

# Transformational leadership and its role in managing conflicts in Libya

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# Transformational leadership and its role in managing conflicts in Libya



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# 1. Introduction

Libya's revolution was different from those experienced in Egypt and Tunisia, as it involved large-scale violence not experienced in the other two countries. Libya's revolution also produced a range of local conflicts and tensions, as well as re-exposing old historical conflicts.

These conflicts have threatened the country's social fabric, increasing divisions and weakening ties between some communities. Local conflicts have also made it harder to agree a shared vision for a new civil state in Libya, as they have gone hand in hand with widespread ownership of weapons across the country and an increasing tendency towards the use of violence to solve disputes.

As a result, it is clear that, three years after the revolution, there is an urgent need to provide opportunities for different groups in Libya to better understand each other, their

experiences and ambitions, as the basis for finding common ground.

To this end, it is important to build a deeper understanding of conflict and how to build peace in Libyan society. A key part of this is supporting community and local authority representatives to become 'transformational leaders', who are better able to manage conflicts and to play a bigger role in making positive changes in their communities.

This report provides an introduction to transformational leadership for a Libyan audience. It also summarises lessons learned from peace initiatives run by community and local authority leaders in four areas. The report was prepared as part of the 'Peacebuilding partnership for Libya'.<sup>1</sup> The report is accompanied by a training manual in transformational leadership, developed specifically for Libya.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Peacebuilding partnership for Libya' was a 12-month project in 2013-2014 designed to: (1) increase the capacity of civil society and local authorities to deliver local peacebuilding initiatives that respond to the conflict and security consequences of the 2011 revolution; (2) support local peacebuilding initiatives that use participatory planning processes to help deal with local conflict and security issues; and (3) assist lesson learning on effective peacebuilding in Libya and provide resources that Libyan peacebuilders can use in the future.

The project involved five training workshops in 'Leadership in conflict management' and six months of mentoring for community-specific initiatives.

The project was implemented for the European Union by EUNIDA (European Union Network of Implementing Development Agencies). It involved international peacebuilding experts working in partnership with Libyan national 'trainer-mentors'

## 2. Transformational leadership and its importance for managing conflict in Libya

### 2.1 What is 'conflict' and how can we manage it effectively?

A conflict is when two or more parties believe that their goals and interests are incompatible. Conflict is a natural part of any society and, if managed well, can lead to positive change (e.g. improvements to the legal system, public services or human rights). However, conflict is negative when people believe that they have no option but to use violence to achieve their goals and interests.<sup>2</sup>

Conflicts in local societies take many forms. Some conflicts are well understood, with a clear sense of what is causing them and an obvious set of actions to address them. Sometimes, however, the forces driving a conflict are not properly understood and need to be uncovered in order to be addressed effectively. Indeed, it is can be the case that the parties to a conflict fundamentally disagree on the cause of the conflict and how it can be resolved. Other conflicts are more superficial, resulting from a misunderstanding between the parties of their respective goals, and can be addressed through better communication.

Just as it is important to distinguish between different forms of conflict, it is also important

to distinguish between different forms of peace. A society might at a superficial level appear peaceful, as it is not suffering from war or armed conflict. At the same time, some people living in the society may not feel safe, or may feel deprived of their rights. Feelings among a particular group of people of insecurity, discrimination or injustice can provide the foundation for violence. This situation is called 'shallow peace'. In order to achieve 'deep peace', people in society need to feel safe, and to believe that they have equal social, political and economic opportunities.

Indeed, it is helpful to think of the ability of a society to achieve deep peace as dependent on how it manages changes in society. Such changes can be slow and long-term (such as demographic changes, or changes to the economy), or can be short-term and dramatic (such as a revolution). Change entails making difficult decisions on how to distribute social, political and economic opportunities – and it is often the case that groups come into conflict as such decisions are being made, as they have or believe that they have different goals and interests.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more information please refer to: Simon Fisher *et. al.*, *Working With Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*, Responding to Conflict (RTC), London 2000.

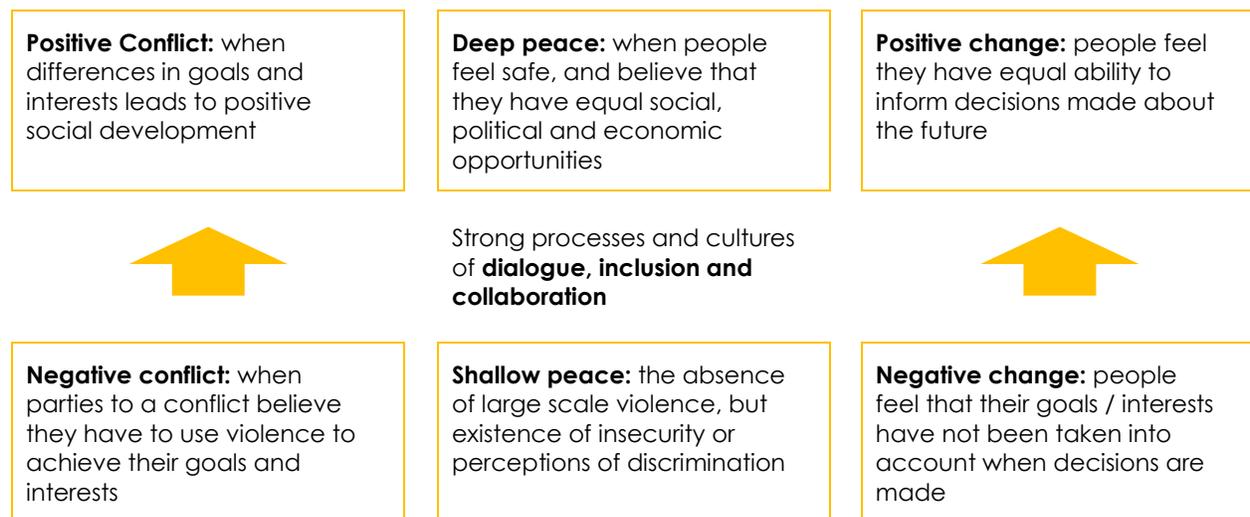
<sup>3</sup> *Social peace & local development in Libya: a handbook for local government and community leaders*, Peaceful Change initiative and a Talk for a Change, Tripoli 2014.

In order to most effectively manage change, so as to achieve deep peace and avoid negative violent conflict, a society needs to have strong processes and cultures of:

1. **Inclusion** – meaning that people have (and feel they have) opportunities to be involved in public life and decision-making.

2. **Dialogue** – meaning that people speak openly, listen to and try to understand each other's opinions.

3. **Collaboration** – meaning more than co-existence, but rather active cooperation in practical initiatives, especially those to achieve peace.



**Diagram 1: effective conflict management**

## 2.2 Which type of leadership can help to manage conflicts during change?

In order to peacefully manage change in society, we must ask: Which groups are leading the change? Who is affected by the change? What are we trying to achieve? Indeed, the main challenge for a society going through change is to find leaders who work in a way that encourages inclusion, dialogue and collaboration.

Such people are 'transformational' leaders. Transformational leaders have the ability to influence the visions, attitudes and behaviours of others in the community that they are part of. They are not only effective in 'getting things done', they are also able to challenge traditional ways of dealing with difficult issues and other groups, and to provide a role model for constructive conflict management through what they say and do.

As noted above, people who have lived through conflict often have only a limited understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those on the other side of the conflict. Indeed, each party may hold different views on the causes of the conflict and different visions for what successful resolution would look like in the future. This lack of understanding across conflict divides can lead to an ongoing cycle of conflict and violence.

In such situations, transformational leaders can play a vital role, by modelling tolerance and understanding, by forging bridges of communication, by demonstrating a desire to listen to others, and by putting themselves 'in the others' shoes' in order to understand their perspectives.

The next four sections of the report provide case studies of initiatives by transformational leaders across Libya, and the learning that we can take from their work.



# 3. Case study 1: Community support for dialogue between Ghadamsia and Tuareg



## 3.1 Background situation

During the armed revolution, Ghadames witnessed violent actions between the city's Ghadamsia and Tuareg inhabitants, with each accusing the other of violating human rights during and after the revolution. One consequence of the violence has been that the Tuareg inhabitants moved out of the town to neighbouring areas. As a result, since the revolution there has only been limited communication between the two communities.

The sides have signed two peace agreements (with the help of the transitional government and other parties) that helped to deliver urgent needs, such as stopping the immediate violence, safe access to the town for those displaced and access to public healthcare. However, some elements of the agreements have not been implemented – most notably regarding compensation, transitional justice and 'recognition of rights' – meaning that some consider the peace agreements a failure.

As a result, there are internal division in both communities, between those who want to re-establish peaceful relationships, including channels of communications and dialogue, and those who object to re-establishing relationship before the delivery of compensation, transitional justice and the recognition of rights. At the same time,

leaders on both sides were nervous about starting a new dialogue, as they were concerned about a negative reaction from their respective communities. A worst case being that they would be labelled as 'traitors' and become socially isolated.

## 3.2 Objective of local leaders

The objective of local leaders in Ghadames was to prepare the two communities for dialogue on peaceful development, by increasing: (1) understanding of the benefits of dialogue; and (2) public support for dialogue. As such, the local leaders looked to communicate the following key messages in their communities:

- Entering into a dialogue does not mean either side giving up their rights and demands.
- Dialogue is essential for sustainable peace. Previous dialogues have stopped violence, and are still needed due to the weakness of state institutions during the transition.

“We need to learn how to have a dialogue with those who have different views”.

Tuareg community leader

### 3.3 Actions undertaken

In order to prepare the two communities for dialogue, parallel 'Peace Teams' of eight to twelve people were established on each side. These teams provided a core group of people willing to promote the importance of dialogue. To this end, the parallel Peace Teams, through external mediation (the two teams never physically met) conducted:

- Initial assessments of community perceptions on the need and support for dialogue – through outreach sessions in schools, mosques and cafes.
- Writing and distribution of a joint brochure on the importance of dialogue, titled 'Our dialogue together – does not mean giving up our rights and demands'.
- Parallel awareness-raising workshops on dialogue for key constituencies on both sides, using the same pre-agreed material.
- Filming of a joint documentary, titled 'A dialogue for peace', in which representatives of both communities expressed their perspectives on recent events, what a solution entails and the importance of dialogue.
- The document film was shown in public viewings on both sides, followed by discussions.

Both Peace Teams looked to engender public momentum for dialogue by opening communication with, and gaining support from, influential people such as the families of martyrs, politicians, religious leaders (Imams), youth leaders and senior wise men.

### 3.4 Results

1. Both Peace Teams, while initially sceptical of dialogue and their ability to promote it,

increasingly became effective advocates. This is demonstrated by the fact that the parallel awareness-raising workshops were entirely delivered by them. In addition, it is important that this work was done in collaboration (albeit through third-party mediation), providing a positive example of how the two sides can work together in the future.

2. Clarification of the difference between reconciliation and dialogue. This was important as many people did not support dialogue, as they equated it with 'forgiveness' and 'giving up our rights'. This clarification helped to remove the risk that those engaging in dialogue would be labelled 'traitors'.
3. Perceptible increase in wider public support for dialogue throughout the initiative. Most importantly, the film showings provided a vehicle for open public discussion between those for and against the idea of dialogue. As such, the two Peace Teams are confident about the possibility of resuming direct dialogue, with external assistance.
4. The Tuareg Peace Team also helped to increase communication with national authorities on the immediate needs of the Tuareg. Increased communication led to the release of salaries of Tuareg workers in the health sector, and establishment of 600 residential units for displaced people.

"With the tragedies that happened... there is a desperate need for dialogue".

Ghadamsia community leader

## 4. Case study 2: Sharing perspectives for effective decision-making in Misrata

### 4.1 Background situation

In November 2013, an anti-armed group demonstration in the Gharghour area of Tripoli – which hosted some brigades from Misrata – escalated into violence and subsequently a larger public movement against armed groups in the city. The crisis was characterised by inflammatory rhetoric, by both political and community leaders in Tripoli, against armed groups in the city and the motivations of communities they are from. This rhetoric was magnified through widespread social media attacks. There were concerns that such rhetoric would encourage 'regionalism' (inter-communal conflict) in Libya.

Within Misratan society there were strong differences in opinion on how to best manage the crisis. Some advocated for the brigades in Gharghour to return to Misrata, as a way of reducing tensions. Others felt that the brigades should remain in Gharghour, as they believed the public demonstrations and media attacks to be unwarranted.

Additional concerns informing opinions were: (1) the potential negative impact on Misrata if the Gharghour brigades returned; (2) disillusionment among young men in Misrata about the revolution, resulting in ongoing willingness to use violence; and (3) the impact of the crisis on Misrata's

revolutionary credentials, and hence relationships with other communities.

### 4.2 Objective of local leaders

The objective of local leaders in Misrata was to prevent an increase in tensions: (1) inside Misratan society; and (2) between Misrata and other communities following the Gharghour crisis.

As well as immediate short-term crisis management, Misratan leaders also planned for long-term work to strengthen relationships between Misrata and other community groups in Libya.

“Our young men... they do not trust the government and fear the future, and will [as a result] not hand over their weapons”.

Misrata community leader

### 4.3 Actions undertaken

During the crisis, local leaders in Misrata proactively engaged in internal dialogue inside the city. This dialogue was hosted by local civil society organisations, but included influential figures not only from civil

society, but also from the local authorities, the shura and revolutionary groups.

Misrata has a strong history of internal dialogue and collaboration on challenging issues. However, this internal dialogue was deepened during the Gharghour crisis.

In addition to the internal Misrata dialogue:

- a training workshop was conducted in transformational leadership, including participation of the South African Ambassador to Libya, to provide experience from other contexts on how such issues can most effectively be managed.
- a cross-section of civil society, shura and local council leaders engaged in dialogue with civil society groups in Tripoli.
- civil society leaders trained in transformational leadership used a conflict analysis as the basis for planning with the Ministry of Labour and local Misratan businessmen for how to manage at risk revolutionary fighters returning from Misrata to Gharghour.
- some leaders planned for longer-term social dialogue processes with other community groups. This social dialogue is targeted at those communities whose relationship with Misratan society may have been damaged by recent experiences during and after the revolution.

#### 4.4 Results

1. Through the process of internal dialogue, Misratan community leaders were able to exchange views and perspectives on very difficult issues in a constructive manner. The result of this dialogue was a decision on how to manage the Gharghour crisis

that was shared and well supported. A key part of the decision was to make arrangements for the return of the Misratan brigades in Gharghour to Misrata.

2. These actions, together with the constructive dialogue with Tripoli civil society, played a key role in preventing further violence and in reducing tensions. As such, the actions of local leaders played a key role in negating the potential for deeper 'regionalism' in the country.
3. The collaborative planning between civil society leaders trained in transformational leadership, local businessmen and the Ministry of Labour resulted in an agreement to a rehabilitation support package for revolutionary fighters returning to Gharghour from Tripoli. This support package was jointly paid for by the Ministry of Labour and local Misratan businessmen.
4. The experience of internal dialogue has also created space for reflection by Misratan society on its role in Libyan politics and how it is perceived by other groups. The result is a greater willingness to engage in social dialogue processes with other community groups. It is important, however, to note that not all local leaders agree that such social dialogue is a priority.

"Through our actions we managed to make the further demonstrations peaceful, and to stop the grudges against Misrata [from building up]" .

Misrata community leader

## 5. Case study 3: Inter-cultural relationships in the Nafusa / Western Mountains

### 5.1 Background situation

The Nafusa / Western mountains is home to the largest Amazigh population in Libya, with significant cultural and social differences between Amazigh and Arab communities in the region.

These differences have not, generally, presented a problem with relatively robust communication between Arab and Amazigh towns. However, as key agreements are being made during the transition (e.g. on the constitution) there is the potential for an increase in tension in the area as Amazigh groups promote and protest their interests.

For example, the perceived low allocation of seats to minorities within the Constitutional Committee has led to a feeling in the Amazigh community that their aspirations for the constitution (such as inclusion of Amazigh as an official Libyan language) will not be achieved.

This has led to a boycott by some Amazigh of the Constitutional Committee, as well as frequent boycotts of elections at both the local and national level. Other protest measures have included cutting off the gas line that supplies electricity generators, demonstrations and strikes.

There is a concern that these actions could be resented or misunderstood by Arab

communities in the area, leading to a break down in relationships and greater potential for violent conflict.

### 5.2 Objective of local leaders

The objective of local leaders was to prevent inter-cultural tensions between Arab and Amazigh residents in the Nafusa / Western Mountains during the transition, especially during the process of drafting and agreeing a new constitution for Libya. This includes:

- increasing understanding between Arab and Amazigh communities of each other's aspirations for the transition.
- focusing on the links between Arab and Amazigh culture and their historical deepness, and that such diversity is a feature of the Libyan national identity.

It is important to note, that the objective of the local leaders was not to promote Amazigh cultural rights, but rather to ensure that there is opportunity and willingness for informed discussion on this issue between Amazigh and Arab groups in the area.

“Dialogue is the gateway to clear all the problems in the Nafusa Mountains”.

Amazigh community leader

### 5.3 Actions undertaken

Local leaders identified a range of short and long-term actions that they felt needed to be taken to help strengthen inter-cultural relationships.

The short-term actions were designed to increase understanding between Amazigh and Arab communities in the region, and to create a positive experience of working together. These actions focused on:

- an Arab-Amazigh poetry tour organised by local civil society organisations with funding from a range of international donors. The poetry tour included Ridgban, Jadu, Ghadames and Kabul, and ended in the old town of Tripoli.
- student discussions (including both Arab and Amazigh students) to plan for shared development needs in the Nafusa / Western Mountains region.
- radio discussions under the title 'Open Dialogue'. The discussions provided both international experience of managing difficult questions during transitions, and discussion of local issues in the Nafusa / Western Mountains area, and how they could be better managed.

Over the long-term, the aspiration of the local leaders was to develop channels of communication between Arab and Amazigh leaders in the region, so as to enable constructive discussions when difficult incidents arise (e.g. protests or boycotts).

### 5.4 Results

1. At the time of writing, it is too early to assess the impact of the group of local leaders on how inter-communal relationships in the region are managed.

The relative success of their work will be demonstrated later in the transition, dependent on how Amazigh and Arab leader work together and communicate during difficult period.

2. Nevertheless, their work has already demonstrated the ability of different community groups in the area to work together in a constructive manner (both Arab and Amazigh communities, and areas closely aligned with the revolution and those that are not).
3. Furthermore the radio discussions, and general outreach conducted by local leaders, has increased understanding in the region of the need for a transformational leadership approach for managing relationships during difficult periods.
4. However, one of the most significant challenges experienced has been to maintain communication and collaboration between leaders from different towns and cities in the region, given its large geographic scope. It is essential that such communication is maintained so that relevant relationships are already in place when crises occur.

**"I was on the radio as we need to educate people in the right way to build peace".**

*Arab community leader*

## 6. Case study 4: Planning for a sustainable solution for the Tawergha community

### 6.1 Background situation

Following the revolution about 42,000 Tawergha have been displaced inside Libya, with substantial communities now living in Tripoli (the West), Benghazi and Sabha.

Due to the sensitivity of the case – Tawergha community members are accused of significant war crimes in Misrata during the revolution – no progress has been made in resolving the community's displaced status (especially given the slow progress in transitional justice). Instead, the transitional government has focused on providing for the immediate humanitarian needs of displaced Tawerghans.

As a result of the absence of a clear roadmap for resolving their displaced status, large parts of the Tawergha community have become frustrated with:

- the transitional government, due to a perception that government figures are not willing to take the steps necessary to support the Tawergha community.
- the Tawergha leadership based in Tripoli, because it is felt not to have delivered an acceptable solution and also not to have always acted in the best interests of the whole community.
- third parties (including mediators), who are felt to have worked for their own

interests or to have politicised the Tawergha issue.

Due to this frustration, the Tawergha leadership announced that they would return to Tawergha in June 2013, even without agreement from the Libyan Government or Misrata. This proposed return ran the risk of worsening the conflict and putting Tawergha community members at risk.

### 6.2 Objective of local leaders

The objective of a group of Tawergha local leaders was to provide the foundation for a sustainable solution to the Misrata-Tawergha conflict (and the issues of displacement), by:

- ensuring effective dialogue inside the Tawergha community on what a sustainable solution looks like.
- preparing community leaders for dialogue with national authority representatives.
- preparing community leaders for direct unmediated dialogue with Misrata leaders (rather than relying on third-party mediators who may act in their own interests).

“Each conflict needs a negotiation table”.

Tawergha community leader

### 6.3 Actions undertaken

Local Tawergha leaders undertook the following actions:

- development of partnerships with international organisations that have experience of finding sustainable solutions to displacement issues. This allowed the group of local leaders to test potential approaches and actions.
- advocacy to the wider Tawergha leadership on the approach and actions that should be adopted by them in order to find a sustainable solution.
- regular consultation and planning sessions between the Tripoli leadership and representatives from the displaced communities in Tripoli (the West), Benghazi and Sabha. The purpose of this consultation and planning was to ensure greater ownership of the actions and policies adopted by the Tawergha leadership in Tripoli.
- limited discussion with some Misratan civil society actors to test how direct unmediated dialogue between the two communities could commence.

### 6.4 Results

1. The group of local leaders played a key role in engendering a productive approach by the wider Tawergha leadership to resolving the Misrata-Tawergha conflict. One in line with their learning from international organisations.
2. Most importantly, this meant that the proposed unilateral return in June 2013 was cancelled – as it was recognised that to take such an action would: (1) deepen the sense of injustice in Misrata (and hence the overall conflict dynamics); and (2) would put Tawergha community

members at substantial risk, as the government would not be able to guarantee their security. Indeed, in cancelling the proposed unilateral return, the Tawergha leadership managed to generate good will and additional support from the transitional government, as well as other community groups.

3. There is greater recognition by the wider Tawergha leadership: (1) of the range of opinions regarding the process of return and how negotiations should be conducted; and (2) that some feel cut off from the decision-making process. As such, there is now greater room for information exchange and consultation inside the Tawergha community.
4. Following the limited discussion with some Misratan civil society actors, the local leaders have now identified how to create an environment for constructive dialogue with Misratan society. This entails
  - unmediated dialogue between the two communities.
  - jointly presenting the outcomes of the discussion to the government, so that any direct dialogue is not politicised.
  - starting dialogue with a focus on how the humanitarian needs of both communities should be met, rather than on more difficult questions.
  - ensuring that any solution to the conflict is developed inside the dialogue, rather than being pre-arranged.

“People are happier that we have a process... but we have not seen any changes yet”.

Tawergha community leader

## 7. Lessons and recommendations

### 7.1 Lessons learned

1. For a peace initiative to be successful it is essential that it is 'inclusive', so that all parts of the community are able to participate in the decisions that are made. Without wider community participation, people will not support the peace initiative, and may in fact openly oppose it.
2. It is especially important that key leaders in a community (such as traditional leaders, imams, and local government leaders) have a shared understanding of how to pursue peace and are working together in partnership. If key leaders are working in partnership, it will be much easier to get support from the rest of the community. As such, it is important to also make sure that women and youth are fully involved – as these two groups are often key actors for or against peace.
3. It is important to clarify the purpose of the peace initiative being undertaken and its relevance for your community. If steps are not taken to clearly explain the process to the community, then people may misunderstand it, potentially leading to objections or even social repercussions for those driving the peace initiative.
4. In the Libya context, it is very important to communicate that 'dialogue' is not the same as 'reconciliation' and does not mean forgiveness or that people will have to give up justice. Instead it is important to stress that dialogue is essential in order to overcome past challenges and achieve sustainable ('deep') peace.
5. Those leading peace initiatives should not focus on reaching specific results too early. Rather it will be more effective to engage your community in a process of understanding and analysing the conflict so that it is properly understood. This will ensure that the steps taken to address the conflict are more informed and more likely to be effective. Taking time will also help to reduce participants' fears and build their sense of trust in the initiative.
6. Similarly, it is important not to push for dialogue between two communities in conflict before people are ready. Instead, more time should be spent on 'internal dialogue' inside each community in conflict, to prepare people for cross-divide dialogue.
7. Invest in the wider community's leadership and team work skills, including – communication, empowerment, self-confidence and social participation. It is important to invest in these skills in Libya, as people often believe that they are not able to make a difference on conflict, but instead wait for external forces to solve such issues for them.
8. Libyan communities show a strong ability to, with the right support, understand and translate conflict management concepts into actions in their daily lives. This includes learning to put themselves in the other party's shoes so as see their perspectives. As such, we should not avoid difficult discussion on conflict. In fact such discussions are needed now in Libya!

## 7.2 Recommendations

1. The government should increase the support available to Libyan non-governmental organisations skilled in conflict management and peacebuilding practice – ‘peacebuilding practitioners’. It is essential that such organisations have the capacity to provide weekly (and in some cases daily) mentoring support to local leaders who are designing and implementing peace initiatives.
2. Increase understanding of, and capabilities for, peacebuilding in wider society. As such, it is important for both government and peacebuilding practitioners to work together to more systematically assess the impact of peace initiatives in Libya, and to ensure that the learning from such research is widely distributed in Libyan society.
3. In addition, government and peacebuilding practitioners should also work together to create national and regional ‘peace centres’, which can provide training in practical conflict management skills (e.g. good communication skills, mediation and negotiation).
4. The government should more systematically link its efforts to resolve local conflicts with those to progress national development processes. This is important because local conflicts can impact on the potential for success of national transition processes (e.g. the constitution-making or decentralisation processes). Vice versa, failure to progress national transition processes can lead to (or reinforce) conflict at a more local level.
5. Importantly, national leaders, local leaders and peace practitioners should all work together to encourage open and frank discussion of the conflict challenges

affecting Libya. There has been a tendency since the revolution to deny the existence and importance of the many conflicts in society. Without societal recognition that local conflicts need to be managed, it will be difficult to progress the national transition process.

6. As such, peace practitioners should look to use traditional and social media as platforms to explore conflict issues and how they can most effectively be addressed. For example, through radio discussions, Facebook forums, comedy events or television series.
7. Local leaders should ensure that the approach they are taking to managing conflict is focused on long-term sustainable peace, rather than short-term solutions. For example, it may seem appropriate to reduce contact between two communities in conflict, so as to prevent immediate violence. However, the absence of channels of communication can lead to a deepening of conflict stereotypes and greater likelihood of violence in the future.
8. Local leaders should ensure that women and young people are involved as key partners in peace initiatives. Without their involvement, such initiatives are unlikely to be successful. However, women and young people may need additional support in order to become involved, especially in more traditional areas.

“You have given us something practical. Now we feel that we have a way to move forward. This work is different from what others have provided.”

Tuareg community leader





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