

<p>Institution: University of Manchester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 24a (Anthropology)</p>
<p>Title of case study: Creating the Conditions for the Formation of a Representative Task-force to Draft a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) in post-war Lebanon</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>On the basis of research on the anthropology of the state and sustainable development, Dr Michelle Obeid was invited to work with two UN organisations, taking the lead in identifying key governmental and non-governmental actors to develop a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) for Lebanon, with peace-building at its core. An inclusive process was employed, that consulted with lower rank civil servants and civil society actors. It was concluded that an official mechanism was needed to mediate the flux created by unforeseen changing governments (three between July 2009 and 2013) who tended to dismiss the work of their predecessors. Acting on Obeid’s recommendations, in July 2012 the project culminated with the creation of an official task-force in the Ministry of Environment, endorsed by the Prime Minister’s Office.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact is based on research developed at the University of Manchester (UoM) from September 2007 onwards, undertaken as part of a Post-doctoral Research Fellowship (2007-2011; Obeid now Lecturer), funded by the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW). CASAW is an inter-university initiative involving Edinburgh, Durham and Manchester, funded by ESRC, AHRC, HEFCE and SFC. Obeid’s work on the state is situated within one of the Social Anthropology discipline’s core themes ‘States, Borders and Mobilities’, which includes research by other colleagues at UoM, including: Harvey’s work on ‘Unsettling the State,’ Reeves’ work on ‘the State in Central Asia,’ Green’s work on ‘State Frontiers,’ and Jansen’s research on ‘Everyday Engagements with the State.’ The research advances recent intellectual shifts in the understanding of the state, as a site of fragmentation rather than a coherent entity, calling for a comparative approach that explores how states take on certain meanings for those they govern.</p> <p>Obeid’s research in Lebanon builds on this body of work, investigating local imaginings of the state and how these are reproduced through the everyday lives of its citizens. Until recently, literature on Arab states had not given much attention to citizens’ perspectives <i>of</i> – and interactions <i>with</i> – their states. Rather, governance (by state and non-state actors) had been understood at central and formal levels, without extending to ‘people,’ and their lived realities as citizens. Key research insights advocate an understanding of ‘the state from <i>within</i> and <i>below</i>’ not just by academics, but also by practitioners. Accordingly, concepts such as ‘the state’ and ‘sustainable development’ only come to life through the meanings they hold for subjects at different levels of society.</p> <p>The impacts outlined here were underpinned by four key outputs (a workshop, two journal articles and a book chapter) that focused on the themes of ‘understanding the state’ and ‘sustainable development’:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The theme of ‘understanding the state’ was developed initially through a workshop on ‘The Anthropology of the State: An Arab Perspective’ (May 2008). In this workshop, a group of international scholars employed a comparative framework to examine how Arab states are understood through everyday experiences of their subjects. The research findings, discussed at this forum, confirmed the importance of unpacking the state theoretically and understanding the cross-cultural specificities revealed through the everyday, despite the universalist claims of states. 2. A later journal article, a product of the workshop, advocated an anthropological approach that sheds light on how citizens understand their state through everyday interaction with its apparatuses, institutions and persons [E]. The article argued that residents of a border town at the margin of the state are often strategists who desire to be incorporated as active citizens. The findings suggest that practitioners should take seriously this desire to be involved in the making of the state, and thus deploy an inclusive approach that takes into account people’s

'statism'.

3. The theme of the state was advanced further by another journal article that explored '**statism and democracy**' at the borders of Lebanon [C]. The article analyses the 2004 elections that saw the victory of the Muslim Brothers. The findings from this article confirm border residents' desires to be attached to national politics at 'the centre.' Citizens participate in democratic elections as active agents who seek to be part of the project of the (Lebanese) nation-state.
4. The theme of **sustainable development** in Lebanon was developed in a comparative workshop organised by colleagues at Manchester on 'Differentiating Development: Beyond an Anthropology of Critique' (September 2008), later published in an edited volume [A]. Obeid's chapter explores the concept of sustainable development in the absence of the state and the dominant presence of development organisations on the northern border of Lebanon [B]. Her chapter brings out the dynamic between global concepts such as sustainable development and their local appropriations, thus bringing to life the localisation of development.

These four research outputs were the basis for a scoping study on the existing **development strategies** in Lebanon since 1991 (the end of the Civil War), which resulted in a commissioned report [D] for the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). The report outlined some of the new inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial linkages that were on-going in Lebanon, highlighting the areas in which the various strategies needed to converge in order to create a unified sustainable national development strategy that takes into account linkages between the three pillars of sustainable development; the social, economic and environmental. This report is the basis for the impact detailed below.

3. References to the research (all references available upon request - AUR)

The research has been published in leading anthropology journals, as well as within a well-regarded edited volume [A].

- [A] (2012) Venkatesan, S. and Yarrow, T. (eds.) *Differentiating Development: Beyond An Anthropology of Critique* (Berghahn: Oxford) (Venkatesan at UoM) (AUR)
- [B] (2012) Obeid, M. "Development, Participation and Political Ideology in a Lebanese Town" in Venkatesan, S. & Yarrow T. (eds.) *Differentiating Development: Beyond an Anthropology of Critique* (Berghahn: Oxford): 151-168 (AUR)
- [C] (2011a) Obeid, M. "The 'Trials and Errors' of Politics: Municipal Elections at the Lebanese Border" *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 34(2) 251-267
doi:10.1111/j.1555-2934.2011.01165.x
- [D] (2011b) Obeid, M. 'Review and Assessment of Capacity for Sustainable Development in Lebanon: Strengthening National Capacity for the Integration of Sustainable Development Principles into Development Strategies in Countries Emerging from Conflict' UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) (July) (AUR)
- [E] (2010) Obeid, M. "Searching for the 'Ideal Face of the State' in a Lebanese Border Town" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16(2) 330-346
doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2010.01628.x

4. Details of the impact

Context: This case focuses on the difficulties faced by the Lebanese government in drafting a UN-initiated National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) in July 2011. It is based upon Obeid's involvement in this process, both in terms of formal analysis [D] as well as the utilisation of her wider approach to studying the state, state-processes and sustainable development. Her role was described by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) as "*important in that she was instrumental in bringing the right stakeholders to the table and facilitating productive discussions which resulted in a clearer framework and pathway for inter-ministerial collaboration in sustainable development in Lebanon*" [1]. Like many countries emerging from conflict, Lebanon faces the challenge of working towards a national strategy that integrates

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sustainable development alongside peace-building approaches. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, Lebanon's political and social divisions were exacerbated and this is reflected in the (in)stability of governments. Since 2009, two governments have collapsed before their expiry date. These swift changes mean that new governments often discount the work of predecessors and set 'new' priorities, either replicating efforts or simply neglecting previous work.

The previous government (2009-2010) had signed an agreement to collaborate with two UN organisations – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) in New York [2] and UN-ESCWA in Lebanon – in the drafting of an NSDS for Lebanon. However, this project was neglected with the collapse of the coalition government in 2010. The new government remained polarized and the NSDS lost traction. The key problem was that, at its inception, the new government was keen to carry on with national planning in a sound and sustainable manner, yet the officials in charge were new to the process and had not yet scoped previous efforts in this domain. When the UN launched a series of meetings with experienced stakeholders from the civil service and non-governmental sectors, to proceed with discussions around the NSDS, there was little response. The NSDS required reiterative and cross-sectoral participation in order to ensure citizen ownership. The process was therefore brought to a halt.

Pathways to Impact: Based on background research on the existing National Strategies since 1991 in the various line ministries [D], and after scoping the processes undertaken to develop and draft them, Obeid's first input was to recommend anthropological approaches and methods that would 'give voice' to the people who are 'active agents' in the making of the state. Engaging with them, and exploring their understandings and experiences of state processes and the sustainability of planning, would shed light on the steps needed for their ongoing participation. Meeting with several state and non-state actors – some associated with previous governments and thus feeling side-lined – over a period of one month (July 2010), led Obeid to suggest in her report that various actors – particularly civil servants within the government – were sceptical of the prospect of drafting a unified integrated national strategy in the absence of an official inter-sectoral body that would monitor the process and mediate the uncertain Lebanese political climate. There was a fear that work accomplished under one government would not be recognised by the next – which could discount strategies, plans and even committees as invalid – unless they were undertaken within an infrastructure that was recognised by high-powered office (such as that of the Prime Minister). This situation was primarily due to a schism between higher rank officials and lower rank civil servants, an issue that was endemic as the former invariably change when governments fall, whilst the latter do not.

Impact: In order to guarantee commitment to contribute to the process of drafting the NSDS by the relevant experienced stakeholders (civil servants from line ministries and representatives of NGOs), **Obeid's report recommended that the UN liaise with the Lebanese government to formalise the process by introducing an institutional mechanism that would ensure that sustainable development outlooks were respected beyond each change of government and that the taskforce would be endorsed officially by the PM's Office in order for it to have credibility** [1]. Indeed, Obeid and the UN team met with the PM's representatives, conveying the need to establish a specialised task-force as a 'recommendation to proceed.' As confirmed by the Associate Programme Management Officer, UN-ESCWA: "*The Prime Minister's Office subsequently assigned a representative who was to attend the scheduled consultation meetings, and who announced at the second of these meetings that the Prime Minister had pledged to create an official body in due course*" [1].

The role played by Obeid, alongside the UN, was henceforth centred upon attempts to create appropriate conditions for the drafting of an NSDS for Lebanon. Once official support was secured, Obeid successfully brought together a team of experts from a range of sectors – 12 Ministries, three umbrella NGOs (comprised of NGOs from various regions of the country), three UN organisations, the EU and three national environmental NGOs – most of whom had been involved in previous national strategies and were experienced in the area of planning. Through two consultation meetings (September 2010 and May 2011), Obeid and the UN facilitated a wide-ranging conversation around the mechanisms needed to work towards an NSDS. The experts

were first brought together for a training workshop on sustainable development planning (as opposed to the conventional sectoral planning in Lebanon that favoured the economic pillar). This was conducted by Obeid alongside a chosen Consultant, who outlines Obeid's contribution:

“Obeid recommended that the UN liaise with the Lebanese government to introduce an institutional mechanism... Obeid's contribution was important... she successfully... convened a broad range of Lebanese stakeholders and ensured that their myriad of interests in development are being considered by their peers and their leaders. And because of her expert grasp of development challenges and needs in Lebanon she ensured that the technical support of the United Nations provided to the Lebanese NSDS process was prudent, appropriate and impactful.” [3]

In a later meeting (September 2011) which Obeid facilitated, the same group was invited to highlight national sustainable development priorities. Recommendations from the meeting [4] – which utilised Obeid's report [D] – fed into a regional Arab Report presented at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in July 2012 [2]. Finally, as the Sustainable Development Officer (Division for Sustainable Development), United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) recounts:

“In May 2012 the Prime Minister's Office identified the Ministry of Environment as the host for a sustainable development and multi-sectoral taskforce that would take the lead in identifying steps to mainstream sustainable development concepts in Lebanon, and to begin to consider a National Development Plan... Dr Obeid played a main and instrumental role in implementing the UN Secretariat project in Lebanon. Her research on past and existing national policies and strategies relating to economic, social and environment objectives in the country along with her recommendations on steps, components and entry points to sustainable development planning that fit Lebanon's specific conditions and circumstances, and her support to the organization and facilitation of a National Training Workshop and a regional awareness workshop ... in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region highly contributed to the successful implementation of the UN-DESA/ESCWA capacity building project in post-conflict Lebanon.” [2]

In conclusion, the impact claimed through this case is a product of Obeid's research, which was able to introduce an inclusive participatory process that shed light on state and non-state actors' understandings of and relations to state processes. The group of experts represented, in microcosm, a larger constituency in Lebanon that would have to be involved in the process of sustainable development planning for it to be conducive to ongoing peace-building efforts. Obeid's recommendations ultimately led to the 'making official' of a task-force that would outlive political upheavals and the collapse of governments.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (all claims referenced in the text)

- [1] Testimonial from Associate Programme Management Officer, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues (ECRI), UN-ESCWA (5th July 2013)
- [2] Testimonial from Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development, UN-DESA (29th July 2013)
- [3] Testimonial from Senior Specialist for Development and Aid, Group W. (31st August 2013)
- [4] (2011) UN-DESA / UN-ESCWA 'Stakeholder Consultation Workshop: Strengthening Capacity to Utilize Sustainable Development Principles in National Policy-Making in Lebanon' (6th – 7th September, Beirut)