

RELIEF

Moving from 'burden sharing' to inclusive prosperity: A RELIEF workshop

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In April 2017, the University College London (UCL) Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted a one-day workshop on the use of the term 'burden sharing' to refer to the demand on resources placed on Lebanon since the arrival of over 1.5 million refugees from Syria since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

This workshop was the first workshop to be organised as part of RELIEF (Refugees, education, learning, information technology and entrepreneurship for the future): a 5-year ESRC-funded Centre focused on Lebanon. The RELIEF Centre is a collaboration between UCL, AUB and the Centre for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese

American University (LAU). The RELIEF Centre proposes inclusive growth and prosperity as a goal for Lebanon, and as an alternative way of conceptualising and addressing the refugee crisis in Lebanon. It is hoped that alternative approaches to the refugee crisis in Lebanon will create and maintain a level playing field between refugees and hosts in the country.

Participants from INGOs, local NGOs, universities in Lebanon and the UK, and social activists were invited to debate the concepts of 'burden sharing' and 'inclusive growth' in the morning, and then to discuss the role of the education sector in levelling the playing field between refugees and hosts, and its contribution to the creation of inclusive growth and prosperity.

OUR AIM

Our aims for the workshop were to explore how key RELIEF themes might be understood in Lebanon. We aimed to use the workshop as a group debate about 'inclusive prosperity' and 'burden sharing'. We also aimed to understand the role

education could play in enhancing inclusive prosperity in Lebanon. Finally, we sought an overview of political developments in Lebanon, which could strengthen an inclusive prosperity project.



Hospitality in Lebanon

The first session of the workshop was opened by Dr Nikolay Mintchev from the IGP. Mintchev proposed that the workshop participants focus on what had enabled Lebanon to host over 1.5 million Syrian refugees. Policy-makers have referred to Lebanon and Lebanese communities as ‘hosting’ Syrian refugees: a term which implies the willing hospitality of ‘hosts’ of Lebanese communities and the role of the Syrian refugees as ‘guests’ in Lebanon. Mintchev asked the workshop participants to discuss the cultures of hospitality in Lebanon, asking whether there is a ‘culture of hospitality’ or several different forms of hospitable culture in Lebanon.

The term ‘hospitality’, however, proved to not only have multiple meanings, but also a seriously limited and problematic term. Tina Gewis from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) proposed that ‘hospitality’ is delimited: that it can be ‘stretched’ only so far, before willingness and/or ability to play the roles of ‘host’ and ‘guest’ stop. Mona Harb from AUB argued that the term ‘hospitality’ needed to be replaced, suggesting that the term is depoliticising what is a deeply political issue, and neutralising the real burden placed on Lebanese communities and Lebanese resources. For Harb, the removal of the term ‘burden’ is misinformed.

Prior to the break out of war in Syria, Lebanon was experiencing a period of low economic growth, which had increased stresses on resources and services. This period of low GDP growth continues to place immense stress on Lebanese people. As Milaad Sebaaly from Global Learning pointed out, ‘sharing poverty is not hospitality’. Lebanese and Syrian people living in Lebanon are suffering from a lack of resources. As an important footnote to this point, Nasser Yasmin from AUB argued that there is a need to dig deeper into the economic dimensions of Lebanon ‘hosting’ refugees from Syria: there is a danger that perceptions of competition might have been mistaken as realities. This point about perception verses reality was taken up later in the discussion.

In contrast to these perspectives - though not in contradiction with them - were ideas put forward by Maha Shuayb (LAU) and Joana Dabaj (CatalyticAction) concerning the labelling of ‘refugees’ and ‘hosts’. Shuayb asserted that the movement of people is the norm, and that hospitality is a part of this norm. The tendency to want to label people who move across borders in different ways can be unhelpful. Dabaj followed on from this point, suggesting that hospitality is embedded in the collective memory of Lebanese and Syrian people, with different nationalities taking on the role of host and refugee at different points in time. Research by RELIEF Head of Public Engagement Committee Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has shown that refugees themselves act as hosts for other refugees. Thus, the distinction between refugees and hosts is not only temporary, but can also be roles simultaneously embodied by one person. Hospitality can be a useful term if we understand that it is contingent, and that it does not change in a vacuum: culture itself

is changed through ‘moments’ of hospitality.

If we do choose to take this as a ‘moment’ of contemporary hospitality, then how do we understand its nature? The question of perception versus reality was taken up: Rayan Koteiche from UNHCR pointed out that the state and major funders have lacked a baseline for data collection (there has been no census in Lebanon since 1932, for example). Therefore, Koteiche argued, it is possible for media and people with vested interest to displace facts with perceptions, and perceptions with other perceptions.

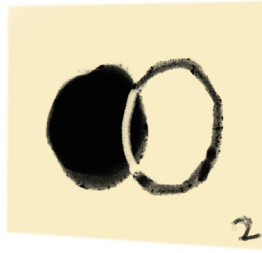
One observation united the participants: since 2013, interactions between hosts and refugees has changed for the worse. There are also variations in cultures of hospitality across different places Lebanon. Participants collectively agreed that we needed to understand what factors change the practices of hospitality, and account for their difference in different places.

Some participants suggested that as time has gone on, people’s perceptions of the possibility of Syrian refugees returning to Syria have changed. This might account for the changed nature of hospitality. In other words, the changed understanding of the Syrian refugee’s role in Lebanon, from being a ‘guest’ to something else, has instigated a change in the ‘host’ community.

Some participants pointed to particular actors which, having inserted themselves into Lebanese society, have changed the nature of hospitality in Lebanon. Dalia Mikdashi from Oxfam indicated the relationship between municipal governments and the foreign ‘aid industry’, which have led to investments being made in particular areas of Lebanon, for specific groups of people i.e. Syrian refugees, and not Lebanese communities. There was general consensus that difference in cultures of hospitality between places is due in part to the power and inclination of municipal governments. Nancy Maroun from Mercy Corps suggested that municipalities enter into relationships with aid actors in order to bargain for money: by accepting more refugees, they gain more funding for projects that could potentially benefit the wider community. In some cases, insurgent municipalities are imposing restrictions on refugees, against national law. Further research needs to be done to find out why municipal governments decide to take these steps against the freedoms and rights of refugees.

Koteichi suggested that there is a ‘halo effect’ happening in Lebanon, where increased interactions between hosts and refugees corresponds with better relationships between them. The direction this session took - from points raised by Harb and Sebaaly, who suggest that finite and depleted resources (food, work, housing, etc.) as being the fundamental issue in Lebanon, to perceptions of refugees, and perceptions of hosts - proves the range of enquiry lines that could be taken up in RELIEF and other research.





Inclusive Growth

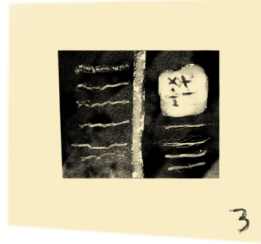
The second session of the morning was opened by Dr Nasser Yassin and Dr Mintchev. Inclusive growth is a notion which challenges 27 years of development in Lebanon. It makes demands on governments to consider what kind of growth is desirable, and how it impacts people differently.

Harb warned the RELIEF team that a neoliberal, capitalist version of growth dominates in Lebanon, and that Lebanese society is far from questioning this form of growth. There are contending visions in Lebanon of what economic growth has done, and could do, for the country. Fouad Fouad from AUB pointed out that Lebanon is presented to international audiences as an oasis of democracy and capital. This vision of Lebanon is located in the power of the market. The contrasting vision, presented by Nadine Bekdache from Public Works Studio, is of a country which kills off its own social and biological diversity in the name of profit. The result is the erasure of neighbourhood histories and the particularities of migration.

For Fouad, politics in Lebanon deals with changes through privatisation. It is not transformative: it does not think about alternatives. Rather, this belongs to the realm of activism. The role of government in creating inclusive growth raised an important question: do we come up against the monolithic idea of economic growth as being in conflict with our values and ideas, then have to appease it? Harb pointed out that the Lebanese government has produced a National Master Plan which provides directions for economic growth. If we were to connect this with a plan or strategy for inclusive growth, then it might be possible to seize on the principles of the Master Plan and build on them. It is not necessary, argued Harb, to see our work as inevitably compromised by a dominant version of progress.

Sebaaly led the discussion towards a focus on the individual and local: if we wish to create inclusive growth, then we need to be able to provide the right human resources for emerging economies. This, he argued, is the knowledge age, where human capital is key.

For Yassin, the informal economy in Lebanon is proof that human capital is already strong. People can manage, he says, when refugees are not overly regulated. Moreover, different forms of value are more available in the informal economy than in specially regulated areas, like Special Economic Zones. Yassin and Sebaaly's points serve as important reminders that transformational change can happen from the level of the individual and the community. Researchers need to consider the value of politics and economic strategy at the local scale, and see whether there is room for manoeuvre at this scale, as well as at the national level.



Education as a Practical Intervention

Professor Maha Shuayb introduced the first session of the afternoon with a presentation about the state of education for refugees and host communities in Lebanon. She prompted important questions about identity and difference, and how these imposed categories have created unnecessary divides in delivery of education. For Shuayb, the refugee community is an imagined community. We have delivered educational programmes in line with notions of temporariness, or difference. However, education is not a short-term issue, and yet we are educating for a limited future. Why is it, she asked, that we are aiming to achieve the bare minimum for young people?

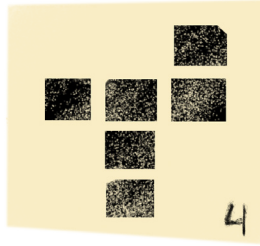
Whilst difference in the delivery of education might be considered necessary by some, Shuayb demonstrated that there have been instances of violence that have occurred thanks to perceptions of difference and hierarchy between groups.

Shuayb suggested that these perceptions of difference do not only pertain to students, but also to teachers. If we are to deploy education as a practical intervention to create inclusive prosperity, then we need to build on the capacities of both students and teachers, and keep options to pursue education open to them.

Gewis encouraged the rest of the workshop participants to consider education from a human rights perspective. Fouad asked who protects the rights of children in Lebanon: whether it is the Lebanese state, INGOs or international legal institutions. If one actor fails to create a situation where children, regardless of their background or status, can receive good quality education and instead oppresses children, then is there room for manoeuvre for other actors?

Other participants focused on the practical barriers to education faced by refugees and poor Lebanese communities. Local Lebanese schools have a low capacity to deal with different needs, and teachers are unable to support some of their most vulnerable students. On the other hand, Shuayb pointed out that difference in curriculum perpetuates the stereotypes that Syrian children cannot cope and are unable to learn. When children are offered different types of education - formal and informal, accredited and 'emergency' - then it is difficult to assess who is learning what.

Shuayb sought to focus the participants' minds on a key question: what is the strategic point of teaching children? In other words, what are children being educated for? This question ties in with the morning's debate concerning inclusive growth and prosperity. Education is valued partly because it is a means of achieving aspirations for a good life, and, as Sebaaly pointed out, sharing in poverty is no aspiration. Research and practice must link education with inclusive growth to ensure learning is worthwhile.

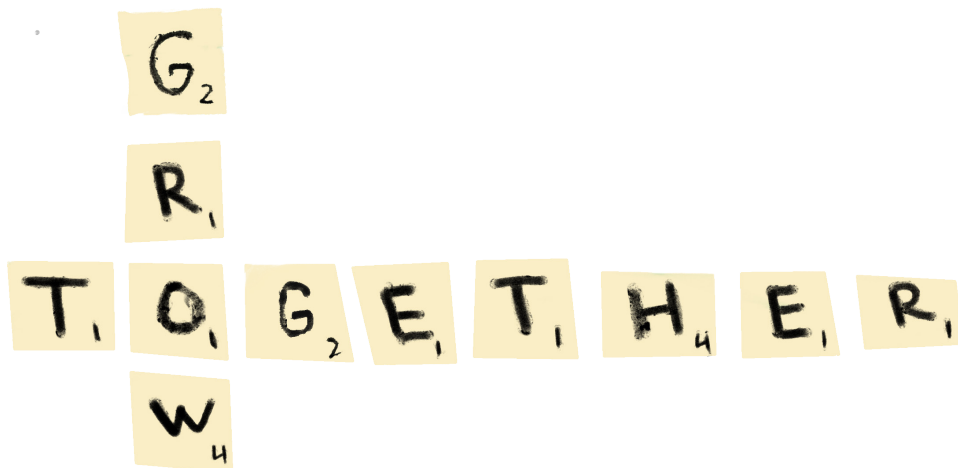


Pathways to Practice

In the final session of the day, the workshop participants were joined by Marina Aksakalova and her team from UNHCR. Marina initiated the discussion with positive news that there has been renewed support for a cohesive response to the refugee crisis. The Prime Minister, she reported, is engaged with the Crisis Response Plan. It is now possible to develop a strategy and take a more entrepreneurial approach to the situation in Lebanon.

Other participants followed Marina with suggestions for sources of transformative change: Gewis noted positive developments on legal residency of refugees have recently occurred, such as a partial waive of fees for legal stay. Camillo Boano from the Development Planning Unit at UCL pointed to the expansion of civil society that coalesces with issues of justice and equal access to resources in Lebanon. These points raised an important debate on the question of citizenship: to what extent is the 'refugee crisis' an issue of citizenship? For Bekdache, it highlights existing issues of citizenship in Lebanon, such as voting rights and the ordering of the governmental system. On the other hand, Gewis suggested that citizenship is actually a non-problem, and that lack of legal stay and basic rights for Syrians living in Lebanon as Syrians are the key issues.

The question of inclusivity - who is included and in what - dominated the debate throughout the workshop. The acute needs of people in Lebanon - from 'host communities' to refugees - have created a tense situation in the country, where claims of difference have been deployed to ensure and, conversely, prevent, access to resources. In the final session, Koteichi voiced a hope that is shared by the partners in the RELIEF Centre: that responses to individual crises can be integrated with the provision of goods and services that are required to live a good life in Lebanon.





Working together for prosperity
and inclusive growth

**We are grateful for the thoughts and comments
of the workshop participants:**

April workshop attendees

Ahmad Sayed Ahmad, *Muslim Aid*
Zeina Hejazi, *Muslim Aid UK*
Yara El Moussaoui, *International Alert*
Tina Gweis, *Norwegian Refugee Council*
Nancy Maroun, *Mercy Corps*
Joana Dabaj, *CatalyticAction*
Abir Sasso Saksouk, *Dictaphone/Public Works*
Nadine Bekdache, *Public Works*
Milad Sebaaly, *Global Learning*
Dalia Mikdashi, *Oxfam*
Lama Kilzar, *ABAAD*
Pamala Maaz, *ABAAD*
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