

Protecting social cohesion

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Over the last 30 years, social protection has been a critical policy instrument in underdeveloped and middle-income nations for improving human capital and dressing poverty. There is significant evidence that social protection has a favorable influence on poverty reduction, educational development, and health outcomes. In which perspective does social protection impact positively social cohesion, trust and social capital?

Recently, there has been a rising recognition that social cohesion is a necessary prerequisite for security and stability. The Council of Europe regards "divided and unequal societies" as countries incapable of ensuring long-term stability and peace.

In reference to numerous scholarly articles and reports, social protection has been conceptually associated with social cohesion and state building, with the idea that efficient social protection programs contribute positively to boosting social cohesion, achieving good governance and building state capacity and legitimacy.

Social cohesion, on the other hand, is about developing pathways for inclusive societies promoting peace and stability. It includes two components: solidarity among citizens and connections between citizens and the state. In its 2012 report "Perspectives on Global Development: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World," the OECD Development Centre defines a cohesive society as one that "works toward the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity for upward social mobility." It also indicates that citizens' trust in state systems increases because of social cohesion, which can lead to higher support for government policies and reforms.

Understanding the function of social protection in creating and preserving social cohesion in Lebanon is particularly important in light of the current multifaceted crisis. The country faces great difficulties in protecting its people, providing basic services, and preserving peace. This unprecedented crisis has been leading to weakened community ties, social unrest and instability.

The rapidly changing nature of the crisis requires a dramatically new and agile approach to social protection that is better apted to an increasingly fluid situation. Among the key components of transformative social protection are protective and preventive efforts to alleviate poverty, effective actions to promote productive skills, and creative initiatives to dress social inequality and exclusion.

While social protection programs serve as a vital link between citizens and their governments and may assist in forming citizens' perceptions of the state, they are a two-edged sword. Sometimes, difficulties arise as a consequence of governance shortcomings, such as the limited ability to provide the appropriate money transfers to the appropriate individuals at the proper time, which may have a significant effect on the impact of social protection on social cohesion.

Positive citizen experiences with social protection may improve citizens' trust and satisfaction in state institutions, but bad experiences may erode trust. Significant elements such as equity, efficiency, and responsiveness can enhance citizens' experiences with social protection and, as a result, reinforce social contracts.

Many nations have opted social protection mechanisms such as safety net interventions as a method of leveraging human capital. Such mechanisms have progressively gained recognition as an essential component of developing nations' efforts to relieve poverty, decrease vulnerability, and promote inclusive growth. When well-designed and executed, it has the potential to significantly increase human capital and productivity, decrease disparities, foster resilience, and break the vicious cycle of poverty. These mechanisms have a transformational character.

Polarization and societal divisions have widened significantly over the previous year as a result of the escalation of political conflicts and the expansion of crises in Lebanon. According to social media research, there has been an increase in polarization narratives online, which mirrors the level of social split in reality. This necessitates an emphasis on social protection, social cohesion, and dialogue to bridge divides.

In turbulent times like these, social protection becomes critical in fragile states where humanitarian crises, civil conflicts, and violence are more common and where people are more vulnerable, hence more exposed to economic hazards.

Lebanon is facing tremendous challenges as a result of several shocks and complicated crises. Violent manifestations, on the other hand, provide another layer of extraordinary difficulties.

It is critical to rethink economic and social transformations when planning for postcrisis. Transitions provide a chance to rewrite the state-society social contract, rebuild institutional architecture, and dress the political, social, and economic inequities that lead to marginalization and deprivation.

Disputes over limited fuel supplies sparked sectarianism and increased tensions between neighboring communities and different social groups. These conflicts, which are mostly motivated by a devastating fuel and diesel scarcity, have become a frequent occurrence in Lebanon, as have other sorts of violent manifestations, raising concerns about falling into chaos following two years of financial crisis. Social cohesion as a strategy for preventing violent extremism through connecting and engaging citizens and eliminating marginalization, becomes vital. Failure to attain social cohesion poses a substantial risk of resurgent extremism, violence, and conflict.

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