
Jordan: Local Capacities for Peace

Summary of a workshop on analysis and response to conflicts and tensions emerging from the Syrian refugee crisis

Workshop report: Amman, Jordan, June 2014

Introduction

The protracted crisis in Syria has seen a large influx of refugees into Jordan, with the number projected to increase to 800,000 by the end of 2014. They join about 29,000 Iraqis and some 4,000 refugees from Sudan, Somalia, and other countries, along with thousands more who remain unregistered with UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.¹ While many refugees begin their journey in one of Jordan's refugee camps, most leave soon after arrival; according to CARE International, around half a million Syrian refugees currently live in urban areas in Jordan.² The influx of Syrian refugees increasingly affects Jordanian host communities, who are battling with many of the same challenges as the refugees – increasing accommodation and living costs and over-stretched public services³ – often leading to tensions between both groups.

In order to fully understand the causes of tensions (beyond simply the presence of refugee populations), as well as adequately respond to them, requires in-depth context analysis. And any attempt to undertake effective context analysis, or to strengthen networks of early warning knowledge, must begin with local actors.

Yet often local actors are cut off from much of the analysis and the consequent responses, with negative outcomes for policy and programming. Through the Capacities for Peace project Saferworld and Conciliation Resources aim to bring out community-level insights and analysis on the effects of the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan, and provide a channel of communication between these actors and those working at the national and international level.

Workshop overview

As part of an EU Instrument for Stability-funded project, Saferworld and Conciliation Resources partnered with the Human Relief Foundation and the Identity Center to provide a space for local community actors, specifically community-based organisations (CBOs) and local municipalities, to identify sources of, and responses to, tensions resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees in Jordan. This included training on the use of conflict analysis tools, as well as the undertaking of joint conflict analysis, in order to strengthen the capacities of local municipalities and CBOs to analyse strains and conflicts that emerge, and to work together collaboratively to identify solutions. The training concluded with a half-day workshop which brought together local actors, international NGOs, donors, and representatives from the government. It aimed to build on the analysis undertaken during the training and begin to develop solutions to address the needs of both Syrian refugees and their Jordanian hosts.

Emerging challenges

The breakdown of challenges facing local actors is based on two and a half days of discussion, debate and analysis by CBOs and local municipality representatives. Participants were trained to use various conflict analysis tools to examine issues they are facing on the ground, and to begin to look at strategies to address these issues.

From the analysis, a picture emerges of how the arrival of displaced Syrians has affected local communities. In some cases, many of the tensions that emerged result from existing challenges facing Jordanian communities, such as unemployment, service delivery shortages, poverty, and lack of

coordination between national and local government, which have worsened with the added stress of large numbers of refugees.

In other cases, existing conflicts, such as that between citizens of Ma'an and the Jordanian gendarmerie, have taken on new forms due to the Syria crisis, the growth of Salafi and Takfiri groups, and the harsh crackdowns by the gendarmerie in the name of counterterrorism. Those from these areas also identified the role of the media in perpetuating certain stereotypes about Ma'anis, which contributes to their marginalisation.

However, new issues are also emerging, particularly around the increased presence of international NGOs (INGOs) pursuing development projects without adequate consultation of local actors, thereby creating new tensions where they did not exist before.

The most recurring issues highlighted across all governorates (both existing and new) were:

Strain on resources and government services

"In Mafraq the population before the Syrian crisis was 70,000. Now it is at 130,000. This has created a huge strain on resources and one problem that is immediately visible is the issue of trash collection, which has gone from 80 to 200 tonnes."
Representative from Mafraq municipality

Since the arrival of Syrian refugees there is an increasing gap between what is required and what is available, which contributes to conflict between Syrians and Jordanian communities, and between municipalities and their constituencies. The strain on infrastructure has been felt in a number of ways: an increase in traffic, water shortages, less access to health and medicine, an increase in the price of rental accommodation, and the collapse of trash disposal services in many cities across the country. Environmental problems, specifically around trash collection delays, have sometimes led to violence, for example between street cleaners and the community, or between Syrians and Jordanians due to perceived cultural differences with how to deal with trash.

Tensions between Jordanians and Syrians over jobs

Many governorates prioritised the issue of unemployment when discussing growing tensions related to the Syrian refugee crisis. Unemployment has always been a problem, but the influx of Syrian refugees, many of whom are willing to work for less money, has put a strain on Jordanians looking for jobs, and driven down wages.

Community groups and local municipality representatives reported growing anger by Jordanians towards Syrians for taking jobs and pushing down wages. In turn, many Syrians feel they are treated unfairly by current labour laws, which do not provide them with enough protection or security.

There is a gender component to this issue: many community groups report that Jordanian women are being pushed out of the labour force as Syrians are willing to work flexible hours and for less money, causing major strain on households who rely on women's employment.

Tensions resulting from INGOs and conflict insensitive practices

There are growing tensions resulting from the presence and practices of INGOs in many governorates with high numbers of refugees. In some areas this has resulted in demonstrations and sit-ins protesting about the INGO presence. The main problems identified by municipalities and CBOs concern the lack of transparency in how projects are developed and needs assessed, as well as the lack of INGO communication with local actors. In Mafraq, for example, community representatives told of an INGO that built a park, which contributed to tensions between Syrians and Jordanians, as many in the community thought the park was only for Syrians and so Jordanians did not go and felt resentful at the segregation.

This contributes to a sense of unaccountability, and a perception by municipalities that INGOs are bypassing democratic governance structures and mechanisms at the local level.

The effect this has is two-fold. At the level of project implementation, local actors feel that the lack of engagement by INGOs contributes to unsustainable

programming that does not target the real needs of the community. Communities and municipalities question the choice of projects and assistance provided by INGOs and do not see them as sustainable. They see municipalities as key to the sustainability of projects, so need to be involved from the beginning in design and delivery.

The second effect is that the lack of accountability challenges existing governance mechanisms and contributes to tensions between communities and elected municipalities, who are often faced with the anger of communities who feel they have been excluded from INGO projects.

Existing governance challenges

Across the three issue areas identified above, it was recognised that pre-existing governance challenges exacerbated the impact of the population increases. The relationship between local and central government was identified as one particular area of concern. Nepotism, lack of communication, and corruption were also raised as concerns by local actors. Municipalities felt that if plans for greater decentralisation were to be implemented, they would have greater control over resources and therefore would be able to respond more effectively to emerging local issues.

“Conflict between central government ministries and local municipalities is a problem for effective response. For example, the municipality suggested buying vehicles for trash collection many months ago but the ministry has still not provided funds or approval on this decision.” Representative from Mafraq municipality

This further affects the relations and expectations between communities and municipalities. For many in the community, the role of municipalities is not clear, leading to conflict as there are often unrealistic expectations of what municipalities can and cannot do. Very little, if any, support and aid has been given to strengthen local institutional capacity, particularly municipality capacity in areas hosting large numbers of refugees.

Such governance challenges were also identified as affecting the way in which donors and INGOs operate.

“We are an elected council and yet we are the last to know about everything. We aren't included in needs assessments or decision-making around projects, and we don't have authority to implement without approval from central government. Many donors and INGOs go straight to ministries and surpass the municipalities, who get marginalised. If you're a female municipality representative like I am then the marginalisation is often double.” Representative of Zarqa municipality

Developing responses

At this stage some early responses were identified as to how particular conflict issues could be addressed. A major cross-cutting issue related to the need for clearer guidelines and better coordination by donors/INGOs and national government with local municipalities.

“Current labour policies and approaches to vocational training need to change, and community leaders need to support these changes to encourage a more productive Jordanian workforce and a stronger economy.” Employee from a CBO in Mafraq

In terms of housing, the rising cost of apartments is partly an issue of the exploitation of newly arrived refugees by landowners, resulting from unclear processes for renting accommodation. It was recognised that better information should be given to Syrians arriving in-country to ensure they are not exploited. Additionally, more focus should be placed on building resilience of the entire community, including investment in stronger infrastructure for both Jordanians and Syrians, rather than focusing the response on Syrian refugees.

It was also clear that local actors have themselves developed initiatives to address the issues, although there was concern that the broader impact of such initiatives and their sustainability was not guaranteed without international support.

On the second day the group was divided along governorates, providing a chance for local CBOs to work more closely with representatives of municipalities in their areas of operations, in order to deepen their analysis of the key issues emerging in their governorate. Following a brief discussion, each group was asked to identify 2-3 main conflicts in their governorate and develop an in-depth

analysis of these conflicts. The governorates identified the following issues as their top three priorities:

Amman:

- **Domestic violence**
- Economic inequality
- Conflict between citizens and government

Ma'an:

- **Conflict between citizens and darak (gendarmerie)**
- Conflict between street sellers and municipalities
- Conflict arising from faulty speed bumps in the road

Zarqa:

- **Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)**
- Awareness of citizens in taking care of their city
- Providing safe spaces for children

Mafraq:

- **Unemployment and tensions between Jordanians and Syrians over jobs**
- Conflict between INGOs and municipalities/communities
- Resource conflicts (particularly water scarcity and rising cost of rent)

Irbid:

- **Health problems (including accumulation of waste in the streets, shortage of medication and access to health, spread of diseases)**
- Unemployment and tensions between Jordanians and Syrians over jobs
- Early marriage and divorce

Karak:

- **Tensions between cement factory and communities**
- Election violence
- Tribal conflicts and university violence

After identifying the major conflicts, each governorate was asked to select one problem to analyse in greater depth. Participants used conflict trees in order to do this, copies of which are presented in the Annex.

On the third day, participants were joined by

international NGOs, donors, and representatives from the government. All stakeholders were divided into four main groups and began to identify solutions towards addressing the major conflicts at the community level.

Group 1: Unemployment and labour markets

The first group discussed the competition between Syrians and Jordanians for jobs. In the eyes of many Jordanians, Syrians are more skilled, more entrepreneurial and are willing to work for less. Both municipalities and CBO representatives believed that Jordanians have a lot to learn from their Syrian counterparts, and proposed more projects where Jordanians and Syrians can work together, particularly on agriculture and food production. Syrians can also support large production industries and infrastructure projects and therefore contribute to economic growth. In the long-term participants recognised that it does not make economic or humanitarian sense for Syrians to be barred from work, and more planning needs to be done to ensure Syrian labour contributes to economic growth and development in the country without threatening Jordanian labourers.

At the same time, more needs to be done to protect Jordanian workers, particularly in response to Syrian refugees working illegally for lesser pay, thereby driving down wages. Beyond immediate labour issues, Jordanian communities in the north who used to benefit from trade across the border have lost their livelihoods, and therefore need to be considered in policies and programming.

The group put forward a series of vision statements to address the emerging problems. These are outlined here.

Vision: Improving opportunities for vocational work and increase the competitiveness of, and opportunities for, the Jordanian workforce

Local Actions for Change

- Increased awareness among citizens of the value of vocational work.
- Better identification of where gaps exist in local labour markets.
- Promotion of more female-friendly work

environments.

- Promotion of community dialogue around tolerance between different groups.
 - Promotion of more projects that bring Jordanians and Syrians to work together on local development programmes.
-

National Actions for Change

- Increased wages, protection of workers and enforcement of a minimum wage rate for both Syrians and Jordanians.
 - Develop policies to support greater opportunities for women to work.
 - Joint projects with Syrians (particularly around occupational development so that Syrians and Jordanians can share lessons and support each other).
 - Tax incentives for entrepreneurship and small businesses.
 - Improved training that is aligned with gaps in the job market.
 - Development of natural resources and investment in infrastructure.
 - Allow work permits for Syrians to avoid driving down wages in illegal pay and to promote economic growth.
-

International Actions for Change

- Funding for joint projects between Jordanians and Syrians.
 - Support to reform training institutions, microfinance and business incentives.
-

Group 2: Tensions between INGOs and local communities

The main issue identified by group 2 on tensions between INGOs and local communities is around slow procedures and the lack of communication with municipalities by INGOs and donors. Municipalities have limited infrastructure and with the increased pressure on services, there is increasing conflict. In theory, municipalities should be able to communicate needs with government, which then coordinates with INGOs in the response. But municipalities are left out of the loop by both national government and INGOs. In terms of assessing needs, municipalities explained that they are not involved in needs assessments, even though they have existing data on much of the information

sought by INGOs. The perception of municipalities is that INGOs come in to the community, undertake their own needs assessment without proper consultation with local authorities, and then sometimes (but not always) return to implement a project of their choosing. The result is often unsustainable projects, and tensions when certain communities or neighbourhoods feel excluded from projects. These tensions are then felt in municipality offices where communities complain of favouritism. This is worsened by the centralisation of authority in ministries, meaning municipalities are often stuck at the local level with their hands tied, unable to implement projects without authorisation, and not seeing the funds trickling down to the local level in the way they think is most useful.

Additionally, some municipality representatives complained of the emergence of a 'humanitarian industry' that is facilitating corruption at local and national level. For example, in Mafraq the number of CBOs rose from 200 in 2011 to over 400 in 2014, as individuals sought to benefit from the refugee crisis. Clearer coordination mechanisms with local governance actors are needed in order to identify credible local partners and address underlying infrastructural and development challenges. While INGOs explained they coordinate with governors, it was explained that governors are often not as aware of issues at the local level, whereas municipalities—who are democratically elected and thus accountable to their constituents—are more aware of community needs and concerns.

On their side, INGOs expressed a desire to strengthen partnerships with municipalities but admitted that they have not prioritised this yet. INGOs explained that they each specialise in certain areas and so the needs assessments need to take that into account. Many agreed that a middle ground can be reached to better communicate with municipalities, while maintaining that priorities of each governorate are different so there is no one-size-fits-all solution. INGOs explained that, as outsiders, they often do not know the focal point in the municipalities—and that if this information was clearer they would be better able to communicate and coordinate. Both sides agreed that ensuring clear contact information and documents on each municipality's website would assist INGOs in terms of consultations.

Vision: Enhancing coordination, consultation and communication between INGOs and municipalities to assess needs, define priorities, and respond effectively to Syrian refugees and Jordanian communities

Local Actions for Change

- Coordinated needs assessment and response at local level, addressing underlying infrastructural and service delivery issues.
- Municipalities should update their websites with: (i) reports of needs assessments; (ii) list of credible local CBOs in their area; (iii) detailed contact information to identify INGO focal points within municipalities.
- Municipalities should strengthen communication channels with the wider Syrian and Jordanian communities in their area to allow for quick communication on needs.

National Actions for Change

- Amendment of municipality laws—improve procedures at the ministry to allow for faster municipality response and decentralisation.
- Improve transparency at national level to allow municipalities and CBOs to better monitor how and where money is being spent.

International Actions for Change

- INGOs need to consult with municipalities in needs assessment and response.
- Donors to stipulate better communication with local governance mechanisms.

Group 3: Domestic violence

Building on the analysis done during the previous day, the group identified some of the primary root causes of domestic violence in Jordan. The first root cause discussed was the existence of certain ideas around marriage, and the lack of knowledge of the rights and responsibilities associated with marriage. Community groups explained that this extends beyond the husband and wife to include the strong role often played by extended families. Additionally, prevailing gender norms and values in society continue to justify and facilitate domestic violence. Finally, unemployment and the broader economic situation were highlighted as root causes of domestic violence. As heads of household increasingly struggle to provide their families with

essential needs due to underemployment and rising prices, the stress often leads to an increase in incidents of household and domestic violence. Syrian women are particularly vulnerable to this as many are forced into entering into marriages out of financial or social vulnerability.

Vision: Promote a more positive culture around marriage in society

Local Actions for Change

- Awareness-raising sessions for people thinking about getting married as well as extended families.

National Actions for Change

- Curricula in schools and universities should include education about marriage and the rights and responsibilities of men and women in a marriage.
- The media should play a role in education, through radio, magazines, leaflets, etc.
- Promote national civil society networks to tackle this issue.
- Passing laws prohibiting early marriage.

International Actions for Change

- Support projects and trainings around gender issues vis-à-vis marriage.

Group 4: Service delivery

In order to tackle a large and complex topic such as 'service delivery', the group decided to focus on the problem of garbage removal and trash accumulation in order to generate more specific responses. As with most service delivery problems, these issues preceded the arrival of Syrian refugees but the problem was exacerbated as the population grew due to the displacement.

Many of the underlying causes raised were similar to those mentioned in other groups, particularly around the problem of coordination between local and central government, and the lack of accountability and communication on behalf of INGOs. In the eyes of local actors, resources available are currently not matching actual needs, and they are struggling to identify focal points within donors, INGOs and central government who can respond to these needs. It was recognised that there was a challenge

of information: municipalities and NGOs did not know what the process was for applying for loans/grants. This is compounded by the fact that donor money is given to national-level ministries so (a) local actors don't hear about them, (b) local actors are unable to access funds as there is no transparent system to ask for it/account for it from the ministries, and (c) it is the larger municipalities that get the money, if any.

Beyond this, participants also identified shortages in the local work force, particularly around training, which contribute to the inability to expand service delivery. Many communities also face shortages of equipment and are struggling with infrastructure and equipment that is old and needs replacement. Additionally, more needed to be done to raise awareness on hygiene habits where cultural differences were identified, and better policies were needed to categorise rubbish and recycling procedures.

Vision: Promote more effective service delivery to account for the increase in population size

Local Actions for Change

- Municipalities should support the formation of a local committee to engage communities in finding solutions to existing problems.
- Involvement of local municipalities in allocating development and humanitarian aid and assistance according to need.
- Implement measures to promote greater financial independence of municipalities.

National Actions for Change

- Operationalising decentralisation to ensure quicker response by municipalities, particularly given relationship between Ministry of Municipal Affairs and local municipalities.
 - Strengthen coordination between different ministries, such as the Ministries of: Municipal Affairs, Health, Labour and Water and Irrigation, to ensure delivery at local level is more cohesive and less chaotic.
-

International Actions for Change

- Donors should provide grants directly to municipalities in the form of aid mechanisms rather than direct financing.
 - Support vocational training to create a more qualified and diverse workforce.
 - Promote greater transparency by putting conditions on funding given to central government requiring consultation with local municipalities, as they are better placed to identify local level needs and are able to monitor how funds received at the national level are spent.
 - INGOs and donors need to provide better information to municipalities and local community groups on mechanisms to receive and apply for funding.
-

Feedback and next steps

"There is some optimism. Our organisation has established a health centre in Irbid. There are 12 clinics for 300-400 patients a day, accepting both Syrians and Jordanians. We've also created a community board with Jordanian tribal leaders and some Syrians in order to promote social cohesion. We do things like extend invitations to Jordanian parties and weddings to promote better relations." Employee from a CBO in Irbid.

There was a sense from participants that the workshop provided an opportunity for different stakeholders to meet each other and discuss challenges around coordination of response, but that this should not be a one-off. Given the strain Syrian refugees are putting on Jordan's economy and resources, more needs to be done to ensure that stakeholders at the local, national and international level regularly meet and share opinions on how to enhance the response, and promote greater accountability between donors, governments and local actors.

About Capacities for Peace

Capacities for Peace' is a global project undertaken by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources funded by the EU under the Instrument for Stability. The project involves working with local actors to enhance the effectiveness of local analysis, early warning and early action in 32 countries around the world.

This workshop forms part of the Syria-focused 'regional hub' that works to strengthen local capacities to respond to the influx of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. A similar workshop will be held in Beirut in September 2014 and in Istanbul in February 2015.

For further information, please contact:

- Saleem Haddad, Conflict Advisor, Saferworld, at shaddad@saferworld.org.uk
- Zahbia Yousuf, Peacebuilding Editor and Analyst, Conciliation Resources, at zyousuf@c-r.org



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this are the sole responsibility of Saferworld, Conciliation Resources, the Human Relief Foundation and Identity Center and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.



¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/5385de2c9.html>

² <http://www.care-international.org/news/press-releases/emergency-response/urban-syrian-refugees-struggle-to-make-ends-meet-in-jordan.aspx>

³ *Ibid.* 20% percent of the interviewed, the most vulnerable Jordanian families, said that they struggle to meet their food needs