Social Cohesion in the context of urban refugees crisis

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Setting the scope: Why does social cohesion matter in urban contexts?

Context: rising social tensions

- Syrian refugees living in non-camp and urban settings (complex, fluid, diverse, and hosts interconnected communities)
- New & diverse challenges to humanitarian agencies and local authorities

Consequences

- Potential of generating secondary conflict
- Huge consequences on equitable access to public space, urban governance, basic services, livelihood opportunities and humanitarian assistance

Humanitarian and development interventions **can** directly or indirectly contribute to increased tensions in the communities.
**Horizontal social cohesion:** the nature and set of relationships between individuals and groups in a particular environment

**Vertical social cohesion:** the nature and set of relationships between individuals and groups and the institutions that govern them in a particular environment

**Indicators of social cohesion**
- Aspects of personal, political, and developmental human security
- Trust in institutions
- Satisfaction and participation in civic life (within groups)
- Measures of intergroup perceptions
- Perceived threats
- Social distance and/or inter-group contact (between groups)

**Manifestations of low social cohesion**
- Social tensions
- Social instability
- Social fragmentation: measured using indicators like frequency of violent inter-group incidences or communication of negative feelings
Understanding social cohesion in Lebanon and Jordan

**Drivers of tensions**

**Structural Causes:**
- Structural vulnerabilities that pre-date the Syrian crisis

**Socio-economic Causes:**
- Differences in religious, cultural, and social norms between refugee and host communities, and lack of social networks

**Proximate Causes:**
- Access, affordability, and quality of housing
- Economic competition over jobs / livelihoods opportunities
- Access to and quality of basic education and basic public goods and services
- The role of international aid
- The role of media and the framing of issues

**Thematic insights**

- Timing and level of analysis matter
- History and context are crucial
- Social cohesion requires thinking beyond refugee-host community dynamics
- Framing is important, experience isn’t everything
- Perception of humanitarian assistance matters
- External factors matter

Such conceptualizations are critical for identifying potential entry points for mitigating or diffusing tensions.
Limitations in current understanding and measurement of social tensions and cohesion

- Social cohesion remains poorly defined and operationalized leading to lack of clarity and misuse of the concept
- Sampling methods used for site selection do not allow exploration of causal relationships
- Preoccupation with proximate causes (pressure on municipalities, etc.) and gap in analysis of those in relation to structural pre-conditions: perceived economic competition vs. actual unemployment
- Cross sectional snapshots dominate the research, leaving little room for understanding trends overtime
- Perpetuation of sector based thinking on the expanse of systemic, integrated approaches
- Recommendations remain at high level and do not translate into actual programming or for prioritizing and targeting aid

How we define and measure social cohesion impacts how we understand and intervene to address social cohesion
Recommendations for local governments

- Identify contextual drivers of social cohesion (at municipality/district level)
- Identify the impact of social tensions on most vulnerable groups from refugee and host communities (children, youth, women, elderly)
- Explore how to integrate faith based networks in initiatives addressing social cohesion
- Highlight case studies of good practice that could be replicated by others
- Ensure municipal policy promotes pluralism and peaceful coexistence within increasingly heterogeneous and multicultural societies
- Partner with civil society to co-develop programs and test innovative tools addressing social cohesion (that align with national and regional plans)
- Collaborate with new and otherwise “non-traditional” humanitarian technology, crisis-mapping, geo-intelligence, private sector to test new data collection, analysis and visualization tools
- Partner with humanitarian organizations and academic institutions to better understand social cohesion in urban, conflict affected humanitarian settings using a multidisciplinary approach
Recommendations for humanitarian actors

Merge the humanitarian & development approaches through:

• Adopting a cross-sector, area-based approaches in urban, non-camp settings to support local municipalities and community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide public goods and services to all vulnerable members of society.

• Empowering local actors by working with both refugees and host communities to create equitable solutions to alleviate tensions over distribution and access.

• Being sensitive to tensions over resources as well as over identity, territory, and security. Investing in greater communication (with refugee and host communities), transparency, and accountability and more advocacy and awareness campaigns addressing negative media.

• Facilitating the establishment of more community-based organizations and community councils with representatives from both host and refugee communities to ensure engagement, discussion and joint planning; a first instrumental step to social cohesion building.
Concluding remarks & discussion

Thank you