Prospects and challenges for women's roles in conflict prevention and reconciliation in Lebanon

Lessons from leading women peacebuilders in Tripoli and Baalbek

Policy brief

international alert

UN WOMEN

Prospects and challenges for women's roles in conflict prevention and reconciliation in Lebanon

Lessons from leading women peacebuilders in Tripoli and Baalbek

Policy brief

Written by Ruth Simpson and Layal Assaad

March 2022

international alert

UN WOMEN

Acknowledgements

International Alert and UN Women would like to thank the courageous and inspiring women who took part in and led this project for sharing their experiences, insights and perspectives. Additionally, the authors would like to thank their International Alert colleagues, especially Amal Abou Hamdan, Hiba Souki, Maya El Jundi and Mohammad Shabaan, whose work on the project made this learning possible and also the UN Women Lebanon Team: Aseel Naamani, Jumanah Zabaneh, Lara Saade and Rachel Dore-Weeks for their close collaboration, expert review and insightful inputs on this policy brief. Finally, International Alert and UN Women would like to thank the UK government which has supported the project and development of this briefing paper.

Contents

Abbreviations

ADP	Arab Democratic Party
GBV	Gender-based violence
GSDRC	Governance and Social Development Resource Centre
ICTJ	International Centre for Transitional Justice
KAFA	KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LAH	Lebanese Association for History
LAW	Legal Action Worldwide
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
NAP	National action plan
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment for Women
VAW	Violence against women
WPS	Women, peace and security

1. Introduction

In 2021, International Alert, with the support of UN Women, conducted a gender-sensitive conflict analysis, zooming in on Tripoli and Bekaa, as part of the Creating Space for Women Peacebuilders project. This analysis demonstrated how unresolved issues from the past, and particularly the civil war, are compromising peace and reconciliation processes and limiting women's central role in these processes. Additional analysis by International Alert found that women, young women and young men coming from lower socio-economic classes and peripheral areas are distinctly disenfranchised from meaningful participation in peace and security. Furthermore, gender, class, age and nationality continue to be points of division and tension among communities in Lebanon that are often triggered by memories from the civil war.[1] This is hindering cross-community and intergenerational dialogue exchanges and the capacity of women to lead community groups to build bridges across divides and work towards a collective peace memory.

This policy brief is based on both the analysis carried out within the framework of the Creating Spaces for Women Peacebuilders project, lessons learned from its implementation, and on the perspectives and experiences of the women's networks that participated in the project. This brief lays out the lessons learned from this project in terms of advancing the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, dealing with the gendered impacts of the civil war and developing spaces for women-led conflict prevention in Lebanon.

The Creating Space for Women Peacebuilders project, implemented by International Alert in partnership with UN Women, brought together 85 women from Tripoli and Bekaa in a series of training and coaching sessions and facilitated dialogue to build dynamic networks of women with the skills, knowledge and confidence to lead conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in their communities.

The project focused on bringing together participants from different regional, age, confessional, socio-economic and conflict divides. This included bringing young women together with older women who have had direct experience of the civil war in order to bridge intergenerational gulfs around memories of the war.

Based on the findings of the gender-sensitive context analysis conducted as part of this project, the women leaders developed their skills to participate in and co-facilitate dialogue sessions with the aim of putting this dialogue into concrete action. The women's networks led a number of peacebuilding initiatives aimed at expanding the role of women in conflict prevention in their communities and in addressing the memories and legacies of the civil war, which impact on the gendered conflict dynamics and social tensions in their communities today.

1 M. Masri et al, Envisioning and contesting a new Lebanon? Actors, issues and dynamics following the October protests, International Alert, 2020, https://www.international-alert.org/publications/envisioning-and-contesting-new-lebanon-october-protests/

2. Background

In Lebanon, men largely dominate discourse and decision-making on conflict and peace. They are present as politicians, clergymen, negotiators, and fighters; however, the extent to which such roles, among others, manifest patriarchal or even violent masculinities, and how such roles intersect with societal markers to shape conflict and peace, and women's role in these, remain largely unexamined. The intersection of these societal markers is complicated by sectarian and class divisions, compounding barriers to meaningful participation of women in political life.[2] These barriers are further compounded by a complex and unresolved history of civil war, which continues to permeate political and social life and impact peace, safety and security in Lebanon today.

Since the end of the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted between 1975 and 1990, the state has not led a comprehensive process of reconciliation between communities. Instead, the Lebanese Government issued an Amnesty Law in 1991 pardoning political crimes committed during the civil war, which saw mass human rights abuses, such as killings of non-combatants, abductions, arbitrary detentions, and the forced disappearance of around 17,000 individuals including Lebanese, Palestinians, and other foreign nationals.[3] Such crimes were committed by various armed militias and foreign military forces.

Lebanon's post-conflict settlement ratified in the 1989 Ta'if Agreement "has been to a large extent monopolised by the very political-military actors who fought the war".[4] When the civil war officially ended in Lebanon, the subsequent government passed a general amnesty law, which imposed no conditions on militia to provide information on or account for crimes committed during the war and no concerted efforts have been made by the government in the post-war period to investigate crimes, violations or abuses such as the fate of missing persons.[5] As a result, there has been little accountability and state-sponsored amnesia, which has caused a void in collective memory of the civil war felt by many in Lebanon. With the absence of a robust framework for reckoning with the crimes committed during the war and the complex, social and psychological legacies of the violence, gaping absences and competing narratives around the past persist.[6] Diverse members of Lebanese society embarked on reconstructing memories in ways that were not necessarily conducive to reconciliation between the country's sectarian and political groups or between and among communities, with widely differing and strongly politicised narratives of the war.

The unresolved memories and trauma of war interact with Lebanon's concurrent political, economic, coronavirus (COVID-19) health and social crises by deepening or entrenching the existing social cleavages which are accentuating the crises. Women continue to bear the brunt of deepening economic strain, COVID-19 restrictions, increasing social tensions and the associated alarming rise in unpaid care work and gender-based

2 A. Naamani, Challenges and opportunities to advance the women, peace and security agenda after Lebanon's protest movement, Peace Agency, 23 June 2020, https://www.peaceagency.org/challenges-and-opportunities-to-advance-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-after-lebanons-protest-movement/

3 For more information, see: ICTJ, Lebanon's legacy of political violence: A mapping of serious violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law in Lebanon, 1975–2008, 2013; Still no justice for thousands 'disappeared' in Lebanon's civil war, Human Rights Watch, 30 August 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/30/still-no-justice-thousands-disappeared-lebanons-civil-war

4 C. Hassoun Abou Jaoude and D. Rugo, Marginal memories of Lebanon's civil war: Challenging hegemonic narratives in a small town in North Metn, Journal of the British Academy, 9(3), 2021, p.12, https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/009s3.011

5 M. Bou Khaled, Contested history, conflicting narratives, and a multitude of initiatives: An analysis of the mapping of initiatives addressing past conflicts in Lebanon, Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support, 2018, pp.1–3, https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/contested-history-conflicting-narratives-and-multitude-initiatives-analysis-mapping

6 Ibid.

violence.[7] Since the endorsement of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in September 2019, there has been some limited and hard-won progress in terms of increasing women's engagement and participation, including in addressing the rise in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). For example, recently there has been a relative uplift in the number of women running for the 2022 parliamentary elections, yet women candidates still face harassment, violence and intimidation.[8] Systematic barriers and obstacles persist within the country's patriarchal political, legal and social systems.

Civil society has long been advocating for women's rights and to reduce the gender gap in different arenas, including increased political and economic participation, better legislation that ensures the protection of and accountability for women from SGBV. This, however, requires large-scale structural reforms with effects to be realised over the long term.[9]

3. Why applying a gender lens to conflict and peacebuilding is important

"Gender inequality, conflict and fragility are key challenges to sustainable development and they are inextricably linked: women's active participation in conflict resolution contributes to peace and resilience, while unequal gender relations can drive conflict and violence."[10]

Women, girls, men and boys are affected differently by violent conflict and peacebuilding processes. During violent conflict and the often-blurred boundaries between violent conflict and post-conflict and peacebuilding, societal norms, power relations and gender roles are in flux and redefined. Violent conflict can open new spaces, new roles and create new risks and vulnerabilities for people according to their gender, age, socio-economic status, and other identity and social markers.[11] After the violent conflict ends, some of these will remain and others are rolled back or renegotiated.

7 UN Women Arab States, The women, peace and security agenda in Lebanon: A key tool for supporting recovery from economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon, 2020

8 Maharat Foundation, Media, elections and gender monitor: Lebanon – 1-30 April 2022, 2022, https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2156/media-elections-and-gender-monitor_april.pdf

9 Ibid.

10 OECD, Gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected situations, 2017

11 H. Myrttinen, J. Naujoks and J. El-Bushra, Rethinking gender in peacebuilding, London: International Alert, 2014, p.11

Some frameworks can reinforce stereotypes of the roles of men and women;[12] applying a gender[13] lens helps to avoid the trap of characterising diverse groups of women from different areas with different motivations, experiences, interests, identities, and beliefs as a 'homogeneous' and 'powerless' group.[14] It allows for a deeper understanding of the different roles, experiences and perspectives of different women and men interacting with the conflict dynamics and how gender informs the formation of collective identities, which can undergo dramatic changes in conflict.

Additionally, gender equality is a cornerstone of conflict prevention, conflict transformation and peacebuilding.[15] Conflict and fragility are perpetuated by gender inequalities compounded by discriminatory gender norms and practices, widespread SGBV, weak institutions and women's lack of access to justice and basic services, women's exclusion from political and economic decision-making, and a narrowing space for opposition or civil society organisations.[16]

"A range of factors, including ethnicity, age, and occupational group, may affect how people experience conflict, more so than differences between men and women. Nevertheless, there is consistent evidence that women, men, girls, and boys experience conflict differently and that conflict has differential impacts on men and women."[17]

In Lebanon, women play diverse and dynamic roles in conflict prevention, yet in reality their roles have often been simplified and their voices sidelined. Narratives of women's roles and experiences in the civil war often deny their agency. Women have played such diverse roles as facilitating recruitment, supporting networks of male fighters, logistics, care for fighters and other support roles, and intelligence and active participation in conflict (such as laying landmines, storing and distributing weapons). Additionally, after the conflict women have continued to play a critical role in conflict prevention at family, community and broader levels, leading peace and reconciliation movements. They have also played roles that have fostered increased tensions and violence.

The gender-sensitive conflict analysis that Alert conducted in Tripoli and Bekaa in 2021 shed light on perceptions and memories of gendered conflict dynamics during the war (see below) and highlighted that the involvement of women and girls in local decision-making and conflict-mitigation processes remains a point of division across generational divides, including among young people. These divisions relate to competing perspectives on gender roles and social norms around women's leadership of local conflict prevention efforts (i.e. between those advancing women's active engagement and those opposing it) and to patriarchal power dynamics, which uphold traditional gender roles and the position of men in dispute resolution.

The analyses and project learning brought to the fore the role that women have played and continue to play in leading local conflict mitigation and solidarity initiatives in both regions. At the same time, the findings also put

12 GSDRC, Gender and conflict – Topic guide, 2015, p.6

13 Gender means "the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them." UN Women, Gender mainstreaming in development programming: An issues brief, New York: UN, 2014, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/gender-mainstreaming-issuesbrief-en-pdf.pdf

14 K.E. Masri, Women in the Lebanese Civil War – The power of guns, 2013, p.3

15 OECD, Gender equality and women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected situations: A review of donor support, OECD Development Policy Papers No. 8, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1787/b75a1229-en

16 Ibid.

17 GSDRC, 2015, Op. cit.

a spotlight on the continued social, cultural and structural barriers to women's active role in decision-making, even within civil society and community groups. Interviews in both Tripoli and Bekaa revealed that women were perceived to have a role in mitigating conflicts through dialogue and converging views within their immediate communities/tribes, but the analysis also revealed diverging views and misconceptions around the role of women in mediating disputes across conflict actors, echoing limiting gender narratives. While such findings were found to be common between Tripoli and Baalbek, some important context-specific nuances are present and are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this paper.

4. The legacy of the gendered conflict dynamics of the civil war

Lebanon has experienced several wars and successive waves of instability and political violence, including serious violations of human rights and the law of armed conflict.[18] The years prior to 15 years of successive wars between 1975 and 1990 saw local and regional political dynamics interplaying with widening internal divisions post-independence in 1943. Since fighting formally ended in 1990, Lebanon and its people have endured recurrent political violence, armed conflicts, foreign hegemony and occupations, characterised by "a near-total lack of official acknowledgment, reparation, truth, or justice for the thousands of victims over the years".[19]

The protracted conflict of the civil war and post-conflict agreements have led to a highly fragmented collective memory, dominated by accounts of the ruling political class.[20] The narratives, experiences and impacts of the civil war vary based on individual experiences of violence, legacies of violence and trauma across generations and are deeply gendered. There is no shared history of the conflict taught in schools. History taught in schools rarely acknowledges the diverse experiences and roles of women in the conflict; women's voices are largely absent.[21] For women, experiences and impacts of the civil war, conflicts and violence vary depended on the village, region, age, socio-economic class, etc; yet narratives around women's experience are largely reductive. One interviewee from Tripoli's remarks typified this: "During the times of civil war, women are [helpless]. They stay home scared to death!"[22]

Civil society and women's organisations have worked to combat the selective, state-sanctioned memory of the conflict through collecting stories, testimonies and evidence of incidents throughout the war. Only now are we seeing more research and data shedding light on the violations, in particular SGBV violence, committed during the conflict.[23] A forthcoming study by Legal Action Worldwide (LAW), Gendered crimes during the Lebanese Civil Wars, provided disturbing evidence on the nature and scale of SGBV (see box on page 10).

18 ICTJ, Lebanon's legacy of political violence: A mapping of serious violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law in Lebanon, 1975–2008, 2013, p.viii

19 Ibid, p.ix

20 C. Hassoun Abou Jaoude and D. Rugo, 2021, Op. cit., p.14

21 Dr Dolly Sarraf, Institute of Social Sciences Lebanon, Remarks at an event with women project participants in Beirut, 25 March 2022

22 Male participant, focus group discussion (FGD), Tripoli, September-October 2022

23 See for example: ICTJ, Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence. A Mapping of Serious Violations of International Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law in Lebanon, 1975 - 2008, 2013

Findings of LAW study on SGBV[24]

SGBV was systematically perpetrated by multiple state actors, and state and non-state aligned militia, including rape, gang rape, mass rape, genital mutilation, sexualised torture, and humiliation including electrocution of breasts and genital area, forced nudity, and forced prostitution.

Killing and abduction of women, girls and infants by state actors, and state and non-state aligned militia were perpetrated during massacres, sieges, at checkpoints and on the streets, often at night when militiamen would enter victims' homes and kill entire families. They were killed based on where they were from, in front of family members, and in retaliation/retribution for other incidents.

Enforced disappearances of male family members had a gendered impact on women and children, with negative economic, social and security implications. With men constituting the vast majority of the missing, detained and disappeared persons, women and girls suffered in three ways: (1) the loss of a family member; (2) the loss of the breadwinner; (3) threat to personal safety. Families were also extorted for money by people falsely claiming to have information on the whereabouts of their family member.

Family violence against women and girls increased including beatings, and verbal and sexual abuse by husbands and male family members. Increased violence occurred within families that were forced into inadequate living conditions due to displacement. Victims also attributed increased family violence to the stress of the conflict environment, and trauma.

The role of women in the militias was important predominantly in non-combatant roles. Women and girls in the militias often joined at a young age, motivated by ideology, a desire to protect their community, and to break out of traditional gender roles. Women and girls in the militias were at increased risk of gendered crimes both from opposing militias and from militiamen in their own militias.

The Lebanese non-governmental organisation (NGO), KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation, and the Lebanese Association for History (LAH) have published findings on how women's agency and perspectives have been minimised in history books. The study dealt with the issue of gender justice in school history in Lebanon by studying the image of women in history books and their position in the process of developing curricula and writing textbooks. The analysis found that women were absent in these written histories. KAFA's report attributed this to "centuries of marginalisation of women's history, their participation and their impact on making events and history".[25] The research also found that women never took part in the process of history writing, editing, collection of data and documentation because that role was solely delegated to men, which also demonstrates the complete dominance of men. No theme or lesson was devoted to women's contributions to history, or reflecting a feminist analysis of history, or showing the status of women in a particular era or during an event. As for the occasional cases in which women appeared, their representation was mainly negative or passive

because they were portrayed either as victims, betrayers, maids or prostitutes. In other cases they appeared as the wives of the male leaders and heroes.[26]

24 LAW and UN Women, Summary report: "They raped us in every possible way, in ways you can't imagine": Gendered Crimes During the Lebanese Civil Wars, 2022

25 LAH and KAFA, The image of women in curricula and history books in Lebanon: A history of systematic exclusion (translated from Arabic), 2022

26 Ibid.

This marginalisation and gender discrimination in history books is also reflected in how women have been under- and misrepresented in terms of dominant narratives related to their roles during the conflict and in conflict prevention following the civil war. Moreover, this is reflective of the continued barriers that women in Lebanon face in terms of social, economic, educational, and political representation and participation.

4.1 Conflict issues and dynamics in Tripoli and Baalbek

Within the dynamics of recent conflicts in Tripoli and Baalbek, there are echoes of the civil war. Unresolved historic grievances, personal, family, and collective traumas and the continued lack of spaces to safely address painful and difficult issues are among other factors perpetuating violence.

In Tripoli, for example, this often manifests as high levels of mental health issues and conflict-related trauma: "We were left with mostly mental damages… People disappeared, our houses were invaded, we lived in a state of constant stress."[27] Women explained how parents internalised the violence they had themselves experienced and witnessed as children and this affects how they interact with their own children: "They were raised on violence, and they are themselves exercising violence on their children."[28] This intergenerational aspect of conflict, along with the gendered social pressure experienced by men to restore family honour, was highlighted by a group of men interviewed in Baalbek:

> *"The clans carry their conflicts and hatred from one generation to another, their traditions affect them very much. […] The reasons [for the existence of] clans are revenge and honour. Therefore, if something happens to him, it is my duty to avenge him. […]"*[29]

In Tripoli, a history of marginalisation, underdevelopment and ongoing violence, including crackdowns by security forces, is perpetuating cycles of conflict. One researcher interviewed noted that "the government sees them [youth associated with Islamist groups] as security threats and imprisons them, which fuels the anger of their brothers and uncles, and creates a cycle of violence".[30]

Gender norms continue to permeate everyday lives, including tensions, in both contexts, although this plays out differently among and between different communities and groups, and they are dynamic, often subject to rapid change. Yet, despite shifting and interwoven dynamics, in conservative neighbourhoods, such as in Tebbaneh, Tripoli, many stigmas and taboos that determine what men and women "should" and "should not" do remain and can create barriers to transforming these gendered conflict dynamics.

This section provides a brief overview of some of the key gendered conflict dynamics in Tripoli and Baalbek highlighted within the project, including by participants in the gender sensitive context analysis, and other conflict analyses and assessments, conducted by International Alert, which included desk research, interviews and focus groups with young people, women's rights organisations and networks, civil society organisations, and local and international NGOs working on gender, human rights and peacebuilding.

27 Syrian refugee woman, aged 21-50, FGD, Tripoli, September-October 2022

28 Female, former member of women's network, interview, Baalbek, September-October 2022

29 Five men aged 19-47 (two clan members), interview, Baalbek, September-October 2022

30 Researcher, aged between 30-60, interview, Beirut, September-October 2022

This brief does not seek to provide an exhaustive list of conflict issues and dynamics, rather it focuses on those issues that participants perceived as most relevant to the project.

Tripoli conflict issues and dynamics

> *"With all the deteriorated security and economic conditions in the country and everything that has been happening, women feel helpless in providing any support…"* (Lebanese man, aged 45 and above, interviewed in Tripoli)

Unresolved political and sectarian conflicts: During the Lebanese Civil War, Lebanese Alawites in the Jabal-Mohsen Arab Democratic Party (ADP) aligned with the Syrian government fought alongside the Syrian army against the Sunni Islamist Tawhid Movement in Tripoli based in Bab Al Tabbaneh. The conflict lasted decades, with both areas experiencing ongoing violence, destruction and significant civilian casualties. Tensions between those two neighbouring areas can still be felt years later and an armed conflict erupted between them in 2011, ceasing with a LAF-enforced security plan in 2014. The plan was focused on security measures related to an immediate cessation of violence and did not address root causes of the conflicts, thus underlying tensions remain and continue to flare up between the communities.

History of marginalisation of Tripoli in post-conflict development: Investment has been centralised and mostly focused on Beirut, contributing to a sense of systemic underinvestment and disenfranchisement. The period following the 2014 security plan saw different actors attempting to revive the city's local economy; however, few of these ideas have been implemented and setbacks have continued to hinder development. Despite the numerous challenges, the October protests created stronger independent youth networks and invigorated youth awareness of politics away from affiliation to traditional political parties, although recently and around the 2022 parliamentary elections process these cross-network ties are starting to weaken seeing more fragmentation of these groups.

Tripoli's geographic and socio-economic divisions: Interviews indicated that the city has severe, class-based and geographic barriers that divide the city. Unemployment in Tripoli is high, with some interviewees saying that certain neighbourhoods have up to 80% youth unemployment. Studies indicate that the economic participation rate is even lower among women and youth in Tripoli.

Decreasing sense of agency and belonging: In Tripoli, conflicts – whether economic or social in nature – have been instrumentalised for political agendas by opposing groups and are further entrenched along lines of religious sects and affiliation with regional geopolitics. With the absence of a shared narrative of the civil war and its legacy, reasons behind the current economic crisis, these narratives of crises and wars can be leveraged by the political elites in ways that further polarise communities and are not conducive for reconciliation or recovery. This is more challenging for women whose agency for decision-making is undermined by traditional family gender norms that give supremacy to men in placing limitations on women's roles and restrict women to household decision-making.

Youth vulnerability to recruitment and drug misuse: Young people in Tripoli face mounting social, economic and cultural challenges and stigma regarding stereotypes that relate to the continuing tensions and risks of recruitment by armed groups. Vulnerability factors are diverse, including a sense of political marginalisation and unequal treatment of security forces; perceptions of social and economic injustice; lack of access to employment opportunities; degradation of education infrastructure; lack of future prospects and sense of social and personal worth and purpose; and disruptive social context and experiences of violence.[31] Some interviewees related the lack of financial remuneration for young men who are out of school and without a job to the intermittent rise of violence in Tripoli, which is often a reaction to marginalisation and socio-economic deprivation rather than ideological extremism. Others said recruitment into armed groups provides a sense of purpose, while some noted that it is linked to the general political climate following the war in Syria and identity politics between Sunnis from Tebbaneh and Alawites from Jabal Mohsen. Interviewees also noted that drug use increased with the conflict in Tebbaneh and Mohsen, and particularly after the Syrian conflict, because armed groups had access to drugs and distributed them among fighters to mobilise them into fighting.

Mental health impact of conflicts and crises: The traumatic impacts of the conflicts, including ongoing and sporadic violence and displacement(s), were particularly felt among interviewees in Tripoli. Some participants reported admissions to psychiatric hospitals a few years after the civil war due to psychological disorders and an inability to function in society with little or no available support. Refugees, women and men, from Syria were exposed to extremely difficult conditions. Most Syrian men interviewed described a feeling of depression and hopelessness, especially in the current difficult circumstances, and financial hardship due to the sense of responsibility and burden of traditional gender roles as male heads of household and breadwinners.

Female Syrian refugees in Tripoli face severe and worsened humanitarian crisis: Interviewees noted that aid provision among Syrian refugees had decreased rapidly, and the pandemic has had a significant impact on Syrians' access to food, health, and education. Women and girl refugees have been hardest hit by deteriorating conditions and increasing gulfs in power dynamics. For example, women and girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence, harassment and exploitation, and forced marriage. Women members of dialogue groups discussed reports within their networks of how spouses' mental health had deteriorated during the economic crisis affecting their relationships with their families and increasing the risks of gender-based violence and violence against the children. Additionally, cases of exploitation by landlords are particularly weighted against female heads of household.[32] Moreover, continued insecurity and violence has led to examples of women refugees being further displaced to escape shooting.[33]

Strong desire among youth groups to work on improving the city: Youth across different nationalities, socio-economic backgrounds, and genders feel a collective sense of injustice and hope to rectify their reality by becoming more active. As such, there have been many initiatives developed in the city (see section on civil society) and led by diverse groups of youth. These include peacebuilding campaigns; arts and cultural events including theatre and poetry nights; street art; neighbourhood clean ups; volunteering in soup kitchens; and developing small neighbourhood libraries.

Stronger networks post October protests: The protests brought together different groups of youth to brainstorm and work together on social, cultural, and political projects. The previously discussed lack of a sense of belonging to the state appears to foster a stronger sense of solidarity particularly among Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian youth coming from impoverished neighbourhoods.

31 International Alert, More resilient, still vulnerable: Taking stock of prevention of violent extremism programming with youth in Tripoli, Lebanon, 2018

32 UNHCR, Woman alone: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/ar/53bb8d006.pdf

33 Ibid.

Baalbek conflict issues and dynamics

> *"Rare are the days where no conflict occurs. If 2-3 days pass and nothing happens, we're shocked, we get bored sometimes as we're always used to action happening."* (Lebanese woman from Baalbek, aged 45 and above, in focus group)

Clan-based family tensions interplay with broader political dynamics and influence gender power relationships and roles: Tribal and familial allegiances are strong in the Bekaa and these relationships can be seen as more influential here than in other regions of Lebanon. These inter-family conflicts have resulted in violence, including cases of retaliatory killings or kidnappings and restricting movements through road blocks. The growing economic crisis is increasing the risk of such incidents.[34] Disputes are often related to competing attempts to capture/maintain power over economic resources in the area and violence is often used to achieve these aims. Clan-based tensions often interplay with national power dynamics and religious factions and clan influence continues to dominate political, economic, cultural and security structures in the region. Elevated levels of fighting can be observed in public places or in the streets in Baalbek-Hermel, even occurring in official locations such as municipality buildings or police stations. These links may suggest overlapping public and private agendas in these conflicts. In the current dire economic situation, fights over money and theft are common in areas that report greater levels of economic deprivation and economic tensions and as such suggest that these conflicts relate to negative coping mechanisms related to worsening economic situations. Patriarchal familial power-structures continue to mean that men are often still the ultimate decision-makers, despite communicating and negotiating with women. Addressing gender-based discrimination and violence, including honour crimes and sexual violence within families has been highlighted as a priority in Baalbek.[35]

History of marginalisation and state neglect: A history of marginalisation and state neglect in the area, as with many rural regions in Lebanon, has fostered a sense of neglect and further reliance on tribal and familial connections for employment and opportunities, including illicit and trade, which can involve violence and crime (for example, in the cultivation and trafficking of drugs such as cannabis).[36]

Stereotyping in terms of vulnerability to recruitment into armed groups: The spill-over effects of the conflict in Syria, including with fighting at times spilling over into the Hermel region and the existence of pockets of ISIS-held territory up to 2017, have contributed to stereotyping of these areas and the communities in them (including Syrian refugees) as hotspots or 'at risk' of engaging in violence.

Securitisation of Syrian refugee presence through evictions: LAF has regularly raided informal settlements, in particular after incursions by armed groups and suicide bombings such as that of Al Qaa in the summer of 2016. The Baalbek-Hermel region has seen a rise in evictions and increased economic vulnerability, impacting refugees as well as the vulnerable Lebanese population, with undocumented refugees and individuals who do not have legal residencies being more at risk due to lack of protection.[37] Additionally, there has been divisive discourse around the presence of refugees, which has grown alongside increasing inter-community tensions

34 Extortion, kidnappings on rise in crisis-hit Lebanon, Arab News, 12 January 2022, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2003191/middle-east

35 WANA, Human security: Localised insights from Baalbek, 2019, http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/WANA%20Balbaak%20english.pdf

36 Ibid.

37 UNHCR, In Focus: Rise in evictions due to increased economic vulnerability, 2020, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77872

amid the economic crisis.[38] These negative perceptions have been used by certain factions to frame Syrian refugee presence as a security threat and stoke tensions.[39]

Long history of mitigating local conflicts through informal mechanisms: Sources of resilience and connectors can also be seen across infrastructure such as youth committees and town meetings. Peacebuilding figures also do exist, and evidence for greater networks and knowledge of such are seen within Baalbeck-Hermel. The prevailing influence and power of clan-based families contributes to the consolidation of influence of such informal local mechanisms for conflict mitigation.

5. Women's roles in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation

As the legacies of violence remain unaddressed and the conflict issues unresolved, the gendered impacts of the civil war on women persist. These ongoing gendered conflict dynamics have very real implications for women's engagement with conflict prevention and public and political life more broadly.

> *"This is the problem in Lebanon. Women are not encouraged to participate in the political arena since it threatens the Lebanese patriarchal system's 'raison d'être'."* (Researcher, aged between 30-60, based in Beirut)

Despite general disenfranchisement among women and young people in Tripoli and Baalbek, our research showed that reconciliation can and must be fostered following a bottom-up approach. The local level is a critical entry point for meaningful reconciliation. Building alliances and supporting networks of feminist activists across the multiple layers of social lines that encompass a person's identity in Lebanon are key ingredients for successful and sustainable conflict transformation.

Women and young people interviewed in Tripoli and Baalbek as part of the project demonstrated significant potential for de-escalation of conflicts; involvement in dialogue and decision-making at a local level will also reduce sentiments of disenfranchisement and marginalisation.

38 ARK-UNDP, Regular perception surveys on social tensions throughout Lebanon, Wave XIII Narrative Report, 2022, https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/TANiCnOmpUOVE8UZ7RYe

39 M. al-Masri, Between local patronage relationships and securitisation: The conflict context in the Bekaa region, Conflict Analysis Report, Lebanon Support, 2015, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/between-local-patronage-relationships-and-securitization-conflict-context-bekaa

5.1 Barriers to women's leadership in conflict prevention efforts

"Some husbands would not accept that their wives get employed, as this will risk him losing his power!" (Male interviewee, Tripoli)

Women experience significant challenges to their active engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in the areas explored, but also show great determination to overcome these barriers.

Reductive narratives of women's agency in and experience of violence and conflict prevention: Women remain largely absent from narratives and history of the civil war in Lebanon. Where they do appear, their roles have been minimised, characterised as playing support roles and victims. Indeed, the male-dominated, post-conflict political system further sidelined women's voices, perspectives and agency. To address the ongoing gendered legacy of the conflict for accountability, reconciliation, and lasting positive change, it is crucial to name, expose and combat these marginalising narratives and structures. At present, however, until initiatives are successful in compiling a fuller, more nuanced and more accurate picture of the roles women have played in past conflicts and play in current prevention, reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, the picture remains reduced, simplified or ignored.

Restrictive, gendered, social norms and patriarchal family systems continue to limit women's participation in such initiatives: Women face compounding layers of additional burden due to caring responsibilities (childcare, care of elderly or sick relatives), which traditionally fall on them in addition to other domestic responsibilities and paid work. This limits the time and energy available to engage in roles outside the household. A number of women reported resistance from male family members to their joining activities outside the home or in other neighbourhoods and regions. Even when women themselves or their families did see the value and importance of women's roles in conflict prevention, it was often focused purely on the women's role of educating their children not to engage in violence, rather than encompassing all the diverse roles women can play. The project worked on these barriers by engaging with male family members to gain their support and working with women to understand their agency and the different roles they can play in leading peacebuilding interventions. One participant whose father used to be in a militia, said that through the project she was able to change her father's perspective on his own involvement in the war and acknowledge his responsibilities and wrongdoing.

Lack of confidence and poor sense of self mean that women require further support and encouragement to take up opportunities and space to engage in initiatives: Our analysis and project learning found that many women internalised negative, gendered stereotypes, which limited their own understanding of their potential as peacebuilders. This manifested as low self-esteem and self-confidence, creating challenges for women to identify their own strengths and skills. The project worked on developing individual self-esteem and positive self-image, as well as creating a supportive network to build each other up.

A significant barrier to women realising their full participation and leadership in conflict prevention relates to exposure to and understanding of gender roles, WPS and their rights: Project needs assessment, MEL and lessons learned events continued to highlight the limited base of understanding of women's rights, gender norms and roles and the WPS agenda. For women-led conflict prevention to be effective, it is critical that women have access to information and can develop their knowledge around these issues, which have a real and daily impact on their lives. Without this understanding, women and men (young and old) can still retain reductive or limiting understandings of gender roles within their contexts.

Alert/UN Women

View from the exchange day (8 March, celebrating International Women's Day) during which women participants executed a large mural in the street separating Bab al Tebbeneh and Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli, Lebanon.

5.2 Women's roles in peace dialogue and community conflict prevention and reconciliation

"Community initiatives allow tangible assessment of importance of these sessions and dialogue." (Joe Haddad, Dialogue Coach and Facilitator)

The gender-sensitive context analysis, facilitated coaching sessions, and lessons and experiences shared by the women leaders in the project informed concrete actions for addessing gendered conflict dynamics and social tensions in their communities. Women leaders from across political, social, economic and regional divides developed their skills to participate in and co-faciliate dialogue sessions and plan and implement local peacebuilding initatives.

Figure 1: Creating Spaces for Women Peacebuilders project process

The dialogue sessions brought up many issues resulting from wars and conflicts in both areas, including:

1. normalisation of violence among youth that is associated with drug abuse and the role of women in prevention
2. discrimination and psychological barriers between the two communities and the roles women can play to bridge divides using their negotiation and communication skills at family and community levels
3. intergenerational trauma within families and communities
4. war-entrenched sectarianism that hinders a unified personal status law and thus limits women's access to rights and resources and thus meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Collectively designed by the women themselves, the inititaives sought to address the issues identified in the dialogue session. In Baalbek, the initatives took the form of engaging women and men in activities focused on breaking down the existing gendered stereotypes and empowering women to have a greater role within their communities and in public life, and to become players in addressing past conflicts and current tensions in their communities. This included a series of three cultural open days, including events with women ex-fighters from the Fighters for Peace (FFP) NGO, who shared their personal experiences and testimonies from the civil war, stressing the need to learn from past mistakes to build a better non-violent future based on continuous platforms of dialogue. In Tripoli, the initiatives were implemented within the framework of the role of women in mitigating local conflicts that have roots from the civil war as part of the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. The interconected activities involved awareness sessions on topics of concern for women, a cleaning campaign in both areas and graffiti and artwork on the walls with reconciliation and gender messages.

Stories of women leaders

"Peace cannot be achieved with force, but through dialogue and kindness."

Abir El Tawm Bitar (46) is determined to share her newfound openness to foster peaceful dialogues towards overcoming the trauma of past and present conflicts in her community.

For Abir El Tawm Bitar and her family of four children, fear and perseverance have been a significant part of their lives. A long-time resident of Qaa, a village in Baalbek, she has spent 22 years working in Qaa Municipality, after graduating in Sociology from the Lebanese University in Zahle.

Qaa is home to 6,000 residents and is located 10 km from the Syrian border. The quaint northern village has witnessed plenty of bloodshed and conflict during Lebanon's 15-year civil war as well as more recent attacks by non-state armed groups. Qaa's troubled history has created tension in the community between members from different religious and political backgrounds, and with the more recent influx of Syrian refugees. Abir recalls:

"I was only 16 years old when armed clashes happened in 1989 to 1990. The image that remains vivid in my mind is of the meeting place for the victims' parade in front of my house, where every day they would meet to carry coffins to graves. I will never forget when a family of three – a father, son and daughter – were taken together. Every day, we would wonder if there would be more victims.

"During the dialogue sessions, we were a group of women (Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians) from different cultural and religious backgrounds and villages, but also with different individual and collective memories of civil war and many other incidents that took place in the Bekaa. Through sitting together, we really got to know each other and learned what each of us had lived through, and you can't help but respect their strength in the face of all this sorrow."

Abir learned to apply what she learned in the sessions during problems in her community. Her new skills of applying dialogue and mediation helped her see things from all perspectives and find a reasonable solution.

"The co-facilitators were able to enlighten us to share even the most hidden memories and strengthen trust not only in ourselves, but with others through the art of listening," Abir explains.

"It also confirmed for me that women have an important role in society and we can be decision-makers too. It boosted my confidence, made me more ready to voice my opinions and not sit aside when tensions begin to rise. These lessons I learned are rippling out in my daily life, I now feel I have a responsibility to give my newfound openness to the people I meet in the village – to pass it along and improve our society as a whole. Peace cannot be achieved with force, but with dialogue and tolerance, and if we want a peaceful society, this is how we must always be.

"Now with the elections coming, there could be a lot of tensions between supporters of different political parties. I now feel ready to apply the mediation skills I learned to help when tensions or conflicts arise and find a way for them to communicate their needs peacefully."

The women creating a more peaceful future for generations to come

Nazha, 33,[40] has faced the hardship of the war in Syria and conflict in Lebanon, but now she is using her journey to promote non-violence and mediation through peaceful dialogues in her community with women from different communities and generations. She fled Syria 10 years ago with her family, hoping to escape from the war engulfing her country and find sanctuary in Lebanon, only to find herself caught up in different sectarian conflicts in the city of Tripoli, north of Lebanon. Nazha recalled:

"We left Syria because we couldn't mentally cope with the unstable situation there, after having lost many of our family members, just to find ourselves frightened and insecure here in Bab Al-Tebbeneh in Tripoli each time a fight takes place. Sometimes there are daily confrontations in the area; we are unable to sleep and my kids get terrified."

Over eight sessions, the women discussed and received training on conflict resolution, communication skills, mediation, gender roles and women's role in peace and security, as well as skills on how to design a campaign, how to implement initiatives, and how to monitor conflict dynamics in the Tripoli context using monitoring tools. The sessions were intended to gather women from different nationalities, professions, generations and communities that have experienced war and conflict, in order to support their role as women peacebuilders in their community.

"Thanks to the women-led dialogue sessions I started feeling a lot better. Through the supportive environment I was able to have a bigger sense of belonging to the group. Together we all got past the initial fear of 'the other' and became comfortable with one another, forming one big, loving family, regardless of our backgrounds and views. Ultimately, we all had the same goal, which is to live together in coexistence and peace.

40 Name changed on participant's request.

"What started as a conversation between a group of women has become an everlasting connection. We all expressed and communicated our concerns, discussed our different individual and collective memories, which broke down the barriers of fear, helped us put the past behind us and move forward. Our families, neighbours and community members also became friends. If problems would [sic] arise again between Bab al Tebbeneh and Jabal Mohsen, I don't fear that things will escalate into violence because of the culture of non-violence that has spread amongst us and our ability to mitigate conflict.

"The dialogue sessions made us expand our views and accept differences between us. Being engaged in the workshops and dialogues boosted my confidence and helped all of us understand our worth and the great value and impact that we, as women, have within our families and communities and how we can bring peace to our communities. Even at home with my own family, I have changed my outlook and how I interact with them on a daily basis; I became more understanding to their needs and able to communicate better.

"This goes beyond my family. In my neighbourhood, I play now the role of the mediator and recently when a conflict happened between the neighbours on the use of a common rooftop, I found a solution after listening to each person's point of view and desires and applied a collaborative approach. It needs understanding and attention.

"Now, if any problem happens in the community, I feel empowered to mitigate conflict and come to a peaceful conclusion. There is always a way to work things out – all it takes is the time and peaceful dialogue to understand the other side of the story and not let anger or frustration rule our interactions."

6. How to engage with memories of war in women-led peace initiatives

With the lack of resources on the role of women during war and their involvement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding now and for the future in the country, and the absence of women in history books, it is important to empower women's networks with the right tools for them to amplify their voices and change the narratives of war, peace and reconciliation for current and future generations.

A crucial foundation is having knowledge on the WPS agenda and women's role in conflict prevention, in addition to understanding how gendered power and conflict dynamics limit women's full participation and how these can be overcome. Shared experiences and exchange between women of all backgrounds, ages and experiences – including from younger and older generations with different experiences and memories of conflicts – strengthens and deepens the potential impact of such dialogue and conflict-prevention efforts.

It also provides safe spaces to challenge pre-existing conceptions and develop more open mindsights. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential to exacerbate painful memories or trauma, it is critical to provide wellbeing support and information on referral to psychosocial support services.

The coaching and accompaniment model provides the skills, knowledge, support and confidence for women to go beyond the confines of their households and extended families' zone of influence and enables them to make a more sustainable and wider impact. The coaching model also proved the need to start working with each women group from 'where they are at', based on their different societal and cultural backgrounds, their experiences and the context in each area.

The trust and mutual support developed through the networks had intended positive impacts. For example, in Tripoli, women from Jabal and Tabbeneh conducted dialogue sessions and shared their individual and collective experiences of what they had experienced during the civil war and in recent incidents in both areas. This built trust and shared understanding among the group acting as an organic, informal mechanism for prevention. The women created a WhatsApp group and started sharing news that was creating tensions in their areas. Women in the group were able to discount fake news and rumours and provide reassurance and support to one another. In turn the women were able to communicate with their families and communities to combat the misinformation and avoid increasing tensions.

Despite the layered intergenerational conflict issues identified in this dialogue process and the lessons learned around the importance of deepening understanding between generations who did experience violence and those who did not, within the relatively short period of the project it was challenging to dig deep into intergenerational aspects of dialogues and break intergenerational barriers.

Dialogue spanning generational divides

The intergenerational approach in the project brought a new dynamic to the dialogue sessions, especially among young women who had only heard about the war in stories from their parents and those with lived experience who were able to share their personal stories. An exchange of perspectives and convergence of positions towards topics including wars, women in conflict and peace, and gendered challenges to meaningful participation in peace and political processes were highlighted in discussions.

Having lived through the daily challenges of the civil war, older women tended to be more expressive about their stories; they shared live testimonies with the group and talked openly about their losses, pain, and what they used to do in order to protect their families. Younger women were proactively listening, sometimes they were silent and showing respect to the painful stories, and the tough conditions others have lived, and at other times they were putting the blame on them for allowing the use of violence to happen during the civil war and for not taking action to stop it. Younger women showed a greater enthusiasm for change and more positivity about a better tomorrow for themselves and future generations.

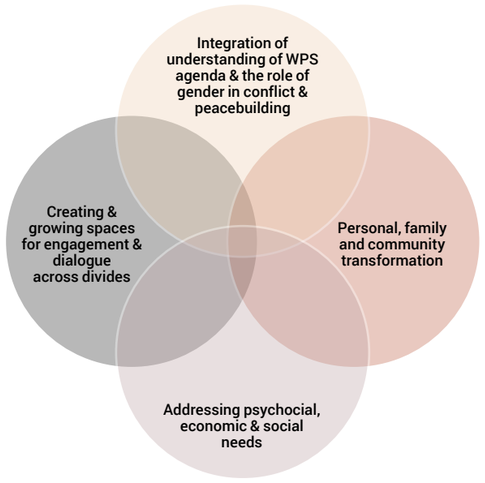
Those sessions and the intergenerational dialogue that took place gave value to the testimonies of the older generation and at the same time they provided the younger generation with more evidence that violence only leads to more loss, encouraging them to take on leading roles in peacebuilding processes.

7. Recommendations for women as conflict prevention change-makers

The recommendations presented here build on lessons learned from this project, including the experiences and perspectives of the women involved and their wider family and community networks, as well as research and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). This policy brief provides concrete recommendations, which apply across regions and can be adapted and applied to future interventions, on entry points and approaches for improving roles of the women leaders in reconciliation and peacebuilding through community-level dialogue with context-driven, conflict-sensitive, and inclusive priorities.

Recognise the importance of holistic programming to expand spaces for women-led conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The barriers to women's active engagement and leadership in conflict prevention and peacebuilding are complex and interlinked, based on patriarchal systems, power structures and social norms that have restricted women's role, as well as interplaying with mental health and wellbeing, psychosocial, social, socio-cultural and economic factors. Just as the challenges intersect, so too must the solutions. Moreover, given the growing economic and food security crises, immediate and basic livelihoods needs should also be considered, especially as continued crisis and precarity can compound past trauma. Therefore, efforts aimed at expanding the spaces and roles of women in conflict prevention must take into account the social, cultural and economic contexts of women peacebuilders, alongside addressing women's psychological, social and economic needs.

Figure 2: Critical components for growing women's leadership in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and reconciliation



Ensure that women leaders understand and work according to the local-national linkages of the WPS NAP of Lebanon. This can be done through capacity-development workshops and an accompaniment approach that introduces UNSCR 1325,[41] the WPS agenda and the Lebanon WPS NAP and works with participants to discuss the relevance of such policy frameworks and national plans to their local efforts. This also means connecting beyond the local and leveraging wider partnerships and networks is crucial for helping ensure sustainability and growing the impact of locally-led women's conflict prevention networks which, while active and dynamic, are often not connected up across regions or to national initiatives.

Enhance skills and knowledge of women leaders on understanding how gender is socially constructed and interacts with conflict dynamics. Gendered identities and norms are constructed through the societal power relations between and among women, men, girls, and boys. These gender roles and relations influence a society's propensity for violent conflict, the extent to which these gender roles and relations might themselves be shaped by violent conflict, and the opportunities they present for transformative change. Ensuring that women leaders have a solid, contextualised and grounded understanding of this is a crucial step in helping the women leaders gain a better understanding of the role they can play as drivers of peace in their communities. It also equips them with the tools to start conversations around those issues and dynamics so they can better lead peacebuilding in their communities.

Build deeper understanding of intergenerational conflict dynamics as one of the root causes of tensions and bring together different generations, including those who directly lived the civil war and those who did not. The project identified the need to strengthen understanding of intergenerational power dynamics. The difference in intergenerational perspectives was evident in the discourse and narratives during dialogue sessions between women who had only heard about the civil war on the one hand and the women who had a lived experience in the civil war on the other. Dealing effectively with the past is dependent upon building effective relationships and understanding across generational lines. It is recommended that projects allow sufficient time for deeper exploration of generational issues within conflict analyses for women themselves to explore, identify, and reflect on 'sticking points' where generational differences tend to emerge, particularly around the roles in previous and ongoing conflicts. This includes sensitively addressing issues related to reluctance in talking out about conflict and balancing the need to encourage open and frank dialogue with respect and understanding of the limits and anxieties associated with talking about painful, past experiences. This is especially important when bringing in individuals who would be perceived as not being able to relate to the horrific experiences of the civil war, having not directly lived it. One example could be beginning with parallel dialogue sessions with smaller groups belonging to the same age range based on their lived/non-lived experience with the civil war before bringing different generations together.

Build and develop capacities of women and young women in leading dialogue facilitation and local reconciliation processes, particularly in engaging with men in their communities and with other stakeholders. This requires a long process that combines training sessions, coaching and accompaniment from dialogue and peacebuilding experts who are also knowledgeable about gender dynamics, legacy of the Lebanese Civil War and its impact on local reconciliation efforts. Throughout this process, a conflict-sensitive engagement with painful memories of the past, that is sensitive to experiences of trauma, and with dealing with new emerging conflicts and tensions should act as a cornerstone to engaging with different age groups and gradual change rooted in behaviours and views.

41 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women Peace and Security affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace.

Improve women's abilities in reflecting on and self-monitoring their own progress and in observing progress within the dialogue sessions and community initiatives towards conflict transformation and reconciliation. Depending on activities and initiatives to be undertaken by the women dialogue groups and led by the women leaders, this could involve training workshops and an accompaniment approach that introduces monitoring and evaluation as a method for mapping and analysing changes in contexts and community perceptions and how participants can monitor and evaluate their interactions with such changes (i.e. how they influence and are influenced by the changing dynamics).

Mainstream mental wellbeing and psychosocial support and address violence against women across the dialogue sessions considering the memory-inducing nature of topics to be discussed. It is crucial to offer a space where vulnerability is not faced with judgement or harm. Safe spaces offer a refuge from judgement, unsolicited opinions, and the pressure of justification. They allow women to feel supported and respected. If need is identified, the project should provide opportunities for women dialogue participants to receive therapy sessions for survivors of the civil war. Specialised support and referral should be signposted and provided for survivors of SGBV and dialogue should address awareness around preventing violence against women.

Active roles in community peacebuilding requires economic self-independence. The dire living conditions of some women participants in the community dialogue, compounded by the financial crisis in Lebanon, was reported as a main hindrance to sustained women participation in dialogue beyond the project timeframe and to more women participating in dialogues and community initiatives. This was mitigated by covering transportation fees to the participants, but when not sustained, it could undermine the sustainability of the project. As a recommendation for future similar projects, peacebuilding projects must be linked to economic empowerment and self-independence of targeted groups; women need to gain economic independence to play an effective role as community peacebuilders.

Approach peacebuilding and reconciliation community initiatives through other methods of non-direct or non-verbal communication. This nonetheless fosters social engagement and trust across divides and could include artistic peacebuilding practices (communicating through languages of music, art, and theatre), as well as joint advocacy campaigns (communicating across society at large) to counter violence or misinformation, and practical/infrastructural/projects determined by the needs of individual communities (communicating through empowerment and action).

Ensure the sustainability of the process and project outcomes. Addressing gendered legacies of violence and working to change social norms is a complex and long-term process. Therefore, projects should be framed within a longer-term strategy (such as within the WPS framework), which emphasises building on and strengthening existing local capacities, mechanisms and partnerships for enhancing women's roles in conflict prevention and ensuring accountability for SGBV and gendered crimes. Specifically, this should include connecting up to facilitate collective healing processes, expanding provision of psychological support to victims and survivors of gendered crimes and improving access to legal pathways to hold those responsible for sexual and gendered crimes and other violations and abuses accountable, through domestic and international laws and mechanisms.

Additional sources

J.P. Eggert, Female fighters and militants during the Lebanese civil war: Individual profiles, pathways, and motivations, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328767423_Female_Fighters_and_Militants_During_the_Lebanese_Civil_War_Individual_Profiles_Pathways_and_Motivations


international
alert


UN
WOMEN