SYRIAN VOICES PAPER

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS: CONNECTORS OR DIVIDERS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON?

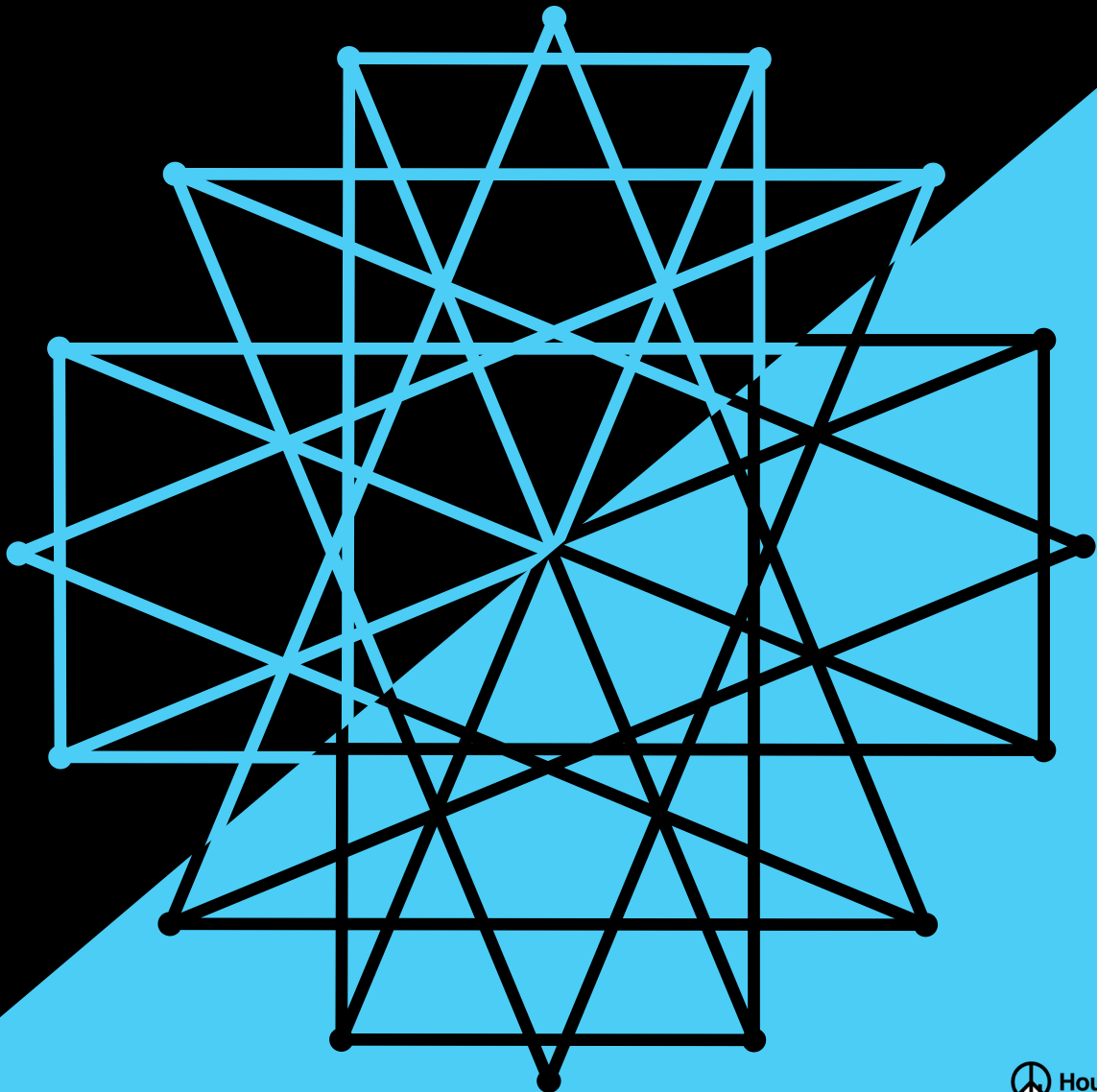House of Peace

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ABBREVIATIONS

- **SVP:** Syrian Voices paper
- **SPW**: Social Peace Building Workshop
- **CP:** Capacity for Peace
- **CW:** Capacity for War
- **HOPe**: House of Peace
- **NGO:** Non-governmental Organization
- **INGO:** International NGO
- **LNGO:** Local NGO
- **RT:** Round Table
- **UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

Syrian Voices paper is an action research paper based on narrative inquiries. The purpose of these papers is to raise Syrian voices, stories and perspectives on the subject matter of social peace, and to share them amongst concerned stakeholders and the humanitarian community, in order to advance best practices in the field of social peace building concerning the Syrian community. These papers are being provided by the House of Peace (HOPe) which is a project that aims to enhance social peace within Syrian society.

SUMMARY

HOPe provides Social Peace Building Workshops (SPWs) in Lebanon and Syria, to groups of local communities and humanitarian NGOs working with the Syrian Crisis. The SPWs provides intensive context, conflict and conflict sensitivity analyses on each group's community (and target community, in the case of NGO groups). Thus the nature of HOPe SPWs provides intense dialogue, stories and perceptions from participants about topics concerned with social peace and Syrian communities. Reoccurring themes were noticed and collected from the field. For this paper, the selected dialogues and stories shared by our participants were those on customs and traditions.

A majority of (SPW) participants believe the Syrian refugee community's social solidarity remains strong despite the crisis. However, many participants felt that adapting to Lebanese culture is causing changes in the customs and traditions of Syrian refugees. Some expressed dismay at these changes, fear their permanency, and believe they have been a source of intra-communal tension, whilst others embrace them. Participants also related changes to the difficulty of Syrians being able to obtain legal residency papers, so as to achieve a sustainable source of income, and to the lack of educational opportunities for Syrian refugees. In addition, many participants felt that Lebanese culture is more liberal which is causing some Syrian refugees to be more lenient with their traditional and customary practices. Many participants also expressed that although Lebanon and Syria are Arab communities, the prolonged presence of Syrian refugees and their cultural differences (i.e., social and celebratory practices), have been the cause of inter-communal tensions. While some participants have shared stories of how hospitable their host community has been to them, some Syrian participants felt they are a subject of discrimination, and feel powerless in Lebanon since there is no form of governing system that offers them security and fair protection. Finally, according to participants, NGO presence has played a role in both conflict and peace for refugee communities.

The findings in this report were presented as observations to Round Tables (RT) consisting of concerned stakeholders, experts, and representatives of humanitarian LNGOs and INGOs, under the title of, Customs and Traditions: Connectors and Dividers for Syrian Refugees? The recommendations of this paper are from RT attendees.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS:
CONNECTORS OR DIVIDERS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON?

SYRIAN VOICES PAPER

CONTEXT:
A REVIEW OF THE DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT INVOLVED IN SYRIAN SOCIETY

As a result of the Syrian war many dimensions of tension have evolved within the Syrian community:

a- Intra-communal tensions:
   Conflict within the Syrian community — largely due to differences of cultural, political and religious views.

b- Inter-communal tensions:
   1. Horizontal tension: Conflict between Syrians and their host communities (i.e., Lebanon) which is mainly due to issues of discrimination and competition for resources.
   2. Vertical tension: Tensions between Syrians and their host government — predominantly the result of a lack of protection and security offered to Syrian refugees.

INTRA-COMMUNAL TENSIONS: THE SYRIAN CRISIS

Syria's social integrity has diminished as a consequence of the civil war. This is because the war has promoted extreme internal conflict and communal segregation, militant sects and political groups[1] , mass trauma[2] and death[3], the destruction of Syria (economy, landmarks and infrastructure), and the internal and external displacement of its people[4] . All these factors have led to the collapse of peaceful communal social bonds. Furthermore, international actors are supporting select groups which is encouraging massive division amongst the population[5] .

[1] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/05/2015/syria-country-divided150529144229467-.html has an overview of the Syrian conflict
[2] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/25/04/2016/syrias-mental-health-crisis/ has an overview of the mental health crisis
[3] 'I am Syria' website does a death toll check for the war in Syria updated number can be found on this website: http://www.iamsyria.org/death-tolls.html
[4] Confronting Fragmentation Impact of Syria Crisis Report 2015:Economic Impact of Crisis p.9-6 http://www.ara.cat/1520927894/11/02/2016.pdf?hash=3a186be3bc9bfbc70d11f0241fd49d847f7f0042
[5] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east23849587- is a report on which international leaders are playing a role in the Syrian crisis.
[6] http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends2015-.html : UNHCR Global trends report 2015.

INTER-COMMUNAL TENSIONS: SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

In 2014, the UNHCR Global Trends reported that the world is facing the biggest refugee crisis in world history (about 59 million forcibly displaced individuals); with the Syrian Arab Republic being the main contributor to this crisis, and Lebanon being one of the top refugee hosting countries[6] . The UNHCR has registered over 5 million Syrian Refugees worldwide, with 1,017,433 residing in Lebanon[7] . This is a large number of newcomers for a country like Lebanon which is struggling with its own socio-political, governmental, and economic issues. The history between Lebanon and Syria, and the massive influx of refugees, is contributing to a regional overspill of conflict from Syria to Lebanon[8] . These antecedent events have been the cause of racist thinking towards Syrian refugees[9]. Moreover, a majority of Syrians can only afford to live in poor marginalized urban areas of Lebanon causing competition over the already scare available resources which is also adding to the weight of inter-communal tension[10] . Furthermore, the Lebanese government's increasingly strict regulations make it difficult for Syrians to obtain residency papers. Thus, many Syrian refugees do not exist in the eyes of the Lebanese government, leaving Syrians with little to no opportunities, privileges, and security. Furthermore, Lebanon is not a signatory of the UNHCR's Refugee Convention (1951) or its protocol, further limiting any aid, protection and security available for Syrian refugees[11] . This leaves Syrian refugees vulnerable to conflicts and tensions that occur during their presence in Lebanon.

SITUATING SOCIAL PEACE

The multiple dimensions of tensions are curtailing social peace reform, therefore there is a dire need to focus on enhancing social peace within the Syrian community. Although social peace is needed, "the UN's 2015 humanitarian appeal for Syrian refugees was just 61% funded by the end of the year"[12] . Also, only 5%, and 18% of the livelihoods and social cohesion targets were met respectively at the end of 2015[13] . This indicates the shortcoming in addressing such major issues that would affect the long-term relationship between Syrians and host communities in Lebanon. Thus, when it comes to the Syrian community there are minimal outlets to present issues and resolutions for peace, which is why House of Peace (HOPe) is officially organizing the Syrian Voices papers (SVp), in the hopes that it becomes a platform for sharing best practices and solutions.

[7] Please see this website for updated numbers on Syrians refugees in Lebanon: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122
[8] This report studies the regional overspill from the Syrian Crisis to Lebanon p.25-34: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR609.html
[9] http://civilsociety-centre.org/PAPER/UNDERSTANDING-RACISM-AGAINST-SYRIAN-REFUGEES-LEBANON : is a review on the history between Syrians and Lebanese and how it related to current issues of racism towards Syrians refugees in Lebanon today.
[10] http://www.alnap.org/resource/20654 : Is a conflict analysis on the impact of Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon; P.5-6 go over living circumstances.
[11] https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/lebanon-residency-rules-put-syrians-risk : report on the issues of sponsorship and residency for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
[12] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/
[13] 3RP Regional Strategic Overview 2016-2017, P.11: http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/

OBJECTIVES OF THE SYRIAN VOICES PAPERS

Over-all objective: Present a platform for best practices and possible action oriented solutions to enhance social peace within Syrian communities.

Sub-Objectives:
   1. Present observations: A collection of stories and perspectives from both Syrian and host communities, and humanitarian NGOs working with the Syrian refuge crisis both in Lebanon and Syria.
   2. Present recommendations: From the humanitarian community – these are solely derived from the Round Table's recommendations.

METHODOLOGY
HOW ARE THE OBSERVATIONS COLLECTED?

The observations were collected from two sources:

1. Social Peace Building Workshops (SPWs):
HOPe's main activity is providing Social Peace Building Workshops (SPWs), with the aim of supporting participants to develop new understanding of their realities and motivating them to develop new community-based initiatives. During these workshops participants complete an in-depth context and conflict analyses of their community (or their target community in the case of NGOs), along with personal reflections on peace and conflict issues. Thus, the nature of the tools stimulate and record new understandings and discussions on perspectives, surrounding actors, context, connectors and dividers, making it a natural rich source for qualitative data collection for issues related to social peace in the Syrian community. The SPWs were provided 2-4 times a month from October 2015 to September 2016 to NGO[14] and local communities[15] located in Lebanon and Syria. The observations were extracted from a pool of 326 participants (83% female and 17% male) between the ages of 16-70 from the 30 SPWs provided by HOPe, which consists of 19 local community groups and 11 NGOs. Number of participants per workshop ranged from 7-30.

2. Round Table (RT):
HOPe hosts Round Tables to present observations it derived from the SPWs. There have been two RT's so far with a total of 28 participants representing 15 NGOs. While the observations are not derived from the Round Tables, RT's inputs and insights about them have been included in the observations presented in this paper. Their recommendations were also documented for this paper (please see annex for details on methodology).

[14] Local Communities: Participants were mainly Syrian refugees and their host community.
[15] NGOs: Participants were from Syrian or non-Syrian humanitarian NGOs working on the Syrian crisis.

OBSERVATIONS

The SPW techniques (please see the instruments/tools section in the annex) provided a space for intense dialogue across social peace issues and the Syrian crisis within Lebanon and Syria. Although each group of participants that attended the SPWs could not fully represent the issues and dynamics of their entire community, there were recurring themes across the 30 groups that attended the workshops. One of the main reoccurring themes during these analytical workshops revolved around customs and traditions. Therefore, as a topic for this platform we formally ask the question:

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS: CONNECTORS OR DIVIDERS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON?
Although there are other issues surrounding social peace, some of the more outstanding issues in the SPWs were those surrounding customs and traditions on the familial and societal level, and 5 major sub-themes were noted:

  A. Changes in family roles
  B. Social solidarity
  C. Celebrating social and religious occasions
  D. Adjusting to changes in certain habits
  E. Organizations involved in the crisis

In general, the narratives we collected from our participants revealed that customs and traditions were considered connectors and/or dividers depending on different contexts and aspects. Differences, in customs and traditions did not just exist in inter-communities, it was also present in homogenous (intra) communities. Thus, the same elements could be perceived as a connector for one group or a divider for another, even if they were from the same culture. It was noted many of the Participants views on which elements were connectors and dividers were heavily influenced by Socio-geographical factors.
*Note: all observations are based on the discussion and analysis of the SPW participants, and the input of RT attendees — HOPe's input is not included (except in the discussion). RT inputs have been labeled and boxed next to their corresponding topic.

FAMILIAL

—[A] Changes In Family Roles

A lot of discussion from the SPWs concerned family dynamics. Some roles have changed within the family unit that have been viewed both as a Capacities for Peace (CP) and Capacities for War (CW). Some embrace these changes, while others view them as dividers for the Syrian community.

i. Changes in Gender Roles
One major point participants discussed was the role of women in the family. Traditionally, the woman takes the position of the caregiver, while the man is the provider and bread-winner. However, some men have gone missing or have died as a result of the war, forcibly shifting the financial burden onto the woman (it is worth noting that women generally receive lower salaries than men).
Also, as most Syrian families do not have legal papers, men are having trouble obtaining a source of income.
This is because they are not able to do so legally, and because they fear that the security at checkpoints may catch them and deport them back to Syria. Women can traverse through checkpoints much more easily, since guards at the border patrol do not target women as much.
Moreover, there is a larger diversity of job opportunities available to women than there is for men (e.g., saleswoman and handcrafting). This is also due to the number of NGO programs and livelihood projects available to Syrian refugee women. Hence, the rise of Syrian working women was a major topic of discussion amongst participants.

General perceptions:
Participants of the SPWs expressed mixed feelings about this subject. Some participants were pleased more women are working and that there has been an increased appreciation and respect towards women and their capabilities. On the other hand, other participants felt that working women were a source of tension in the community, as the traditional family paves the way for a healthy upbringing and should be reinforced. They believed a working woman was being negligent towards her family since she could not attend to them full time. Also, women's new found independence and feelings of empowerment were thought to be the reason for increasing divorce rates.

Different perspectives were noted about this point; some mentioned that women were divorcing their husbands because they were unable to contribute financially and thus were a burden; others felt that more women were able to have the courage and power to request a divorce that they had longed desired. For instance, one Syrian NGO said that three of its Syrian employees had divorced their husbands, and that their manager was proud of them for challenging their traditions and overcoming their fears. Moreover, many participants felt that female empowerment has been deeply encouraged by NGO awareness and vocational projects - there were different views on whether such projects was a negative or positive element in the participants' community.

Men's perceptions:

Many male participants expressed the belief that a new role for women was necessary because they as men were having difficulty obtaining work. These men felt very proud of the women in their community. Nonetheless, many also felt ashamed, emasculated and at times threatened by the idea of their wives working on their behalf. For example, One story shared, was that of a man who pulled his wife out of a vocational training program by force, in fear that she may gain too much independence and leave him. Participants also disclosed that there are instances of men physically assaulting their wives as a result of these insecurities. Another story shared by a NGO participant was on the time the men in their target community requested that the NGO cease offering awareness-raising workshops because they believed it was making women more defiant. Although a segment of these unemployed men did not oppose women going to awareness-raising workshops, they would never accept the idea of their wives working, and do not want it to be encouraged.

Women's perceptions:

Female participants also gave mixed reviews on the topic of working women. Some working female participants expressed that they felt a sense of satisfaction and new found confidence. One female participant mentioned that even though she was at first doubtful, when she successfully completed a mixed-gender vocational training program she felt as though she could now "accomplish anything" since she was able to succeed alongside men. Some women in the spirit of liberation were divorcing their husbands, while other women were working and remaining committed to their role of mother and wife. Although, many women expressed happiness over their growing independence, some women believed their role was solely to be a caregiver. They felt that in Syria they were taken care of (by their husbands), and that they did not have to work and be far from their families for long periods of time, which they see as negligence on their part.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES IN GENDER ROLES

Reoccurring topic:
- The increase in working women and unemployed men in the Syrian refugee community.

Viewpoints on why this has occurred:
- Residency papers and sponsorship laws are strict prohibiting many Syrians (especially men) from being able to work.
- Gender bias: It is much easier for a woman with an illegal status to navigate through checkpoints without needing to be checked and identified, since women are not deemed threating.
- Some family's fathers have died or are missing.
- There are more diverse job opportunities for women.
- Psychosocial support and vocational projects for women has increased awareness of women's rights and given them a sense of empowerment.

Positive feedback:
- Women are more appreciated and respected by the community.
- Women are becoming more independent, self-efficient and confident. Many who have felt unhappy in their marriage now have the courage to request a divorce (this is also seen as a negative perception).

Negative feedback:
- Some women and men feel that these changes go against their traditions, and that the sole role of the woman should be that of caregiver.
- Men are feeling excluded and emasculated, causing some to lash out at their wives, at times violently.
- Women are divorcing their husbands: Some because they have longed wished to, and feel empowered to do so now, while others are divorcing because the husband can no longer fulfill his role as the provider (due to his inability to work), thus is a financial burden for the family.
- Some are equating working women to family negligence.

A.i. ROUND TABLE COMMENTS

Round Table participants mentioned that sociogeographical factors play a role in the acceptability of working women. They gave the example that a woman from Homs, was more likely to have worked outside her family unit before seeking refuge in Lebanon and therefore the prevalent circumstances did not change much for her, while a woman from Syria's countryside tended to stay at home, a practice that impacts her circumstances in Lebanon. Moreover, the geographical locations of the refugees in Lebanon also influences the acceptability of working women. For instance, women in Akkar are highly involved in agricultural work while also assuming their familial responsibilities, and although men in this region feel it is the male's responsibility to be the provider, they are more accepting towards working women. One RT participant also noted that in a study she did she found it was the older women who were likely to be unhappy about taking up the financial responsibilities of the family, as they felt it them took away from their position of being the family's guide and representative.

ii. Child Labor and Early Marriage

Many local and NGO communities mentioned there has been an increase of early marriage and child labor. This has been related to the issue of Syrian refugee families having difficulty obtaining residency papers, thus, it is difficult for parents to work and support the family. As a result, a lot of children are being forced, by their parents, to leave their education to pursue work. This is because some refugee communities view labor as a form of character building and believe it to be more advantageous than an education, and thus prefer their children to work. Moreover, participants felt Humanitarian and UN efforts are not prioritizing educational establishments for Syrian refugees; in addition to this issue, the majority of educational establishments in Lebanon refuse to accept Syrians. Finally, any attempts to encourage education has been more geared to females and children which is discouraging male adolescents. As a result, the lack of educational and work opportunities for Syrians is discouraging children and minors from pursuing their studies and forcing them to join the labor market, where they risk being exploited by the Lebanese workforce.

Many participants agreed there has been an increase in early marriage. Families are marrying off their young daughters as soon as it's deemed acceptable to lighten the financial load in their household. Traditionally, especially in Muslim cultures, the groom offers "moher" (dowry) to his fiancé. "Moher" is being methodically used for families to gain finance. The daughter typically has no say in the matter and is forced to get married. However, many NGOs pointed out that early marriages existed in Syria before the crisis across all classes of Syrian society, hence it is one of the reasons it has been deemed an acceptable method to assuage the financial burdens that accompany being a refugee.

SUMMARY OF CHILD LABOR AND EARLY MARRIAGE

Reoccurring topic:
The increase of child labor and early marriage.

Viewpoints on why this has occurred:
- Residency papers: Difficult for parents to work legally, minimizing sources of income.
- Bleak educational opportunities for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- Traditions: Child labor is seen as a form of character building by some Syrian families.
- Traditions: Early marriage is a norm in the Syrian community.

A.ii. ROUND TABLE COMMENTS

Some of the Round Table participants blamed the media and shows like "Bab al Hara" for making marriage look 'trendy'. However, other participants felt that conflicts of Syrian marriage were not due to early marriages, but from inter-communal marriages: mainly of Lebanese men marrying Syrian women. They believed this was a stronger source of horizontal tension between the communities, and stressed the need to get accurate figures on the rates of inter-marriage to provide evidence that the number is actually significantly smaller than perceived. An example was given by a participant in regards to a study done in the location of Bekaa, Taanayel, which presented that there was only 1000 reported inter marriages, which is a small number in comparison to the number of inhabitants (please see social solidarity for more on this topic)

As for the topic on child labor, the Round Table believed this matter needed to be dealt with as it affects both male and female children 13 and above. Unlike the issue of marriage, child labor is not as related to issues of customs and traditions, as it is to the inability for Syrian refugee families to achieve a legal source of income to support themselves. Therefore, to lessen this trend, it is important to present alternatives sources of income.

SOCIETAL

Syria has strong traditional values, some of which have held throughout the crisis, and some of which are changing. Moreover, although Syria and Lebanon are neighboring countries with similar customs, their differences are more prominent now that Syrians are living amongst the Lebanese population.

—[B] Social Solidarity

Intra-communal perceptions
Syrian participants felt that although they believed they faced a lot of prejudice and stereotyping, they had a strong expression of gratitude towards one another. They believed that intra communal bonds were strong despite the war, especially in terms of family, cooperation, generosity and honesty (please see 'Adjusting to changes in certain habits' for more on intra-communal matters).

Inter-communal perceptions
Participants from the workshop felt there was tension between the Syrian and Lebanese communities, mainly due to the history between Syria and Lebanon, and because of the prolonged presence of Syrians in Lebanon.

While some communities feel discriminated against, others have expressed that their host communities have been kind and hospitable. Some gave informative stories on times host community members intervened to help refugees. One was the story of a Syrian woman who, when her baby fell ill, was provided with financial and medical aid by a Lebanese woman. Another involved the story of a Syrian family who could not pay their rent on time, and so offered to repair the apartment as a method of payment. This caused major disputes between them and their landlord, however, a Lebanese Sheikh intervened to help solve the problem in favor of the Syrian family. In these cases a Lebanese intervening was seen as a capacity for peace in the community. Nonetheless, there are times these good intentions are perceived as a capacity for war. For instance, there was a story of a Lebanese man who intervened when a woman was being brutally beaten in public by her husband. The Lebanese community thought they were stopping a behavior that to them was considered unacceptable. However, the Syrian community saw this as a matter between the married couple, and thought that the Lebanese man had no business interfering. This particular Syrian community believes that men are allowed to physically assault their wives, because men are entitled, and also because physical punishment is seen as a disciplinary action. Hence the women who shared this story, did not view this incident as abuse, but they did acknowledge that since this behavior is upsetting to their neighbors, it should not have been done publicly.

Another noted tension that arose in the context of social solidarity, was the concern that inter-marriages was a growing phenomenon. The Lebanese community feel that their bachelors are desiring to marry Syrian women. Some participants claimed that Lebanese couples are divorcing as a result. For instance, there was a story brought up of two women, one Syrian the other Lebanese, who had a heated argument in a taxi they happened to share. The Lebanese woman exclaimed that if it was not enough that Syrians were sharing their land, they were now taking their available men. Their argument escalated to the point of the driver asking them to leave the taxi before they reached their destinations.
Inter-marriages are also a concern for the Syrian community. Many Syrian participants mentioned that intra-marriages were preferred, and that some Syrian women were entering into polygamous marriages with Syrian husbands as a result.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Reoccurring topic:
• Social solidarity amongst the participating communities.

Feedback addressing Intra-communities:
• Despite the displacement of the Syrian community, the Syrian participants of the SPWs expressed that they felt their family bonds and intra-communal relations stood strong against the crisis.

Feedback addressing Inter-communities:
• Some Syrians believe they are being discriminated against, however, many stories arose of how supportive and hospitable Lebanese communities have been.
• There have been many stories, on times Lebanese members have intervened in Syrian issues in order to help them. This was seen as both a capacity for war and peace.
• Many participants believe the reason there is a lot of tension between the communities is due to the prolonged stay of the Syrian refugees in their host's community.
• There have also been many concerns about inter-marriages. Both communities seem to not fully support the notion of marriage between Syrians and Lebanese communities. This is causing a lot of tension, but Round Table participants mentioned these concerns may be exaggerated worries, and that research needs to be done to establish the facts.

B. ROUND TABLE COMMENTS

Round Table participants pointed out that there is a balance in the integration of Syrian refugees and their host communities, since Syrian refugees have made it a point to reside in places that match their personal political and religious beliefs. Host communities are also more accepting of refugees that share their political and religious views. RT participants also agreed that a lot of conflict is due to the prolonged presence of Syrian refugees, and Syrians meddling in Lebanese affairs. They did add though, that there are host communities that have happily integrated with Syrian communities. They gave the example of the Al Jahariyeh camp in Bekaa, where Syrians and their host community exist harmoniously. One participant told the story of the time a fire broke out in a Syrian household and a Lebanese family welcomed them into their home.

Questions were raised about projects that aim to build connections between Syrians and Lebanese communities, and on whether they were properly attending to these major points of conflict. Moreover, it was noted that when it came to the topic of tensions, the conversation tended to mainly venture to horizontal tensions (Syrians and their host communities), not intra-tensions. The Round Table also noted that horizontal tensions were a result of the difficulty of Syrians being able to obtain residency papers, which placed them under the thumb of Lebanese sponsors, and vulnerable to economic exploitation. RT participants also stated that there are different definitions of "security" for Syrians and Lebanese. Lebanese view security as "political stability", while Syrians view security as "economic security". Hence, RT participants felt it was important to understand the role socio-economic development plays in reinforcing a sense of stability for Syrians, since there has been no plan by the Lebanese government to receive refugees.

−[C] Celebratory and Social Occasions

Although celebratory and social events are considered strong connectors for the Syrian community, participants have shared stories where these occasions have caused divide between Syrians and their host communities. This is mainly due to the different manners in which the two communities choose to celebrate the same occasions. Some Syrian communities have told stories in which their host Lebanese community forcefully interfered with Syrian celebratory and social events.

For example, Syrian weddings are typically celebrated at night, with large numbers of guests gathered in one household. Lebanese communities typically celebrate their wedding occasions outdoors and at an earlier time. This causes feelings of apprehension in Lebanese neighbors who end up calling security forces because they are uncomfortable with such a large number of people gathering and celebrating at night. Such incidences have caused Syrians to move out of their host community, either because they were forced to, or because they no longer felt welcomed. There has also been complaints about the different ways in which Syrians and Lebanese use their local public spaces. For instance, in some communities Syrians make have a habit of gathering together in open spaces (e.g. gardens, parks) during the weekends. Lebanese are not accustomed to this behavior and feel bothered by it.

A more specific incident that sheds light on this issue is the story of a Syrian barbershop that evolved into a local hang-out for Syrian men. To the Syrians it was a place for them to comfortably sit and smoke 'Argileh' (hooka), while chatting amongst themselves. A Lebanese woman was extremely uncomfortable with this amount of men gathering in one place, and deemed it a threat. She demanded the establishment cease these social activities and only conduct business. Despite her request, the barbershop continued being a site for large social gatherings of men. In response to this, the Lebanese woman sent her son to break the windows of the store. She claimed this was a warning and that if they persisted staying open she was going to contact a local political gang to stop the activity. This is a major example of how 'customs and traditions' may be both a point of conflict and peace for Syrian refugees.

SUMMARY OF CELEBRATORY AND SOCIAL OCCASIONS

Reoccurring topic:
  • Social and religious celebratory occasions are deemed connectors for Syrian communities, but have caused conflicts between Syrian and Lebanese hosting communities.

Shared perspectives on the varying social and celebratory practices that cause inter-communal tension:

Syrian Patterns of Social and Celebratory Occasions	Lebanese Patterns of Social and Celebratory Occasions
• They socialize late at night • They celebrate indoors • They gather in Large numbers • Genders do not mix • Syrians enjoy using local open spaces to do gatherings during the weekends.	• Lebanese celebrate earlier in the day • They celebrate outdoors • Genders mix

Shared outcomes of these circumstances:
  • There were stories shared on times when Lebanese have forcibly interfered in Syrian celebrations because the Syrian way of socializing caused them distress. This has caused upset in the Syrian community and created tension between them and their host.
  • Some Syrians have been forced to leave their hosting community, or cease their usual social and celebratory activities entirely.

−[D] Adjusting to Changes in Certain Habits

The dynamics of customs and traditions has evolved, some communities have accepted and indulged in these changes, while others felt upset, and wish things to remain as they are. Many Syrian customs and traditions are rooted in their religion which is why it was a topic of concern for many. Participants gave several main examples:

  • Many women have gone from covering their face to wearing hijab (showing their face).
  • Some women are shaking hands with men (something that was considered culturally inappropriate before).
  • The community believes that women are becoming more "open-minded" (due to more women seeking educational and work opportunities, and not practicing customary habits).
  • Some NGOs have noted that their co-workers are not fasting during Ramadan, and are accepting to work in a mixed gender work space.

Not all changes occurring were thought to be at the will of the people. For instance, a woman from the workshop shared her story on how she felt pressured into dressing her child to look like his Lebanese peers, even though it was a financial burden for her. Some fear the changes are due to Lebanese society being more open minded, which is influencing Syrian customs and traditions. Some Syrian participants fear that these changes will be permanent even after they return to Syria.

Reoccurring topic:
- Participants felt that Syrian community's customary habits and practices are changing.
Viewpoints on why this has occurred:
- Many participants believed these changes to be the consequence of Syrian society mingling with Lebanon's more liberal culture.

Feedback:
- Some Syrians are indulging and welcoming these changes, while others are concerned that these changes go against their traditions.
- Some Syrians were worried that these changes would remain permanent even after they return to Syria.

D. ROUND TABLE COMMENTS

Round Table participants felt these changes and related matters should be more clearly defined, so as to capture their essence better. The participants felt the term culture for instance, changes in different contexts. One participant suggested, "We should focus more on intellectual development, instead on the word 'change', since change can be seen as a negative or positive occurrence, whereas intellectual development supports the ideas of progression and advancement". Participants mentioned that they would indeed like to cultivate progressive ideas that promote positive change, but that they must take into consideration the dangers on promoting such views. To demonstrate this danger they asked a rhetorical question on which customary habits would be approved for change and which would not? Therefore they insisted that efforts for change must respect and understand existing customs and traditions.

The discussion examined the reasons refugee communities change their customary habits. They mentioned that in the case of refugees in Lebanon, since Lebanon and Syria are culturally similar, such changes have been more easily absorbed into the Syrian community. They gave the example of Palestinian refugees in America, who see American values and customs as very different from their own and therefore tend to isolate themselves from the American community, whereas Palestinian refugees in Lebanon do not. Therefore, they believe that in the context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon these customary changes are inevitable.

As a result of this discussion the question was raised as to whether the goal of a humanitarian NGO is to affect social change, or simply to improve social conditions. This is important considering that Arabic societies have problems with maintaining stable identities, and tend to be in a constant state of change. Therefore, capacities to confront and cope with constant changes need to be investigated.

–[E] Organizations Involved In The Crisis

Many organizations are naturally involved in the activities of the Syrian refugee community, and while their programs are designed to aid Syrian refugees, there have been stories and concerns from participants where they believed NGOs have been a factor of conflict in their community.

For example, one NGO participant reported an incident where the organization helped a woman escape her husband. She had been longing for a divorce so that she could marry the man she initially wanted. The NGO assigned her a divorce lawyer and provided her with a secure place to reside until her divorce was finalized. This created conflict between the husband and his family and the NGOs administration.

Another story involved a community conflict that an INGO (that is involved in crisis management and aid) got involved in. Syrian drivers were accepting lower pay which was causing Lebanese drivers to lose customers. This created tension, since the hosting community felt Syrian workers were taking up job opportunities. Things escalated in the community when a Lebanese family had a fight with a Syrian driver, which led to the Lebanese community having a protest against Syrian workers, and demanding higher regulations to stop them from working in transportation services. An INGO got involved by making a protective space available for the protestors to make their demands, with the help of the local municipality. As a result, strict regulations were implemented making it very difficult for Syrians to work in transportation legally.

Moreover, almost all participants felt that the changes (i.e. in customary habits, women's roles) happening in their society, was a result of the psychosocial and vocational workshops provided by NGOs. Reactions from participants towards these changes greatly depended on socio-geographical factors.

SUMMARY OF ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRISIS

Reoccurring topic:
- Many participants have mentioned that although NGOs serve a good purpose, their presence at times has contributed to existing tensions or created new ones.

Viewpoints on why this has occurred:
- NGOs are not contributing enough time to the necessary preliminary research of community identified needs (i.e. extensive context analysis) before implementing their projects.
- NGOs are not practicing conflict sensitivity to the extent that they should.
- There is a lack of consideration to the differences between each local community NGOs target.
- There is a lack of transparency between NGOs and their donors.
- Some NGO projects adhere to the needs of their donors, rather than the needs of their target community.

E. ROUND TABLE INSIGHTS AND COMMENTS:

As the Round Table participants largely consisted of NGO representatives there were was an abundance of valuable insights and stories discussed which have been formally organized and paraphrased below:

After listening to the observations, the Round Table participants discussed whether assistance and aid being provided to refugees is based on their own assumptions on what they believe Syrians need, rather than on comprehensive and statistical studies. RT attendees spoke about two main issues that occur in social development projects; the relationship between NGO projects and their beneficiaries; and the relationship between NGO Projects and their donors.

NGO Projects and their Beneficiaries:

The Round Table participants expressed that since there are many inter-changing variables in each community of beneficiaries, that the lack of attention to context and conflict analysis of their target is causing NGO projects to create unintended conflicts. Furthermore, NGOs attend to these mistakes by learning from experience, rather than conducting appropriate measures to study their beneficiaries before projects take place.

An example of this issue was the impact psychosocial awareness projects had on marriages. Women were feeling empowered and in this spirit were divorcing their husbands. After noting the effects of excluding men from their awareness projects, it prompted organizations in this area to start making an effort to include more men in their projects. For instance, one organization is working on a project in Shatila camp to decrease the feelings of exclusion in men. They reassured their male beneficiaries that the man is not solely responsible for the wellbeing of the family and that the wife shares responsibility as well, and since refugee status has its burdens it is only natural the wife helps (in this case by working). They are hoping this well lessen domestic tensions, and increase acceptance in the trend of working women.

Round Table participants also went over the fact that although a project may be successful in a majority of refugee communities it may cause tension or fail in others. They gave the example that while music festivals may be enjoyed by many communities, in others it would be considered offensive to their religious or traditional beliefs. Therefore, it is the responsibility of NGOs to be more aware of the social setting it is operating in.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ROUND TABLE

After sharing their insights and stories on the topics involved with customs and traditions, it inspired many recommendations from both Round Tables. Their recommendations have been combined and organized below in the following categories:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS IN REGARDS TO THEIR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Needed projects based on observations:
- There needs to be more projects raising awareness about the dangers of early marriages, but in a manner that does not contribute to more tension.
- Projects need to start targeting and attracting more male beneficiaries. (I.e. take under consideration the working hours of potential male beneficiaries).
- Offer free education and school transportation to Syrians wishing to attend school, so it is not a financial expense for parents.
- The humanitarian community needs to start creating campaigns to pressure the government to: abate restrictions of sponsorship laws, begin registering Syrian births and marriages, and offer free education to Syrian refugees.
- Public spaces (i.e. parks) tend to be a site of horizontal tension due to the different manners in which Lebanese and Syrians use such spaces. Therefore, there needs to be more projects that tackle this issue.

Project development considerations and practices:
- Projects should aim for realistic goals that are feasible and achievable within their set timeframes.
- NGOs need to cease any projects that do not practice a gender neutral environment.
- NGOs must take up the responsibility of conducting field analysis involving the current context and conflicts of their target community before implementing their projects (so they will not be blind-sighted by the fact that their project may not be appropriate to their beneficiaries).
- NGOs need to properly inform and be transparent with their donors, so that they can conduct projects appropriate to the needs of their beneficiaries, and not to the desires of their donors.
- NGOs need to live among their beneficiaries so as to better understand their situation, and to build a stronger relationship with them, as well as share their success and achievements to as to regain back their full trust and confidence in humanitarian projects.
- There needs to be an open dialogue between NGO projects and the communities they are working with, so as to understand what the communities' needs are. This dialogue should include the target community (Syrian refugees) and their host community (i.e., Lebanese or Palestinian), so that there are no conflicts of interest. NGOs should also consider taking on suggestions on how to aid Syrians from their host community so as to reduce tension, and allow the host community to feel included in Syrian aid.
- NGOs involved in the same manner of work, or who are working with the same community, need to start identifying and communicating with one another better, so that they may learn from each other's experiences and best practices. This will greatly assist the over-all success of their respective goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND REVIEW

- There needs to be a review on the issue of evening school sessions for Syrians students and its effects on students' performance, as well as tying it to the spread of child labor.
- There needs to be statistical studies of marriages between Lebanese and Syrians (particularly Lebanese men to Syrian women), which may help counter the misconception that inter-marriages are very high (since this belief is contributing to horizontal tensions).
- NGOs must always do a conflict and context analysis of their target community and a project review to ensure it practices conflict sensitivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING STRONGER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN WORK AND THE MEDIA

- NGOs should begin strongly working with and informing the media on matters that are creating divide amongst the population such as the issues of sponsorship and security. They should share and request that media outlets emphasize shared customs and traditions between refugees and their host community (i.e. Lebanon).
- NGOs should also start using the media to expose misconceptions and stereotypes about Syrian refugees in Lebanon (e.g., intermarriages), many of which have existed before the crisis and are not exclusive to the presence of Syrian refugees.

CONCLUSION

There are many dimensions of conflict surrounding Syrian refugees in Lebanon, therefore it is important to mark out new conflict trends from the perspectives of the community's involved to arouse best practices to aid social peace. For this paper, the most outstanding observations were those that revolved around customs and traditions. While customs and traditions are a natural social cohesive, the observations shared by our participants, show that they can be either capacities for war or peace in varied contexts.

There were three main contributing factors to the overall tensions in the subject of customs and traditions that were brought up constantly during the SPWs and RTs; sponsorship and residency, the lack of sources of income for refugees, and the lack of educational opportunities. This has caused changes in the family unit (increase in working women, child labor, and early marriage), and has increased conflicts involving competition for resources between Syrians and their host communities. In response to this the humanitarian community has been providing aid (resources), creating spaces for vocational training for niche markets, and doing awareness/psychosocial support projects. However, there are over a million Syrians in Lebanon, and without governmental assistance into these matters, the needs of this large amount of Syrian refugee's falls solely on the humanitarian community, making their efforts more strenuous. Therefore, one major recommendation was to officially start campaigning for the ablation of sponsorship laws and free education for Syrians, since they are primary factor for many other issues and tensions.

Stories related to Intra-communal tensions were mainly a result of the changes in traditions and customary habits within Syrian society. Many members are not practicing their customary habits or abandoning them all together, which is causing some Syrian's to be upset, as they worry about the permanency of these changes. Many stories of concern were those surrounding working women. Recommendations towards this were mainly based on including more men in NGO projects and helping them seek work opportunities to remove any feelings of exclusion.

Stories surrounding inter-communal tensions were mainly about competition for recourses, and cultural differences. This goes back to the issue that there is no formal system for Syrians to legally abide to. Therefore, many Syrians are illegally accepting lower pay placing great stress on Lebanese citizens to compete with these low salaries. Moreover, cultural differences are more prominent now that Syrians are residing amongst the Lebanese which is causing tension between Syrians and Lebanese. Finally, inter-marriages was a shared concern and source of conflict between Syrians and Lebanese members. Many participants believed that the number of inter-marriages is tremendous. Thus, RT participants felt the simple solution to this was to get exact numbers on inter-marriages, so as to reveal to the Lebanese and Syrian community, that inter-marriages are far less frequent then perceived.

Furthermore, NGOs have become a variable in capacities for war or peace, making conflict sensitivity and any preliminary overhaul of their target community a very important practice in the field. Since there are so many variables. Both SPW and RT participant agreed that psychosocial awareness projects (e.g., vocational and empowerment for women) was having some negative outcomes. It was recommended that NGOs always study their target community so as to not contribute to existing or create new tensions. One of the major recommendations for the Round Table was to develop a more collaborative system for humanitarian aid work to maximize positive outcomes for all NGO projects. Moreover, RT participants persisted that NGOs need to involve more Media outlets in their project, so as to create greater awareness of the needs of Syrian refugees and NGO projects, as well as, eliminate any stereotypes, misconceptions and prejudices against Syrian refugees.

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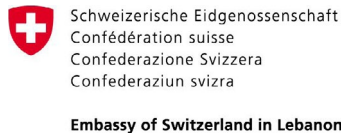
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ANNEX

INSTRUMENTS:

SPW tools:

The workshops have three foci: Context and Conflict analysis, and an additional focus for NGOs; Conflict Sensitivity analysis. Each foci had its own tools designed to stimulate dialogue and gather information on the topic of social peace.

Tool description:

Context Analysis: The tools in this focus are designed to analyze the context (i.e. community) of the participants:
- Appreciating the community: the participants specify positive traits that exist in their community.
- Community mapping: the participants map out their community, and discuss shared public spaces and establishments. They pinpoint areas that have high tension and areas that practice peaceful gatherings.
- PESS: participants discuss; Political, Economic, Security and Social factors that influence social peace within the community.

Conflict Analysis: The tools encourage discussion of major and minor conflicts within the community and how they are related to context.
- Story Telling: During this space, participants share and discuss major conflicts (stories) that have been occurring in their community, and pick 3-2 stories to do a full analysis on.
- Stakeholder analysis: the participants go over actors involved, and study and discuss their relationships to the community, to one another, and to the chosen stories.
- Fish Bone: This is a tool that visually displays the minor and primary causes of a major problem and its related outcomes. The participants draw and apply this diagram to their selected stories.
- Identifying Capacities of Peace (CP) and Capacities of War (CW): Here the participants list elements in their community that are promoters or potentials of peace (CP) and war (CW), and discuss it.

Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: The tools in conflict analysis are designed to allow NGO workers observe the elements of their project and see how they relate to capacities of peace and war.
- Conflict Cake: This is a visual tool that goes over the elements of the project in relation to CP and CW.

LOCATIONS:

SPWs have been given in all major areas in Lebanon except Nabatieh.

LEBANON	SYRIA
• North Lebanon: Tripoli, Al-Chok, Wadi Khalid. • Mount Lebanon: Bachamoun. • Beirut: Shatila, Bourj al Barajneh, Tareek Jidieh, Cola. • Beqaa: Chatoura, Majdal Anjar, Saadanayel, Ghazze. • South Lebanon: Hasbaya.	• Damascus • Latakia

CONTEXT ANALYSIS TOOLS

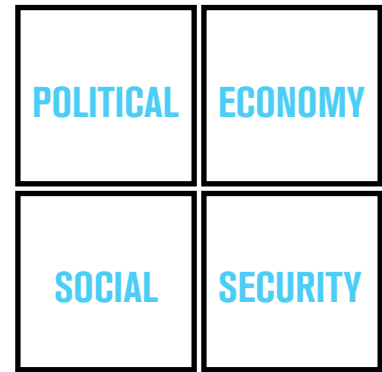**POLITICAL** | **ECONOMY**

SOCIAL | **SECURITY**
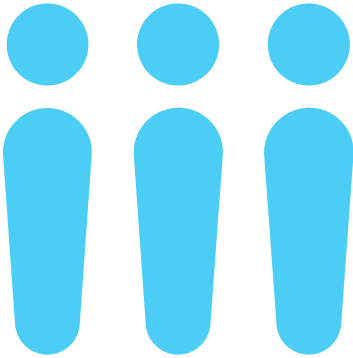
APPRECIATING THE COMMUNITY
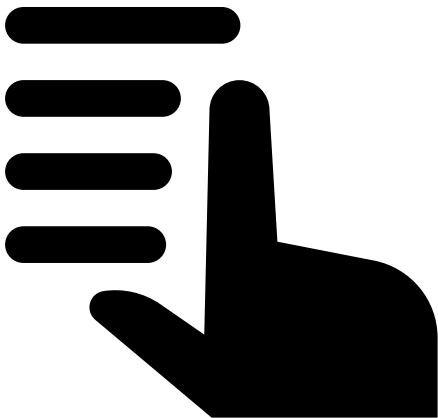Participants List the Pros of Their Community
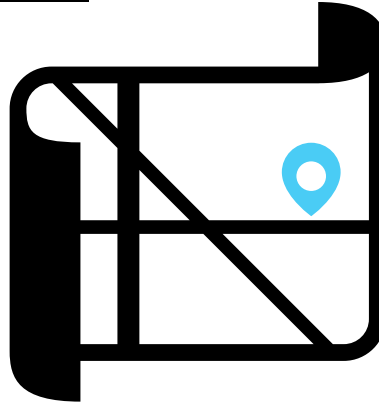
MAPPING
Participants Map out Their Community
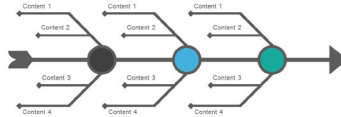(i.e. Local Establishments, Neighbors,
Transportation Pathways

PESS
Participants List all Factors Related to PESS
that are Contributing to their Conflicts

CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

CP
Listing Capacities of Peace

CW
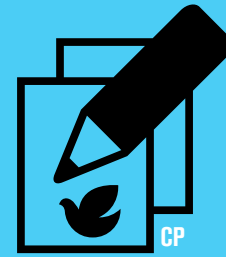Listing Capacities of War

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS
Participants Identify Main Actors and their
Relationships

FISH BONE
Diagram that Helps Observe Secondary and
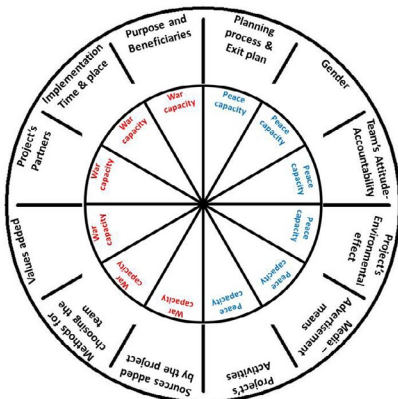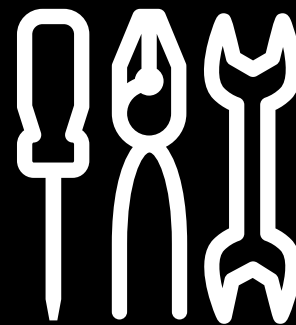Primary Causes About a Main Conflict
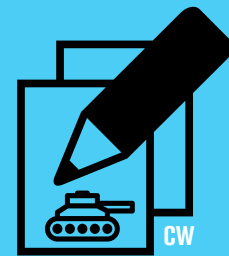
CONFLICT SENSITIVITY TOOL

CONFLICT CAKE
This Tool is Mainly Used with NGO›s to Review if Their Projects
Practice Conflict Sensitive when Aiding their Target Populations

SPW FRAMEWORK: TOOL EXAMPLES

House of Peace

Development and Peace
CARITAS CANADA

Caritas France
Secours Catholique

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon

Development Office

caritas
LUXEMBOURG