Libyan Civic Contributions to Development During Conflict: Dynamics of actors, ambitions, and approaches

Summary

In this study I examine the case of Libyan people engaging in dialogue and action, in and beyond community borders, to advance the rule of law and development. The efforts of these people and their bottom-up approach demonstrate the importance of asking development ethics questions in order for development interventions to be successful: who needs to be included, what ambitions matter, and which approaches are used?

In Libya, the lack of a stable national government leaves the door open for influence from local communities and regional and international stakeholders to contribute to this development process. Using the EU's Shared Action for Rule of Law Progress (SHARP) programme as a case study, the thesis addresses the main research question: What, and how, do moral-social dialogue and action contribute to the emergence of development efforts initiated by Libyan individuals who work collaboratively with local and national communities/institutions and the EU to advance manifestations of civic logic in Libya?'

This study has a social epistemological grounding and takes as a starting point value pluralism and the many different ways to perceive, understand, and act in the world. The study is based on 259 dialogues and 54 actions all designed and implemented by, for and with Libyans. Based on the initial analysis of this collaborative work, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach that identifies development challenges as wicked problems, includes development ethics, and employs participatory action research (PAR) via cooperative inquiry to include a diversity of perspectives. This allows us to see the people in a conflict-affected setting as principal actors. The focus is on the characteristics of الـناس, 'al-nās', translated as 'the people' the activists, scholars, municipal workers, housewives, and young graduates participating in SHARP; and their collaborative efforts that, step by step, try to advance development and diminish conflict while valuing different ambitions and approaches.

Theoretically, this study begins with the assumption that a predominantly Western liberal perspective obstructs the utilisation of diverse perspectives to promote human development in (post)-conflict environments. Critical development studies acknowledge the intertwined relationship between conflict and development, including the importance of diverse perspectives, participation and ownership of a variety of actors. However, for those engaged in development efforts, it remains difficult to bridge the gap between policy (rhetoric) and the complexity of reality and practice.

In this regard, three phenomena stand out. In the first place, the people less frequently participate, let alone lead in practice, while external actors remain in charge and are considered and studied as the driving force behind development interventions. In addition, the absence of the local along with national and international actors hinders moving from a dominant to diverse perspectives and bottom-up ambitions and approaches to feature in interventions. Finally, little attention is given to how theoretical insights can be used practically and what this demands of actors involved.

I examine these three phenomena, using a conflict and development perspective acknowledging their combined occurrence. I regard this occurrence as modern conflict, drawing on Kaldor's work understood as driven by 'three logics of public authority'. Two logics fuel conflict, while the third logic is more compatible

with peaceful development. This is civic logic, to be found in the way actors aim to unite, find common goals and services.

Civic logic is explored with a focus on three levels of action. Locally, the public, civil society organisations, and local politicians are major participants. At the inter-communal level, I consider the engagement between women, men, youth, and elders from different communities. Finally, at the (inter)national level, the participation of national actors and the EU is regarded through their policy and programming intentions.

The study finds that inclusion among different actors becomes possible when a start is made at the local level, in communities. Here, inclusion is visible as an ongoing process based on trust, knowledge and skills. The position of the people, via 'acts of citizenship', brings on board women, youths, local officials and minorities. The reflection of the people on their legitimate role as citizens to participate in strengthening their society also offers an opportunity to legitimise the role of officials and authorities; they are specifically requested to join as the people recognise them for their position (Chapter 5).

The exchange in dialogues and actions fosters a collective framing of what the people can agree on. The local set-up makes (dis)agreement visible and allows for a process to unite for common goals, contributing to the public cause. High-level ambitions, like justice, equality and reconciliation, are made practical. People move towards common achievable goals for better rule of law and less conflict (Chapter 6).

The efforts of citizens in their communities create possibilities to reach out beyond the community level, between communities and with (inter)national levels. This fosters a legitimate process aimed at cooperation to handle development as wicked problem. The use of simple approaches like dialogue and action emphasise the relevance, at all levels, of existing knowledge, values, and capacities (Chapter 7).

The findings demonstrate that manifestations of civic logic can be found in the bottom-up-driven efforts of the people who continuously seek to include other actors. The collected insights highlight inclusion as a process in which collectively defined common goals are accomplished through cooperative discourse and action. A configuration of actors transforms civic logic, supported by 'relatings, sayings, and doings', in what I call an emerging 'civic practice'. This practice depends on a framework where the conditions of development efforts can be handled. I propose that this framework consists of three elements.

First, different levels of action — community, inter-communal, and (inter)national — require attention. Inclusion starts within levels and then expands to the interfaces between them. Here, what matters are different perspectives, small steps and long-term engagement, well-known elements to handle a wicked challenge such as development. Development efforts in conflict settings benefit from this handling at each of the three levels and at their interfaces. This necessitates that all actors, especially (inter)national authorities, reconsider their modes of operation in order to create opportunities for change.

Second, at these interfaces, bottom-up and top-down efforts merge. The search for synergy among actors takes shape here, particularly with regard to the scope and process of their development efforts. Finally, development interventions are likely to succeed by recognising a broad definition of legitimacy. Different sources of legitimacy exist and should be included. Furthermore, the scope of development activities must be evaluated as legitimate, as well as how they might be accomplished through legitimate procedures of cooperation.

In addition, I propose that attention is paid to five indicators to advance further the manifestations of civic practice: engagement and presence (1), transparency and accountability (2), acknowledging expertise (3), social moral dialogue before technical-organisational dialogue (4), and equal time and place (5).

I conclude the study with critical observations on the implications of the findings for donor and INGO involvement in Libya, national actors, and the people. I suggest future research focus on multi- and interdisciplinary methods, PAR, public authority logics, and donor and INGOs' (un)learning.