Local governance in conflict-affected contexts

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15 November 2017

Question

What are the key lessons or best practices regarding local governance in conflict contexts similar to South Sudan?

Contents

1. Overview

Although no two conflicts are alike, many have comparable areas of dispute and it is therefore possible for lessons learned to be discussed in relevant examples. This review looks at lessons learned from local governance initiatives and experiences in other fragile and conflict-affected states. While incorporating lessons learned in other countries might be helpful, it is important not to assume that all of those lessons are necessarily applicable to other conflict situations. A key piece of literature related to these learnt lessons is from a recently developed UNDP How-To Guide on *Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings: Building a Resilient Foundation for Peace and Development* (Garrigue, 2016).

Local governance is an open, evolving and multi-dimensional system, involving formal and informal stakeholders of different institutional nature and legitimacies (Garrigue, 2016: 3). Given the complexity of local governance in conflict-affected contexts, the uniqueness of different conflict-affected contexts, and the time constraint of 5 working days, this review only gives a brief overview of lessons learnt and is not exhaustive. Nor is it able to provide recommendations for interventions. Where possible examples have been taken from conflict-affected contexts including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, Syria and Yemen. However, some lessons learnt are more general where the literature indicates that these are relevant to fragile and conflict-affected states but explicit examples from conflict-affected states have not been found. Two further in-depth examples with lessons learned from Somalia and Syria are discussed in the final section. Literature argues against using a 'best practice' approach to local governance, and instead a 'best-fit' approach is suggested, whereby initiatives 'work with the grain', building on what is already there and works in a local context, and a shift towards local problem-solving (Booth, 2011; Garrigue, 2016; Grandvoinnet et al, 2015).

Other lessons learned include:

- Important to pay attention to context, timescales and trade-offs.
- Context at the local level is particularly key for effective local governance interventions. Local and regional specificities need to be understood, as well as the political economy of central-local relations.
- Local governance approaches should be flexible, and can be designed at different states of a conflict continuum.
- Transforming local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings is a long-term undertaking and programmes sometimes need to readjust what they consider 'success' to look like.
- Programming can be too localised or on the other hand too centralised.
- Policy choices on the shape of local governance systems in fragile settings are often reduced to a simplistic dichotomy: new or old. Focus on resilience-strengthening instead.
- Informal or traditional power-holders in fragile states, such as tribal and religious leaders – or by business interests or elite groups are important to consider. These informal power-holders may act either as 'blockers' or 'enablers' to change.
- Lack of coordination between various local governing structures on the ground can impact effectiveness.

- The presence or absence of humanitarian aid represents a largely unrecognised factor in the prospects for post-conflict state building (including local governance) in intra-war settings.
- Investing time and resources in trust-building is paramount.
- Paying attention to the marginalised (e.g. women, youth) energises grassroots participation.
- Providing funding to local governments from day one to promote comprehensive development of local institutions.

Rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of local governance interventions in conflict-affected settings is limited. Lessons learned in guidance and grey literature are often reiterated in different sources, however, explicit examples from conflict-affected settings are not always available. Literature searches were concentrated on specific countries that had similarities to South Sudan at the request of the DFID advisers (e.g. DRC, Somalia, Syria and Central African Republic). The coverage, quantity and quality of the literature varied greatly for each state (e.g. no relevant recent literature was found on local governance in the Central African Republic in the review timeframe). The impacts of local governance interventions and lessons learned are also not always evident in the literature. One reason for this paucity of evidence relates to the difficulty in measuring the long-term impact of activities on institutions.

Gender issues were considered in some of the literature, especially as it is recognised that women's participation in local governance and peace negotiations plays a crucial role in the termination of conflict. Disability was also considered during the literature review but was not reflected in any of the literature found.

2. Establishing local governance in conflict-affected contexts

Many researchers argue that the success or failure in establishing local governance can be measured according to three dimensions: Effectiveness, Security and Legitimacy (see Khalaf, 2015). *Effectiveness* means regular and equitable provision of basic needs such as electricity, water, food, jobs, etc. *Security* involves securing the lives of civilians in a systematic rather than ad-hoc manner through the creation, maintenance and management of the police, judicial system and armed services. *Legitimacy* refers to a complex set of beliefs, values and institutions (endogenous and exogenous) about the social compact governing state-society relations. In conflict, legitimacy is related to the provision of basic services and security measures in a manner accountable to local citizens (Khalaf, 2015: 41-42).

Service delivery

Improving the local delivery of basic services has been seen as a vital entry point for reforming local governance in fragile states. Services can improve the livelihoods of poor populations and thereby boost the legitimacy of the state and of local-government institutions. Service delivery can also be an entry point for the capacity-building of local service-providers and triggers local democratic action by mobilising citizens around demands for services and participation in planning processes (Kyed & Engberg-Pedersen, 2008: 3).

The primary strategy for addressing fragility has therefore focused on strengthening the capacity of state institutions to deliver services (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 194). However, it has recently been recognised that not only the effectiveness of state institutions but also other dynamics in societies contribute to fragility. This literature also suggests that state legitimacy needs to be understood in a broader context of state-society relationships (see Elgin-Cossart, Jones and Esberg, 2012 in Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 194), with the ability of a state to provide services is only one factor affecting its legitimacy.

Security

Morrissey (2016) argues that it is important to recognise the protection/governance cross over and the potential for positive (individual, collective and structural) change through addressing both. The Within and Without the State (WWS) programme[1] run by Oxfam in Équateur state in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) found that protection and governance are closely intertwined in the DRC (Morrissey, 2016: 4). The programme has established community protection committees with an equal number of male and female representatives. Recognising the importance of creating a safe space for women within the community for dialogue between citizens and those in power, Oxfam also created separate women's forums as part of the local structures (Oxfam, 2016: 7, 12). The inclusion of local minorities (especially women) in peace negotiations is argued to play a crucial role in the termination of conflict (Leonardsson & Gustav Rudd, 2015: 832).

Legitimacy

Political legitimacy refers to whether people who make decisions at the national, state, or local level are seen as legitimately representing the interests of citizens (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 195). Fragile and conflict-affected situations are marked by a breakdown in trust and social cohesion, which can inflame tensions and perpetuate violence. Relationships within society must be restored before social and institutional relationships can be re-established and trust restored (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 196). Addressing issues of trust, legitimacy, and justice through social accountability sometimes takes precedence over issues of service delivery in fragile and conflict-affected states, as state building becomes a more difficult undertaking unless there is some notion of a social contract to provide the basis for state-society interaction (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 212).

There are differing ideas between donors on whose capacity to support, i.e. local government, local communities or civil society. Despite these differences, critics of local capacity approaches also argue that such approaches often assume a non-state and traditional local that is inherently authentic and legitimate, thus circumventing the need to critically assess who this local represents (Leonardsson & Gustav Rudd, 2015: 830). Leonardsson & Gustav Rudd (2015: 831) argue that the need to leave space for local peace initiatives is an important component of the emancipatory approaches to peacebuilding, which derive from the notion of local agency as crucial in peacebuilding and governance.

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[1] A five-year global initiative (2011–2016) funded by the Department for International Development's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department. See https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/governance-citizenship/within-and-without-the-state

From 'best practice' to 'best-fit'

Booth (2011: 1) argues against the 'universal best practice' approach to governance, arguing that there are no institutional templates that are valid everywhere and for all stages in a country's development, and instead suggests a 'best fit' approach. According to the Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP) research, Booth (2011: 1) writes that best-fit approaches imply a real commitment to 'working with the grain', meaning building on what already works such as existing institutional arrangements that have recognisable benefits, and a shift from direct support to facilitating local problem-solving. An implication of this best-fit model is that external actors base their decisions and their policy dialogue on a thorough understanding of the prevailing institutional arrangements (Booth, 2011: 3). Booth argues that in most cases, institutional arrangements that work are 'practical hybrids' that combine modern professional standards with elements of local society.

Garrigue (2016: 24) also supports 'best-fit', highlighting that the main principles for transforming institutions are: to help local institutions focus on immediate priorities of men and women for services and guide them away from trying to tackle everything at once; and to pursue 'best-fit' changes (rather than mechanistic 'best' practices) in the way local institutions function, allowing flexibility and innovation and avoiding overly normative frameworks. He also highlights the importance of feedback from piloted experiences to shape reforms of local governance arrangements.

Through interviews with World Bank staff working on social accountability programmes in fragile and conflict-affected states, Grandvoinnet et al (2015: 216) also found that social accountability approaches based on organic structures and initiated by local stakeholders themselves tended to be the most successful and judged by World Bank staff to be the most legitimate. World Bank staff also reflected that wherever feasible, programmes should build on existing government and traditional institutions.

3. Lessons learned in local governance

Many of the following lessons learned are taken from the UNDP How-To Guide on *Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings: Building a Resilient Foundation for Peace and Development* (Garrigue, 2016)[2], as well as from contexts such as Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, Syria and Yemen. The Guide draws upon the extensive experience of UNDP and the United Nations system in working with local governance institutions in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and was developed through insights and guidance from UNDP staff and experts in Country Offices and in Headquarters.

Context is key

Context at the local level is key for effective local governance interventions. Local and regional specificities need to be understood, as well as the political economy of central-local relations (Garrigue, 2016: 15). Grandvoinnet et al (2015: 213) also underline the importance of investing in

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[2] The Guide proposes a holistic Framework for Action and as part of the guide, UNDP has created a Diagnostic Tool on Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings to help with analysis and understanding of the local political and development contexts to support programme design (Garrigue, 2016: xv).

understanding the local context of fragile states, both in the design phase of a programme and throughout implementation, adjusting accordingly. Context can change quickly in these states, hence, programmes need to be adaptive and readjusted to fit complex situations. A regionally differentiated approach may be necessary: urban areas in particular require a different approach to more dispersed rural populations (World Bank, 2017). The use of local facilitators to help understand the local context and ensuring that the programme approaches are rooted in the social norms of the community can also be important (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 216).

Case study: Hybrid governance in Syria

Khalaf (2016) argues that Syria is without functioning government in many areas but not without governance. Khalaf (2015: 65) argues that a 'Hybrid Governance' is being formed in Syria as state-building and civil society forces seek to reconstruct and/or reform governance with and without formal governance structures. She hence argues that international interventions will not be able to positively redress this fragility unless they understand governance on the ground in Syria, from a local perspective (Khalaf, 2015: 66). Khalaf's (2015: 66) assessment of case studies from across Syria illustrate that both economic and human resources are critical for improved governance, but so is agency and social relationships on the ground.

Case study: community-driven reconstruction in Democratic Republic of the Congo

Community-driven reconstruction (CDR) has become a new paradigm in post-conflict development, it combines infrastructure restoration with introducing good governance at the local level. Recent evaluations show that governance objectives are not easily met and significant change cannot be demonstrated through CDR. Kyamusugulwa et al (2014: 813) add to this argument on the basis of ethnographic research on a CDR programme in eastern DRC, finding that the impact of the programme was in the realisation of projects, rather than in affecting local governance. This is the result of factors including the working of power relations on the ground and the mismatch between the project initiatives and the locally prevailing norms, institutions and existing accountability mechanisms. Not having experienced this type of governance before, people had no expectations relating to the governance objectives of the programme. Kyamusugulwa et al (2014: 813) identify room for improvement by better adjusting capacity building to locally prevailing accountability mechanisms and by coordinating capacity building with other development programmes. They concluded that governance practices may be enhanced beyond these CDR programmes when: the existing community dynamics are taken into account, including the prevailing accountability norms and practices; when the training content is consistent and adjusted to local realities; when incentives are built in to promote accountable project delivery in practice; and when coordination is undertaken with other actors promoting governance in the same area (Kyamusugulwa et al, 2014: 825).

Flexibility in design is critical

Flexibility in local governance programme design is critical. A local governance programme can be designed at different states of a conflict continuum (see Garrigue, 2016: 49-50 for more information). However, different conflict stages can coexist in a single country (e.g. Eastern versus Western DRC, Somaliland versus Somalia) and each will require a specific programme strategy. Programmes may also straddle different conflict stages over the years (Garrigue, 2016: 49). Flexibility and adaptation to changing political and security circumstances is also necessary.

Timely and long-term support is needed

Local governance needs long-haul support to achieve change at scale. Donor support often comes too late in post-conflict situations and stops too early (e.g. tied to the completion of local elections) (Garrigue, 2016: 15). Transforming local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings is a long-term undertaking. Timelines for institutional change are highly contextual, however, evidence shows that governance reforms do not usually produce quick results, and a more measured long-term ambition on a 10-15/15-20 year timeline is more realistic (Garrigue, 2016: 17; World Bank, 2011: 11).

Provide comprehensive multi-layered support

Building linkages between local and national governance early on in post-conflict situations, including by rebuilding intermediary levels of government, ensuring communication capacities and enabling resource flows, is key to rebuilding the viability of the state (United Nations/World Bank, 2017: 7). Programming can be too localised, focusing on the community level, or on the other hand too centralised, focusing mostly on policy aspects (Garrigue, 2016: 15). Comprehensive multi-layered support to the various levels of sub-national governance is rarely seen; instead the concept that these levels of local governance need to be built one after the other sequentially is commonly applied, which is not always effective (Garrigue, 2016: 15).

Consider the diversity of functions of local government

Donors tend to focus on the service-delivery function of local governance institutions in a conflict or post-conflict situation. Yet, expectations from local populations on what their local governments should do may be different. The complex set of functions of local governance systems needs to be built into more holistic change strategies (Garrigue, 2016: 15).

Focus on function over form

The United Nations/World Bank (2017: 7) highlights that the resumption of minimal levels of service delivery and the facilitation of participation in decision-making where possible is critically relevant in creating or re-instating formal institutional arrangements or agreeing to best-practice options for the future sub-national institutional arrangements of the state. This may mean making use of community decision making rather than formal subnational government decision making. The United Nations/World Bank (2017: 7) also emphasises the building and strengthening of what institutional and social accountability mechanisms already exist (even if local elections may not be feasible in the immediate post-conflict situation), especially with regard to revenue and expenditures of local governments. In the absence of agreed laws, these may be informal.

Case study: local systems of governance in South Kivu, DRC

For more than 15 years, the DRC's South Kivu province in the East of the country has experienced recurrent war and violence. But while the state collapsed during this time, governance did not entirely disappear. Mushi's (2013: 31-34) article examined how and why local systems of governance and networking survived in South Kivu during the civil war, and draws lessons from unstructured interviews with people in local governance. Multi-layered, networked governance exists in the absence of a state, and needs to be harnessed in post-conflict reconstruction, not viewed as a threat to it. In DRC, churches have emerged as one of the most accessible and durable channels of outside assistance to local communities. Mushi (2012) found

that the social contract between the state and society has largely been re-established in the DRC, partly due to the powerful negative lesson of what the alternative represents. However sources of tension remain.

Reconsider what 'success' looks like

Lessons learned from the WWS programme in Équateur state in the DRC, highlighted that governance work in contexts such as DRC with such endemic fragility takes time and programmes sometimes need to readjust what they consider 'success' to look like. Since there are such limited resources in the government to meet the supply side of meeting citizen's needs and issues of law and order are so complex, success and progress come through the form of compromise for a 'good enough' solution (Morrissey, 2016: 9).

Find a balance between modern vs old local governance systems

Policy choices on the shape of local governance systems in fragile and conflict-affected settings are often reduced to a simplistic dichotomy: new or old. The focus on resilience-strengthening acknowledges the need to use local solutions and engage with informal actors and processes, even if they may be at odds with the democratic paradigm. A risk, however, is that too much focus on 'resilience' justifies maintaining problematic socio-political orders in place (Garrigue, 2016: 15).

Case Study: decentralisation in DRC

Gaynor (2016), through documentary and field work in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo, highlights three principle sets of challenges to the decentralisation process in DRC – resistance from central authorities; weaknesses in the relevant legislation; and a lack of responsiveness to local priorities at provincial level. She argues that these challenges are due to decentralisation being rooted in the post-war elite political settlement of the early 2000s which privileged regional stability over political transformation, strengthening the power of former rebels and combatants at both national and provincial levels thereby increasing the vulnerability and marginalisation of the population (Gaynor, 2016: 210). Consequently, decentralisation in the DRC is limited to territorial reform and therefore differs fundamentally from the more politically transformative forms reviewed in the literature and pursued in neighbouring states. She recommends thinking beyond elections as a means toward political transformation to more regularised fora of debate and exchange between citizens and their local authorities; moving beyond the political settlement and building and supporting deeper and more inclusive governance mechanisms (Gaynor, 2016: 210).

Understand informal power dynamics

Oxfam's WWS programme produced guidelines in 2013 developed from experience gathered through the programme's first two years of practice. The guidelines highlight the significance of informal or traditional power-holders in fragile states, such as tribal and religious leaders – or by business interests or elite groups (Fooks, 2013: 5). These informal power-holders may act either as 'blockers' or 'enablers', preventing change which they do not see as desirable, or being able to influence formal power-holders in the state to achieve change. Strengthening governance may also involve working to improve the accountability and transparency of these informal power-holders, and ensuring they exercise their own power in the interests of citizens and communities

(Fooks, 2013: 5). A further lesson learnt from the WWS programme was that working with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was an appropriate entry point into fragile states, however noting that this is not sufficient to promote good governance (Fooks, 2013: 3).

Case study: tribal traditions in Yemen

Al-Dawsari (2012) highlighted the important role tribal law and traditions could play in the Republic of Yemen in restoring a degree of stability, as the new government struggled to establish legitimacy and address its most pressing issues during the transition period after the signing of a power-sharing deal in 2011. He argued that Yemenis have relied on indigenous tribal traditions to regulate conflict and establish justice for centuries. He acknowledged that engagement with the tribes and the traditional system might involve some risk and a lack of understanding of local power dynamics and the political landscape could create or exacerbate existing conflicts (Al-Dawsari, 2012: 14). He argued that tribal mechanisms for conflict resolution needed to be integrated with the formal system so that they work alongside and complement formal institutions, and that issues related to the stresses that the tribal system were facing must be addressed within that framework (Al-Dawsari, 2012: 2).

In the Republic of Yemen, one of the main factors behind the push for local governance is the desire to enhance engagement with citizens, bolster the legitimacy of the state, and strengthen its authority (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 259). The World Bank undertook a contextual review of social accountability approaches for six regions in Yemen more recently. It found that 'the future of political and economic development in the Republic of Yemen depends to a large extent on the tribe-state relationship. Historical legacies have made this relationship increasingly complex. Tribal leaders who have been co-opted by the state have lost legitimacy in the eyes of their tribesmen. Even so, the absence of state institutions has forced citizens to refer to these leaders and tribal networks. Given the impact that tribal leaders and institutions have on society, they have to be factored into any governance reforms (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 271).

Case study: clan elders and traditional authorities in Somaliland

Kyed & Engberg-Pedersen (2008: 3) highlight the role clan elders and traditional authorities have played in local affairs in Somalia. Although having contributed to conflicts, violence and abuses of human rights, customary courts of elders also cater for the resolution of a large majority of reported crimes. The complex reality and extensive powers of elders have been addressed by certain donors, including the Danish Refugee Council in Somaliland, where it has treated powerful elders as both targets and agents of change in an attempt to reduce clan conflicts in a wider peace and state-building process.

Reliance on non-state authorities (e.g. traditional authorities, warlords, religious leaders, or clan elders) in service delivery and local governance can be effective in reaching marginal populations and help boost local legitimacy for reform, but such authorities often operate in ways that are at odds with liberal-democratic values. Thus, non-state authorities should be regarded not only as 'agents of change', but also as 'targets of change' (Kyed & Engberg-Pedersen, 2008: 4). Reliance on non-state providers in service delivery risks creating parallel structures that are not aligned with formal state and local-government institutions.

Coordination between governance structures is important

Case study: local councils in Syria

Since 2012, hundreds of local councils (previously known as Local Coordination Committees) have been formed in Syrian cities, towns, and villages where the al-Assad regime has relinquished control (Aljundi, 2014: 10). Today more than 400 councils still operate in opposition-held parts of Syria (Chalhoub, 2017: 2). The councils provide essential public services, including water, electricity, and street cleaning, as well as humanitarian relief, transportation, police and security. Local councils have different levels of independence and effectiveness due to varying circumstances on the ground (Aljundi, 2014: 15). Some local councils often fail to represent their communities since they are not elected, they struggle to follow democratic procedures, create effective organisations, and delineate decision-making procedures. Councils lack a consistent source of funding that would allow them to systemise their work and plans. Some local councils also maintain relations with military groups, and some have military units, but often the exact nature of the relationship is unclear. Many of the local councils also lack the presence and participation of women (Aljundi, 2014: 11).

Through interviews and work undertaken by the Syria Initiative (SI) with local actors, Chalhoub (2017) identifies the lack of coordination between various local governing structures on the ground in Syria as a major issue to local governance effectiveness. This finding mainly concerns the lack of coordination in opposition-held areas between local councils, civil society organisations and quasi-governmental bodies. Khalaf (2015) also discusses this lack of coordination, which has resulted in a loose constellation of city-states and villages. As a result, local organisational structures have remained a-territorial, failing to create strong bottom-up local structures and economies of scale that allow for the geographically dispersed areas to exchange services and knowledge. More importantly, the lack of coordination between local bodies has put them in a weak position vis-à-vis the armed groups that provide for the security in the respective areas (Chalhoub, 2017: 2).

Recognise the role of aid and competing donor interests

External support to fragile states may lessen the government's dependence on tax revenues, threatening to remove the most fundamental connection between the state and society (Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 219). Referring to Somaliland, Eubank (2010 in Grandvoinnet et al, 2015: 219) notes that the lack of outside support provided a compelling reason to accept compromise and co-option of opposition groups.

Case study: donor involvement in Syria

Meininghaus (2016: 1454) argues that, in the case of intra-state war, the presence or absence of humanitarian aid represents a largely unrecognised factor in the prospects for post-conflict state building. She draws on the example of the Syrian war, where she suggests humanitarian aid has become deeply politicised. Meininghaus (2016: 1457) argues that, among the wider population, the uneven distribution of aid between government- and opposition-held areas influences population movements and shapes local governance processes. Meininghaus (2016: 1468) discusses how Syria is witnessing the emergence of manifold hybrid systems of humanitarian and political governance which do not run parallel but have become conflated. In the paper, she highlighted the way that humanitarian aid provides resources, builds service infrastructures and

influences local governance processes, which, beyond the warring parties, decisively shape the everyday realities and power relations on the ground for the local population at large (Meininghaus, 2016: 1468).

Chalhoub (2017: 2) argues that competing donor interests have also contributed to scattering local governance structures in opposition-held areas in Syria. By failing to synchronise guidelines, budgets and capacity-building programmes offered to local CSOs and local councils, donors have contributed to the de-facto isolation of local actors. Chalhoub (2017) further argues that the competition among donors has hence segregated local actors and reduced them to total dependency on external aid. These policies have also weakened the collective impact that local governing bodies could have on building credible political structures that can speak in the name of local communities in Syria.

4. Further case studies

Case study: external support - UNDP Joint Programme on Local Governance in Somalia

Local governance systems in the three main areas of Somalia are diverse. In the South Central region, emerging self-government administrations that have been increasingly providing basic services and security face resistance from the new Transitional Federal Government that favours a more centralised state. Somaliland, a self-declared independent state, has adopted a unique system of local governance integrating modern and clan-based structures. It has had great success in maintaining stability, but still lacks considerable capacity to improve local development planning and deliver universal access to services. In Puntland, an autonomous state in the Somali federation, the rule of law is weak and this is reflected in an incomplete local government structure (no elected councils, outdated legislation) with basic capacities for administration and service delivery (Garrigue, 2016: 59).

With the main objective of increasing the delivery of basic services to rural populations living in extreme poverty, and moving away from a humanitarian assistance model that was prevailing at that time in Somalia, UNDP and four other UN entities launched the Joint Programme on Local Governance in 2008. This programme was designed to support the establishment of district-level autonomous and accountable local governments and the development of effective linkages with constituent communities and the private sector (Garrigue, 2016: 59).

The following lessons learned from the UNDP Joint Programme in Somalia are taken from Garrigue (2016: 59):

- A bottom-up approach to building subnational institutions is relevant, even in the most adverse environments.
- Investing time and resources in trust-building is paramount in contexts where local governance stakeholders have grown very suspicious of each other and of central government institutions.
- Paying attention to the marginalised (women, youth) energises grassroots participation in the programme.

- The rigidity of programme documents need to be sacrificed for practical realities and increased local ownership; but a clear assignation of roles to programmes partners in such a complex conflict environment is essential.
- Providing funding to local governments from day one, even in high risk environments such as Somalia, including by such creative solutions as tapping into local and diaspora resources, is the only way to promote comprehensive development of local institutions. It also creates a sense of shared responsibility at the core of renewing state-society relations.

Case study: locally developed - Kurdish self-governance in Syria

Sary (2016) discusses Kurdish self-governance in Syria. Syria's Kurds have emerged at the forefront of the battle with self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), gaining them support from the United States even as tensions between them and the Syrian opposition have increased. The ascension to power of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) signalled a pragmatic approach in which tacit agreements with the regime have been sought in order to obtain greater autonomy from the central government.

In the north-east of Syria, the PYD has announced its intention to establish a federal region of Rojava (Khalaf, 2016). The PYD's local legitimacy, while not uncontested, stems from its success in combating ISIS and its ability to deliver a localised form of governance. The PYD now seeks to further consolidate its power and to legitimise itself through the provision of security, services and public diplomacy (Khalaf, 2016: 2). The model of local administration in Rojava, the PYD-led Rojava Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), has fostered a number of positive developments, such as a focus on individual personal freedoms. In addition, it can also be argued that its decentralised model may hold at least part of the solution to a lasting settlement in Syria.

However, Sary (2016: 11) argues that TEV-DEM remains insufficient, and at times heavily dependent on the central government in Damascus. Sary (2016: 2) highlights that TEV-DEM should be mindful of the dangers associated with overreach and recommends that it should focus on strengthening the local administration in areas it already controls rather than continuing to expand into areas of Sunni Arab majority. Such expansion threatens to sow the seeds of ethnic conflict and place unmanageable burdens on TEV-DEM capacities and resources. Khalaf (2016: 2) also highlights that the PYD has less support in areas further from combat zones, with locals citing its brutality and authoritarianism. The PYD continues to suppress critical civil society voices and political opposition.

Khalaf (2016: 2) discusses how the PYD is an effective provider of services, a function it also instrumentalises as a means of consolidating its power. Service provision varies across Rojava: in areas where the PYD co-exists with regime authorities, a myriad of institutions have developed, sometimes creating parallel structures. Meanwhile, in areas where the PYD enjoys greater control, power remains centralised, despite the PYD's claims to decentralise power to the local level. In Arab-majority areas such as Manbij, locals report that the PYD ensures that only representatives that are loyal to it are able to govern, undermining the legitimacy of the new structures in the eyes of the local community.

Khalaf (2016: 2) highlights how Rojava's leaders continue to walk a tightrope between international and regional interests. As the chances for legitimacy in the form of political endorsement are slim, locally-derived legitimacy is of great import. At the local level, legitimacy

means more than just the provision of services, security and public diplomacy image management. Legitimacy here implies a non-authoritarian approach that enjoys social and political trust in the Rojava project from the different components of society. It involves practising a social contract based on real participation and representation from these societal components and non-coerced acceptance of the Democratic Autonomous Administration[3] institutions (Khalaf, 2016: 24).

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[3] DAA is a structure of local governance systems comprised of local councils and assemblies across three cantons the PYD collectively calls Rojava. The PYD refers to it as the administrative governing authority but the division of powers between it and the TEV-DEM governing coalition remain unclear (Khalaf, 2016: 3).

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- Oxfam: Within and without the state: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/governance-citizenship/within-and-without-the-state

Suggested citation

Price, R.A. (2017). *Local governance in conflict-affected contexts.* K4D Helpdesk Report 234. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report

This report is based on five days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

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