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WORK IN PROGRESS PAPER

Decentralisation and Social Cohesion in Religiously Heterogeneous Societies in Transition: A case Study from Egypt

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May 2013

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Summary

This paper explores the linkages between decentralisation and social cohesion within communities of differing religious backgrounds. It builds on the case of post-Mubarak Egypt, where an increased but informal devolution of power to manage relations between the majority Muslim and minority Christian populations has not alleviated community tensions. The paper uses a power analysis framework to understand the impact of devolution on social cohesion.

Key messages from the research include:

- devolution of power, if not accompanied by measures to ensure inclusive politics, may undermine social cohesion and increase violence against minorities
- the emerging balance of power after the revolution has increased tensions between different religious groups and eventually undermined social cohesion
- in the post-Mubarak context, the use of informal conflict resolution mechanisms and other practices associated with decentralisation have further undermined social cohesion

Keywords: decentralisation, social cohesion, transition contexts, Egypt

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Introduction

This paper is about decentralisation and social cohesion in religiously heterogeneous communities in times of transition. Post-Mubarak Egypt is taken as a case study of a country in transition, where there has been a certain level of informal devolution of power in managing sectarian relations between the majority Muslim and minority Christian populations. The paper uses power analysis to explore the configuration of actors and their weight in the Egyptian context and the impact that this had on social cohesion.

The paper argues that sometimes devolution of power, if not accompanied by measures to ensure inclusive politics, may undermine social cohesion and increase sectarian violence against minorities, rather than create space for voice and accountability.

The first part of the paper discusses the concept of social cohesion, its relevance and limitations, and explores ways in which decentralisation has been considered to positively contribute to social cohesion. The second part of the paper briefly describes the nature of Egypt's transition, and provides analysis as to the causes and manifestations of increased sectarianism as they have manifested themselves in the period following the ousting of President Mubarak.

The third part of the paper looks specifically at why decentralisation negatively affected the management of sectarian relations and examines ways in which the forging of solidarity between groups reduced prospects of addressing the underlying power relations. Efforts to create social cohesion by strengthening the "we" factor may end up strengthening the hegemonic normative values and ideas of the majority in power. The paper recognizes that in the Egyptian case study, decentralisation was more of a site where sectarianism became manifest rather than a cause for its occurrence. Without a political will to create a socially inclusive society, even if decentralisation did not occur, social cohesion would still be threatened. However, the paper argues that when accompanied by other factors, decentralisation in terms of an informal process of devolution of power to local actors can exacerbate and deepen sectarianism and communal violence. The two policies examined here are those of informal selection of representative leadership and conflict mediation through informal justice mechanisms.

1 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a fuzzword (Green 2012) which can carry multiple meanings and nuances and is laden with normative values, making it very difficult to arrive at a common definition (Jensen 2010). The concept became popular in development discourse at a particular juncture in the late 1990s. Developed countries that had embarked on neo-liberal policies and prioritized economic growth had become aware of the growing forms of social and economic exclusion in their societies. Strong social policies were deemed as necessary to mitigate the negative impact of social and economic exclusion on social relations between diverse groups in society. These social policies were intended to produce a more 'cohesive' society (Jensen 2010). Three concrete strategies to strengthen social cohesion were proposed by the OECD, Council of Europe as well as France: (i) a focus on employment and social rights through the incorporation of the informal sector into the modern sector (Tokman 2007: 105–106), (ii) improving legislation to better protect workers' rights, and (iii) combining flexibility for workers with employment security (Jensen 2010: 6-7).

The fact that the concept of social cohesion emerged in a western context to address problems of industrialization and urbanization raises questions with respect to its analytical value when examining other contexts with very different historical trajectories. However, more recent literature, has approached the concept of social cohesion as highly relevant to contexts of rapid social and political transformations as well as times of fragility when relations between different groups can sometimes be under extreme strain (Marc, Willman, Aslam, Rebosio, and Balasuriya 2013). In view of the above, the term social cohesion is relevant to examining the Egyptian context, one in which the Egyptian revolution led to a deep re-organization of political and social power between citizens of different religions.

While definitions of social cohesion vary, most have elements of the two dimensions identified by Regina Berger-Schmitt (In Jensen 2010), namely (i) the inequality dimension and (ii) the social capital dimension. The inequality dimension concerns 'the goal of promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within a society. This also includes the aspect of social exclusion', whereas the social capital dimension concerns 'the goal of strengthening social relations, interactions and ties and embraces all aspects which are generally considered as the social capital of a society'. (Berger-Schmitt, 2002: 404–405 in Jensen 2010:3). Social cohesion is considered an important aspiration for development policy because cohesive societies are meant to have found ways of dealing with difference and diversity without recourse to violence and separation (though not necessarily meaning negation of difference). This is particularly pertinent for heterogeneous societies where there is no demographic demarcation between different groups of ethnic or religious affiliation and where there has not been a drift towards dealing with difference through separation (i.e. federalism and independence).

Kaplan noted that

'Cohesive identity groups with long common histories naturally develop their own sophisticated political, economic, and societal system of self-governance. This system includes various mechanisms to regulate political relationships, police members' behaviour, lower the cost of various transactions between members, and encourage the security of property'. Conversely, 'A multiplicity of competing identity groups, when combined with weak formal state structures, does not always result in bloodshed, but it does always cripple efforts to promote development. This toxic combination: the absence of social cohesion and the lack of a set of shared, productive institutions prevents states from fashioning a robust nationwide governing system, yielding instead a host of chronic problems, ranging from state illegitimacy to high transaction costs, to corruption.' (Kaplan 2009: 467)

There have been various approaches to promoting social cohesion which are partly a reflection of the political inclinations of the actor proposing them. According to the OECD report *Perspectives on Global Development 2012*, the OECD definition of social cohesion is premised on the relationship between (i) social repertoires of trust embedded in social capital, (ii) the necessity for social inclusion of those on the fringes and (iii) opportunities for social mobility - all linked together (OECD 2011)). While there is nothing new in engaging with social mobility in terms of social capital, inclusion, and mobility (see Dixon, J.; Levine, M.; Reicher, S.; and Durrheim, K. 2002)) yet the policy implications emanating from such a definition do matter. The focus is on institutional reform through highly technocratic economic interventions such as 'improving human resource management' and 'performance based budgeting' and 'promoting horizontal cooperation across ministries' (OECD 2011). The OECD report, focuses on fast growing developing countries, and hence may not apply to many contexts whose economies do not fit this description. This narrow institutional approach may provide donors with the possibility of focusing on highly depoliticized technocratic interventions that will not incur the wrath of authoritarian regimes or those that

are most resistant to change. However, it is questionable whether this particular approach to social cohesion is relevant to societies suffering from no social relations among groups as a consequence of religious or ethnic heterogeneity.

Another approach to social cohesion is the focus of Marc *et al.* (2013) on the cultural and social norms/identities that are needed to create solidarity across groups as highlighted in the World Bank's *Societal Dynamics and Fragility Report*. The term social cohesion was described as 'a convergence across groups in society that provides a framework within which groups can, at a minimum coexist peacefully. In this way, social cohesion offers a measure of predictability to interactions across people and groups, which in turn provides incentives for collective action' (Marc *et al.* 2013: 3). The proposed approach exposes the dynamic nature of ever-changing relationships, in the sense that it is a reminder of the need to move beyond static conceptions of group identities. However, the main proposition that: 'when groups see their interests as converging with those of others, they become more connected to other groups and ultimately have more incentive to collaborate. Convergence thus serves as an essential element for collective action' (Marc *et al.* 2013: 3) can serve to conceal highly unequal power relations.

For example, due to extreme power inequalities, a minority that suffers from political and social discrimination may see that it has no option but to show convergence with the majority. However, this would not produce a cohesive society since the minority's convergence is informed by the conditions of choice which are inherently unequal. This is a theme that we will return to later.

A third approach which combines the social, economic and political variables dimensions of social cohesion is that proposed by Norton and De Haan (2012) who define social cohesion as 'the capacity of societies and social groups to peacefully and inclusively navigate social change, while enhancing individual and group rights and freedoms.' Norton and De Haan (2012) argue that in practical policy terms, this requires (i) accounting for low levels of social exclusion, (ii) empowerment of minority and disadvantaged groups, (iii) promoting low levels of violence, and (vi) strengthening institutions for peaceful management of rapid change. This approach benefits from the social dynamics approach of Marc *et al.*, but is a more comprehensive approach because it (i) creates a greater balance between a societal approach and a statist approach, (ii) makes more explicit and central the notion of inclusive policies and rights, and (iii) recognizes the need for dealing with inequalities as well as forging collective identities. Norton and De Haan's perspective on social cohesion is however far less developed than the other approaches with respect to the methodological approaches to its assessment. However, Norton and De Haan's approach inform this study in view of the relevance of the four dimensions highlighted above for the context under examination, that of Egypt.

Norton and De Haan (2012: 4) warned that 'For the concept to be useful as a policy tool to support progressive developmental change, it needs to avoid a *bias to the established social and political order* and a *bias to cultural and social homogeneity*'. If power hierarchies between groups are ignored, then the bid for creating solidarity can mean a re-enforcement of existing hegemonic normative frameworks based on the beliefs and ideas of the majority. The focus on creating social harmony and solidarity in the concept of social cohesion may lead, in more extreme cases, to an emphasis on participation of people, irrespective of whether they are participating out of a sense of inclusion or whether their participation is forced or for performance purposes. For example, Chan, J, To, H-P and Chan, E (2006: 284) argue that 'social cohesion requires only people's participation, cooperation and mutual help; as such it does not presuppose values like tolerance or respect for diversity, or vice versa.' This kind of understanding of social cohesion when using proxies such as participation without looking at power relations says nothing of the quality of social relations existing

between those co-operating and therefore says nothing about whether a society is cohesive or not.'

2 Decentralisation, social cohesion and power

There is a burgeoning literature suggesting that one of the measures that can promote social cohesion and deal with religious and ethnic conflict is decentralisation. Decentralisation here refers to the transfer of political and/or economic decision-making powers from central to local government. Tranchant suggested that the devolution of power from the centre to the groups that have been marginalized reduces their vulnerability to discrimination and increases their sense of control over their own affairs: 'On the field of ethnic conflict, it is supposed to dampen strife by giving groups control over their own affairs and by insulating minorities from predatory politics from the centre' (Tranchant 2007:13). The implicit assumption here of course is that the conflict is occurring within groups that occupy different demographic parts of the country; hence the devolution of power would go to those groups in the periphery. Tranchant did not address the possibility that such devolution of power may re-enforce unequal power hierarchies between the majority and minority on a local level.

Kaplan (2009: 471) contended that one of the advantages of decentralisation in relation to social cohesion is that it grants the ruling powers legitimacy in the eyes of the people:

'a shift from state-centric to more local level governance would enhance the legitimacy of the political order... [...]...Whereas a robust state uses local identities, local capacities, and local institutions to promote its development, a fragile state's formal governing structures undermine all of these indigenous assets. As a consequence, a weak state cannot leverage its people's histories and customs to construct effective formal institutions with wide legitimacy; nor can it draw on the social capital embedded in cohesive groups to facilitate economic, political, and social intercourse; and nor is it able to employ the traditional governing capacities of its citizens to run the affairs of state.'

Marc *et al.* (2012: 189) following the same line of argument, pointed to another way in which decentralisation affects social cohesion. Devolution of power that empowers institutions that operate locally can provide a space for groups to participate in their own development-space that might not exist at the central level. He affirmed that 'community driven development if acting as a function of local governance, can reduce patronage and elite capture if well designed' (*ibid*). However the same study warned that community driven development might not necessarily lead to social cohesion if 'projectivized' and if it ignores contextual dynamics. Local governance measures proposed by the study by Marc *et al.* to support social cohesion include supporting informal justice mechanisms (local forms of addressing conflict for example through customary laws and practices); the promotion of participation in local structures including service delivery and the encouragement of civil society to create bridges across groups. While these measures in and of themselves may have potential to be effective in certain contexts, what will be argued through the Egyptian case study, is that they can also be used to re-enforce unequal hierarchies and deepen communalism.

Efforts to foster solidarity across the advantaged and disadvantaged groups can come at a cost: ignoring the underlying structural roots of inequality, and accordingly adopting policies that deal with them. As Dixon, Levine, Reicher, and Durrheim (2002: 417) have suggested,

'Research on common identification suggests that even when we are successful in creating more positive intergroup attitudes, encouraging people to evaluate one another more favourably, we may leave unaltered the conservative policy orientations of the historically advantaged. Viewing others as part of a shared in-group, it seems, does not necessarily promote support change in a structural or institutional sense. Moreover, members of dominant groups lean towards 'assimilative' forms of inclusion that preserve rather than challenge social inequalities.'

A power analysis may expose how interventions such as increasing participation at the local level and involving local actors needs to be careful as it can serve to perpetuate inequalities while giving them a mantra of collaboration, joint action and harmony. For example, hidden power characterised by who sets the agenda and the term of engagement, what is to be kept off the agenda, who is invited, and who is kept out, determines the nature of relationships being forged under the 'social cohesion' mantra. If both groups have been raised to believe that it is natural/expedient for the stronger party to influence and shape the agenda, then through the invisible power of these normative values, such an assimilative form of inter-group collaboration is presented as a step towards social cohesion.

Visible power refers here to

'seeing who participates, who wins and who loses in these arenas... For instance, we can analyse which interests are able to maintain debate, whose interests prevail in key decisions, such as on a key policy or budget decision, and whose voices and interests are present, but have little influence' (Powercube, understanding power for social change).

One of the limitations of focusing exclusively on visible ways in which power is exercised is that there is little attention being paid to those voices that are not being represented and the reasons behind it.

Hidden forms of power

'are used by vested interests to maintain their power and privilege by creating barriers to participation, by excluding key issues from the public arena, or by controlling politics 'backstage'. They may occur not only within political processes, but in organizational and other group contexts as well, such as workplaces, NGOs or community-based organizations.' (*Ibid.*)

Invisible power goes a step further than hidden power because it does not look at the issues that are kept off the agenda, but the ways in which ideologies, values and forms of behaviour influence how people think and relate to issues.

'In this form of power, people may be unaware of their rights, their ability to speak out, and may come to see various forms of power or domination over them as 'natural', or at least unchangeable, and therefore unquestioned. Poor people, for instance, may accept their circumstance as the status quo even in the face of inequalities around them, internalizing dominant explanations of poverty.' (*Ibid.*)

These three concepts inform the power lens used to examine decentralisation and social cohesion in the context of Egypt's transition below.

3 The Egyptian context

Mubarak who presided over Egypt for almost thirty years was ousted on 11th February 2011, against the backdrop of mass citizen uprisings, a security apparatus that had faltered, and the commanders of the army that chose to ally with the people in a quiet coup against the President (Tadros 2012a). The eighteen days of uprising witnessed a historical moment of citizens unifying under a common cry: 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice' (a variation of which was 'Bread, Freedom and Human Dignity'). In Tahrir Square, in particular, what emerged was a space with its own normative social values that was distinct from the rest of the country. Sexual harassment, widely prevalent in Egyptian society, was not reported by Egyptian women, despite the fact that they stood in large numbers among the masses. People from different political ideologies (leftist, right of centre, Islamist) co-operated and co-ordinated their efforts to a large degree, and Muslims and Christians stood side by side holding the Egyptian flag. Images of men holding the Koran and the cross were widely disseminated in the media, intended to enforce the notion that there is religious unity in the face of a common oppressor.

The spirit of Tahrir Square did not have a ripple effect spatially or temporally on Muslim-Christian relations after the common mission of ousting Mubarak had been accomplished. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) that took over forged an informal alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood which came to represent the political settlement of organising power in the post-Mubarak phase (Tadros 2012b).

The incidents of sectarian violence against Christian minorities, *Baha'is* and *Sufis* increased in 2011¹. An important question is whether increased sectarianism was a consequence of the policies pursued by the authorities or that the removal of the heavy handed measures exposed the tensions lying underneath? I would argue it is a combination of both. SCAF governance of Egypt from February 2011 to June 2012 was characterized by the absence of a political will to uphold the rule of law in dealing with incidence of sectarian violence, a trend that was amplified after President Morsi took over (see below).

The army was responsible for the single worst incident of sectarian violence against Christians in contemporary Egyptian history, which involved army vehicles running over peaceful protestors, and which became known as the 'Maspiro Massacre'. SCAF took no measures to hold the perpetrators accountable. It was a clear political signal of a high level of tolerance towards religious-based discrimination and injustice.

On the other hand, the new power configuration in Egypt, which bestowed the Muslim brotherhood and the *Salafis* substantial formal and informal power to influence all levels of governance had a direct relationship on sectarianism relations, a theme we will return to later. Finally, social cohesion had been eroding in Egypt between Muslims and Christians in many communities for several decades, and there have been incidents involving collective violence against the minorities living in the community. The collapse of the heavy handed state from regulating social affairs in Egypt led to increased agency and mobilisation of citizens on a national scale. No doubt, the revolution did not create sectarianism; it only brought to the surface the cumulative outcome of tensions that have been simmering for years.

¹ The percentage of different religious groups in Egypt has been hotly contested (Tadros 2013), generally, it is roughly 85-90% Sunni Muslim, about 10% Christian Coptic Orthodox, less than 1% other Christian denominations, mainly Protestant and Catholic, and less than 200,000 Bahais. Jews account for about 200 members.

In 2008, there were 33 incidents of reported sectarianism in the press, in 2009, there were 32, there were 45 in 2010 and increased to 70 sectarian incidents after the revolution in 2011, and increased again in 2012 to 112. If the numbers of incidents for the two years since the revolution (2011 and 2012) are combined they would total 182, representing a striking increase in the number of total incidents for 2008, 2009 and 2010 combined. There was almost doubling of the number of incidents from 2010 to 2011, and an increase by a third in the incidents from 2011 and 2012.

3.1 Triggers of sectarian conflict:

Not only have the number of sectarian incidents increased since 2011 in quantitative terms, but qualitatively, the level of intensity of assault has also increased. In analysing the key 'triggers' that lead to the escalation of sectarian conflict in the period 2008-2012, it is possible to note the following:

3.1.1 Non-religious small scale disputes:

The first main trigger has been non-religious small scale disputes which have turned into sectarian incidents of violence. In the period from 2008 to 2010, the most frequent trigger was the escalation of small disputes or fights into full-fledged sectarian incidents.

Since there is a power differential in most communities as a consequence of the Copts being a minority, once an ordinary dispute assumes a sectarian character, the mobilization that takes place by the Muslim majority is usually not only against the person involved in the dispute, but against the Copts in that community (be it an urban neighbourhood, village or hamlet). An examination of these incidents that fall under this category provides us with important insights into the most significant source of sectarian strife.

In terms of trigger, while in some cases the disputes are criminal, in most cases, they are simply heated discussions on everyday matters that can occur between any two citizens, anywhere. This is highly significant in that it shows that there is a great deal of sectarian antagonism beneath the surface, which can be sparked off easily even when the original dispute had nothing to do with religious affiliation whatsoever. It shows that social cohesion is under strain.

Evidently, in every case where mobs have risen against a minority, there have been Muslims who have sought to protect them, to stand up for them and to disassociate themselves from the acts of the majority. However, they have been a minority, and have often paid a heavy price socially for their stance.

What is particularly alarming about the fact that ordinary citizen disagreements are being transformed into full scale communal clashes is the *spontaneity* and *unpredictability* of such incidents. Whereas for example in the case of the construction or upgrading of a church, policy makers can assume the worst and take precautions to protect the premises and raise awareness, on the other hand, one cannot predict that haggling over prices between a vegetable seller and a shopper can escalate into sectarian strife. It makes the possibilities of developing an early warning system against the occurrence of such incidents far more difficult. In effect it means it requires years - possibly a generation - to change the social mores, values and ideas about the religious other. It also means it is impossible to predict where disputes will escalate into sectarian violence (though arguably predicting their occurrence is also difficult in other instances). Yet unlike for example churches which are of a known geographical location, a heated debate, an incidence of fraud, a disagreement can happen virtually anywhere, anytime.

What is striking is the increase in the number of small scale disputes turning into incidents of violence against Christians following the revolution. The total number of such incidents was 26 in the period 2008-11, 11 in 2011, and 24 in 2012. This is cause for serious concern for the reasons highlighted above. When undertaking ethnographic research in rural communities in December 2012, I was told in a village which had experienced such incidents that the increasing powers of the Salafis on the ground and there being a perception in the community that the Islamists gaining power and an upper hand, had created an environment where the spread of any rumours of Copts' wrongdoing towards Muslims not only becomes cause for sectarian aggravation but its containment becomes very difficult. The *perception* that Islamists are no longer accountable to a higher authority since they are the ones in power has meant that those who perpetrate violence against Christians have very little to fear.

3.1.2 Construction/Renovation of places of worship:

The second most frequently cited trigger for sectarianism in the Egyptian context has been the construction or expansion or renovation/upgrading of a Christian place of worship, which resulted in 19 incidents of sectarianism from 2008-10. Egypt does not have a unified law regulating matters pertaining to construction and maintenance of places of worship. There are no legal restrictions on the construction of mosques; however, Christian places of worship are governed by a discriminatory legal degree which makes it very difficult to construct new churches (Tadros 2013). Since increases in population created a situation in which existing churches were no longer able to accommodate the growing number of worshippers, a de facto situation emerged in which churches were built having the status of illegality but enjoying at the same time government approval.

The process was succinctly articulated by Judge Noha el Zeiny, who highlighted that the standard practice was for people to seek application for the construction of the church and the State Security Investigations (SSI) to deny them an official permit but allow them to convert a place into a house of worship which would be used informally as a church. There are many churches which were denied an official permit but were allowed by the SSI to function for decades in this particular way as if they were 'legal' entities². The SSI usually was more lenient in granting official permits to renovate churches or build an annexe building to be used for church-related activities (such as Sunday school). However, the acquisition of such official permits sometimes took months, even years, to obtain. During the Mubarak years, the realisation that a building was being used as a church or that an annexe building is being constructed or that a fence or wall were being renovated provoked unknown persons believed to belong to various Islamist groups to mobilise the residents by expressing their opposition to the construction/ renovation act. In other words, assaults did not only happen on 'illegal' churches but also on renovation or extension works that had official permits. The outcome was often the attempted or actual destruction of the church. Usually, the security forces intervened, though perpetrators were rarely brought to justice.

Following the revolution, a new phenomenon emerged which makes it difficult to classify as 'church expansion/construction related'. These were acts which did not involve either the construction or renovation of churches, nor were brought about by any visible triggers. Such acts included the Salafi occupation and attempted annexation of church owned buildings, the mobilisation of citizenry to press that a church be closed on the premise that it is unlicensed, or acts of sudden destruction of church fences and annexation of parts of the premises (all of which occurred in Minya, Cairo, Beni Suef, Sohag) as examples. This shows a rather serious new development, in incidents of 'untriggered' assault on Coptic Christians. It suggests that there has been a rise in the level of intolerance, such that the very existence of churches in an area is cause for sectarian assault.

² Noha el Zeiny in an interview with Wael el Ibrashy, Dream TV, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF_B1qwjS6o

3.1.3 Muslim-Christian gender relations:

The third main trigger of sectarian assault during 2008-2010 was matters to do with Muslim-Christian gender relations (19 such incidents in total). Political critic Ibrahim Eissa noted that 'most of the incidents of sectarian strife in Egypt are caused by a Christian boy falling in love with a Muslim girl or a Muslim boy wanting to marry a Christian girl or something to do with relations between the opposite sexes' (Eissa 2012). In a society such as Egypt where the divisions along religious lines are so deep, inter-religious marriages are an anathema.

Legally, a Muslim man can marry a Christian woman but a Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man. There are no social prohibitions for Muslims to marry Christian women in particular since the latter convert to Islam upon marriage. However, these women's families normally reject such marriages and believe they bring dishonour upon them and upon the wider Christian community. What causes sectarian strife is often when Christian women disappear and their families discover that they have converted and married Muslim men, but they have no way of finding out whether they did so voluntarily or under pressure. Matters become particularly aggravated when the missing daughters are minors (below 16 years of age) in which case legally they are under the guardianship of their families and the state is obliged to help them find their daughters, which it was reluctant to do.

However, after the revolution, once again, a new phenomenon emerged, making it difficult to classify under 'gender relations' and that is the disappearance of young girls and women (at least 8 incidents in 2012) where there is no evidence that a relationship with a Muslim man existed previously. These were incidents in which women were out on errands or returning from a social engagement and never returned. In one instance, a Salafi leader admitted that the young woman, age 14, was in their company, that she intended to convert and that the family should not try to get in touch with her. These incidents have led to the organisation of protests and marches by Coptic citizenry, sometimes entering into direct confrontations with the powers that be.

3.1.4 Untriggered Assaults:

The most dramatic change in sectarian violence to have occurred after the Islamists have informally risen to power in 2011 and formally assumed office in 2012 has been the rise of 'untriggered' incidents of assault against Christians. There were three such incidents in 2010, 16 in 2011 and 31 in 2012. These involved incidents in which there was no reason- not even a dispute- to spark acts of violence. For example, there were several incidents in which Coptic Christian women were assaulted for not wearing a veil. While non-veiled Muslim women were also exposed to such acts, in the case of the former, they would be accompanied by verbal abuse such as being referred to as 'infidels'.

What is clear is that the overwhelming majority of sectarian incidents of violence occur at a community level, rather than high level confrontations between religious leaders or state figures. Hence any decentralisation initiatives that involve a devolution of power will influence the sectarian situation, it may affect mitigation of conflict, depending on whether it is sending out signals of low or high tolerance towards sectarian violence, it is likely to affect management, in terms of the extent to which there is partisan allegiances affecting perpetrators and victims are dealt with and it would affect post-conflict reconciliation in terms of the extent to which people perceive justice to have been assured.

4 Informal decentralisation and devolution in Egypt: Ruptures in social cohesion

The Muslim Brotherhood-led government have not taken (so far) any formal measures of decentralisation such as delegating central government budgets and responsibilities to local municipalities and councils. The government have also not formally sought to devolve the power of central government to issue legislation at a local level. Nor have service delivery measures been implemented in a way to increase local ownership and management. However, there have been a number of *informal* mechanisms of decentralizing authority to the benefit of local actors. There have also been incidents where the government had to yield to local demands associated with governance issues. In the following section we will examine instances of decentralisation in the areas of: a) forced devolution of power vis-a-vis selection of governorate level leadership on political matters and b) informal justice mechanisms in lieu of government in post-conflict reconciliation.

4.1 Devolution of leadership to governorate level

Two months after the ousting of President Mubarak there was increasing pressure on Musharraf's transitional government to show its commitment to changing the figures in power during the former regime. On the 14th of April the Cabinet announced the names of the new governors. Wide scale protests ensued in many governorates because many of the new appointees were police or military men from the old regime. There was also a high expectation that the selection of governors would be made through a less top-down process and involve consultation with the various stakeholders at the local level. So far, the story seems to be one of a people demanding a right to participate in the governance of their country. After a while the protests subsided in all of the governorates except one, that of the Upper Egyptian governorate of Qena, where local inhabitants stepped up their protests, performed a sit in over the railway lines (bringing rail travel between upper Egypt and the rest of the country to a complete standstill) and threatened to cut off electricity supplies to nearby factories. It is easy to interpret the Qena crisis as a straightforward case of citizen agitation against a recalcitrant government.

But to read the events in Qena as a case of citizen demand for democracy would be to ignore the actors, the agendas, the discourses and the justifications of the protestors. What happened in Qena involved a complex constellation of actors: the tribal leaders, the Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, leaders from the dismantled former ruling party (National Democratic Party) with critical interjections at various points in time from the Sufis and the officers from the dismantled state security investigations apparatus (*mabaheth amn al dawla*) who, according to some reports, actively helped block the railways. The common objective was not a demand for a civil governor, but a Muslim one. It was the religion of the governor that served to unify all the different parties into one alliance, not the demand for a civil, democratically-elected governor.

This was the second time that Qena was appointed a Christian governor, (Magdy Ayoub being the first and having served as its previous governor). Ayoub was loathed by the Christian Qenawis who argued that in his attempt to give the image of being non-partisan, he discriminated against Christians. It is during his time in office that Egypt witnessed one of its bloodiest sectarian attacks ever (in Nagi Hammadi on parishioners leaving church following Christmas Eve mass in 2010). Qenawi Muslims also complained that his fear of antagonising different political forces locally made him a weak leader. While the rule of Mubarak's generals as governors over Egypt has often created tensions with local constituencies, some

of the complaints that Ayoub received were on the basis of his religion, namely, that he could not participate in the Friday prayers when in office³.

A statement produced by the 'intellectuals of Qena' pointed the fingers to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis who led the protests, though the former later retreated. According to several press reports, the mosques of Qena were transformed into platforms for the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis to call upon the people of Qena to reject the appointment of a Christian governor because there is no *wellaya* (authority/governance) of a non-Muslim over a Muslim⁴. Among the most popular slogans raised in the public protests of Qena were: '*Islamiyya, Islamiyya*', '*Islamiyya, Islamiyya*, not Christian, not Jewish', 'Raise your head up, you are a Muslim'⁵, and 'There is no God but God, Mikhail is God's enemy. We want a Muslim governor', 'We want him [the governor] Muslim' and 'There is no God but God, the Nazarene [the Christian] is the enemy of God' and 'Salafis and Brotherhood one hand against the Nazarene governor!'

4.1.1 Analysis of Power Structures

Political commentator Daa Rashwan⁶ argues that since Christians were among the first to oppose Mikhail's appointment, this is evidence that the protests were not motivated by sectarian sentiments. Yet such a conclusion fails to take into account how the underlying power relations influenced the way people chose to exercise their agency. A power analysis using visible, hidden and invisible power would reveal the following:

A) Visible power:

The most visible level of power was the mass mobilization of citizenry and members of the Islamist groups to use demonstrations, sit-ins and threats to severing public infrastructure as a means of exerting pressure on the government to respond. It was in one sense a representation of the *power with* to force government responsiveness. The government was keen to seem to be responsive to the people who had organized en bloc and to end a crisis that was bearing heavy political and economic costs. It chose to 'freeze' the appointment of Mikhail, delegated the responsibility to the secretary general of the governorate, and later on moved to appoint an alternative Muslim governor. The decision reflected the victory of the Islamists over the government, and the setting of a new rule of power- the power of the majority will prevail.

B) Hidden power:

Hidden power can be examined either on the level of hidden actors, as well as who or what gets excluded in the agenda-setting. The state security investigation apparatus in addition to the former NDP members were keen to pacify the new Islamists who had come to power in an attempt to forge a new alliance. While they were not the visible movers and shakers, they collaborated in a politically pragmatic move. Even when the government created invited spaces, policies of exclusion represented hidden power at work: When the Minister of Interior and Minister of Local Administration visited Qena, they held a meeting which was held by majority Salafis. 'When the Minister of Interior asked about any Copts, they discovered there was no representation and two priests were brought in for a meeting to be held with the Minister afterwards' noted one

³ Abou al Abbas Mohammed *Roz al Youssef* magazine, ibid.

⁴ Karima Kamal Al *Masry al youm*, 21.4.2011 "The case of Qena: "We want him Muslim", p13, and Nader Shoukry, *Watani* 22.4.2011 "Qena burns under the of through the hands of the Islamists and the Military council faces a dilemma", , <http://www.wataninet.com/ArticleDetailsEX.aspx?A=492>

⁵ A play on the famous slogan raise your head up, you are an Egyptian" commonly chanted during the 17 days of uprisings

⁶ Daa Rashwan, *Al Shorouk* Monday 25th April, 2011, p10 "A vision and possible solutions to the Qena crisis", Monday 25th April, 2011, p10

journalist's report⁷. The meeting also excluded several other political forces such as the youth coalitions and the leaders of all the tribes.

C) Invisible power:

The emergence of the Islamist movement as a powerful force in the formal political sphere in addition to the already strong presence it has in civil society meant that challenging it could have long-lasting implications on people at grassroots level. Appointing a Christian in a formal position of formal leadership only addresses the visible level of power. It does not affect in the invisible power of the deeply sectarian normative values which as an individual he would not be able to overcome.

Also in view of the new power configurations in terms of the Islamists' ascendancy to formal power while being uninhibited at the grassroots level, it would have been political suicide for any Copt to express the right to hold office when the odds are so set against him. An application of an invisible power lens would suggest that Christians had more to lose in supporting a Christian governor than in decrying the anti-Christian slogans and the visible show of hostility displayed by the protestors. Hence to interpret their support for a non-Christian governor should not be interpreted as genuine solidarity with their belief that Christians should not be appointed as governors.

The Qena crisis highlighted the challenges of democratic transitions when handled by a regime that was very much handling governance issues with a majoritarian mind-set. To appoint men from the security forces associated with the old regime was undoubtedly an insult to the intelligence and sentiments of the public in Qena and elsewhere.

But the Qena crisis cannot be reduced to a public call for a civilian state. After the government had retracted with a freeze on Mikhail's assumption of responsibilities in Qena, the protestors released a statement saying that they were not thugs and had blocked the railway for legitimate demands, namely that they do not want Qena *to be the quota for Copts*⁸ (italics mine). It did not help that he was a general from the secret political police, and it did not help that the procedures for governors' appointment were top down, but the fact of the matter is, that as important and legitimate as these factors were, the essence of the struggle- if you take away the democratic sugar coating, was a rejection of the principle of equal citizenship, in rights and duties, irrespective of religious affiliation.

4.2 Devolution through the enforcement of informal justice mechanisms

One of the most dramatic changes occurring after the revolution is in the shift in the management of sectarian incidents on a local level from the state security investigations apparatus (SSI) to that of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. The outcome of such informal committees for administering justice has been the creation of deep fissures between Muslims and Christians in a way that severely undermines social cohesion.

A troubling phenomenon had started to appear from 2000 onwards (Shoukry 2009) which is that of informal reconciliation sessions as mechanisms of administering justice. These were in lieu of recourse to rule of law. In the *Urfi* (customary) justice system, the head of the tribe or elder reputed for being just and wise arbitrate after hearing the accounts of both parties. In view of their social legitimacy, decisions arrived at during these customary sessions are considered binding. Since the process is governed by the principles of Islamic Sharia, there

⁷ Ahmed Abd Ellah, *Roz al Youssef magazine*, pp18-20, 23-29 April 2011, "the Salafis sparked the fires of sectarianism in Qena twice"

⁸ Hamada Ashour, *Al Shorouk*, 27th April, , "Freezing Mikhail's releases the Qena protest", front page.

are specific conditions to be met in the selection of the judge, the presence of witnesses, the presence of the defence, the people, the process of issuing a decree etc. However, Shoukry (2009) noted what had occurred is the distortion of how *urfi* courts were historically administered.

There was one major significant difference perhaps between the *urfi* courts as they were administered in tribes and Bedouin communities and as they have been administered in cases of sectarian violence: namely, the arbitrator became the SSI apparatus which was able to exercise soft power (coercion) and hard power (incarceration and threats of torture) should citizens not comply. Its powers had in many instances in Mubarak's Egypt surpassed those of the National Prosecutor and hence, it was empowered to usurp the course of justice through the administration of the rule of law. Ironically, it was a case in which the arbitrator of justice was an accomplice in the very act of violence that was instigated in the first place. In the majority of cases of SSI-administered incidents of reconciliation sessions (*lejan al solh*), there was a clear attempt at mollifying the dominant group in the community at the expense of the weaker party. The rulings often meant a collective penalisation of all the Christian inhabitants of a particular village as a consequence of the act of one individual or family, and it often meant that compensation for assaults made on Christian places of worship or property were, if at all, only of a nominal value.

As the political restrictions against civil activism waned after the revolution, the inhibitions against Islamist forces were removed, and they assumed a more prominent leadership role in public in particular on a local level. In one of the first sectarian incidents under the reign of the SCAF, a church was burnt in Sol, one of the villages of the Giza and reconciliation sessions were held to deal with the crisis. A Christian man was caught alone in the company of a Muslim woman in his car, which stirred popular outrage and demands for the reclaiming of honour. Concurrently, rumours of a long standing relationship between another Christian man and a Muslim woman suddenly surfaced. The elders of the most prominent families in the village met with the local priests in a meeting in which they asked that the two Christian men in question be expelled from the community. The priests agreed, and believed this was a reasonable settlement that would hopefully secure peace and harmony in the village. The uncle of the woman who was rumoured to be in a relationship with a Christian man confronted her father and pressed him to kill his daughter to cleanse the family honour. A dispute ensued between them, the father refused to kill his daughter and defended her virtue, the uncle insisted that the family honour had been tarnished, and matters escalated, and both shot each other.

On the 4th March 2012, the day of their burial, after Friday prayers, unknown persons incited citizens to seek vengeance against the Christians who were blamed for the loss of the lives of the two Muslim men. The uncle was a member of the Islamist movement (unclear whether this was the Salafis or the Muslim Brotherhood). Inhabitants of Atfeeh responded by burning the church and looting and pillaging the property of many Christian residents of the area. In the first reconciliation session that was held soon after with SCAF's presence and with the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi leaders, and representatives from the church, the church leaders were pressed to agree to rebuild the church in a different location, preferably on the edge of town, to avoid disturbing majority sensibilities. It was also agreed that the perpetrators (who were caught on camera) would not be tried.⁹

Following massive protests led by youth coalitions and Copts at Maspero, the army volunteered to rebuild the church, although the perpetrators were never referred to trial. When the army came under open fire for having called the renowned Salafi Sheikh Mohammed Hassan (commonly known as Sheikh Hassan) to manage the reconciliation committee, SCAF sought to deflect criticism of their continued reliance upon him for

⁹ *Al-Wafd*, March 7, 2011.

managing sectarian strife by explaining that it is 'because people listen to him.'¹⁰ The army built a new church in a speedy and efficient manner, and they also built a new mosque, of great grandeur and of greater proportions to the church in the same village, in addition to building a new bakery and upgrading the existing health centre.

The Coptic families that left following the crisis returned but one of the Coptic residents who were interviewed a year later, reported that though there have been no outbreaks of violence, the situation remained tense. One man said 'now if there is a wedding or a funeral, we don't go to pay our tribute and likewise they don't come to ours [weddings and funerals] except those who are very close friends'. The same man was keen to point out that some Muslims played an exceptionally heroic role in trying to protect the church and the homes of the Copts from being looted and plundered, however things were not like they were before. 'It's like each keeps to his own' said another interviewee.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis also organised a series of widely publicised reconciliation committees in the village of el Nahdah in the town of Ameriyya, Alexandria in January/February 2012. In January 2012, rumours spread that a Christian man allegedly had circulated via his mobile indecent images of a Muslim woman. Out of fear for his life and the lives of his family, the young man in question gave himself up in the local police station but the youth in the village congregated and demanded that he and his family leave the village. This was followed by acts of burning and vandalism of homes and property owned by Copts. In one instance, a member of these families fearing for his life against the crowds shot bullets in the air. Three reconciliation committee meetings led by the Salafis and the Muslim brotherhood were convened to deal with the matter. The reconciliation committees were attended by Lieutenant (Ameed) Khaled Shalaby and led by the Salafi sheikhs, headed by Sheikh El Sherif el Hawary. In the first reconciliation committee meeting, despite the expressed opposition of the local priest and the Coptic family in question to the clauses of the agreement, it was decided that three families would be expelled, and that a committee would be formed to sell their property. However, the youth congregated felt that this was insufficient punishment. In reaction, a second reconciliation committee meeting was convened and it was agreed that five more Coptic families would be added to the list of those to be expelled¹¹

In the third conclusive reconciliation committee meeting, eight other Christian families who had nothing to do with the young man were forcibly expelled from the village. The agreement clauses published in *Al Wafd* newspaper stipulated that on the 1st of February, 2012 the "exit" of the families was for the protection of their lives. One of the more interesting clauses was bestowing upon the committee the responsibility of selling the properties belonging to the expelled families, with the pricing and the process of selling and buying to happen under the direction of Sheikh El Sherif el Hawary. What is striking is the way in which the right to dispense with the property of the Christian families, one of whom was known to be one of the wealthier members of the village, was violated. The Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood leaders in the reconciliation committee usurped the right of the police to investigate and prosecute, and yet this contract was signed in the presence of the highest security authorities in Alexandria.

The second interesting clause was to bestow upon the arbitrators the responsibility of determining the scope of damage 'in accordance with the precepts of the Sharia'¹². The reference to the Sharia law is interesting because reconciliation committees have conventionally followed a number of social customs and traditions, which have geographically differed from one area to the next. The *urf*, or custom, in this area was that a

¹⁰ *Al-Dustour*, May 11, 2011.

¹¹ Gad, Emad "The Ameriyya [incident] is sectarian you philosophers of denial" *Al Tahrir*, 21st February, 2012, p10

¹² Oreiby, Ala, The report [contract] for expelling Christians from Al Ameriyya, *Al Wafd*, 13th February 2012, p5

man would not be expelled except if there was a case of premeditated murder, and even then, he himself would depart, but not his family. As for the punishment for shooting bullets in the air with the intention of scaring people off, custom has it that the person would apologize and compensate any victims injured. The collective punishment of the Copts and their expulsion was contrary to local custom¹³.

Once again, the press and media exposed the details of the agreement, forcing parliament to intervene, which sent a committee to investigate the matter and press for the families that were evicted to return. However, the powers of Sheikh Hawary, the Salafi leader remained unshaken and those responsible for the violence were not prosecuted. The signals given implicitly were that citizens can get away with acts of violence against a religious minority, and this seemed to have a ripple effect in the adjoining villages. In May 2012, four months after the incident at Al Nahdah village, in the nearby village of al Bassra, rumours of an alleged relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman developed into a full scale sectarian incident. In early May 2012, a 20 year old Coptic Christian who had a small business in selling mobile phones and mobile recharging cards passed by one of his Muslim female neighbours who asked him for a loan of LE20 (less than £2). He gave her the money, but he was seen by a man who was allegedly a member of the Salafi movement. According to the boy's father, this man was responsible for spreading rumours that the Christian man and Muslim woman were in a relationship. He called upon the Muslim residents to congregate at the mosque after evening prayer, after which they attacked the homes and businesses of the Christians living in the village, and one residential home was burnt. Residents of nearby villages later arrived to join in the attacks on the other homes. As in the village of Al Nahdah, Sheikh Sherif el Hawary again presided over a reconciliation session in which it was decided that the young man in question and his family would leave the village for a month. In the reconciliation session, it was also revealed that the rumours regarding the relationship were unfounded. One of the interviewees also affirmed that the young woman had to undergo a medical examination which confirmed her virginity, and thus served as evidence that they were not in a relationship. The man who allegedly belonged to the Salafi movement was never prosecuted for spreading rumours, nor were the owners of the houses attacked compensated. Needless to say the young woman was also not compensated for the loss of reputation and for her exposure to a very humiliating medical examination. Four Christian families voluntarily left the village, fearing for further reprisals.

Interviews were conducted with Christian families living in the village of Al Bassra in March 2013, 10 months after the incident. It was clear from the interviews that social relations were strained. The young man's father said 'relations with our Muslim neighbours are not like before anymore, the relationship now is short, there are no dealings like before. Before there were relations and [a feeling of] love, but after this, it is reduced to hellos and good byes'. The same sentiment was reiterated by other interviewees.

It is clear that the reconciliation session did not create the conditions allowing for the promotion of social cohesion, but rather social alienation. Clearly, the delegation of resolution of conflict to the Salafis with the implicit endorsement of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government did not deliver on justice any more than the SSI-mediated reconciliation sessions enacted during Mubarak's era. To the contrary, it re-enforced the power of the local hegemonic political forces. Reconciliation committees, as they have been run, institutionalise the collective subjugation of a religious minority to the majority with severe implications: first, it re-enforced the power of the Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood as the authoritative mediators of conflict; second, it signalled the non-accountability of the mediators to a higher authority; third, it sent signals in the community that those who mobilize the citizenry to instigate violence against the minority will not be prosecuted; fourth, it generated long

¹³ Gad, Emad "The Ameriyya [incident] is sectarian you philosophers of denial" Al Tahrir, 21st February, 2012, p10

standing animosity in the community that may in the long run be fertile ground for further violence.

The problem does not lie in the principle itself of bringing together the leaders who have authority and legitimacy in the community to mediate in conflict resolution, rather it is in the way in which it re-enforces unequal power hierarchies, thus undermining the prospects of inclusive and just policies. In effect it may appease the crowds at that moment but it contributes to a disabling environment for nurturing social cohesion on a long term basis.

5 Conclusions and key policy messages

Decentralisation evidently involves a wide range of political, administrative and fiscal policies which can have vastly differently designs and approaches. It can also be formally pursued by the government or implemented through an informal delegation of powers to local actors. In this paper, we have examined two dimensions of the process of devolving political power in Egypt, first, an instance in which local actors sought to assume the powers of choosing their own leader at a local level, and second, the mediation of Islamist forces of reconciliation sessions in lieu of the formerly centrally managed state security investigations apparatus. Both instances involved an informal process of local actors assuming decision-making powers.

These acts of devolution of power were examined against the backdrop of a highly volatile political context in the aftermath of a revolt that brought an end to Mubarak's thirty year reign and paved the way for the political ascendancy to power of the Muslim Brotherhood. It argued that while the revolution did not cause an increase in sectarian tensions between the country's majority and minority religious groups, nevertheless the power configurations that emerged thereafter undermined social cohesion. Hence when local actors assumed power to deal with sectarian matters, the measures and policies reflected unequal relations, rather than redressed them. Measures which have been popular in decentralisation literature such as local selection of leadership and mediation of conflict through informal justice mechanisms became in such contexts, mechanisms that severely undermined social cohesion.

On the surface, both case studies of informal devolution of power would suggest that there was a high degree of participation, and even convergence. In the Qena instance, Christians joined with the crowds in demanding that they not be appointed a Christian governor. They participated in the reconciliation committee meetings as well and committed to complying with the agreed terms. In both instances, if one were to define social cohesion in terms of convergence (Marc *et al.*) or participation with others (Chan *et al.*), then communal relations may not seem so threatened. However, if one were to consider social cohesion in terms of Norton and De Haan, one would note that (i) there is a disempowerment of minorities, in particular if hidden and invisible forms of power are analysed, and (ii) cycles of violence are only momentarily disrupted and (iii) the institutions that need strengthening for peaceful management of rapid change such as those associated with rule of law have not been weakened at the expense of those institutions that re-enforce power hierarchies on the ground.

Inclusive policies would be required to comply with the underlying power configurations that are premised on majoritarianism. Since sectarianism is very deep seated in Egyptian society, a strong political will at the highest level is the critical factor that would make the

most difference here. If such a political will exists, then a number of measures may serve to enhance social cohesion at a local level such as:

(1) Develop locally appropriate mechanisms of reporting, documenting and flagging incidents of sectarian conflict. One of the limitations of having to rely on data from the press is that it often is inadequate in exposing underlying power dynamics at work. Also, incidents only come to the surface if they develop into newsworthy items- involving having already evolved into large scale conflict. It may be worthwhile to examine whether it is possible to institutionalise at a local level mechanisms of reporting on growing tensions that would alert us to where there are threats of possible ruptures emerging in the community.

(2) Protect the independence of the media. In order for a system that flags emerging hot-points to be effective in eliciting appropriate responses as highlighted above, the independence of the press and media are essential. The press and media played a central role in exposing the injustices of the outcomes of the reconciliation sessions in all of the incidents mentioned and described above. While local minorities are sometimes scared that the media's exposure of incidents would aggravate further reprisals against them due to the invisible powers at work, nevertheless, there is no guarantee that if silence is maintained, the situation would not have worsened anyway.

(3) Reform the state security apparatus. The retreat of heavy handed centralised state actors such as the SSI apparatus from managing sectarianism has evidently not brought about social cohesion. What is needed is a different security role, not less security. Local police and other security actors need to manage sectarian conflict differently, and this requires training but also greater accountability.

(4) Strengthen rule of law. It is clear that in many of the incidents of sectarian conflict highlighted above, the recourse to formal channels of justice were obstructed. However, the politicisation of the judiciary in dealing with sectarian matters would only serve to undermine prospects of delivering justice. It is critical that even if judicial court rulings are sometimes anathema to the majority, that they are respected and complied with, in order to send the right signals with regards to sectarian assault.

(5) Scrutinize the outcomes of the reconciliation committee meetings as needed. The elimination of reconciliation committee meetings altogether is unlikely to be the solution to fostering social cohesion because locally, it is the informal leaders who wield power, not those working in the local council or in the civil service. In other words, the power configurations are such that those recognised as the elders in the community in addition to religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian) are the ones that have the social legitimacy to make socially binding decisions that people adhere to. However, the reconciliation committees have become mechanisms for the collective punishment of the minorities and for allowing those responsible for inciting violence through the spread of rumours or through inflammatory speeches to evade accountability. The problem is not one of visible power, i.e. adequate representation of all parties concerned, but of hidden and invisible power (the influence of religious leaders in citizens' responses to sectarianism, as well as the role of behind-the-scenes actors). How to make reconciliation sessions more just will require high level government policy as well as a strengthened judiciary and improved security.

(6) Undertake action research in select communities to examine whether the involvement of influential leaders and the participation of citizens in joint development activities to create a more enabling environment for social cohesion. In highly polarised communities, as is the case today and in view of the high levels of poverty, it may be worth examining whether inclusive development initiatives contribute to creating positive social interactions.

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