End-of-Project Workshop Report

"Towards more effective human security approaches in the context of the emerging threat of violent extremism in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia"

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1. Workshop Overview

The West Asia North Africa Institute (WANA) hosted an end-of-project workshop to publicise the findings of the three-year long research project "Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia." This end-of-project report provides an overview of the key thematic issues discussed during the workshop. It also captures some of the reflections and commentary raised by the participants, and provides some remarks on the way forward.

The end-of-project workshop aimed to publicise the findings of the research project. First, in-and cross- country variations were highlighted by WANA and its research partners in Lebanon and Tunisia: the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS) and the Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication (JFRC), respectively. Second, the recently published White Paper (accessed here) was presented. In the third and final session, the workshop solicited participant feedback on the proposed Theory of Change for Human Security (ToC).

The workshop was attended by academics, community stakeholders, policy-makers, development and humanitarian practitioners, consortium partners, and donors. Security actors were also invited, but were unable to attend. In total, 33 participants from Jordan and the region attended the workshop. All attendees took part in the proceedings.

2. Project Background

In brief, the project sought to reconceptualise Human Security (HS) to align with, contribute to, and balance policies aimed at Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism (C/PVE). Researchers tested the premise that effective HS policy and programming would enhance the resilience of at-risk communities located within fragile contexts in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The project also examined the impact of State-Centric Security Policies (SSPs) on conflict dynamics as well as the drivers of violent extremism. In addition, it explored the relationship between SSPs and successful HS programming. The research was carried out with two other goals in mind: to develop a TOC that better addresses the emerging threat of violent extremism (VE), and present evidence-driven recommendations for HS policy and programming. All project publications can be accessed on the WANA website here.

The conclusions of the project build on the findings of field research activities conducted in 18 communities across Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The three countries are comparable in size and population, exhibit similar levels of fragility, and have been affected by neighbouring conflicts and refugee crises. Radicalisation hotbeds, refugee-host communities, marginalised areas, and controlled research areas were examined. Research teams interfaced with and gathered the views of over 1700 respondents, including local government officials, security officers, local religious and tribal leaders, civil society activists, and vulnerable residents together with those at risk of recruitment by extremists. Over 200 interviews, focus group discussions, workshops, and policy labs were held.

Led by WANA, the project was funded through the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO-WOTRO), commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and developed in close collaboration with the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law. Mercy Corps and the Arab Institute for Security Studies are WANA's consortium partners.

3. Workshop Proceedings: Thematic Research Findings

The workshop was kicked off with an overview of project aims and research methodology. Some difficulties and research design limitations were acknowledged, including changes to the regional context since the beginning of the project in 2016. For example, although the momentum of the so-called 'Islamic State' (ISIS) had begun to wither that same year, ISIS-affiliated terror attacks took place in al-Karak (Jordan), Sousse (Tunisia), and Tripoli (Lebanon) in 2016, 2017, and 2019 respectively. Although observers claim that the terror group has been defeated, it is unwise to think that the threat, or the spectre, of transnational VE is over. It is not. Military success has addressed only the tip of a deep and unseen iceberg.

The rise of ISIS, or Da'esh, is emblematic of the shortcomings of traditional C/PVE policy and programming. Notwithstanding ideological and psychological factors, the drivers of violent extremism and the dynamics of intra-state conflicts in the WANA region are related to the enduring structural challenges faced by both states and populations. Governance failures characterised by a rise in the emphasis of national governments on SSPs in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings have drawn attention to the state of human *insecurity* in the region. At its heart, the project is a response to these developments. In response to a question raised by one of the participants on the role played by the Arab-Israeli conflict in the radicalization process, an ideological issue long acknowledged as a driver of VE, researchers emphasized that the project sought to focus research questions on the underexplored dimensions of extremism. This explains why findings did not clarify the impact of ideological pull factors, but elucidated the effects of push factors like SSPs, HS gaps, and marginalisation.

Although progress has been made in the war of narratives, those wins are deemed fruitless long as governments officials, policymakers, and practitioners neglect other push factors. Individuals are less likely to be pulled to violent extremism if they are not pushed into the radicalisation process by idleness, hopelessness, and anger in the first place. Sessions one and two of the workshop

presented research findings, from Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, that illuminate these issues. The section below provides a thematic snapshot of these sessions.

3.1 Human (In)Security

Broadly speaking, respondents from Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia understood HS in similar ways, but emphasised different aspects of the concept. In general, respondents quite often understood HS in terms of perceived Human Insecurity, referring to aspects lacking in both their individual and communal day-to-day lives. In Jordan, HS was conceived on an abstract level, in the language of rights, and in terms of basic human needs (like access to quality healthcare and education). The majority of those surveyed in Lebanon identified HS as social justice, and pointed to pervasive clientelism as a major driver of Human Insecurity. In Tunisia, where the legacy of French colonialism is strong, JFRC encountered (and presented) a more complex view of HS that included aspects like cultural security. The researchers proposed dividing HS into its constituent material and non-material parts. Workshop participants commended the proposal as a useful tool that better accounts for the surprising resilience of some locales like Ben Guerdane in Tunisia.

3.2 Marginalisation

The concept and phenomenon of marginalisation is one way to capture these varied experiences of Human (In)Security. The findings pointed toward an acute sense of marginalisation in all 18 communities despite the differing histories, political structures, socio-economic and development levels, and demographic makeups of Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Most respondents across these three countries framed marginalisation in terms of the absence and/or weak presence of the state, which is largely understood as a service provider. Residents of al-Tafileh (Jordan) spoke of an inadequate public transportation system. Communities in Baalbek (Lebanon) lacked access to lawful job opportunities. Drug abuse was rampant and unaddressed in Dowar Hicher (Tunisia).

Marginalisation – one effect of the decades-long, neoliberal process of the rolling back of the welfare state in the region – is a driver of different forms of violent extremism and socio-political unrest. In Lebanon, as workshop participants highlighted, identity politics have made a comeback in already-marginalised locales that have now become host communities for Syrian refugees. Humanitarian programming directed almost exclusively to refugees has reinforced this sense of marginalisation, leading to an uptick in socio-political tensions. UNDP recorded 78 separate incidents threatening refugee-related violence in one month only.

Nonetheless, some workshop participants critiqued the focus on marginalisation as misplaced, and pointed to the role played by ideology as a driver of violent extremism. One participant noted that, for instance, none of the returning Jordanian Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) had cited access to quality transportation and healthcare as a reason for joining Da'esh. Instead, the FTFs said they joined the terror group "in support of the cause" in Syria and/or Iraq. WANA, LCPS, and JFRC agreed that marginalisation is a key research finding, and acknowledged the role played by research design in producing this focus (marginalisation was a criterion for the selection of focus group discussion participants). They also noted that radicalisation is a complex and multi-dimensional

process that cannot be reduced to a single ingredient, such as marginalisation, no matter how impactful that factor is.

3.3 Troubled Security

Rising levels of mistrust in and antagonism toward the state are threat multipliers. Although local communities in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia view short-term SSPs during times of crises positively, feelings of marginalisation have been compounded by the role played by some security agencies in the selective application of restrictive laws and the disproportionate use of force. In Lebanon, Sunni residents of Tripoli viewed the 2016 and 2019 security operations as inherently discriminatory. In Jordan, residents of the city of Ajloun critiqued the excessive use of force at a time when the provision of quality and adequate services is sorely lacking. Although antagonism towards security forces in Tunisia is understood to be less marked than in Jordan and Lebanon, it remains present and is sometimes expressed at football matches as well as funerals and in the form of religious expressions. Moreover, evidence from al-Mafraq and al-Tafileh in Jordan also points to the limiting effects of SSPs on effective HS policy and programming.

Workshop participants raised the question of whether it would be wise to advocate for an increased role for state security agencies in human security policy, programming, and delivery. The question was raised after WANA presented its findings from Jordan. Residents of the governorate of al-Tafileh have a high level of trust in the Jordanian Armed Forces – the only provider of quality healthcare in the entire governorate. Trust in the Jordanian police in some locales is on the rise as a result of the introduction of community policing programmes. LCPS also recorded a relatively high level of trust in the Lebanese Armed Forces, but not in the national police force. The data suggests that the answer to the question posed by workshop participants is an emphatic 'No.' The erosion of trust in governments appears to have extended to the other security arms of the state. Moreover, security officers in Jordan and Tunisia do not exhibit an understanding of the complementarity between HS and SSP. And, as the last remaining reservoir of trust in Jordan and Lebanon, workshop participants stressed that it would be inadvisable to involve militaries in HS policy and programming.

3.4 Resilience

Workshop participants had an insightful discussion on resilience, conflict, and violent extremism after JFRC researchers presented findings on the Tunisian town of Ben Guerdane. The findings underline the importance of non-material aspects of HS in enhancing resilience to violent extremism in cases where the state is absent as both service and security provider. Ben Guerdane is a smuggling point on the border with conflict ravaged Libya. It is a community where infrastructure is lacking, the formal economy is almost non-existent, education policies have failed, unemployment is high, and religious institutions have lost their appeal. Recognising it as fertile ground, Da'esh attempted to take over the city using the help of some locals. However, the community resisted successfully. Notwithstanding the last-minute intervention of Tunisian security forces, high levels of non-material HS, mostly the result of a strong collective identity, allowed the residents of Ben Guerdane to stand their ground. A traditional, tightly-knit community

was quick to ostracise its rebels, reject alien approaches to religion, and turn down the prospects of money laundering and human as well as arms trafficking.

The case of Ben Guerdane indicates the potential for marginalised communities to act as agents of resilience and mend relations between the local and the national. Research findings from Jordan and Lebanon also underscore the impact of identity factors on resilience. Workshop participants discussed the different experiences of host communities in the two countries. Participants observed that locales in northern Jordan continue to exhibit a higher level of resilience than their counterparts in Lebanon. Initial resilience levels in Jordan and Lebanon may have roughly been similar. However, those levels began to drop slowly. It was highlighted that donor fatigue had quickly set in during the first four years of the conflict, leaving governments in Jordan and Lebanon with a greater burden of providing for citizens and refugees. A long history of hosting refugees combined with cross-border, tribal kinship links and commercial connections may explain the lower risk of violent extremism and intra-state conflict in Jordan. A sensitive demographic makeup, a fractious, confessional political system, and a history of troubled diplomatic relations with Syria could explain the heightened levels of fragility in Lebanon.

4. The Theory of Change for Human Security (ToC)

As the Theory was still being developed, only an initial conceptualisation of the thinking behind it was presented during the end-of-project workshop. Feedback was solicited from participants, who raised some important points that will be considered as the ToC is being finalised. Comments include:

- Defining the actors and targeted stakeholders more clearly. The ToC should not only address state-centric security actors, nor only human-security actors/providers.

- Developing a clear timeframe that should explain the desired change in the short-, medium-, and long-run.

- Rethinking the design and presentation of the ToC. The ToC should not approach the activities of state-centric security actors and human security actors as dichotomous, parallel tracks. It was advised to adopt a more interactive model that highlights the overlaps between the two approaches. More space should also be dedicated to feedback loops and channels that exist between the different elements of the ToC.

5. Concluding Remarks

Real and lasting security in the WANA region is impossible to achieve without first realising Human Security. States find themselves trapped in a situation where citizens expect their national governments to provide them with adequate and quality services, but do not trust them to do so. Mistrust in government has spilled over into the security sector. Failed development programmes and heavy-handed, hard security policies have interacted and led to a profound sense of marginalisation. A sense of antagonism toward the executive and legislative arms of the state has spread in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and

International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) have delivered some effective HS programmes, but their work remains limited in scope and nature. Although external conflicts and the refugee crisis continue to play destabilising roles, the risks of violent extremism and intra-state conflict are greater. Workshop participants emphasised that if societies and states are to be made resilient, then states need to turn away from state-centric security policies toward a more comprehensive human security approach. States must also trust that their citizens are capable and willing to take part in policymaking and programming on the local and national levels. The post-Arab Uprising protests in Lebanon, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, and Algeria are a stark reminder that the yearning for a life in both dignity and security is a fact of the world.

The project has sought to re-centre the focus of current praxis, policy, and programmes on violent extremism and intra-state conflict. To that end, this end-of-project workshop was an opportunity for the different stakeholders that WANA brought together, including academics, community stakeholders, policy-makers, development and humanitarian practitioners, consortium partners, and donors, to reflect on effective human security approaches. WANA intends to refine the Theory of Change for Human Security based on feedback solicited from workshop participants. The Theory will be published in the near future.

Project findings and feedback from the workshop participants also point to a number of potential avenues for further research:

- The role played by gender in mediating experiences of marginalisation. In Lebanon and Jordan, women viewed the visible and active presence of security forces in more favourable terms than men.
- The impact of ideological issues, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the growing, regional footprint of Iran, on the radicalisation process
- The relative saliency of the material and non-material aspects of HS in producing resilience against violent extremism and intra-state conflict on the community level.
- The potential to harness identity to build resilience in communities particularly prone to violent extremism and intra-state conflict (lessons drawn from the case of Ben Guerdane).
- The role played by sectarian networks and para-state actors in the provision of human security for the elderly population and low-income groups in Lebanon, and the impact of this provision on the resilience of the wider community.
- The dynamics between social cohesion and identity politics in fragile locales such as refugee-hosting communities in Jordan and Lebanon.