



SEEKING STABILITY: Evidence on Strategies for Reducing the Risk of Conflict in Northern Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The expanding Syrian refugee crisis is a potentially destabilizing force within the region. In Jordan, more than 80% of Syrians refugees are living among host communities, rather than in official refugee camps. The sudden population influx has placed increased demands on already limited community resources and services, such as water and housing, straining relations with Jordanian hosts. The resulting tensions between host communities and refugees, as well as general dissatisfaction with the local government's response in terms of service provision, have created concern for the outbreak of wider conflict and instability in Jordan if these problems are not addressed.

Despite the heightened attention to conflict in Jordan stemming from the Syrian refugee crisis, little evidence exists on which interventions are effective in mitigating the risk of violence and further instability. In addition, the literature on contemporary Jordanian society, the complexities of its many tribal dynamics, as well as the local communities' relationships with the national government – particularly in recent years – remains thin. Thus, many aid actors lack sufficient information about the changing nature of problems and tensions in host communities or how best to operate within this context, even if not directly addressing these challenges.

In 2013, Mercy Corps undertook research in Northern Jordan (Mafraq and Ramtha) to help fill these knowledge gaps and help inform our programs and those of other actors working in Jordan and other refugee host countries. The published report, *Mapping of Refugee-Host Community Tensions in Mafraq and Ramtha, Jordan (May 2013)*, provided a situational analysis of the host and refugees communities, identified specific sources of tension between and within the Jordanian and Syrian communities, and highlighted multiple dimensions of destabilizing and stabilizing factors to be addressed or leveraged when working in this context. The report was one of the first benchmarks for Mercy Corps' Foreign and Commonwealth Office-funded *Conflict Management for Syrian Refugees, Host Communities and Municipal Actors in Jordan Program* which, since February 2013 has engaged with community members and government representatives to address the sources of tensions and mitigate conflicts.

In May 2014, Mercy Corps undertook a second, more comprehensive study to further deepen the knowledge base, to elucidate questions that had arisen during program implementation, and to help the aid community to address more sensitively and effectively the sources of tension and destabilizing factors identified in the first report. The findings from the research indicate that conflict mitigation programs such as Mercy Corps' model can help preclude conflict by building and strengthening the mechanisms and relationships needed for communities to address disputes non-violently.

The goals of this study were three-fold: (1) to understand better the sources, trends and evolving dynamics of tensions between Syrian refugees, Jordanian hosts and municipal actors in Northern Jordan, especially any changes that have emerged in the last year; (2) to analyze the extent to which Mercy Corps' conflict management programming has impacted perceptions of violence and support for nonviolent dispute resolution; and (3) to examine key aspects of the theories of change related to individual perceptions of violence and peaceful resolution of conflict that underpin conflict reduction efforts. The research was conducted in Mafraq and Irbid governorates, where Mercy Corps has taken the two-pronged approach of training local community leaders (Syrian, Jordanian, and municipal) in interest-based negotiation and simultaneously supporting community development projects jointly designed by these leaders with their local government that benefit both refugee and host communities. The research employed a mixed methods evaluation design with quantitative and qualitative data collected at baseline and 12 months into program implementation among both target and comparison communities.

The results provide insights into the major drivers of conflict between Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees, and help identify empirically grounded leverage-points for addressing them. Key findings include the following.

KEY FINDINGS

Discerning Sources of Tension

- **Tensions continue to be linked to scarce resources and opportunities:** According to qualitative and quantitative data sources, the primary causes of tensions between Jordanian host community members and Syrian refugees in Northern Jordan continue to be related primarily to scarce resources and limited income-generating opportunities.
- **The magnitude and nature of intergroup tensions continue to correlate with tribal identities in addition to national identities:** Intergroup tensions were much higher in Mafraq than in Ramtha in 2013 because of more tribal differences between refugees and hosts there. A year on, however, the refugees flowing into Ramtha have started coming from all over Syria rather than predominately from neighboring Dara'a, and this difference in identity has markedly heightened intergroup tensions in Ramtha.
- **Two additional dimensions of the inter-group tensions have developed in the past year.** In May 2013, Mercy Corps' first community mapping assessment found that tensions were not only between Jordanian host community members and Syrian refugees, but also between Jordanian citizens and their own government. However in 2014, new aid practices that prioritize or serve only some refugees and not others have created tensions *among Syrian refugees* themselves (esp., newcomers versus earlier refugees). Meanwhile, deportation policies for illegal Syrian labor have generated increased resentment also between Syrian refugees and Government of Jordan (GoJ).

- **Multiple challenges that cause tensions have not only increased in magnitude, but are also compounding into several vicious cycles:** Compounding the resource-based tensions, the challenges of obtaining housing and securing jobs have escalated into multiple reinforcing cycles. Jordanians' resentment that Syrians are taking their jobs has been a source of tension since early in the refugee crisis. First, without valid work permits and legal income-generating opportunities, Syrian refugee families are unable to pay the skyrocketing rental prices. The high rents in turn deplete refugees' savings, forcing them to seek work in the informal sector, where they have no choice but to compete for jobs with Jordanians. Second, the failure to eke out an income results in Syrians being unable to pay rent and resorting to living in informal tented settlements, which provokes anger among Jordanians on whose land these tents are often pitched. Third, the GoJ's new deportation practices for adult male Syrians working without permits has led to a sharp increase in child labor in order to support family income, which often involves abuse in the work place and increases refugees' resentment for their hosts' treatment of their children.

Evaluating Program Impact

- **Program Design Reduced Support for Violence:** Survey results show that residents in communities where Mercy Corps is conducting conflict management activities saw a decrease in their support for and use of violence, while communities that did not participate in the program showed an increase in support for the use of violence during this period. Participants ascribed the positive impact of the program on inter-communal relations to increased interaction and improved communal spaces, in addition to the high quality of NGO-community relationships.
- **Program Implementation Created Precedence for Intergroup Trust:** In communities that possess high level of skepticism for outside actors, the Mercy Corps program is a powerful example of building inter-group trust between NGOs and various local constituencies. The experience of this program shows that NGOs can no longer behave as external aid distributors, but rather must carefully cultivate and capitalize on the relationships that they build with local authorities and communities over time. Behaving respectfully, following through on stated commitments, and administering programming equitably have been essential to Mercy Corps program success and should be encouraged and emulated.

Understanding factors related to support for violence

- **Negative inter-group perceptions and discrimination can increase acceptance of violent behavior:** Jordanians and Syrians reported that their views of the other group have grown increasingly negative since before the start of the Syrian crisis. Jordanians more often perceive Syrians negatively than vice versa, fearing their presence in their community or criticizing their cultural practices. This often manifests in the form of discrimination, which was found to be a strong predictor of risk of engaging in violence. Syrians who believe Jordanians discriminate against Syrian workers in the country are nearly 1.5 times more likely to accept violence as a legitimate form of expression than Syrians who do not perceive such discrimination.
- **Social trust and cohesion are related to support for peaceful conflict resolution:** Positive social interactions among Jordanians and Syrians can help reduce tensions over time and erode negative perceptions. Jordanians and Syrians who have had this type of interaction are nearly 1.5 times more likely to support peaceful conflict resolution than those who remain more isolated in groups of their own nationality. These findings lend support to Mercy Corps' facilitation of community projects that bring together Jordanians and Syrians to solve common problems.

- **Leaders with conflict resolution mechanisms and skills are critical for managing tensions:**

The cross-sectional household survey results show that presence of leaders with conflict mediation skills is an important factor limiting tensions in host communities. Focus group discussion respondents also emphasized the importance of leaders and tribal structures in minimizing conflicts that did occur. Greater satisfaction with leaders, such as those trained by Mercy Corps, who can manage conflicts appears to be crucial to promoting the view that the peaceful resolution of disputes is possible and accessible – a critical step towards ensuring that tensions and disputes do not escalate into wider conflicts.

IMPLICATIONS

These results have important implications for the work of Mercy Corps and other aid actors working to address the causes and consequences of conflict in stemming from the Syrian refugee crisis:

- **Scale up joint conflict management and community development interventions in host communities:** Given the continued influx of Syrian refugees, increasing tensions and their potential for fueling violence, conflict management interventions should be woven into relief and development programs targeting Syrians and Jordanians in host communities.
- **Expand access to conflict management skills and mechanisms:** Mercy Corps' training of local leaders in conflict resolution and negotiation skills can serve as a replicable model for reducing the likelihood and impacts of conflict.
- **Leverage interventions to build social cohesion:** Aid organizations should do more to promote positive social contact between refugees and hosts. Joint community projects that help ameliorate strains on local resources and services appear to be an effective way of supporting such interactions. Additionally, in developing interventions to build social cohesion, it is important to ensure enough resources for both populations so they do not feel added competition.
- **Deliver aid and communicate policies in a way that does not create or exacerbate conflict:** Recognizing that aid can be a source of tension and conflict, humanitarian organizations and donors must do more to make sure that aid is distributed equitably and to the neediest communities and people. Aid organizations should strengthen accountability and conflict-sensitivity of the aid community through improved coordination with each other and with local authorities.
- **Partner with media to directly debunk myths about the refugees and aid practices:** Misconceptions about Syrians and aid persist among Jordanians – for example, many Jordanians believed that UNHCR was paying for all Syrians' rent and food – so efforts must continue to harness the power of TV and radio to counter misperceptions that fuel stereotypes and increase tensions.
- **Alleviate the immediate and underlying causes of grievances:** Interventions that improve basic services from municipalities and support better housing would help reduce the potential that hardships are used as grievances to mobilize for violence. With greater investment and coordination, directly addressing the basic needs of the affected communities could be achievable in the short-run. In the long term, maintaining peace will require creating an environment in which Syrians and Jordanians can live in dignity, together. To achieve this, the international community should work to address the structural factors fueling tensions, by advocating for policy and legal reforms that will create more opportunities for Syrian refugees living in Jordan.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SYRIAN CRISIS IN JORDAN

As the conflict in Syria has entered its fourth year, Syrians continue to flee their country, with close to 3 million of them having crossed as refugees into neighboring countries as of late summer 2014.¹ While some governments have established refugee camps to house Syrians, 85% of Syrian refugees are living in non-camp environments among host populations.² The scale of the refugee crisis combined with the wide dispersal of refugees has put unprecedented pressure on host countries and created significant challenges for the aid community seeking to support Syrians who have fled their country.

In Jordan, the presence of Syrians has had a major impact on society, straining already scarce resources and creating tension between Jordanians and Syrians. In 2013, the Government of Jordan estimated a total of 1.3 million Syrians in Jordan, including refugees who are not registered with UNHCR.³ While there have been multiple reports of refugees returning to Syria for various reasons, the total number of refugees in the country continues to rise. In the first half of 2014, the total number of UNHCR-registered refugees and persons of concern increased from approximately 580,000 to 610,000.⁴ Most of that growth is taking place among the Syrians living in urban areas in Jordan, rather than in camps. By June 2014, approximately 87% of Syrian refugees were living outside of camps in a ratio that has increased gradually in recent months, with estimates from early in 2014 between 75% and 80%.⁵

There is a growing acknowledgement among humanitarian actors and governments that there is no end in sight for the Syrian conflict, and Syrian refugees will remain in Jordan for an extended period. A clear implication is that supporting Syrian refugees will require mid-to long-term development efforts alongside humanitarian relief. Aid actors are directing greater amounts of support to Syrians living outside of camps, recognizing that these communities face a number of unique challenges.⁶ Refugees outside of camps are often isolated from support systems, unaware of or unable to access relief services, and subject to exploitation in the housing or informal labor market, among other challenges. Alongside this change in approach by the aid community, there is now an almost universal recognition that Jordanians in host communities, not just Syrians, are negatively affected by the crisis and need support, and that not supporting them has negative consequences for all, including increased tensions between the Jordanian hosts and Syrian refugee communities.⁷ All of this is happening in an environment of diminishing international funding for the Syria crisis response.

At present, the situation in Jordan remains calm relative to neighboring countries that have been more directly affected by the spillover of violence from the Syrian conflict. Yet, persistent inter-communal tensions and sporadic incidents of conflict in host communities, combined with overt violence in Zaatari refugee camp, have created concern for the outbreak of wider conflict and instability in Jordan.

1 UNHCR, 2014c. As of 24 August 2014 the UNHCR was aware of 2,978,070 Syrian refugees or persons of concern across the region.

2 UNHCR, 2014a

3 Coutts, 2013

4 UNHCR, 2014c

5 UNHCR, 2014a

6 Mercy Corps, 2013a; Amnesty International, 2013; UNHCR, 2014b; REACH, 2014

7 Mercy Corps, 2013a; REACH, 2014

1.2 PROGRAM CONTEXT

Responding to the rising tensions and potential for conflict, Mercy Corps has been supporting conflict management initiatives in communities with large numbers of Syrian refugees in the Mafraq and Irbid governorates in Northern Jordan since the Syrian crisis began in 2011. The largest of these efforts is the United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) funded *Conflict Management for Syrian Refugees, Host Communities and Municipal Actors in Jordan* program (hereafter referred to as ‘the program’), which has been in place since February 2013. Given Mercy Corps’ history in conflict management after merging with the Conflict Management Group in 2004, this program was modeled on Mercy Corps’ successful intervention in Iraq that has been ongoing since 2005, and has successfully trained a nationwide network of almost 90 Iraqi leaders in the Harvard Program on Negotiation (PON) “Interest-Based Negotiation” (IBN) methodology.⁸ This program aims to address the tensions that threaten to create conflict and destabilize relations between Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees. This is done primarily through:

1. Enhancing conflict management capacities of local government, Jordanian, and Syrian community leaders to manage current and emerging intergroup tensions;
2. Increasing opportunities for Jordanians and Syrians to develop common solutions to immediate and underlying sources of tensions in the border towns of Northern Jordan; and
3. Creating safe spaces and a positive environment for both communities to interact and resolve common concerns and problems.

Implementation of the program began in early 2013 in six communities in Northern Jordan. Three of these are in Mafraq governorate (Zaatari Village, Hamra, and the Hayy al-Janoubi/Hayy al-Hussein neighborhood of Mafraq City), and the other three are in the Sahel Houran region of Irbid governorate (Shajara, Turra, and Emrawa/Thneiba). These communities were selected because of their high number of Syrian refugees, the proportion of Syrians to the total population, and the level of tension present.

Major program activities included selection of both Jordanian and Syrian community leaders as well as local government representatives, training for participants in interest-based negotiation strategies and proposal writing, conducting community activities that bring together Syrians and Jordanians, and the selection and implementation of specific communal projects to improve each neighborhood. Community projects undertaken to date have included improvements to the municipal services and major expansions of shared public facilities such as schools, sports fields, and health centers.



⁸ Since early 2009, Mercy Corps has supported a nationwide network of 87 Iraqi leaders who are committed to promoting good governance and reconciliation through consensus-based negotiation. With funding from the Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Mercy Corps established The Network of Iraqi Negotiation Experts (NINE), which includes Sunni and Shia, Arab and Kurd, tribal elders, religious leaders, government officials, politicians, and civil society representatives from every region of Iraq. These leaders have worked together across regional, political, and sectarian lines of division to resolve almost 130 major disputes, including tribal conflicts over land, tensions between citizens and government over services, disputes over elections, and clashes between rival factions of the Iraqi army and police.

Definitions:

Tensions: general strain on relations between communities stemming from a lack of trust, misunderstanding, or negative perceptions of the other.

Conflict: disputes or serious disagreements between groups which go beyond mistrust and general misunderstandings, and are manifested in actions.

Violence: conflicts that involve physical altercations or force intended to hurt, harm or kill.

In this study we use a subjective measure of propensity towards violence based on self-reported support for the use of violence in different scenarios.

1.3 SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

In this section, we identify the key challenges and dynamics faced by refugees and their hosts. A thorough understanding of these issues is essential to describing the tensions in these communities, and is an important first step to designing interventions that can minimize conflict in the future. Many of the most severe challenges facing Syrians and Jordanians in Northern Jordanian communities are issues of economics and basic survival: securing livelihood, shelter and food. Increased competition due to the influx of Syrians, combined with government restrictions on Syrians, has made these issues, which were difficult for Jordanians before the crisis, now almost impossible for many people of both nationalities.

In general, it is the poorest Jordanians who have had to host the poorest Syrians since March 2011, putting great strain on the relations between these two national groups that otherwise have a history of good relations and positive mutual regard. Because of their experience with the Palestinians who have become Jordan's permanent refugees, many Jordanians express a shadow of concern for the possibility that Syrian refugees may stay in the long term.

The demographics and local tribal dynamics in the different regions in Northern Jordan have a significant impact on how refugees have been received and how the crisis has developed. In 2013, refugees flowing into Mafraq were from families incongruous with those of the big Mafraq tribes, whereas those flowing from neighboring Dera'a into Ramtha were often extended family members or distant relatives of Sahel Houran families. Accordingly, the intergroup tensions were much higher in Mafraq than in Ramtha. A year on, however, the refugees flowing into Ramtha have started coming from all over Syria, a difference in identity which has markedly heightened intergroup tensions in Ramtha. The fact that the refugee and host experience in different regions is quite different is important to designing aid interventions that meet the specific needs of that region and that are appropriate to the context there.

Besides the economic hardship and competition between Jordanians and Syrians, differences in culture, religiosity and marriage patterns persist as points of friction, the latter particularly among women. Municipal services, such as garbage collection, streetlights, and transportation services are overtaxed and strained. The tensions surrounding water and education needs have intensified since earlier in the conflict, and schools in particular have become a hotspot for clashes between the two communities. Communities perceive that aid resources (from International NGOs and local CBOs) are a site of competition as well. Tribal differences fuelled disagreements in some cases, but tribal structures were also noted as a source of stability. In addition to the continued lack of medical resources to meet physical health needs, the psychosocial support needs of the communities have palpably increased since the 2013 Mercy Corps research.

In addition to issues over which host and refugee communities are competing over, Mercy Corps identified additional destabilising factors that are exacerbating the situation, including negative perceptions disseminated by the media, a hidden repertoire of protection violations and organised crime, and the fraying social cohesion between and within Jordanian and Syrian communities. To counterbalance these forces, there are also sources of stability, which Mercy Corps has previously identified and continues to recommend all actors to draw upon and amplify. These include shared tribal ties between the two communities, shared cultures of family-oriented support, trade relations and economic strength in these areas.

1.4 RESEARCH RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Despite the heightened attention to tensions in Jordan stemming from the Syrian refugee crisis, little evidence exists on what interventions are effective in mitigating the risk of violence and further instability, and on the mechanisms through which programs can help reduce the likelihood of tensions leading to violence. In addition, aid actors lack sufficient up-to-date information about the changing nature and nuances of conflict in host communities in the Mafraq and Irbid governorates of Northern Jordan.

Mercy Corps recently undertook research as part of the program in Northern Jordan to help fill these knowledge gaps, and to help guide other actors in being more intentional and effective in their interventions. Through this research we strove to achieve three main objectives:

- Understand better the sources, trends and evolving dynamics of tensions between Syrian refugees, Jordanian hosts and municipal actors in Northern Jordan, especially any changes that have emerged in the last year;
- Analyze the extent to which Mercy Corps' conflict management programming has impacted perceptions of violence and support for nonviolent dispute resolution; and
- Examine key aspects of the theories of change related to individual perceptions of violence and peaceful resolution of conflict that underpin the Mercy Corps program and similar conflict reduction efforts.

This study is intended to give insights into the major drivers of conflict, as captured through attitudes and behaviors towards the use of violence and support for nonviolent dispute resolution, amongst Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees, and to identify empirically grounded leverage-points for addressing them. The results are aimed at informing the program strategies and priorities of Mercy Corps and other aid actors working to address conflict and instability in Jordan and other countries hosting major Syrian refugee populations.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed methods evaluation design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at baseline and 12 months into program implementation among both communities targeted by the program and a set of comparison communities outside the program area. In addition to the surveys of Syrian and Jordanian households, primary data was collected through focus group discussions with families and local leaders in the target communities. Secondary data sources included a review of recent literature about the conflict situation in Jordanian host communities, along with key informant interviews to get up-to-date information and perspectives.

Desk Review and Key Informant Interviews

Textual sources for the desk review included studies and reports from international NGOs (both public and unpublished) and relevant news media articles. Major reports since May 2013 about Syrians in host communities

include a preliminary impact assessment by REACH and a study by CARE, in addition to a number of UNHCR reports. This research also reviewed earlier Mercy Corps studies, drawing from the insights and expanding their scope. Specifically, in late 2012, Mercy Corps conducted a rapid needs assessment of neighborhoods in Northern Jordan hosting Syrian refugees. In May 2013, Mercy Corps followed up with an in-depth conflict mapping of selected neighborhoods in Mafraq and Irbid governorates.⁹ Supplementing the desk review were a number of key informant interviews with researchers, NGO staff active in the field (including Mercy Corps staff), and the Assistant to the Governor of Mafraq.



Household Survey

Surveys of heads of households were conducted in June 2013, prior to the inception of the program, and a similar follow-up survey was conducted nearly one year later in May 2014 in the two governorates to assess changes in perceptions of violence, security, tensions and economic outlook, as well as other intended program outcomes. A random sample of households was selected for the survey from communities in which Mercy Corps' program was being implemented. To be able to attribute changes to Mercy Corps' program, we also surveyed a comparison group of households from communities not affected by the program. In total, 854 individuals were surveyed in June 2013 (667 treatment and 187 control) and 845 individuals were surveyed in May 2014 (662 treatment and 183 control).

Statistical analysis of the household survey data was done using STATA. We used difference-in-difference tests to assess if participation in the program had any impact on key outcomes related to attitudes and behaviors towards the use of conflict. Correlation analysis was used to test hypotheses linked to the program theories of change to identify apparent mechanisms through which support for violence may be reduced.

Focus Group Discussions

Qualitative data was collected through five days of focus group discussions and observations during program site visits in early May 2014. Focus group discussions were conducted in Mafraq city and in Sahel Houran region of Irbid governorate. 114 participants were drawn from the six communities where Mercy Corps has been conducting its conflict management programming since early in 2013. 51 participants were from the three neighborhoods in Mafraq, while 63 participants were from Sahel Houran communities.

9 Mercy Corps, 2013b

The 12 focus group discussions (6 in each region) were divided into two sets – community members and Mercy Corps program community leaders. In each region there were four discussions held with groups of community members, divided by nationality and gender (63 participants total in 8 focus groups). The Mercy Corps program community leaders participated in focus groups divided by gender, with both nationalities together (51 participants total in 4 focus groups). Across all groups, there were 45 Syrian participants and 69 Jordanian participants, 51 male participants and 63 female participants. Focus group discussion groups and participants are detailed in Annex 1.



Limitations

Selection of the comparison communities was purposive, based on neighborhoods with similar population characteristics as the program communities, yet far enough away to avoid spillover effects. As a result, baseline indicators for the program and comparison communities indicate that the two groups varied in some key aspects. Generally, there was greater perceived freedom of movement, better economic outlook on both the country and personal level, and a higher level of personal happiness in the treatment communities prior to the program. In addition, support for violence was higher in program

communities than among the comparison groups at baseline. We attempted to compensate for this imbalance in our analysis by relying on difference-in-difference estimates.

It is also important to note that a key limitation of the quantitative analysis in this study is that it relies on subjective indicators of violence—that is, people's self-reported perceptions and attitudes towards violence—since there was a lack of objective measures of violence from the targeted areas. Future research should collect data on actual incidences of disputes or conflict in these communities to assess if findings using such objective measures align with our findings.

For the focus groups, we strived to select participants who represented various backgrounds. However, some of the focus groups were lacking in diversity of tribal or other affiliations. Additionally, within the discussions with Mercy Corps community leaders that included both nationalities, there was some evidence of self-censorship amongst Syrians, such as when a Syrian community leader spoke to researchers privately after the focus group to mention concerns that he did not feel comfortable sharing in front of the mixed group. Despite this, Syrian community leaders were outspoken in disagreeing with their Jordanian colleagues in many instances.

2. KEY FINDINGS

In this section we first present findings on the key underlying sources of tensions between Jordanians and Syrian refugees. This is followed by results related to the program's impact on propensity towards violence and other major intended outcomes. Finally, in an attempt to better understand what specific factors may contribute to a reduction in support for violence, we present the results from our testing of hypotheses underlying the program's theories of change. Specifically, we determine if the following factors are related to Jordanian and Syrian's attitudes and behaviors towards the use of violence: inter-group perceptions and discrimination, social trust and cohesion, conflict resolution mechanisms and skills, economic conditions, and involvement in local decision making.

2.1 SOURCES OF INTERGROUP TENSIONS

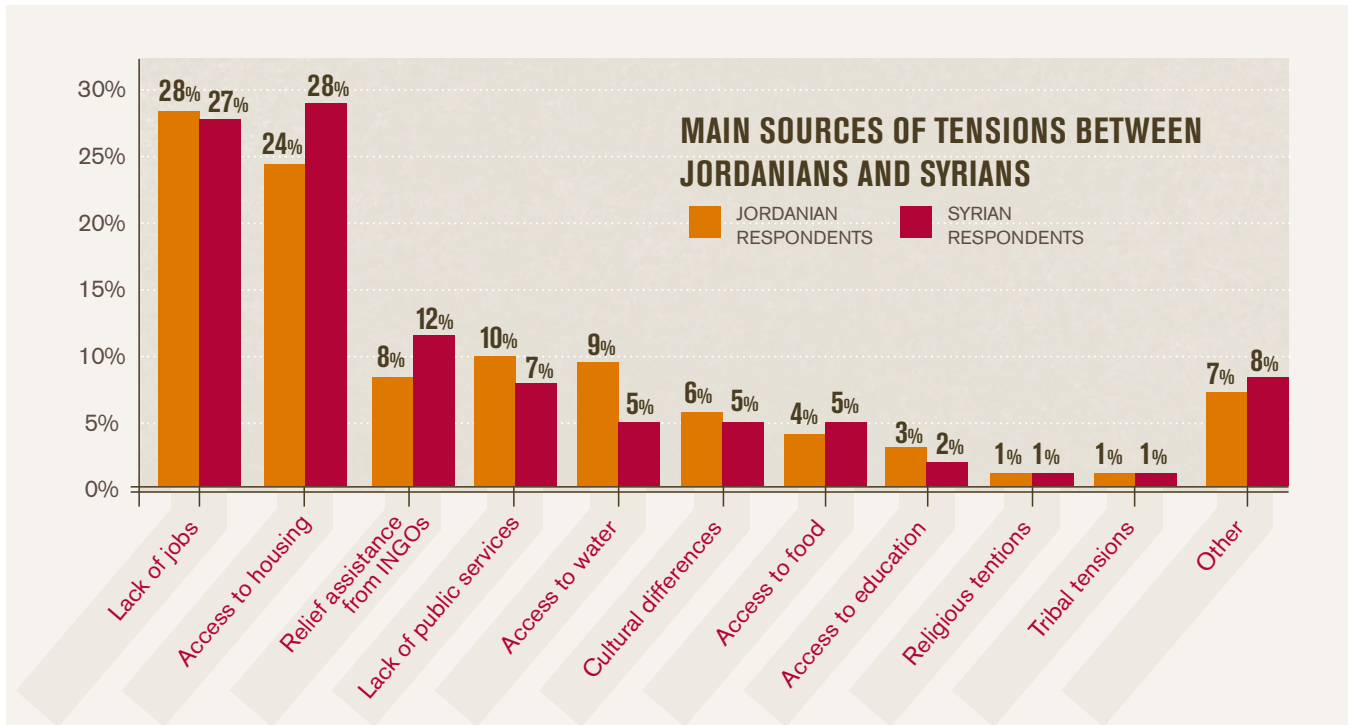
According to focus group discussion participants and Mercy Corps staff, overt violence in communities during the past year has not been a major issue of concern. While there have been a few violent incidents that have involved the security forces (such as the killing of two arms dealers by Jordanian security forces in Mafraq in October 2013), these have been rare and have not significantly inflamed inter-community tensions. A few major violent events of external origin have increased tensions and worries in host communities, yet none of these has resulted in wider violence. These include incidences of bombs from Syria falling in Sahel Houran and the riots and death in Za'atari camp in April 2014.

Despite the lack of overt violent conflict in Northern Jordan since 2013, there are significant tensions between various groups, directly linked to the problems and competition over resources described above. In addition to the tensions between Jordanians and Syrians as they compete over housing, jobs and other resources, there are also tensions evident between community members (from both groups) and the Jordanian government, as well as among Syrians. The strain on government services has prompted tensions between Jordanians and their government, while the increased deportations are a point of grievance for Syrians against the Jordanian authorities. Especially for Syrian men who are unable to provide for their families, there is a sense of powerlessness and psychological instability.

The primary causes of tensions in Northern Jordan, in communities at large and in between Jordanians and Syrians, are still economic. **Figure 1** (on page 8) shows the response to the general question: "In your opinion, what is the main source of tension between Jordanians and Syrians in your community?" in which respondents marked three responses (only the top ten common responses are included in this chart). It is a relatively small number of economic issues that cause the most tensions between Jordanians and Syrians: increased competition over limited job opportunities and the difficulty in finding affordable housing. The economic nature of tensions and the essential importance of jobs and housing are clear from multiple reports consulted for the desk review, from the focus group discussions, and from these descriptive results from the household survey.

Focus group participants described how these tensions manifested themselves in the daily lives of community residents. During the past year, there were a small number of interpersonal conflicts that were sparked by resource-based tensions or had an undertone of Syrian-Jordanian tension. These include incidents of verbal abuse or vandalism directed at Syrians and interpersonal conflicts that escalated into altercations. In all of the specific instances described, however, the conflicts were resolved or minimized before escalating into

FIGURE 1.



something significant. Focus group respondents attributed the resolution of the altercations in most cases to tribal structures and leaders who intervened on behalf of the people in conflict. This is a reminder of the importance of tribal structures in these communities as a local system of conflict resolution that must be taken advantage of.

Housing and the growth of Informal Tented Settlements

One of the most burdensome problems for residents of Northern Jordan since the Syria crisis is the challenge of finding affordable housing. Demand for housing has burgeoned with the influx of Syrians: on the one hand, rental prices have increased dramatically by six or seven times the original rent prior to the conflict (from 50 JOD to up to 300 or 350 JOD per month) as Jordanian landlords take advantage of the surge in demand; on the other hand, new construction simply has not been able to keep up. The lack of housing adversely affects Jordanian families whose children are unable to marry because of the housing price increase. As a result, competition over affordable housing and resentment over how the influx of Syrians motivated the unaffordable rent is a major cause of tensions between Jordanians and Syrians. Indeed, the importance of this issue for Syrians and Jordanians is not new, as it has emerged in prior research conducted by Mercy Corps and other organizations.

Due to high rental prices that are ultimately unaffordable for refugees, new developments from the past year include the increase of refugee settlement in unsanitary conditions. Syrians have begun renting storefronts or ruined structures lacking plumbing because they can no longer afford an actual apartment, which has implications for sanitation and hygiene in these neighborhoods. In Mafraq especially, focus group participants reported a sharp increase in the growth of informal tented settlements (ITS), as many Syrians are unable to find housing at all, let alone at an affordable price, and resort back to tents. People living in these settlements were identified as the most vulnerable people in their neighborhoods, as they have no easy access to plumbing, water, electricity, and other services.

Livelihoods and the phenomenon of increased deportations

Securing a livelihood is the other primary difficulty for residents of Northern Jordan. Many Syrian refugees, forbidden to work by the Jordanian government, have taken to work in the informal sector in order to earn enough money to support their families, putting pressure on a previously limited Jordanian labor market.

The most significant development of the past year in the domain of labor is that the Jordanian government has increased summary, no-process deportations of Syrian men when they are caught working illegally.¹⁰ The threat and reality of deportations has kept many Syrian men from work, faced with potential separation from their families or a forced return to a war zone. Those who still work are liable to be more vulnerable to exploitation from employers than before. Increased deportations represent a new source of tensions, now between Syrians and the Jordanian government, a third dimension of tensions not formerly identified in 2013.

This is significant as one of the previously-identified stabilizing factors had been the Syrian refugees' express appreciation of the Jordanian government and the army, whom they referred to as the "neshama", one of the trademark monikers in the Arab world used to refer to Jordanians who have a reputation for being "a good people". The fact that the attitude of Syrians towards the Jordanian authorities seems to be changing is a cause for concern: this could be a destabilizing factor going forward as Syrian families threatened by deportation become more desperate in their attempts to survive.

Child vulnerability as part of a linked complex of factors

In a significant change from previous research, children and their status in communities were a source of concern among a number of the focus groups. Many participants, especially Syrians, vocally expressed their concerns and fears about their children and the future ahead of them. The Jordanian authorities do not deport Syrian children who labor illegally, creating a situation in which children are often the only people in the family able to earn a living. All of the focus groups in both regions and from both groups reported a significant increase in child labor over the past twelve months.

Child labor and the dangers associated with it are destabilizing factors and potential sources of tensions between Syrians and Jordanians. Syrian parents feel resentment towards Jordanian business owners and supervisors who may exploit or even abuse their children in the workplace. Syrians also may blame Jordanian landlords whose high rents seem to be the cause for their family crisis.

It is critical to note that a number of these problems facing vulnerable Syrians are functioning as a cycle of cause-and-effect, rather than as isolated problems. In February 2014, all Syrians interviewed by Mercy Corps on this issue reported that the increased numbers of working children in their neighborhood is predominantly a coping mechanism that refugee parents resort to due to insufficient income. A recent analysis¹¹ of household incomes in host communities found that, three years into the refugee crisis, the majority of Syrians have exhausted their savings and men are finding it increasingly challenging to find jobs, regardless of how menial it may be. High rental prices are causing those Syrians living outside of camps to deplete their savings and seek work in the informal sector. In turn, this pressure to earn a livelihood combined with the threat of deportation is pushing children, especially boys, to join the workforce and abandon school.

¹⁰ The Mafraq governorate official interviewed for this research denied categorically that any Syrian is being deported on account of working without a permit. Participants from all focus groups, however, reported that deportations are happening and have increased significantly this year. A human rights researcher who has been studying this issue closely during the past twelve months confirms the existence of deportations and the recent increase, as does a recent Amnesty International report. (Amnesty International, 2013).

¹¹ Cash NFI Sector Gender Analyses, 16 June 2013 as listed in footnote 86 of UNCHR, WFP, UNICEF, "Joint Assessment Review (JAR) of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan".

Syrian children who work are exposed not only to grueling forms of labor, but also to physical, verbal, mental and even sexual abuse at the hands of Jordanian employers. Reports of child sexual assault and even organized child prostitution surfaced in a number of focus group discussions. Syrian participants in Sahel Houran described reports of sexual violence against children and expressed their deep fears for their children's safety. Research participants emphasized the link between children working and their vulnerability to abuse at the hands of Jordanians, a fact which has the potential to sour the relationship between communities.

Thus, the coping strategies that a family finds for one crisis in their lives (ex. need for income) often fuel the next crisis in their lives, contributing to an overarching cycle of issues that lead to increased intercommunal tension.

When the topic of high rents and the lack of availability of work came up, Syrian women in Sahel Houran were eager to tell of how the lack of resources is influencing their families and especially their children. One woman's children refrain from eating, hoping that if they can save money on food they can avoid being evicted once again for not having the rent. Another woman's son in second grade asked her for some pocket money so that he could buy juice mix from a store, mix it, and sell it on the streets in order to increase their family's income. A third woman's daughter asked her, "Do you want me to prostitute myself to get money for our family?" These stories are not outliers but common themes among refugee families in Northern Jordan.

This increase in reports of child labor and child sexual violence in Northern Jordanian communities, an issue that was hardly mentioned during earlier research, indicates a change in the pulse of how desperate the refugee communities are becoming. The issue demands further research and attention from the humanitarian aid community, not as an isolated problem but rather as linked with the issues causing them: the lack of housing and limited work opportunities.

Harmful Aid Community Practices create tension among Syrians

Practices of the aid community constitute another problem facing both Syrians and Jordanians and a major cause of tensions. Uneven coverage, unequal distributions, lack of coordination between aid organizations and reported corruption among community-based organizations are the principal grievances of Syrians and Jordanians. Many Jordanians perceive that giving aid to Syrians on the basis of nationality alone is an injustice when there are Jordanians poorer than many refugees. Recently, organizations have increased the percentage of aid that they allocate for vulnerable Jordanians – a change from last year that Jordanians recognize as positive – but there are still mutual accusations of the other national community taking “our” money from the NGOs. Aid distribution events are sites of tension and even outright conflict: reports of altercations erupting during poorly organized aid distribution events are common. Over time, divisions between communities are likely to deepen if perceptions of disproportionate aid distribution persist.

Both Jordanians and Syrians complained about some Syrians taking advantage of such disorganization and going from organization to organization to pick up more than their share of aid. Indeed, a new strain of conflict has become apparent: Syrian-Syrian conflict over competition for aid resources. Indeed, while tensions

between Jordanians and Syrians, between Jordanians and their local government, and between Syrians and the Jordanian government (in response to the deportation policies) existed in 2013, a fourth dimension of tension has emerged: tension among Syrian refugees who have begun to receive differential treatment as a result of new systems that NGOs have adopted. One key and repeatedly articulated source of strife was the retina scan system that UNHCR has begun to adopt. Syrians who have registered and been scanned are eligible for a monthly cash stipend, but not all have been accepted to be scanned as the target beneficiaries are reportedly the most recently arrived refugees. Refugee families who have been in Jordan longer – those more likely to have used up their savings – have been unable to sign up and feel that they are not receiving their fair share. Syrians in this group reported feeling frustration and bitterness towards the other Syrians who are receiving this form of assistance.



Focus group participants also reported instances of Syrian family members stealing each other's share of aid, and even kicking family members out of their houses because of limited resources. The possibility that aid practices are encouraging this breakdown of social cohesion among Syrians is a worrying development. Aid organizations (international NGOs and local CBOs alike) must stay aware of how their policies and distributions are influencing the status of tensions and conflict between various communities.

Other issues destabilizing the current situation that need to be addressed

Beyond these underlying and ongoing issues, participants in focus group discussions identified other emerging or increasing issues causing tensions. These included limited educational resources and municipal services, a lack of adequate public transportation, prostitution, and drug- and weapon-smuggling. Organizations must stay aware of these and other emerging problems that are liable to prompt conflict in order to create interventions to respond to them effectively.

It is important to note that most of these issues (raised in Mercy Corps' prior research) seem to have neither increased in magnitude nor become more complex in the last 12 months. The issues of prostitution and drug- and weapon-smuggling were points of concern that this study was unable to explore further given the methodology of focus group discussions in which participants may have been shy or felt it culturally inappropriate to reveal their knowledge about the details of such criminal activity.

Given how Mercy Corps staff themselves emphasized having observed the increase in drug and weapon-use and reports of sexual trafficking, however, this report strongly recommends that a more in-depth study be conducted on this topic. These issues have the potential to be significant destabilizing factors that negatively impact the formal economy and may become negative coping strategies for refugees (including children) who have no legal income-generating opportunities available to them.

2.2 PROGRAM IMPACTS ON SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE AND INTERGROUP RELATIONSHIPS

Impact on Support for Violence

The aim of Mercy Corps' conflict management program in Northern Jordan is to mitigate tensions and prevent the outbreak of violent conflict in Jordan as a consequence of the Syrian refugee crisis. We used a violence scale to measure of propensity to support violence, in which we asked survey respondents if they thought the use of violence was justified in different scenarios. We then analyzed the extent to which the program has contributed to changes in this measure.

Our analysis found that the program significantly decreased propensity to support violence in the target areas. Post intervention, surveyed respondents from communities where Mercy Corps implemented the program were less likely to believe that violence is a legitimate form of expression relative to respondents from the comparison communities. In comparison communities, there was a relatively large increase between the baseline and follow-up survey on the violence scale, indicating that the risk of conflict is generally higher in these areas. This trend highlights the practical significance of the program impacts on support for violence, an indicator of the potential for future conflict, in the target areas.

Though these findings are positive, it is important to acknowledge some limitations in attributing this impact to the program. We found limited evidence of an impact on short-term program objectives that we have considered mechanisms for reducing conflict. Specifically, the quantitative survey analysis did not find significant program impacts on the quantity of interaction between Jordanians and Syrians, inclusion in decision-making processes, or experiences of discrimination. For instance, the proportion of people indicating that they had interaction with people of other nationalities remained relatively constant in the treatment community, while it increased slightly in the control community. These findings contrast with qualitative findings and the daily experience of the Mercy Corps field team, in which increased interaction and understanding between the groups are readily apparent. While we can conclude that the program contributed to reducing support for the use of violence, more investigation is needed to identify the precise mechanisms of change.

Intergroup Social Relationships

The qualitative findings helped shed light on what made the program effective from the perspective of the communities involved. Based on this data, it seems likely that the quality of social interactions (that they take place in a positive environment, free from competition) is more important in improving relations than the mere quantity of interactions.

One issue of interest is the difference in experience of social interaction between men and women. Female focus group participants from both Mafraq and Irbid tended to be more positive about the improvement in personal relationships between Syrians and Jordanians at the local level than their male counterparts. They cited the community-friendly spaces (combined playgrounds and gathering-places) established through the program as an important reason for this change, since mothers could socialize while their children play together.

Overall, male focus group participants from both regions tended to be less optimistic about changes in personal relations between the communities, though a minority of them stated that relations were better than a year prior. This may be because men have fewer established opportunities than women have to take part in

ritualized social interactions, either at home or in public places such as playgrounds. Understanding how these apparent differences between men’s and women’s experiences of social interaction between national groups will be important to designing and implementing activities that target both genders. Communal projects, as the most prominent and visible signs of the Mercy Corps program, must continue in such a way that they create opportunities for positive social interaction among all genders and sectors of society.

Conflict Management Capacity

Community leaders shared examples of their being able to use the skills they acquired through Mercy Corps conflict resolution and interest-based negotiation trainings to resolve problems that emerged in their neighborhoods and maintain relationships. For instance, a water-shortage crisis in Zaatari Village in the summer of 2013 caused Jordanians to blame Syrians and some minor fights to break out. In response, two Jordanian community leaders recently trained by Mercy Corps intervened to calm the situation and acquire more water for the neighborhood. In the aftermath of this, these leaders organized community dialogues to clarify the reasons for the shortage and created a small committee of Jordanians and Syrians to help respond to both communities’ needs. As the Mercy Corps conflict program continues, care should be taken to make sure that the benefits received by Mercy Corps’ selected community leaders (training, skill-building and the chance to cooperate in a productive way with their neighbors) are spread beyond these individuals to the wider community.

Community Stability

Communal projects proposed by community leaders and implemented by Mercy Corps in close cooperation with municipal authorities, were one major component of the program that focus group participants indicated contributed to greater community stability. Focus group participants described improvements to municipal services, such as the streetlights and rubbish bins, and increases to educational and health-services capacity brought about through the program’s communal projects as having had a palpable impact on the severity of key problems that caused tensions in communities. Focus group participants suggested that these projects have created sites for positive social interaction, free from competition over resources, that were previously absent from the neighborhoods, and have had a positive impact on Syrian-Jordanian relationships and attitudes.

“Since Mercy Corps built the playground Jordanian and Syrian mothers bring their kids from all parts of Hamra village. The kids have fun with one another, while the parents end up socializing and getting to know each other. Before the playground there wasn’t much interaction, but now interaction is clear.”

– Mafrq (Hamra) Jordanian community member.

2.3 FACTORS THAT PREDICT SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE OR PEACEFUL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

In this section, we explore what factors are likely to reduce support for violence by testing the key theories of change or hypotheses that underlie the program. It is important to note that in this section we are not reporting program impacts or differences in outcomes between program and non-program communities.

Rather we examine what factors influence people's perceptions of support for violence or nonviolent dispute resolution for the entire surveyed sample. These findings will help identify program strategies for future interventions that appear critical for preventing or mitigating violence.

Inter-Group Perceptions and Discrimination

Syrians and Jordanians report that their perceptions of each other have generally become more negative since before the beginning of the crisis in Syria, especially among Jordanians, a conclusion supported by both a review of the surveyed sample and the focus group discussions. Negative perceptions manifest themselves in the form of stereotypes and discrimination, which can fuel tensions and conflict. Analysis of the survey data shows a strong link between Syrian's experience of being discriminated against and their propensity to engage in violence. Syrians who believe Jordanians are against Syrian workers in the country are nearly 1.5 times more likely to view violence as a legitimate form of expression, indicating that perceived discrimination may be a key driver of violence. This phenomenon was explained by focus groups in Mafraq in which they described incidents in which Syrians perceived slights against them on the part of Jordanians and then initiated a physical fight because of the perceived discrimination. Focus group participants reported an increase in such instances of minor interpersonal violence over recent months.

On the surface, focus group participants typically expressed positive perceptions of the other nationality, with Syrians grateful to Jordanians' hospitality and Jordanians sympathetic to Syrians' plight and admiring of their resourcefulness. Upon further questioning, however, participants agreed that positive attitudes and relationships present before the crisis are now worsening because of Syrians' extended presence in Jordan and the resulting strain on resources. This is corroborated by survey results indicating that Syrians and Jordanians in both areas described a decline in the perception of the other group. In the household surveys, Syrians show a decline in their positive perceptions of Jordanians since before the crisis: 83% of Syrians in Mafraq report feeling positive or very positive about Jordanians before the crisis, while only 71% report that they feel that way now. In Sahel Houran the decline was comparable: from 87% to 71%. Yet despite declining perceptions, Syrian focus group participants were reluctant to say that inter-group relations were explicitly bad.

Jordanian perceptions about Syrians are far more complex and there is some intriguing evidence about the trend of these perceptions. In the household survey, Jordanians reported that their perception of Syrians has sharply declined since before the crisis. In both locations, a similarly high proportion of Jordanians currently have negative or very negative views of Syrians (61% in Mafraq and 57% in Sahel Houran), in contrast to their perceptions of Syrians prior to when the war began (only 10% in Mafraq and 14% in Sahel Houran say they used to view Syrians negatively or very negatively).

According to respondents, some of these negative perceptions of Syrians may be due to differences in cultural norms. Jordanians consistently described Syrians as having cultural customs and habits that are generally more permissive than those of the Jordanian community. Examples of such customs usually involve public behavior: Syrians are more likely to socialize in public and Syrian women will run errands alone during the day or go walking at night, behaviors that have traditionally been considered unacceptable in these communities. This perception about Syrians does not always correspond to observations of Mercy Corps staff – nevertheless, it was very common among Jordanian participants, especially women.

In addition to comparing perceptions before the conflict in Syria and now, focus group participants were asked about how their views of the other nationality has changed during the most recent stage of the crisis (between

2013 and 2014). Jordanian men, especially in Sahel Houran, voiced a fear of Syrians as troublemakers, armed, and potentially violent. Jordanians worried about the presence of spies or agents for any of the various armed factions in Syria settling in their community. This Jordanian fear of Syrians' presence was newly apparent in contrast with the 2013 conflict mapping, when there was little social tension apparent in Sahel Houran. Participants explained this change over the past year as being a result of the increased and changing refugee populations. Initially Syrians coming to Sahel Houran were from just across the border and often related by blood or marriage, they said, but now there were many more unfamiliar people coming from cities further away in Syria such as Damascus, Homs, and Hama. This change points to the vital role that tribal and familial ties play in mitigating tension and preventing conflict. Without close links to their new Syrian neighbors, Jordanians were far more likely to judge and mistrust them.



This narrative stands in contrast to the Mafraq focus group discussions, in which some participants from each focus group described an improvement in interpersonal relations with Syrians over the past year. They attributed this improvement to the passing of time and to the groups simply getting used to one another, despite the fact that tensions over resources remain present and concerns about culture and customs are still loudly voiced. While Jordanian and Syrian participants in Mafraq reported improvements in the interpersonal relationships between the two groups, Jordanians still complained about Syrian behavior and customs. One possible explanation for this is that Syrian and Jordanian individuals are getting to know one another and build positive relationships, but that their perceptions of the other group as a whole are still negative.

This description of changes in each region over the past year suggests that cultural differences between Syrians and Jordanians initially cause significant tension, as in Mafraq in 2013 and in Sahel Houran in 2014. With time, however, expectations and norms change and social conflict diminishes, as illustrated in the example below.

Participants in Mafraq and Sahel Houran suggest that the social customs of Syrian women are having a liberalizing impact on the social norms for Jordanian women. A Syrian woman living in Zaatari Village (Mafraq) reported that the Jordanian women used to point and comment about them walking in the street, “but now they walk with us.” A Jordanian woman from Sahel Houran noticed a change in herself: she told a story of going by herself to a store to pick up some food and only realizing when her children expressed their surprise about it that she would never have done this before the Syrian crisis. The presence of Syrian women in the market made her feel comfortable there, whereas previously she would have been the only woman.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Skills

Within the Mercy Corps' conflict management program, the rationale behind the selection and training of the community leaders is to create leaders who can help resolve conflicts and facilitate negotiation in communities, especially between the different national communities. In theory, increasing the access to dispute-resolution mechanisms would increase the likelihood that conflicts can be resolved peacefully. Our survey results lend support to this assumption.

Our analysis found that Syrians and Jordanians who are satisfied with the dispute-resolution mechanisms available to them are 1.37 times more likely to be willing to resolve disputes peacefully. This suggests that Jordanians and Syrians are more likely to manage conflict nonviolently if they have a trusted individual or entity to which they can take their problems. Survey respondents also identified the presence of leaders with conflict mediation skills as the most important factor for limiting tensions in their community. Neither of these findings give insight into the exact nature of the dispute resolution mechanisms, a topic that deserves more investigation. In general, however, it is clear that greater satisfaction with leaders who can mediate conflicts may be crucial to promoting the view that the peaceful resolution of disputes is possible and accessible – a critical step towards ensuring tensions and disputes do not escalate into wider conflicts.

Findings from focus groups highlighted how community leaders trained by Mercy Corps have mediated conflicts, including several landlord-tenant disputes. In one case, a Syrian refugee community leader negotiated a conflict between a Syrian and a Jordanian owner, succeeding in postponing a rent collection and allowing the tenant to stay on under new terms.

Focus group participants emphasized repeatedly that tribal leaders have played a major role in resolving conflicts in their communities through mediation between parties. When asked for clarification of statements describing their communities as “tribal societies,” participants in two separate focus groups gave examples of instances when potential conflict was averted by tribal leaders calling together family members and mediating the conflict. This evidence emphasizes the importance of understanding and interfacing with local tribal structures and systems when designing interventions aimed at reducing conflict. It should be noted that some of the Mercy Corps community leaders in Mafraq are also tribal leaders, suggesting that ideally they could use their influential position to promote compromise.

Social Trust and Cohesion

Mercy Corps' support to communal projects that bring together Jordanians and Syrians is premised on the contact hypothesis. This theory asserts that purposeful, safe interactions can build trust, cooperation, and recognition of mutual interests between conflicting groups. Though the impact assessment found that the Mercy Corps program did not increase social interaction amongst participant communities in comparison to non-participant communities, the results of our hypothesis testing lend support to this general theory. We found that increased social interactions among Jordanians and Syrians (including attending weddings and funerals, being invited to meals, and household visits) are significantly correlated with more willingness to compromise and solve conflicts peacefully. Jordanians and Syrians who have had this type of interaction are nearly 1.5 times more likely to support peaceful conflict resolution than those who remain more isolated in groups of their own nationality.

This finding tracks closely with the focus group results, in which participants with more positive and frequent social interactions with the other nationality, free from competition, expressed a more conciliatory view towards their needs, challenges and interests. Jordanian focus group participants in Mafraq described their interactions with the Syrians as helping them to accept the different social practices of the other group. For instance, when

describing the parks and playgrounds that have been built or improved through the Mercy Corps program, community members noted the importance of these competition-free places for socializing and getting to know one another. In many of the neighborhoods, these facilities are the only common recreational spaces.

Increased social contact between Syrians and Jordanians in and of itself is not sufficient to improve attitudes and relations between groups. When contact takes place at a site of competition, the effect can be opposite. Overcrowded schools, for example, where education is a contested resource, have become zones of conflict between students, teachers and parents – with a strongly negative Syrian-versus-Jordanian dynamic. The addition of a school dedicated for Syrian students in one neighborhood reportedly reduced conflict. While fulfilling an essential service for Syrians, a school system divided by nationality no longer allows for students and parents to interact in educational settings, potentially undermining longer-term cooperation.

We found that the type and quality of interaction matters. For example, in our hypothesis testing, economic interactions between Jordanians and Syrians were not linked with willingness to resolve conflicts peacefully. Such interactions, similar to the interactions in overcrowded schools, are taking place in zones of competition and scarcity. Common interactions of this type include landlord-tenant exchanges and encounters at shopping centers approved for UNHCR food coupons. The former is a manifestation of the challenge of finding housing, and the latter is a site where aid-distribution tensions are likely to emerge. When communities have the opportunity to interact based on cooperation rather than competition, negative perceptions are eroded over time, while tensions and the potential for conflict can be reduced.

Economic Conditions and Influence Over Decisions

Underlying many conflict management programs is the assumption that people who feel economically better off will be less likely to resort to violence to resolve their problems. For instance, we would expect that Jordanians who have become poorer in recent years and blame Syrians for their economic suffering would be more strongly motivated to resort to violence to address their grievances.

This survey produced mixed findings on the relationship between Jordanians' perceptions of economic suffering and their tendency to accept violence as a legitimate form of expression. Jordanian respondents who have recently had to rely on distressful economic coping strategies, such as limiting meals or consumption and borrowing from relatives, are more likely to accept violence in general as justified, as predicted. Counter-intuitively, however, respondents with a more optimistic personal economic outlook are 1.33 times more likely to espouse accepting attitudes towards the use of violence for 'just causes'. This unexpected result suggests that there may be unobserved factors that affect the links between economic conditions and attitudes about violence, which require further investigation.

Another assumption of the Mercy Corps program is that the more people feel included in decision-making processes that affect their lives; the less likely they are to accept violence as a legitimate form of expression. Surprisingly, our survey analysis points to a positive relationship between greater political efficacy and support for violence. A sense of greater influence in decision-making was also strongly correlated with a lower belief in the importance of peaceful dispute resolution. These findings suggest other factors at play: individuals who feel more socially or politically empowered than others may be emboldened to think that they do not need to compromise to achieve their goals. Alternatively, such individuals may feel that they would be less likely to get into trouble with the law if they resorted to violence. Any conclusion along these lines is tentative, but leads us to recognize that the link between empowerment and violence is more nuanced and multi-faceted than typically understood. These findings also reemphasize the importance of empowering the most vulnerable and being sensitive to power dynamics, while working to reduce violent conflict.

3. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have important implications for Mercy Corps and other aid actors working to address humanitarian needs and conflict-related issues in Jordan and other countries hosting major Syrian refugee populations.

- **Scale up integrated conflict management and community development interventions in host communities:** The situation is dire, but the findings of this research are encouraging as they point to a concrete model that has been successful and is scalable in the context of Syrian refugees and their host communities. Given the continued influx of Syrian refugees, increasing pressure on host resources, cultural- tribal- and protection-related tensions and their potential for fueling violence – conflict management interventions should be intentionally integrated with relief and development programs that engage Syrian and Jordanian leaders to spearhead positive change in their communities, ideally in close cooperation with local authorities. Mercy Corps’ conflict management program must also ensure that its interventions reach men as well as women and cater to their unique needs as necessary.
- **Expand access to and awareness of conflict management skills and mechanisms, and strengthen inter-group trust through open dialogue:** Our research found that those who had access to trusted leaders to mediate disputes were more likely to choose to resolve disputes peacefully. Mercy Corps’ training of local leaders in conflict resolution and negotiation skills, combined with building their relationships with their respective groups through open community days and activities, can serve as a replicable model for increasing access to peaceful conflict management mechanisms. Programs that build skills in negotiation and mediation should be expanded and make sure to incorporate leaders from a variety of communities and privilege levels, while also building relationships with each leader and the group that she or he represents. This can allow increased influence and power to spread among vulnerable groups, rather than being limited to the selected leaders only. As part of any expansion, programs should identify and strengthen the existing mechanisms community members turn to when needing to resolve disputes, while also increasing access to those mechanisms among the most vulnerable. Moreover, it is important to build awareness of such conflict resolution programs via publicity of services and success stories in the media.
- **Leverage interventions to build social cohesion and resilience of both refugee and host communities to conflict:** In light of the finding that increased social interactions among Jordanians and Syrians are significantly correlated with more willingness to compromise and solve conflicts peacefully, aid organizations should do more to promote positive and non-competitive social contact between refugees and hosts. Joint community projects that help ameliorate strains on local resources and services appear to be an effective way of supporting such interactions. Special outreach is needed towards



Jordanians who, threatened by the presence of Syrians in their communities, have responded with prejudice and fears. Mercy Corps has already begun to do this through community activities such as the Open Days and holiday iftar meals which provided unprecedented opportunities for the communities to mix and interact. Such activities should be maintained throughout the duration of the program, particularly as the Syrian population is highly mobile within Northern Jordan.

Activities should be designed to intentionally address the gendered differences in experience of the crisis. These include conflicts over marriage, how conservatively one should dress and act, and how parents teach their children about the “other.” While these may seem like petty issues, negative rhetoric at home manifests in bullying at school, creating conflicts that can then escalate into fights that involve entire families. It is these sorts of relationships that may not have mattered in the short-term (as most of the focus was on coping), but will matter immensely in building the resilience of both communities to conflict in the long-term. Given current political instability in the region, social cohesion among refugees and hosts is more important than ever before.

- **Deliver aid and communicate aid-related policies in a way that does not create or exacerbate conflict.** Recognizing that aid can be a source of tension and conflict, humanitarian organizations and donors must do more to avoid repeat distributions and fraud, making sure that aid is distributed equitably to the neediest communities and people. This research reveals that aid-community practices, already highlighted a year ago as a source of tension, have become more so during the past year. Organizations have been accused by the community of a lack of oversight, lack of respect for local authorities and tribal norms, and corruption or theft. Certain policies and new procedures were also identified by this research as having created yet another dimension of conflict, internally between Syrians whose needs are prioritized by the aid community and those who are not.



In response, leading NGOs should strengthen accountability and conflict-sensitivity of the aid community: organizations should make an effort to reach out to and register non-camp Syrians who have been in Jordan for an extended period and may be running out of resources, in addition to newly arrived refugees. Aid actors must enter communities with sensitivity to local conditions, being sure to incorporate local governments and community members into project planning from the outset of any anticipated work and to follow through

on their commitments. The Jordan iNGO forum and Inter-Agency Working Groups should offer trainings in Do No Harm and encourage NGOs to formally commit to a shared protocol.

- **Partner with the media to directly debunk myths about the refugees and aid practices.** As highlighted in the previous report, the critical role of the media in Jordan needs to be further harnessed to address misperceptions that fuel conflict. For example – many Jordanians in the focus groups articulated the belief that UNHCR was paying for all Syrians' rent and food and other supplies, and for this reasons

did not have any sympathy for the Syrians' anxiety about high rent when they perceived that UNHCR was "footing the bill". When Jordanians were informed by Mercy Corps staff that this was categorically untrue, however, they quickly expressed more sympathy for the Syrians' plight. Mercy Corps' pilot media program within the current FCO conflict management project has indeed succeeded in disseminating positive stories in Mafraq, Ramtha and all over Jordan. NGOs as a community could take this as a model and work together to disseminate information about aid activities and policies.

- **Advocate and cooperate with the Government of Jordan and donor agencies to create productive and legal opportunities for refugees.** Four years into the conflict, it is evident that issues such as the practices of refugee deportation and other destabilizing factors of concern are only increasing in magnitude in Jordan. Our research findings revealed that such issues are linked with key problems of survival and compound into vicious cycles. For example, the lack of legal income-generating opportunities has pushed many refugees to make ends meet through various coping strategies including child labor or more harmful illegal activities. Organizations should advocate for solutions to the shortage of housing and legitimate work opportunities, despite the immense challenges in facing these issues. Organizations must also stay aware of other emerging problems in communities and create interventions to respond before overt conflict emerges.



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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Focus Group Discussion Make-up and Participants

Location	Type	Nationality	Gender	Total Participants	Syrian Participants	Jordanian Participants
Mafrq	Community Leaders	Mixed	M	8	2	6
Mafrq	Community Leaders	Mixed	F	13	4	9
Sahel Houran	Community Leaders	Mixed	M	13	6	7
Sahel Houran	Community Leaders	Mixed	F	17	3	14
Mafrq	Community Members	Syrians	M	6	6	6
Mafrq	Community Members	Jordanian	F	8	0	8
Mafrq	Community Members	Syrians	F	8	8	0
Mafrq	Community Members	Jordanian	F	8	0	8
Sahel Houran	Community Members	Syrians	M	8	8	0
Sahel Houran	Community Members	Jordanian	M	8	0	8
Sahel Houran	Community Members	Syrians	F	8	8	0
Sahel Houran	Community Members	Jordanian	F	9	0	9
				114	45	69

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