حلول دائمة في العراق
Iraq Durable Solutions

Technical Coordination Committee

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Emerging themes relating to social cohesion in international peacebuilding literature and relevance to Iraq Durable Solutions - challenging assumptions.

Context.

The Jun 2021 Inter-agency Durable Solutions (DS) Strategy and Operational Framework Strategic objective states as an overall guiding objective that, *"IDPs, returnees and other displacement-affected populations are supported to pursue and ultimately achieve a voluntary, safe, and dignified durable solution to their displacement through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in Iraq".*

Iraq's 2021 National Plan for Returnees, in the section focusing on social and psychosocial challenges, draws conclusion from geographically targeted studies in conflict affected areas that: *"The most important social challenge as the lack of social cohesion".*

This thematic note draws on some emerging thinking and conceptual developments to assist Area Based Coordination Focal Points and others in thinking about social cohesion planning and response. It considers broader developments in thinking towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and builds on the guidance given in the revised 2022 TCC concept note on Social Cohesion which provides operational definitions and recommendations for programming at national and regional level in Iraq.

It aims to support ABCs in meeting the DS Specific Objective Six (SO6)", that, *"Displacement-affected populations are able to live together peacefully and in safety, with inter-communal trust strengthened".*

Although in some contexts the very terminology of social cohesion is sensitive, emerging research on the topic and a wide array of existing tools exist. In Iraq, it is recognized that ethno-religious tension, tribal disputes, and the issues of perceived affiliation to Daesh are factors that add to the difficulty of rebuilding the Iraqi social fabric. Therefore, an understanding of the underlying concepts and theory of social cohesion approaches, drawing from international experiences, can help in developing approaches that can work and actively engage with communities in a participatory and conflict sensitive manner.

1. What are the contemporary themes and developments in relation to social cohesion?

a. **Definitions of social cohesion are consistent with the general concepts of building trust between people and developing pluralism within communities.** As a starting point it is helpful to refer to Maslow's hierarchy of needs[1], where it is argued that *physiological* and *safety* needs underpin all other needs. According to this widely cited sociological theory dating back to the 1940s, social human needs, described as a ***sense of belonging*** and ***self-esteem***[2] are second only to the essentials of safety. Building on this, the concept of

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[1] See https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002216788102100406?journalCode=jhpa for an account of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs as a guide for living.
[2] A sense of belonging and self-esteem are widely used as social cohesion indicators

Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT)[3], which was developed in the 1950s further developed approaches in attempts to examine society cohesion dimensions. ICT has four key criteria that are still widely used today as a basis for social cohesion programming, through observing levels of discrimination and tension in society. These are:

a. Equal status.
b. A shared goal or interest.
c. Cooperation not competition.
d. With the support of local authorities and social norms.

It is also worth noting that the early origins of the concept of social cohesion date back much further than this, with the development of ideas underpinning modern sociology recorded in the fourteenth century. In modern times, research into social cohesion tends to be centered around North America and Western Europe and in general is focused upon the **impact of minority groups on social majorities.** While definitions offered by institutions vary as to precise terminology, there is consensus in understanding social cohesion as a complex, quasi, concept, encompassing a multiplicity of dimensions and indicators. Informal definitions and emerging definitions provide valuable insight into the cross-cutting nature of the term.

In Iraq, minority and majority concepts are not clear cut. In the context of Iraq, and specifically that of returning community members who are perceived as having Daesh affiliation, barriers to social cohesion can be very specifically aligned with recent conflict dynamics. In her recent research paper, Melisande Genat[4], looked at lived experiences of IDPs in Falluja, and points to various and complex factors preventing returns (including PMF presence, tribal tensions and fears of punishment and retribution). She argues that it is not so much the *social majority*, but more specifically that often that the IDPs "relatives do not allow them to return". She presents the importance of **localized community approaches**, determining that where local dynamics are so heavily influential, tribal committees are needed examine specific files, often on a case-by-case basis,

Trust building should lead to positive peace. More broadly, as the IOM Power of Contact guide details, in considering social cohesion programming, various stages to the process are essential. While they can take different shapes and follow tools selected to suit the environment, all interventions should be based upon a thorough understanding of social dynamics. It is often the case in post-conflict scenarios that interventions should be sequenced, starting with **social mixing**, with further interventions subsequently moving towards a process of social cohesion. Cohesion is a process and accordingly, as Prof Larsen[5] proposes, in thinking about *social cohesion*, it should be accepted that there is always a prior process of **social integration** planned.

b. **Positive peace is long-term and is more that the absence of violence**. Research does not point to specific timeframes for interventions, but all interventions should aim to go

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[3] The International Journal of Intercultural Relations gives an account of recent advances in intergroup contact theory here https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176711000332

[4] See *Lived Experiences of IDPs in protracted displacement, and return: the case of Fallujah Region* (2022, Melisande Genat, IOM)

[5] See Social cohesion: Definition, measurement, and developments, by Christian Albrekt Larsen, Professor, Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies (www.ccws.dk), Aalborg
University, Denmark at https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2014/ChristianAlbrektLarsen.pdf

beyond feelings of initial anxiety that social mixing can cause. Timeframes for research are always difficult in post conflict environments, especially when aiming to establish baselines, so where available, long term, national data is ideally used to monitor and identify trends. It is important when considering social cohesion related issues that the perspectives of host communities and their needs are considered, in parallel with those of returnees and migrants. Cohesiveness equates to the social contract between all members of a community and cannot be forced. As a recent University of London blogpost detailing the implications of the Global Compact for Migration observes, [efforts] to realize full inclusion and social cohesion strongly depend on the effective guarantee of economic, social, and cultural rights to **all members** of societies, including migrants"[6] The UNDP guide to strengthening Social Cohesion[7] notes that "if social cohesion is to be sustainable, it must emerge organically[8]".

c. **Social cohesion is rooted in politics**. **Politics is the formal and informal means through which contestation or cooperation occurs in a society.** According to Dr Salma Mousa[9], the Middle East is not necessarily a place where social identities have always existed, and neither have social identities structured conflict. She highlights the political nature of **constructed fault lines**, which have not historically been a driver for conflict. The elasticity of the term highlights its political nature. The choices that are made by communities relating to social cohesion are political choices – and consciously the question is made whether social cohesion to be fostered or not. Social cohesion should be seen as a joint responsibility where local government exists. Field research in support of programming, should be informed by the practices of Political Economy Analysis (PEA[10]), and to seek to identify trust deficiencies in a conflict sensitive manner, politically aware manner. Political economy analysis is about understanding the political dimensions of any context and actively using this information to inform policy and programming. This is an especially useful approach in Iraq where often a lack of interaction goes back many years and has led to fear and dehumanization of other groups – a political problem[11].

d. **Social cohesion is intrinsically linked to economics and livelihood factors.** There are no international legal instruments specific either to migrant integration or social cohesion. However, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[12] is both part of the International Bill of Human Rights and at the core of the universal human rights system. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is a non-binding document that respects states' sovereign right to determine who enters and stays in their territory, under which, objective sixteen relates to aims to increase the empowerment of migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion[13.] Recognizing migrants' identities and promote the customs and traditions of local communities should be combined

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[6] University of London School of Advanced Study observations in a blog post examining the Global Compact for Migration: Objective 16: 'Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion'. See https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2018/11/19/gcm-commentary-objective-16/

[7] UNDP Strengthening Social Cohesion. Conceptual framing and programming implications (2020)

[8] UNDP Strengthening Social Cohesion. Conceptual framing and programming implications (2020)

[9] Dr Salma Mousa speaks about her experiences in social cohesion after conflict in Iraq with The Pearson Institute for the study and resolution of global conflicts https://www.spreaker.com/user/ucppp/salma-mousa

[10] See Mcloughlin, C. (2014). Political economy analysis: Topic guide (2nd ed.) Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, available at https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/political-economy-analysis/

[11] Activities to promote inclusion in political participation, to promoting the representation of migrants and returnees in the decision-making process are key social cohesion aims when the political situation allows.

[12] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf

[13] Access at https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration

with a focus on integration into the labour market, a key element of orderly and regular migration. Therefore, social cohesion activities that also act as economic incentives have particular potential.

e. **Vertical and horizontal dimensions are useful (citizen-citizen, citizen-state).** Social cohesion programming should emphasize the value of taking an inclusive approach and one that reflects consideration of underrepresented groups in society will ultimately enhance its prosperity[14]. Professor Harb proposes that a social cohesion index should focus on two variables as proxy indicators, these are vertical and horizontal **attitudes** and secondly vertical and horizontal collective action **tendencies**[15]. Attitudes and collective action tendencies relate to identities, and these exist at the individual level and the group level. What people think and feel, and how they are likely to act is influenced by society norms and established group structures. It is argued widely in the literature that the experience of living through Daesh has affected society norms in Iraq, and hence social attitude and conflict analysis surveys often ask about shifting senses of identity, whether to tribe, ethnic group, religion, or nationality. In examining the case IDPs in Fullaja, Mélisande Genat examines structural identifies and roles in the returnee process, highlighting the complexity of social structures and sense of belonging, beyond vertical and horizontal notions and pointing to the collective nature of tribal disputes and feuds, a trait of Iraqi society that gives context to notions of agency, individualism and social dynamics when considering social cohesion.

> *"Accusations of affiliation to ISIL are often used to settle personal disputes. They may arise from a single individual, but it is not uncommon that baseless or exaggerated accusations are made by group of people. Such accusations of terrorism or ISIL affiliation are often motivated by old tribal feuds or unrelated family grievances, a land or familial dispute, or some other perceived abuse. Tribal disputes or feuds are collective in nature; therefore, if one individual has wronged or is perceived to have wronged another, his or her whole family or tribe may suffer the consequences".*
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> Lived Experiences of IDPs in Protracted Displacement, and Return : The Case of Falluja Region by Mélisande Genat

2. Does being conflict sensitive impact upon social cohesion and how can existing programming in humanitarian, livelihoods be aligned with social cohesion aims?

a. **Social Cohesion interventions risk elevating trauma**. Social cohesion programmes can be aligned with MHPSS and taking a **trauma sensitive approach** to implementation allows for the utilization of specialist referral pathways where they exist. This is an especially crucial element of planning, as when, through activity, the impact of longstanding traumas might become more pronounced, and interaction can sometimes elevate risk.

b. **All activity changes perceptions.** Larson argues that because social cohesion is a non-material phenomenon, to be observed in the cognitions of citizens, that while phenomena such as equal objective chances, employment and rule of law are important, they are not in

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[14] University of London School of Advanced Study. See https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2018/11/19/gcm-commentary-objective-16/
[15] Charles Harbes is a professor of social psychology and chair of the department of psychology at the American University of Beirut, his paper for UNDP on the social cohesion index can be accessed at https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/developing-social-cohesion-index-arab-region-0

themselves indicators of social cohesion. **Cognitive indicators** are needed. In measuring conflict sensitivity, the do no harm framework's concepts of connectors and dividers, developed by CDA in the 1990s for aid workers[16] offers a useful and simple approach based on dividers and connectors. But for wider social cohesion programming, tailored MEAL approaches that consider targeted indicators are required. These can coalesce around a single theme, for example the SCORE study[17], focusing on reconciliation in a post-conflict context in Cyprus, selected the importance of **human security** as the most critical variable in predicting the outcomes of its index. Conflict sensitivity should be considered in all programming, but not all interventions have the capacity to conduct conflict analysis. It should be considered that **positive intentions can lead to negative perceptions.** The UNDP guide to social cohesion, for example, citing an intervention in South Africa aimed at poverty reduction, points to evidence that although the levels of violence and xenophobic attacks reduced overall, the Community Works Programme (CWP) [itself] was also "seen a source of racial or interpersonal conflicts, power struggles amongst the local elites for the control of the CWP"[18].

c. **Human security needs can be targeted in programming.** Reporting and conflict analysis in Iraq indicate that community perceptions of insecurity persist despite often significant and highly visible presence of state and non-state security actors. This can indicate that security actors are not necessarily working to support the needs of their communities, and furthermore that people feel less secure as a result of security presence. Indeed, where security actors are effectively controlling the return process of IDPs by refusing to provide the approvals for families to return to their area of origin, or by rejecting request to return forms, or where land is held for military gain[19], their presence can be actively destabilizing for communities. In instances where local security needs are not being met, a trust deficit can occur between local communities and security forces, and the security needs of underrepresented groups in society can be overlooked. In this sense, often coined the 'human security' perspective, security needs are hyper local and bear hallmarks of chronic trust deficits. In these cases, facilitated negotiation, and openly engaging with difficult issues[20] can be successful with careful stakeholder mapping and a willingness to engage with security actors, such as PMF, intelligence and police. The IOM Iraq Local Peace Processes Toolkit deals with this issue in detail and examines approaches to conflict analysis to support peace processes and perceptions of security.

d. **Most programming contributes to social cohesion aims at impact and outcome level.** Group involvement, and the concepts of safe spaces and by virtue of spending time in each other's company, social cohesion outcomes are often observed, and trust is increased, so

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[16] The Do No Harm Handbook (The Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict), developed by Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) can be accessed here https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-do-no-harm-handbook-the-framework-for-analyzing-the-impact-of-assistance-on-conflict/#:~:text=The%20DNH%20'Analytical%20Framework'%20was,humanitarian%20and%20development%20assistance%20plans.

[17]. The SCORE index is a tool designed to measure social cohesion and reconciliation as two indicators of peace in multi-ethnic societies around the world. Detail on the methodology can be found at https://www.scoreforpeace.org/en/methodology

[18] See UNDP Strengthening Social Cohesion. Conceptual framing and programming implications (2020) page 37.

[19] PMF control for example is often cited in areas such as Al-Riyahd as a destabilizing factor.

[20] Perceptions of unfair aid distribution and allegations of sexual exploitation are examples of where a trust deficit can make outside interventions difficult and highlight the need for meaningful local participation.

for example, the involvement of a community in a humanitarian or livelihoods-based endeavor can be effective also as a trust building exercise. Additionally, with engagement with the community, **social segregation** in communities, a structural cause of friction, can be addressed through taking social cohesion into account when rebuilding infrastructure. Religious minorities, women, youth, and persons with disability are typically underrepresented in local peace processes but are targeted by humanitarian projects. **Arts** and **media** have advantages in demonstrating the social cohesion benefits of humanitarian and livelihoods activities when integrated[21].

e. **Conflict drivers including climate change, lack of economic opportunities and poor local governance challenge longstanding perceptions of ethno/religious division as primary drivers.** Although vertical and horizontal dimensions are helpful dimensions, a lack of social cohesion typically follows conflict related dehumanization, and a generalized lack of common humanity, social capital, and investment, cannot be easily related to vertical or horizontal. Perceptions of security differ according to socio economic factors and may not be obvious which is why programming should always be based on evidence and research to develop an unbiased understanding of the social environment. Therefore, taking a consciously human security perspective in analysis and planning implementation gives perspectives on security and conflict drivers that might better be defined by drivers such as climate change and or a lack of economic opportunities. The social activist Wafa Eben Beri[22] observes that devising a common aim in social cohesion programming focused on **neutral issues**, for example *food*, and in *activism* or in *jointly volunteering* towards a common goal, institutional and perceived ethno/religious differences can be overcome.

3. **What evidence is there that social cohesion programming can work?**

a. **Contact theory is evidenced to effect changes in individual's perceptions of other individuals. But changing Individual perceptions of other individuals does not necessarily translate to individuals changing their views of other groups.** Prof Salma Mousa cites a football-based project near to Mosul, resulted in very localized changes – Christians being more open to their Arab co players, but not more likely to visit Mosul and with only minor change observed in attitudes overall towards Arab population as an entire group. For this reason, she argues, interactions between groups should be **recurring**, not a one off.

b. **Short term quick impact projects reap short term effects.** Studies show the longer the contact the better, with positive effects tending to diminish over time. Maintaining a theme and a common focus on an area of shared interest over an extended period is generally cited as being important. The question of **scalability** is key in interventions, allowing for upscale and downscale, and replication, with a managed approach to the risks involved in target communities. This underpins the importance of taking a participatory approach, supporting where possible **existing initiatives** within a community, supporting local groups, and fostering the conditions for activity to continue without direct support or funding.

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[21] GIZ can offer expertise in this and examples of international media and arts in social cohesion work.
[22] Wafa Eben-Beri is a social activist and currently an Obama Foundation scholar at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago (USA). See https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/contributor/wafa-eben-beri/

c. **Social cohesion exists as a phenomenon between people**. In the case of interventions, changes are not just observed between the people participating, studies showing that social cohesion activity can also bring about benefit for those observing the activity and not participating directly, such as friends or family. With planning, the ripples and positive effects of interventions can be **boosted with media** and by bringing along local influencers to raise awareness levels. Although this might not always be possible or suitable, is often the case that migrants arrive and live in neighborhoods that are characterized by pre-existing structural inequalities and residential segregation, where opportunities to interact are limited and stereotypes and distrust between social groups already exist[23]. The secondary effects of programming and value added for the wider community, in assessing how community perceptions can be influenced through activity is a vital and often overlooked component. and engagement with the media (and with local businesses) in project work is essential to gain and maintain legitimacy.

d. **Social cohesion building activity must be participatory to be effective.** Participatory analysis of conflict drivers, using systematic analysis processes, such as CDA's Systems Approach[24] to conflict analysis is a vital component of identifying needs, as is subsequently involving the community in all aspects of social cohesion programming. Because of the participatory nature of all social cohesion programming, creating safe spaces and avoiding situations where goals presented are diametrically opposed to each other, (as can happen sometimes in sport) is important. Through engaging with officials, and where suitable working in a participatory manner with Local Peace Committees, or other identified mechanisms, the levels of trust in legitimate government institutions can be improved, as examples given by Peace Paradigms[25] in Iraq have demonstrated recently.

4. How can social cohesion be measured?

a. **Cycles of violence are usually generational**. Larsen argues that the most important aspect of social cohesion is that citizens believe they share the norm of not cheating each other. Most studies of social cohesion rely on secondary data analysis, for example national surveys, and meta data from statistics to test theories. Developing and conducting a conflict analysis is fundamental to understanding dynamics, but for social cohesion programming, it should be considered as *situation* or *context* analysis. Taking this approach helps, so that not just conflict drivers are met, but also identified **gaps in peace**, or in identified opportunities for peacebuilding that might not necessarily meet specific conflict drivers[26].

b. **Social and attitudinal change is long-term.** Social contact theory states that, given the right conditions, perceptions and interactions between groups can be helped by regular contact. This relies on groups having equal status, a common goal, interactive cooperation,

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[23] International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021. The Power of "Contact." Designing, Facilitating and Evaluating Social Mixing Activities to Strengthen Migrant Integration and Social Cohesion Between Migrants and Local Communities. A Review of Lessons Learned. Geneva.

[24] See process overview at https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Conflict-Systems-Analysis-Benefits-and-Practical-Application.pdf

[25] Peace Paradigms are a local peacebuilding partner to IOM in Iraq.

[26] For example, it may be that due to political or security sensitives, or through proximity to other programming interventions, and related economies of scale that opportunities arise or are dismissed for social cohesion programming.

and support from authorities. Studies from the 1950s, referenced by Larsen sees no evidence that "the ethos of a people cannot be changed according to plan", so the impacts and aims of social cohesion programming should be typically realistic in their ambition[27]. The opposite of *social cohesion* is *social erosion,* and it is arguably concerns over **social erosion** that are of more concern to communities.

c. **Conflict drivers are rarely objective.** Asking people what they feel, gives more insight that asking what they see. This calls for methods of data collection which account for both *normative* and *empirical* perspectives, to **understand what people are *feeling*** more effectively as well as what they are *observing.* This helps build an understanding of the social environment. Certain core variables, as presented by Professor Charles Harb for UNDP, when looking at social cohesion, should focus on

   1. Identities - a sense of belonging.
   2. Emotions - motivation.
   3. Trust - with four further specific variables for the Arab region of:

      I. Threat
      II. Justice
      III. Contact
      IV. Levels of participation and representation.

d. **Trust is difficult to measure.** Trust between citizens is typically measured with the simple question, "generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted" – or – "that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people", a long-established question that has been used to measure a rule of thumb for the present, rather than seeking to examine the past (Larson). In broadly looking at the impact on levels of trust by interventions, this too can be used to look at trends over a period. Because social cohesion stakeholders can be invisible using traditional data collection methodology approaches, especially those who are difficult to reach using traditional data collection approaches such as KIIs and FGDs, alternative approaches to understanding perceptions are required, which can for example include passive media monitoring or through online surveys. Design of questions requires expertise and careful application to create useable data and care should be taken in attempting to use quantitative approaches unless the sample size is sufficiently large. In making basic assessments when resources or time are scarce, the Do No Harm framework proposes dimensions of conflict which can serve as proxy indicators for levels of trust, based on the concept of **dividers** and **connectors,** which although primarily designed for conflict sensitivity, are also helpful in seeking to understand trust and identity.

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[27] Refer to nudge theory for example of approaches to long term society change practices.

Categories of Dividers and Connectors according to the 'Do No Harm' framework

1. Systems and institutions: Formal and informal forces that either connect people or promote difference and division between them. Systems and institutions can either be inclusive or exclusive, perceived as legitimate by all or just by some of the people in a society.
2. Attitudes and actions: The things people say and do. People can promote connection or division through their actions or their attitudes. These attitudes and actions can be small scale (how groups interact in a community) or large scale (what national-level politicians say).
3. Values and interests: The things that are important to people, their concerns, their principles, and their standards such as shared values and common interests that connect people and different values or competing interests that divide them.
4. Experiences: Shared experiences can unite people across lines of division. Different experiences of a singular event can shape people's perceptions and create positions of division in a society. Community experiences are the source of how that community understands itself and its history.
5. Symbols and occasions: Symbols (e.g. the national flag, football team, religious rituals, norm of hospitality toward strangers)and occasions (e.g. holidays) can unite people across lines of division, or further divide them. Symbols and occasions should be analysed not only for what they are, but for what they represent to people and whom they include (or exclude, as the case may be)[28].

Key framework documents.

1. Resolving Internal Displacement in Iraq (2021) Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Strategic and Operational Framework.
2. Government of Iraq (2020) Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers, Office of the Council of ministers' affairs and committees. National Plan for returning IDPS to liberated areas.
3. UNDP (2020) Strengthening Social Cohesion. Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications.
4. IOM (2021) The Power of Contact designing, facilitating, and evaluating social mixing activities to strengthen migrant integration and social cohesion between migrants and local communities.

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[28] Refer to the network for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding Conflict Analysis Guidelines (DDG/DRC)