



WHAT WORKS AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR SOCIAL STABILITY IN JORDAN?

Evidence from Mercy Corps' Host-Refugee Social Cohesion Program

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Executive Summary

The Syrian refugee influx into Jordan has heightened risks of conflict and insecurity in what has long been considered a bastion of stability in the region. Tensions between host and refugee populations over already-limited public services and employment opportunities have exacerbated existing grievances among Jordanians and increase the risk of civil unrest and political violence. In response, international donors and multilateral institutions have provided billions of dollars in aid and loans to Jordan since 2012 with the broad aim of strengthening social cohesion and stability. However, the evidence on which these investments are based is limited, with few rigorous studies on what works to achieve these outcomes in host-refugee contexts.

To contribute towards filling this evidence gap, Mercy Corps' research team partnered with International Security and Development Center (ISDC) to undertake an impact evaluation of one of Mercy Corps' long-standing UKaid-funded social cohesion programs in Jordan. The primary objectives of this program were to build trust, interaction, and cooperation between Jordanian hosts and Syrian refugee populations, and reduce competition and disputes over basic services such as water, health, and schools. To do so, the program implemented two main sets of activities: 1) a "software" component to strengthen local conflict management skills and increase positive interactions between host and refugee groups; and 2) a "hardware" component that used a Community Driven Development (CDD) approach to improve local infrastructure.

We rigorously tested the attributable impacts of the program on social cohesion and stability outcomes, including intergroup interactions, willingness to use violence, and cooperation over local services. We evaluate the relative effectiveness of software provided in isolation, versus in combination with hardware.

Key Findings: What Works?

The program as a whole had a strong, positive, impact on overall social cohesion between hosts and refugees. These impacts were evident even shortly after the interventions took place, and were primarily driven by improvements in the Syrians' and Jordanians' attitudes and behaviors, such as greater acceptance and interactions, toward one another. However, when we examined each of the indicators that comprised our overall social cohesion measure on their own, we did not find evidence of program impacts on them. This suggests that the intervention did not significantly affect any single measure of social cohesion; however, in looking at the measures as a whole, there is a positive, significant impact.

Hardware interventions appear to reinforce the impacts of the software components on social cohesion. Our findings show the most pronounced effects of the program when software and hardware projects are implemented together. While software interventions were effective on their own, our results indicate the positive role that infrastructure projects play in improving social cohesion above and beyond that of software activities. We also see greater impacts when communities were involved in the program for a longer period of time, allowing greater benefits to accrue. Since the hardware component and the longer exposure to the program are intertwined in our evaluation, we are not able to determine which of these two factors affected our results to a greater extent. However, based on our analyses, and other literature, it appears that the hardware has a more significant effect than does time.

What's Next?

The likely persistence of tumultuous regional and domestic politics makes it all the more important to address the evolving, often interconnected drivers of social instability in Jordan and across the broader Middle East with evidence-based interventions. While the majority of Syrian refugees displaced in the region hope to return some day, the factors preventing them from doing so -- primarily security and economic concerns -- will likely persist in their home country for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the service provision and legitimacy issues Jordan faces extend beyond the Syrian refugee crisis. These longstanding drivers of instability in Jordan, including governance-related grievances and the impacts of climate change on water and other natural resources, will continue to shape social cohesion and citizen-state relations in Jordan.

Recommendations

Evidence from this study suggests that the model of combining software activities focused on conflict mediation and intergroup relationships with CDD-inspired hardware interventions can be an effective way to promote social cohesion and stability among refugees and host populations in areas of Jordan with scarce public resources. Based on the results from this study, and our projections of the social stability challenges Jordan will continue to face in the coming years, we offer a set of recommendations for policy makers, government officials, and aid actors working to address these issues:

Scale up investments in social cohesion programming that combines short-term benefits with longer term change: The findings from our study support other evidence showing that social stability programs are most impactful when they provide benefits that are visible immediately, such as the dispute resolution and community activities, while simultaneously addressing more systemic issues that drive conflict, such as a poor infrastructure.¹ Investment in conflict management and social cohesion in Jordan should build on and replicate the “software + hardware” approach taken by Mercy Corps, which produces both short and longer-term benefits.

Prioritize strengthening citizen-state relations based on the evidence of what works to improve governance and government legitimacy: Current research on Jordan has found significant evidence of deficits in trust between citizens and state. Social cohesion issues between refugees and Jordanians can further compound grievances with the government, breeding instability. Community strengthening programming should expand efforts to address long standing governance challenges that exacerbate the effects of refugees’ arrival in Jordan. These investments should reflect the growing evidence base showing that changing perceptions of government legitimacy requires going beyond improving access to basic services. Rather, programs must address issues of inequity, transparency, and citizens’ voice on service delivery and other government decisions.

Further invest in expanding the evidence base on approaches to build social cohesion and stability in Jordan and similar contexts: Research remains limited on effective models of improving social cohesion and the social contract between citizens and the state in host-refugee contexts such as Jordan. Important outstanding topics to examine include: how the benefits of CDD-type programs can be expanded and felt beyond the small group of stakeholders that are intensely involved; the long-term effects of infrastructure and capacity strengthening approaches on conflict and stability outcomes; and effective approaches to improving citizen-state relations at both local and national levels.

¹ Alliance for Peacebuilding (April 2019), *Violence Reduction Subsector Review & Evidence Evaluation*.

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Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian conflict, Jordan has become a primary host country for those displaced by the violence. Of more than an estimated 1.3 million Syrians in Jordan (over 650,000 of whom are officially registered),¹ over 80% live within host communities rather than in designated camps.² Increasing neighborhood population density has strained the Jordanian government's already insufficient administrative and technical capacities to provide the services demanded by its public. Resulting competition for basic services has led to rising tensions over basic services, exacerbating existing grievances Jordanians hold against the government.

In response to these heightened risks of instability, international donors and multilateral institutions have provided billions of dollars in aid and loans to Jordan since 2012 with the broad aim of strengthening social cohesion between host and refugee communities. Programs funded by these resources take several main forms: employment programs to reduce the perceived scarcity of economic opportunities, infrastructure projects to improve and reduce competition over basic services, contact-based interventions to increase positive interactions between host and refugee populations, and capacity building of local conflict management capacities and systems.

The geopolitical impetus for these investments in social cohesion and violence prevention is clear: to stabilize a geopolitically important country, and equip it to provide sufficiently for the Syrian refugees within its borders. However, the evidence on which social cohesion project investments are based is limited, with few rigorous studies available on which of the main types of programs and policies are most effective in promoting social cohesion and stability in Jordan, or other countries experiencing major refugee influxes in the region. Further, many aid actors have insufficient awareness of the historical and evolving nature of social instability in Jordan. As a result, program and policy responses risk leaving unaddressed underlying challenges that pre-date the Syria refugee crisis, and which are likely to remain after it has passed.

To contribute to filling the critical gap in evidence on what works, Mercy Corps' research team, in partnership with the International Security and Development Center (ISDC), undertook an impact evaluation of one of Mercy Corps' longstanding social cohesion programs in Jordan, described below. As part of this study we, the research team, also analyzed existing data sources to better understand potential emerging drivers of conflict, including the changing dynamics of relationships between host and refugee communities, and between Jordanian citizens and the state.

The impact evaluation examined the UKaid-funded "Strengthening Social Capital and Reducing Tensions Between Jordanian Host Communities and Syrian Refugees" program, which Mercy Corps has been implementing since 2012 across 11 governates in Jordan. The program approach includes several of the core components of social cohesion programs described above. These are grouped into "software" activities to equip community leaders with conflict mediation skills and "hardware" interventions to build and improve basic services. Early research on this Mercy Corps program indicated that the model was helping preclude conflict by building the platforms and relationships needed for communities to address disputes non-violently.³ Mercy Corps designed the subsequent phase of the program to rigorously test the attributable impacts of the program on social cohesion and stability outcomes.

1 UNHCR (September 30, 2019), *Registered Syrians in Jordan*.

2 IRC (April 2018), *Still in Search of Work Creating Jobs for Syrian Refugees: An Update on the Jordan Compact*.

3 Mercy Corps (2015), *Seeking Stability: Evidence on Strategies for Reducing Risk of Conflict in Northern Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees*.

The research team took advantage of the staggered nature of program rollout to attempt to understand the added effects, if any, of the later hardware interventions following software ones on social stability outcomes, including trust, cohesion, and cooperation between hosts and refugees. There is a high demand for evidence on this question among donors given the significant resources required for hardware infrastructure investments.

The research contributes to improving understanding of the role that intergroup contact, mediation skills, and addressing the scarcity of local services play in reducing and managing conflicts between host and refugee communities. This brief summarizes the major findings from our impact evaluation, and provides recommendations to donors and practitioners for future programs and policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion and stability in Jordan, and in similar contexts in the region. We also offer forward-looking analysis of emerging social stability issues in Jordan, including the risk to citizen-state relations, and how policies and programs can best respond to the evolving drivers of future instability.

Context

To date, Jordanian public sentiment remains moderately generous toward refugees,⁴ with prejudice against Syrians only boiling over into violent conflict on rare occasions. However, large increases in neighborhood populations have created real and perceived tensions on several axes, placing pressure on Jordan's increasingly fragile citizen-state relationship. Diminishing social cohesion is most dangerous to already-vulnerable people, including women and refugees,⁵ as it further limits their access to social support networks that are often crucial for finding employment in Jordan.⁶

The narrative most often advanced in public debate, and sometimes also by international NGOs, is that that refugees bring with them into host countries a sea of economic and political troubles. In reality, existing instability and political dynamics of citizens' grievances with the state, as well as regional and international politics, in interaction, all determine the effect of refugees on host countries.⁷

Economic Hardship: Even before the Syrian crisis, Jordanians faced water and housing shortages and high overall rates of unemployment,⁸ paired with a youth bulge⁹ and one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world.¹⁰ Refugees then arrived in Jordan during the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis; in that period, the regional instability of the Arab Spring also dealt serious blows to Jordan's key trading partners, slowing direct investment into Jordan.¹¹ While the influx of Syrians has been an economic benefit in some ways - they contribute to Jordan's economy as well as drawing international aid funding - significant portions of Jordanians in communities hosting refugees still at least partially blame Syrians for their own diminishing job prospects. A 2017 International Labor Organization (ILO) survey found that 96% of Jordanian respondents believed that Syrians were taking Jordanian jobs, and 85% called to stop letting Syrians freely into Jordan.¹² The economic struggles for Syrians certainly persist as well. A limited number of one-year work permits are issued to the largely destitute Syrian population (but are not available for many high-skilled professions) as part of a 2016 agreement between

4 Ala' Alrababa'h et al. (2019). "Attitudes toward Migrants in a Highly-Impacted Economy: Evidence from the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan." Immigration Policy Lab, working paper.

5 World Vision (2015), *Social Cohesion Between Syrian Refugees and Urban Host Communities in Lebanon and Jordan*.

6 IRC (April 2018), *Still in Search of Work Creating Jobs for Syrian Refugees: An Update on the Jordan Compact*.

7 Francis, A. (2015), *Jordan's Refugee Crisis*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

8 Laub, K. & Malkawi, K. (March 2016), "Jordan Test Ground for Large Jobs Program for Syria Refugees," AP.

9 Milton-Edwards, B. (2018), *Marginalized Youth: Toward an Inclusive Jordan*. Brookings Doha Center.

10 UNICEF (February 2019), *Opportunities for Youth in Jordan*.

11 Francis, A. (2015), *Jordan's Refugee Crisis*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

12 Stave, S.E. & Solveig Hillesund, S. (2015), *Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market*, International Labor Organization and FAFO.

Jordan and European countries.¹³ However, these have not brought significant economic improvements for Syrians; Mercy Corps research found that in 2016, Syrians were the lowest paid workers in Jordan, even when compared to other non-Jordanians.¹⁴

Lack of Service Provision: The Jordanian government’s limited ability to provide satisfactory services, particularly after the influx of Syrian refugees, has compounded governance and legitimacy problems in the eyes of many Jordanians. Local authorities have insufficient administrative and technical capacities, and often lack the equipment and logistical means to meet increased demands on municipal services. As a consequence, public infrastructure including schools,¹⁵ health centers,¹⁶ roads, and water¹⁷/wastewater networks, are overwhelmed and deteriorating, resulting in a general decline in the quality of life among all households -- particularly in places where poverty was entrenched even before the crisis began. Most recently, protests over International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed austerity measures involving a tax law introduced in 2018 underscored Jordanians’ frustrations with rising prices of basic staples like electricity and fuel, with demonstrators broadly calling for the Jordanian Government to “Change the Approach.”

Ongoing Ethnic Divides: Governance and economic grievances are interwoven with ethnic politics in Jordan. Despite Jordan’s pluralistic culture, tensions still exist between the various waves of refugees the country has hosted from the West Bank, Iraq, and now Syria. Historically there has been a feeling among “East Bank,” native Jordanians that the government’s liberal economic policies advantage the Palestinian-dominated private sector. Concerns that Iraqi refugees — and the successive wave of Syrian refugees — make Jordan even “less Jordanian” fuel the flames of these grievances.¹⁸ Given the protracted nature of the region’s conflicts, these various groups are likely to remain an ongoing and potentially permanent part of the Jordanian economy and social landscape. UN surveys have revealed, for instance, that only between 4 and 14% of Syrian refugees in Jordan polled at various points in 2018 plan to return to their country within the coming year.¹⁹

It is clear that refugee-host community issues in Jordan will remain pressing in the coming decade, regardless of regional politics. The pressure this places on already resource-scarce communities, in Jordan or elsewhere, could contribute to destabilizing, potentially violent clashes, making programming that addresses these causes of instability all the more vital.

Program Overview

As a response to the growing concerns around inter-community conflict and socio-political instability, Mercy Corps has implemented the UKaid-funded “Strengthening Social Capital” program. The project is conflict-sensitive, recognizing that Jordanians in host communities, not just Syrians, are negatively affected by the crisis and need support, and that not supporting all members of host communities sparks resentment and inter-communal tensions. Mercy Corps has rolled out the program in “waves,” starting in December 2012, targeting six

13 Yet, the process for obtaining them is onerous, often cost-prohibitive, and many refugees hesitate to go through it for fear it will prevent them from receiving formal asylum in Jordan, and if cuts to international aid funding occur those employed will be excluded from benefits.

14 Mercy Corps and the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute (March 2019), *The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Jordanian Labour Market*.

15 A very high portion of the Syrian population in Jordan is school age, and many schools have been running “double shifts.”

16 Mercy Corps’ research revealed that health centers in host communities offer limited services, experience equipment shortages, routinely fail to accommodate the number of patients using them, and are only open in the morning. The health infrastructure faces not only increased numbers, but also new challenges of communicable diseases previously eradicated in Jordan, which are both dangerous and expensive for Jordan’s health system to treat.

17 Water shortages are a perennial problem, especially during the summer; two thirds of participants in Mercy Corps’ focus groups in target areas cited this issue.

18 Ryan, C. (June 2018), *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, Columbia University Press.

19 UNHCR (March 2019), *Fifth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees’ Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*.

neighborhoods each year, covering 11 governorates as of October 2019.

The program includes two main components aimed and enhancing social cohesion and stability:

1. **“Software” activities that promote social interaction and build local conflict management capacities:** This first part of the program equips local leaders, including women, youth, and government officials, with skills in interest-based negotiation (IBN) and mediation techniques to better deal with conflicts and disputes that arise. It provides funding for small community activities that are designed to foster contact between Syrians and Jordanians, such as sports and community events. These activities include requirements for inclusion of women and youth, recognizing that conflict resolution methods are more effective when these groups participate. Over 75,000 individuals have taken part in the various software activities implemented by the program since 2012.
2. **“Hardware” projects that provide new pieces of critical infrastructure or rehabilitation of existing facilities:** Mercy Corps works with community members to identify and implement medium-sized infrastructure projects that are based on stated community needs, and aligned with the local government’s development plans. The hardware improvements aim to reduce real and perceived physical constraints to services that drive tensions between communities, focusing on community facilities that foster social interaction through communal use and events. Projects include rehabilitation of water facilities, expansion of schools and health centers, upgrading community parks and football pitches, and building community centers. In addition to providing needed infrastructure improvements, these projects mobilize communities around transparent and inclusive consultation, planning, and implementation practices. A Committee of community leaders, including local government representatives, Syrians, and young people, consult with the community and prioritize projects accordingly (and document their consultation process as part of any submitted proposal for projects. Since 2012), the program has reached 36 communities with infrastructure support.

Theories of Change

Box 1: Example of a community infrastructure project



Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps

In the Jordanian town of Kharja, Neighbours Lena (a Syrian refugee) and Leila (a Jordanian woman) have built Kharja’s first women’s gym, with the support of Mercy Corps and their local conflict resolution group.

Lena (left) and Leila (right) in front of the new women’s gym.

Box 2: Example of a conflict management training

“I like volunteering and I like to be an influential person in my community. They call me ‘problem solver’ at my university because of my problem-solving skills that I developed through the training.”

— Raneem, a university student from Irbid, who completed Mercy Corps’ interest based negotiation skills training

PSA trainer Luma Halah and trainee Raneem during a PSA training session in Irbid.



A core part of Mercy Corps’ “Strengthening Social Capital” program is building the capacity of community members to identify, implement, and maintain community projects that address shared priorities. The underlying assumption is that this collaborative process among host and refugee community stakeholders will build trust and social connections across lines of division, thereby decreasing tensions and negative stereotypes. This reflects the logic of Community Driven Development (CDD) approaches, and is rooted in the belief that conflicts can be reduced through groups working towards a common goal and realizing the benefits of cooperation. While CDD has been theorized to have a number of direct and indirect positive effects on social cohesion and citizen-state relations,²⁰ evidence from rigorous program evaluations has shown limited impacts on these outcomes.²¹ Recognizing this, Mercy Corps intentionally included program components to address previous gaps and shortcomings of CDD and adapted them to host-refugee contexts in Jordan.

The project has focused on specific forms of community infrastructure and services that have been the primary drivers of tension between refugees and host communities, including water, education, and health facilities. Meeting these shared needs may reduce perceived scarcity, which can lead to competition and conflict. To ensure that the wider community would benefit from the infrastructure projects, priority has also been placed on communal facilities that promote social interaction between hosts and refugees, such as parks, playgrounds and community centers. The infrastructure projects are complemented by funds for community events that bring groups together, such as for football matches and block parties. The link between these activities and improved social cohesion is based on the contact hypothesis, according to which, under certain conditions, increasing positive interactions between minority and majority groups can reduce stereotypes and prejudice, and improve attitudes towards the other group.²²

The explicit inclusion of training on conflict mediation and management for local leaders represents another innovation to the traditional CDD approach. If effective, the local mediators will keep tensions and disputes from escalating into violence, such that relationships between host and refugees do not get worse. Over time, peaceful dispute resolution may lead to more positive social norms and behaviors in the wider community.²³

In addition to improving host-refugee relations, the program is designed to affect citizen-state relations in several

20 For more background on CDD, see: *Community-Driven Development*, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment>

21 International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (March 2019), *Community-driven development: does it build social cohesion or infrastructure? A mixed-method evidence synthesis*.

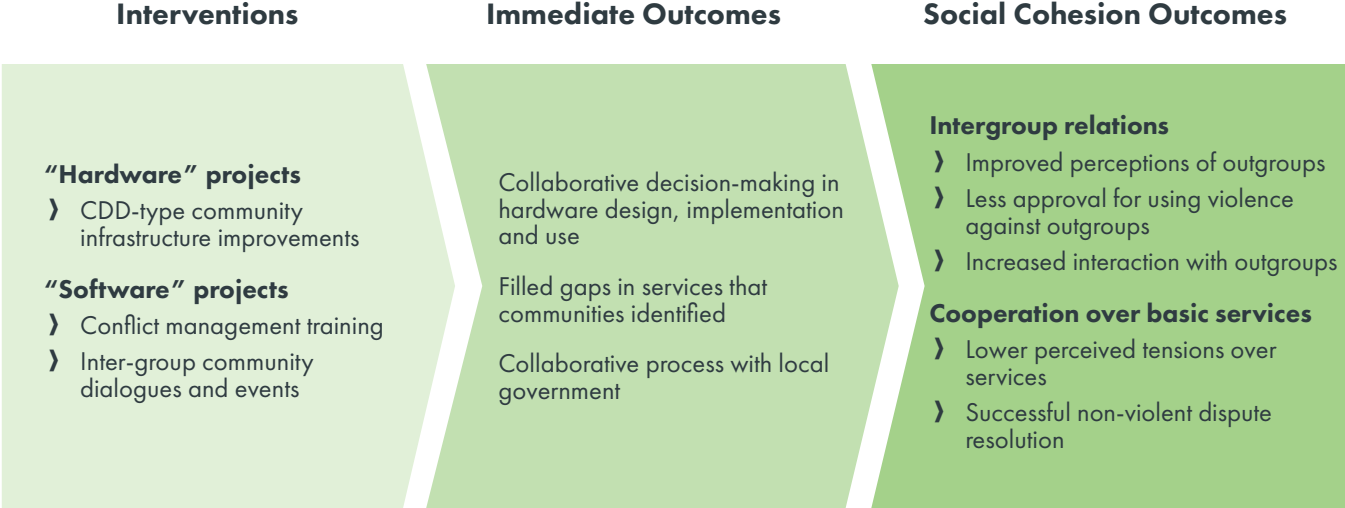
22 Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006), “A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory.” *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 90(5), 751.

23 Hartman, A., Robert B., and Blattman, C. (2018). “Engineering Informal Institutions: Experimental Impacts on Dispute Resolution, Violence, Property Rights, and Investment in Liberia.” Working paper, University College London, UK.

key ways. Citizens may credit the government for improvements to basic services from the infrastructure projects, thereby decreasing governance-related grievances.²⁴ Furthermore, existing research shows that perceptions of government are not closely linked to the quality or quantity of public services themselves. Rather, people’s views of government are more likely to improve when they have a say in how and where services are provided, and when government is transparent about these decisions.²⁵ Mercy Corps’ program attempts to achieve this by having local Jordanian government representatives actively take part in the community-led infrastructure and conflict management activities. In addition, steps are taken to ensure that the processes for prioritizing, planning and implementing these projects are transparent and inclusive. The premise is that through these engagements, the relationships between local government, community members and civil society may improve, and thereby form more productive avenues for people to express grievances and seek nonviolent solutions.²⁶

The logic of the program is that when the software and hardware are provided together, they will deliver impacts that are greater than the sum of their two parts would in isolation. Improved infrastructure should result in reduced tensions between individuals and communities, and greater inter-group contact as a result of both the hardware and software activities should lead to positive relationships between groups. Furthermore, when tensions do arise, the stronger dispute resolution skills should better equip people to resolve them non-violently. In isolation, the hardware may reduce instances of confrontation but does not provide a means to better resolve problems that do arise; the software may improve how disputes are resolved but not how frequently they arise in the first place.

Figure 1: Theory of Change



24 Winters, M., Dietrich, S., & Mahmud, M. (2017). Aiding the virtuous circle? International development assistance and citizen confidence in government in Bangladesh. *Research and Politics*, 4(4), 1–6.

25 Nixon, H. and Mallett, R. (2017) *Service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy: findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

26 DFID’s “Stability Framework” recognizes that trust between people and authorities is crucial for stability. Department for International Development (DFID) (2016), Building Stability Framework. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5968990ded915d0ba00019e/UK-Aid-Connect-Stability-Framework.pdf>

Research Objectives and Design

The impact evaluation was designed to determine the attributable impact of the program on intended social cohesion and stability outcomes by examining three research questions:

1. Has the “Strengthening Social Capital” program in Jordan delivered impacts on inter-community relationships between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host population?
2. Has the program delivered impacts on how individuals view tensions and dispute resolution over access to services in the places where they live?
3. Are these impacts attributable to the infrastructure-based ‘hardware’ projects, training-based ‘software’ activities, or both?

Sampling

In order to answer these questions, Mercy Corps’ research team partnered with the International Security and Development Center (ISDC) to design and conduct a rigorous impact evaluation of the program. The analysis is based on the primary data collected by third party survey firms in participating and non-participating neighborhoods in Jordan between 2016-19.

The data consists of two rounds of household surveys from randomized samples, which were representative of the Jordanian and Syrian populations of the sampled communities. Baseline data collected was collected during 2016-2017 (n=5,600), while endline data was collected in January 2019 (n=9,133).

The surveys were conducted for two separate ‘waves’ or phases of the program. Of note, by the time of the endline survey, ‘Wave A’ had received both hardware and software interventions, while ‘Wave B’ had received only software activities. This made it possible to examine any differential effects of the two program components, specifically any effects of the software when it was isolated from those from the hardware activities. The endline conducted approximately 12 months after the full set of interventions was implemented in Wave A, and immediately following completion of the software interventions in Wave B.

Outcomes

Overall social cohesion index: We tested program impacts using an overall ‘social cohesion index’ that includes six primary outcome measures of social cohesion (outcome measures represent a composite of answers several survey questions each). This decision was based on our understanding of the literature on social cohesion and the pace at which we expected to observe significant change, as well as our expectations of the forms positive changes would take in Jordan specifically. These pointed to the likelihood for the program to have a combined effect on small shifts to many independent indicators of social cohesion, rather than large effects on any one indicator, particularly in the period shortly after implantation when the program was evaluated.

Intergroup relations index: Three measures were compiled into a composite index that captured overall inter-group relationships. These indicators represent shifts in social cohesion pertaining to individual beliefs and perceptions about the other group/nationality. The “intergroup relations index” is based on indicators for:

- › *Perceptions of outgroups:*²⁷ Determined from questions on how accepting respondents are of various interactions with individuals of other nationalities, including living next door to, working with, children going to school with, and family members marrying a member of the other group.
- › *Attitudes to violence, both generally and towards outgroups:* Determined from questions on respondents’ acceptance of use of violence against the other group under a range of situations, such as to protect their family and their acceptance of the use of violence, in general, as a dispute resolution mechanism.
- › *Interactions with outgroups:* Determined from questions on how frequently they have met individuals members of the other group in a range of social situations, including: children playing together, sharing a meal, in the market, and at religious events.

Cooperation over basic services index: Measures that capture tensions and conflict management between groups were combined into a composite index capturing the severity of tensions and on how well equipped the neighborhood is to provide solutions to these conflicts. The “cooperation over basic services index” consists of measures of:

- › *Perceived tensions:* Indexed from questions on the existence and intensity of reported tensions over access to different services and other societal fracture points, including access to education, employment, healthcare; housing prices; group-based discrimination, and general welfare concerns.
- › *Non-violent dispute resolution:* Indexed from respondents’ views of how well their neighborhood leaders are equipped to resolve tensions pertaining to these services.

Methodology

The selection of which neighborhoods received support from the program was non-randomized, due to program constraints. As such, the evaluation relies on a quasi-experimental, differences-in-differences design, noting any shifts in the survey responses in the target neighbourhoods before and after the program, and comparing these with any shifts in responses in selected non-target neighborhoods. The design incorporates instrumental variables to account for the biases arising from this non-randomized roll out, as well as coarsened exact matching (CEM) to account for differences between the structure of the baseline and endline sample pools that might arise from the data collection approach, which relies on two waves of (random, stratified) cross-sectional data.

We acknowledge important limitations in our impact evaluation design, including the non-randomized targeting of neighborhoods, our inability to collect panel data from the baseline respondents, the small number of clusters/neighborhoods, and the high levels of intracluster correlations on some key outcome measures within neighborhoods (particularly on outcomes related to common experiences, such as a neighborhood’s experience with local services). As described above, we employed multiple strategies to reduce the potential bias to our results and other potential statistical errors introduced by these design issues.

²⁷ In the evaluation we used the term “outgroups” to refer to the different nationality group from the one an individual is in. So in this case, Syrians are part of the “outgroup” to their Jordanian host community counterparts and Jordanians are part of the “outgroup” to the Syrian refugees.

Results and Discussion

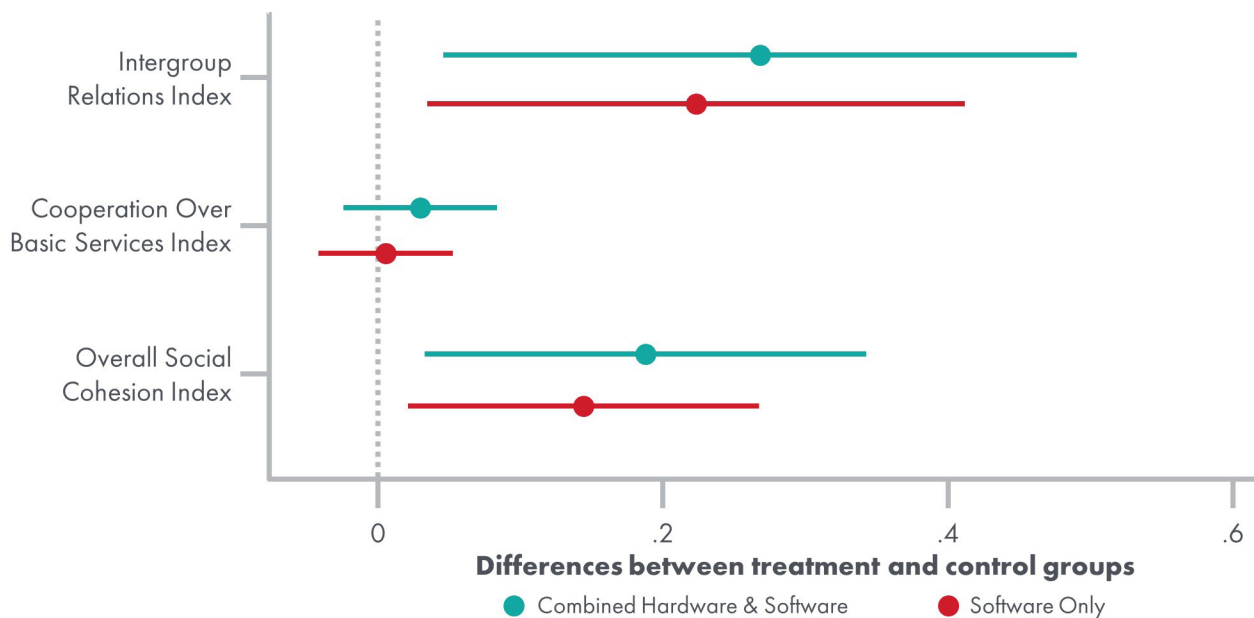
Comparing outcomes from the survey responses from participant communities before and after programming ('treatment group') with those from the communities that were not targeted with program support ('comparison group') allowed us to draw three major conclusions.

Positive impact of the joint hardware-software approach is evident, even shortly after the intervention takes place. The program as a whole had a strong, positive, impact on the overall social cohesion outcome index. We see the largest program impacts on social cohesion index (by .19 points on a scale of 0-1) for the combined Wave A and Wave B results, which represent the software and hardware interventions together. This is primarily driven by changes to the intergroup relations index, which includes attitudes and behaviors of Jordanian hosts towards Syrian refugees and vice versa, as evidenced by the size of the effects on intergroup relations index (.27) being larger than those from the overall social cohesion index.

We do not find impacts of the program on cooperation over basic services, providing little evidence that the combined hardware and software program has improved perceptions of tensions and dispute resolution over service provision. Two factors may explain these findings. The first is time. The process of how a community center, for example, would lead to improved acceptance of outgroups is a long one: the center must be built, individuals from both host and refugee communities must make use of the center, and in doing so interact across group lines. All of these steps may not have been fully completed for a sufficient number of people for us to capture within the short timeline we consider in this evaluation. The second possible explanation is the lack of variation in our data on these outcomes. Responses of people from the same neighborhoods to questions about local services are highly similar given they use, and have access to, similar services as each other. This reduces statistical power and our ability to capture movement in these outcomes. For these reasons, we caution that finding little evidence of improved perceptions on these outcomes is not the same as evidence that perceptions have not improved.

We did not find program impacts on any of the single indicators linked to enhanced social cohesion that comprise the indices reported above. This suggests that shifts in individual indicators are too small to be captured statistically, especially in the relatively short-term period (at most 12 months) after program implementation.

Figure 2: Program effects on primary outcomes



Software interventions on their own were effective in improving social cohesion. The software component of the program, when isolated from the hardware component, still had positive impacts on social cohesion in target communities. Analysis of the Wave B data showed that being reached by the software activities is associated with an improvement (by 0.15 points) in the overall social cohesion index. The effects are slightly smaller than those from the combined hardware and software activities. Here again, this effect is driven entirely by changes to the intergroup relations index. This result points to the potential cost-effectiveness of the software interventions (compared to considerably more expensive infrastructure projects) as an approach to improving social cohesion.²⁸

Hardware interventions appear reinforce the impacts of the software components on social cohesion. Our findings show the most pronounced effects of the program when software and hardware projects are implemented together. While software interventions were effective on their own, our results indicate the positive role that infrastructure projects play in improving social cohesion above and beyond that of software activities. The size of the program effects on the social cohesion index are larger in the presence of the combined hardware and software interventions (Wave A) than for the software-only intervention (Wave B).

We also see greater impacts when communities were involved in the program for a longer period of time, potentially allowing for greater benefits to accrue. Because the hardware component and the longer exposure to the program are intertwined in our evaluation (both occurring as part of Wave A), we are not able to determine which of these two factors most affected our results. However, based on our analyses, and other literature, we argue that this outcome is more likely driven by the presence of the hardware projects. Previous studies on CDD interventions, which do not include the software components that we examined, have rarely been shown to increase social cohesion, even with more time. Second, our analysis of a duration variable, which considers the time since the programme was implemented in a neighborhood, produced insignificant results for most outcomes. Thus, if time is playing a role at all, it appears to be small and is unlikely to fully explain the differences in the program effects we see when combining the hardware and software interventions.

Projecting Forward

When war ends, the potential for conflict nonetheless will persist. While the majority of Syrian refugees displaced in the region hope to return some day, the factors preventing them from doing so -- primarily security and economic concerns -- will, unfortunately, be challenges in Syria for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the service provision and legitimacy issues Jordan faces extend beyond the Syrian refugee crisis: they are steeped in historic drivers of instability that will continue to shape social cohesion and citizen-state relations in Jordan. Against a backdrop of tumultuous regional politics, addressing these evolving, often interconnected drivers of social instability in Jordan and across the broader Middle East with evidence-based interventions is more important than ever.

Challenged Government Legitimacy: Recent polls indicate that a majority of Jordanians do not trust elected and appointed government officials, with respondents citing frustrations with economic hardship and various forms of corruption.^{29 30} Discontent with the government and its economic policies has long historical roots, and the factors driving it show no signs of subsiding. Periodically since 1989, austerity and economic liberalization

28 We are exploring the possibility of conducting cost analyses of the program components to examine this question in more detail.

29 Huseini, R. (June 20 2019), "Some 65% of Jordanians believe situation in Jordan going in the wrong direction." The Jordan Times.

30 International Republican Institute (November 2018), *Jordan Poll Reveals Low Trust in Government; Increasing Economic Hardship*.

measures implemented as part of IMF stabilization programs have sparked large-scale demonstrations; liberal economic policies were seen as eroding the social safety net and disadvantage the Jordanians employed in Jordan's oversized public sector.³¹ Similar issues came to the fore again when the Arab Spring unfolded across the region: in 2012, protestors demonstrated across the country regularly, calling for reforms to counter pervasive corruption and institutionalized nepotism (known as "wasta"), and once again in 2018 protestors gathered to oppose tax increases. This ongoing concern about a lack of real political power, in combination with rising cost of living, lack of employment options, and unsatisfactory government service provision, can lead to further disaffection with the state and a rise in non-peaceful and destabilizing political tactics.

Continued Syrian refugee presence: Compounding tensions resulting from previous refugee arrival waves, including of Palestinians and Iraqis, the indefinite presence of Syrian refugees will continue to be a source of tension. Mercy Corps' research has found that levels of tensions between refugees and host communities correlate to the economic standing of the host community prior to the crisis.³² Skyrocketing rent, overcrowded conditions in schools, health clinics, and strain on the water and waste management systems have had serious effects on Jordanians' lives: for instance, in towns with high portions of Syrians, such as Mafraq and Ramtha, rent has increased by as much as 600%,³³ and 60% of Jordanians surveyed by the REACH Resource Centre cited overcrowded healthcare centers as a principal concern.³⁴ While the Jordanian government has largely hesitated to establish the permanence of Syrians' presence in policies or laws, this sense of tension will continue.

Climate-related competition for resources: The observable decrease in available natural resources further contributes to potential instability. Jordan is the world's third most water-insecure country³⁵ and since the start of the Syrian conflict, government statistics show that overall domestic water consumption is up by 40%. Jordan's dependency on foreign energy sources is among the highest in the world, with 96% of the country's energy needs supplied by imported oil and natural gas,³⁶ exposing Jordan to price hikes and the politically destabilizing requirement to purchase fuel from Israel.

Increasing violence: Jordan is often characterized superficially as a country free from violence in a difficult neighborhood. Though it has largely avoided open, civil conflict, there has been a rise of terrorist incidents in recent years and there is growing concern that violence will continue to spill over from Syria.³⁷ Jordan is also a country where domestic violence is more prevalent than global averages, high schools are among the most violent in the world according to UNICEF Country Representative, and there are frequent occurrences of local violence between patrimonial groups.³⁸ The large number of illegal weapons in circulation (media has cited unofficial statistics estimating the number to be one million) could cause further instability.

Recommendations

This research contributes to a better understanding of the role that intergroup contact, conflict management skills and service provision play in reducing and managing refugee-host community tensions. The results from this impact evaluation suggest that the model of combining CDD-inspired hardware interventions with software

31 Ryan, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings, 2018

32 Mercy Corps (April 2015), *Seeking Stability: Evidence on Strategies for Reducing the Risk of Conflict in Northern Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees*.

33 Mercy Corps (May 2013) Mapping of Host Community–Refugee Tensions in Mafraq and Ramtha, Jordan.

34 REACH (March 2019) Fifth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria

35 Hlavaty, H. (March 2018), *Water Management Initiative (WMI)*, USAID.

36 Ed. Grover, V. and Alfarra, A. (August 2019), *Water, Sustainable Development and the Nexus: Response to Climate Change*. Taylor and Francis Group.

37 Al Sabaileh, A. (April 2019), The Impact of the Syria Crisis on Jordan's Terrorist Threat. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

38 Khalil, E. (2007), *Violence Against Children Study in Jordan*, USAID.

activities focused on conflict mediation and positive interactions across nationality groups is an effective way to promote social cohesion and stability among refugees and host populations in areas of scarce public resources in Jordan.

Based on the results from this study, and our projections of the social stability challenges Jordan will continue to face in the coming years, Mercy Corps offers a set of recommendations for policy makers, government officials, and aid actors working to address these issues:

Scale up investing in social cohesion programming that combines short-term benefits with longer term change: The findings from our study support other evidence showing that social stability programs are most impactful when they provide benefits that are visible immediately, such as the dispute resolution and community activities, alongside addressing more systemic issues that drive conflict, such as a lack of infrastructure.³⁹ This combination is effective because social instability is often driven by both short-term considerations, such as competition for economic opportunities, and longer-term issues, like ideology and governance-related grievances. Investment in conflict management and social cohesion in Jordan should build on and replicate the “software + hardware” approach taken by Mercy Corps, which produces both short and longer-term benefits.

Prioritize strengthening citizen-state relations based on the evidence of what works to improve perceptions of government legitimacy: Refugee-host community tensions constitute only one of the threats to social stability in Jordan, which appear to be shifting to those concerning citizen-state relations. Community strengthening programming should continue to treat the social and infrastructural consequences of mass foreign displacement to Jordan, but alongside efforts to address longstanding governance challenges that exacerbate the effect refugees’ arrival in Jordan. These investments toward strengthening citizen-state relationships in Jordan should be designed based on the growing evidence base that shows improving delivery of basic services on its own is unlikely to be sufficient in addressing the grievances that drive the risks of instability.⁴⁰ Rather, changing perceptions of government legitimacy requires addressing issues of inequity, transparency, and citizens’ voice service delivery and other government decisions. This in turn can contribute to reducing Jordanian’s propensity to use violence to change government policy or practice.

Invest in expanding the evidence base on approaches to build social cohesion and stability in Jordan and similar contexts: There remains limited research on effective models of improving social cohesion and the social contract between citizens and the state in host-refugee contexts such as Jordan. Rigorous evaluation should be done on the impacts of other models of strengthening social cohesion in these types of settings. Important outstanding questions to examine include: how the benefits of CDD-type programs can be expanded beyond the small group of stakeholders that are intensely involved, the long-term effects of infrastructure and capacity strengthening approaches on conflict and stability outcomes, and effective approaches to improving citizen-state relations at both local and national levels. To further understanding of the effects of CDD, research should evaluate whether improving service provision can encourage people to opt for gradual forms of political involvement, rather than destabilizing ones. Further areas for research on Jordan in particular include: What avenues exist for meaningful Jordanian political participation to best address public grievances? How can programming by organizations like Mercy Corps incorporate the most relevant social cohesion-focused efforts into training for local leaders?

39 Alliance for Peacebuilding (April 2019), *Violence Reduction Subsector Review & Evidence Evaluation*.

40 Nixon, H. and Mallett, R. (2017) *Service delivery, public perceptions and state legitimacy: findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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