AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

DISSECTING COLLABORATION MECHANISMS AND
DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT
AND UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES IN RESPONSE TO THE
SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS (2011- 2018)

by
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ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS OF

Yara Youssef El Moussaoui   for   Master of Arts
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Title: Dissecting Collaboration Mechanisms and Dynamics Between the Lebanese Government and United Nations Agencies in Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis (2011-2018).

This research explores collaboration mechanisms and evolving dynamics between the Lebanese government and the United Nations (UN) agencies in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, examining the period between 2011-2018. The primary objective of the thesis is to contribute towards expanding existing literature on the Syrian refugee crisis that has paid little attention to the ways national governments structure and manage their responses, and the relations between host countries and UN agencies. This research relies on qualitative data collected from interviews with key informants and lead staff members within humanitarian organizations, UN agencies and INGOs, as well as representatives from Lebanese ministries. This thesis, therefore, seeks to conceptualize the evolving dynamics in relations between the Lebanese government and UN agencies, contributing to fill the gap in literature on refugee crisis management, policy-making and relations between host countries and United Nations agencies, and provide useful recommendations and lessons learnt from these experiences. An analysis of the data reveals a turn in the Lebanese government's response to the refugee crisis after 2015, whereby the government adopted an active position in shaping the response plan, and shifted its dynamics of everyday collaborative work with designated UN agencies. This shift has had significant impacts on the provision of services to the most vulnerable refugee beneficiaries via implementing partners.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
CERD	Center for Educational Research and Development
GoL	Government of Lebanon
HRC	Higher Relief Council
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
MEHE	Ministry of Education
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PMU	Programme Management Unit
SDC	Social Development Centers
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"*Things have changed from the beginning of the response till now. Before, the United Nations (UN) used to be in total control of funds and donor relations, but the government stepped in. Nowadays, we do not work with a centralized organism, we work with several ministries that are very different in nature. The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) is a very politicized entity, not very approachable ,and not open to change nor to exchanging information. With the Ministry of Education (MEHE) there has been a great deal of resistance in sharing data from their side, which is essential to the functioning of our collaborative work. The Programme Management Unit (PMU) that was recently created within MEHE in response to the crisis to directly collaborate with UNICEF, wants to control everything, even the recruitment of the PMU staff, who are directly and completely funded by UNICEF, and enforces the recruitment of staff who are not always qualified. The relationship between UNICEF and Lebanese ministries is not very egalitarian. UNICEF needs government approval on everything.*"

I was told this story by a high-ranking UNICEF staff who has been collaborating with Lebanese ministries on several projects that aim to alleviate the negative repercussions of the Syrian crisis on both host and refugee communities in Lebanon. This statement is what first made me think about the dynamics of collaboration between the UN and Lebanon's state institutions and how these dynamics evolved from the beginning of the crisis response till now. The senior staff's statement openly criticizes and raises serious questions on the UN's mandate and operationalisation of work, that is nominally built upon ensuring a systematised process of capacity-building and collaboration with governmental institutions to equip them to better manage crises. Moreover, this statement raises important questions on the Lebanese government's

(GoL) role in managing the response to the Syrian crisis, and the resulting tensions and dynamics that arise.

Being one of the most researched and documented humanitarian crisis, there has been a plethora of reports and documents written about the Syrian conflict and its spill over effect on neighbouring countries. While conducting my initial research for my thesis, I was able to find a wealth of information and reports (technical and non-technical) that focus on the Lebanese government being either weak and ineffective, or resilient in face of the protracted crisis and a leading model of generosity. Most other literature has tended to adopt a sectoral approach in addressing the economic ramifications of the crisis (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). This literature, however, only provides an incomplete overall picture of the realities, and falls short of advancing a critical assessment of the Syrian refugee crisis response in Lebanon.

There exists, therefore, a dearth of literature and resources detailing the evolving role of the government and UN organizations, their shifting dynamics throughout the response, and how these dynamics and factors affected their collaboration and the quality of the response (Harvey, 2009). In my research, I therefore wish to investigate primarily the process of the response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, and the relations and dynamics between the GoL and the UN, assessing the extent to which each entity influenced the shaping of the response, as well as the causes and consequences of these dynamics. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to new knowledge that will fill the gaps within existing literature on the relation of national governments with international relief actors in responding to crises, particularly in the context of the response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon.

I, therefore, raise the following research question: How did the role and collaboration of both the GoL and the UN evolve, and how did these shifts in dynamics affect the collaboration, and the refugee crisis response on the ground? My research takes as case studies, UNICEF and UNHCR's responses and collaborations with two local governmental institutions, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and its associated Programme Management Unit (PMU), and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). These case studies aim to determine to what extent collaboration exists between UN agencies and local authorities, and to explore if they have seen their cooperation dynamics shift between 2011 and 2018. The case studies also provide insights into the impact of these shifting dynamics in the field on the nature of collaboration efforts, and the quality of the response.

In order to best address the research question, primary data was collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants from ministerial staff (the MEHE, MoSA), UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR), and UN implementing partners. To best tackle this research, I start first by providing an overall background and contextual analysis of the development of the crisis response. Second, I explore literature conceptualising relations between host countries and UN agencies, especially emerging critical literature shedding light on the role of governments and international humanitarian agencies in shaping crisis response interventions. Third, I flesh out and analyse the main findings of my research, exploring the relationship between UN agencies and GoL, and the challenges and lessons learnt from the UN's refugee crises response.

Findings indicate that there has been a considerable shift in the working dynamics between the UN and GoL throughout the response to the Syrian crisis in

Lebanon. This shift has placed the GoL in a stronger position after 2015 to shape the response and resulted in a shift in the dynamics of everyday collaborative between the staff of the designated UN agencies and ministries. This shift has also had significant impacts on the ground with resultant changes and challenges in service provision and coordination of response efforts.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

A. General Overview

As the Syrian conflict enters its ninth year, it continues to negatively impact the region as millions of Syrian refugees are still dispersed across neighbouring countries. Lebanon, one of the highest per capita ratios of registered refugees in the world (UNICEF, WFP, 2017), remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crises of modern times (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018). At the end of 2017, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) estimated that the country hosts 1.5 million Syrians who have fled the conflict in their country, including 997,905 registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Adding to this number, are the 34,000 Palestine Refugees from Syria, 35,000 Lebanese returnees, and a pre-existing population of more than 277,985 Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update). Out of the 1.5 million hosted displaced Syrian population in Lebanon, "more than 76 percent of displaced Syrians are living below the poverty line", with public services overstretched, and demands exceeding the capacity of public institutions and infrastructures. Therefore, the conflict in Syria has significantly impacted Lebanon's social and economic growth, deepened poverty and humanitarian needs, and exacerbated pre-existing development constraints in the country (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update).

Additionally, at the end of 2015, the crisis had cost Lebanon an estimated US$18.15 billion due to the economic downturn. Service sectors are overwhelmed, with the public health sector accruing debts as displaced Syrian patients are unable to pay off

their bills (UNICEF, AIR, 2018). Basic infrastructure cannot keep up with the large demand. Sixty-four percent of the overall population on Lebanese soil does not have access to safe drinking water services (UNICEF, AIR, 2018). The 1.5 million displaced Syrians have increased the demand on the hosting country services, which struggle to meet increased needs.

In 2017, the funding required to provide adequate support to the displaced population in Lebanon was estimated at US$ 2.035 billion. At the end of 2017, those needs were only 30% funded. Insufficient funding threatens basic services within Lebanon such as food assistance, health care, and access to safe water, as well as constrain the ability to support vulnerable localities in the prevention and management of tensions between host communities and refugees (UNICEF, WFP, 2017). Unemployment and high levels of informal labour were already a severe problem pre-2011, with the World Bank suggesting that the Lebanese economy would need to create six times as many jobs only to absorb the regular market entrants. The influx of Syrians increased levels of unemployment especially in some of the country's most vulnerable localities, putting considerable pressure on Lebanese communities (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update).

As a result, long-standing disparities have been deepening and tensions at local level have been rising, mostly over competition for employment and access to resources and services. The economic downturn has had an excessive effect on young people and others who are entering the workforce: Lebanon's youth unemployment rates are three to four times higher than the overall unemployment rate (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update).

Furthermore, the impact of the Syrian displacement has been exacerbated in Lebanon by the absence of a solid national strategy in response to the challenges posed by the influx of refugees and given the weak governance and a collapsing system of public service provision in Lebanon. Therefore, international organisations led by UN agencies took the initial lead in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011 (Boustani et al., 2016). However, the work of the UN, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was rendered more challenging and difficult since Lebanon has neither signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol. This has forced the UNHCR operations to proceed instead through informal agreements. Coordination, moreover, became more complicated due to the informal nature of refugee settlement in Lebanon, which followed refugees' social networks and their ability to take care of themselves outside of a settlement strategy organised by the government. As a result, the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon became a rather *impromptu* affair, resulting in lower efficiency and an unequal distribution of aid (Boustani et al., 2016).

B. Dissecting Developments Between 2011-2018

After reviewing the general context, I highlight in more details the interaction between GoL and UN and their impacts on shaping the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon, revealing how these interactions evolved and shifted greatly. The progression is laid out through three chronological phases:

1. 2011–14: The Lack of an Official Governmental Policy

The experience of hosting Palestinian refugees influenced greatly Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. In 1948, around 100,000 Palestinians sought refuge in Lebanon, and as their stay prolonged, limitations on their rights within Lebanon were established, including being restricted to camps that through time became overpopulated and under-serviced urbanized areas (Kelley, 2017). Based on the experience with Palestinian refugees and from the beginning of the Syrian refugee influx, Lebanese authorities, with only a few exceptions, dismissed any possibility of establishing formal refugee camps for fear they would become permanent. Similar reasons were given for the refusals to enable legal recognition of temporary residence and to facilitate registration of Syrian refugee births (Kelley, 2017). The government went even further in refusing to call any gathering of Syrian refugee a camp or Informal Tented Settlement (with tents alluding to a camp in Arabic), but as Informal settlements.

The earliest response to the influx of refugees in May 2011 was led by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the Higher Relief Council (HRC), whereby the former carried out registration and documentation, while HRC offered basic humanitarian assistance. This initial phase was described later by several reports as the phase of the 'policy of no-policy,' with the Lebanese government largely absent from deliberations and regulations on the settlement of refugees (Hamdan and Bou Khater, 2015; et Mitri, 2014; Idris, 2017). A non-encampment policy meant that refugees were settling informally in the Bekaa and North (Turner, 2015). While the numbers and humanitarian needs of refugees quickly increased, the budget and human resources of MoSA and HRC did not expand (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

Another factor that influenced the Lebanese government's response to the refugee crisis was Lebanon's long complex political history with Syria. From 1976 to 2005, Syria maintained a military presence and strong political influence in Lebanon. Syrian ties inside Lebanon therefore were and remain strong. Throughout the Syrian crisis, successive Lebanese governments have adopted a policy of neutrality, officially known as "disassociation," towards the situation inside Syria. Nonetheless, the two major political coalitions within Lebanon were divided, with one supportive of the Syrian opposition cause and the other backing the government of Syria (Kelley, 2017).

This political polarization over the situation in Syria politicized the discussion over the response itself to the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, leading to a laissez-faire 'policy of no-policy.' Because political leaders could not informally agree on a position on the events within Syria, they also could not form a consensus over the treatment of refugees entering from Syria (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). The 'Baabda Declaration' of June 2012, which announced the government's policy of dissociation from the conflict in Syria, further cemented the government's inaction on the issue of Syrian refugees within Lebanon (Hamdan and Bou Khater, 2015). Lebanon was to stand in solidarity with the humanitarian needs of Syrians but remain neutral and disassociate itself politically from the crisis.

Within less than a year, however, the Declaration was breached by Hezbollah, a major party in the Lebanese government, that declared that it was actively fighting inside Syria alongside the Assad regime (Hazbun, 2016). This was in tandem with the first postponement of Lebanon's parliamentary elections in 2013, followed by a two-year vacuum in the Lebanese presidency (Salloukh, 2017). However, deadlock did not stop UN agencies from providing basic relief and programming to address the situation

of refugees and impoverished host communities. By 2012, around 70 per cent of NGOs from survey data admitted they had shifted their missions to focus on Syrian refugees and that the majority of funding came from foreign donors, indicating increased support for refugee issues, despite the large absence of a formal government policy (European Union, 2015). As early as 2013, UNDP had set up a nationwide programme to help municipalities work on social cohesion efforts to help refugees integrate in Lebanese communities.

When the government finally made attempts to appeal to the international community in order to equip itself to address the crisis, the result was unfruitful. United Nations agencies and donors exhibited distrust in directly funding ministries to address the refugee crisis and reluctance even to share UNHCR's data on registered refugees (Mitri, 2014). The Lebanese government's no-policy phase had given the green light for UNHCR to take charge of the design and implementation of the humanitarian response. Even during political deadlock, the government outsourced the response to municipalities and NGOs funded by the United Nations and other donors. During this period, United Nations agencies were in complete control, with almost no interference from the government (Hamdan and Bou Khater, 2015).

2. *2014–16: The Government's Position Changes*

As the Syrian crisis became a protracted conflict, there was an apparent change in the policy of the Lebanese government and its relations with United Nations agencies. Due to a number of political developments, the government's position started to shift from a recipient to an active partner. Now Syria was experiencing a fully-

fledged war, with several actors involved, not limited to foreign militias and armies, and a growing influence of armed Islamist groups (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

In Lebanon, the number of Syrian refugees registered or awaiting registration with UNHCR increased by over half a million, reaching almost 1.2 million by September 2014 (UNHCR portal, 2018). A national unity government under Prime Minister Salam was formed in February 2014, represented by ministers from both March 8 and March 14. The presence of Syrian refugees was becoming beyond uneasy for the Lebanese, growing to become a more divisive issue for sectarian communities in Lebanon (Geha and Talhouk, 2018), and across all political lines there was a consensus that the persistent arrival of refugees was menacing the continued stability of the country (Kelley, 2017).

The turning point was the incidents in Aarsal, a small Sunni town bordering Syria, which had been a safety net for over 40,000 Syrian refugees whose number by August

2014 shadowed that of the local population of 35,000 inhabitants. While reports mention that Lebanese residents of Aarsal and similar areas initially welcomed refugees into their homes, by 2014, the socio-economic burden in addition to the security altercations with local authorities had begun to cause tensions between the host and refugee populations (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). Syrian opposition fighters moved openly in and out of Aarsal and, in early August 2014, they engaged in a violent stand-off with the Lebanese Army that left 19 Lebanese soldiers and 42 civilians dead, hundreds of soldiers and civilians wounded, and 29 policemen and soldiers captured by Al-Nusra and ISIS forces (Kelley, 2017). Security incidents like Aarsal's and the outpouring number of refugees took a heavy toll on vulnerable Sunni communities in

areas where Syrians settled in huge numbers, given the proximity to their home country and the political safety of being in a Sunni area, typically labelled as anti-Assad (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

Further, burdens on sectarian communities and polarization over the conflict within Syria was overpowered by a convergence of interests among politicians to develop a policy towards Syrian refugees within Lebanon. This was the beginning of a more assertive policy position in which the Lebanese government played a leading role. While the Lebanese government was still unable to take primary responsibility for the refugee response, the presence of refugees could no longer be neglected or overpassed anymore (Idris, 2017). The Lebanese Government shifted its position with respect to the United Nations from an observer and recipient to a balanced partner with significant negotiating power. This can be traced through a number of policy decisions and major events (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

The first official governmental policy on Syrian refugees was the October 2014 policy, which focused on three main headlines: "reducing the number of refugees, providing security, and alleviating the burden on the host community" (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). The measures to fulfil these objectives included border restrictions that began to be progressively imposed in September 2014, stemming in February 2015 the flow of refugees to the country (Kelley, 2017); requesting UNHCR to stop registering displaced Syrians except after the approval of MoSA; and organizing the relationship with international agencies according to Lebanese laws and treaties, necessitating access to all information about persons displaced from Syria in order to reduce their numbers in accordance with legal standards and to provide legitimate displaced persons with their needs. The policy also introduced the notion of supporting host communities and

pooling funding for government agencies in order to initiate projects for the development of the Lebanese economy (Boustani et al., 2016; et Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

Shortly after, the General Security Directorate issued a directive to change the regulations for entry and residency of Syrians in Lebanon, implemented starting 5 January 2015. These regulations required all Syrians to renew residency permits for a $200 annual fee and provided them with only two options to enter the country: registering with UNHCR and pledging not to work or finding a Lebanese sponsor. In May of the same year, the Cabinet requested of UNHCR to stop registering refugees from Syria and cancel all registrations since January 2015 (Boustani et al., 2016).

In parallel to changes within Lebanon, one has also to consider the context of immigration and advent of migrants and refugees to Europe, which raised fears within Europe of a mass influx of refugees and became part of the political debate. The European migration crisis served as one major driving factor that enabled the Lebanese government to assume a strong position in negotiating with the international community. Recognizing the international interest in stabilizing Lebanon and improving its security and socio-economic conditions, the Lebanese government benefited from the presence of refugees as an opportunity to request further funding. Starting in 2015, the Lebanese government made funding requests for sectors that had been performing weakly and worsened with the presence of Syrians including water, electricity and waste management, indicating an upgrade in the positionality of the government vis-a-vis the presence of refugees (Boustani et al., 2016).

In 2015, the Lebanese government launched the first Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) (Idris, 2017). The plan was led by the MoSA and co-coordinated by

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNDP (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). As stipulated in the 2016 LCRP document, it is "a multiyear plan to address the stabilisation challenges of the country, while taking into account key protection and humanitarian issues, livelihoods and countering threats to security", (LCRP, 2016) setting up a formal structure of coordination and implementation between government agencies, United Nations agencies, INGOS and local NGOs.

In 2015, the LCRP required that each intervention sector be co-led by a ministry ang giving some ministries a central role in relief coordination (Boustani et al., 2016). As a result of putting together the plan, the Lebanese government presented specific policy demands and desired outcomes and budgets. This included asking for direct financing of its ministries and municipalities to address the crisis at the 2016 London Conference for Supporting Syria and the Region, (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2017 Update).

Formally and officially, Lebanon had not recognized Syrians as refugees and violated its own commitment to withhold military intervention in Syria, and yet it had actively collaborated with the United Nations to develop an elaborate policy approach to handling education, energy, food, protection and health care. With changing political circumstances, European countries and the United Nations now had a vested interest in complying with the Lebanese government's decisions and requests, in order to help Lebanon cope with refugees and deter further resettlement of refugees across Europe (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

This period can be characterized as a period of partnership between United Nations agencies and the Lebanese government, whereby the former previously had a

green light to set their own strategy and direct the response to the refugee crisis, and the latter had previously been largely absent.

3. *2016–present: Lebanon's Leadership & Compliance with the United Nations*

Late 2016 witnessed the end of political deadlock in Lebanon. After over two years of presidential vacuum, the Lebanese parliament finally elected a president of the republic. Anti-refugee sentiments in the West coupled with internal political consensus enabled the Lebanese government to leverage the presence of refugees and enhance its bargaining power even further. Amidst these geopolitical changes, there was a shift in the government's discourse on the refugee crisis, shifting from lauding the role of the UN as the entity who has rescued the situation in Lebanon during the initial stages of the crisis to emphasising that sovereignty should not be compromised even though the UN are the main funders (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

This strategic shift is most clearly manifested through the creation of a Ministry of State for the Affairs of the Displaced. This ministry's main role is to develop a strategy for the government's response to the refugee crisis. Under the pretext of developing a clearer policy on refugees, ministries also took on a more assertive role in managing the crisis within their sectors and capitalize on the various funding opportunities to serve their own agendas.

Further, the government has been more brazen lately in appealing to donors to fund not only humanitarian and stabilization projects, but also development projects that are completely unrelated to the Syrian refugee crisis for infrastructure that has long been in dire conditions (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update).

The United Nations, on the other hand, has exhibited compliance with the demands and the approach that the government had been pushing for especially after 2016 and has effectively stopped registering Syrians including new-borns. This is reflected in the shift that occurred in the funding priorities by United Nations agencies, moving from relief efforts towards development projects in the Bekaa and North.

The above information and analysis in the background and context analysis section is the typical material to be found when one researches the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. However, new critical research is emerging contesting existing literature depicting the Lebanese government as weak, given the elaborate mechanisms, both formal and informal, that the government has used to influence United Nations policies and programmes on Syrian refugees. This research is arguing that the Lebanese government, throughout its response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon, is far from weak (Geha, Talhouk, 2018).

New arguments and expanding literature explore the evolution of Lebanon's response to the Syrian crisis and its influence on the policies and programmes of UN agencies. By devising and changing its policy stances, the Lebanese government was exerting greater influence over the crisis thereby changing its dynamics with United Nations agencies from a recipient of aid to an actor in shaping policies. This shows that, contrary to the prevalent logic of weak ineffective state, the Lebanese government displayed a capacity to step up and to influence United Nations agencies in the wake of crisis. This was most relevant to how the Lebanese government managed to allow United Nations agencies to cater to Syrian refugees' needs while treating them as "temporarily displaced migrants", and not refugees (Geha, Talhouk, 2018).

By questioning how the Lebanese governmental policy evolved during the crisis, one can understand how the government exerted influence over refugee policies and programmes in times of crisis, its shift from a mere recipient of aid to a major proponent in the design of policies to respond to the refugee crisis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. General Overview

In order to best address the research questions, primary data was collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants from MEHE, MoSA, UNICEF, UNHCR, and UN implementing partners. A series of open-ended questions for the informants are designed to better understand collaboration and cooperation mechanisms and these mechanisms' strengths and shortfalls. Open-ended questions offer the participants the flexibility to speak about cooperation mechanisms and projects in broad terms as well as provide specific and descriptive insights on their experiences. In total, this research relies upon fifteen semi-structured interviews that were conducted with a number of central actors within the humanitarian sector and UN agencies as well as governmental sectors working with Syrian refugees.

I proceeded to transcribe the interviews and analyse them using inductive content analysis. I was able to develop a coding scheme composed of the several themes and sub-themes that I expand upon in my analysis. The inductive grounded approach of my qualitative analysis allowed me to derive coding categories directly and systematically from the text, rather than imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Content analysis offered me the chance to develop the themes and relations within my data through a flexible, pragmatic and rich method that is grounded and inductive (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Given my own extensive work within this field, I also drew upon the informal discussions and observations I have collected over the years of work with humanitarian

organizations, Syrian activists, and beneficiaries from both vulnerable host and refugee communities. My own ethnographic observations working in the field of refugee humanitarian relief have assisted me in shedding light on collaboration mechanisms, the shifting dynamics, and its impact during the refugee response and will provide several key insights from an insider perspective. I approach these ethnographic insights reflexively, acknowledging both the valuable insights I am able to advance given my insider positionality as a researcher within the field, as well as the possible biases or oversight that result.

This research also relies upon extensive collection of secondary data through in-depth desk review to explore the literature on aid coordination especially in terms of UN and local institutions, collaborative approaches, and scales of governance with a focus on the Syrian crisis response in Lebanon starting 2011. The research tracks the developments in UN-governmental interactions since the start of the Syrian refugee crisis, and analyses the contents of the LCRP to highlight how concepts within the response have evolved over time. Further, I rely upon the UNHCR data portal for the Syria Regional Refugee Response for Lebanon and Activity Info[1] to track the achieved and non-achieved humanitarian indicators in order to best assess collaboration between UN agencies and local authorities in the field.

Through these multi-scalar methods, I seek to be alert to methodological triangulation of primary and secondary data in an effort to mitigate bias and answer my research question in a comprehensive manner that allows for an enhanced understanding of the research topic. Given my existing work experience in the field, I seek to reinforce

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[1] A software for data collection and reporting on activities which are geographically dispersed and implemented by multiple partner organizations and led by UN agencies

my methodological approach with existing knowledge of the field, and understandings of the interactions, tensions and challenges that arise between INGOs and government agencies in their work on the Syrian refugee crisis.

B. Limitations

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising number of cases in Lebanon disrupted the initial design of my fieldwork study. Initially, I intended to incorporate a second technique to collect primary data through attending humanitarian working groups that bring together UN and INGO staff with representatives from Lebanese ministries to discuss critical matters related to the crisis response in Lebanon, in order to observe their work dynamics. Throughout my attendance of these working group discussion, I had intended to focus on and observe the work dynamics that arise to keep my fieldwork manageable in a way that is methodologically defensible (Jerolmack and Khan, 2017).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this possibility as working group meetings were cancelled or shifted online, thereby greatly limiting the quality and nature of the data that could be collected. I, therefore, chose not to include this method and rely instead upon the in-depth interviews with informants through which I can collect dense observations. I believe the insights I was able to record from my interviews were able to offset the limitation posed by the elimination of the working-group component of the research.

The conduction of open-ended interviews was also shifted online due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the health-risks of in-person fieldwork and interactions. Online interviews typically lasted one hour and were conducted remotely using Zoom

online platform. While the use of remote online technologies has the potential to limit the ability to build trust and rapport between the researcher and the interviewee, the fact that my informants were mostly middle-class employees working within international institutions or holding higher-tier ministerial positions granted that their familiarity and ease with digital technologies was already developed. Therefore, the familiarity of my informants with the use of these platforms facilitated the shift towards online interviewing technologies and did not greatly impact or limit the quality of the data I was able to collect during the interview process.

Another limitation to the scope of my research is that it did not incorporate interviews with Syrian refugees themselves to observe the impacts of policy shifts within INGOs and government agencies on the refugees themselves. While an expansive literature has focused on the impact of policies and the shortfalls of humanitarian assistance on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, not enough has been written on the internal dynamics and tensions that arise between INGOs and governmental agencies in humanitarian responses. Given the limited time-frame and scope of this research, I, therefore, intend to focus primarily on the later agencies and organizations to be able to expand on existing understandings of their internal interactions.

C. Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the identities of my informants and the confidentiality of the data provided, and based upon the IRB recommendations, all my interviews are anonymous, and no personal identifiers were collected that could be traced back to the informant. In place of interviewee names, I use pseudonyms and provide only the basic abstract role or position of the interviewee (e.g. nature of their work, work position)

with respect to the research. This is intended to protect interviewees' identity when disclosing sensitive internal information or even general work-related information that could be subject to sanctioning by employees and institutions. All interviewees were informed of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation, and their participation was requested through IRB-approved 'Informed Consent Forms.'

CHAPTER IV

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon can be broadly categorized into three main streams. The first stream of research focuses on the weaknesses and dysfunctionality of Lebanese governance during the crisis (Fakhoury, 2017). Scholars in this stream depict the Lebanese state as failed or 'weak,' particularly in its (non)/response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Scholars within this stream focus on Lebanon from the lens of a weak state led by political 'elite bargaining' as the main mechanism for developing and agreeing on state policies (Clark and Salloukh, 2013). As such, the state's outsourcing of activities and programmes to local governments and NGOs is described as an outcome of failed governance as opposed to a purposeful strategy that allows Lebanon to maintain some form of political stability during the crisis (Atzili, 2010).

In contrast to the first tendency, the second stream of literature emerging on the Syrian refugee crisis focuses mostly on Lebanon being 'resilient' to the spill-over effects of the crisis in Syria (Salloukh, 2017; Wählisch and Felsch, 2015). Scholars here mainly highlight how Lebanon, as a 'weak state,' withstood rising security threats during the Syrian crisis (Hazbun, 2016). The third stream of literature takes a sectoral approach, addressing the economic and urban implications of the Syrian refugees crisis on Lebanon, focusing on refugee livelihood and service provisions such as health and education (Ammar et al., 2016; Buckner et al., 2017).

While providing extensive coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, this expansive body of literature, however, falls into a number of conceptual traps that often

reproduce rather than question analytical binaries such as weak/strong state. Moreover, existing literature's attention to the complex dynamics between state and INGOs, and how these in turn result in the politicization as well as de-politicization of the Syrian refugee crisis remain insufficient. What is needed, instead, is an account of Lebanon's crisis response that examines the dynamics between national politics and international organizations, placing them within the larger theoretical debates on globalization, forced migration, and international organizations' humanitarian response. In order to contribute to bridging the existing gap within literature on the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and better unpack its complexities, I bring in three intersecting bodies of literature that explore: conceptualizations of the 'state' and its role; globalization and relations between states and INGOs; and humanitarian aid response to the refugee crisis and its (de)/politicization effects.

A. The Lebanese State: Beyond Weak/Strong Dichotomies

The most prevalent and common notion in everyday public perceptions and political commentaries, as well as within scholarly discourses, bemoans the so-called weakness of the Lebanese state (Mouawad and Bauman, 2017; Kosmatopoulos, 2011). A dominant trend within academic and policy theorizing renders Lebanon the prototype of 'failed states' (Kosmatopoulos, 2011). Common expressions, such as "Mah fih dawleh bi Lubnan" (There is no state in Lebanon) or rhetorical questions such as "Wen el dawleh?" (Where is the state?) are highly common in popular discourses (Kosmatopoulos, 2011: 117).

Kosmatopoulos (2011: 117) argues that conceptualizations of Lebanon's "failing Leviathan" adhere to the Hobbesian concept according to which "humans are always

ready to resort to violence in order to defend personal and group interests, and civil wards can be avoided only through the establishment of strong sovereigns." Mouawad and Bauman (2017: 60), similarly, argue that classification of several developing countries as weak or 'failed states' in scholarly work, corresponds to the "Weberian ideal type of modern states" as built upon "rational-legal bureaucracy" and "a monopoly of legitimate violence over a given territory."

Lebanon, according to this logic, fits the category of a 'weak' state given: first, that the Lebanese society is perceived as primordially segmented; second, because the state does not claim monopoly over legitimate violence, nor protection of its sovereignty given the weakness of the army; third, because state autonomy is compromised by regional interference in domestic affairs; forth, given the laisser-faire nature of the economy and minimal state intervention, compensated by clientalistic networks of patronage (Mouawad and Bauman, 2017b: 68).

Kosmatopoulos (2011: 118) argues that while experts are often aware of the complexities involved, institutional constraints and a familiar sense of self-evidence to dominant "Western paradigms and binaries" lead them back to adopt the typology of "state failure." Yet, this conceptualization constitutes, according to Kosmatopoulos (2011: 134), a "powerful political instrument that effectively distributes moral responsibilities, rewrites historical trajectories, and reinscribes power relations."

However, critiques of the essentializing and western-centric roots of this term have been increasing, calling for a move away from conceptual dualisms and clear-cut "Weberian ideal types" towards an understanding of statehood as "hybrid" (Kosmatopoulos, 2011: 125). Critical literature is increasingly calling for questioning "not *which* states are failing but rather *for whom and how"* (Boas and Jennings, 2005, in

Kosmatopoulos, 2011). Any claim of "failure," argues Kosmatopoulos (2014: 481), "must be treated with care, given that the failure of some is the profit of others."

The acceptance of the archetypal notion of a 'weak state,' Mouawad and Bauman (2017b: 78) argue, does more in concealing complex dynamics and active interventions on behalf of the state. The authors, instead, call for transcending "weak-strong state categorizations" in order to better reveal the complexity of state-society relations. For instance, while the state's 'no-policy-policy' or ambiguous policies that 'formalize informalities' (Nassar and Stel, 2019) are often seen as a failure on behalf of a 'weak' and 'absent' state to properly intervene, transcending these binaries can help address the complexities involved in the response of the state to the refugee crisis.

By examining the Lebanese state's response to the Syrian refugee crisis beyond the common tropes of political deadlock and lack of capacity and infrastructure, Nassar and Stel (2019: 50) argue that "institutional ambiguity" has been also strategically adopted by the state as a response in its own right. Nassar and Stel (2019) argue that the Lebanese government's policies or lack thereof represent 'strategic' choices that seek to reproduce uncertainty. "Institutional ambiguity" is then strategically adopted in the initial response to either absolve the state from its responsibilities towards Syrian refugees or to create inadequate conditions that compel refugees to leave the country (Nassar and Stel, 2019). Similarly, Geha and Talhouk (2018) argue that while research often frames the Lebanese state's inadequate response to the Syrian refugee crisis as a result of its weak and divided nature, the government's subsequent agency and active role in influencing UN policies and work points to the contrary.

The second most common narrative often advanced by the international community and political leaders and echoed even among scholars, instead celebrates the

Lebanese state's so-called 'resilience,' especially in relation to the influx of Syrian refugees into the country (Mouawad, 2017). Yet, as Mouawad (2017) argues, 'resilience' is neither a policy nor set of practices, but a discourse that serves to conceal the empowering of a "system of patronage and clientalism—"often endorsed directly or indirectly by the international community"—while undermining public institutions of the state. The discourse of 'resilience' feeds back into the "weak-strong state categorizations" that conceals the reproduction of elite and private interests at the expense of state institutions (Mouawad, 2017: 4).

In order to overcome the analytical binaries of weak/strong state that conceal more than reveal to better understand the complexities at play, this research adopts Timothy Mitchell's (1991: 89) conceptualization of the state that acknowledges the "elusiveness of the state-society boundary" and the "complexity and collusion in state-society relations." Mitchel (1991: 91) calls for the need to move beyond an understanding of the state as a "coherent" object separate from society, or as an "organizational" entity consisting of "individual officials" led by "national interest," or even reduced to an autonomous realm of "rule making, decision making and policy-making."

Instead, Mitchell (1991: 94) calls for understanding the state as an "effect," stating that "By approaching the state as an effect, one can both acknowledge the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their elusiveness." The "state effect" actually works to create the illusion of a divide between state and society, a "line drawn internally," Mitchell argues, to maintain the social and political order. Yet, Mitchell (2006: 174) states that this must not lead us to reject 'the state' as a concept altogether, but instead, to examine the ways in which the state

constructs itself as a "discrete, self-directing object" separate from society and conceals the "porous edges" between the official and unofficial. Similarly, scholars have increasingly adopted caution against conceptualizing the state "as a given—a distinct, fixed and unitary entity that defines the terrain in which other institutions function" (Gupta and Sharma, 2006: 8 in Kosmatopoulos, 2011: 120).

Therefore, rather than reproduce empty dichotomies or taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes the 'state' in Lebanon, this research seeks to challenge existing literature on the state's response to the Syrian refugee crisis to better unpack the complex dynamics and interactions between official state institutions and international organizations that led this response, which takes us towards the second body of literature below.

B. Governance of the Refugee Crisis: Relations between Host Countries & the UN

Relations between host countries and United Nations agencies have been a focus of a growing literature, especially after the Cold War (Black, 2001). Within this field of study, UN agencies have come under scrutiny in cases where basic rights of refugees have been violated such as in Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst others (Salama et al., 2004). But, when it comes to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, little has been done to understand how governments of host countries were able to influence UNHCR's policies (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

Recent research reveals the Lebanese state's shifting dynamics of response to the Syrian refugee crisis from a "policy of non-policy" to an active leading role vis-à-vis UN agencies (Geha and Talhouk, 2018; Nassar and Stel, 2019). The result of this

shift was the advancement of the October 2014 policy framework that sought to limit the number of refugees in Lebanon and alleviating pressure on the host community, which led to requesting UNHCR to stop registering Syrian refugees except following approval from MoSA (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). The General Security Directorate, moreover, shifted regulations for entry and residency making it more restrictive for Syrian refugees to navigate ever-changing and uncertain waters (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). The European fears of increasing refugee influx, in addition, gave the Lebanese government additional bargaining power, compelling the state to request further aid (Geha and Talhouk, 2018). Therefore, contrary to the initial passive role, the launch of the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) in 2015, and later the Ministry of State for the Affairs of the Displaced, which sought to coordinate relations between the government agencies and UN and local NGOs, paved way for greater leadership and influence of the state upon the work of UN agencies (Geha and Talhouk, 2018).

Recent policy oriented and sectoral studies were conducted to assess the impacts of specific legislative shifts on refugee's access to different services, such as education, healthcare and the labour market. The developments in the Lebanese state's policy regulations adopted in October 2014 increased restrictions on the residency and work of Syrians in Lebanon resulted in detrimental impacts. The requirement for Syrian workers to obtain a pledge of responsibility from a Lebanese sponsor as of January 2015, while denying the right to work from Syrians registered under the UNHCR, increased vulnerability with many having to decline the partial aid provided by UNHCR in order to work (Lebanon Support, 2016).

The process of finding a 'Kafeel' willing to pledge responsibility and undergo the complex bureaucratic process and fee requirements, in turn, places more constraints

upon Syrians and subjects many to increasing exploitation, pushing them into illegality

and informality (Lebanon Support, 2016). Moreover, the government's request for the

suspension of registration of new Syrians by UNHCR in May 2015 provided the final

blow (Lebanon Support, 2016). As argued in Lebanon Support's report, under this

pretext, Syrians suffer in either cases from poverty and indebtedness as both

humanitarian assistance from UNHCR and wages from informal labour falling far short

of insuring adequate living and wellbeing.

In addition, the interaction between visa requirements and governmental

restrictions that produce fear, insecurity and discrimination are often overlooked in

humanitarian organizations' design of service provisions such as healthcare. The

contradictions and tensions between the state's policies and UN agencies' response is

evident in the case of Syrian refugee's access to healthcare in Lebanon. According to

Parkinson and Behrouzan (2015), UNHCR's humanitarian healthcare system and

procedures facilitating access to healthcare for Syrian refugees in Lebanon often

overlook important factors such as everyday insecurity and informality that prohibit

refugees from seeking healthcare services. The fragmented nature of the healthcare

system in Lebanon further impacts UN agencies' response. While UNHCR is

responsible towards healthcare provisions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it only

covers 74% of refugees' medical costs and only in life-threatening emergencies,

leaving refugees with chronic health conditions that do not qualify outside any

possible protection scheme (Lebanon Support, 2016b).

While taking proactive steps to offer educational opportunities for Syrian

refugees in Lebanon, the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

(MoEHE) and UN agencies remains fraught with a number of challenges that speak to

the unresolved tensions between host countries and international organizations. The MoEHE's adoption of the 'Reaching all Children with Education' (RACE) framework in 2014, while promoted by the shift towards right-based service provisions and the availability of funding, remained limited in terms of implementation (Buckner et. al., 2018).

Despite major efforts, the three-year program fell short of its intended goals, particularly given the multiplicity of formal and informal actors involved in the education service provisions for refugees, and their legitimacy, knowledge and reach within local communities (Buckner et. al., 2018). Buckner et al. (2018) argue that unofficial civil society initiatives and local community-based organizations providing educational services under the radar benefitted from their close proximity to refugee communities and personal sensitivity and connections and have been better able to meet refugee's needs compared to larger organizations.

Provisions for refugee education by UN agencies present complex arenas where the interplay and conflict between human right codes and doctrines of international organizations and the limiting citizenship rights within host nation-states pose a challenge for relations between the two (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Dryden-Peterson (2016) traces the historical changes in relations between UNHCR and nation-states in relation to education provisions for refugees, given the increasing numbers of refugees and the protracted nature of displacement. UN agencies have been shifting their role from central leaders in designing education programs for refugees, often acting as "pseudo-states" supranational entities, towards a reintegration of refugee education within national systems (see UNHCR 20112 Global Education Strategy, GES) (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). As a result, since 2011 UNHCR has been seeking to form formal

relationships with national authorities to coordinate refugee education provisions, taking into consideration local provisions and particularities (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). However, despite this coordination and integration, Dryden-Peterson (2016) argues that refugees still face the challenges of having been barred from future economic, political and social integration within host countries, including exclusion from the right to work and make use of their educational attainment, pointing to a marked paradox and misalignment.

The absence of encampment policy within Lebanon in turn left settlement and registration to municipalities within already vulnerable and impoverished communities of the Bekaa and North (UNICEF, WFP, 2016). The unregulated settlement of refugees in poor regions contributed to increasing tensions over unemployment and aid provisions (Knudsen, 2017). The United Nations contributed to lauding Lebanon's response as resilient to the extent that it is being hailed as a major international pillar and a model of generous hospitality (Government of Lebanon, United Nations, 2018 Update).

Yet, while initially praised by international organizations for being a more humane and cheaper solution, the 'non-camp policy', however, is argued to be the result of deep political divisions over the Syrian war, which resulted in the absence of a clear policy (Knudsen, 2017). Other researchers, such as Turner (2015) among others, posit that the state opted for non-encampment because it lacked capacity to regulate and police potential camps.

However, others contend that the ability of the Lebanese government not to recognize Syrians as refugees and not to enact an encampment policy is not a result of weakness, but a purposeful and practical policy response. Nassar and Stel (2019) argue

that the government's no camps approach is linked to previous experiences with refugee crisis that link camps to potential security threats and long-term settlement. Not to recognize refugees, establish camps or develop coherent policies, allowed the Lebanese state to dodge a politically sensitive issue and its legal responsibility towards refugees (Nassar and Stel, 2019). Furthermore, despite a tumultuous political and security situation, as the crisis worsened, Lebanese governments undertook active, stringent, fickle and arbitrary policy responses that evolved during the crisis and led to severely detrimental consequences (Nassar and Stel, 2019).

The impacts of refugees on host countries labour market is, moreover, an important focal point and bone of contention when it comes to relations between INGOs and host countries. Recent policy legislations adopted by the Lebanese government since October 2014 aimed to restrict the presence of Syrians in the country under the pretext of protecting the national labour force (Lebanon Support, 2016).

Yet, besides overlooking the positive and significant contribution of Syrian cheap labour force to the Lebanese economy, these measures resulted instead in increased illegality, informality and exploitation among refugees (Lebanon Support, 2016). Arguments advanced by the political class on the detrimental impacts of the Syrian crisis, moreover, overlook the significant contribution of the influx of humanitarian aid money and support to the Lebanese economy (Lebanon Support, 2016). These arguments, in addition, often overlook the pre-existing economic hardships and absence of adequate infrastructure in their attempts to place all blame on the refugee crisis.

In an article on the impacts of Syrian refugees on the labour market in Jordan, Fakih and Ibrahim (2016) argue that the economy in Jordan was already facing

significant challenges prior to the refugee crisis. Despite this, Syrian refugees in Jordan receive access to public health services, free education, and inclusion into food voucher and cash assistance programs (Fakih and Ibrahim, 2016). While not legally allowed to work in Jordan, Syrian refugees' informal employment has been on the rise, according to the article's extensive data analysis, yet with only slight impacts on the labour market and native salaries and employment (Fakih and Ibrahim, 2016).

A number of important lessons has, in fact, been cited from Jordan's more recent experience with the adoption of the Jordan Compact in the donor conference in London on February 2016 (Leener and Turner, 2018). The Jordan Compact represents the first formal recognition by a Middle Eastern country of the importance of formal integration of Syrian refugees into the productive labour force (Leener and Turner, 2018). The Jordan Compact aimed to provide 200,000 Syrians with work permits, triggering the enthusiasm of international organizations into this experiment (Ibid.). Yet, while representing an important precedent, the Compact faced a number of challenges, and eventually only around 35,000-45,000 permits were put in effect (Leener and Turner, 2018).

While standing as an important step towards collaborations between state governments and the international community, the Compact experience points to the need for incorporating the rationales of multiple actors, such as experts, academics and international organizations, as well as the refugees themselves in the planning and strategizing of responses to the crisis (Leener and Turner, 2018). While including innovative measures such as the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in collaboration with the EU to employ refugees in Jordan and improve access to European market for businesses that employ refugees within the SEZs, the Compact overlooks

important factors related to the livelihoods and securities of refugees and the host communities involved (Huand et. al., 2018).

In addition to the need for more attention to the complex socio-economic and strategic elements in planning Compacts, Huand et al. (2018) argue that creating multi-stakeholder governance boards led by host governments as well as international organizations, donors and local actors can help systematize and strategize more effective Compacts. Which brings us to the third body of literature this research seeks to draw upon which focuses on the nature, impacts and consequences of international humanitarian responses to crisis.

C. The Humanitarian Response: Between Politicization & De-politicization

Analysis of refugee crises can never be entirely non-political, and the protection and repatriation of refugees, for instance, are highly politicized matters (Goodwin-Gill, 2017). Although UNHCR is committed to core protection principles across the world, it often comes into confrontation with the political interests of countries hosting refugees and even with the politics of its own members (Chimni, 1998). An article by Leenders and Mansour (2018) reveals how the Syrian regime's claim to state sovereignty in the face of international humanitarian efforts gave it exceptional control over aid distribution and channels as well as access to resources and benefits that became highly politicized against the best intentions of aid institutions.

The Syrian government required from agencies to seek constant clearance from authorities, or restricted provisions through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARC) that is directly linked to the regime. All INGOs were required to go through SARC, the primary gate keeper, resulting in disproportionate provision directed away

from opposition-held areas with the greatest need for aid (Leenders and Mansour, 2018). Government-accredited NGOs and charities partnered with UN agencies were strong supporters of the regime and parachuted straight into UN agencies, occupying senior staff positions. Business cronies and supporters also benefited from the multi-billion dollar humanitarian aid, with UN agencies and international organizations contributing with significant sums of money to SARC and the Syrian government to cover salaries and services (Leenders and Mansour, 2018).

The government also had political impact on UN and INGOs' assessment reports and plans, with agencies having to downsize the threats and scope of needs in opposition areas (Leenders and Mansour, 2018). These limitations deeply impacted the work of UN humanitarian organizations often standing in the face of aid provisions to cross-frontline areas (Leenders and Mansour, 2018). These arguments reveal how authoritarian regimes can manipulate humanitarian aid agencies and international organizations to their interests, while reinforcing their control and sovereignty. In fact, the article argues that through their humanitarian efforts, UN agencies have as a result inadvertently contributed to the regime's resilience (Leenders and Mansour, 2018).

Another significant factor when tackling humanitarian aid organizations, concerns categorizations of refugees. UNHCR, argues Janmyr and Mourad (2018), through its categorizations of refugees may actually reinforce vulnerability and perceptions of who is deserving of humanitarian aid. The article describes the short-comings in UNHCR's vulnerability assessment protocols and criteria that is often kept obscure to prevent claim making (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018). These categorizations often fail to recognize different forms of vulnerability faced by unregistered refugees living under informal conditions, as well as the experiences of both men as well as

women, when it comes to determining access to humanitarian aid (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018). The ambiguous and conflicting categorizations of Syrian refugees as registered/unregistered or recorded refugee by UNHCR, or as 'vulnerable/mandate/convention refugee' by resettlement officers and 'worker/displaced/foreigner' by local authorities all have ambiguous and conflicting implications on the opportunities and rights given to different categories of refugees by different actors (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018b).

These inconsistent categories are often exclusionary in not accounting for different dimensions of vulnerability and the experiences, for instance, of young men with informality and exploitation (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018b). Syrian refugees, as a result, are trapped in different categorizations by humanitarian organizations as well as local and national authorities and society at large that often reinforce rather than alleviate vulnerabilities and exploitation (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018b).

A number of studies have, additionally, pointed to the de-politicization effects of humanitarian aid efforts that serve in overshadowing nagging political questions in favour of an approach to refugees as bare bodies to feed and shelter. Hanafi (2010) in his work on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon argues that, "By classifying people as victims, the basis of humanitarian action is shifted from rights to welfare." The NGOization of civil society under the impact of professionalization and donor funding requirements, according to Hanafi and Tabar (2003), shifts organizations towards disassociated, neutral and de-politicized forms of action that are often disassociated from local actors and populations. NGOs, including INGOs, often rely on small numbers of professionalized staff whose job is to target and aid particular populations,

which raises a number of questions on their legitimacy, representativeness and democratic structure (Jad, 2004, Kosmatopoulos, 2014).

With humanitarian aid also come different forms of control, particularly in the management and securitization of refugee camps, that reproduce hierarchies of vulnerability and dependence upon aid, while suspending refugees in "states of exception" outside the frameworks of rights and legality (Agamben, 2005; Agier, 2010). Agamben (2010) argues that protection and legal status remains tied to citizenship rights and the nation-state, while refugees remain suspended in temporary status and excluded as a "*homo sacer*" outside of human jurisdiction and devoid of value. The nation-state, therefore, retains authority over who is admitted into political life and who is consigned to a bare life by evoking the "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005). International organizations operating under the banner of de-politicization through strict humanitarian aid provisions, therefore, risk reproducing and maintaining vulnerability and exclusions.

These various points and aspects in international organizations' response point to the complex dynamics between and among international organizations and state official parties providing humanitarian crisis relief. Literature critical of the politicizing and depoliticizing impacts of humanitarian interventions has been necessary to unpack these interactions in more depth, and examine their implications on Syrian refugees in host countries.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

A. Beyond Weak/Strong State Dichotomy

A central question in understanding the government's response, or lack of response, prior to 2015, is whether it was a deliberate 'policy of no policy' or rather the outcome of weakness. All interviewees in this research agreed that the government didn't have the needed capacities to respond to the crisis. One clear example of the absence of adequate capacities is the MEHE's struggles with bureaucracy and the coordination of the response. As mentioned by a senior UN staff deployed to MEHE, efforts by the ministry weren't always efficient, referencing instances when the ministry's delegate would fall asleep during working group meetings led by the UN. This was one among many other factors that enabled the UN to lead the response, circumventing the MEHE. According to this interviewee, the shift that took place from 2015 onwards is that a team fully dedicated to the emergency, the PMU, was created, regardless whether it was successful or not, but a department was created dedicated to the emergency in the ministry.

According to another senior UN staff deployed to MEHE, the government didn't have the ability to respond without the UN. Taking as an example the PMU, even after 2015 when the government gained more presence, the UN was behind opening-up the PMU department, writing the program, enrolling students and paying them money. Another senior INGO worker stated that the government did not intervene from 2011 till 2015 because of lack of capacities as it didn't have the knowledge or expertise to deal with the extensive needs or manage the influx of funding that was entering the

country back then. According to the senior INGO worker, the government does not have the capacity to do coordination platforms, but also, the interviewee notes, it lacks political will. "When you observe how the refugees entered the country, the government adopted the position of an observer, thinking, let us observe and see what will happen. Rather than enact encampment policies, among other things, government just allowed things to unfold without having to take certain costly positions or decisions that could lead to refugee settlement, argues the interviewee. Similarly, another senior UN staff adds that: "I believe that the government was weak and still is. We can't deny this. The government doesn't have the capabilities to respond to anything, not even to internal crises, so how could it respond to external ones? It is a weak state, but at the same time it decided to have no policy for political considerations that we have already mentioned: not to make Syrians comfortable, fear of them of staying here, etc".

The view that government action or non-action was motivated by deliberate political considerations is supported by several other interviewees. As a senior INGO staff concurs, "As everything in this country it was a political decision. At the beginning of the crisis a certain party wanted to regulate the influx of the Syrians (FPM). And since they don't have aligned political agendas, an adversary political party (Future movement) stated that this shouldn't be the case, and Lebanon should support the Syrians as they are our brothers. In 2015 there was a change in the political scene in Lebanon with the arrival of FPM to power. There was also the fear from changes in demographics, a threat as well between 2011 and 2018 as the numbers of refugees were very high. All of these are reasons, in addition to the acknowledgement that there's money coming into the country and we have to regulate this, contributed to the way the response developed."

This is in line with the literature review shared previously in the context analysis that argues that the government's intervention in 2015 was very much compelled by political considerations and events. Before 2015, and with the beginning of the influx of refugees, the government's response was torn between two conflicting directions, one to regulate the influx (held by the FPM) and the other not to limit it (Future Party). The influx of funds tipped the balance towards pushing the government to intervene.

This nuanced view was collaborated by other senior UN staff interviewed, one of whom was deployed to MEHE and believes that the government did not intervene at the beginning of the crisis both because it didn't have the capacity to respond *and* it deliberately opted for a policy of no policy. According to this senior UN staff, "At the beginning of the crisis all the country was in a coma, there wasn't a policy in place as they thought all of these refugees will return home soon, and based on our experience with the Palestinian refugees, we learned not to welcome refugees anymore and not to call them refugees". The government did not consider the protracted Syrian crisis in Lebanon as a 'refugee' crisis, but rather as a 'displacement' crisis. This approach undermined UNHCR's work, "the main problem was that the ministry didn't consider them refugees but displaced, while the UN considered them refugees. The UNHCR dealt with the country as one facing a refugee crisis. The government was not intervening thinking the crisis will be ending soon, and therefore there would be no need to plan anything since they will return home in six months or so. It was only after two years that the government became aware that these refugees are here to stay, and started to plan accordingly". Therefore, both absence of adequate capabilities and deliberate political non-action informed the earlier stages of the crisis, with the Lebanese government in denial of the possibility that the crisis would become

protracted *and* in refusal of acknowledging the rights and entitlements that would incur from labeling the situation as a 'refugee crisis.'

Yet, the government's denial of the possible longevity of the crisis affected the response planning to the crisis. The government adopted a short-term response plan on a yearly basis, which was mostly reflected in the planning of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The LCRP, the joint plan between the Lebanese government and its international and national partners, was only laid out for two years, and was renewed for a third year. The government adopted a year by year response strategy, out of refusal to acknowledge or concede that Syrian refugees would likely be staying for much longer. The refusal to devise any long-term plan, with the belief that if any planning was done, refugees will be incentivized to stay in Lebanon, was therefore a deliberate, politically informed decision, or as some have termed it, a 'policy of no policy'. Another senior INGO worker explicitly said that the government did not intervene based on a political decision, raising the nonetheless political banner of 'neutrality.' "The fact that the government decided not to have role, this is a policy by itself," the interviewee argues.

The Lebanese government's attitude started shifting away from the initial stance towards more involvement, likely given the availability of aid. A common view that emerges across the interviews is that the government's decision to intervene was politically motivated by the availability of aid funds. Granted the intervention would allow greater governance control and ownership on what is happening on the Lebanese soil, especially as the government realized the crisis was bound to continue, which it did, and as the political context in 2015 pushed the government to take the lead. According to a senior UN staff member, "I believe the government became involved in

the LCRP when it saw the large amount of funds coming into the country, and realized there is room to manipulate and recruit people here and there."

Several INGO and UN staff members held similar negative views on the government's intervention, arguing that the Lebanese government was after the aid money coming in, but also denied refugees the right to work. According to a number of interviewees, the decisions taken by the government did not follow any higher reasoning or serve for instance public interest by diverting funds to the development of Lebanon's infrastructure. Even the adoption of the neutral dissociation policy, was not followed by concrete efforts to implement this stance in practice, nor was the government placing any effort to showcase a possible future role in the reconstruction of Syria.

Therefore, arguments dominant within mass media and even among certain academic work on the Lebanese state that simply rest on the assumption that the Lebanese state is 'weak' overlook the complex manner through which the Lebanese political state and its system are structured in such a manner to perpetuate the stronghold of sectarian political parties. The government response's weakness, moreover, is not to be blamed on the UN either. Everyone wants and benefits from the 'weak' presence of the government. The government's weakness is after all what justifies the presence, intervention and work of international organizations like the UN. As became evident through several critical discussions with key informants operating from within, the aid system is built in a way that doesn't enable the government to become stronger. As stated succinctly by a senior UN staff, "It is exactly the 'weakness' of the government that justifies the presence of everyone else". Moreover, having a powerful government would not allow outside contenders to take over, and in a country

like in Lebanon where everyone wants to have a leading role, a powerful central government would be a detriment to the independent operation of competing organizations. In other words, there are no incentives to strengthening the role of the government.

This critical dynamic that is an intrinsic part of the international aid paradigm is often overlooked within literature on the Syrian refugee crisis and the Lebanese state's relationship with UN agencies. INGOs are built upon and subsist by advancing their organizations that would provide the support needed to 'weak' and incapacitated government, thereby contributing to and reproducing this weakness. While talks of capacity-building are rife everywhere among international organizations, no one would really benefit from having a strong government. The political economy of the humanitarian aid sector is built upon filling in the gaps left behind by weak governments. Meanwhile, the funding for services channeled in, rather than be directed towards benefiting vulnerable population, raise additional questions about who is actually benefitting. Designed by elite employees behind international organizations, these services do not speak enough to the needs of people they are meant to serve. The next section will seek to dissect these dynamics by exploring the case of the MEHE's response to the crisis and its collaboration, or lack thereof, with INGOs, and the UN agencies in particular.

B. Corruption, Cronyism and The Creation of Parallel Systems

1. Case of the MEHE:

To better unpack and highlight the complex dynamics in the relationship between UN agencies and governmental institutions, I zoom into the particular case of the

MEHE's response plan to the refugee crisis, that has also recently garnered added media attention with the leakage of scandalous corruption allegations against the MEHE and the Minister of Education then, Elias Bou Saab.[2] Rather than strengthen the existing governmental systems, the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon contributed to the creation of a parallel system within the MEHE. As argued by several interviewees, this parallel system, the Program Management Unit (PMU), was mostly created for political reasons, to try to please the government in power. The PMU is the executive arm of the RACE program, which provides education services to Syrian refugees, and focuses on the implementation of programs funded through RACE and follows up on their implementation within the field. The PMU, therefore, does not directly implement the projects in the field but instead manages and follows up on their implementation.[3] When asked what they experienced at the ministry when they were deployed, one of the interviewees, a senior UN employee who was deployed from the UN to MEHE, said:

> "The ministry's structure already had some mechanism to support the response to the emergency, the Committee of Education in Emergencies that was initiated when the Iraqis fled to Lebanon in 2003. However, unfortunately, the existing structures and the committee were not fully activated with the start of the crisis."

The deployed UN staff only met once with the coordinator of the committee during the five years they spent at MEHE, although the committee convened the heads of primary education, secondary education, CERD, and representatives from UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children, which could have made it highly effective in the response to the

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[2] To learn more, see Shuayb, Maya (2020). How a generation of Syrian children in Lebanon were robbed of their education. Open Democracy. Retrieved from: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/how-generation-syrian-children-lebanon-were-robbed-their-education/
Riad Kobeissi, Al Jadeed. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bEZusgS4PM
[3] For more info on what is RACE II and the PMU, check LCRP 2017-2020.

Syrian crisis. Instead, a creation of a parallel system, the PMU, was supported by the then appointed Minister Elias Bou Saab.

To highlight the corruption that was taking place in MEHE with regards to the response to the Syrian refugee Crisis, the UN deployed staff stated that:

> "Bou Saab came in and created the PMU for political reasons and took control of the RACE program (although the UN wrote it) as if it were his own creation. He "invented" the PMU that doesn't report to the general director but reports to the minister, and he brought in all of his cousins and sons and daughters of his bodyguards, drivers, etc. and enrolled them in the PMU, they are all also from one political party. Moreover, he appointed a close person of his the head of the PMU, and the UN agreed. As a UN staff, I tried to advocate relentlessly against this, all alone, and was trying to raise voices from inside UNICEF and UNHCR that we are creating a parallel system and excluding the general director, and when the minister leaves there will be retaliation and the director general will take vengeance, and this is what actually happened. I told them we are perpetuating corruption: we are recruiting kids, without conducting any interview, we don't know who they are, and we are paying them money to do something they know nothing about. We are creating a unit instead of strengthening the ministry's infrastructure."

Rather than attempt to consolidate the work of the ministry, UN interventions contributed in one way or the other in strengthening divisions and the creation of parallel competing internal mechanisms. Other senior UN employees confirmed what was mentioned above by the senior staff member, and that this approach was a "UN mistake", perpetuated by working through and closely with the government. This adds to larger questions on how the UN operates, and how the close collaboration of the UN with governments often times sacrifices transparency, efficiency and capacity-building. This was compounded by a constant fear from UN agencies of not being allowed to work anymore on the Lebanese soil if they do not comply with all governmental decision, to which they ceded power.[i]

The creation of a parallel system paved way for another strategic shortfall, with work and reporting being directed to the dominant political authority in the ministry, namely the minister, rather than to the Director General whose position is more stable than the minister's. Quoting one of the interviewees, a senior UN staff deployed to MEHE: "It was important to work with the Director General rather than the minister as he is the one who stays while the minister would eventually be replaced." This shortfall could be interpreted on several levels as contributing to strengthening the existing corruption within the system, with the tacit support or complicity of high-level UN officials. Rather than address or confront the root causes of corruption within the existing systems, UN agencies' compliance with the status quo rather serve in reproducing or reinforcing existing corruption. We can also add that by supporting the minister, whose presence is typically temporary in the ministry, UN officials appear to have a lack of adequate knowledge or understanding of the local political context, and the volatility of political appointments in Lebanon. These shortfalls would have lasting and significant implications, affecting the nature and quality of educational serves for thousands of Syrian refugee children.

The appointment of employees was also evidence of the consolidation of corruption. Strengthened by the creation of a parallel system that wasn't really needed as there was existing structures that could have been consolidated, the appointment of the head of the PMU was heavily motivated by crony-political considerations. As stated by the senior UN staff, "The head of the PMU was 90% selected for political reasons, as she is part of the FPM and is very close to president Aoun. She was close to the extent that she used to call him on the phone. Bou Saab also appointed her as head of PMU because there's a lot of money involved, and he wanted to pick someone on his side

given these benefits." The creation of a parallel system, therefore, promoted increased divisions inside the ministry, given that the head of the PMU wasn't appointed by the Director General, who typically wanted to conduct a fair recruitment process to see who will lead the PMU, but in principal was also against the creation of the PMU from the start.

Throughout the response, the creation of parallel systems was taking place across different ministries, knowing that this was common place even before this response. This raises important questions on the role of the UN in countries already suffering from systemic corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. In overlooking existing shortfalls and loopholes within the political and administrative machinery, the UN, knowingly or not, served in reproducing and consolidating the corruption and fragmentation. Quoting the senior UN staff deployed to the ministry:

> "It has always been like this, with ministers coming in and bringing in with them their 'entourage.' They would move people from one group to another, and we as UN would respond anyway. We allowed the head of the PMU to report to the Minister, then the minister changed so now she reports to the Director General, which was very bad. Now the head of the PMU is marginalized because the present minister (Tarek Majzoub) hates her, and currently not even holding meetings with her. She is not doing a thing now".

Therefore, as this interviewee's statement attests, the creation of a parallel system negatively impacted the continuation and impact of the educational response to the refugee crisis, directly affecting the beneficiaries and vulnerable communities.

2. Case of the MoSA: The Emerging Projects

The nature of the political system in Lebanon and the rampant corruption complicated efforts to collaborate and manage the response efforts. A senior UN staff

working closely with MoSA believes that the initial conflict was that these new ministry projects (like the PMU) had their own funding, and thus their own staff. In 2014- 2015, MoSA became an 'employment office' (*maktab touwzifeit*) especially around the time just before the elections. This has been one of the most detrimental factors to the response, and to the work the UN was conducting. Although the UN was insisting on maintaining some mechanisms for recruitment, these mechanisms went unnoticed. These practices were in place in 2013, before 2015. After 2015, the UN stepped in to limit a lot of these problematic recruitment issues. During 2016, the UN attempted to let go of the people who didn't have a synergy with the administration of MoSA. Yet, this didn't really improve the situation, as conflicts arose again within the ministry among the different political parties, fragmenting the resulting work.

The impacts of the economic crisis had also started to become apparent, with the UN facing a lot of problems working through the ministry of finance, awaiting the transferring money required to the MoSA, which resulted in delays from the government to sign off projects. The rampant bureaucracy within the ministries, absence of computerization, all contributed to shortfalls in response and much-needed services for vulnerable communities. As argued by a senior UN staff, "a thing that would typically just take one day, would take a week, or two weeks with the ministry, all of this would slow down the implementation".

C. Relationship Between UN Agencies & Lebanese Ministries: Challenges & Lessons Learnt

When asked about challenges of collaboration, the head of the PMU, and other governmental staff are less willing to discuss the challenges of coordination or collaboration they might have faced with UN officials, while UN organizations' staff

tend to be more open to speak up. Government staff focus on the structural challenges

related to the crisis itself. As stated by one interviewee, "I can't say that we faced

challenges when dealing with the organizations. The main challenges were reaching out

to the children, enrolling them in schools, keeping them at school despite all socio-

economic and sometimes educational obstacles, and receiving funds on time and for our

specific needs", adding "There was a high level of coordination with the UN agencies,

and the main challenge I can say is having to deal with an unprecedented crisis like this

one with more than half a million of children in the age of schooling. One of the main

challenges is to have educational programs that fit the capabilities of these children, as

not all these children can attend schools if you open them".

1. Post-2015 Governmental Intervention: A Cure or a Curse?

As has already been mentioned before, there has been two phases in the

response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon, a pre- and post- 2015. The pre-2015 was

marked more by the work of the UN and INGOs in the field, while post-2015 witnessed

greater government involvement in the work of its institutions.

> "In 2015, the government came in quickly but not in a positive way, they
> came in rather aggressively with the attitude of "We are the government",
> wanting to assert their authority, and to lead or co-lead on everything.
> Coming in quickly as they did in 2015 is a good thing, but since they came
> in quickly and aggressively, wanting to change a lot of things, asserting
> their presence and placing obstacles, this didn't support programme
> implementation. You are asking me how did I notice it? As I said before, an
> example is the LAP which sometimes takes months to get an approval with
> lots of back and forth. INGO and NGO staff would have their programme
> ready, but they are obliged to get the approval of MoSA before starting
> work. This doesn't make things easier".

The senior INGO staff describes here how the government intervened in 2015 and describes this intervention as "not positive" and "aggressive". One would predict that four years after the start of the Syrian crisis the government would have developed the know-how to better intervene in the response, after having witnessed the work of UN agencies and their implementing partners. The interviewee also argues that the design of the intervention itself did not support programme implementation either. The LAP is taken as a proof of how the government's institutional bureaucracy impacted service delivery and the work in the field.

Another senior INGO staff qualifies the intervention of the government's institutions in 2015 as sudden and powerful and labels it as a shift. Prior to 2015, and around 2013-2014, "the government was somehow absent from coordination, and there wasn't a lot of guidance from their side especially in the fields of nutrition and health". From her expertise, the senior INGO staff adds that health and especially nutrition wasn't a priority for MoPH, instead UNHCR held a strong presence in the field of health, and in allocation of funds. Quoting the interviewee: "Suddenly in 2015, MoPH wanted to have an opinion on everything". In terms of programming and as part of an INGO funded by the UN, the interviewee was doing capacity-building for primary health care centers on nutrition issues related to Syrian refugees and this work was mainly led by UN agencies. The intervention of the ministry started to be showcased as follows, "At a certain time, MoPH started to ask to be the lead on how this capacity-building is being conducted, they were even asking to read the slides that we were using while conducting the capacity-building in the PHCs, focusing on the smallest details such as the removal of a coma or not. Mind you this came after a long period of absence". The interviewee also adds that they were requested to change their approach

and even to handover their project to the ministry by rolling out a national capacity building plan. They were requested to do this national capacity building plan for all PHCs, train them and do on-site coaching, and leave the project afterwards. The main takeaway here is that the government's intervention in 2015 was mainly disruptive for ongoing projects and efforts. As argued by another interviewee, the intervention of the government in 2015 "was sudden and extreme, coming from no intervention to conducting micro management, it was not well designed".

Yet, for others, the idea of the government's intervention was welcomed, given that the sustainability of projects could be better insured when the government is involved. As stated by an INGO worker, they worked from the beginning of the project on building the capacity of the PHCs and were pushing for the government to take ownership of the project. Yet, it's the manner with which the intervention came that was criticized, not the intention to intervene itself, which was itself welcomed and encouraged as part of the intended aims of the INGO, as stated by the staff member, which tends to press ministries to take ownership and lead on advocacy with PHCs in the field.

Another INGO staff couldn't categories whether the presence of the government was 'strong' or 'weak' in the field post-2015, questioning the significance of these terms: "Was it 'strong'? I don't know what you mean by 'strong,' but it was present in the field". The debate over whether the government was actually working or rather placing obstacles, is a whole debate in itself, as things differ from one ministry to another. For instance, while the structure of MoSA can be very efficient, it wasn't activated before 2015 by the government. Once the ministries became part of the response in 2015, INGOs had already built expertise, social workers had received

trainings and capacity-building, reinforcing the concept that expertise and capacity were

built by the UN agencies prior to 2015, facilitating the government's later response. As

argued by an interviewee, this shift was positive in many aspects and again this is what

was needed. She also states that ill practices were not systematic or intended by the

government, but often times fell on directors of the DSCs or even on the social workers.

This can be proof of how the government did not always have complete control over the

response, and may not be fully blamed for shortfalls of its own institutions.

These discussions point to the complicated, intricate and complex dynamics that

characterized the relationship between UN agencies and governmental institutions and

the nature of the government's response. Contrary to common dichotomous depictions

that tend to label governmental response in Lebanon to the refugee crisis as either

'weak' or 'strong,' testimonials from lead UN and governmental staff reveal that these

terms do not adequately capture the complex and changing realities and considerations

on the ground, nor do they help us understand the role governments and INGOs play in

shaping and directing refugee crises responses. Moving beyond these simple

dichotomies can help us illuminate these more intricate and nuanced considerations and

realities.

2. *The Negative Impacts of Governmental Intervention*

The response post-2015 required NGOs to work very closely with MoSA, and

even have their work fully dependent on it with the creation of the LAP, a tool of

coordination that was called as a tool of bureaucracy by implementing INGO staff as it

required a lot of back and forth. This approach became common in the work between

MoSA and all other NGOs. The majority of projects and coordination was being done

through MOSA, not only to coordinate and implement but also to build the capacity of SDCs. In the next interview, we will see that other tools that reinforce bureaucracy were also created by ministries, such as the MEHE and the LCRP.

According to a senior UN deployed staff, "The government started to have a more active role in 2015, this became more evident with the creation of NGO 'expression of interest' in the LCRP. As a senior UN staff explains, this expression of interest aimed to have control over the selection of implementing NGOs, and thus control over their work. The government opted for an unusual way of selecting the NGOs that will work on the LCRP. Quoting the interviewee, "I have never heard of something like this, nor in Lebanon or anywhere else. Usually the LCRP, which is an appeal, is done in other countries and all NGOs or the ones who want to take part in it would apply, and the UN will decide which project to allocate to which NGO." Instead, the UN staff states that, "the government took charge of the LCRP and decided that the NGOs that can apply to the LCRP should submit an expression of interest to the ministry. A database was created where the NGO should present its portfolio, its work on education, the mandate, etc. and the ministry would decide which NGOs can apply to the LCRP. This was a precedent. This happened because the ministry was in quarrel with several NGOs, which used to attend the working groups and would get in conflict with the ministry".

3. *Power-Play Between UN Agencies & Government Institutions*

Evident power play characterized interactions among different stakeholders, and both local and governmental parties as well as INGOs and UN agencies deployed power play strategies through everyday practices. A senior INGO staff gave the following

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example, "let's say that the SDC usually closes at 2:00pm, and during a response to an emergency, it is not very logical to have the SDC close at that time. It doesn't make sense. However, we would see these kind of obstacles being placed by social workers or directors of SDCs. For example, if they didn't like an NGO that didn't benefit them (gave them a *tenfi3a*), they would place obstacles in its way, and would claim that they report to MoSA and they should close at 2:00pm. This used to happen a lot, and our biggest challenge was to always ensure the constant buy-in of the directors of the SDCs.

In addition, power play was also strategically used by UN agencies that funded certain projects project, argues the interviewee, "they would give the SDC people anything just to make their work easier". In this statement we see that power play worked both ways. From the side of the local institutions, who placed obstacles on matters they were able to control and hindered the work of UN agencies and INGOs, such as closing up social development centers early. They would do this especially if they weren't happy working with a certain NGO that didn't provide them with some benefits. Humanitarian actors, in turn, spent a lot of their efforts ensuring the approval of the SDC directors and other prominent governmental actors to allow them to work. There was also power play on the part of UN staff who would provide benefits to SDC directors just to allow them to work. In other encounters with senior UN officials, this dynamic was also repeated in MEHE whereby the ministry used to threaten UNICEF not to allow it anymore to access schools in case they do not comply with their decisions.

After 2015, and based off observations from a senior INGO staff, the fact that you started to see representatives from ministries in the working groups, lessened the power dynamics exerted by INGOs or UN agencies. This was proof of the increase

presence of the government in the response, and created more balance between governmental institutions and the humanitarian sector.

4. *The Capacity-Building Component*

Regarding the capacity-building component, the UN always brands itself as an organism that develops the capacity of local staff and stakeholders. A senior staff from MEHE states that donors and UN agencies were obviously placing efforts to support the local systems and enhance the capacity of the personnel, taking into consideration the attention Lebanon was receiving given the big number of Syrian refugees it hosted. The senior MEHE staff adds: "I believe they did not only strengthen the educational response but also strengthened the systems and enhanced the quality of education. The UN also tried to get in expertise and supported existing ones". This was confirmed by other ministerial staff members, with capacity building efforts coming in from the side of the UN and donors. This is also confirmed by a senior INGO worker who states that healthcare centers are still using the knowledge passed on by UN funded partner and are still conducting activities that they were trained on. While this may not be the case across all centers, especially not with the same quality, but the impacts of these capacity-building efforts were felt. While more follow-up from ministries, and capacity for ministries to conduct the follow up would have been beneficial, interviewees conceded that efforts to build capacity were placed, and improvements noted.

Yet these efforts were not without significant challenges. Capacity-building on the part of the UN often times took another format with extent coordination meetings becoming simply an act with the UN wanting to give a prominent role to the ministry, but the ministry not able to take it on. As an example, they would push the ministry

representative to share any updates with the members, but he would be embarrassed and not sure of what to say or do. The UN representative would have the answer, but they would not provide it to give the ministry a space to answer, so you would feel that in some places that there is some artificial role play.

Moreover, when asked if there was capacity building from UNICEF to MoSA, a high level UN staff stated that there has been a change on the level of the ministry's high management and there has been a capacity building for the directors of SDCs in the field, but the problem is that the UN wasn't able to achieve the change needed as a result of two main factors: first, the ministry doesn't have sufficient staff, meaning the functions the UN needs are not present, and the staff are typically very old and retire year after year, resulting in high turnover.

The second problem is the absence of computerization and of information system management in ministries. This made the work more difficult especially with regards to proper communication and reporting. These are significant shortfalls that UN agencies cannot resolve alone. For instance, MoSA started to develop a Child Protection Management Information System with the support of the UN, but that alone is not enough as there should be a decision from the government to decide where to place the data, how to use it, and how to report it. The absence of such mechanisms for data management and reporting significantly hampers and weakens the capacities of ministries, and makes the process of monitoring progress and implementation very difficult in the absence of indicators.

The UN tried to push the ministry to have more independence in execution or networking, but this was a bit more difficult for it to be translated in the field because there's a bureaucratic process behind it and no computerization, and a lack of resources

and staff. The interviewee added that: "Even if you support the ministry a lot, it doesn't mean it has the capability. Moreover, they recruit staff from outside and not from inside the ministry, and there are no specific operating processes in the ministry, only one or two persons can do it and these persons are responsible for several projects at a time."

An additional challenge is the general demotivation among the ministry's staff. Some of the primary roles that the ministries would have to carry out would be left unaddressed with staff members dis-incentivized to get the work done, particularly given the low salaries they were making, that have now gotten even lower. All of this has had a negative impact on building the capacity of the government's staff. The funding process was also another issue, with transfer of money to the government to conduct the work, being further complicated by the central bank's delimitations, and the slow pace of delivery. This resulted in significant delays in execution, even before the economic collapse of 2019, starting right since 2015 with money transfers to the ministry.

Another important dimension to note here and one of the biggest problems faced as well is that the response to the Syrian refugee crisis was done as a project in MoSA and was not given to the administration. Instead staff was recruited for it from outside the ministry (very similar to the creation of the parallel systems at MEHE, i.e. the PMU) with significant nepotism and salary inflation with respect ordinary ministerial staff. This didn't contribute positively to building the capacity of the ministry.

In the case of UNICEF, things were acted upon differently as there was an insistence that the administration should have a role, and a lot of the implementation especially on case management was done exclusively with the ministry's staff and social workers in the SDCs. Moreover, in implementation in the field, UNICEF had a

big contribution to building the capacity of MoSA field workers, however the staff turnover was one of the main problems as staff left at the end of 2018. UNICEF didn't continue with them because they were part of the MoSA crisis unit and worked on a project not related to UNICEF, which was not very aligned with the work. However, UNICEF tried to bring them to play a role in their project, but there wasn't really a will for this to happen. So UNICEF came to a conclusion that they were having a different role not necessarily within UNICEF's mandate to support the work of the ministry, meaning they were responding to the Syrian crisis in a more general way not particularly on child protection. This highlights the significant level of bureaucracy present within ministries.

Throughout, a senior UN staff deployed to the ministry notes we see that MEHE's response to the protracted Syrian crisis in Lebanon within the scope of education, both pre- and post-2015, was centered mostly in the hands of one person that is Sonia Khoury. The name of this person is repeated in most interviews that I have conducted, and which tackled MEHE's response. There was no systematic delegation and division of tasks, which could have favored the sustainability of the newly established response systems. This allowed perpetuation of disorganization and short-term planning within the government's institutions. Quoting a senior UN staff: "Someone like Sonia is needed to be able to have a mechanism in the ministry that can respond to the emergency, that would know what is going on and would put limits on what is happening as well". But again, the whole response of a ministry was limited to the individual capacity and jurisdiction of one staffer. There was no clear system put in place for the ministry to respond as an entity, instead it was left to the occasional motivation and capabilities of individuals. What also promoted the "individuality" of

the response is not instilling a clear system that engaged the director general i.e. the higher manager whose position is more stable than that of the politically appointed ministers. This strategic mistake was supported by the actions of the UN as well.

As mentioned before, the already present infrastructure should have been activated instead of creating new and parallel structures . There should have been a strengthening of the already present ones, especially the committee of education in emergencies. This committee should have been more activated as it convened all stakeholders, as it is different from the PMU that is managed solely by one individual. Quoting a senior UN staff, "We did a mistake by creating a parallel system in the ministry. When this parallel system will leave, the whole knowledge will leave as well".

Regarding the capacity building element, the senior UN staff states that the UN didn't do any system strengthening in MEHE, "we didn't get one of the employees of the ministry and trained them or included them in the response to the Syrian crisis. Within the newly created parallel system, i.e. the PMU, they recruited employees from outside the ministry and none of them had experience in the field of education. They were bureaucratic/office people that pass on papers, little kids, and Sonia didn't allow them to attend meetings." The senior UN staff concludes: "Us as UN we created this". Based on a number of interviewee testimonials, the UN agencies seem to have been, knowingly or not, implicated in the perpetuation of political corruption and cronyism by allowing such practices to continue and guide the response to the refugee crisis. Similar dynamics could also be gleaned in the collaboration between MoSA and UNHCR and the impact of this collaboration on the work in the field, especially from the perspective of INGO workers. INGO staff started to see a projection of how the government deals

with several entities not only UN agencies, but also the crony corruption within, as stated by a senior INGO staff.

As for local actors, as argued by a senior INGO staff, capacity-building with the humanitarian sector was not perceived by local actors such as the SDCs directors as an opportunity to learn and develop their capacities, but more as an opportunity to gain some benefits, or "tenfiaat" as the interviewee called them. "Some SDC directors used to think they were doing favors to the NGO and UN committees when allowing them to access the SDCs". The benefits wouldn't necessarily be of a large sum of money, but they are something to be taken advantage of from the humanitarian sector by the local institutions. This attitude was prevalent during that period, according to several interlocutors, and hinders the role of UN agencies in building the capacity of local actors.

5. *The Enduring Importance of Government Regulation*

Another important point to raise is the enduring role of government supervision and regulation, a central point often overlooked within literature on the government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. Taking the example of the INGO Relief International (backed by USAid) that was working in schools without informing the ministry and replicating the work of ALP and UNHCR with the same pool of beneficiaries, it became apparent that the absence of government oversight and regulation often results in the adverse impacts, such as the duplication of service and aid delivery. The duplication of work by multiple NGOs has often been cited as a major shortfall in the work of NGOs responding to humanitarian crises and competing in the service provision and funding arenas for recognition and resources.

Another example that brought to the fore the importance of government supervision is the multiplication of NGOs supporting Syrian curriculums in the absence of coordination with the ministry. Supporting Syrian curriculums, some of which had problematic Jihadist and political propaganda infused in them, is by law forbidden on Lebanese soil. Organizations were supporting semi-private schools irrespective of the curriculum they were teaching the afternoon and whether they were properly connected or informed of the requirements of the ministry. These schools had a ceiling of a certain number of students, for example 450, meaning that only these 450 can go to the ministry and get diplomas. If they have more than 450, the extra children will not receive any diploma or be registered with MEHE. Yet, schools were taking money from funders such as Relief International (RI) and others and were enrolling more than the ceiling number of students, jeopardizing those additional students' registration with the MEHE and their chances of receiving any diplomas. Interviewees even noted that the UNICEF and UNHCR were not aware that the extra number of students will not be accounted for, highlighting even further the importance of having the ministry's close supervision and oversight, and its role in the dissemination of legal and organizational decrees during the response.

Therefore, as pointed by a number of interviewees, but often overlooked within literature on the relationship between INGOs and government institutions, the absence of adequate government supervision in the Syrian refugee crises response paved way to increased corruption, potential fraud, and misuse of funding, with one obvious example being the unauthorized adoption of curriculums within a number of schools, that promoted the spread of extremist ideologies and placed vulnerable communities at increased risk. Despite costing more in terms of time and efforts, working with the

governmental institutions and ministries is necessary, to grant authorities ownership and co-leadership in coordination meetings, rather than have the UN lead on everything.

Most of the ministerial staff interviewed are with the intervention of the government in the response for sustainability purposes. As summed up by a senior MEHE staff, "For sustainability purposes, I am in favor of something that would make the system continue after everything ends and after all donors would leave. I am pro having a systematic plan that is coordinated with everyone, and there has been a lot of efforts from both UN agencies and the ministry to coordinate the work" and "It is very important for sustainability purposes and for system enhancement to have coordination with the public administrations of the country".

With the intervention of the government, all entities gained more control over the implementation of educational programs. Shortcomings in implementation that were not previously detected by the UN, as those in educational curricula, were identified by the ministry and staff and personnel were deployed, given the ministry's expanded access and reach. Quoting a senior UN staff: "The government started stopping these matters in 2013. Things became clearer when we were deployed from the UN to the ministry and we started to discover that the UN was funding these schools. We started stopping them in 2013, there was no policy nor strategy, but we started responding anyway and detecting the mistakes".

As an example of the chaos prior to the government's intervention in 2015, one interviewee stated, "I discovered from one visit that there were pictures of military men in the school and I knew that this school belonged to that armed sheikh who was killed on the checking point in Tripoli in 2012. He was very similar to Al Assir, and I discovered that his brother was teaching his doctrines in this school. As a semi-private

school they were also not allowed to take on a big number of students. Moreover, there were pictures of armed men even though they didn't allow us to see much. I reported back to MEHE and discovered that there was a law that forbids semi-private schools to accept more than their ceiling number of students. These schools were also teaching material we didn't know about, so we stopped the funding of UNICEF/UNHCR to these semi private schools". This statement also indicates the absence of knowledge and awareness on the part of UN agencies of certain ministerial laws and regulations for management of field implementation. Moreover, the discovery of mal-practices within semi-private schools and NGOs in the field was also aided by field visits conducted by the deployed UN staff who were more accustomed to this system of work than the ministry. Therefore, these sensitive incidences attest to the importance and centrality of effective collaboration between UN agencies and governmental entities, in this case the MEHE. This discovery also highlights the importance of coupling planning and strategizing with on the ground field visits or as they call it "spot checks" in insuring the smooth and effective implementation and delivery of services to vulnerable communities and prevent undue harm and exploitation of service provisions for personal, religious or political gain.

The important role here of the ministries and the state in extending and enforcing their legal jurisdiction and oversight to control and monitor the field cannot be overstated enough, and is evident in the chaos that preceded governmental intervention in 2015. Moreover, as became evident throughout the interviews, it is very important to secure governmental intervention and oversight as early as possible, since the more systematic and organized the response is, the more it would benefit and safeguard the beneficiaries. As stated by a senior INGO staff, "Students benefited from

the transition, since the PMU organized matters, had it done a strategic plan or no. More students enrolled into schools, and between morning and afternoon shifts we had 400,000 students. Formal and non-formal education programs became better organized. With a unit in place, more funds came in and MEHE was managing matters. So the impact on the student was positive, as there wasn't a capability to enroll this large number of students before".

Government intervention and oversight was also much needed for deterring the influence of extremist donor agendas. As stated by a senior UN staff, "the funding for NGOs became less under RACE, with some NGOs receiving politically-motivated funding from donor countries such as Qatar and KSA funding Syrian curriculums. What was in fact happening, is that some funds were being directed to rebels who were involved in designing Syrian curriculums, in the hope that following the assumed success of rebel groups, Syrian students would return and reintegrate into schools back in Syria. However, and according to Lebanese law, teaching a Syrian curriculum in Lebanon is not permissible nor is there a protocol on this between these two countries. Lebanon does teach French and international curriculums through official licenses. The Lebanese government received a complaint from the Syrian embassy in Lebanon inquiring from the ministry on the matter. We told them that it is not the government who is doing this but certain NGOs and we are working on shutting them down. We are still trying now to close them, some of them were closed and some of them aren't yet. For example, Qatar was funding the rebels and they thought that they were going to conduct the official exams in Turkey (they would do the exams in Lebanon and send them to Turkey to be corrected) and they assumed that when they would win in Syria,

they would re-integrate these students. However, if they didn't win, the students will never be re-integrated in Syria."

Another positive result of governmental intervention in the field and based on the testimony of several INGO workers, is that the services provided to beneficiaries now became more sustainable. Had the government not intervened and had it not taken ownership and advocacy and power over the centers that NGOs used to deal with, the project wouldn't have persisted, and the funding would have ended. Therefore, the beneficiaries, both Lebanese and Syrian, would not have received the required services. Therefore, the government's intervention was less about the improvement of the quality of the services, and more about the sustainability of these service provisions.

A senior UN staff confirms that after 2015 things became more organized in terms of coordination in the field and access to services for children, especially that NGOs kept on working, and never stopped.

There's always existed sensitivities in Lebanon between NGOs and the government, and the government would always play the role of a regulator and despite its limited capacity. Furthermore, given that the ministry becomes burdened with 100 projects, it is not able to take on this role effectively. On the other hand, while NGOs generally assume that their work is going well, the lack of adequate government regulatory of field work has major negative consequences. These NGOs are not very distant from the dynamics ruling the country, the sectarian ones, even if they are INGOs their operating possibilities are limited and are mostly focused on Syrians. As for the local NGOs, they all typically have some sort of affiliation. There are sensitivities between them and the government and have a conviction that the government doesn't understand and should leave them alone. On another hand, these organizations are

taking up the role and filling in the gaps left behind by the absence of state public. This system reproduces and reinforces existing governmental weaknesses and retrenches the absence of state provisions.

D. The UN Response: Challenges & Shortcomings

1. *The Impacts of International & Donor Funding*

Donors had an overall negative impact on the response, demonstrated by their appetite for certain projects, and relationship with UN agencies and ministries. International donor funding resulted in problems in the allocation of roles and funding among actors within the field. Rather than fund the work in one sector via one partner, donors would often fund multiple partners within the same sector and then ask them to liaise with the ministry.

The multitude of actors receiving funding to implement similar provisions within the same sector would make the implementation more difficult for the ministry as they would now have three operating projects to coordinate, knowing that the ministry's own resources and personnel capabilities are very limited. On the executive front through the SDCs, you could choose from several centers, but on the level of administration, there is three to four people who are responsible for protection and the SDCs. As argued by several interviewees, it is nearly impossible for only 3 to 4 people to keep up with 3 to 4 full projects at a time. Meanwhile, for the sake of comparison, while UN agencies would deploy tens of people to work on a given project, the ministry is limited in terms of the number of staff to allocate as per specific internal regulations and rules. In order to be able to bring on more people, some ministers tended to open up so-called 'emerging projects' within the ministry to recruit people from outside the

ministry. Yet, by doing this, they weakened the ministry's structure rather than strengthen it, fragmenting responsibilities within the ministry, and creating sensitivities between project directors and general directors due to the duplication of authorities and roles.

This was clear within the MoSA, with donors, according to interviewees, providing funds to UNICEF to work with MoSA on a certain issue, and then also other organizations to work on the same issue with MoSA as well with different SDCs. This created double work for MoSA, that now has to coordinate with two entities implementing the same intervention in the field. This wasn't conductive to effective work flow, as the ministry wouldn't be able to simultaneously manage both since they don't have the same staffing capacities found in other entities. As stated by a senior UN staff, "this was one of the worst things we witnessed. At some point, things developed into a competition, between UN agencies and organizations."

Even between UN agencies themselves overlapping responsibilities and interventions developed. According to several interviewees, while every UN agency has its own mandate, in order to attract additional funds, agencies would justify broadening their mandates beyond their initial purview. This would at times, even attract a lot more money that what is really needed, responding as they effectively were to the growing donor appetites to fund certain sectors. UN agencies and organizations rushed into propagating these funding cycles. As argued by a senior UN staff, the child protection issue suddenly took on more than it really required in Lebanon throughout the past years and received a lot of money. One would say, they added, based on the amount funding received, that much more should have been accomplished. The senior UN staff added, "we were implementing activities that I don't know were even relevant to the

beneficiaries, as we never actually reviewed their efficiency, in part because we were in the middle of the turmoil: we received the funding, we needed results, and we continued with what we were doing".

Donor pressure to channel funding to certain organizations, as part of a money cycle for the funds to return to the donor country, also had problematic consequences. Projects would be subcontracted to people or entities from funding countries, or supplies would be bought from donor countries or through certain corporations and suppliers originating from these countries, raising huge questions on the actual beneficiaries of the funds and who they are meant to actually serve.

The liquidation of funds raised additional problems, as it encouraged the careless spending of money without enough consideration of the quality of implementation. At the end of the day, not spending the money became worse than wasteful spending, as organizations are expected to show that they have complied their internal auditing and conducted monitoring visits with everything appearing neat and appealing. Organizations would be less compelled to check if they have done any impact or met certain needs, or if other sectors are meeting the other needs. Had the support been provided as cash assistance, its impacts would have been much better.

The chaos and ill-management of international donor funding, therefore, had a number of adverse consequences. While aiding service provisions, these funds were also promoting parallel educational systems such as with the use of Syrian curriculums, promoting excessive competitiveness within the field, and sacrificing the quality of service provision and its adequate delivery to the most needy populations. According to several interviewees, donor countries could have played a more significant role on the political level, to decrease the present fragmentation, but instead, they just went with the

flow, rushing to give out money, without necessarily taking into consideration the impact of their interventions or the particular contexts. The weakness of adequate understanding and knowledge of local context and regulations was additionally one of the major shortfalls of UN agencies' response, particularly within the educational arena. Not knowing the ceiling number of students in semi-private schools, and protocols with the Lebanese government on educational curriculums, up until a deployed UN staff came in to work with the ministry and was able to have an overview of these matters, was cited among interviewees.

Donor funding oftentimes preceded and directed the response with its own agendas and conditionalities. The UN agencies did not have the capacity or jurisdiction to control these shortcomings especially that it is donor countries, who have a higher reach and power than NGOs, and who were actually promoting their own agendas. Quoting from an interview with a senior UN staff, "It's not really about NGOs, it's more about donor countries. Even UNHCR was providing money to the Syrian curriculum students before there was a plan put with MEHE, at the beginning of the crisis in 2011-2012. UNICEF was supporting semi-private schools as well that were promoting jihadist propaganda and curriculums in the afternoon, during 2012".

Donor funding had a number of major detrimental consequences on the Syrian crisis response given the politicization of certain international and regional funds. Arab donors, for instance, according to several interviewees, never connected with the UN, nor attended the RACE executive committee or the education working groups. As stated by a senior UN staff deployed to MEHE, "We wrote to them on multiple instances asking them to please stop supporting Syrian curriculum schools, but they didn't stop," up until recently, with the controversy arising from several Syrian schools and the large

number of students who were forced out of schools because of it. However, there remain a few problematic schools open and some countries still donating towards them. According to another interviewee, "Relief International, for instance, was funded by USaid who played a very dirty game as it intervened within the UN, and MEHE, and also worked on its own. It was all based on politics, not the wellbeing of the student. Other organizations funded by Arab donor countries, not from DFID let's say, but for example by the Qatari government were benefiting politically through this support".

2. Clashes with the Government

The UN's modality of work and especially its ties with government institutions in the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon involved several shortcomings. As stated by a Senior UN staff deployed to MEHE, the government used to jeopardize the work of the UN by constantly threatening them of being kicked out of the country unless they abide by government requests. Quoting one interviewee, "MEHE would make the UN feel that they can be kicked out of the country, that without the ministry they cannot work. If the ministry says that it doesn't want UNICEF to access schools, they can, because UNICEF works through the government, but this doesn't mean UNICEF should do everything the government requests". As also stated by a senior INGO staff during her observations, "When you work at the UN level there are more considerations that need to be taken on the particular national policies and systems. As an NGO you can overlook some matters for the sake of the implementation, however, the UN cannot do this as they have a close relationship with the government and many things require their validation. Additional considerations factor in besides responding to needs". These

are very important dimensions that require careful consideration when talking about the dynamics of operation between UN agencies and the government.

3. UN's Expertise

From the ministry's perspective, it is argued that MEHE didn't have the financial and human resources to take care of both the formal and non-formal education programs. Regarding the early detection of the need for non-formal education, the head of the PMU argues that the lack of knowledge of non-formal education was the key factor in not pushing non-formal education from the beginning. As stated by the head of the PMU, "We weren't focused on non-formal education from the beginning as based on our experience in Lebanon, the experience with non-formal education is very minimal since most of the children that are of schooling age are in schools. The issue of school dropout wasn't this big of a deal in Lebanon as the rate of enrollment was high in Lebanon, and therefore when we realized that the rate of enrollment within Syrian children is low, and was low for several years, then we were able to discover that there's a big need for non-formal education". Lebanon has a different educational context than Syria, and especially the regions displaced Syrian children originated from.

Yet, this raises important questions about the role of UN agencies in the response and in advising ministries on how best to tackle similar contexts. The absence of adequate counseling on the detrimental consequences of creating a parallel system in MEHE, the PMU, also points to shortfalls in arenas the UN could have offered more hands-on assistance and guidance.

4. Lack of Efficient Coordination between UN Agencies

The lack of interagency coordination promoted corruption and-ill implementation in the field. Raised as an example by a Senior UN, an NGO received funding from another UN agency after being cut-off by UNICEF, quoting from the interview, "There is no blacklist in the UN, only gossip. The blacklist would stay internal, another Chief of Education would come in and this list would be forgotten. There's no coordination although they hold a lot of meetings, but a lot of coordination sometimes kills coordination".

Another point of controversy is inter-agency competition which undermines the united position of the UN and allows for duplication of work, and resource wastage. Based on insights from UN staff, this competition was taken advantage of by the government, which would often hold bilateral meetings. As mentioned by one interviewee, "They used to go to UNHCR and tell them that UNICEF wants to remove this from your jurisdiction and vice versa…add to that originally we hated each other, and we would duplicate each other's work once or twice." Some staff from government institutions benefited from the non-coordination between UN agencies and the duplication of work. There were committees inside the ministry that the UN used to pay more than once. Ministerial committees would receive funding from multiple UN agencies at once to respond to the crisis. As stated by a high-level UN staff, "We used to pay them for political considerations. We used to pay each person from 1,000 to 2,000$ per month but they did nothing, it was just another salary for them. We knew that UNESCO was paying the same people as well. When UNHCR paid once and things didn't go well as their audit didn't approve, they asked UNICEF to pay instead".

The high turnover of UN staffing also negatively impacts work on the crisis response, resulting in ruptures and discontinuations of work, a matter consistently mentioned by several implementers and ministerial staff. As one MEHE senior staff explained, "Another thing that had a negative impact is the high turnover of UN agencies staff, despite the handover processes and procedures in place, but by the time the new person comes on-board to take over things, the work would have already been impacted negatively. Moreover, the turnover is frequent, a lot of times teams change, some would go on missions, etc. This is one of the known dynamics of working with UN agencies. Unfortunately, this would harm ongoing projects."

5. *Politicization & The Absence of Critical Literature & Self-examination*

While often perceived as existing outside political debates and considerations, humanitarian and international aid organizations are very much intertwined within political debates and systems of power. According to a senior UN staff,

> "The UN is an NGO/civil society organization funded mainly by contributing countries. The country that provides greater funding, gains the most influence. In some places, the same dynamics we find in a certain country, are reflected inside the UN. The UN doesn't always serve the interests of the people it claims to serve, and given the way the system is put in place, it is not really there to strengthen governments but instead to justify its existence at all times. So, to justify the UN's existence, government weaknesses aren't actually strengthened but rather maintained and reproduced through the intervention itself. The UN's work and its channeling of funds serves the global power system in place and the interests of donor countries, through which they justify all other infractions conducted at the level of the global economy. Economic crises in certain countries are fabricated, and money doesn't increase in a place without decreasing somewhere else. Money flows out of one place and from populations that become impoverished (i.e. from the global south), towards nations that become richer (i.e. Western economies). The process of impoverishing certain populations is actually a process to enrich the rich, living in countries where they enjoy security. This is the capitalist economical model where individualism perseveres, and everyone is only

focused on advancing their interests and the issue of taxes becomes a very contested one".

As the above analysis of a senior UN staff member reveals, UN agencies do not operate in a vacuum, outside political disputes and global power dynamics. Instead, they are part and parcel of the global economic and political structures and operate to perpetuate those same structures and interests.

The embeddedness and reliance of UN agencies on those political and economic structures, including local governments, makes them less capable or willing to engage in critical self-reflection and re-evaluation and less likely to produce critical literature and studies. When researching the development of the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon, it became more and more evident the marked absence of critical studies and literature on the shortfalls of governmental and UN interventions. Instead, most of the studies took on more particular, sectorial approaches, and merely pointed to the government as either weak or resilient. The collaboration between UN agencies and the government's institutions also suffers as a result of the absence of critical research, despite the significant resources dedicated to the response and at the disposal of the leading organisations involved.

Upon digging deeper, it became apparent that the organisational policies of the UN prevent it from raising criticism against local governments, which are instead considered main partners. Given the nature of its role, critical literature produced within the UN, would risk jeopardizing its relation to the government and place the continuation of its work at risk. Quoting a senior INGO staff, "it is not the role of the UN to criticize, and if it did, this would raise big question marks, as its role is to respond to crises and not to change policies and systems within countries of operation".

The local government in turn is neither equipped nor willing to produce any literature that criticizes the collaboration. The dearth in critical studies is also due to the sensitivity of the issues raised, particularly for stakeholders involved who would not be ready or willing to publicly disclose shortfalls or challenges else they jeopardize their relationship with the government.

Additional consideration includes Lebanon's sectarian demographics and sensitive balance, resulting in political aversion to disclosing or publishing studies that disclose demographic data or census estimates. As stated by one interviewee, if there were to be a vulnerability assessment for the Lebanese population, it will be very challenging to conduct, as first it would require census data that is not publically disclosed. One example is when ILO had a publication on labor market and really struggled to publish it due to demographical consideration. As stated by another senior INGO staff, "this is a point of blockage between the work of UN and the government". The government has also been known to push for and require the change of certain terminologies (such as refugees, informal tented settlements, etc).

This has resulted in major gaps in critical literature tackling the relation between ministries and the UN on the issue of the response to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon. As stated by a high level MEHE staff, "I believe that it should be a priority especially that there are a lot of efforts being dedicated to the response, and research would make these efforts more useful".

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This research sought to provide a critical assessment of the refugee crisis response in Lebanon, as there aren't many resources on the shifting roles and dynamics between the Lebanese government and UN agencies, and how these dynamics affected collaborations and impacted the nature of the response. In my research, I focused on the collaboration mechanisms and relationship that emerged between UN agencies and Lebanese ministries in managing the Syrian refugee crisis response from 2011 till 2018, examining the shifting dynamics between these entities and assessing their impacts. I sought to outline throughout this research the existing mechanisms of collaboration between the UN and Lebanese ministries and whether in fact there has been a shift, and, if so, what were the reasons behind it, and what lessons can be learnt moving forward.

When reflecting on the past years and evaluating the quality of the response, it is important to concede to and acknowledge that most of interviewees argue that there has been some improvement in the dynamics between the UN and governmental institutions from the start of the response till now. Yet, they maintain that the improvements were not enough or sufficient in addressing the needs or responding to future crises. As argued by several interviewees, things could have been better, not enough was achieved in the past nine years of the crisis in terms of improving capacity and effectively involving the local government.

When asked if the government is now better able to respond to a crisis like the Syrian refugee crisis, most interviewees were in doubt. Ministerial staff interviewed had similar feedback on lessons learned, as one interviewee stated, "I believe that things are

institutionalized now. If the government will be forced to confront a crisis again like the protracted Syrian crisis, the response would certainly not be like before. There are now more systems in place, up and running, and institutionalized. However, we didn't achieve the quality of teaching and learning that we wanted. It is still work in progress".

The enduring challenges in crises management and response became evident with the start of the COVID 19 pandemic, and also following the port blast in Beirut on August 4th, 2020 that left behind massive destruction and hundreds of fatalities. Within the COVID pandemic response, UN agencies had a big role to play, yet also experienced clashes with ministries, especially the MoSA and MoPH. Initially ministries weren't prepared to the response and the WHO was taking lead, with ministries taking some time to get their response together. Clashes also arose with regards to response priorities with the Lebanese government wanting to focus on vulnerable Lebanese populations especially amid the economic crisis and the scarcity of resources, while UN agencies were emphasizing the need to take the well-being of Syrian refugees into consideration as well. As stated by a UN senior staff, "The government wasn't able to take advantage of the crisis…We failed in everything, not only this. The UN was going ahead with its work and justifying its presence as needed since the government was not able to manage".

Based upon the extensive observations discussed in the preceding sections, and the rich interview data which this research was able to collect from senior UN and ministerial staff members, I summarize in what follows a number of important recommendations and lessons learnt that must be reflected upon if future crisis are to be dealt with more effectively. As mentioned by several interviewees, as a recommendation that would have made the response better and avoided reproducing

existing networks of corruption and cronyism, parallel systems shouldn't have been created and a more assertive and proactive response by UN agencies , i.e. not conforming to all donors and the government's requests, could have directed the response more effectively. As stated by a senior UN staff deployed to the ministry, rather than "abide by the requests of donors and funders" and "do whatever they request," the UN should have held a stronger more decisive and influential position, given its position vis-à-vis the government and donors countries.

Another senior UN staff recommends that the UN's stance should also be stronger vis-à-vis the government and ministries, "As UN we never told the government 'no,' if we tell them 'no', we won't be able to get funds anymore. But, let's follow our convictions, sure we may lose some funding, but at least the government will run after us to get the work done. They can't respond to the crisis by themselves." This recommendation is much needed especially in light of the rise of multiple other crises, and the need for more effective and sustainable measures to approach them. As pointed by another senior UN staff with regards to the impacts of abiding with the MEHE's plan that resulted in a parallel system: "We threw away millions of dollars in the trash, millions in salaries. Meanwhile, Syrians are currently marginalized, we don't know what will happen to them". This raises important questions on the ways the UN liaises in crises response and how its close collaboration with local government institutions and donor requests and conditionalities jeopardizes the efficiency and transparency of project implementation.

The deployment model from UN agencies to the ministries could be the focus of additional study, as it yielded some effective outcomes. A good example of the timely and effective transfer of knowledge and skills from the UN to the ministry, is the

deployment of support UN staff to the MEHE. According to a senior UN staff deployed

to MEHE, it was the UN who started by leading the educational response but kept the

response under the umbrella of MEHE for final approval. Quoting the interviewee, "The

UN was doing the outreach, enrolling children, while coordinating with MEHE to allow

the children to be enrolled". As the ministry required support, it asked the two leading

agencies for support through the deployment of their staff. The physical presence of UN

staff at given offices within the ministry, dividing their time between the UN agency

and the ministry, consolidated better collaboration.

Nevertheless, the MEHE only had two personnel who were deployed from the

UN, and approximately six people were deployed from an established INGO but didn't

persevere. Instead as previously argued, another 'deployment' mechanism was devised

by the minister, consisting of a unit of people who were recruited to work at the

ministry, with a ministerial contract but paid by the UN. The PMU, as became evident

in the interviews, was inefficient at best, with no experienced education professionals, a

high-cost operation that ended up as an explicit embodiment of nepotism and

corruption. This parallel model of 'deployment' by ministries was unsuccessful,

sacrificing the response effectiveness, capacity-building within ministries and the

sustainability of response efforts.

Nevertheless, and often overlooked in literature, several interviewees maintained

that the government should have had a more active role from the start of the crisis

response. As stated by a senior INGO staff who worked in the field, even if the

government came in as aggressive, but it was needed to have a role from day one, from

2011 or 2012. As this research argues, the government's involvement remains an

enduring and necessary requirement. Pre-2015 held more freedom for NGOs and UN

agencies to respond faster on the ground, and by this their work was considerably easier given the absence of bureaucratic intervention. However, NGOs and UN agencies do not operate in a 'no man's land,' and cannot execute effective and sustainable crisis responses by themselves and outside official supervision and liaison. They would eventually be forced to coordinate with the government and its institutions, at least with the local municipalities and MoSA (represented by the SDCs) to make their implementation more impactful and have greater scope, as become more and more evident. As argued by several interviewees, the fact that the government was not present before 2015, while facilitating the work of NGOs, was detrimental to the quality of the response, and impacted the coordination between NGOs in the field, giving rise to excessive competition and duplication of work. The multitude of NGOs that were not organised, in turn, paved way for more corruption within the humanitarian organisations.

Finally, as this research sought to also argue, UN agencies and organizations do not operate in a vacuum or outside local and global political and economic structures. In fact, they are deeply intertwined within those very structures of power. The reliance of UN agencies and institutions upon international donor funding ties them to the political and economic interests of powerful Western countries. Moreover, the high reliance and mandated partnership between UN agencies and local governments prevents agencies from confronting and critiquing local governments and political systems, and forces them in many instances, as became evident post-2015, to concede to and at-times become complicit in propagating networks of corruption and cronyism. These ties and conditionalities limit the capacity of UN agencies to forgo self-critique and critical

revamping of crisis responses, limiting their interventions to the alleviation of

humanitarian needs and the shoring-up of local governmental responses.

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