



RELIEF

The Vital City: Time and space in the unpacking of displacements, crisis and city futures in Lebanon

30th and 31st January 2018 | American University of Beirut

Keywords: Lebanon, cities, urban environment, sustainability, inclusive growth



R·E·L·I·E·F CENTRE



S, U, M, M, A, R, Y

In January 2018, members of RELIEF research strand one, 'The Vital City', co-hosted a workshop at the American University of Beirut over two days. This workshop explored the following questions:

- What are the mechanisms cities develop to sustain growth of all kinds in contexts of mass displacement?
- How do processes of evolution and transformation get impacted or fuelled by mass displacement?
- How do cities reinvent themselves to deal with these challenges?

The workshop was opened and closed by Professor Henrietta Moore (Director RELIEF Centre and Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London), and moderated by Professor Howayda Al-Harithy (American University of Beirut), Professor Camillo Boano (University College London), Professor Mohamed Fouad Mohamed Fouad (American University of Beirut), Professor Nick Tyler (University College London). Joana Dabaj (Catalytic Action) was responsible for co-organising and helping to facilitate the workshop. Workshop participants included researchers, NGO representatives, United Nations representatives, urban planners, members of local municipalities in Lebanon, and members of the local community.

The format of the workshop included presentations and discussions, some of which drew on personal experiences of living and working in Lebanon. The wider discussions that followed each session provided an

opportunity to explore themes within, and links between, talks.

Discussions focused on Palestinian and particularly Syrian refugee populations. Since arriving in Lebanon, Syrian refugees have settled mainly in Sunni majority areas and towns including Bar Elias in the Beqaa valley, Beirut and Mount Lebanon. A smaller number have settled in the south, in towns such as Saida and Tyre. For this workshop, we focused on refugee populations in Bar Elias and Saida to explore how the presence of Syrian refugees impacts upon areas with different political, economic and social profiles.

The first day focused on how we approach and tell stories of mass displacement. Presentations explored the theoretical frameworks, terminology and methodologies used in research on mass displacement, vitality and urban transformation in Lebanon. The role of civil society, local governance and communities in Bar Elias were used to explore how these approaches are put into practice.

On the second day, discussions of methodologies and approaches used in research of mass displacement continued in the context of Saida. The local economy of Saida was discussed in depth, with investigation into how it both enables and inhibits responses to mass displacement for incoming and host communities. The day concluded with reflections on the legacies left by mass displacement and its impact on future migration movements.

Index

Day 1

Session I: Theoretical Framing of the Intersection between Displacement and Urban Transformation in Lebanon *Page 1*

Session II: The Case of Bar Elias *Page 5*

Day 2

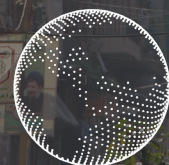
Session III: The Case of Saida *Page 8*

Session IV: Reflections and the road map for our research *Page 12*

Our Aim

Our aim for this workshop was to explore and critique the theoretical and methodological frameworks used by scholars working on mass displacement in Lebanon. In doing so, we were able to get a sense of the common themes and approaches already being used. By having an impression of what has already been done, we minimise the possibility of duplicating work.

The workshop discussions focused on Bar Elias and Saida, in order to ground our investigation of growth, evolution and reinvention. The conversations that came as a result of this will be used as a basis for future investigations in RELIEF.



Day One
30th January 2018
09:30 – 17:00



Session I: Theoretical Framing of the Intersection between Displacement and Urban Transformation in Lebanon

Moderator: Professor Camillo Boano (UCL)

The first session of the day invited scholars working on mass displacement in Lebanon and its surrounding countries to present their research trajectories and methods. Presentations were delivered by:

Mona Harb

Professor of Urban Studies and Politics at the American University of Beirut and the Chair of the Department of Architecture and Design

Mona Fawaz

Professor of Urban Studies and Planning and the Coordinator of the Graduate Programs in Urban Planning, Policy, and Design, American University of Beirut

Rabih Shibli

Director of the Centre for Civic Engagement and Community Service, American University of Beirut

Tala Kammourieh and Riham Kowatly

UN-Habitat

Mona Khechen

Independent urban development consultant and senior lecturer at the Department of Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management, American University of Beirut

Words matter in mass displacement

In academic research and in the media, a select number of terms reappear in descriptions of mass displacement and those affected by it. These can be useful in providing common understandings across complex contexts, and can mobilise conversations. However, they can also de-humanise, over-simplify and impose interpretations that lack nuance.

Though they are used by many, the terms “refugee” and “crisis” are not neutral. They can be problematic and restrictive. Individuals who are affected by mass displacement but whose status or situation may be considered outside these terms of reference, risk being excluded from conversations that touch on their life experiences. A broader, alternative term such as “dwellers” could succeed in capturing these lost groups. In listening to them, participants noted, we could build a more detailed picture of the broad spectrum of individuals and groups who are affected by mass displacement.

Notions of “belonging” also influence how we understand and tell stories of mass displacement. They are bound up in discussions of personal identity and have both individual and collective meanings. External forces can be powerful in influencing how individuals perceive their sense of belonging. Changes to this, especially if they are unwanted, can be divisive and disturb social relations.

Participants agreed that if we contest the concepts of “refugee”, “crisis” and “belonging” we are able to rethink the idea of “host” versus “displaced” communities. This could help reposition refugees not as “others” in opposition to host communities, as they are often referred, but as partners who reside amongst them. This may be closer to how some refugees already perceive themselves and their lives within Lebanon. It is also a way of uniting those affected by mass displacement by focusing on shared experience rather than emphasising those who are seen as vulnerable, and those who are not.



Vulnerability

Lebanon did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, which aims to ensure the fair treatment of refugees and to protect their human rights. It has, however, signed most other human rights treaties relevant to the protection of refugees. All refugees living in Lebanon are affected by this. Because they tend to reside in poor areas of Lebanon, refugees also share some of the same life experiences due to their living conditions. However, their treatment and access to rights and services, the “vulnerability” they experience, in Lebanon differs.

Lebanon’s Palestinian refugees lack status, and therefore human rights as foreigners. They have experienced continuous displacement in Lebanon. Property ownership among Palestinians was made illegal in 2001 and Palestinians cannot register their homes or legally transfer property rights to their families. Syrian refugees have also faced harsh restrictions on residency permits since 2015, the same year UNHCR stopped registering them. This instability has made it difficult for both refugee populations to have the economic leverage and security to invest in developing their livelihoods and to contribute to their local economies in Lebanon.

Some Lebanese host communities feel vulnerable because of the rising numbers of refugees around them. To some, an influx of displaced individuals presents a threat to the prosperity of their nation through increasing unemployment, insecurity, and upset to the national economy. This is aggravated by a fear of cultural difference which can manifest in different ways. Syrians living in Lebanon are, at times, accused of taking work from young Lebanese; forcing them to leave the country to find work elsewhere. Yet for Syrian refugees, gaining access to the labour market helps them feel more secure and integrated into their new environments, and gives them agency.

Paradoxically, the support refugee populations seek in order to feel less vulnerable often makes communities feel increasingly vulnerable in turn.

Participants summarised that it is important to think carefully about where, why and how we use vulnerability to describe those affected by mass displacement. This does not mean that we should avoid using it entirely or overly-critiquing it. In doing so, we then risk focusing too closely on ideas of “resilience”, which is a complicated term in its own right.

Formal and informal responses to mass displacement in Lebanon

Lebanon is currently hosting more refugees than any other country of its size. The scale of the refugee crisis, especially since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, has proved overwhelming to Lebanon’s administration. This has led to a range of strategies and policies, at the municipality and national level.

Formal responses to mass displacement at the municipality level

Formal responses to mass displacement at the municipality level run to different degrees of success. This is due to a range of factors including how easily they are scaled up and replicated across different areas, and whether they are sustainable and build capacity. Contrasting policies and responses to mass displacement crises are used across municipalities in Lebanon. This is due to the combination of social, cultural, economic and political profiles particular to each area.

Informal coping mechanisms

Informal institutions and coping mechanisms have developed in parallel to formal responses to mass displacement in Lebanon. They are used by, and affect both refugee and host communities. This can be seen in the labour market in Lebanon. As it is difficult for refugees to obtain work permits, they mostly work in the informal economy (though it should be noted that Lebanon traditionally has a high incidence of informal work). Such informality within the economy can have adverse effects for Lebanon's growth and the welfare of workers.

Methodologies for the study of mass displacement

The uncoordinated approach the Lebanese government has taken towards managing the influx of displaced populations in Lebanon has led to dispersed settlements all across the country, most of whom live in poverty. Each settlement is defined by its own complex and shifting dynamics. Research on these different groups demands a specific approach and set of methodologies, depending on their context and the researcher's interests. The data gathered on populations affected by mass displacement in Lebanon is, as a result, disparate. This was illustrated in the range of approaches participants presented in their research in this workshop. Some were more focused on specific localities and the administrative boundaries of cities, others saw space as built continuously.

Conclusion

There are advantages and disadvantages between specific and general approaches to studies of mass displacement – whether it is in the language we use, how we coordinate activities, or how we understand the experiences of different groups. Having insight into both the individual and collective experience of refugees and host communities in urban areas is valuable. The city is always changing. In order to understand how and why this is, we need to understand the various circumstances that influence it.



Session II: The Case of Bar Elias

Moderator: Dr Nasser Yassin (AUB)

This session focused specifically on exploring changes to the urban environment in Bar Elias as a result of mass displacement.

Presentations given in this session were delivered by:

Hamzy Mayta

Member of the Municipal Council of Bar Elias and Lawyer

Mohammed Al Sayah

Humanitarian Programme Manager at UN-Habitat

Moayad Hamdallah

Perspective from a Palestinian born and raised in Bar Elias. Moayad was displaced from his home in Palestine in 1967 and came to Lebanon as a child in 1970.

Nimat Bizri and Salwa Al Jabir

Social Support Society

An introduction to Bar Elias

Bar Elias is the second largest town in the Zahlé District of the Beqaa. It is known as the “gate to Syria” and has played host to many Syrian refugees as it is located halfway between Beirut and Damascus. Bar Elias had around 60,000 inhabitants before the Syrian crisis which has now doubled to house the growing Syrian refugee population. It contains a large amount of agricultural land upon which approximately 65 refugee camps have been established.

The economy and urban structure of Bar Elias has been impacted significantly by its transient population (although this region was already suffering from poverty and high levels of unemployment before 2011).

Many local and international NGOs addressing mass displacement in Lebanon have chosen to offer their support in this region.

The impact of mass displacement in Bar Elias

There have been both positive and negative developments that have come about in Bar Elias as a result of mass displacement. The influx of Syrian refugees has revived Bar Elias' economy to an extent, and support from the United Nations (UN) has led to an increase in provision for the local area, including the construction of a new hospital, public parks and playgrounds. However, communities here live with more challenges than opportunities, which have affected the Palestinian and Syrian populations in different ways. There is concern that Bar Elias is becoming too dependent on the UN for support, to the extent that were Syrians to return to Syria, living conditions in the area would deteriorate.

Discussions from this session focussed particularly on issues surrounding the economy and labour market, environment, and housing.

Economy and the labour market

- As mentioned earlier, different levels of support are made available to Palestinian and Syrian refugees. They are not entitled to the same rights and do not have equal access to the labour market. As a result, they are in competition for jobs.
- Most Syrian refugees find paid work in sectors that Lebanese citizens are less interested in, such as construction, agriculture and cleaning services, which are characterised by low productivity and low pay. There is low competition in these industries from Lebanese citizens and employers remain more willing to hire Syrian workers than other groups as cheap labour. As a result, there is an increasing amount of unemployment and poor labour conditions amongst the Lebanese and Palestinians, including in Bar Elias, because of an increase in labour supply.

Education

- Gaining access to education is difficult for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Lebanese and international NGOs have been developing programmes in Bar Elias, and across the country, that provide educational services to Syrian refugees and break down the legal, financial and language barriers that prevent refugee children from getting an education.



Environment

- The two rivers passing through Bar Elias are now more polluted as a result of ineffective sewage systems in the informal settlements. Increasing demand for drinking water has put pressure on the water infrastructure which could lead to shortages. Houses are digging wells to cope with low levels of water.
- There are larger traffic jams on both local and international roads, particularly at the entry points into Bar Elias.

Housing

- The first wave of Syrian refugees who arrived in Bar Elias did not consider themselves refugees, but as members of families living in the Beqaa. This has changed now that we have entered a protracted crisis with increasing numbers seeking support in the area.
- There are no established official refugee camps in Lebanon, but refugees in Bar Elias are mostly housed in informal settlements. These small and dispersed refugee settlements put a strain on healthcare facilities, schools and infrastructure.

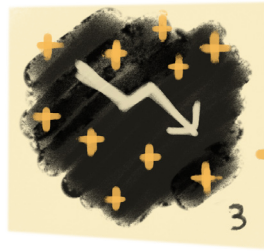
Refugee and Lebanese communities continue to live side-by-side in Bar Elias. Their living conditions are complex and intertwined. Towns and cities across the Beqaa Valley lack the human and financial resources needed for them to work together to address local needs. The ongoing strains that the area faces have fuelled the large amount of instability and uncoordinated responses which are beyond the municipality's power alone to fix.

Conclusion

In her closing remarks, Professor Henrietta Moore acknowledged the need to respond collectively to the challenges posed by mass displacement in Lebanon. Professor Moore stated that the RELIEF Centre aims to do this by programming with a range of colleagues on how to tackle problems on the ground. The research that comes from this is then the result of a collaborative identification of problems.



Day Two
31st January 2018
09:30 – 17:00



Session III: The Case of Saida

Moderator: Professor Mohamed Fouad Mohamed Fouad (American University of Beirut)

This session engaged representatives of the local community, NGOs, Palestinian and Syrian community, and local government in a discussion particular to Saida.

Presentations in this session were delivered by:

Tarek Bizri

Country Representative at Human Appeal, Executive Director at the Union of Relief and Development Associations and representative of the Islamic Welfare Association in Saida

Mustafa Hijazi and Ali Dali Balta

Members of the Municipal Council of Saida

Dr Jad Chaaban

Lebanese Economist and Social Activist. Associate Professor of Economics at the American University of Beirut

Tala Kammourieh and Riham Kowatly

UN-Habitat

Ola Hariri

Architect, urban planner and founder of Saida's Observatory for Social Impact

Jaber Suleiman

Independent researcher/consultant in Refugee Studies

An introduction to Saida

Saida is the third largest city in Lebanon with a population of 65,000 in the city, and around 200,000 in the metropolitan area. It is located 40 kilometres south of Beirut. Palestinian refugees began to arrive in Saida in 1948 and settled primarily in the camps of Ein el-Hilweh and Mieh Mieh which now constitute an integral part of the city structure, though have a separate legal and political status. The city has continued to transform and host the displaced, including those from the south of Lebanon since 1975 and Syria since 2011. It is estimated that Saida has a population of around 400,000, 50% of whom are displaced.



The impact of mass displacement in Saida

Saida is made up of small, tight-knit neighbourhoods which contribute to its local economy. Because it is to the south of Lebanon and not near the Syrian border, it has been able to plan a more “personalised approach” to the refugees who arrive there. Many Islamic and international organisations are responding to the presence of the refugees currently living in the area. This session focussed on how these actors are working beside, and with each other to manage the increasing refugee population.

Economy and the labour market

- There is a large amount of urban poverty in Saida, which can be seen through the child-labour, over-crowding, poor infrastructure and deteriorating environmental conditions in the area.
- Poverty levels have been dropping in Saida. This might appear surprising given the large amount of new displaced individuals from Syria who arrived in the area after 2011. However, it is possible that this growth in urban population provoked the economy through the increased amount of work and goods made available through the market.
- 32% of the population are unemployed in Saida and there are three times as many unemployed Palestinians as there are Lebanese.
- 90% of those employed in Saida work without contracts, accepting daily payments instead.

Education

- There are a variety of socio-cultural factors determining how many refugees are enrolling in school in Saida. The Government of Lebanon has allowed Syrians to access the education and health systems. Palestinians, by contrast, are barred from formal education.
- For both Palestinian and Syrian refugee populations, the need to generate income is often prioritised over education, especially when parents are unable to work. There is a notable drop in the number of children enrolled for school when they reach adolescence. This can be seen through the increasing number of primary school-age Palestinian children enrolling for school, compared to the decreasing amounts of secondary school age children. Enrolment is particularly low amongst young men. One participant suggested that this is because assessments do not happen until secondary school. Without the reward of qualifications, there is perhaps a lower incentive to attend. The phenomenon of “waithood”, boys dropping out of school to sit around and wait for work, is also prevalent among socially-excluded populations.

Environment

- Many refugees in Saida are made vulnerable through unprotected living conditions. This, in hand with the absence of tenure security, has an impact on their ability to adapt to and prepare for climate change.

Housing

- The rental system in Lebanon has allowed large numbers of Syrian refugees to be absorbed into its housing system. However, the accommodation refugees live in varies widely in terms of quality. Some refugees live in storefronts and garages, for example and those living in informal settlements face major issues in terms of security.
- Refugees also form host communities in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees have hosted refugees on a number of occasions – including other Palestinians who were displaced to Syria and then to Lebanon, and other Lebanese during the 2006 Lebanon War.

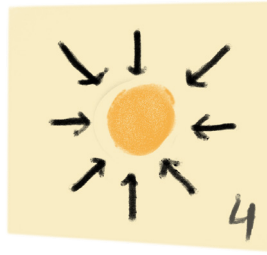
A coordinated response to mass displacement in Saida

It is not always easy to encourage different municipalities in Lebanon to engage in “clustering projects” that address local needs through collaboration. This is in part due to the lack of resources they have available for such joint work. NGOs, however, sometimes have the independence and additional income needed to work in a more joined-up way.

There are a high number of NGOs operating in Saida – around 45 excluding those working strictly in Palestinian refugee camps. This suggests that there is more capital available within host communities here than in other areas of Lebanon. 27 of these NGOs, including the four largest in the city, founded Saida’s local coalition of NGOs in 2015. This coalition is coordinated by the local municipality and the number of members today has increased to 36. The idea behind this union was to create a joined-up, coordinated approach to challenges posed by mass displacement. Initially, the union was only giving assistance to Syrians. However, in 2014 rising tensions between refugee and host communities led to the municipality asking member NGOs to also support local people (NGOs agreed to commit 30% of their support to the local community).

One outcome of the coalition has been the creation of a shared database containing information about refugees that could be accessed by all union-member organisations. The purpose of this is to maximise available resources and encourage a collaborative response to the complexities of mass displacement. This is one example that shows how greater amount of resource can lead to the development of a more flexible and adaptable humanitarian relief framework.





Session IV: Reflections and the road map for our research

Moderator: Professor Nick Tyler (University College London)

Presentations in this session were delivered by:

Kamel Dorai

Researcher at the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research) and Director of the Department of Contemporary Studies at the Institut français du Proche-Orient, Beirut

Khalil F. Dagher

Interagency Basic Assistance Sector Coordinator with UNHCR

Sari Hanafi

Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies at the American University of Beirut

Rouba Mhaissen

Syrian-Lebanese economist, activist, community mobiliser and development practitioner. Founder and Director of Sawa for Development and Aid

Abir Saksouk and Nadine Bekdache

Abir and Nadine are from the design and research studio, Public Works

How memory, family and tribal relations influence where refugees live in Lebanon

Migration movements shape the humanitarian, socio-economic, political and security circumstances of particular areas. Through the legacies they leave, previous migration movements affect future migration movements.

The 2006 Lebanon War, the 34-day military conflict in Lebanon, Northern Israel and the Golan Heights, displaced approximately one million Lebanese. Around 175,000 Lebanese from the very south of Lebanon moved to Saida. The scale of this movement brought about both immediate and lasting change to the area. For example, since 2006, low-income, informal settlements have been absorbed into Saida and service provision has extended to them. The 2006 Lebanon War has equipped Saida, its municipality and the NGOs who work there with experience of managing mass displacement. Those who have to move as a result of mass displacement might be more likely to gravitate towards this area as they know there is support there.

Family or tribal links can also play a part in determining where refugees live in Lebanon. At present, relatively little research has been done to explore how the history of migration links to community knowledge and practice. However, one participant noted that there is a high correlation between a refugee's district of origin and district of settlement. One example of this would be the 850 Syrian refugees from Hawija, a village of several thousand nearly 200 miles north of Damascus, now living in an unfinished four-storey building in Saida. A sense of normality and community is maintained here through everyday acts like the barber who comes to give haircuts occasionally, and the calls to prayer that happen every day in the unfinished mosque beside the building.

To conclude, issues of heritage and community are equally important to consider in understanding how migration movements and mass displacement shape an area, as space and access to resources.

What the future holds for refugees

Refugees are often cited as the cause of many current political, security and economic problems in Lebanon. However, Syrian refugees contribute over one billion dollars to Lebanon's economy. If they leave to return to their home country or to another, this will impact upon Lebanon's infrastructure.

Some discussions of Syrian refugees living in Syria again, now focus on a narrative of them "re-migrating" rather than "returning". The idea of Syrian refugees returning to Syria does not make sense because the place or situation from which the refugee has come has changed irrevocably. With this in mind, we might ask how Lebanon might continue to absorb or accommodate refugees. Professor Henrietta Moore advocates that for approaches taken towards this to be successful, they must be sustainable.

Research that is conducted on the whole migration process will continue to be useful in finding ways to better integrate refugees. A comprehensive approach to gathering data will help accommodate the many different forms of integration that exist in Lebanon. However, there is a danger in creating knowledge for the sake of having knowledge – we end up doing nothing with it.

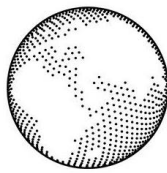
Conclusion and outcomes

The input from the workshop participants gave the RELIEF Centre team invaluable insight into the theories, methodologies and storytelling techniques used in research of mass displacement in Lebanon. The case studies of Bar Elias and Saida illustrated how civil society, local governance and communities interact and assume different roles depending on the area of Lebanon they are in.

The social-cultural, political, economic and geographic profiles of individual areas in Lebanon are largely responsible for how they adapt to, and are affected by mass displacement. However, areas across the country share many of the same challenges, including a lack of resources to work together to address issues of mass displacement.

It was clear throughout this workshop that cities and areas in Lebanon are continuously adapting to the shifting environments in which they are based. If the approaches we develop towards challenges posed by mass displacement are to be sustainable, then they must build on the work that has already been done and make the most of knowledge and actors active in the field.





R·E·L·I·E·F CENTRE

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

Participants

Professor Mona Harb, *American University of Beirut*

Professor Mona Fawaz, *American University of Beirut*

Rabih Shibli, *American University of Beirut*

Tala Kammourieh, *UN-Habitat*

Riham Kowatly, *UN-Habitat*

Mona Kheshen, *American University of Beirut*

Hamzy Mayta, *Municipal Council of Bar Elias*

Mohammed Al Sayah, *UN-Habitat*

Moayad Hamdallah, *Resident in Bar Elias*

Nimat Bizri, *Social Support Society*

Salwa Al Jabir, *Social Support Society*

Tarek Bizri, *Union of Relief and Development*

Association

Mustafa Hijazi, *Municipal Council of Saida*

Ali Dali Balta, *Municipal Council of Saida*

Dr Jad Chaaban, *American University of Beirut*

Ola Hariri, *Independent Researcher*

Jaber Suleiman, *Independent Researcher*

Kamel Dorai, *CNRS*

Khalil F. Dagher, *UNHCR*

Sari Hanafi, *American University of Beirut*

Rouba Mhaisse, *Sawa for Development and Aid*

Abir Saksouk, *Public Works*

Nadine Bekdache, *Public Works*

Joana Dabaj, *Catalytic Action*

Marwa Bakabas, *Sawa for Development and Aid*

Ziad Hakawati, *Municipality of Saida*

Ali Dali Balta

Mostafa Hijazi

Anaheed Al Hardan

Hala El Helou

Marie Noelle Abi Yaghi, *Lebanon Support*

Iman Assi, *Lebanon Support*

Tamirace Fakhoury, *LAU*

RELIEF team members

Professor Henrietta Moore

Professor Camillo Boano

Professor Nick Tyler

Dr Howayda Al-Harity

Dr Fouad M. Fouad

Dr Harriet Allsopp

Annelise Andersen

Dr Eileen Kennedy

Dr Nikolay Mintchev

Hannah Sender

Dr Andres Vicente

Nikolett Watson-Puskas

Dr Nasser Yassin



www.relief-centre.org



RELIEF Centre



@RELIEF_Centre



Support for this workshop was obtained from the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) under the Grand Challenges Research Fund (Grant number: ES/P008003/1), as well as the UCL Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund (Grant number: KEI2017-03-23). We are grateful to them for their support.

