

Press release

Launch of 'Syria: Justice to Transcend Conflict' Report

Impact of Syrian Conflict 2020

27 May 2020

The Syrian Center for Policy Research, an independent, non-profit research institution, launched the "Syria: Justice to Transcend Conflict" report on Wednesday 27th of May 2020.

This report is part of a series of reports that provide multidimensional analyses of impacts of the armed conflict in Syria during the period 2011-2019, examining the socioeconomic situation and institutional performance of the country during this time. This report, Justice to Transcend Conflict, diagnoses the conflict based on an innovative Human Status Framework that assess the interlinkages between institutional, social, and economic factors on macro, meso, and local levels. The report also frames the conflict through a social justice lens, and provides alternatives based on expert-developed participatory approaches. Key results and messages of this report are as follows:

Justice

For the purpose of this report, 'justice' is defined as equitable rights and entitlements of citizens that assure fair political, social, and economic capabilities, opportunities and outcomes as perceived by the society. It implies distributional and procedural equities that avoid and/or recover socially produced differences between and within populations groups.

The aggravation of **injustice is a root cause** of the Syrian conflict, as are **political exclusion** and violations of civil rights; a lack of accountability and the use of force have eroded citizens' voice and representation. The continuation of 'institutional suffocation' which SCPR defines as the divergence between the society and ruling institutions without available means to mitigate the gap, compounded the injustice status for Syrians. The **neoliberal policies** and economic 'reforms' created jobless and anti-poor economic growth in the new millennium, which aggravated vertical and horizontal inequalities. This was associated with shrinking the public space and a **lack of social policies** that promote social relations and trust.

Throughout the conflict, human rights abuses, de-development and deterioration in factors in positive human status have created a cycle of injustice and conflict. The transformation of the social movement to address the injustice devolved into a severe armed conflict shifted the grievances to catastrophic levels.

The conflict has created three types of injustices: the **retroactive injustice** which refers to the destruction and deterioration of the tangible and intangible wealth of the country that have accumulated through centuries; the **current injustice**, which represents the production of injustice now, as the conflict shifted the integrated and productive economic and social activities towards the destructive one; and **future injustice**, as the subjugating powers institutionalizing conflict-centered institutions, relations, and

economy. These powers build the foundations of injustice in the future to be added to grievances that created during the conflict.

The report used a composite index to assess the impact of the conflict “Human Status Index” (HuDI) that consists of five main dimensions that measure demographic, economic, human development, social and institutional performance. Syria’s HuDI deteriorated by 42 per cent between 2010 and 2019, across all sub-indices and leading by the collapse of the institutional performance which dropped by 67 per cent. The extent of deterioration in the HuDI varies across time, regions and communities, and has been driven by violence, insecurity, the policies of dominating actors, conflict economy, social degradation and external interventions among other factors.

Economic Injustice

The conflict had led to the emergence of different, fragmented economies within the fractured state. The varied system of incentives across these new economies demonstrated that one of the few common interests among the rival powers was the abuse of economic resources for the benefit of new conflict elite, and at the expense of productive economic activities.

The economic foundations were transformed into a self-sustaining cycle of violence in which much of the capital stock was destroyed or reallocated to conflict-related activities. Many workers lost their jobs and a substantial part of the remaining job opportunities served the conflict. Economic institutions changed their policies and rules to support the new conflict actors or be allowed to continue to operate.

Total accumulated economic loss during the conflict by the end of 2019 is projected to reach 530.1 billion USD, compared to the counterfactual scenario, which is equivalent to 9.7 times of GDP of 2010 at constant prices. The total loss consists of GDP loss equal to 420.9 billion USD, the increase in military expenditure is equal to 37.8 billion USD, the capital stock damaged or lost which is equal 64.6 billion USD, and the informal production of the oil and gas is projected to reach 9.9 billion USD by the end of 2019.

Public subsidies have witnessed a consistent decrease as a percentage of the current GDP from 20.2 per cent in 2011 to 13.1 per cent in 2014. Due to the price liberalization, the subsidies dropped sharply to 5.1 per cent in 2015 and 4.9 per cent in 2019. As a result, the public budget deficit with off-budget subsidies dropped from 23.6 per cent in 2013 to 8.8 per cent in 2019.

Fiscal policies funded the enormous deficit through foreign and domestic public debt which creates a substantial burden for future generations. The total public debt increased from 30 per cent of GDP in 2010 to 208 per cent in 2019. This is especially egregious given that it has been used mainly to fund armed conflict and conflict economy.

The currency witnessed another wave of depreciation by 43 per cent in September 2019 compared to July 2018. This is a substantial depreciation, despite the fact that the period 2018-2019 saw an expansion in government-controlled areas and relative stability in many regions in addition to exceptionally good agriculture season and slow recovery in the manufacturing sector. The period October 2019 - January 2020 witnessed an acceleration of depreciation to reach 96 per cent on 16 January 2020 compared to 17

October 2019. The report highlights key factors for this deterioration including the dominance of conflict-centered institutions and the dynamics of conflict economies. The conflict has damaged the foundations of the economy and caused weak performance of public institutions and a reduction of external support, compounded recently by United States' sanctions and the economic crisis in Lebanon.

By the end of 2018, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was increasing by 0.4 per cent compared to 2017. However, in 2019 the inflation rate surged to 33 per cent; the increased occurred mainly in the third and fourth quarters. The CPI during the nine years increased 18-fold between February 2011 and December 2019, which severely deteriorated the real income of households and increase poverty.

Total employment decreased sharply during the conflict from 5.184 million in 2011 to 2.568 million in 2016 and increased gradually to 3.058 million in 2019. The unemployment rate increased from 14.9 per cent in 2011 to 51.8 per cent in 2016 and decreased gradually to 42.3 per cent in 2019. Utilizing counterfactual scenarios, the labor market lost 3.7 million jobs. The huge loss of job opportunities surged the economic dependency ratio from 4.13 persons per employee in the year 2010 to 6.4 persons in the year 2019.

Social Injustice

The population inside Syria declined by 2.3, 2.9, and 1.9 per cent in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively. Then it increased by 0.9 and 1.1 per cent in 2018 and 2019 respectively to reach 19.584 million in 2019. The conflict has changed the demographics of the population as the result of various factors including the increased number of male deaths compared with female; age-specific death rates and changes in fertility and the impacts of displacement and migration.

Refugees experience multiple forms of injustice which can be categorized into three dimensions: entry and movement; human development; status, voice, and representation. Though these three are interconnected and overlapping, examining each allows for understanding the numerous and increasing deprivations which refugees suffer.

The Human Development Index (HDI) dropped from 0.631 in 2010 to 0.431 in 2016 with a minor increase in 2017-2019 to reach 0.445 in 2019 due to the increase in life expectancy and an increase of income. In 2019, Syria was one of the worst ten countries in the world in terms of HDI performance.

The HDI results indicate the extent to which Syria has deviated from its development path and has highlighted the collapse of crucial social structures necessary for empowerment. As a result, people have been denied access to food, health, and education services. These indicators show the expanding inequality in Syria relative to the rest of the world.

The Syrian population continues to lose millions of years of schooling as the children (5-17) who are out of school in 2019 number 2.4 million. The current outcome is still disastrous as those millions of children will suffer from a lack of skills and knowledge in addition to the impact of the conflict. The conflict created a lack of curriculum consistency across Syria, with different education systems established in different

regions depending on the ruling power. The 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview highlighted six different curricula being used in schools in Syria.

The fragmentation across the country and the rapid emergence of different fighting parties resulted in the creation of weak governed institutions highly dependent on violence. These crippled institutions negatively affected the overall health system; including hampering access to services and medications; perpetuating pervasive discrimination; weakening healthcare capacity; causing the destruction of health infrastructure, including the targeting of hospitals and Health Care Workers (HCWs); and triggering the collapse of the pharmaceutical industry.

The increase in mortality among different population groups is one of the most catastrophic impacts of the conflict. Our data reveal a rise in the crude death rate from 4.4 per thousand in 2010 to 10.9 per thousand in 2014. The projections for 2016-2019 reflect a consistent decline, with crude death rates reduced to 9.9 per thousand in 2017 and 7.0 per thousand in 2019. The morbidity in terms of communicable and non-communicable diseases, such as poliovirus, measles, influenza-like illness, acute diarrhea, typhoid, leishmaniasis, disability, and trauma have all surged.

The overall poverty rate reached its peak at 89.4 per cent by the end of 2016, dropped in 2019 to 86 per cent due to positive economic growth, yet the last quarter of 2019 witnessed a surge in the prices that increased the poverty rates. The average overall poverty line for a household equals on average SYP 280 thousand per month at the end of 2019.

The Food Security Index declined sharply by about 34 per cent between 2010 and 2014, while in 2018 the index decreased by about 8 per cent compared to 2014. The Access to Food Index improved slightly by about 3 per cent due to the decrease in siege areas and the military operations, but the availability, stability and utilization indexes decreased by 20 per cent, 14 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

The Social Capital Index dropped by 43 percent during 2010-2019; with subjugating powers continuing their use of violence and fear to subordinate people. Identity politics were one of the main policies used to fuel the conflict by abusing the diversity of religions, ethnicities, economic and social backgrounds, bonding relations, regions to create fragmentation and polarization that are needed to “eliminate and dehumanize the other”. This deterioration of social capital reflected a substantial aggravation of social injustice as it deteriorated the wealth of social relations and common values and harmed social solidarity and people's capabilities and agency.

Women are among the main victims of the conflict in Syria. They faced severe violations including killing, detention, kidnapping, sexual violence, labor in harsh conditions and increased economic responsibility – especially in the case of displaced families or widows. Women have also been affected by more frequent incidents of underage marriage, customary marriage, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation. They also suffered from political, social, and economic exclusion.

Children witnessed three types of violations during the conflict. The first is ‘serious violations’ represents the conflict environment that ruined children’s lives, such as the conflict economy, including child labor;

food insecurity reaching starvation levels; forced displacement including family separations or missing family members; poverty; poor living conditions; lack of access to health and education services; and social degradation. Second is 'grave violations' which represent the exposure of the children to kidnapping, detention, forced recruitment, and besieging. The third is 'extreme grave violations,' representing the exposure of the children of Syria to direct loss of their right to life as many of them killed or injured by during the conflict.

Environmental degradation was one of an aspect of injustice during the conflict as the quantity and quality of weapons used in the conflict poses a serious environmental threat to arable land, as toxic substances have caused soil contamination, which adversely affects the quality of agricultural land and its cultivability or productivity. The conflict has led to the waste of many natural resources such as forests and water resources as a result of destruction, vandalism or misuse, such as logging for heating or drilling of artesian wells in unsustainable ways. Waste and pollution factors affect the long-term potential of environmental sustainability and create Intergenerational future Injustice.

Institutional Injustice

The Human Status Index showed the enormous collapse in institutional performance and the deadly struggle between fighting political actors. Throughout the conflict, decision-making processes have been fragmented and internationalized, as multiple internal and external actors engaged in setting contradicting priorities and mechanisms for each of the involved actors. The different forms of institutions were conflict-centered and adopted extreme strategies to detrimentally affect human beings, social relations, and resources, as well as to subordinate communities.

Although the intensity of battles has declined during 2017-2019, the rule of law, participation, accountability aspects of governance continued to deteriorate.

There are major contradictions between the five internal actors including civil society. The priorities of justice, freedom, transparency, participatory and democracy are at the bottom of the priority list for those in power, which reflects the nature of the conflict centered actors. Only civil society ranked justice, freedom, and democracy as top priorities. The priorities of external actors showed major contradictions as well.

The abuse of the judicial institutions was one of the government's authoritarian characteristics before the conflict, with the absence of an independent legal system, and the aggravation of security services that had the upper hand in directing the legal system and other justice institutions. This led to the absence of any institutions that can resolve conflicts in a just manner, which has compounded enormous grievances.

The conflict has contributed to the reconfiguration of Syrian civil society in complex and overlapping forms and functions. In 2011, the movement created new spaces and aspirations towards political, social and economic participation. The pathway to fulfill these aspirations was confronting despotism and freedom from fear that has afflicted public life in the country for decades. However, the adoption of the military and security confrontation of the movement, the blockage of horizon in opening spaces for reaching social

congruences, and the increase in violations and losses have hindered the promising growth of civil society institutions and initiatives. In a second stage, with the serious deterioration of the armed conflict, the military and security forces succeeded in using repression, identity politics, and the conflict economies to disrupt social capital, which led to serious divisions in the structures of Syrian society.

The organic relations between political actors and new private elite have been deepened and transformed wealth (that which has not been destroyed) to their own benefits in an unprecedented forced redistribution of tangible and intangible capital. Therefore, enormous injustices were created between the political actors and the new private elite on one hand, and the surviving private sector, employees, unemployed, displaced, and poor people, among others.

The global governance system failed to protect civilians in Syria and to activate humanitarian international law and/or effectively enhance the prospect of a just and sustainable settlement. The case of Syria is not unique in the region; the people in this region suffered from injustices at the hands of the global system in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, and others.

The application of international law during the Syrian conflict has been negligible, which has impeded the alleviation of civilian suffering and set the grounds for a prolonged conflict. The global power struggle has a direct effect on the intractability of the Syrian conflict. This struggle represented in the approaches of the permanent five members of the Security Council in addressing the Syrian war and the impacts thereof. The struggle is reflected in contradicted priorities and policies including political and military interventions, sanctions, and economic and humanitarian support, with substantial involvement of conflicting regional actors.

Justice to Transcend Conflict

This report suggests the Human Status Framework as a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to analyze the impact and dynamics of the conflict from the justice lens. The institutional, social, and economic diagnoses of the conflict identify injustice as a core root of the conflict, and perpetuation and creation of new and existing injustice as a key outcome of the conflict.

The report suggests alternative approaches to start the transcending process of conflict, based on the political economy analysis of the key active powers and dynamics of the conflict.

- Social congruences: The political economy of peace-oriented institutions
- Dismantling conflict economy
- The Nodes Overlapping Development Strategy
- Justice to save the future

End of press release

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Note: The report can be downloaded in Arabic and English from the Center's website.