Reconceptualising Human Security in Lebanon

A policy lab for the project
**"Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches
in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Radicalisation
in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia"**

Movenpick Hotel
Beirut, Lebanon
January 10 and February 26, 2019

1 Introduction

LCPS hosted two events to bring together 39 international and local civil society actors, senior state security officials, and community stakeholders to discuss perceptions of violent extremism and the role of human security in its prevention. The discussion tackled the question of how to effectively implement human security measures in light of the Lebanese state's limitations and touched on the difficulty of agreeing upon a definition for violent extremism which is crucial for providing holistic and preventative methods at the individual, community, and state levels.

The first policy lab brought together 15 participants (10 males and 5 females) on January 10, 2019 in Beirut. They included senior state security officials and members of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Security, and the Internal Security Forces, along with local and international NGOs to discuss their perceptions of violent extremism and their contributions so far. The first session of the event discussed existing Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) approaches across the different security institutions and the second session explored with civil society on how their human security programmes might fit within those PVE approaches.

The second policy lab was held on February 26, 2019 with a total of 23 participants (10 males and 13 females) representing state officials from various ministries along with civil society actors and INGO staff members. The session focused on the practicalities of designing and implementing PVE projects and how they relate to overall human security concerns. This session generated discussion on the overall failure of the Lebanese government to instil trust and feelings of belonging in Lebanese citizens. There were specific mentions made of the drawbacks of using violent extremism-related tropes that stigmatise vulnerable populations. Discussants also offered insight into how the provision of human security is a state affair that should come within a vision of citizenship and belonging, rather than mere threat-prevention. Indeed, when stakeholders frame human security only in terms of violent extremism, they run the risk of securitising basic needs and resources, thereby regenerating unequal citizenships. The following paragraphs synthesise the interactions and main arguments that took place in the two policy labs.

2 Security Sector Cannot Substitute the Lebanese State

Discussions highlighted the progress Lebanon has made in recent years expanding its scope of human security approaches. In this vein, Lebanon's security branches have instituted a number of new initiatives. For example, the Internal Security Force's 2018-2022 strategic plan aims for change in the current policing framework. Broadly, it recognises the need for Lebanon to shift focus from policing to servicing. Specific objectives include training communal police and changing protocols within the ISF institutions in order to better serve citizens. Other initiatives like the Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC) join the efforts between the Lebanese Armed Forces and civil society by training the military to better understand and respect the local contexts in which they operate.

A main discussion point was the need of coordination between the different security branches. Specifically, participants mentioned that they should not have individual PVE strategies. However, they mentioned that this is difficult under a Lebanese government that does not have a definition for violent extremism and relies on different interventions from the security sector to quell political and social unrest. According to the civil society representatives – perhaps as a result of its weak state – Lebanon has no unified vision for PVE. The representatives mentioned that this ambivalence is reflected in Lebanon's hesitance to sign any international treaty except the 'National Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism,' which remarkably does not mention security forces.

There are great risks in giving the army the PVE agenda because this could cause a degree of dependency common to 'deep states.' There were also long discussions on aspects of the government's rule: According to both security providers and civil society, the Lebanese government must be effective in protecting citizens, but this cannot continue in a way that amounts to the normalisation of a state of emergency.

3 Defining Violent Extremism

Violent extremism is not limited to violent extremist activities, and therefore cannot always be prevented based on a list of clear indicators. There was consensus between community stakeholders and civil society organisations that violent extremism is a result of marginalisation and vulnerability and lack of access to services from the Lebanese state. Therefore, human security programmes need to be framed – primarily by the government – as an active and effective citizenship protected by security forces. This means that it serves all without exception. The failure to do so would only result in more violent extremism.

4 Operationalising PVE Measures

Two reoccurring themes in the discussion were the need for more coordination on two levels: between the Lebanese state and the different security branches at one level, and coordination between the different security branches themselves at the other.

First, the government's strategy is not in concert with security institutions, and some do not know the definitions of violent extremism proposed by the government. In addition, projects that are implemented by international organisations in areas that are known to be "hotbeds of violent extremism" affect the local and international understanding of violent extremism, and this could have political consequences.

Second, there is a need for coordination between the different security branches that have different strategies to prevent violent extremism. However, this is difficult under the Lebanese government that does not have a definition for violent extremism and relies on different interventions from the security sector to quell political and social unrest arbitrarily. Both the security officials and civil society representatives concluded that as long as the Lebanese government does not have an official definition of violent extremism, it will rely on different – sometimes competing – interventions from the security sector. Therefore, civil society representatives warned against localised and separate strategies to combat violent extremism that might be adopted by local security branches. Along with an official definition, Lebanon's national PVE strategy would have to include all Lebanese actors involved on the ground.

The General Security Department is also introducing new ethics and legal regulations to their work. According to senior security officials, these branches have all been undergoing trainings in order to make the implementation of hard security measures more sensitive to community and individual needs. However, while taking up these initiatives, all security branches view their work as playing a supportive rather than substitutive role for the Lebanese government. The security branches therefore made it clear that civil society should not expect them to implement human security programmes that are holistic enough to meet Lebanon's needs. They warned of the risks of the security branches taking exclusive control of the VE agenda, as it could cause Lebanon a level of internal dependency common to 'deep states.' Overall, both security officials and civil society actors agreed that the Lebanese government must be effective in providing protection, but not by normalising a 'state of emergency'.

5 Interventions Need to be Holistic and Applied Equally Across Lebanon

Community members as well as local and international NGOs call for a systematic approach to be applied across Lebanon to avoid stigmatisation, which leads to a looser sense of citizen belonging and discomfort towards the Lebanese state. This is especially the case in the more marginalised regions of Tripoli, Baalbek, and Sidon. Civil society representatives stressed a need for all stakeholders to ensure that hard security measures are not interfering with the government's development work in any particular area. Institutions need partnerships because if they act independently they are likely to negatively affect the work of civil society organisations that have invested in long-term projects tackling human security needs. All participants agreed that human security should not be solely ensured by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

If the upholding of moderate security is needed outside the times of direct threat, then this needs to be applied homogenously across Lebanon so that marginalised and vulnerable communities do not feel targeted.

6 Rule of Law is a Necessary Condition for Human Security Implementation

Civil society actors characterised the Lebanese population as very dismissive of the Lebanese government. There is no trust in governmental institutions, they argued, because they feel that the rule of law does not apply to everyone equally. There is a general sentiment that the Lebanese state does not invest in people's well-being and there is no long-term planning. This extends to the lack of organisation when the state delivers projects on basic issues of human security such as electricity and water.

In participants' views, the issue of rule of law, access to services, and state efficiency in delivering human security programmes, can all explain how people might turn to violent extremism. In Lebanon's current political climate, political representation is unattainable in several marginalised areas. This reinforces participants' perceptions of being oppressed. When people are oppressed, they act collectively against what they perceive to be an oppressive system. But if they are provided with a secure environment, good health services, quality education, and political rights, then there would be no need for people to turn to violent extremism.

7 Corruption on the Local Level Hinders Human Security Project Implementation

In these sessions, government officials raised the problem that the communities' fragmentation is reflected in the government and vice versa. They added that this fragmentation results in the unequal and unfair distribution of governmental resources within and between communities. Even though there are several investments currently aimed at developing vulnerable communities to improve human security, tensions in local politics stifle the implementation of governmental and civil society projects. To the central government, issues of patronage take precedence over serving members of the communities as a whole. This point was reiterated by community members who expressed that, even though there would be projects intended for large segments of society, certain communities would be prioritised based on their political connections. Local civil society representatives corroborated the fact that there are several services provided by the government but they do not reach them because there are politicians who divert these efforts for personal gain. To some of these representatives, the problem is decentralisation – including the lack of state oversight that comes with it – as well as the reliance on local authorities that ensues as a result.

8 Multiple Levels to Achieving Human Security

As discussed by civil society representatives, there are three levels to achieving human security:

1) Individual: this is where vulnerable people might seek alternative ways to mobilise and claim their rights. If human security is not interpreted for the individual as a social, economic, and connective enterprise, then individuals will devise their own means to achieve these rights.

2) Communal: there is a lot of work that needs to be done on how communities see themselves vis-à-vis other communities and how they define their values. Any human security intervention needs to be aware that there are identity issues between communities, and therefore this is a very sensitive process. Human security is needed in places more marginalised by the state than others, but Lebanon in general suffers from a weak state and this affects all of its communities. The government and civil society actors need to find a nuance where no community feels targeted, privileged, or serviced more than others – because this creates further tensions between communities. In the case of Lebanon, these tensions could quite dangerously be mobilised in a sectarian sense.

3) State: the Lebanese government needs to apply more monitoring and evaluation control measures to make sure resources are being invested in the desired and needed human security programmes and ensuring equitable accessibility to these programmes and services.