LE CERCLE DES ECONOMISTES ARABES

منتدى الاقتصاديين العرب

Concept Note

Local Needs Assessment (LNA) methodology and themes

The LNA approach

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This concept note describes the methodology developed by the "Cercle des Economistes Arabes" for the analysis of the socio-economic profile of cities in conflict within their environment, as well as the application of this methodology on two cases: the cities of Homs and Nawa in Syria.

The LNA approach & objectives

The LNA approach derives from the City Profiles that UN-Habitat perform for cities around the world. Based on the experience acquired in Iraq and Libya, thus in conflictual situations, the LNA approach was first applied on two cities in Syria which had experienced the consequences of the conflict. It was developed in the context of the **New Urban Agenda** and the project to develop an **Urban Recovery Framework in Conflict-Affected Countries and Communities (URF-CACC)**, particularly Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria by **UN ESCWA and UN Habitat** Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS). It was performed in close collaboration with specialized institutions, such as IMMAP, REACH and Common Space Initiative, as well as other UN agencies (UNHCR, OCHA, etc.).

The main objective of an LNA is to go beyond a snapshot on the situation of a city to **address the specificity of the conflict in the concerned city, its social, economic, political and environmental dynamics, placing it in its close regional environment, and to seek elements for peacebuilding and recovery.** This is while **the major novelty of the LNA** approach consists on organizing one or several **consultative meetings** during its process, involving key stakeholders, specialists and CSO' activists from the city with different sensitivities under the auspices of a UN organizations. The consultative meetings introduce dialogue between these actors, discussions of the first findings of the LNA analyses and debates on the priorities for the livelihood of the population and key priorities for peacebuilding and recovery.

Scope of the different LNAs

Seeking clarity and conciseness, the LNA analyses and reporting is divided in **two sections**: the background and the impact of the conflict. This is in addition to concluding remarks depicting priority recommendations.

The **background** section consists mainly on a short description of the city, placing it **in its close regional environment and the country**, **in its particular history and social structures**. The city is the center of the analysis, but it is essential to assess its relations with its environment; at least the very direct one. The historical background opens the way to find elements of the **city collective identity**, which could be significant in closing the social divides, if any. The analysis of the social structures are also key to assess

the different levels of belonging of the city and its region, between pre-State, sectarian or religious, local and country citizenship levels; this aspect is essential for peacebuilding. Other issues could be of interest to assess in a background, depending on each specific case. Per example, in the context of water scarcity as generally in the Arab countries, it could be of major interest to analyze the water resources in the city environment, i.e. the rivers and the waters basins and their sharing context, locally and cross-borders, in order to assess the medium and long term sustainability.

The **core section on the impact of the conflict** starts with a – rather concise – description of the conflict and its timeline. Then, the impact is assessed on each sector of population livelihood and public services: population, IDPs and refugees; housing damage, constructions and HLP; urban planning and land use; economy, including close region agriculture, industry, services and employment; the various public services: health, education, drinking water, sewage, waste management, electricity, transportation; as well as governance and civil society mobilization. Surely, this along the 7 pillars of the URF-CC (housing, economy, infrastructure & services, governance, civil society, environment and cultural heritage) and the 7 guiding principles (Do No Harm; Inclusivity; Local ownership; Insider-outsider roles and dynamics; Gender sensitivity; Purpose-oriented; Continuity).

Beyond a snapshot image of the impact of the conflict on each of these issues, this section **focuses on the dynamics involved, seeking to assess the potential for peacebuilding and recovery**. In particular, the population displacements issue is to be taken within the general pre-conflict dynamics, especially for what concerns rural-urban migrations and social cohesion. The housing damage and HLP issues is be assessed within the particular context of the city housing needs for population growth, of informal and formal constructions including during the conflict, as well as of the urban planning in the city. The economic impact is to be assessed in terms of the city assets for recovery, its production assets and its workforce. The public services issues need to separate between those manageable and repairable at the local level, i.e. by the local council and the municipality, and the others depending on the surroundings and national networks. The governance and civil society issues are also key, as the population and the civil society had managed their affairs during the conflict, and created an experience of such management and mobilization; the lessons of which are essential for the post-conflict peacebuilding with community engagement.

The **conclusions and recommendations** of an LNA should focus both, on the priority elements in the short-term which can insure the livelihood of the population and **positive drivers for peacebuilding and recovery**, as well as on the critical issues for medium term sustainable reconstruction and growth.

Initial investigations are undertaken using the UN agencies data, IMMAPP/UrbanS analyses and direct inquiries with local stakeholders. This is in order to prepare the consultation meetings. The selection of the participants to such meeting (s) is in fact a complex process, which depends on the initial investigations, on the determination of main dynamics for peacebuilding and recovery and on the identification of key stakeholders of the city representing the various tendencies with valuable input on the different issues. It necessitates as well an effort of mediation to convince these stakeholders to participate to the meetings.

All these aspects indicated above are thoroughly discussed during the consultative meetings; the debates of which can be facilitated by the prior research on the city background seeking to identify the communalities in the collective memory on the city identity.

Main lessons of Homs and Nawa LNAs

The choice of Homs as the first city on which to perform an LNA resulted from the fact that the Syrian uprising had transformed there to a civil and communitarian war at a very early stage of the Syrian conflict. Also, even if the conflict had stopped in the main parts of the city as early as May 2014, the city continued, 5 years later, to be strongly marked by the physical and social stigma of the war.

Nawa is a much smaller city, even if it's the second in population size in its governorate. It is much less marked by the conflict in terms of damage and population displacement. It lived for 4 years out of the control of the central government, away from the confrontation line, and its population had to find ways to manage its public services and affairs, including partially through negotiations and bargains with the central government. Such an experience did not exist in Homs, except in a limited way in Al Wa'er neighborhood.

In both cases of Homs and Nawa, it was found during the consultative meetings that large communalities were shared between the stakeholders with a specific city and distinctive city identity. This is despite the fact that Homs experienced an accelerated rural-urban migration prior to the conflict, much higher than Syria average, with major issues for cohesive urban integration. Also, Nawa maintained through the last decades a mixture between rural and urban culture.

The conflict in Homs has resulted in massive destructions in housing and displacement of population. That makes **reconstruction and return of Homs displaced and refugees a major issue for its case**. However, the reconstruction necessitates a major regularization effort of the property rights, boundary marking and registering definitively in the records the relations between land and dwelling properties. In the case of Homs, there were a sizeable share of informal dwellings in the non-central neighborhoods, up to 30% of total housing stock in the city. The municipality had issued, prior to the conflict, master plans for these neighborhoods taking into account the reality on the ground. However, the compatibility between the property registries based on the land and the complex kinds of real-estate properties had not been completed to insure full clarification of the property rights, owing the large number of housing units involved. The destruction of a sizeable share of properties and the massive displacement of the owners outside Syria makes the effort needed for boundary marking and registering even more complex. This is while the repair and the reconstruction of the damaged housing units necessitate this "clarification" of the property registries. This issue, generally addressed as the "house, land & property, HLP" issue, is common to all cities where massive destructions had occurred with initially a large share of informal constructions; what is not the case of Nawa, where also damage on housing was relatively limited. Its solution is not simple while it hinders the return of the displaced and reconstruction. It confronts also projects of the present local councils and the central government to issue new different master plans for neighborhoods, without proper consultation of the population and the initial owners, what can create more grievances and jeopardize peacebuilding.

The conflict in Homs has also resulted in an inverse urban-rural migration and in the division of the city in two zones, separated in their social composition and economic and services functional assets. Some small cities in the rural areas had grown significantly and developed their economic and services functional assets. This poses the challenge of making the city again an attraction pole for its rural areas, which is necessary for the return of its pre-conflict population, as well as the challenge of the unification of the economic and social attraction poles inside the city for social cohesion and peacebuilding. In the case of Nawa, the evolution took a different direction, with the city ensuring during the conflict its attractivity for its surroundings.

Contrary to the common perception, industrial activities were, prior to the conflict, limited in Homs despite the presence of large public factories (refinery, fertilizers, etc.). Homs economy depended on trade, especially the formal and informal ones with Lebanon, and on trade-based SMEs. The economic recovery of the city is presently hindered by the financial crisis in Lebanon, as well as by the drastic reduction of the share of the most economically active part of the population, those aged between 25 and 35. **The economic recovery of Homs could thus be only slow and gradual, needing strong interventions to be fostered.** On the contrary, Nawa economy depends on agriculture in a relatively rainy area and on small agri-food SMEs. Its economy recovered partially without major central interventions. The position of the city and its neighborhood allows it to be a good candidate for an even more active recovery with minor interventions. **Nawa can constitute an example for quick recovery for its governorate and the rest of Syria**.

Moreover, the social structures in Homs are extremely complex, closely related to that of its surroundings. Several fault lines of social divide and of grievances and greed exist. This makes common social mobilization for peacebuilding complex, necessitating gradual and significant efforts. The social structure in Nawa are much more cohesive. Rebuilding social trust and common social mobilization is much more straightforward, which facilitates aligning quick peacebuilding with quick recovery. This necessitate taking the lessons of pre-conflict governance as well as those during the conflict taking into consideration the significant social mobilization that had occurred.

On the level of **public services**, there are, in both cases, items which can bring **quick wins** for population livelihood and others that necessitate an improvement on a general level in the country, that can only be gradual. In the case of Homs, the quick win issue could be that of drinking water, reducing pollution and improving the quality of water provisioned to all neighborhoods. In the case of Nawa, the quick win could be that of the national hospital which could be supported not only to serve the city population, but also to make the city a health hub for the surroundings.