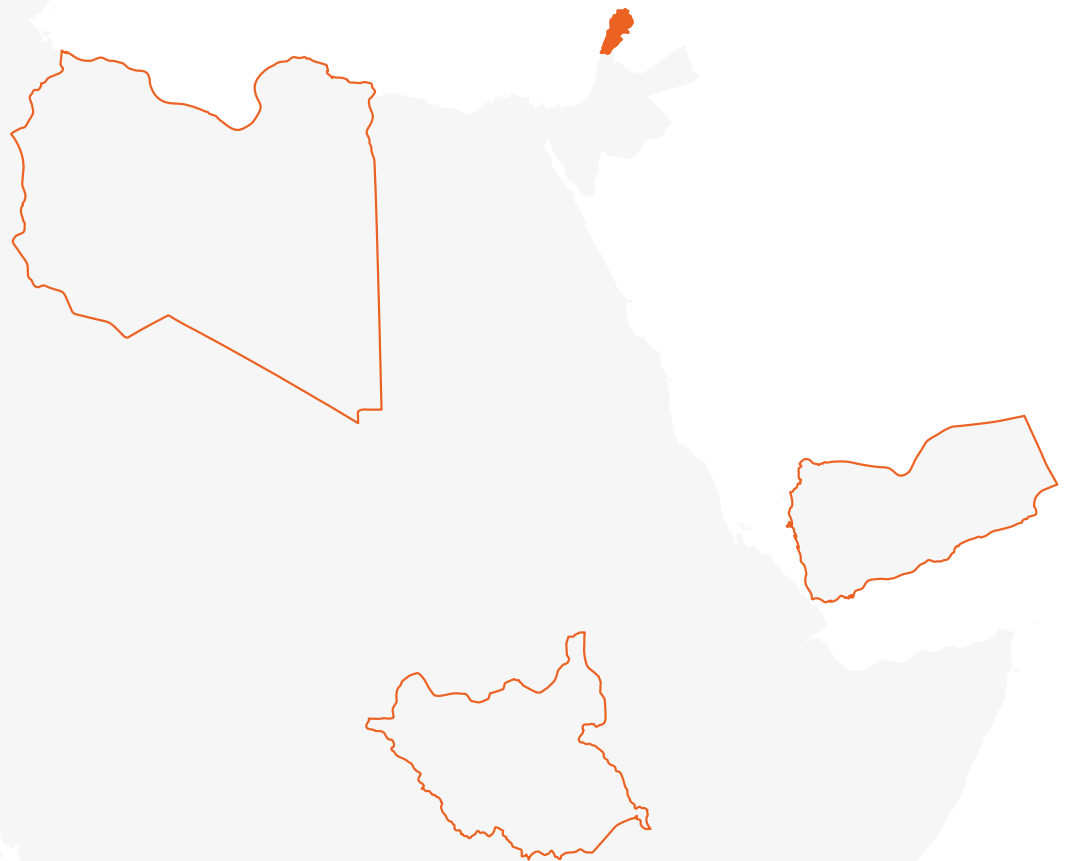




**CONFLICT
SENSITIVITY
COMMUNITY HUB**

Supporting conflict sensitivity through country-focused facilities

Case Study: Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum



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Acronyms

conflict sensitivity (CS)

Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC Hub)

House of Peace (HOPE)

international non-governmental organisation (INGO)

Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum (LCSF)

non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Theory of Change (ToC)

Methodology note

This case study provides some insights on a locally led conflict sensitivity (CS) Forum in Lebanon. It complements the more extensive case studies on CS facilities in Libya, South Sudan, and Yemen that were also produced between April and September 2021 by presenting an alternative emerging model for in-country guidance on CS. The case studies accompany an overall Lessons Paper.¹ Collectively, the Lessons Paper and case studies contribute to a learning initiative for the Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC Hub).²

The authors exchanged analysis and key points with a research team led by CSC Hub member International Alert, who were producing a lessons and design report in the same timeframe for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to inform a new CS facility in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Lebanon case study is based on a literature review and interviews and conversations with two current staff members of House of Peace, who lead on the Lebanon CS Forum. The literature review included programme proposals, activity descriptions, learning products, and briefing papers.

¹ Conflict Sensitivity Community (CSC) Hub (October 2021), *Supporting conflict sensitivity through country-focused facilities: Lessons from Libya, South Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon*.

² <https://www.conflictsensitivityhub.net>

I. Origin and structure

The Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum (LCSF) was initiated in 2019 by House of Peace (HOPe),³ which identified the need to have conversations about conflict-sensitive aid in the country. This was triggered in part by the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and the deepening economic and political crisis in Lebanon that saw worsening relations between host communities and refugees regarding access to aid and livelihood opportunities.⁴ Since 2015, HOPe has developed experience in providing conflict sensitivity (CS) trainings to humanitarian and development agencies, enabling it to draw on its network of ‘friends’ from both international and national agencies to initiate a discussion about how to approach the crises in a more CS manner – and ultimately, to create the LCSF. The Forum was therefore established to “provide a space for local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reflect together on topics”⁵ pertaining to CS. Its mission, which was developed jointly with HOPe’s national and international partners, centres around three key aspects:

- Acting as a learning hub to share experiences and lessons learnt related to CS and collaborating with other platforms;
- Mainstreaming CS in Lebanon through capacity building, developing tools and guidelines, and through follow-up and support; and
- Advocating for CS policies with local and international entities.⁶

The LCSF has thus far facilitated joint conflict analysis discussions and has produced some tools for CS practice, but has not yet engaged in influencing high-level policies and decision-making.⁷ In this context, the Forum’s approach to CS is fairly standard and conceptualised as a three-step process: 1) understanding the context and the conflict within the intervention area; 2) understanding the interaction between a certain intervention and its context; and 3) acting upon this understanding to enhance positive impacts and mitigate negative ones.⁸ The primary target audience for the initiative is humanitarian and development actors, as these two actor groups are perceived as being at the forefront of addressing Lebanon’s multiple and overlapping crises and the resulting ripple effects on social cohesion.⁹

Moreover, there is currently no permanent structure for the LCSF. Instead, it is hosted by HOPe and implemented by three of its staff, who spend 15-20% of their time on this initiative (depending on the number of scheduled activities). Additionally, the LCSF is not funded as a stand-alone ‘project’. Instead, its activities are covered by several mid-sized grants from international non-governmental organisations (INGO)¹⁰ (rather than government donors) for HOPe’s broader programmatic work.¹¹ Its donors are therefore very different from those of the other facilities as they do not bring the same governmental / political agendas and some of them are operational or have a presence in Lebanon. Yet, the LCSF donors have not been involved in shaping the initiative and only occasionally participate in LCSF activities. Costs associated with the

³ <https://www.houseofpeace.ngo>

⁴ HOPe (n.d.), ‘Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum’; Written feedback by LCSF staff.

⁵ HOPe (n.d.), ‘Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum’, p. 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview, 17 March 2021.

⁸ Elias Sadkni (2018), ‘Conflict Sensitivity Stories: Stories That Shape the Concept’, HOPe: Their Voices Paper, 4: 1-24.

⁹ HOPe (n.d.), ‘Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum’; Written feedback by LCSF staff.

¹⁰ Donors include Secours Catholique – Caritas France, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, forumZFD and Porticus.

¹¹ Interview, 19 July 2021.

LCSF remain low and mainly relate to staff time and covering expenditures for the meetings. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to activities being temporarily suspended or moving online, further reduced costs.¹²

II. Evolution

HOPe developed its CS profile from CS trainings, which it has been delivering since 2015. The trainings – which are not formally integrated into the LCSF – are mainly targeted at national and international NGO workers to equip them with the necessary CS skills at the personal, programme, and institutional levels.¹³ Through these, HOPe positioned itself in the CS sphere in Lebanon at a time when awareness and knowledge about the concept was relatively marginal in the country. The connections and trust forged with participating organisations, which included national as well as international aid agencies, in turn allowed HOPe to initiate a discussion about the forum element.

The idea for this collective space was largely copied from other contexts and the Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC Hub), of which HOPe has been a member since 2016. Available learning, especially from the facilities in Libya and South Sudan, therefore played a crucial part in laying the groundwork for the design of the LCSF. Yet, the participatory, bottom-up, and non-institutionalised set up of the LCSF and the focus on mainly humanitarian and development actors came from the specificities of the Lebanese context and HOPe's mandate and capacities as a local organisation.¹⁴ As such, potential member organisations – both national and international – as well as several activists and journalists were given significant control in the design of the mandate and mission of the LCSF. In June 2019, 24 individuals participated in a meeting where they brainstormed their expectations of the LCSF, as well as its mission and vision.¹⁵

To date, the Forum has primarily served as a collective space for national and international humanitarian organisations to raise issues of concern and talk through some of the CS considerations. Key themes discussed during the meetings centre around voluntarism, the economic crisis, and the COVID-19 response. On the latter, a best-practice note was developed that summarises insights from the meeting and outlines concrete programmatic adjustments for conflict-sensitive COVID-19 responses.¹⁶

III. Multi-Stakeholder

Despite still being in its infancy and operations being delayed and disrupted by the pandemic, it is clear that the LCSF differs from the more institutionalised CS facilities in South Sudan, Yemen, and Libya on a number of issues.

Target audience

The LCSF focuses explicitly on humanitarian and to some extent development organisations operating in the country and deliberately does not differentiate between national and international actors. Staff members highlighted that connecting and facilitating dialogue between diverse aid actors is an integral part of the value the LCSF brings. Including both national and international constituencies appears to heighten the quality of discussions as local organisations

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://www.houseofpeace.ngo/what-we-do>

¹⁴ Written feedback by LCSF staff.

¹⁵ HOPe (n.d.), 'Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity Forum', p. 1.

¹⁶ HOPe (n.d.), 'Conflict Sensitivity Tips for COVID-19 Aid Response in Lebanon'.

contribute important context knowledge. HOPE actively supports this exchange by, for example, arranging translators so that organisations can speak in their preferred language.¹⁷

The LCSF does not focus on traditional donors and government entities, though some sporadic participation by municipal actors has occurred.¹⁸ This emphasis on operational organisations has influenced the way the LCSF operates, which is reflected in current outputs. For instance, the guideline for a conflict-sensitive COVID-19 response, which was developed in consultation with aid organisations, focuses almost exclusively on the programmatic level and provides detailed and implementable action points rather than delving into more political and institutional issues.¹⁹

Positioning of the LCSF

The uniqueness of the LCSF – as a bottom-up CS facility, implemented by a Lebanese organisation – potentially also provides some learning in terms of positioning. Contrary to fears that local organisations leading such sensitive conversations may face undue pressure or risks from authorities, to date, HOPE has not experienced any such challenges.²⁰ Furthermore, the LCSF has not encountered any major challenges regarding having both local and international actors present, and staff do not think that this has hampered the quality of the discussions. In many contexts, this could be an issue as local organisations frequently receive funds from international organisations, thereby disincentivising the sharing of challenges; while at the same time, international organisations could be more reluctant to talk about political issues when local organisations are in the room. In response to these potential concerns, one interviewee noted that Forum discussions have simply not been about particularly sensitive subjects and very much remained focused on the practical level, which seems to provide a common ground for international and national aid agencies alike.²¹

This in turn raises some questions about the evolution of the LCSF and to what extent HOPE as a Lebanese organisation will be able, in future, to tackle more sensitive issues, advocate for change in international aid policies, and facilitate discussions with donors. While the LCSF is clearly interested in conducting more donor-focused advocacy,²² to date there has not been much progress in this direction. This might simply be due to the LCSF's early focus on HOPE training participants and the limited time the LCSF has been running. Furthermore, HOPE respondents felt that the coming together of multiple crises put the LCSF in a rather reactive position to respond to the deteriorating situation. In addition, not being fully institutionalised makes it more difficult for the LCSF to engage in stronger, joint advocacy efforts. It therefore remains to be seen how this could be further developed.

A final aspect on the positioning of the LCSF relates to the relationship between HOPE and the LCSF in the range of CS engagements that are delivered in Lebanon. HOPE already worked on CS capacity-building before the creation of the LCSF, but its hosting of the LCSF has further cemented its role as a CS-supporting agency in the sector. This is evidenced by HOPE recently establishing a partnership with the United Nations Development Programme to develop tailored CS guidance notes on cross-cutting issues in the country.²³ Therefore, there seems to be a progression from the bilateral work HOPE does on CS, for instance through the CS trainings, to the collective space for discussion provided through the LCSF, and then the more in-depth CS

¹⁷ Interview, 19 July 2021.

¹⁸ Written feedback by LCSF staff.

¹⁹ HOPE (n.d.), 'Conflict Sensitivity Tips for COVID-19 Aid Response in Lebanon'.

²⁰ Interview, 19 July 2021.

²¹ Interview, 19 July 2021.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

follow-up that is taken forward by HOPE bilaterally. In this sense, the LCSF is contributing to HOPE's work, but it also clearly remains a space that international and national agencies benefit from in terms of grappling with CS challenges in the context. If the LCSF becomes more institutionalised and develops more activities under its own banner, this relationship between the LCSF and HOPE will likely need to be further defined and delineated. The question of how best the lead agency should position itself vis-à-vis the CS facility is a question that other facility implementers in other contexts have also had to think through.

IV. Conclusion

Despite being a relatively young facility, the LCSF has already shown important value in raising the profile of CS concepts in country and promoting collective analysis and peer learning among international and national operational agencies. With a Lebanese organisation taking the lead and the LCSF's deliberate focus on international and especially national aid agencies as vehicles for change, it provides a different model from the other reviewed facilities. Time will tell how it will evolve further and what more can be learned about more locally anchored ways to provide country-focused CS support.

Annex

Reference List

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Interview List

No.	Name	Organisation	Position
1	Jaafar, Lama	House of Peace	Conflict Sensitivity Coordinator
2	Sadkni, Elias	House of Peace	Peacebuilding & Conflict Sensitivity Specialist



conflictsensitivityhub.net