

Whose voice matters? Inclusion in local decision-making in Kenya and Lebanon

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Abstract

In recent years, the view that peacebuilding is essentially local has gained traction. Debates in the field of development research point to the potential of citizen' participation and influence for promoting effective, appropriate and legitimate developments, but post-conflict contexts offer additional challenges. Here, societal divisions infiltrate the local level and its policy-making, and participation does not necessarily offer answers to issues of voice and inclusion. This article compares participation and influence in Kenya and Lebanon, two deeply divided post-conflict countries. The study has three main findings: there are possibilities for local communities to participate in local decision-making; inclusion and ability to influence local decision-making depends on personal status; and local decision-making bodies are influenced by national dividing lines, which risks replicating conflictual divisions. Therefore, while participation and influence in local decision-making in post-conflict contexts is possible for some, it risks promoting further exclusion of those already marginalised, thus hindering efforts to consolidate peace and development. Based on these results this report offers three recommendations for local governments to further develop local participation. First, there is a need for continued attention to include of those usually not heard, for example women, youth and local minorities. Second, there is a need to transparently acknowledge who is included in national versus local arenas. Third, there is a need to allow for alternative avenues for influence, especially if marginalised actors use these avenues to impact local decision-making.

Keywords

Participation, influence, Kenya, Lebanon, post-conflict societies, peace, development

Preface



By Johan Lilja, Secretary General, Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

The mandate of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy in primarily low- and middle-income countries. In order to fulfil this mandate, we promote and encourage decentralised cooperation through municipal partnerships programme; capacity-building through our international training programmes; and investing in relevant research and creating important research networks. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks, connects relevant researchers with practitioners, and organises conferences and workshops. We also maintain a publications series. *'Whose voice matters? Inclusion in local decision-making in Kenya and Lebanon'* is the 21st report to be published in ICLD's Research Reports series. This is a result from the research project financed by ICLD, comprising this report, a policy brief and a workshop guide on the same theme.

No context is like another, and to understand how local democratic arenas promote citizen influence, it is necessary to understand the local reality. The experience of armed conflict means democratic processes are developed somewhere on 'the continuum of peace' – somewhere between absence of organized violence and a fully peaceful society. Leonardsson and Habyarimana's research takes the discussion on participation and influence out of the theoretic vacuum and dissects it within the "messiness that is peace and conflict".

The report explores where participation intersects with influence, warning us to look beyond surface values of participatory and inclusionary forums. It becomes clear that these are not automatically a way to move beyond conflictual divides. We learn that inclusion may be a double-edged sword, simultaneously providing space for influence and fuelling a continuation of divisions. Therefore, context-sensitive analysis is necessary and must take into account identity, personal status of individuals as well as group belongings and national power hierarchies. The findings resonate with the key principle in international development, once again showing the link between peacebuilding and development – leave no one behind.

In line with this, I believe that for us to fight poverty and reach the ambitious goals set out by Agenda 2030, change must be anchored at the local level through data-driven, community-based improvements in means of transparency, participation, and accountability. I hope that this research will contribute to inspire and inform local policymakers to continue the hard and challenging work and to play their part in making the world a better place for all.

Visby, Sweden, December 2022

Johan Lilja
Secretary General, ICLD

About the Authors



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Introduction

The view that peacebuilding is essentially local has gained traction in recent years. In 2016, this prompted the UN to introduce a new understanding of peacebuilding, focusing on sustaining peace together with the communities affected by conflict (Coning, 2018, p. 304f; UN Security Council, 2016; United Nations, 2015). This development is paralleled by a debate in scholarly literature, emphasising the local level in peacebuilding, grounding post-conflict policies within affected communities (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). In part, the debate on localising peacebuilding takes inspiration from research on participation and local influence arguing that participative local policies stand a greater chance of promoting effective, appropriate and legitimate developments (Chambers, 1983; Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Grindle, 2007). While these debates have inspired development practice for decades, the hope is that the same measures can be translated to post-conflict contexts. Nevertheless, post-conflict contexts are often characterised by continued divisions along former conflictual lines, offering additional challenges to local participation.

In this research report, we explore local participation in the post-conflict settings of Kenya and Lebanon, by analysing how participation and influence is pursued. We define post-conflict contexts as having past experiences with outbreaks of violence and the manifestation of societal divides through violent means. Describing a context as “post”-conflict does not entail a lack of contestation, and societal divisions between former enemies often continue after fighting ends (Bou Akar, 2018; Mueller, 2011). Such understandings are mirrored in writings on peace as a continuum, as well as “the messiness that constitutes peace and conflict” (Mac Ginty, 2022, p. 41; True, 2020). Our two cases, Kenya and Lebanon, are both countries that have experienced past periods of violence and a continuation of societal divides, in Kenya pertaining to ethnicity and in Lebanon pertaining to sectarianism.

Building on the perception that decentralisation reform can act as a conflict mitigation tool, but may also enhance other challenges (Jackson, 2016), we analyse whether structures of local governance affect participation and influence. We do so by comparing Kenya

and Lebanon, two countries that vary in relation to the structure of local governance. In 2010, Kenya underwent a decentralisation reform, while Lebanon’s municipalities are still ruled by a centralised system of governance.

Kenya, election violence and devolution of power

Kenya, a vast country in Eastern Africa is home to almost 50 million people, with 11 larger ethnic groups and plenty smaller ones dividing the population. Kenya’s experience with conflict is related to recurrent election violence in 1992, 1997 and 2007. Electoral violence in Kenya has been fuelled by party politics driven by ethnic divides and clientelism, and a centralised political system where the winner takes it all. The main dividing lines in the conflict have been between those in power and the opposition, with disputed elections fuelling feelings of exclusion. However, because political elites use ethnic identities to mobilise supporters, violence has played out along ethnic lines (Mueller, 2011). Thus, although Kenya’s elections were non-violent in 2013, 2017 and 2022, the dividing lines still exist, and continue to restrain peace.

After the election violence of 2007-2008, Kenya engaged in constitutional reforms, including introducing counties as elected bodies in a new decentralised structure. The decentralisation reform aimed at changing the centralisation of power around the presidency, bringing government closer to the people, promoting accountability, protecting and promoting the interests and rights of minorities and marginalized groups, and facilitating an equitable sharing of national and local resources. The new constitution institutionalised gender quotas dictating that no gender can occupy more than two thirds of county assembly seats. Also, the new constitution promoted participation through local forums called “Barazas” (Cheeseman et al., 2014). Importantly, the constitutional reforms distributed political and economic gains to the county level, lessening their association to presidential power and allowing local groups greater say locally.

Lebanon, civil war and continued sectarian divides

Lebanon, a small country in the Middle East, is home to almost 7 million people, including a large group of Syrian and Palestinian refugees or their descendants. Lebanon is characterised by division of power among its 18 recognised religious groups, the three largest ones being the Christian Maronites, Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. During the 1975-1990 civil war, militias mobilised along sectarian lines, although conflicts and alliances also shifted throughout (Hanf, 1993, p. 976). The 1990 Ta'if peace agreement and consecutive agreements have emphasised power-sharing along sectarian lines, reinforcing a society built on clientelism and a political elite pursuing politics through sectarian identities (Salamey, 2014). Today, Lebanon is experiencing a triple crisis, including an economic, political and humanitarian crisis. Although non-violent to date, many argue that the institutionalisation of sectarian divides has sustained the impunity of political elites and contributed to current crises (Macourant Atallah & Tamo, 2021).

The Taif peace agreement included measures to lessen sectarianism, including a decentralisation reform, which has not been implemented. Nevertheless, Lebanon held municipal elections every six years between 1998 and 2016. Until 2016, local governments avoided some of the national political stalemate through regular local elections, allowing citizens a space to engage in politics closer to home (Harb & Atallah, 2015). At the same time, Lebanese local governance works under a system of centralisation, obliged to seek permission from higher levels of authority for local decision and with few local revenues municipalities are dependent on external funding, limiting their fiscal and administrative autonomy (Harb & Atallah, 2015).

Participation and influence in post-conflict contexts

State of the art

Traditional approaches to post-conflict reconstruction focus on establishing, reforming, or strengthening state institutions (Barnett 2006). However, often, such mechanisms generate façade institutions while governance and power continue to be concentrated in and implemented through informal structures, ranging from systems of patronage, regional or ethnic bonds, to old political and military ties (Themnér & Utas, 2016). To counteract such façade institutions, participation and inclusion are key. By including actors such as local communities, civil society actors, marginalised groups, as well as women and youth, policies of post-conflict reconstruction are claimed to gain broader legitimacy, and relevance for everyday needs (Gizelis & Joseph, 2016; Paffenholz et al., 2017). However, literature on peacebuilding and participation often consider participation in a national arena, studying participation in peace negotiations or in relation to international actors intervening in post-conflict contexts (Obradovic-Wochnik, 2020; True & Riveros-Morales, 2018; Zvaita & Mbara, 2019). Despite its importance, participation in these forums is far from the everyday lives of most people in post-conflict spaces.

In the scholarly debate that has come to be known as the 'local turn in peacebuilding' (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013), bottom-up perspectives are emphasised to ground peacebuilding in the everyday lives of the population (Roberts, 2011). Scholars focusing on the efficiency of peacebuilding have been inspired by studies on decentralisation, local governance and localised claims to legitimacy found in theories of democracy, governance and development to pursue a more localised peace (see for example Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Grindle, 2007; Rosanvallon, 2011; Öjendal & Dellnäs, 2013). Building on these perspectives, scholars such as Brancati (2006), Brinkerhoff (2011) and Donais (2012), to name a few, argue that local governance provides space for local participation, locally relevant service provision, local ownership and consensus building,

giving local actors a role as agents. Such approaches consider local governments as effective institutions to localise peace agreements, peacebuilding processes and post-conflict reconstruction, advocating for decentralisation of centralised powers to local constituencies (Jackson, 2016; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Decentralisation, or the “transfer [of] responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government” (Falleti, 2005, p. 328) includes devolving administrative, fiscal and political authority. However, in practice, decentralisation ranges from devolution in all three sectors of authority (administrative, fiscal and political) to minimal devolution in one (Dubois & Fattore, 2009; Falleti, 2005).

With varying versions of decentralisation practices, there is little evidence supporting decentralisation as a solution for bad governance, poverty and conflict across the board (Booth & Cammack, 2013; Grindle, 2007). Studies on local governance and decentralisation provide a mixed picture, emphasising some successes as well as challenges. For example, in Central America, decentralisation became a popular tool in post-conflict reconstruction aiming to address inequalities that fuelled civil wars in the latter half of the 1900’s. Despite a relative success in opening up for local participation (Bland, 2007, 2017), Stein (2012) argues that the reforms did not address unequal power relations. Furthermore, power relations continue to determine local participation in post-conflict states in, for example, in Africa and Asia, as well as in processes of post-conflict development and transitional justice (Jackson, 2016; Maconachie, 2010; Obradovic-Wochnik, 2020). As such, localising participation within post-conflict governance renews the dilemma between post-conflict institutions acting as a tool to build peace or deepen inclusion and democracy (Jarstad & Sisk, 2008; Paris & Sisk, 2009; Vélez-Torres et al., 2022).

Participation and influence – three key issues

Acknowledging the mixed record of participation in post-conflict contexts, this research report probes further and asks how we can understand post-conflict participation and influence. To investigate this, we explore three key points found in the literature on local

participation in local governments. First, the existence of arenas for citizen participation and how participation is pursued. Second, citizen influence over local policy-making, emphasising the workings of power relations, hierarchies and that participation does not necessarily mean being heard. Third, the link between participation and influence to post-conflict divides in local as well as national arenas. Below, we elaborate on these three key issues.

First, scholars claim that local governments improve participation through local democratic arenas, arguing that ‘municipal councils, as collective decision-making bodies, lend themselves to inclusion and consensus-oriented problem solving’ (Bland, 2007; Brancati, 2006; Jackson, 2013; Sisk & Risley, 2005b, p. 37). This counteracts the inaccessibility of the national government and national policies. In this sense, local governments can complement representative democracy through, for example, meetings, hearings, surveys as well as more direct forms of citizen initiatives (Bevir, 2009, p. 146f). This provides opportunities for the local population to engage with political elites, voice local needs and demand accountability (Donais, 2012, p. 54f; Vélez-Torres et al., 2022). Nevertheless, who participates is shaped by gender structures, hierarchies and access to power, usually excluding women, youth and minority groups (Arnstein, 1969; Jaji, 2020; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). Thus, to understand participation, we need to explore what forums for participation exist as well as who participates in these forums.

However, paying attention to who participates does not necessarily give an equal say to all actors, as participation may reproduce power relations and legitimise already made decisions (Hasselskog, 2016). Such participation creates a participation favourable only to a few, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies that exclude women and youth from influencing decisions (Horst, 2017; Leino & Puumala, 2020; Vélez-Torres et al., 2022). Without the ability to influence, participation risks creating what Sen (2000, p. 28) has termed ‘unfavourable inclusion’. Unfavourable inclusions emphasises how participation is performed, highlighting that in some instances it leads to influence for the participant, while in others it furthers exclusion as some participants’

voices are not heard (Sen, 2000; Stepanova, 2015). The inclusion of women is one such example. While women's participation is crucial, their inclusion is often legitimized in relation to adding a female perspective, emphasising female agents contributing to feminized tasks and excluded from other parts of policy-making (Goetz & Jenkins, 2016). This highlights two aspects of local participation. First, that meaningful participation includes having influence over policy processes and outcomes, necessary for building trust and willingness to cooperate (Paffenholz, 2015, p. 85; Stepanova, 2015). Second, that if participants have the possibility to influence, we still need to investigate how it relates to power structures and influence over what.

Moving back to writings on peacebuilding, scholars often emphasise local agency. Local agency, expressed through participation and influence, is perceived as a tool for emancipation and resistance also available to women, youth and minority groups. However, research on gender and agency reminds us that participating and exercising influence does not necessarily mean resisting existing power structures or ways of life as agents can choose to re-emphasise existing power structures and submission (Björkdahl & Gusic, 2015; Horst, 2017). In post-conflict contexts, these power structures include local as well as national dividing lines between groups and actors, and a realisation that while a group may be the majority in the local arena, it can simultaneously be a minority nationally, or vice versa (Leonardsson, 2019). As such, even if participation and influence assumedly allows for the expression of local needs and contestation of political elites, attention must be paid to how it plays out in relation to contextual power structures. This includes asking questions about who participates and how, but also how post-conflict divisions across local and national arenas affect participation and influence in the local.

Exploring the mixed picture of decentralised governance, we investigate participation, influence and its connection to post-conflict settings in Kenya and Lebanon, where Kenya has undergone a decentralisation reform and Lebanon is still ruled by a centralised governance system.

Methodology

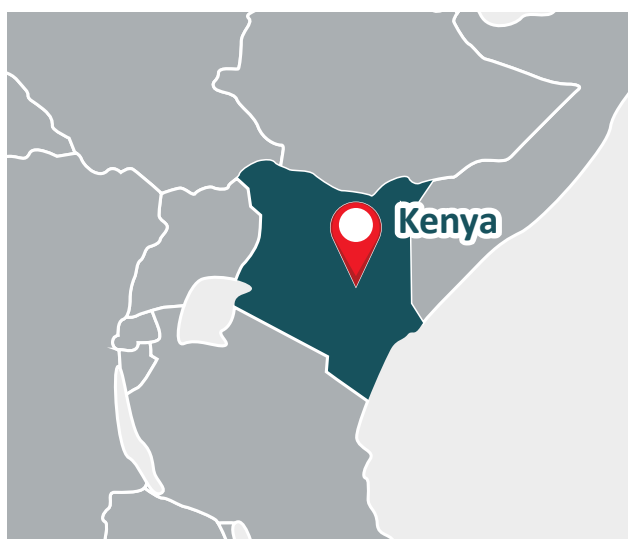
This study uses comparative analysis with the aim of providing an in-depth illustration of how local participation and influence are pursued in Kenya and Lebanon, and how this relates to post-conflict contexts. The comparative component of the study is case-oriented, meaning that it is in the thick description of the cases that meaningful comparisons of participation and influence can be understood (Della Porta, 2008). Adhering to the case-oriented approach, our cases, Kenya and Lebanon are both post-conflict contexts, meaning that they have experienced conflict but still grapple with societal divides and peace as a continuum. Also, our cases differ on their level of decentralisation, where Kenya has implemented a decentralisation reform, and Lebanon has not. As such, the study sheds light on the complexities of participation and influence in post-conflict contexts, as well as how devolution of central powers to local constituencies influences such processes.

The study was conducted at the County and Municipal levels. In Kenya, we studied Nairobi, Kenya's Capital City where all the kingpins from the 'tribal' parties come to exercise and negotiate political influence at the national level, and Kisumu, seen as the land of the Luo ethnic group historically known as the stronghold of the opposition. In Lebanon, the dividing line in politics is sectarianism, nationally as well as locally. For this study, we selected Saida and Bourj Hammoud. Saida is a mostly Sunni Muslim municipality with close connections to the Future Movement and Hariri family – major political players on the national level. Bourj Hammoud is mostly Armenian, locally run by the political party Tashnak – a minor player on the national political scene. Considering the passion for ethnicity as divisive politics in Kenya, and sectarianism in Lebanon, the local governments represent the national diversity of each country, but also how local governments have different relationships to national power – closely connected to it or as part of a minority or opposition. This allows us to study how local participation is ingrained, and affected by, national hierarchies and power relations (Hasselskog 2016).

The study used structured and semi-structured interviews conducted between 2014 and 2020 in Kenya and Lebanon by Habyarimana and Leonardsson respectively. Lebanon's material includes 55 interviews with municipal councillors, municipal and state employees as well as civil society actors. In Kenya, the material includes 70 interviews conducted with County officials, local civil society actors, and community members. Interviewees in both countries were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Attention was put on making sure that women, men and the youth are included. The interviews explored the role of local governments and local actors in peacebuilding, peace initiatives and local governance.

Findings

Kenya



Participation

As suggested by the theoretical framework, local governance opens up for participation by bringing governance closer to the population and complementing traditional democratic channels with meetings, hear-

ings, citizen initiatives, etc. (Bevir, 2009, p. 146f). Such forums would allow the local population to engage with local decision-making to voice needs or demand accountability (Donais, 2012: 54f). Therefore, as a starting point for our study, we ask what possibilities for participation exist as well as who participates.

As far as possibilities of local participation in Kenya are concerned, the majority of interviewees indicate that forums through which people participate in local decision-making exist. Examples of such forums include public meetings, participation in budget processes as well as platforms created by civil society organisations. The 2010 Constitutional reform, which introduced decentralization and devolution of power and shifted resources to the Counties, emphasized citizens' participation through local forums commonly known as Barazas (Omanga, 2015). At the time of the interviews in 2020, our results suggest that such measures have been implemented.

Although different communities in Kenya participate in local government policy-making, our research suggests that they do so in unequal ways. Women and youth are two groups that the interviewees perceive as not participating equally.¹ In Kenya, discrimination by for example, ethnicity, gender and age offers additional challenges to the belief that devolution would increase citizens' inclusion, participation and influence in policy-making. Reflecting on the quota for women in Kenya's politics, one interviewee said:

The Constitution of Kenya is clear that at least 30% of political positions should be given to women. However, this idea is yet to be implemented. Kenyans are still attached to cultural beliefs that women are meant to stay in the kitchen and take care of children while power and authority belong to men (Member of County Assembly, Kisumu, December 2020).

¹ After the 2017 elections the average national ratio between female and male members of county assemblies (MCAs) was 34 percent female and 66 percent male. However, if only counting the MCAs that were appointed through elections, women won 6.6 percent of the seats. Women's representation was increased through nominations to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the MCAs are of the same gender in accordance with the Kenyan constitution (Nation Gender Equality Commission (NGEC) and County Assembly Forum (CAF), 2018; Republic of Kenya, 2010). This furthers the question on whether the inclusion of women implies that they have voice? Statistics for the 2022 elections are currently unavailable, so are statistics on youth.

And another interviewee pointed out that:

Some women prefer to stay away because politics in Kenya involves a lot of violence, and generally women are victims. So, instead of going to expose themselves, they prefer not getting involved in politics (CSO member, Nairobi, December 2020).

The youth or young adults face similar challenges when they wish to participate actively. The majority of our interviewees in 2020 (eight out of eleven) pointed out that the youth is not given equal chance to participate in policy-making at the county level. Thus, despite the existence of forums for participation, Kenyan power relations privileging the role of men and older generations affect who participates in local decision-making.

Influence

The local government and non-government actors interviewed, generally agree on that there is a possibility to influence local decision-making in Kenya, even if such influence is often a façade. Sen (2000: 28) calls such façade influence ‘unfavourable inclusion.’ One interviewee described this, saying that:

even if local communities are invited, decisions look like they have been taken even before the meeting. Most likely, the voices of the people do not come out as they should during the meetings (Member of County Assembly, Nairobi, December 2020).

However, the data illustrates that local governments are intertwined with multiple local actors that can influence decisions in different ways, although not necessarily through formal channels. One interviewee summarised this, saying:

In Kenya, there is too much bureaucracy at the local administration that makes only same people participate. But when you have connection to national leaders, your voice is heard. This is natural (Member of County Assembly, Kisumu, December 2020).

Thus, in the Kenyan clientelist society, it is common practice to use connections and collaborations to influence policy-making (Egan & Tabar, 2016; Kingiri & Hall, 2012). Another interviewee confirmed that saying:

I know the needs of my community and I have to make sure these elected leaders take care of our needs. I have a good connection with the Member of County Assembly (MCA) and, as you can see, the Sub-County Commissioner opens the door for me anytime (Civil society actor, Nairobi, 2017).

The above accounts illustrate that official forums for participation are not the only ways through which local people can influence policy-making. Indeed, different community members use their connections to national leaders to influence local policy-making. Put in relation to the literature on participation, this means that while official ‘participation for participation’s sake’ (Leino & Puumala, 2020, p. 2) is insignificant, the practice of participation and influence finds other paths, often through personal connections. These unofficial paths are shaped by hierarchies set within a post-conflict context related to local capacity and willingness to act. This type of influence is perceived as connecting the County to people’s needs.

Moreover, findings show that influence depended on how sessions for collecting people’s ideas are communicated, highlighting how poor communication between local leaders and populations has frequently limited influence of the latter. Even during the meetings, ideas and voting over motions do not seem to have equal power of influence, as one participant demonstrated saying that ‘generally people make clear what is important for them but decisions that are taken at higher levels do not seem to give priority to the citizens’ claims’ (Youth Leader, Nairobi December 2020).

Lebanon



Participation

In Lebanon, local inhabitants participate in local governance through municipal elections but interviewees claim that there are no other forums for local participation and that the decision-making power is with the municipal council. However, in literature on post-conflict contexts, one argument is that local councils are more likely to include actors from different local communities, lending themselves to consensus building (Sisk & Risley, 2005a). This is the case in Bourj Hammoud where the municipal council includes representatives of the major communities, allowing for a participation of sorts. In Saida, elections in 2010 and 2016 saw competition between several lists (The Monthly, 2016). This illustrates a potential for deepening democracy but at the same time emphasises the need for other forums where opposing lists can have a say.

In addition, interviewees claim that women do not have equal opportunities to participate. Lebanon has an exceptionally low average of women participating in politics, with women winning just above five percent of the seats in the 2016 municipal elections (Abu-Rish, 2016) and just below five percent in the 2018 parli-

amentarian elections (World Bank, 2021). In the 2022 parliamentary elections, the number increased to just above 6 percent. Similarly, interviewees suggest that youth² in Lebanon are excluded from municipal decision-making. One young civil society actor claimed that the municipality targets young people through different activities but when it comes to influencing policies their voices are not heard (civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015).

Nevertheless, through interviews with female municipal councillors, we learn that the few women who are involved do not express any particular disadvantage of being a woman participating in municipal activities. One female municipal councillor claims: 'the one who works, works. I can work better than the men because they have their other work and I have more time' (Municipal councillor, Saida, June 2015). However, while she is positive, this also demonstrates the link between participation, power hierarchies and patriarchal structures, as women are not busy as breadwinners of the family (Goetz & Jenkins, 2016; Twining-Ward et al., 2018; Vélez-Torres et al., 2022). In this particular case, this is to her advantage. In addition, the story of this female municipal councillor verifies the notion that power relations and personal status matters for participation in Lebanese politics. Like many others interviewed, this woman is well established in the local community and president of a local NGO. Thus, municipal governance opens up a space for female participation for women, particularly when they are from locally influential families, if they are locally known and known to contribute to community development (Ghaddar, 2016; Sbaity Kassem, 2012).

Influence

Despite the lack of official forums for participation beyond local elections in Lebanon, our findings show that local actors participate and have influence over decisions and implementation of decisions through other means. A municipal councillor in Saida claims that 'NGOs and the population [are] involved and

² For a definition of youth we refer to the UN that defines youth as young people between 15 and 25 years. However, in line with the UN, we also acknowledge that youth in political participation often refers to young people up to the age of 35, because of national regulations on eligibility for political posts (UNDP & UNDESA 2013). In Lebanon the legal age for voting and running for political positions is 21.

consulted in planning of activities' (Municipal councillor, Saida, June 2015), suggesting that there are consultative forums in relation to individual events. In addition, interviews described possibilities to influence outside official channels. One civil society actor summarises this well, saying that: 'if you know somebody, who knows somebody, who knows somebody, it can go somewhere' (Civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015). The same is seen in interviews from Saida, as one civil society actor said:

Our chairman here of the association is a member of the municipality [...] we have direct contact with [the municipality], we discuss with her daily. If we have something, she can take it to the mayor; for us, it is very easy to accomplish (Civil society actor, Saida, November 2015).

This illustrates that official forums for participation are not the only ways through which local people can influence policy-making. Indeed, while official forums are missing in Lebanon, community members have used their connections to municipal leaders to influence local policy-making. Whether this occurs through individuals directly interacting with municipal officials, or through civil society organisations, these practices give birth to perceptions that the municipality is responsive. One interviewee in Saida explained: 'my view is that the municipality is highly regarded as very perceptive of people's needs, it is because the civil society is giving them this image' (Civil society actor, Saida, November 2015).

However, this pattern resembles that of many clientelistic societies where it is common practice to use connections and collaborations to influence policy-making (Egan & Tabar, 2016; Kingiri & Hall, 2012). It also implies that these interactions are intertwined with relationships of power, emphasising participation and influence as a relationship of mutual exchange with elites providing opportunities for influence in return for support for their political ambition (Cammett & Issar, 2010). One of our interviewees confirms this by saying:

Some of the responsible people in this party help us, when they want to, to realise our projects. When it is in their own interest you get all the help you need, but if its not [demonstrative pause] (Civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015).

Our interviews with civil society actors as well as municipal councillors and employees highlight that while influence is an admirable goal, its practice is intertwined with personal connections as well as local power relations and interest of actors. This creates participation and influence available to some, at some points in time (Leino & Puumala 2020).

Participation and influence in Kenya and Lebanon's post-conflict settings

So far, our findings illustrate that participation is perceived as a façade, and not equal for men and women, youth or between different local communities. At the same time, our material suggests that there are possibilities, at least for some, to practice influence through indirect means. Indeed, interviewees in both Lebanon and Kenya confirmed that they exercise influence through unofficial channels, such as connections to national leaders and relatives. These results correspond to existing research on the practice of participation and influence, saying that participants' resources and capacity matter for the influence they are able to have (Hasselskog, 2016; Leino & Puumala, 2020).

However, in this report we are asking how differences in participation and influence relate to local governance in post-conflict settings in particular. In both countries, patron-client relationships has shaped how political influence is pursued, and it is also along these lines that armed mobilisation has occurred during times of violent conflicts like the civil war in Lebanon and post-election violence in Kenya (Chulov, 2021; Hamzeh, 2001). The nature of patron-client relationships also highlights the vertical connections in societies where individuals reach out to more powerful actors higher up in the hierarchy to solve local problems (Leonardsson, 2020).

Our research highlights these vertical relationships as well as the importance of personal status. According to our interviewees, good connections to national actors as well as actors' economic and educational status are seen as the most important conditions for local influence. This emphasises that personal connections matter for influence, as discussed above, but also the importance of relationships to national actors for local decision-making.

In Lebanon, the municipality of Saida offers a good example. Saida is run by a local coalition with close ties to the Future Movement, a major party in national politics and leader of the Sunni-Christian alliance in Lebanese politics. Municipal councillors described the relationship to the state as:

Very good, because of Mrs Bahia and Siniora [parliamentarians for Future Movement]. It makes it easier; it facilitates problems that may occur. We contact them if there is something we need (Municipal councillor, Saida, November 2015).

In practical terms, the relationship had resulted in infrastructural projects and a new waste management plant. This emphasises the important role of national actors for local developments, while it also confirms the continued shaping of the local arena through national dividing lines. This means that the local is not a space of its own, as local developments are always set in relation to the national. This influences the local's ability to respond to local needs. In Lebanon, the centralised governance system and lack of fiscal autonomy of municipalities reinforces this dependence on external actors (Harb & Atallah, 2015).

However, the ability to fulfil local needs does not overshadow local perceptions of municipal dependency on national divides, as one interviewee in Saida claimed: 'On the ground, he [the mayor] is doing good work together with the civil society, a well-selected municipal council. But in the end, they are representing a certain political party' (civil society actor, Saida, November 2015). The same can be said about the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, even if the less prominent posi-

tion of national allies meant smaller local capacity and a tighter network serving the local majority. As one interviewee explained:

When [the mayor] is someone who is from the community, because he is Armenian and everyone around him is Armenian, it is normal for them to serve their people before they serve others (Civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015).

In the clientelist system this is perceived as normal. The same civil society actor also explained that their community finds their own ways of responding to the needs of their Christian Maronite community: 'we have people from the government, we have people from the Ministry of social works, they are here in our community, they help us to serve the people' (Civil society actor, Bourj Hammoud, November 2015). These examples from Saida and Bourj Hammoud illustrate that connections to national actors within one's own group matter. In addition, it illustrates that the difference between having connections to influential national actors, as Saida, or less prominent national actors, as Bourj Hammoud influences what type of local developments are made possible. Compared to the large infrastructural projects implemented in Saida, municipal projects in Bourj Hammoud were mostly smaller initiatives implemented through a network of actors. When these networks are perceived as based on sectarian belonging, even if refuted by the municipality itself (interviews with municipal councillors, November 2015), it matters for local understandings of participation and influence. In a system that lacks official forums for participation, such perceptions matter for local understandings of influence based on who is the local majority as well as the reproduction of local exclusion and local divides. This emphasises the contextual power structures present in post-conflict settings (Leonardsson, 2020; Vélez-Torres et al., 2022).

As has been discussed, local policy-making implies possibilities to participate and influence. However, influence is shaped around clientelist politics whose possibilities to impact local development is connected to power relations within national politics. In terms

of answering the question of how post-conflict opportunities and challenges impact local participation and influence, this is troublesome. Literature on local peacebuilding often claims that local democratic arenas present better opportunities for participation, often presented as a vital ingredient in local constituencies being able to move beyond conflictual divides (Donais, 2012; Sisk & Risley, 2005a). However, results of this study illustrate that the local is not disconnected from national politics and dividing lines, engaging with national elites through sectarian and ethnic alliances. Our results also show that local participation is set along these lines, where people can use good connections to national leaders and other attributes to influence policy-making at the local. At the same time, interviews show that local participation provides both opportunities and challenges, deepening local democracy and making local democracy part of a context of conflicts and national divides. As such, studying local participation and influence necessitates an analysis of the local context and an awareness of identity, personal status of individuals as well as group belongings and on what level a group of people are a majority or a minority. Thus, while responsiveness to minority needs on the local level may compensate for national unresponsiveness (Brinkerhoff, 2011, p. 142f), local contexts are rarely homogeneous and greater participation of a local majority who is a national minority may mean the local exclusion of others, as in of Bourj Hammoud. This means that while participation promotes ways of interaction, it is hierarchical and gives more influence to some and less to others (Leino & Puumala, 2020).

In Kenya, the County governments are theoretically autonomous and serving the interests of their Counties. However, ethnicity continues to be an important dividing line between the political parties, and local governments defined by their relationship to different ethnic communities. One interviewee said that 'identities, especially ethnicity, are still important for political participation. You'll find that it is difficult to join a political party because it belongs to a certain ethnic group' (CSO member, Nairobi December 2020). In this context, County governments seem to represent

the interests of major ethnic communities within the County, but underlines also the fact that minorities in this County might be excluded.

Furthermore, due to the patron-client system, political parties have continued to be highly dominated by ethnic kingpins (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2018). County leaders have remained dependent on the abilities of 'ethnic' party leaders to sit at the same table with ruling coalitions characterised by the same ethnic ideology. In a system of winner-takes-it-all, the ability to show one's muscles has led some areas to get resources that they would hardly receive otherwise (Habyarimana, 2018). Kisumu and Nairobi differ in their relationship to national power holders, and Kenyans understand that these divides matter for who has influence on local policy-making. They consider that good connections to national leaders allow local actors to participate and have influence. One respondent belonging to the ethnic majority in Kisumu highlighted this:

Of course if you are connected to important people you get respected and listened to. For example, right now you can see that I easily enter in the office of the District Commissioner without any problem. People listen to us because we bring their queries to higher offices and they see that solutions come (Youth Leader, Kisumu 2017).

In Kenya, as in Lebanon, influence is shaped around clientelist politics where possibilities to impact local development is connected to power relations within national politics. This contradicts the above presented claims in the literature on local peacebuilding that local democratic arenas present better opportunities for inclusion (Donais, 2012; Sisk & Risley, 2005a). Moreover, similar to Lebanon, local inclusion in Kenya deepens local democracy through participatory forums. At the same time it makes local democracy part of a context of conflicts and national divides, creating winners and losers along these lines (Leino & Puumala, 2020).

Concluding discussion

While long-standing debates in the field of development have promoted participatory and inclusive approaches, our study illustrates that post-conflict contexts offer additional challenges through continued divisions along former warring lines. In this study, we analyse local participation and influence in Kenya and Lebanon. Both countries are post-conflict, characterised by ethnic and sectarian dividing lines that have previously fuelled violent encounters. However, Kenya and Lebanon differ on how they have approached local governance after conflict. In 2010, Kenya initiated a decentralisation reform to counter the centralisation of power around the presidency, whereas Lebanese local governments work under a system of centralisation, restricted by administrative regulations, a lack of resources and capacity.

Our study found that as far as local participation and influence are concerned in post-conflict societies, decentralization reform in Kenya has opened up for local forums for participation, such as meetings, public forums, or participation in budget processes at the County level. However, when it comes to the quality of participation and influence the decentralisation reform does not appear to have made much of a difference. Results show that, in Kenya and Lebanon, participation and inclusion in local decision-making is possible for some actors and in those cases does promote responsiveness in local governance. At the same time, the analysis showed that ‘participation by some’ tends to happen along existing alliances, and further exclude those already marginalised in relation to local power structures, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, age or abilities, often emphasising existing dividing lines related to previous conflict. There are three main takeaways that we want to emphasise.

First, although possibilities for the local communities to participate exist, they also suggest that these possibilities are not equally accessible to women and youth. In Kenya, the legal 30 percent quota for women is met by nominating women as MCAs. Thus, while women fill the positions, the question remains if their partic-

ipation is equally influential. In Lebanon, the general perception is that women are excluded to a greater extent as the influence of patriarchal structures on participation is strong. In both countries, youth may participate, but their influence is hindered by limited financial capabilities to compete against established elder politicians, or by councils of elders that tend to associate political power with old age.

Second, our study has shown that personal status matters for inclusion in local decision making in both Kenya and Lebanon. Such personal status includes economic and educational status as well as connections to national and local decision-makers and political leaders. This echoes previous research on the hierarchies of inclusion present in participatory approaches (Leino & Puumala, 2020; Sen, 2000). At the same time, the study also illustrates that influence through personal status and connections opens up for some women who have a prominent role locally to influence local decision-making and allows groups who may not have a say nationally to make their voices heard in the local space. As such, hierarchies can work in two ways, excluding those who do not belong to a particular group, but also including those prominent individuals who can act as representatives of others, oftentimes women, youth or people with disabilities.

Third, although local decision-making bodies are expected to be open to inclusion and consensus across dividing lines (Sisk & Risley, 2005a), our study suggests that local decision-making bodies are influenced by national dividing lines, and local participation and inclusion risks replicating conflictual divisions through the reliance on personal status and connections within one’s own group for influence. Thus, while ethnic and sectarian dividing lines enable some participation and influence, the study highlights the doubleness of local inclusion, simultaneously providing space for influence as well as exclusion and a continuation of divisions.

Adding to the field of local development and local peacebuilding, our study suggests that local participation and inclusion is performed through existing power dynamics, and local governments work through them or in opposition to them depending on local possibili-

ties. As such, our study emphasises that the local does not work in isolation and is not in itself a solution to post-conflict problems. This adds an additional layer of complexity to debates on decentralisation and local governance, especially in post-conflict contexts. However, our findings also show that through an in-depth comparative case analysis, we can discern the realities on the ground, its possibilities and challenges, seeing beyond generalized claims of the benefits of decentralisation and instead engage in the rooms for manoeuvre that exist within the specificities of individual places.

Policy recommendations

This report has shown that citizens' participation and inclusion in local decision-making still entails the risk of promoting further exclusion of those already marginalized due to ethnicity, religion, gender, age or disabilities. Building on these results, we present three policy recommendations of particular relevance to local governments in post-conflict settings.

Pay attention to the inclusion of those not usually heard.

Local governments should be more inclusive towards women, youth and disabled people, as well as local minorities. This should be done by implementing quotas for female representation where it exists and ensuring the inclusion of participants beyond "the usual crowd" where quotas do not exist. In addition, local governments should be more aware of the fact that inclusion means paying attention to the ideas and opinions of marginalized groups, rather than just allowing them a seat in the room.

Transparently acknowledge different voices included in national versus local arenas.

Local governments are aware of the power dynamics within their constituencies as well as in relation to national arenas and tend to use the avenues for influence available to them in ways that benefit local development. Although the use of vertical power dynamics to improve local service delivery tends to benefit the whole local community, reliance on particular relationships for local development creates a feeling of exclusion in local governance. Local governments

should be more transparent on how decisions are made and how connections to national actors and agencies are pursued to benefit the community as a whole or to compensate for national ignorance of a particular local group.

Pay attention to alternative avenues for influence and how less influential actors use these avenues for influencing local decision-making.

Providing official forums for participation and influence is good. However, these tend to provide an illusion of participation instead of real influence. Local governments should foster inclusion by opening up multiple ways of participating in and influencing local decision-making. These different ways include formal as well as informal avenues for participation and influence such as listening to community groups and civil society organisations or including their representatives in decision-making, or opening up for informal conversations with youth. However, such measures should be contextually relevant and aware that different actors and local contexts may prefer different methods for influence.

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