions manifest as disputes, and not all disputes escalate into violence. There are various, potentially overlapping, hypotheses to explain the data. Older and better educated people could potentially be more aware of their circumstances compared to others, their relative deprivation, and are therefore more likely to speak out against this perceived injustice, which leads them into disputes with others. However, they do not allow said disputes to escalate into violence, possibly due to that fact that older and better educated people may have better analytical and communication skills, coupled with life experience, and are therefore able to find non-violent resolutions to their disputes. The data is insufficient to definitively answer why these correlations exists.

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25   Please see footnote above.

Regarding social services, the data shows that, for Lebanese respondents, satisfaction with social services is correlated with less incidences of disputes over three main drivers of conflict: money, employment, and housing; however, the fact that these findings are not reflected in the questions on violence reinforces the conclusion that while social services access issues are causing tensions between Lebanese and Syrians, and these tensions do sometimes manifest in disputes, people do not allow social services disputes to escalate into violence. On the other hand, employment is the more consistent predictor across both the violence and disputes questions.

Municipalities in dispute resolution

To understand dispute resolution mechanisms, and thereby identify which actor(s) are the most effective in peacefully resolving disputes before they escalate into violence, the research enquired about the drivers of intra- and inter-community disputes, which actor(s) respondents turn to depending on the dispute driver and dispute type, the type of intervention that is requested, and how often the intervention is successful in resolving the dispute. The drivers of disputes are the same seven outlined above, and the actors listed are: community/family leaders, religious leaders, relatives/friends, political party officials, municipality, police, or army. The following analysis compares these actors to the default option of respondents resolving disputes themselves and focuses on inter-community disputes as these represent the threats to social cohesion that the programme is working to alleviate.

Municipalities are the most effective dispute resolution actor considering three key factors:

i)   Success in resolving disputes;

ii) Percentage of the population of each community who are able to utilize the actor;

iii) Response capacity to use a range of mediation, legal, or punitive action depending on the circumstance.

The second and third factors are especially important as some actors have a high rate of success but are utilized by a minute percentage of respondents or can only use one or two response capacities. For example, for Lebanese, political party officials are the most effective actor in resolving inter-community disputes, scoring 4.5/5 in terms of success rate; however, only 0.7% of respondents have the social capital necessary to call upon them if they have a dispute. For Syrians, the army scores 4.6/5 in terms of success rate; however, only 7.3% of respondents stated that the army has the capacity to mediate, which is vital considering the low intensity and non-violent nature of the majority of disputes. In comparison, municipalities are effective in resolving disputes for both communities – ranked second and third most successful for Syrians and Lebanese respectively – utilized frequently by both communities, and while their first reaction is the 'soft' approach to mediate disputes (52% of the time when called upon by Lebanese), they also have 'hard' capacities at their disposal, such as legal responses (38.5%) and punitive action (9.5%).

Successfully utilizing the municipality for dispute resolution does correlate with feeling more involved in municipal decision-making, with an additional 9.4% for Syrians. This suggests that it is naturally those with higher levels of social capital who can call upon assistance external to a dispute to help resolve it; therefore, programming seeking to enhance the role of municipalities in dispute resolution should be in parallel with initiatives expanding community involvement in municipal processes so people possess the necessary relationships – outlined further in the recommendations section below.

The data has two findings on mediation supporting the recommendations for municipal involvement as mediation is their primary capacity. Syrians who request mediation from third parties to resolve disputes correlating with feeling higher levels of social cohesion, scoring 8.7% more; in contrast, Syrians who turn to their relatives/friends and have lower success rates in resolving conflicts, are correlated with feeling lower levels of social cohesion, scoring 8.7% lower. As the data shows correlations and not causation, the most likely explanation is that Syrians who have the relationships necessary to utilize mediation are also likely to have more inter-community contact, which would correspond to higher levels of social cohesion; in contrast to Syrians who only have their relatives/friends to rely on will have lower levels of inter-community contact, and thereby lower levels of social cohesion.

Social and Economic Interactions

Social – depth and frequency matters

Mercy Corps' previous impact evaluation[26] found that social interactions are the most closely related to improving inter-community perceptions and building social cohesion, and the GCAP survey finds statistically significant data for both Lebanese and Syrians to re-affirm this. Furthermore, the data confirms the hypothesis that social interactions, which imply higher levels of trust, are correlated with higher levels of social cohesion. For Syrians, participating in informal discussions is correlated with 1.7% increase while participating in social events is more than double with 3.6% increase, representing a higher social cohesion impact. Whereas for Lebanese, out of the options provided, only increased frequency of shared meals was correlated with higher levels of social cohesion.

Economic – can be positive or negative

The data shows that economic interactions can improve social cohesion for both communities under conditions that are mutually financially beneficial and socially positive.[27] Among Lebanese, respondents who reported more positive economic interactions with Syrians also reported higher levels of social cohesion, measured by positive perceptions and trust of the other group (an additional 2.9% for each positive interaction per month). Among Syrians, there was a relationship between each additionally positive economic interaction per month and social cohesion, yielding a 1.5% increase. However, crucially when the economic interactions were not socially positive, they were negatively related to social cohesion, with a decrease of 0.6%. It is interesting to note that positive economic interactions have a significantly greater impact on social cohesion than adverse interactions. These are important findings for livelihoods programming, demonstrating the importance of concentrating on increasing the frequency of positive economic interactions between Syrians and Lebanese as a means of improving social cohesion. In 2017, Mercy Corps will utilize new programme household surveys to develop our understanding of economic interactions and social cohesion, attempting to understand which forms of economic interactions contribute to different aspects of positive perceptions and trust by further disaggregating economic interactions.

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26   Mercy Corps, 2015, *Social Cohesion and Governance Programming in Lebanon – Testing Theories of Change and Impact Evaluation,* at http://www.urban-response.org/resource/21234

27   Economic interactions were measured by a set of questions looking at how respondents felt (from very bad to very good) on a range of economic interactions such as borrowing money or an item renting accommodation, employment, and trading or other financial exchanges with the other community.

Recommendations

❯ Increase livelihoods opportunities to reduce propensity for violence

The Syrian refugee crisis is causing wages to fall and working conditions to deteriorate due to the sheer volume of competition for employment. This can be an advantage for business owners, for whom the cost of labour has decreased and demand for goods/services could have increased due to the rise in population in the area. However, for Lebanese who are already faced with high unemployment rates, the perception of competition for available jobs with a cheaper labour force from Syria is likely to increase incidences of use of violence to express their frustrations and attempt to redress their current economic situation. Based on the findings of this study, it is more likely to be the younger, less educated Lebanese population who take recourse to violence. This risk factor of recourse to violence over economic drivers is lower for Syrians as the monopoly on the use of violence is firmly with the Lebanese state, who would naturally side with the Lebanese disputant if violence occurs.

Therefore, social stability and livelihoods programming aiming to reduce and prevent conflict should look to provide income generation and employment opportunities for non-, semi-skilled and skilled workers, ensuring that Lebanese are also targeted by these interventions. In the short term, this could include Labour Intensive Programming, aiming to provide quick income generation opportunities for groups of extremely vulnerable Lebanese and Syrians. An example of this is the work done by Mercy Corps' 'Reinforcing and Empowering Communities to Overcome the Effects of the Syrian Refuge Crisis (RECOVER)' program, funded by the RDPP, which provides short term economic opportunities to both non/semi-skilled labor Lebanese and Syrians to work in construction, while improving municipal services and infrastructure to the communities.

In the medium to long-term, programs should facilitate demand side (job creation through targeted private sector development) and supply side (training based on local needs) initiatives, aiming to create jobs for semi and skilled labourers and train non-skilled labourers so that they are able to access these jobs. Job creation initiatives should assist in the strengthening and expansion of businesses with high potential for creating employment. Mercy Corps implements two such multi-pronged initiatives with the support from the UK under the Improved Networks, Training and Jobs (INTAJ) programme, and from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Fostering Resilience by Strengthening Abilities (FORSA) which: i) provide further skills training so people can advance to specialized roles and thereby improve their livelihoods; ii) provide funds and technical support to businesses so they can create new jobs; and iii) invest in underdeveloped sectors (such as solid waste management and recycling, construction, agro-food, renewable energy and ecotourism value chains) to promote job creation.

❯ Promote public information campaigns on support provided to host communities

Social stability and livelihoods programs should look to communicate widely in the communities they serve on how they are addressing livelihoods concerns and promoting livelihood opportunities, as well as improving public services, particularly when these are focused on providing opportunities or resources for Lebanese, in order to counter the widespread perceptions that aid and development initiatives are unfairly targeting refugee populations to the detriment of Lebanese, as well as to address the concerns that employment that would otherwise be for Lebanese are being taken by Syrians.

❯ Facilitate positive interactions between host communities and refugees

Facilitating positive interactions is crucial in reducing conflict between Lebanese and Syrians. Such interactions will produce positive outcomes, both in projects that are working to explicitly build and strengthen social cohesion, and in projects that are focusing on livelihood and economic development.

Social cohesion interventions should seek to gradually escalate the intensity and meaningfulness of social interactions, utilizing community, socio-cultural, or religious events as connectors to deepen relationships beyond collaborating within programme activities. Well-designed social interactions have proven to be successful in increasing empathy between individuals and communities, and in reinforcing a mutual perception that significant common grounds and room for cooperation exist between these communities.[28] Furthermore, such positive interactions, when coupled with empowering local community representatives in nonviolent communication techniques and conflict resolution principles, have shown remarkable potential to diffuse tensions and resolve conflicts in the communities.[29]

As for promotion of economic interactions, whether they are between Lebanese farmers and Syrian daily laborers, between shop owners and customers, or between landlords and renters, all interventions should ensure that such economic interactions that are facilitated in a positive manner, maintaining Do No Harm principles of inclusivity and transparency, as these will also contribute to building social cohesion.

❯ Expand community involvement in municipal decision-making

While the findings clearly show the effectiveness of municipalities in resolving disputes, the data also states that people utilize the municipality when they perceive themselves to be involved in its decision-making processes. Therefore, programming that bolsters the role of municipalities as mediators must be in tandem with activities that expand involvement in municipal decision-making processes for Lebanese, and this needs to include processes for municipal consultations with Syrians so that they likewise have access to the municipality, and thereby its mediation capacities.

❯ Bolster the role of municipalities as mediators

The effectiveness of municipalities in successfully resolving inter-community disputes for Lebanese and Syrians, alongside mediation being correlated to improved social cohesion, justify significantly higher levels of investment in municipal mediation capacity. Recognizing that 70% of municipalities are small, often with no full-time paid staff,[30] and that their role as mediators is on an informal ad-hoc basis through volunteers, there is scope for programming to both build the skills of these volunteers and expand their numbers. Mercy Corps' previous UK-funded programme in Miryata (Zgharta caza) in 2014-15 simultaneously trained municipality staff and volunteers in mediation, and mobilized and trained a cohort of 'Community Representatives'. As part of the exit strategy, the programme led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the municipality and the 'Community Representatives' that sought to utilize these 'Community Representatives' to supplement the municipality's dispute resolution mechanism. The 'Community Representatives' involvement is a win-win strategy. While the municipality benefits by having a greater pool of mediators, 'Community Representatives' gain the legitimacy of acting in coordination with the municipality. In the case of Syrian-Lebanese relationships, it is recommended to include both Lebanese and Syrian community representatives in capacity building programmes related to conflict resolution. The process of training

28   Bruneau, E. G., and Saxe, R. (2012). The power of being heard: The benefits of 'perspective-giving' in the context of intergroup conflict. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48(4), 855-866

29   Burleson, M., Martin, M., and Lewis, R. Assessing the Impact of Nonviolent Communication – An Outcome Evaluation. The Center for Nonviolent Communication, https://www.cnvc.org/sites/cnvc.org/files/NVC_Research_Files/EVAL-2011-Final.pdf

30   Mercy Corps, 2014, *Engaging Municipalities in the Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*

mediators from both communities and deploying them as volunteer mediators in their own communities is more likely to be impactful and trusted by relevant stakeholders. Such areas of intervention will indirectly increase the positive perception of both Lebanese and Syrians in the ability of these community representatives, and effectively the municipality, to resolve disputes fairly and non-violently.

〉 Mobilize youth mediators

An intergenerational divide exists regarding perspectives on the use of violence, with older generations being less prone. It is therefore vital that mediators – whether they are a formal part of the municipality or more informal 'Community Representatives' – include youth. Otherwise, if mediators are all older individuals, there is a risk that this intergenerational divide is exacerbated with youth perceiving that their elders' attitudes of non-violence are unrepresentative, which will subsequently alienate them. Therefore, youth mediators can help to bridge this divide by demonstrating the effectiveness of mediation to their peers.

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