



Visualising Syria's Road towards Resilience Post-DDR

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Abstract

The protracted Syrian conflict renders a conventional, top-down Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) process unviable due to the absence of a national political settlement.

This paper argues that resilience and stability must be built organically from the ground up by leveraging hidden opportunities within Syrian society itself. It proposes an innovative, multidisciplinary framework rooted in bottom-up initiatives—such as hyper-local security agreements, economic interdependence projects, and trauma-informed mediation—that collectively function as a form of organic DDR.

The paper introduces the Syria Stability Lab (SSL) as a practical mechanism to pilot and scale these models, focusing on community-led solutions for economic revival, social cohesion, and psychological recovery. By advocating for a complex adaptive systems approach that navigates inherent complexity and eliminates introduced complications, this research provides a pragmatic roadmap for transforming post-conflict Syria. The conclusion posits that fostering pockets of resilience is not an alternative to a political solution but an essential strategy to create the conditions that make one possible.

Keywords: Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), Syria Conflict; Bottom-Up Approaches, Resilience; Social Cohesion, Complex Adaptive Systems; Localisation, Restorative Justice, Syria Stability Lab (SSL), Post-Conflict Reconstruction.

1. Introduction

The Syrian conflict has created one of the most complex and devastating humanitarian and security crises of the 21st century, rendering traditional post-conflict frameworks largely ineffective. A conventional, top-down Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) process remains a distant prospect, paralysed by the absence of a national political settlement and deep societal fractures. Goebel and Levy (2020) ^[15].

This paper argues that waiting for these conditions to change condemns Syria to prolonged instability; instead, a transformative approach must be initiated immediately from the ground up. It proposes that hidden opportunities for reconciliation and rebuilding exist within Syrian society itself, accessible through a bottom-up, multidisciplinary framework focused on resilience. Berti (2018) ^[2].

By exploring concrete initiatives in hyper-local security, economic interdependence, and trauma-informed dialogue, this paper contends that an organic, community-led form of DDR can create facts on the ground that foster stability. Ultimately, the paper introduces the Syria Stability Lab (SSL) concept as a practical mechanism to operationalise this framework, transforming Syria from a state of persistent conflict towards a resilient future. Buheji (2020) ^[5]

2. Literature Review

1.1. Definition of DDR and its Application in Syria

DDR typically means in a post-conflict setting Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration, Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) ^[18]. In disarmament, the transition authorities start the collection and disposal of weapons. During demobilisation, a formal

disbanding of armed groups, releasing combatants from a military structure. During the phase of reintegration, the process of helping former combatants return to civilian life, often achieved through economic, social, and psychological support. Abdulghany (2025) ^[1].

The term "DDR" in the context of Syria is highly complex and contentious. It does not refer to a single, unified national process like it might in other post-conflict countries. Instead, it refers to a fragmented set of initiatives, primarily led by the Syrian government and its allies, with starkly different perspectives from the opposition and international community. Goebel and Levy (2020) ^[15].

2. Core Principles Hidden Opportunities framework

To explore hidden opportunities called for bottom-up labs: led by local civil society, community leaders, and municipal councils rather than the national government or international bodies. Another variable to explore for exploiting hidden opportunities is to use a multidisciplinary approach. It integrates psychology, sociology, education, economics, conflict resolution, and traditional justice. Buheji (2022) ^[4] Syria's fate is related to multiethnicity. The country actively includes Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian, Turkmen, Armenian, and other groups; thus, respecting their distinct identities and needs is a requirement for a proper comprehensive framework. "Reintegration First": Focuses on creating the social and economic conditions for reintegration, which can then create the safety and trust for eventual disarmament and demobilisation. Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) ^[18].

3. Hidden Opportunities and Concrete Initiatives

The hidden opportunity lies in bypassing the paralysed national politics and investing in the Syrian people's innate capacity for reconciliation and rebuilding. By focusing on shared needs (security, jobs, healing) and empowering local, multidisciplinary, and inclusive structures, a form of organic DDR can begin to take root from the ground up. Marwah *et al.* (2010) ^[17].

4. Opportunity of Hyper-local Agreements

There are certain initiatives that can exploit the hidden opportunities for DDR and enhance Syria's resilience. For example, local ceasefires and community-based security can be designed to tackle the disarmament/demobilisation angle. Instead of nationwide disarmament, which is impossible now, focus on hyper-local agreements. Buheji (2019) ^[6]

The opportunity here is to focus on relatively stable, but tense areas, for example, certain parts of Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, or mixed areas in the northeast. These communities have a shared interest in basic security against crime, vendettas, and the resurgence of extremist cells. Thus, the initiative should facilitate local peace treaties and community policing models. Former combatants who know the terrain and players can be trained and integrated into multi-ethnic local security committees under civilian oversight, Özerdem, (2022) ^[19]. This isn't about handing heavy weapons to the state; it's about managing light weapons for community safety, potentially leading to voluntary weapons collection programs later. Buheji (2020) ^[5]

5. Opportunity of Reintegration through Economic Interdependence

The other opportunity comes from reintegration through economic interdependence. This is designed to tackle the reintegration angle, Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) ^[18]. The best deradicalisation and demobilisation program is a job and a sense of purpose. Thus, the opportunity here is to get all the targeted communities to get involved (work for) and engaged (work with) in all of the types of rehabilitation and rebuild efforts. This creates a demand for labour and skills that can transcend former front lines, Buheji (2020) ^[5]. The initiative here is about designing a multi-ethnic civilian work brigades that create teams for clearing rubble, restoring electricity/water, and agricultural projects. Deliberately form teams that mix individuals from different sides of the conflict, focusing on a shared, apolitical goal: survival and recovery, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024) ^[13]. This is based on the "contact hypothesis" in psychology, which states that under certain conditions, intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Under this second initiative, vocational training hubs can offer training in desperately needed skills (construction, solar energy installation, plumbing, IT). Criteria for entry should be based on community need and individual motivation, not former affiliation. This makes the economic opportunity a pull factor away from armed groups. Abdulghany (2025) ^[1].

6. Opportunity to Bring New Narrative that is based on a Healthy Multidisciplinary Mind and Spirit

DDR is not just about weapons and jobs; it's about mindsets and trauma. Hence, the opportunity here is to create a reference of excellence story that is based on reintegration through a trauma-informed mediation initiative, Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) ^[18]. The initiative starts with training local mediators and social workers in both conflict resolution and trauma awareness. This helps them manage dialogues where anger and PTSD are prevalent. This can be integrated with inter-community storytelling and history projects. It would facilitate safe spaces (initially within communities, then between them) for people to share their war experiences, Buheji and Hasan (2025b) ^[10]. This could be through oral history projects, art, or theatre. The goal isn't to agree on one narrative but to acknowledge the multiplicity of experiences and suffering. This builds empathy and counters dehumanising propaganda.

7. Opportunity to Create Bottom-Up Approach that leverages on Civil Society Network

Since the infrastructure for this already exists, despite being stretched and under-resourced, Syria has an opportunity to build a resilient network of local NGOs, women's centres, relief organisations, and local councils that have operated throughout the war, Buheji and Hasan (2025b) ^[10]. They are the trusted, on-the-ground partners. Therefore, a capacity-building initiative can help to build local entities to design and run the programs mentioned above. Women's groups are particularly effective at fostering dialogue across conflict lines and should be at the centre of designing reintegration programs, as they understand the social fabric that needs to be rewoven. Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) ^[18].

8. Opportunity to build a Home-grown Restorative Justice Mechanisms through Inclusive-based Design.

Based on the Syrian traditions of conflict mediation (Alsulh), there is a good opportunity for a hybrid justice model that blends traditional conflict resolution with modern transitional justice principles. This could involve elders from different communities facilitating agreements between families and individuals for the return of displaced people, apologies for harm, and symbolic reparations. This addresses the need for acknowledgement without immediately resorting to a state judiciary that is widely viewed as partisan. However, such programs are hyper-local and don't offer the "quick win" that donors often want; thus, scaling them up is a challenge.

This bottom-up approach is not a replacement for a national political solution and top-down DDR in the long term; rather, it is a way to create facts on the ground—pockets of stability, reconciliation, and interdependence—that can build momentum and demonstrate the possibility of a shared future, thereby pressuring the top to eventually make a deal. Buheji and Hasan (2025a) ^[9].

9. Overarching Principles for Any Resilience Strategy

Syrian communities can learn together through bottom-up approaches on how challenging models can help to compromise and overcome consistent depressions and

societal disorders during and after DDR. Multidisciplinary change agents can establish field models through specific clusters that enhance Syria's goodwill value. Buheji (2025)

10. Localisation of Model Solutions

Empowering local communities, civil society organisations, and local governance structures is crucial. They have firsthand knowledge and have been the first responders throughout the crisis.

11. Ensure Model Sensitivity

Any intervention must be designed to "do no harm," avoiding the exacerbation of existing tensions and being acutely aware of the political economy of the conflict.

12. Ensure Sustainable Approaches

Solutions must be financially, technically, and socially sustainable in the long term, avoiding creating dependency on external aid.

13. Ensure Inclusivity

Prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable—including the displaced, women, youth, elders, and people with disabilities—is essential for building a truly resilient society. Buheji (2019) ^[6]

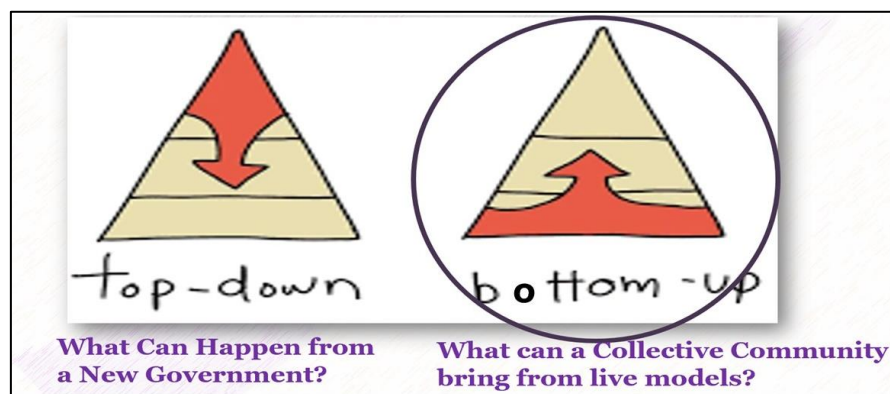


Fig 1: shows an Illustration of how the Collective Community can bring more Resilient Models post-DDR through Bottom-Up Approaches rather than being dependent on Top-Down Approaches.

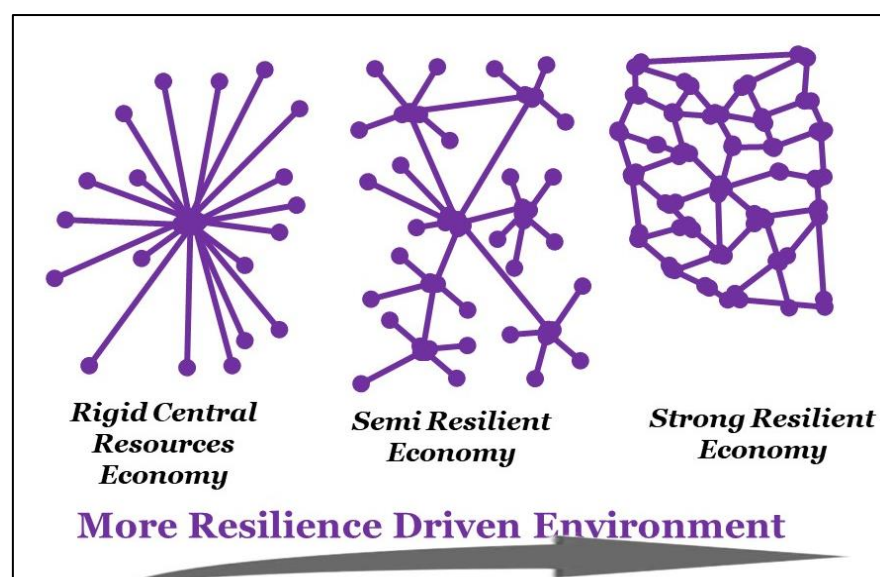


Fig 2: Role of Multidisciplinary Models in Enhancing Syria's Resilient Fabric and its capacity to Absorb Shocks

14. Managing Complexity and Complications During and After DDR

Complexity is often inherent and unavoidable, while complication is introduced and avoidable. Complexity is about the number of components and their relationships. It's a characteristic of the system itself. Complication is about the difficulty in understanding and managing those components and relationships. It's a characteristic of our interaction with the system. Buheji (2017) [8]

Complexity arises from the nature of a problem or system. It is about components of the problem and how they are associated. It might be one of the characteristics of the current system. It is defined by a large number of interconnected, interdependent, and often diverse elements. The behaviour of the whole system cannot be easily predicted by understanding each part in isolation (this is known as emergent behaviour). Buheji (2017) [8]

Managing complexity in Syria's DDR process requires accepting its inherent, multi-layered nature while eliminating unnecessary complications introduced by poor design. This is best achieved through an adaptive, systems-based approach that empowers local, polycentric decision-making networks like community security committees and civil society organisations. Initiatives must be simple, practical, and context-specific, avoiding rigid, one-size-fits-all models and

bureaucratic donor requirements. Complication is about the difficulty in understanding and managing the components of the problem and relationships. It might be one of the characteristics of the interaction with the system. Buheji (2017) [8]

The Syria Stability Labs serve as ideal vehicles for this, functioning as iterative spaces to test integrated solutions that address economic, social, and psychological needs simultaneously. By working with the system's complexity instead of against it, these bottom-up efforts can build pockets of stability and interdependence. This approach turns localised resilience into the foundational engine for a broader recovery, moving beyond the limitations of a traditional, top-down DDR model. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024) [13]

Syrians cannot eliminate complexity, but you can manage it through good design, abstraction, and modularisation. The goal is to hide complexity behind simple interfaces.

The Syrians should work to mitigate the complications that can be unnecessarily difficult through choices, poor design, or historical accident. It is the "accidental" difficulty on top of the "essential" difficulty (complexity). Complication makes a system harder to understand, use, and modify than it needs to be. Figure (3) shows the importance of acknowledging the complex problems during and after DDR.

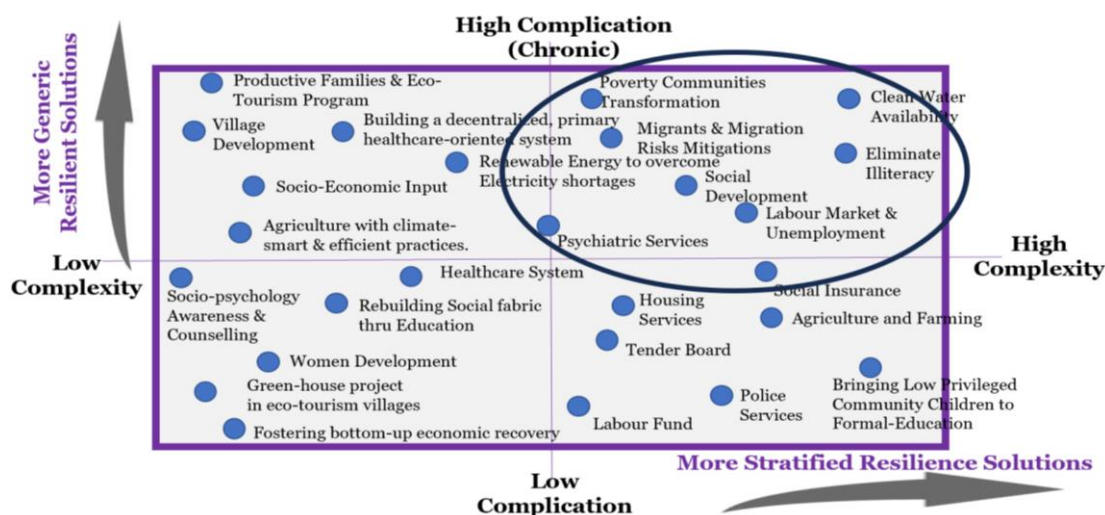


Fig 3: Acknowledging (a Matrix of Complexity vs. Complication) of Syria's Challenges during and after DDR

15. Series of Models that Design Syria's Resilient Economy

- Models that would help to build the ability to "absorb shocks, repercussions and sudden reversals of any socio-economic shocks,"
- Models that bring profound knowledge (what, how and when) to deal with societal-economic problems, absorb repercussions, and transform risks into opportunities.
- Models that help to build evolution through high-tolerance socioeconomy that optimize the use of the non-financial wealth within Syria.

One of these models can be about rehabilitating and decentralizing water infrastructure. This would require projects that repair and modernize key water pumping stations and treatment plants. This can be supported with an awareness campaign that promote solar-powered water systems for irrigation and drinking water, reducing dependence on unreliable grid electricity and expensive fuel. Rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling should be

promoted at the household and community levels, especially in arid regions. Thus, public awareness campaigns on water conservation and safe hygiene practices should be launched to reduce the risk of cholera and other water-borne diseases. The other model can focus on reviving Syria's agricultural backbone with climate-smart and efficient practices. Transition from water-intensive crops (like cotton) to drought-resistant varieties (e.g., certain types of wheat, barley, olives, and pistachios) can be one of the early projects. It should provide farmers with access to improved seeds, affordable fertilizers, and microcredit. Drip irrigation and other water-efficient technologies should be promoted to drastically reduce water usage. Thus, the development of cooperatives (called coops, for short) and local storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses and give farmers better market access. The government also should support backyard gardening and poultry farming for household nutrition and income, as part of the self-sufficiency program. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2025a) [11]

Since Syria has chronic electricity shortage, renewable energy project can be another model. For example, investment in decentralized solar micro-grids to power essential services like hospitals, schools, and water pumps, making them immune to grid failures can be a good option. Thus, government should encourage small-scale solar solutions for homes and businesses through affordable financing schemes.

The other model would focus on fostering bottom-up economic recovery and stability. Support Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) through grants, loans, and business development training, particularly for women and youth. This should be hand-on-hand with reviving traditional industries and crafts (i.e., textiles, glassblowing, food processing) with a focus on export and tourism markets. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024)^[13]

Digital financial services (mobile money) should facilitate safer and more efficient transactions, especially for remittances from the diaspora. Conditional Cash-for-Work programs can provide immediate income while communities rebuild vital infrastructure.

This socioeconomic development needs a decentralized, primary healthcare (PHC)-oriented system. PHC provides basic services, vaccinations, and maternal care. One can invest in training and retaining community health workers to serve remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Syria also has a great opportunity for building social cohesion through education and dialogue. These approaches can help in rebuilding strong social fabric that sustain. But first schools need to be rehabilitated and raise their capacity to provide accelerated learning programs for a generation of children who have missed years of education. Also, psychosocial support (PSS) and trauma-informed care need to be integrated into school curricula and community centers. The support for youth centers and vocational training programs also can provide alternatives to violence and despair, focusing on market-relevant skills. Community-led dialogues and cultural events can foster also reconciliation and a shared sense of identity.

During the creation of these models, Syria could have another opportunity for strengthening the capacity of local actors for accountable governance. Technical and administrative capacity of local councils to deliver basic services effectively and transparently should be of focus during the model creation stages. Core funding and institutional support to Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs) are key agents of change and service delivery. Independent media and community radio should work to promote access to information and civic engagement.

Interventions in Syria must be tailored to specific sub-national contexts as different areas in the country are controlled by different authorities, making a nationwide approach impossible. Comprehensive international sanctions, while aimed at the government, create significant unintended barriers for banking, imports of dual-use items (e.g., medical equipment, water treatment chemicals), and foreign investment.

The scale of destruction in Syrian cities, industrial zones, and transport networks are monumental. Millions still being either displaced or refugees. Thus, we need to rebuild the demographic fabric of the country that would speeden up the

recovery efforts. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024)^[13]

16. Learning from the Nicaraguan Revolution Experience

The Syrian transitional government can draw several lessons from Nicaragua's Sandinista Revolution (1979) and its subsequent governance. While the contexts differ, there are valuable parallels in post-revolution reconstruction, reconciliation, and governance. Downs and Kusnetzoff (1982). After overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas initially formed a broad coalition (including business elites, Marxists, and moderates) to stabilize the country. However, ideological purges later led to civil war (Contras). Harmer and Van Ommen (2021).

The lesson for Syria is that the transitioning government must include diverse factions (secularists, Islamists, Kurds, tribal leaders) to avoid fragmentation. Exclusionary policies could reignite conflict. Therefore, the new Syrian government must either negotiate reintegration or decisively neutralize them to prevent prolonged insurgency.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas nationalized industries and redistributed land, but this triggered US sanctions. Same in Syria radical economic policies, i.e. sudden nationalization of war profiteers' assets may trigger sanctions. So, the solution is gradual reforms with incentives for private sector cooperation could be more sustainable. Ryan (2000).

The Sandinistas made a mistake in aligning with the USSR/Cuba, inviting U.S. hostility. Later governments moderated their stance. The lesson for Syria's new government should be to avoid over-reliance on any single foreign patron (whether Iran, Russia, or the West) and seek diversified alliances to maintain sovereignty.

Post-1990, Nicaragua avoided large-scale revenge killings but saw persistent political polarisation. Thus, a truth and reconciliation process (like South Africa's) may be more effective in Syria than purges, which could fuel further conflict. The Sandinista Popular Army in Nicaragua initially remained politicized, contributing to instability, Harmer and Van Ommen (2021). Thus, the new Syrian government must demobilise or integrate militias into a neutral national army to prevent warlordism. Ryan (2000).

The Sandinistas gained early support through literacy campaigns and healthcare reforms. The new government must quickly restore services (electricity, water, schools) to gain public trust and undercut extremist narratives. Daniel Ortega's return to power saw democratic erosion, repression, and dynastic rule. In Syria, revolutionary leaders must commit to term limits, checks on power, and pluralism to avoid replicating dictatorship.

Syria's path will be uniquely challenging, but Nicaragua's experience highlights the dangers of exclusionary governance, economic mismanagement, and foreign over-dependence. A successful transition would require broad-based coalition governance (not just one faction). Balanced foreign relations, economic pragmatism, reconciliation mechanisms to reintegrate former regime elements without vengeance, and security sector reform to prevent militia rule. If Syria's revolutionaries learn from Nicaragua's mistakes, they might avoid prolonged instability and build a more durable post-war order. Harmer and Van Ommen (2021), Ryan (2000).

17. Building a Pre-DDR Coexistence Model in the Druze Area

A successful approach requires moving beyond a simple government-led "absorption" model—which implies coercion—and towards a framework of negotiated coexistence and mutual guarantee. This involves a combination of top-down acknowledgements and bottom-up community strengthening. One example, is to integrate the Druze community in Syria, although this is a critical and delicate issue. This is central to the country's future stability, Buheji and Hasan (2025a) ^[9]. The Druze represent a unique, cohesive, and strategically important minority whose allegiance has been pragmatic and survival-oriented.

Any strategy must begin by recognising the Druze community's historical and current reality. Their history is defined by a doctrine of Taqiyya (religious dissimulation) and political pragmatism to ensure survival as a close-knit, endogenous minority.

For them, the geographic concentration is part of their primary power base is the Jabal al-Druze (Jabal al-Arab) in Sweida province. This territorial concentration is a key source of their autonomy. They have largely avoided becoming a primary fighting force for any side, though they serve in the state military. Their local militias are focused overwhelmingly on local defense, not national objectives. They hold a deep-seated distrust of all major powers: the Sunni-majority opposition (fearing Islamism), the Alawite-led government, and foreign actors.

The state could negotiate a formal agreement granting the Sweida governorate significant. This can formalise the role of local Druze-led security committees and integrate them into the state's security apparatus for the province, giving them primary responsibility for local policing and checkpoints. They could also be guaranteed for the right to manage their own personal status laws (marriage, inheritance) and religious endowments (awqaf) without interference.

In the meantime, national educational curricula can be reformed to include and accurately represent Druze history and identity as a core part of Syria's social fabric. The government have to recognise that Sweida has been historically neglected. Targeted state investment in infrastructure, water management, and agriculture is a crucial "carrot" to incentivise integration and reduce the economic grievances that fuel separatism.

The government should ensure genuine, powerful representation for a Druze leader in key state institutions (e.g., Vice Presidency, senior security council roles), not just symbolic ministerial posts. This gives them a direct stake and a voice in the central government.

18. Sample for a Bottom-Up for Building Community Social Cohesion

This is arguably the most important layer, focused on building trust and interdependence at the grassroots level. Inter-community dialogue facilitates and funds people-to-people programs that rebuild ties between Druze communities and their neighbours, particularly Sunnis in Daraa and Suwayda. This includes reviving cross-governorate trade, creating agricultural cooperatives, and rebuilding supply chains. Economic interdependence is a powerful deterrent to conflict. Addressing grievances from the conflict period through local, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (sulha), not state-imposed ones.

Empowering local Druze NGOs, women's groups, and youth initiatives that work on social cohesion and development should be part of the bottom-up strategy. This strengthens the community's internal resilience and provides partners for dialogue.

After establishing all the previous coexistence manoeuvres, the government could quietly reach understandings where Druze conscripts are preferentially stationed near their home areas for defense, rather than being deployed to offensive operations in distant provinces, which is a major source of resentment.

The Druze do not exist in a vacuum. External actors play a role that can be either destructive or constructive. Jordan's border with Sweida and its historical relations with the Druze make it a key player. Amman can act as a quiet mediator and potential guarantor of any autonomy arrangements, ensuring the community's stability, which is in Jordan's direct security interest.

A key Druze fear is being pawns in a regional game. The international community should unequivocally support their autonomy and reject any plans (e.g., from Israel or others) that seek to exploit their situation for separatist goals. The message must support an autonomous Druze community within a unified Syrian state. Government or any other entity should not forcibly break the communal structures or religious norms of the Druze, as it would create waves of fierce resistance.

Also, collective punishment should be avoided. One cannot hold the entire community responsible for the actions of individuals or factions. Also, the Druze community should be discouraged from inviting foreign intervention that promises protection, as they, in fact, would deliver destabilisation.

"Absorbing" the Druze is the wrong framing. The goal should be to negotiate a pact of coexistence that is based on mutual interest. The Syrian state (or a future government) needs the Druze to provide stability in the south, legitimise the state as a multi-sectarian entity, and secure the border with Jordan.

The Druze need the state to formally guarantee their security and autonomy. Thus, they need to be provided with economic opportunity and development and be protected from being targeted by other factions. The manoeuvre is therefore a reciprocal deal. The Druze acknowledge the authority of the central state in Damascus, and in return, the state formally guarantees and devolves significant administrative, security, and cultural power to them. This is achieved through a combination of top-down political agreements and bottom-up efforts to rebuild the social and economic tissue that connects the Druze to their country. Buheji (2019) ^[6]

3. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative case study design to analyse the potential for community-led resilience strategies in Syria. The methodology is structured in three sequential phases. A desktop Analysis and literature synthesis is done through a comprehensive review of existing academic and grey literature on DDR, complexity theory, and Syrian civil society will establish the theoretical foundation. This phase will also analyse documented examples of local reconciliation and grassroots initiatives already occurring within Syria.

Then the findings are synthesised from the literature review, a conceptual framework for bottom-up, organic DDR will be

constructed. This framework is built upon the core principles of the "Hidden Opportunities" model, focusing on localisation, multidisciplinary, and adaptive management. Then, a proposed framework will be applied to generate plausible, context-specific models for economic interdependence projects. The validity and feasibility of these models will be tested not through field research (due to access constraints), but via a critical analysis against established criteria of "do no harm," inclusivity, and sustainability, drawing on lessons from comparable post-conflict contexts.

4. Application & Analysis

Syria Stability Lab (SSL) is meant to be a Syrian-focused, challenges transformation-based approach that mobilises local resources, knowledge, social assets, natural assets and human capital to build self-sufficiency and social cohesion from bottom-up, Buheji, and Mushimiyimana (2025a) ^[11].

SSL Lab explores collective solutions that argue against traditional, aid-dependent models. They are a series of resilience labs that are built from within the targeted Syrian stability or advancement challenges, rather than just being dependent on political resolutions.

Figure (4) shows how the mechanism of the SSL, which focuses on the big picture of Syria's main challenges, would enhance the stakeholders of the problem to apply a lens of hope that creates a proactive engagement, besides building the capacity to explore opportunities within the specified challenges of the stability or advancement problem of focus. The outcome of these Labs is more piloted models that bring more opportunities to Syria's rehabilitation, stability, development and then advancement. Moving more rapidly away from traditional DDR approaches. Peña and Del Pilar (2018) ^[20].

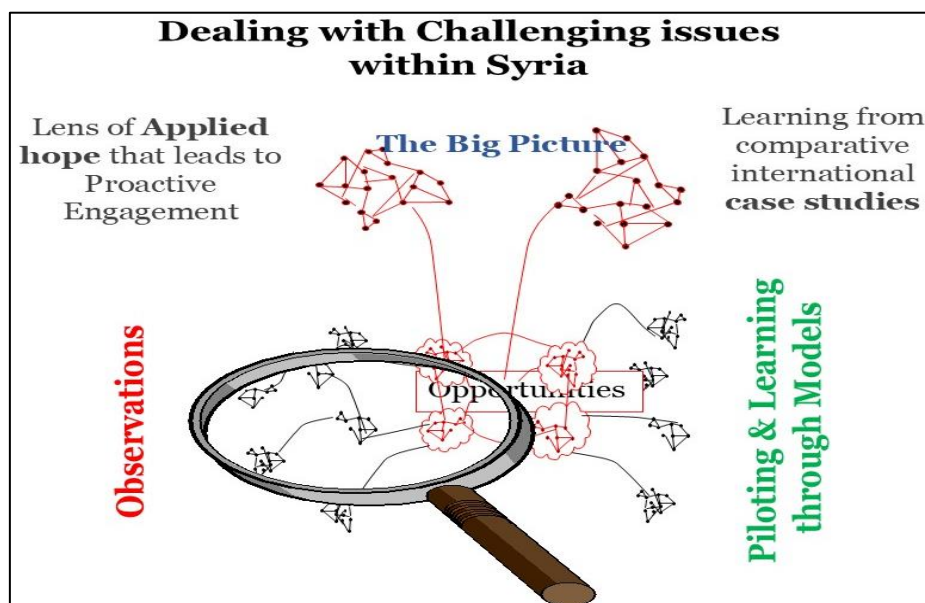


Fig 4: Mechanism of Syria Stability Lab (SSL) in Creating Models that lead to Advancement

Here are examples of Syria Stability Lab (SSL) projects that would enhance the post-DDR stage in Syria, if adopted properly.

4.1. Labs that focus on Syria's Economic Resilience and Self-Sufficiency

The focus of these self-sufficiency-driven labs can be summarised in three points:

- **Shift from Aid to Investment:** Move focus from humanitarian aid to creating investment opportunities that stimulate local production and reduce dependency. This involves supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-entrepreneurship.
- **Agricultural Revival:** Prioritise regaining self-sufficiency in food production through modern, sustainable farming techniques and supporting local farmers, as a cornerstone of national security and stability.
- **Learn from Similar Community Recovery Stories (i.e. Vietnam's Đổi Mới):** Implement pragmatic economic reforms that encourage foreign investment and private sector growth while gradually transitioning from a controlled economy, mirroring Vietnam's successful

post-war model.

4.2. Re-Building Syria's Social Cohesion "i.e. Lab for Re-Engineering Syria's Coexistence"

The focus of these coexistence-driven labs can be summarised in three points:

- **Create "Safe Spaces" for Interaction:** Facilitate community-level projects that necessitate cooperation between different social, ethnic, and religious groups (e.g., shared economic ventures, environmental cleanup, cultural events).
- **Focus on Shared Goals and Values:** Redirect focus from divisive political identities to shared universal values and common goals, such as providing for families, rebuilding neighbourhoods, and creating a better future for children.
- **Build Collective "Goodwill Value":** Actively cultivate trust and social capital—termed "goodwill value"—as a critical currency for stability. This involves honouring local customs, promoting transparency, and demonstrating a genuine long-term commitment to community well-being. Buheji (2025) ^[12]

4.3. Develop Syrians Psychological Resilience “Applied Hope”

The focus of these psychological resilience-driven labs can be summarised in mainly three main points:

- **Foster's Psychology of Possibilities’:** Combat despair and trauma by promoting narratives of hope and agency. This involves showcasing local success stories and creating a vision of a viable future to motivate the population, especially youth.
- **Community-Based Psychosocial Support:** Integrate mental health and psychosocial support into community activities and economic projects, normalising healing as part of the rebuilding process.
- **Engage the Diaspora:** Leverage the skills, capital, and networks of the Syrian diaspora as a vital source of hope, investment, and knowledge transfer for rebuilding.

4.4 Run a Parallel Governance and Institutional Resilience

The focus of these governance building labs can be summarised in three points:

- **Decentralised, Local Governance:** Empower local community councils and civil society organizations to lead recovery efforts, making them more responsive to local needs and building trust from the bottom up.
- **Learn from best Reconciliation Cases (i.e. Rwanda's Gacaca Courts):** Adapt aspects of restorative justice and community-based reconciliation processes to address grievances and foster healing, rather than relying

solely on retributive justice models which can be divisive.

- **Build Legitimacy through Service Delivery:** Establish the legitimacy of local institutions by demonstrating their effectiveness in delivering essential services (e.g., electricity, water, waste management) fairly and efficiently.

5. Framework Proposed

The following framework and road map aim to transform Syria from DDR towards enhancing Syria’s resilience. It is a multidisciplinary, multiethnicity and bottom-up approach to rapidly transform Syria from DDR to a viable path forward in the absence of a national political settlement. It focuses on building peace from the ground up, community by community.

As shown in Figure (5) the framework is divided into three phases. Phase 1 focuses on creating stabilization and safe spaces. It focuses on immediate needs & creating environments for social interaction. Phase 2 focuses on creating more sustainable livelihoods for the Syrians. In this second phase, it is expected that income-generating projects be launched so that we can rebuild core infrastructure.

The final third phase focuses on systems change, where a scale of successful local models is reflected into broader regional and national policies for long-term development.

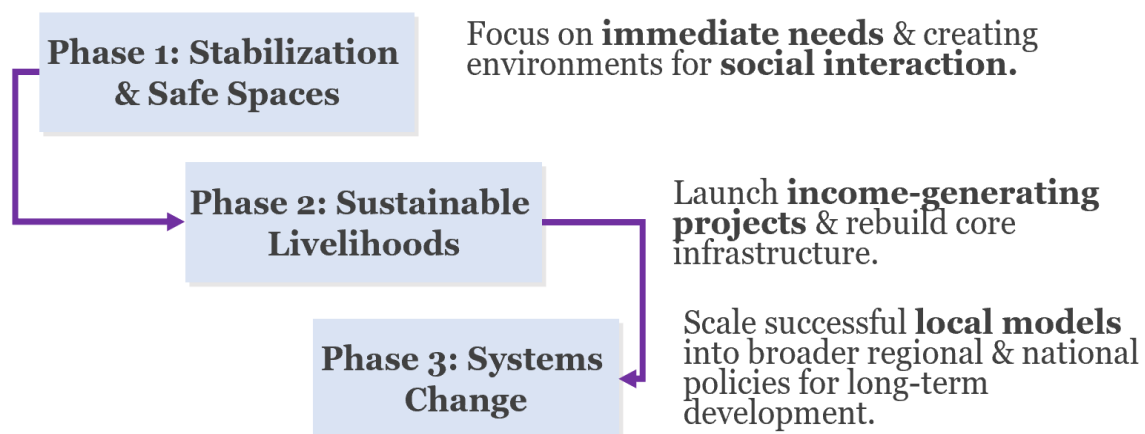


Fig 5: Shows the Proposed Framework for transforming Syria from Post-DDR Stage to more Resilience and development-based stage

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Enhancing Syria's resilience is about supporting Syrians to build a new, more adaptive, decentralised, and inclusive system post DDR that can withstand future shocks—be it social, economic, or political.

The most effective pathway is to empower local actors and prioritise economic inclusion at the smallest levels. This bottom-up approach, while challenging, offers the most realistic and sustainable hope for strengthening community resilience across Syria's fractured landscape.

The findings challenge the prevailing paradigm that DDR in Syria must be postponed until a comprehensive political solution is achieved. Instead, this paper demonstrates that a focus on building resilience—defined as the capacity to absorb shocks and create opportunities for advancement—provides a viable, parallel pathway. The proposed framework’s effectiveness stems from its alignment with the

principles of complex adaptive systems; it does not attempt to impose order from the top down but seeks to nurture emergent stability from the bottom up through hyper-local, multidisciplinary labs.

The discussion must, however, acknowledge significant limitations. The success of the Syria Stability Lab (SSL) model is contingent on securing flexible funding and navigating the highly fragmented and securitised governance landscape without exacerbating tensions. Furthermore, while initiatives like economic interdependence and restorative justice show great promise for social cohesion, they cannot fully substitute for a legitimate national framework addressing accountability for mass atrocities. The SSL model is therefore not a panacea but a crucial confidence-building measure designed to create the social and economic facts on the ground that make a broader political settlement more likely and more sustainable.

This paper concludes that the future of Syria hinges on its ability to build resilience from the community level upward. By redefining DDR not as a singular event but as an organic process of creating security, livelihoods, and social trust, the proposed framework offers a pragmatic way forward amidst political deadlock. The Syria Stability Lab (SSL) concept operationalises this vision, providing a mechanism to pilot integrated solutions that address the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of reintegration simultaneously. Ultimately, the journey from conflict to DDR and then resilience is iterative and nonlinear. This research argues that the international community and Syrian stakeholders should shift investment from planning for a distant, idealised national DDR program to empowering the latent capacity for recovery that exists within Syrian communities today. By doing so, they can help forge a future where stability is not bestowed by an agreement but built, lab by lab, through the collective agency of the Syrian people.

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