Summary

The Expert Group Meeting on “Development Under Crisis Conditions” (Beirut, 27-28 June 2006) aimed at reaching a common understanding of the impact of conflict on socio-economic and political development in the region. It also sought to identify means of assisting member states in pursuing their Millennium Development Goals despite instability and political volatility. The meeting examined comparative experiences with development implementation under crisis conditions in three locales: Iraq, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon.

Participants made a number of recommendations to pertinent stakeholders, concerned states, and to ESCWA. They underscored the need for a long-term sustainable development strategy despite crisis conditions, one that privileges institution building, good governance, and the development of citizenship participatory norms. ESCWA was invited to play a mediating role in this process, especially in coordinating the efforts of different international and local regional organizations involved in development activity under crisis conditions.

This report summarizes the main debates and concerns raised by experts in, and practitioners of, development under crisis in a variety of contexts. Albeit not comprehensive, it aims at conveying the plethora of strategies and recommendations advanced during the EGM for coping with the challenges of practicing development under crisis conditions.
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INTRODUCTION

Political tensions and conflicts in the Middle East show little sign of abating, highlighting the challenges of undertaking sustainable development objectives under crisis conditions. These conflicts express themselves not only in terms of stunted economic growth, but also in dislocated social and political forms.

Crisis conditions strain traditional development models and mechanisms. Protracted political crises and violence obfuscate even the best development plans. Regional instability and domestic crisis also result in unpredictable changes in governments and donor policies, thus frustrating development efforts. Consequently, the great challenge facing international agencies concerned with promoting peace and development in Western Asia is finding viable means to assist countries in their pursuit of long-term, sustainable development in a region experiencing perpetual instability and uncertainty.

ESCWA, through its regional role, relations and diverse areas of expertise, is uniquely situated to examine the challenges involved in development planning and implementation under crisis conditions. ESCWA’s Unit for Emerging Conflicts and Related Issues (ECRI) hopes that this deliberative exercise will help advance the prospects for development under crisis, not only for planners and practitioners in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories but also in other post-war areas confronting similar challenges, or other similar conditions of political instability or socio-economic uncertainties.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

The EGM concluded its deliberations with a number of recommendations for stakeholders, states, and ESCWA.

Recommendations for Stakeholders and States

- **Privilege a long-term development strategy despite crisis conditions**: immediate development needs are crucial in post-war societies. However, this should not deflect international agencies and local and national actors from a long-term vision. Emergency and humanitarian efforts should be integrated into a broader, flexible, long-term, development strategy. Similarly, capacity building, education, and vocational strategies should target long-term peace-building goals, as well as sustaining life during crisis.

- **Political economy considerations are just as important as economic calculations (if not more so) in development planning under crisis conditions**: development under crisis cannot be suspended from political considerations. Nor should development be relegated to technical expertise only. Political support to end the causes of regional conflicts is as important as financial assistance in post-war reconstruction.

- **Avoid double standards in implementing international legality**: the international community should apply similar standards across all post-war societies. Otherwise, local populations will perceive efforts to promote democratic openings as a neo-colonial tool. The governments of Western Asia should lobby for the implementation of pertinent international resolutions.
The civil state is the path toward Arab democracy: creating a new sense of civic citizenship (muwatana) is necessary for civil peace, social justice, and the prospects for good governance and democratization in Western Asia. In turn, a democratic society can negotiate peacefully its overlapping social, economic, cultural, and political crises. Otherwise the region will remain exposed to externally imposed divisive projects, and the brain drain will continue.

Reinvigorate civil society actors in the Arab world: NGOs, professional syndicates, political parties, and the private sector and its institutions may play an important role in reinvigorating the Arab world if given the tools, capacity and chance. They should compliment the efforts of an already-strained public sector. The private sector is strategically located to share in development functions beyond state capabilities. The state and the private sector should act in unison to serve long-term development plans. NGOs are especially important actors because they can assist in ensuring transparency in the post-war rebuilding phase, through advocacy and direct participation.

Recommendations for ESCWA

• Produce a document of best practices for local actors and international agencies outlining the main challenges and opportunities encountered in development work under crisis conditions.

• Assume the lead in coordinating UN agencies approaches in the Middle East to project a united stance on regional issues. This does not assume the lack of plurality within UN agencies. It nevertheless aims at projecting the UN as an active, though neutral, actor in the region.

• Exert serious efforts in bringing together UN agencies operating in the Middle East to project a united stance on regional crises.

• Cooperate and coordinate with other UN agencies to generate user-friendly data on Iraq similar to that generated by OCHA for the Palestinian territories.

• Link think tanks and NGO networks in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq engaged in similar post-war development activity to generate cross-fertilization and learning.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. THE IMPACT OF CRISIS: TRENDS AND EMERGING CHALLENGES IN WESTERN ASIA

What are the main challenges facing the states and societies of Western Asia? What roles do domestic and external actors play in ameliorating or exacerbating these challenges? How do these challenges affect developmental strategies? And how do they overlap with calls for domestic and external development and reform?

Experts participating in the EGM identified a number of challenges. These may be classified into a number of overlapping clusters:

1. The Challenge of Identity
2. The Challenge of Political Economic Restructuring
3. The Challenge of Reform
4. The Challenge of Terrorism.

To be sure, these different challenges operate in similar contexts: that of occupation and external intervention.

Experts agreed that the societies of Western Asia are home to multiple and often overlapping identities. Albeit a source of cultural diversity, these identities strain state resources. They divide the local population along parochial sectarian, tribal, or ethnic loyalties, thus inhibiting the emergence of a national consensus on a host of domestic issues. Consequently, debates over the distribution of political offices and natural resources become arenas for conflict and civil strife. To advance their own geopolitical objectives, regional actors manipulate sub-national identities. Conversely, pan-national identities, especially Islamist, are conduits through which transnational networks insinuate themselves into local arenas, with devastating consequences.

The states and societies of Western Asia thus need to re-negotiate their multiple identities toward more inclusive and intercultural variations. Exclusivist identities degenerate into ethnic chauvinism, and create fertile conditions for domestic discord. They are unviable in an increasingly globalized world. Alternatively, ethnic federalism is perceived as an externally imposed recipe to vivisect the region into fragile sectarian states. Experts recommended that a new understanding of civic citizenship (muwatana) should be articulated to help manage the tapestry of religious and ethnic pluralism in Western Asia; it would also pave the way for more participation and good governance in Western Asia. This, however, requires restructuring the political economy of the region’s states.

Experts noted that rentier economies sustain unrepresentative regimes, generate lopsided economies, and prevent the proper exploitation of local productive capacities. Distributive policies financed by oil revenues allow regimes to restructure socio-political coalitions to neutralize domestic challenges as well as calls for greater political participation. Rent economies also impede equitable socio-economic development. They institutionalize a culture of corruption based on neo-patrimonial strategies, encourage a brain drain toward oil-rich states, and concentrate wealth in small pockets of the population. One expert noted that prospects for democratic transitions in Western Asia entail restructuring rentier economies, a prospect that is unlikely in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, states have responded to the challenge of political economic restructuring by engaging in selective political and economic liberalization. The former, however, has been reversed to contain the growing power of Islamist movements, while civil society organizations remained superficial at best.

Experts also identified a broad basket of needed reforms with respect to the states and societies of Western Asia. One expert noted that reforms are of different types: legal, ideational, cultural, social, and political. He noted that legal reforms require opening up Islamic religious texts to modern interpretations that account for novel problems experienced in contemporary Muslim societies. Ideational reform involves changing mentalities in the Arab world in the direction of promoting an indigenous type of secularism that liberates discourse and politics away from religious dogma. Cultural reform problematizes what one expert diagnosed as a nascent clash between an emerging transnational religious culture and a culture of entertainment that instills apathy in local populations. Social reforms target educational systems to promote critical, rather than rote based, learning methods. Finally, political reform aims at broadening the parameters of political contestation and representation to empower civil society and private sector actors.
One expert raised the following question: Who implements these reforms? And what purposes do they serve? Indeed, considerable debate focused on the external/internal dimensions of the reform agenda. Some experts criticized the role of external actors in implementing reforms to serve external agendas. This is especially the case given the intrusive role external actors play in the regional system, either through direct military invasion or indirect political and economic leverage. Other experts drew attention to local actors, especially powerful Islamist organizations, and their agendas. Be that as it may, there is a dialectical relation between external and internal calls of reform: even if the former is meant to serve the security interests of foreign states, local agents have used these calls to advance their own agendas. This has come with a price, however: the identification of democracy with Western imperialism. One expert argued that now that democracy promotion is no longer a US objective, local actors could become more proactive in demanding greater participation and representation.

The final challenge identified by the experts in the meeting is that of “terrorism”, where it was pointed out that no clear definition has been proposed or globally adopted. One expert noted that albeit after 9/11 the so-called ‘war on terrorism’ was considered a tool to promote reforms in Western Asia, it was ultimately replaced by a narrower security objective: building the coercive institutions of local states to deploy them in the regional US-led ‘war on terrorism’. This shift played into the hands of states facing challenges from domestic groups or transnational terrorist networks. They invoked domestic security threats to clamp down against opposition groups, suppress civil society, and eliminate the political arena as a site for contestation. External pressure and support also emboldened states to neutralize threats from transnational terrorist networks.

Be that as it may, “terrorism” is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Experts identified at least three different types of terrorism in the states of Western Asia: terrorism rooted in domestic socio-economic and political crises; terrorism generated by occupation; and terrorism fuelled by resentment against Western, namely American, policies in the region. Consequently, the experts agreed that terrorism is not only a domestic phenomenon. External variables, especially military invasion, give rise to many of the “labelled terrorist groups” and facilitate recruitment of new cadres. Nor are these different permutations mutually exclusive. They overlap in dangerous combinations, expressing the despair and frustrations of local populations. It is thus important to demystify the objective causes of terrorism in the region and beyond. One expert noted that the claim that terrorism is a reaction to a clash of civilizations or the lack of a dialogue between religions conflates causes with consequences. Anchoring terrorism in socio-economic and political variables is a prerequisite to containing its repercussions and eliminating its causes.

B. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT UNDER CRISIS: FRAMEWORK AND MECHANISMS

What are the constraints on, and possibilities of, development efforts under crisis conditions? What are the advantages of regional approaches and cooperation for development under crisis? How does the instability in the region hinder development efforts? And, finally, what strategies can improve funding development projects and efforts under crisis conditions? These are the four thematic clusters considered in this panel.

Experts noted that development efforts under crisis conditions suffer from a number of pitfalls. The region’s instability strains development efforts and generates erratic crisis responses from both national governments and international donor agencies. This frustrates development programmes and plans and wastes much needed resources. Security considerations and government restrictions also hinder development planning and implementation.
One expert argued that development under crisis should be conceived as a dynamic process. Agencies engaged in development work in war zones should produce short-term projects tied to a broader, long-term package. This flexible approach allows them to respond effectively to emergency situations. Otherwise, crisis is bound to disrupt the development effort. In these contexts, humanitarian assistance should also be linked to long-term development objectives, and international development projects would become more effective when they seek to empower local actors. For international agencies, development programs will be most successful when they balance security, their organizational mandates, community needs and relevance in time and space. Relevance is of particular importance as it ensures that whatever the development program, it can support a larger push towards peace and possibly have a multiplier effect beyond the immediate limits of the program.

Experts noted that in post-conflict situations, development efforts should concentrate on:

1) Consolidating the postwar peace settlement: this can be achieved by investing, in early stages, in highly visible and easily implemented projects that demonstrate the peace dividends of the postwar era.

2) Involving civil society actors in a wide consultative process affecting the decision-making process: local participation in postwar reconstruction planning legitimizes the process and establishes the institutional foundations for civic engagement. Consequently, the postwar development process can help promote a culture of participation and responsibility. In the long run, this can help establish transparent, representative, and accountable institutions.

3) Avoiding untested and parochial NGOs: not all local organizations possess the same track records or institutional capacities. Donors should be highly selective when funding NGOs. Those serving parochial agendas should be avoided. Islamist NGOs, on the other hand, may pose a special challenge to the international community. Many have proven their effectiveness in local contexts and are considered legitimate in the eyes of local populations. However external actors may be suspicious of their religious platforms and ultimate objectives. Funding some of them may facilitate the promotion of exclusivist ideologies; excluding the more effective ones from donor resources may radicalize them and elicit popular sympathy. Dealing with Islamist-affiliated NGOs is one of the most delicate challenges facing donor activity under crisis conditions.

4) Neutralizing spoilers: domestic actors may spoil the war-to-peace transition if it threatens their economic and political interests. Power sharing arrangements and post-war socio-economic planning can help neutralize spoilers if they succeed in providing them with political and economic incentives to support the war-to-peace transition.

One expert emphasized the role of regional economic integration as an alternative strategy to ensure sustainable development under crisis. This perspective assumes that regional economic integration helps mitigate crisis because it replaces the calculus of conflict with that of bargaining and negotiation. On a psychological level, it creates a culture of optimism and the promise of a better future. Economic integration also creates crosscutting interests between regional states, inviting cooperation in mutually beneficial sectors. Moreover, diversification through integration creates new economic opportunities for young, fast-growing populations. Horizontal linkages between regional economies also increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis international markets.

This perspective is not without problems, however. Some experts voiced concern over the viability of integration across Arab states in the current context of a deeply fragmented regional system. They argued that for political and security reasons, Arab states prefer bilateral agreements with extra-regional states to similar agreements among themselves.
The chronic instability of the Arab states system is another facet of the challenges of development under crisis in Western Asia. One expert drew attention to the instrumental uses of crisis and conflict in the Arab states system. Whether over tangible (borders and natural resources) or intangible (political prestige and influence) resources, protracted conflicts are common in the Arab world. They are used to legitimate Arab regimes or divert attention from internal socio-economic challenges. The permeability of the Arab states’ system to transnational ideological appeals is also deployed for similar purposes. Interestingly, however, as one expert noted, neither oil nor water have been used as a weapon in intra-Arab conflicts, unlike migrant workers, whose employment opportunities in host countries are affected by political considerations.

Experts noted that protracted conflicts, even if not always violent, divert resources away from long-term development efforts. Expenditures over military and security establishments come with socio-economic costs. This trend of wasted resources will probably persist in the short run as states increase their spending on coercive institutions to fight transnational radical networks and suppress domestic dissent.

The final challenge identified by experts in this panel is related to the role of financial organizations in funding development under crisis. Once more, experts emphasized the need to think of this task as an on-going, dynamic process. A development portfolio should be created, one that outlines protocols for the implementation of development programs financed by regional institutions. Other suggestions by experts to improve the financing of development projects under crisis conditions include:

- Create a data bank that identifies development priorities and priority projects in the region.
- Identify viable mechanisms and make recommendations that can guide in the successful implementation of development programs.
- Specify the pertinent functions of local authorities as distinct from those of funding institutions to minimize overlap and inefficiency.
- Funding should target community-driven development and education sector development. Both have far-reaching short-term and long-term implications on societies living under protracted crisis conditions.
- Impact assessment reports should be streamlined to help monitor development projects and their efficacy.

C. MANAGING TRANSITIONS: BEST PRACTICES IN USING DEVELOPMENT AID FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

What strategies work best in managing conflicts and war-to-peace transitions? What are the most viable approaches to development cooperation under crisis conditions? And what is the role of third parties in developing local capacities and trust after conflict?

Experts noted that in the current international system development efforts in fragile states are increasingly the norm rather than the exception. Fragile states score low on a number of indicators used to measure state strength and institutional capacity. These indicators include government legitimacy, social fragmentation, territorial authority, provision of services, and international recognition. However fragile states are not homogenous. Experts identified at least three sub-types – consolidating states, weak states, and failing/failed states – ranked in terms of descending capabilities. However, as one expert argued, the insecurity of failed states should not be cause for the suspension of development efforts. On the contrary, all experts concurred that
development agencies should produce imaginative tools, ones that help development under crisis while recognizing the sensitivity of local contexts.

Third parties undertaking development work in war-to-peace transitions should emphasize ownership and self-responsibility among local actors. This will benefit both local partners and external actors. The former develop their self-governance capabilities and learn to submit their institutions to greater transparency and accountability. The introduction of an indigenous perspective to development work allows third parties to adjust the implementation process as required by local circumstances. This injects a necessary measure of flexibility to development work in fragile states. Experts noted that these are major lessons learnt from past development work in war-torn situations.

To do so, however, as one expert noted, third parties should not shy away from coordinating local capacities in the absence of a viable state structure, nor from mediating between warring parties. To be sure, this exposes them to the charge that they are replacing local authorities instead of building and empowering local institutions. In fragile states, however, local authorities lack the requisite institutional capabilities. Experts argued that at least part of the aid should be directed strategically to state-building efforts; it must also train a new generation of local personnel. This aims at building resilient institutions that can withstand economic and political pressures, and persist once development agencies have departed. This is a complex process, prone to predatory practices. One expert underscored the need for a transparent process, and a protracted ‘on the ground’ commitment of third parties. Addressing the security concerns of international and local staff is also necessary for the success of this protracted process.

All experts emphasized one fundamental feature of post-war development efforts: namely, that all aid is political. Instead of ignoring this basic tenet, experts invited development agencies to focus on promoting civic activism among one-time warring ethnic groups. One expert, describing lessons learnt from the Kosovo experience, suggested that third parties could do this by engaging in community infrastructure repair. This entails a process-oriented approach rather than the often-used product-oriented approach. Local communities should be included in the post-war development process early on, and encouraged to create crosscutting non-partisan participatory institutions. This is both a sensitive and difficult process. It risks creating a clash between development agencies and spoilers bent on monopolizing the post-war reconstruction process. Nevertheless, development agencies can help place the foundations for transparent, participatory institutions by encouraging communities to create local councils that can play the role of arenas of inter-ethnic trust-building and conflict resolution.

The Kosovo experience is instructive in this respect. One expert explained how local councils were created as counterpoints to self-appointed, ethnically parochial, government posts (mayors, for example). Their chief function was to promote a new sense of community beyond ethnic boundaries. An attempt was made to create a new community of interests (such as the disabled) to soften post-war ethnic animosities. By taking the lead in fixing development priorities, organizing local elections, and drafting protocols, council members practiced self-governance. This represented an alternative, and perhaps more fruitful, route to democracy promotion: through participation rather than coercive diplomacy. Experts noted that this experiment could be exported to other post-war societies in an effort to build local institutions and capacities.

The same expert also noted that the participation of two sectors was especially important for the limited success of the local councils’ experience. Media involvement is crucial because it can amplify the message of community participation and action beyond local contexts. Moreover, the private sector, whose interests often clash with those of development planners, may be lured into
participation through the media. The expert noted that once the media became involved, the private sector jumped on the bandwagon.

To be sure, however, local councils did not replace ethnic institutions and loyalties. Nor did they serve as a viable bridge between different ethnic communities. Moreover, the patriarchal structure of society impeded the election of women candidates to the councils. Nevertheless, the expert argued that local councils played an instrumental role in planting post-war norms of civic activism and trust, ones that were later picked up by more focused democratic programs. Local councils also served as forums for grievances. Consequently, those communities that established local councils experienced less post-war violence than those that did not. Comparative experiences will help refine these techniques in post-war societies.

D. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AMIDST ON-GOING CONFLICT, NATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES: IRAQ

What are the main challenges constraining development planning in post-war Iraq? What choices exist for post-conflict development planning? What can UN agencies, external-funding agencies, and civil society associations do to ensure sustainable development in post-Saddam Iraq? How can security concerns be addressed to ensure post-war development under crisis conditions?

Sustainable development in post-Saddam Iraq suffers from a number of structural constraints. Well before the fall of the regime in April 2003, the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, the invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990, and the concomitant embargo had drained Iraq’s human and economic resources, militarizing the economy, and destroying its professional middle class.

One expert suggested that the immediate post-Saddam phase witnessed a clash between two visions of how best to transform Iraq from an authoritarian state with a closed, centralized economy to a democratic state with a market-based economy in which the private sector plays a leading role. One school of thought, labelled the ‘ideological’ school by one expert, called for the implementation of ready-made reform and development packages imported from the East European post-Communist experience. Another school, labelled the ‘pragmatic’ vision, argued for a more contextualized approach, one based on incremental development reforms choreographed in a manner to contain the centrifugal forces permeating post-Saddam Iraq.

The same expert explained that advocates of the ideological approach assumed that post-Saddam Iraq was void of domestic conflicts, and hence was ready for comprehensive post-conflict development. The consequent dismantling of the army and security agencies created a security and political vacuum that doomed development planning to failure. In contrast, some experts assumed that incremental, selective, reforms would have been much more appropriate for the post-Saddam era. These would have prioritized security, national unity, and building the state’s coercive and institutional capacities, prerequisites for the successful implementation of development plans. This approach lacked overall vision of a long-term national objective.

Consequently, post-Saddam Iraq faces a number of challenges that impede local, national and international efforts to achieve sustainable development:

- Security is sparse, and the state – as the entity claiming monopoly over the legitimate use of force – is absent in many parts of the country.
- State institutions are weak or non-existent in some areas. The state lacks both administrative capacity and trained personnel. There is little or no coordination between the centre and the peripheral parts of the country.
State revenues are concentrated in the oil sector. This consolidates the rentier structure of the economy, impeding economic liberalization and diversification.

The private sector is marginalized. It has to be involved in development planning, and new laws have to be promulgated to encourage both domestic and foreign private investments.

Corruption and administrative waste permeates public institutions. More ominously, corruption has also spread to internationally financed contracts.

Many NGOs in post-Saddam Iraq mirror sectarian and ethnic identities. These do not contribute to civil peace; rather, they harden sectarian and ethnic identities under the guise of associational activity. They undermine state building and capacity building efforts. Islamist groups engaged in civil society activity pose a similar problem. Participants debated whether or not international donors and the Iraqi government should treat these groups differently from other civil society organizations.

A substantial amount of external funds is spent on non-construction sectors, especially the multiple security agencies protecting expatriates.

International funding agencies operate from outside Iraq. This invites corruption and financial leakage. Moreover, undertaking development work under occupation tends to de-legitimize the process.

The hegemonic control exercised by the occupation’s administrative machinery on the post-Saddam state building process, and its future implications, especially vis-à-vis the institutionalisation of sectarianism.

The long-term impact of the occupation authority’s almost total economic and political dominance, especially on the state’s extractive and penetrative capabilities.

In a nutshell: experts concurred that sustainable development is difficult if not impossible without security and stability. Priority must thus be given to achieving civil peace, security, and the rule of law. What can be done to ameliorate these challenges? The experts gathered in this panel suggested a number of practical solutions:

- External agencies can train Iraqi personnel to improve the administrative capabilities of state institutions.
- Coercive tactics and high military expenditures do not resolve the insecurity dilemma of Iraq. Instead a political solution is required, one that ensures that no sectarian group is excluded from the post-Saddam era. The negotiation of a new, inclusive, Iraqi identity must be a major part of this effort.
- Civil society participation in development planning and decision-making and program implementation should be broadened. Albeit civil society organizations can bridge sectarian divisions, they should not assume the role of state institutions. Capacity building at both levels should proceed in synergy, otherwise civil society organizations could weaken central authority.
- A UNDP representative highlighted the challenges of working from remote locations, in this case Amman, Jordan. This hampers development efforts and makes transparency and accountability especially difficult. They suggested some situational best practices, such as contacting former UN employees, local program participants, international NGOs, local authorities, and local media to ensure efficient project implementation.
- Given the security situation in post-Saddam Iraq, international agencies should consider alternatives to bidding procedures and procurement policies.
- Participants noted that businesses require not only capacity building but also capital, which is a challenge in a country with no operational banks. They emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment for public-private partnerships.
E. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AMIDST ON-GOING CONFLICT, NATIONALEXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES: THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

What is the impact of occupation on sustainable development efforts? How do the policies of funding agencies shape the prospects for sustainable development under occupation? What coping strategies exist to promote development under occupation? What does the Palestinian experience tell us about the challenges of development under crisis conditions?

The occupied Palestinian territory presents a peculiar test case for prospects of development under occupation. Israel’s occupation has been a protracted and proactive one, devastating the social, economic, institutional, and physical landscape of the Palestinian territories. Palestinian society has not stood idle, however. It has responded to Israel’s policies through an array of resistance strategies that were developed by experience on an ad-hoc basis without serious attention or intended planning. One expert distinguished between three phases of development resistance in the occupied Palestinian territories. Before the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, Israel sought to destroy Palestinian identity and society. The Palestinians responded by reaffirming their identity, and by undertaking economic and grassroots resistance, especially during the first intifada. Since the Oslo Peace Accord in 1993 and until the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, much infrastructural development took place under the auspices of the international community. State institutions were established from naught. Here was serious effort to slowly reconstitute the Palestinian economy away from the Israeli economic dominance, and private sector investment was promoted. This short hiatus came to a crushing end in late 2000, before achieving the hoped for goals, with the upsurge of the second intifada, when Israel returned to its pre-1993 strategy of destroying Palestinian society, its economy, and physical contiguity. The building of the ‘separation wall’ best illustrates the Israeli aggressive and determined strategy of vivisecting the West Bank into unmanageable Bantustans. One expert and former official concluded that Israel’s current implicit policy might be to ‘transfer’ as many Palestinians as possible away from the West Bank. The ultimate objective, he concluded, is to limit Palestinian control to only 40% of the West Bank. This, the expert argued, should be the undeniable context of development in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Experts concluded that development under occupation suffers from at least two types of constraints; one is objective, rooted in the structural consequences of occupation, the other procedural, reflecting the shortcomings of policies adopted by national and international development agencies.

The main structural constraint to development planning in the OPT is Israel’s policy of “asymmetric containment,” as labelled by one expert. Israel’s policies and practices converge to perpetuate the dependency of the OPT on Israel. Integration between the two economies is confined to low value-added and non-strategic activities, namely in the construction, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors. The social and economic consequences of Israel’s settlement policies and the separation barrier also impede development policies in fundamental ways. This asymmetric containment has rendered the Palestinian economy dependent on capital inflows, which consequently leads to income volatility and limits the diversity of the export economy.

Occupation has affected development in the occupied Palestinian territory in other ways as well. It has robbed Palestinians of autonomous decision-making, a necessary prerequisite for viable development planning. A bloated and inefficient public sector, based on neo-patrimonial strategies, emerged at least partially as a consequence of state building in adverse conditions.
Very high poverty and unemployment rates drain the resources of inefficient political institutions undermining the ability of central authorities to implement development projects. Closures and re-occupation stretch fragile institutions to their limit, threatening a total institutional collapse. Finally, some experts suggested that the occupation is intimately involved in the economy of corruption that has emerged inside the Palestinian Authority. This advertent de-development of the Palestinian economy complicates development planning and implementation.

Development agencies have also contributed to the failure of a long-term plan for the OPT. One expert noted that donors, at least during conflict conditions, prefer funding short-term projects of an emergency humanitarian nature. This has come at the expense of long-term development objectives. Bracketing occupation policies, economic prosperity and political stability can only be achieved via sustainable medium-term and long-term development programs. All types of aid, one expert insisted, including relief operations, should be linked to a long-term development plan whose objective is the release of the Palestinian economy from externally imposed constraints. It should also help Palestinians survive occupation policies and practices. Another expert criticized donors for neglecting the realities of the war-torn nature of the Palestinian economy when devising reform packages. Economic reform cannot proceed in a political vacuum; it has to be tailored to fit state building needs under crisis conditions, in this case occupation.

On a more positive note, all experts emphasized the instrumental role played by Palestinian civil society organizations, despite their limited resources, in shouldering the burdens of development in the occupied territories and enabling Palestinians to survive the agonies of occupation. Some 1,200 NGOs operate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian NGOs took the lead in building human capital and grass-roots capacity in an array of domains. They have also created dense horizontal networks in the West Bank and Gaza, and have branched out to link up with other Arab NGOs. One expert underscored the role ESCWA can play in facilitating this latter process. Another underscored the need to include Palestinian NGOs at all levels of the development planning and implementation process.

Although NGO activities have helped Palestinian society survive occupation, one expert cautioned that this role did not contribute to strengthen the rather weak trade unions, professional syndicates, and political parties. Nor are all NGOs internally democratic and capable of engaging in vertical public policy input. Moreover, NGOs cannot, and should not, replace the functions of Palestinian Authority (PA) ministries. This undermines institutional capacity building and hence efforts to formulate and implement long-term development objectives. Despite attempts in the past year, especially in the Ministry of Finance, to curb corruption and increase accountability, PA institutions remain weak, with very limited extractive and regulative capabilities.

Developments since the Hamas victory in the latest parliamentary elections are ominous. One expert noted with astonishment the resilience of PA institutions despite the lack of sufficient external funding. Nevertheless, limited resources risk unravelling neo-patrimonial patronage networks, threatening a total collapse of PA institutions. The same expert warned that once institutions begin to disintegrate and collapse, shoring them up becomes almost impossible. This will have profound consequences on short-term as well as long-term development efforts and planning.

Experts recommended devising new development plans based on the assumption of a total Israeli embargo on Palestinian workers movement into Israel, and on commodities, whether those imported by Israel from the Palestinian territories or those exported into the OPT. Such plans should focus on promoting small and medium-size industries, invigorate the role of the private sector, utilize new technologies, as suited to prevailing conditions, especially in the education and
health sectors, and regulate the movement of expatriate labour to the Gulf countries. Experts also called upon the international OPT. They also called upon the Security Council to implement UNSC Resolutions pertaining to Israel’s settlement activities.

F. DEVELOPMENT UNDER UNCERTAINTY: LEBANON

What are the prospects for building a modern state with a measure of autonomy from sectarian groups, and strong institutional capacities, in post-war Lebanon? What is the impact of post-war economic planning on long-term sustainable development? Is it possible to reform the sectarian system away from clientalism and toward genuine civic citizenship? How can an inclusive secular space be created despite the hegemony of the sectarian system?

The impact of post-war economic planning on sustainable development efforts was debated at length. Experts agreed that post-war economic planning in Lebanon lacked a broad, integrated, long-term developmental vision that included roles for both the public and private sectors. One expert noted that the post-war development model concentrated on Beirut and the coastal areas in Mount Lebanon, emphasizing tourism and the real estate sector, neglecting the industrial and agricultural sectors. This model lacked a holistic post-war rehabilitation strategy, leading to the atrophy of productive economic sectors.

Another expert noted that post-war economic planning failed to create the environment for sustainable development. Post-war fiscal and monetary policies focused on financing a growing internal and external debt, and the stabilization of the Lebanese Pound. This led to a lopsided redistribution of income. Banks reaped the greatest financial rewards from this process. Moreover, the post-war civil peace was predicated on the predatory practices of ex-warlords. State resources were placed at the disposal of sectarian leaders. This allowed them to lubricate their clientalistic networks and consolidate their political and social power in the post-war era. This came at the expense of an increasingly weak central government, unable to penetrate society to regulate social relations or extract revenues. Instead of establishing the proper conditions for sustainable development, post-war political practice undermined prospects for sustainable development and plunged the country into a spiralling debt crisis.

Experts agreed that the Lebanese political elite has yet to appreciate the urgency of the country’s dire economic and social straits, and that hard reform choices have to be made to obviate a possible total economic collapse. Short-term coping strategies – whether through attracting more capital inflow from the latest oil boom to finance new investments and another real estate boom, or debt refinancing – only postpone the day of reckoning. But how best to proceed with reforms? One expert suggested that Lebanon needs a ‘bundle of reform initiatives’ rather than radical reforms. The latter may jeopardize civil peace, and will be resisted by sectarian leaders.

Experts also deliberated the instrumental role of civil society organizations in post-war development. Here the balance sheet is mixed. On the positive side of the ledger, civil society organizations have played important roles in citizen advocacy campaigns. They have organized to monitor parliamentary and municipal elections, some have even tried to spotlight corruption cases, support disadvantaged social groups, draft new history and civic education textbooks, and launched campaigns to protect the environment. Moreover, civil society organizations played an important role in the repatriation of the displaced, and in setting up commissions to interrogate, to a certain extent the causes of the civil war.

Yet despite these important strides, civil society organizations suffer from a number of structural problems. Vertical integration into state institutions permitting participation in public policy
making remains minimal. National councils established for drafting social engineering projects, and gathering representatives from the NGO sector and the state, are often dominated by the latter. Nor is the centralized Lebanese state amenable to conceding space to civil society organizations, and tends to ignore the rather progressive law organizing civil society organizations. Most important, however, is the sectarianism embedded in Lebanese society and in most civil society organizations. This has proved to be the greatest impediment against the emergence of a truly national and multi-sectarian civil society in Lebanon, one that can mobilize Lebanese behind national, rather than sect-specific, objectives. One expert argued that sectarian sentiments have proven very resilient, undermining any effort toward the emergence of a trans-sectarian national movement. To be sure, at times of crisis Lebanese tend to be proactive and mobilize actively at the societal level and across sectarian lines. But gradually this mobilization gives way to sectarian priorities, and loyalty to sectarian leaders takes precedence over national objectives. So far, civil society organizations have been unable or “unwilling” to challenge this sectarian paradox.

Experts debated how best to exit the straightjacket of sectarianism. One expert noted that the experiences of other pluralistic societies suggest two routes: either the emergence of a neutral space that gathers the different sects around non-sectarian loyalties; or, the emergence, inside each sect, of a civil group that demands the establishment of a new, non-sectarian, political system. This, of course, is not without difficulties. Inter-sectarian collective action remains limited and often non-political. Nor is there a coherent, viable road map toward the realization of de-confessionalization.

The post-war state in Lebanon is, as one expert noted, a paralyzed state: it is besieged by perpetual political crises, divided among sectarian leaders into neopatrimonial fiefdoms, possesses very low institutional capabilities, and is penetrated by multiple external actors. Corruption permeates its already-weak institutions. To become viable, the post-war state requires a host of reforms. It has to gain greater autonomy from domestic social forces as well as external actors. It also requires a comprehensive social and economic development plan, one that addresses the needs of vulnerable social groups and rectifies the lopsided nature of the Lebanese economy. Proceeding with past policies risks further economic and social distortions.

Experts agreed that the sectarian system, the root cause of weak institutional capacities and the main impediment against the implementation of a viable, rational long-term development strategy, should be overhauled. They suggested that a secular space has to be opened despite sectarian loyalties and the concomitant confessional system. This, in turn, requires a new electoral law, one that redesigns electoral districts to promote inter-sectarian cooperation and vote pooling. Experts also noted that a new electoral law should also reform the residency requirements for voters. Voters should be able to vote in their places of domicile. The current arrangement, which forces voters to vote in their ancestral villages, plays to the advantage of sectarian leaders and their neopatrimonial networks. These electoral reforms may pave the way for the emergence of national rather than sectarian politicians. Finally, experts noted that a new personal status law is a prerequisite for the emergence of a novel sense of civic citizenship, one that transcends narrow sectarian affiliations. A modern personal status law could help undermine the hegemony of the sectarian system.

III. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the meeting were to:
• Ascertain the impact of conflict and instability on socio-economic and political development in the region.
• Identify particular challenges to pursuing long term development in the conflict afflicted countries of Western Asia.
• Assess best practices for development under crisis conditions applicable to Western Asia, particularly in Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territory.
• Discuss means by which development can be used as a tool for conflict prevention/mitigation in Western Asia.

IV. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. ATTENDANCE

Held at the UN House, Beirut, the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Development Under Crisis Conditions was attended by experts from the OPT, Iraq, and Lebanon, experts with comparative experience in development under crisis conditions, and by members of regional and international organizations, by civil society actors, and by the local media (see Annex I for full list of participants). The meeting opened with a speech by Mr. Samir Farah, representative of Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Lebanon (co-sponsor of the meeting). Mr. Farah underscored the need for a Middle East perspective on the debate concerning the mandate, membership and functions of the proposed UN Peacebuilding Commission, and the possibility of achieving sustainable development under crisis conditions more broadly. He noted that this EGM meeting is a first step in a process that will ultimately contribute to a broad and inclusive debate on the international effort at achieving sustainable development under crisis conditions.

Then, Mr. Atif Kubursi, Deputy Executive Secretary, delivered on behalf of UN-ESCWA Executive Secretary Mervat Tallawy, a speech underscoring the need to push forth a new philosophy of development aid. Kubursi cautioned that “if we allow emerging needs to trump the long-term vision and commitment to develop and advance, we will be condemned to a life of underdevelopment and servility.” He stressed that even the most pressing short-term need can be linked to a development aim or target where, for example, the distribution of food could be made by purchasing local products and international charity can be transformed into an investment program.

B. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The EGM was organized along six panels of experts (see Annex II: Organization of work) that deliberated on the following six themes:

1. The impact of crisis: trends and emerging challenges in Western Asia
2. Sustainable development under crisis: framework and mechanisms
4. Sustainable development amidst on-going conflict, national experiences and best practices: Iraq
5. Sustainable development amidst on-going conflict, national experiences and best practices: occupied Palestinian territory
6. Development under uncertainty: Lebanon

The last session of the meeting consisted of the discussion by a panel of experts and ESCWA of the main conclusions and recommendations.
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ANNEX II: ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Day 1
9:30 – 11:30 Opening remarks
Mr. Samir Farah, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Representative, Lebanon
Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary, ESCWA

Panel I: The Impact of Crisis: Trends and Emerging Challenges in Western Asia
Chair: Mr. Atif Kubursi (ESCWA, Deputy Executive Secretary)

Mr. George Corm, Former Lebanese Minister of Finance
Presentation: Impact of Crisis and Emerging Challenges in the Region

Mr. Asaad Abukhalil, Professor, Department of Politics, California State University
Intervention: Future Sources of Conflict and Instability, Political Trends

Mr. Mustapha Hamarneh, Director, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan
Intervention: The Impact of Conflicting Interests of Political Actors on the Arab Region

Mr. Walid Khadouri, Chief Economic Editor, Al-Hayat Newspaper
Intervention: Oil: Source of Conflict/Crisis and Means for Post-Conflict Development?

Discussion

11:30 – 12:00 Break

12:00 – 13:30 Panel II: Sustainable Development under Crisis: Framework and Mechanisms
Chair: Mr. Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil (Professor of Economics, University of Cairo)

Mr. Oren Murphy, ECRI/ESCWA
Presentation: The Role of Development Aid in Mitigating or Exacerbating Conflict: Framework and Mechanisms

Mr. Atif Kubursi (ESCWA – Deputy Executive Secretary)
Intervention: Economic Integration as a Mechanism to deter conflict and crisis

Mr. Jamil Mattar, Independent Consultant
Intervention: The Ability of Arab States to Mitigate Conflict and Assist Crisis Afflicted Countries: Past, Present and Potential Mechanisms

Mr. Osman Mahgoub El-Fiel, Acting Chief, Country Operations, Islamic Development Bank
Intervention: Funding Development Amidst Crisis

Discussion

13:30 – 14:30 Break

Chair: Mr. David Shearer (Head, OCHA)

Mr. Roman Poeschke, Priority Area Manager, Crisis Prevention, Urban Development, State Reform and Democracy, GTZ
Mr. Prey Joachim, GTZ Country Director, Palestine
Joint Presentation: Utilizing Development Aid for Conflict Prevention: Successes and Failures in the Arab Region

Mr. Ray Jennings, Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars
Intervention: Strategic Use of Aid to Pursue Peace: Successes and Failures (Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo)

Discussion


Chair: Mr. Hasan Al-Charif (ESCWA - Regional Advisor)

Ms. Alia Al-Dalli, Team Leader, Poverty and Human Development, UNDP-Iraq
Presentation: Development Aid and Conflict Prevention: Iraq, A Case Study

Mr. Ali Sada, Development Alternatives Incorporated
Intervention: The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Development Planning/Implementation

Mr. Kamal Field Al-Basri, Chairman of Iraq Institute for Economic Reform
Intervention: The Role of the Public Sector in Sustaining Development Efforts during Crisis: Lessons Learned in Iraq

Ms. Basma Al-Kateeb, Representative, Iraqi Al-Amal Association
Intervention: Challenges and prospects of Iraq's civil society in meeting development needs

Discussion

Day 2

9:00 – 11:00  Panel V: Sustainable Development Amidst On-Going Conflict, National Experiences and Best Practices: Occupied Palestinian Territory

Chair: Mr. Taher Kanaan (Managing Director, Jordan Center for Public Policy Research and Dialogue)

Mr. Samir Abdalla, Director, Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)
Presentation: Development Amidst Conflict and Occupation: The Case of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud El-Khafif, First Economic Affairs Officer, UNCTAD
Presentation: Palestinian War Torn Economy: Aid, Development and State Formation
Mr. David Shearer, Head, OCHA
Ms. Francine Pickup, Head, Research and Analysis Unit, OCHA
Joint Intervention: The Humanitarian Situation and its Constraints to Economic Activity and Development: The Barrier and Internal Closures

Mr. Alam Jarrar, Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations (PNGO)
Intervention: Role of Palestinian Civil Society in Meeting Development Needs Amidst Occupation, Lessons Learned

Discussion

11:00 - 11:30 Break

11:30 - 13:30 Panel VI: Development Under Uncertainty: Lebanon

Chair: Mr. Dimianous Katar (former Lebanese Minister of Finance)

Mr. Kamal Hamdan, Director, Consultations and Research Institute, Lebanon
Presentation: Post War Recovery, progress to date and future Prospects

Mr. Dimianous Katar, former Lebanese Minister of Finance
Intervention: Public Sector Reform and Privatization, An Incentive for Development?

Mr. Salim Nasr, POGAR – UNDP
Intervention: The Politics of Development, Good Governance, Clientalism and Patronage Networks

Mr. Oussama Safa, Head, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
Intervention: The Social Costs of Instability and its Impact on Communal Tensions

Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Head, Arab NGO Network for Development
Intervention: The Role of Lebanese Civil Society in Development, the Post-War Experience

Discussion

13:30 – 14:30 Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:30 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion