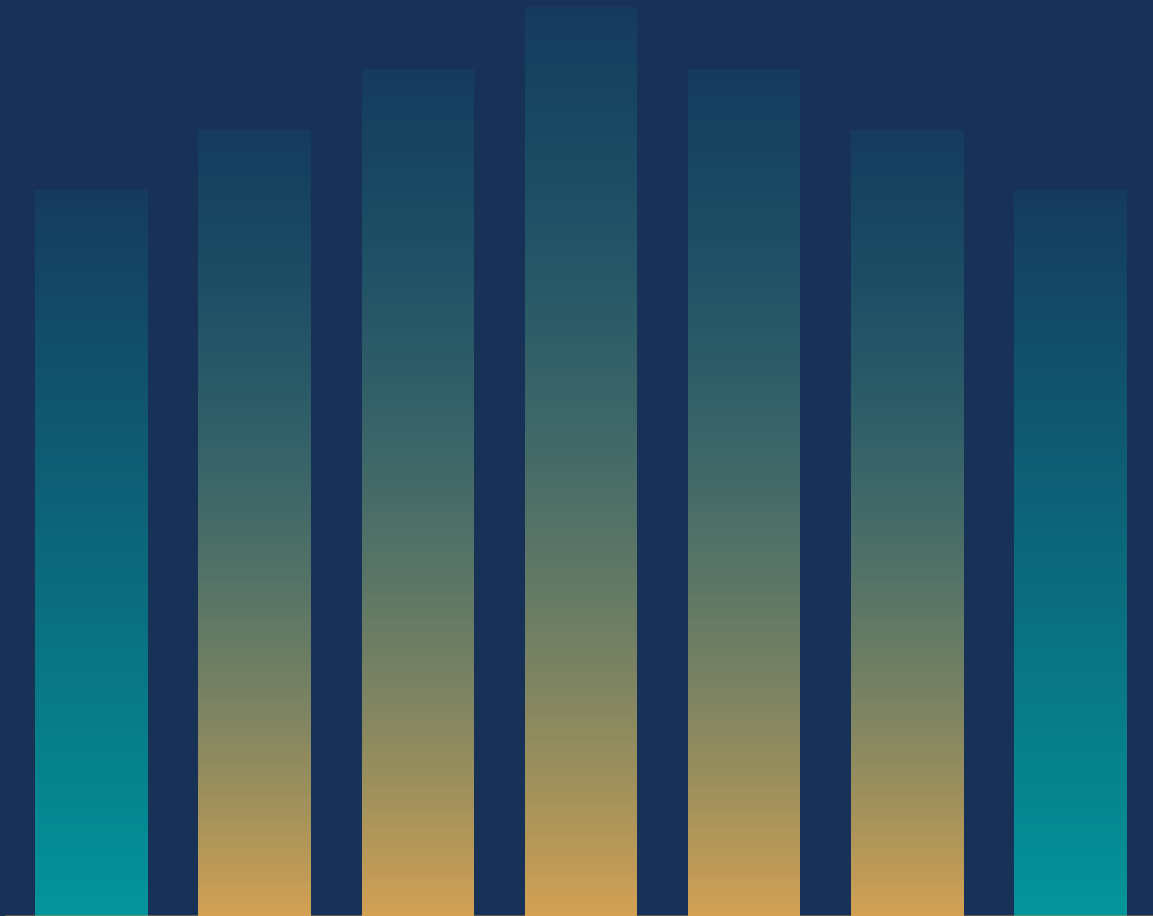




Economic Parameters for the Transitional Period in Syria



اليوم التالي
لدعم الانتقال الديمقراطي في سوريا



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Supporting Democratic Transition In Syria

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Abstract

This paper presents a set of key economic parameters for the transitional period in Syria, based on a participatory research methodology within the context of a TDA-implemented project titled 'Toward Equitable and Sustainable Economic Reconstruction in Syria in the Transitional Period'. The research is based on participatory workshops held in 2025 in five cities, involving actors in public affairs from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Based on extensive discussions and a critical review of the literature, the paper identifies seven interconnected parameters for economic transition in Syria: governance, justice, participation, transparency, development, sustainability, and decentralization. The paper argues that economic reconstruction is not separable from renegotiating power, wealth distribution and the system of incentives. The research paper links economic discussions with peace-building discussions, including a critique of liberal peace models, and offers evidence of the dangers of conflict economics and exclusion in the economic development process. The paper concludes with some policy recommendations.

Introduction

The conflict in Syria, which lasted for more than 14 years, has led to the deformation of public institutions and undermined the economy and the social fabric. As the country embarks on a fragile transition after the fall of the Assad regime, some challenges emerge in overcoming the roots of conflict and rebuilding an economy which has been destroyed by the armed conflict. In this context, this paper analyses the outcomes of participatory workshops held in several Syrian cities (Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Latakia, and Damascus), where various groups of Syrians expressed their views on the parameters of economic transformation in the transitional period. The study used critical political economy as an analytical framework, adopting a participatory approach to identify seven major economic parameters: governance, justice, participation, transparency, development, sustainability, and decentralization. The analysis highlights the difficulties facing each parameter and recognizes the diverse priorities of different areas, shaped by their experiences during the conflict. In addition, the paper identifies major internal and external actors that affect those parameters. The paper then explores the pathways for economic transformation proposed during the workshops.

After analyzing the findings, the paper discusses them in light of the academic literature on post-conflict eras, adopting a critical approach to prevalent economic models, focusing on addressing structural grievances to establish a durable peace. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for interventions and policies in the short-, medium-, and long-term. These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between participatory views and academic knowledge, proposing practical steps for policymakers and stakeholders committed to a democratic, transparent, and equitable economic transformation in Syria.

Methodology and Analytical Framework

The primary data for this paper are drawn from a series of five participatory workshops organized by The Day After in 2025, which included Syrians from various areas. Each workshop involved local stakeholders, including economic experts, civil society activists, local officials, businessmen, youth and others, to exchange ideas and discuss the foundations of Syria's future economy. The sessions were structured around major questions related to economic governance, social justice, development models and reconstruction priorities. The participants engaged in group activities such as SWOT analysis, stakeholder mapping, and priority sequencing, along with open discussions. Quality inputs from these workshops were coded into thematic groups (the seven parameters and their relevant sub-themes) to enable comparative analysis. Quotes were labeled with the workshop area, e.g., ECO-Ale for the Aleppo workshop, to highlight local perspectives.

In analyzing the outcomes of the workshops, we used a critical political economy framework, that involves studying the interrelation between historical powers, institutions, and structures that shape economic outputs, as well as analyzing the affected social categories. This framework focuses on issues of inequality related to class, regional, political, and cultural backgrounds, as well as the legacy of authoritarianism and the impact of neoliberal policies. This framework critically examines prevailing technical solutions, emphasizes the political character of the economic reconstruction process to expose the deeper context behind the participants' calls for transparency, justice, and inclusion, and contributes to evaluating the proposed pathways in a critical manner, taking into account power dynamics in Syria.

This study focuses on the foundations of the Syrian economy during the transitional period. It does not cover all sectors in detail. Consequently, it highlights parameters and structural issues more than overall indicators or specific policies. One limitation of the study, despite its diverse participants, is that it does not engage many population groups across geographical, social, or economic dimensions.

Open discussions in workshops may also affect participants in the context of instability and severe polarization, which could make some reluctant to share their ideas freely, notwithstanding the team's efforts to build a safe space for dialogue.

Furthermore, the situation in Syria is still evolving, and the analysis reflects conditions through the end of 2025 and may require review as conditions evolve.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the participatory data offer important insights into Syrians' aspirations and fears, providing a solid foundation for the policy recommendations outlined in the conclusion.

Infographic

Methodology and Analytical Framework

Determinants of Economic Transition in Syria

01 Data Sources



5 participatory workshops (2025) organized by "The Day After" association.



A diverse spectrum (economic experts, civil society activists, local officials, businessmen, youth).



SWOT analysis, stakeholder mapping, open discussions.

02 Processing and Coding



Coding qualitative inputs according to the "Seven Parameters" categories:

- 01- Governance
- 02- Justice
- 03- Participation
- 04- Transparency
- 05- Development
- 06- Sustainability
- 07- Decentralization

ECO-Ale

Local Perspective: Labeling quotes geographically (e.g., ECO-Ale) to highlight local variation.

03 Critical Political Economy Framework (Core of Analysis)



Studying the interrelation between powers, institutions, and historical structures.



Examining issues of inequality (class, regional, political) and the legacy of authoritarianism and neoliberal policies.



Critiquing prevailing technical solutions and emphasizing the political character of the reconstruction process.

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

**Governance: Toward
Accountable
Effective Institutions**

- Challenges
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Governance: Toward Accountable Effective Institutions

Participants in all areas maintained that good governance was the cornerstone for rebuilding Syria's economy. Most participants stressed the pressing need to restructure how economic decisions are made and resources are managed to transition from decades of authoritarian rule and the absence of transparency to a new era of accountability, the rule of law, and inclusion. A broad agreement emerged among participants that, without radical improvements in governance, including combating corruption and ensuring the state works for the public good, other economic reforms would stumble. However, the emphasis varied from one area to another. For example, in Aleppo and Homs, two areas that suffered massive destruction and mismanagement, participants prioritized building democratic, transparent and responsive institutions.



We must develop a new social contract based on participation and transparency and promote the role of civil society as an intermediary between the state and society. (ECO-Ale)

This participant from the Aleppo workshop affirms the need to redefine the relation between the state and society on the basis of participation and openness. Participants in Aleppo stressed that independent monitoring institutions must be enabled and laws must be reformed to break with the authoritarian past. As one participant put it:



The new Syria needs clear economic laws that protect the rights of investors and ensure fair competition... we need modern legislation that aligns with international practices. (ECO-Ale)

This reflects a demand to build an economic system based on the rule of law so that no arbitrary state interventions or crony monopolies can thrive. In Latakia and Damascus, two areas that remained under the former regime's control for longer, discussions also acknowledge shortcomings in governance, though sometimes in different terms. Participants in Latakia highlighted local governance and the mitigation of centralization as key to good governance. They argued that decision-making processes closer to the people would, by default, improve accountability.



When the authority is close to the people, it is easier for citizens to monitor the performance of their officials. (ECO- Lat)

At the same time, the Damascus workshop explicitly acknowledged the deeply rooted culture of corruption. One academician in that session commented,



Corruption was not a casual phenomenon, but an institutional culture cultivated for decades. (ECO-Dam).

This assessment indicates that governance issues in Syria are deeply structural and have been deliberately maintained under the former regime.

Challenges

The discussions featured a debate over who has the right to manage the economy: existing technocrats, new elites close to HTS, or some hybrid arrangement between the centre and localities? Participants complained about the lack of clarity in the economic program itself and about conflicting economic decisions. Although participants agreed on the term 'good governance', discussions revealed some disagreement about how it could be achieved. For instance, one complexity lies in balancing rapid change and stability. In this context, many participants in Aleppo and Idlib called for a decisive break with former governance practices, dismantling nepotism networks and introducing democratic controls. Some participants (especially in Damascus) warned against the collapse or paralysis of the state if reforms were too swift. They stressed the importance of maintaining the basic state functions during the transitional period. For example, they called for keeping the technocrats who know how ministries were managed, even if they had served under the old regime, provided they have a clean record. On the other hand, participants, especially in Idlib and Aleppo, were less willing to accept any person who is suspected of having any links to the Assad era, reflecting a profound trust crisis. These diverging positions may lead to governance paradoxes during the transition: there is a need to build trust by excluding suspected individuals, while also retaining experienced personnel and avoiding creating a void in the management of state affairs.

Another debate tackled how governance reforms may be sequenced in relation to the other needs. In war-torn societies like Homs, some argued that security and basic services must come first, as people do not care about institutional reforms if they are hungry or insecure. They pointed out that without stability, governance initiatives may fail.



Political and security instability and lack of trust between society and the state are major challenges. (ECO-Ale)

Others argued that improving governance (e.g. addressing corruption in aid distribution) was a prerequisite for effectively addressing these basic needs. The debate did not resolve the question of prioritizing security or governance, underscoring the link between peace and governance. Priorities also varied geographically at times. In Idlib, for instance, participants in the workshop spoke less about comprehensive institutional reform (perhaps due to their experience with governance by non-governmental hybrid entities) and more about direct governance issues, such as coordination between humanitarian actors and local councils.



The focus in Idlib was on “absence of participation in decision-making at the governorate level” (ECO-Idl),

which they viewed as an impediment to effective governance and service provision. This indicates problems that are related to centralization and exclusion in the north west under entities formerly associated with HTS.

Key Actors

The participants identified several actors vital to consolidating good governance. At this stage, the transitional government has the primary responsibility to set the rules by enacting laws on transparency, empowering anti-corruption committees, and enshrining accountability. Civil society was repeatedly mentioned as both a partner and a monitor. One participant said,



Civil society includes human rights and development organizations ... to guide people's needs and undertake monitoring and evaluation (ECO-Ale).

In other words, civil society organizations (including human rights, development, professional, and other organizations) must communicate the community's needs to public policy-makers and monitor the government's work. There was some wide support for giving civil society a formal advisory role in economic decision-making. Nonetheless, some participants in Latakia and Damascus expressed cautiousness about an extremely polarized civil society, emphasizing cooperation over confrontation. They were keen on NGOs helping rebuild trust, not merely criticizing. Private sector actors (e.g. businesspeople, chambers of commerce) were also deemed essential, whether as potential backers of reform (since corruption harms credible companies) or, conversely, as potential stumbling blocks for those who profited from old/new corruption networks. It is noteworthy that one representative of chambers of commerce called for a dialogue between the public and private sectors within the framework of local governance, suggesting that every municipality establish an economic council that includes representatives of the business sector and the community to ensure decisions align with local needs (ECO-Ale). The participants, however, warned that economic elites associated with the old regime and war profiteers would most likely resist governance reforms that threaten their privileges. Unless they are curbed, these actors may work to undermine anti-corruption efforts or control the new institutions.

Pathways

To enact governance reforms, participants across the areas proposed tangible policies and procedures, such as establishing an independent anti-corruption commission. In Damascus, for instance, it was proposed to “establish an independent national commission to combat corruption with executive and investigative powers that reports to an elected parliament.” (ECO-Dam). Participants stressed that an appropriate legislative framework and independence from executive authority were crucial to prevent political intervention. In addition, participants urged judicial reform to ensure courts can uphold the law with integrity.

This included training the judges and, if needed, seeking international capacity-building support. Some areas (Homs and Aleppo) emphasized digital governance as one pathway to curb petty corruption and improve transparency. Some offered their vision of electronic government models for public finance management. For example, one participant from Homs discussed “digital transformation and electronic governance... digitizing public finance management through a system whereby all financial transactions are registered electronically with enabled automatic auditing.” (ECO-Hom).

The workshops stressed the binding legal frameworks for transparency. They recommended enacting a freedom of information law and adopting open budget laws. In this context, one proposal was made on “transparency of the general budget: publishing details of revenues and expenditures periodically so citizens know how state funds are managed.” (ECO-Ale). Finally, many participants focused on building a culture of good governance through engaging the public and exercising patience. Participants’ perception of governance is to effect a radical transformation from a dishonest and authoritarian system to one that is transparent, law-regulated, and participatory. They recognize, however, the enormous challenges and the need for well-developed (legal, technological and cultural) strategies to achieve that.

2

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

Justice: Rule of Law and Social Justice in the Transitional Period

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Justice: Rule of Law and Social Justice in the Transitional Period

Participants discussed justice in the economic sphere as a multifaceted concept, encompassing both the rule of law (fair enforcement of rules, protection of property rights, and an impartial judiciary) and social justice (equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, and redressing conflict-related grievances). The majority of participants agreed that a just economic system is essential to preventing future conflict and achieving societal recovery. However, the concept of justice and its practical application varied across regions. In Aleppo and Idlib, there was a focus on transitional justice and accountability for perpetrators, with many participants in Aleppo in particular noting that without accountability for war crimes and rampant corruption, genuine recovery is impossible. One participant from Aleppo insisted on the necessity of



establishing truth and reconciliation mechanisms, while ensuring perpetrators of serious crimes have no impunity (ECO-Ale).

Transitional justice was thus explicitly linked to the future of the economy, as people need to see those who unjustly profited from the war or abused power held accountable to restore trust in institutions. This argument was echoed by others who said that achieving a balance between justice and reconciliation was delicate but non-negotiable: truth must be revealed and legal consequences imposed for serious violations; otherwise, impunity will undermine the new Syria.

In addition to accountability for wartime violations, legal reform to ensure a fair economy was emphasized, with several participants from Aleppo and Homs arguing that Syria's legal framework must be reformed to ensure economic justice.

Many current laws (some dating back to the French Mandate, the Ottoman era, or the Baathist period) are outdated and easily manipulated by the powerful.



Old Ottoman and Baathist laws will not work for a twenty-first-century economy (ECO-Ale).

For example, commercial and labor laws need to be modernized to protect rights and encourage fair competition. Several participants also emphasized the importance of establishing a judicial system in which contracts are enforced, property rights are respected (especially for displaced persons reclaiming their homes), investors feel confident disputes can be resolved impartially, and monopolies and cronyism—which had been a source of injustice—are prevented.

Social justice was the other pillar of the justice discussion, meaning fairness in the distribution of wealth, access to resources and opportunities, and the delivery of services. Participants across various workshops expressed concern about the flagrant inequalities exacerbated by the war, some linked to geography (with certain governorates feeling marginalized) and others to class (war profiteers versus the impoverished masses). Participants from Idlib highlighted how their governorate remained in a deteriorating economic position before and during the conflict, leading to an emphasis on giving special attention to marginalized areas. Proposals emerged for ensuring fairness in income distribution and public services through progressive taxation and pro-poor spending. The Homs group, for instance, called for a progressive tax system that imposes higher rates on high-income earners and revenue-generating activities (such as real estate speculation) while easing the burden on the poor. This was viewed as a correction to the pattern of the old regime, in which those in power accumulated wealth without taxation while ordinary people paid indirect taxes and suffered from inflation. Justice for marginalized groups was also raised, with many speaking about the plight of martyrs' families, detainees' families, persons with disabilities, widows, orphans, and the displaced. There was consensus that a just economy must provide for the needs of those who suffered most. As part of economic justice, the question of property restoration or compensation for destroyed and confiscated property was raised, with some participants stressing the importance of establishing mechanisms to resolve property disputes fairly, including returning lands seized by militias or the regime to their rightful owners, or compensating them if recovery was impossible, thereby directly linking economic justice to transitional justice.

Challenges and Contradictions

Achieving justice entails confronting some difficult dilemmas, as the participants themselves acknowledged, in which the central tension lies in balancing justice with reconciliation. Voices from Aleppo and Idlib, representing communities that were victimized by the former regime, tended toward a more retributive stance, such as prosecuting war criminals, recovering looted public funds, and lustration of corrupt officials, even if doing so required confronting powerful figures or groups. On the other hand, participants from Latakia and some from Homs expressed concern that insisting on maximum punitive justice might impede reconciliation and reconstruction. One participant emphasized the importance of



working toward transitional justice for all parties (ECO-Lat).

The phrase “for all parties” implies an inclusive approach, meaning that justice must not be one-sided in favor of the victors. Some participants feared that if justice is seen only as punishing the other side, it could entrench divisions. They called for mechanisms that acknowledge suffering across all communities, including those who were conscripted or took the regime's side under coercion. The contradiction lies in balancing legitimate demands for accountability with the need to avoid perpetuating grievances. Participants frequently mentioned reconciliation alongside justice.

Another complexity arises from the focus on formal/legal justice (the judiciary and laws), which must be integrated with informal or social conceptions of justice. Some participants, particularly from communities that felt marginalized (for example, tribal areas or the northeast), pointed out that justice also means participation in the new state. Discussions in Homs, for instance, focused on how marginalization was the catalyst for the revolution. This suggests that in the coming phase, justice requires inclusive governance and equal rights, not merely legal prosecutions. Accordingly, if the new system repeats patterns of exclusion, it will be seen as unjust and may spark future unrest. This broader conception of justice, which encompasses political inclusion, complicates the transitional justice agenda, as it means that even while some perpetrators are punished, entire communities must not be stigmatized with collective guilt.

Regional differences reveal potential contradiction in priorities. For example, while participants in Damascus emphasized the rule of law for economic recovery (such as protecting investors and property rights), some participants from Idlib appeared more urgently concerned with relief justice, such as the fair distribution of aid. If policymakers at the national level focus exclusively on long-term legal reforms, those in most urgent need may feel that justice is a theoretical or deferred matter. Conversely, short-term measures such as redistribution or aid allocation for war-affected groups, if not implemented carefully, may be seen as unfair by others. For example, giving returnees and IDPs priority in employment and housing is just from one perspective, but local residents who never left may view it as unfair favoritism unless it is clearly communicated and appropriately balanced.

Key Actors

Judicial institutions naturally come at the forefront; courts, whether existing ones or any transitional justice special courts, are essential actors. Participants emphasized the necessity of an independent judiciary; in Latakia, for example, the proposal of



judicial independence and impartiality vis-à-vis all parties (ECO-Lat)

was raised as a pillar of justice. Nevertheless, the current judicial personnel includes many judges from the former regime's era; therefore, a vetting or rehabilitation process for judges and prosecutors was proposed.

Legal professionals and academics (lawyers, judges, and law professors) were identified as important actors for drafting new laws and guiding legal reforms. Some workshops even proposed forming a special legal reform committee comprising local and international experts to rewrite commercial, property, and labor laws in line with justice and best practices. Special transitional justice actors were also mentioned, such as establishing a truth commission to document crimes, and local reconciliation committees to mediate certain disputes (for example, property disputes or minor offenses). In these mechanisms, civil society and community leaders help balance justice and reconciliation.

Participants from Homs suggested establishing local truth-telling forums with international support, indicating that a hybrid model of justice (combining formal and informal approaches) may be needed.


The security sector is another key actor; security forces and police are expected to enforce the rule of law fairly. Several participants argued that without security sector reform, the judiciary would be largely meaningless. Interestingly, armed opposition factions and former militias were also mentioned as stakeholders in justice, as they must be disarmed and either integrated or prosecuted if they committed crimes. For example, participants from Idlib and Aleppo insisted that warlords who profited through smuggling or looting must be held accountable just as the former regime's clique; justice must work in both directions.

Participants also acknowledged the role of international actors, with many feeling that the United Nations or international courts may need to be involved, particularly in prosecuting major war crimes or recovering assets stolen abroad. External donors also influence the course of justice through the conditions they attach to aid (for example, requiring anti-corruption measures). Some participants in Damascus and Latakia expressed concern about “donor-conditioned policies,” while others welcomed international oversight to ensure that transitional authorities do not backtrack on reforms.

Pathways

The workshops put forward several actionable ideas for promoting justice, including establishing hybrid courts (with Syrian and international judges) to prosecute major crimes such as large-scale corruption and violations, possibly under a special mandate to shield these trials from political pressure. Another proposal involved establishing a property claims commission to handle the expected surge of disputes upon the return of displaced persons; this commission could expedite rulings on claims and provide arbitration, and should include representatives from affected communities to ensure legitimacy.

Regarding social justice and redress, one of the most prominent recommendations was the immediate adoption of pro-poor policies, with participants calling for a significant increase in public budgets for health, education, and social welfare. One participant stated:



Priority for education, health, and basic services: allocating greater resources to support free education and healthcare (ECO-Ale).

This would represent a break from the years of war (and even pre-war) during which military spending overran social spending. Additionally, participants proposed cash transfer programs or subsidies to support widows, orphans, and war-injured individuals, as a demonstration of tangible justice toward these groups. To entrench fairness, participants also urged the inclusion of constitutional guarantees. In Damascus, some insisted that the new constitution explicitly commit to parameters such as equal opportunity, balanced regional development, and the right to access information. Enshrining economic rights in the constitution is meant to prevent any future government from deviating from them.

The idea of transitional reparations programs was raised, such as establishing a one-time compensation fund for families of detainees or those who lost their property, financed from recovered stolen assets or international aid, as a form of economic justice.

Finally, to ensure the rule of law, emphasis was placed on capacity-building in the justice sector, including training new judges, appointing legal professionals who had been sidelined under the old regime, and establishing a judicial police force to enforce court orders.

In some sessions (Homs/Latakia), the concept of mobile courts was proposed to reach remote communities, so that justice is not limited to residents of major cities.

Participants' conception of justice is broad and deeply connected to both healing the wounds of war and creating a more equitable economic system. They recognize the difficult concessions involved, but strongly demand that the transitional period not sacrifice justice for short-sighted self-interested considerations.

The strategies reflect a combination of retributive and restorative measures, with a clear message: stable peace can be built by achieving justice in both the courts and in daily life.

3

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

Participation: Empowering Communities in Economic Decision -Making

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Participation: Empowering Communities in Economic Decision-Making

The participation parameter emerged as a cornerstone of the aspired new economic model, as a direct response to decades of rigid top-down governance that marginalized citizens (particularly those outside elite circles). In every workshop, participants emphasized the necessity of Syrians having a voice in shaping the economy, from the national level down to the village level. This is coupled with the term “inclusion,” affirming the need to involve all components of society across regions, generations, ethnicities, sects, genders, and social classes in decision-making. Participation is deemed essential for achieving legitimacy and preventing future conflicts. For example, participants in Homs supported community involvement in reconstruction plans and called for engaging local stakeholders at every step of planning and monitoring. One recommendation noted the importance of



involving the local community, especially vulnerable groups, women, and youth, in planning and evaluation (ECO-Hom).

Most participants agreed on the importance of involving those who are most often marginalized (the poor, women, and youth) across all regions, reflecting an awareness that these groups have unique needs and insights that must be taken into account when formulating policies (such as employment programs or service delivery), and that their marginalization is not merely unjust but also a waste of valuable human and social capital.

The workshops also highlighted the importance of institutionalizing participation. In Idlib and Aleppo, participants proposed establishing formal channels for the public to express views on economic policies. Specifically, a group in Idlib proposed holding



national forums for dialogue and participation (ECO-Idl), where citizens and civil society could regularly consult with authorities on economic plans. Similarly, participants in Damascus spoke of **“embedding participation in law: incorporating the parameters of the economic social contract into the new constitution” (ECO-Dam).**

This reflects an interest in guaranteeing participation rights, such as the right to public consultation on budgets or development plans. At the local level, decentralization was frequently linked to participation, with many arguing that empowering local councils and elected bodies automatically increases citizen participation, as people can more easily engage with local officials than with distant central authorities. In Latakia, participants pointed to a challenge whereby the centre had previously excluded local experts and community leaders.



Centralized decision-making and the exclusion of local competencies from participation in decision-making (ECO-Lat).

Another aspect is the participation of the private sector and civil society in policy formulation. For example, workshops in Aleppo and Homs included business representatives and NGO activists, all of whom expressed support for participatory economic governance. Business people wish to have a say in economic decisions and reconstruction strategies (such as consultation on new trade policies or reconstruction priorities), while civil society seeks to represent community needs and ensure transparency.



One output from the Aleppo workshop stated: “Accountability and participation: involving civil society, trade unions, and local councils in setting spending priorities and monitoring implementation” (ECO-Ale).

Challenges and Contradictions

Although everyone endorsed participation in principle, discussions revealed some practical concerns and potential contradictions.

One key issue is capacity and representation: understanding who participates and whether they represent the interests of broader groups or only themselves. Participants acknowledged that merely opening the door to “participation” does not automatically yield inclusive outcomes; for example, women and youth may remain marginalized if structural barriers are not addressed. A member of a women's group from Homs noted that in many communities, older men dominate decision-making processes, and that simply inviting women and youth to meetings is not sufficient; proactive measures are needed to ensure their voices are heard. Similarly, in Idlib, civil society is vibrant but under pressure from local authorities, and its participation may therefore be limited unless its freedom is guaranteed.

There is also a potential tension between efficiency and broad participation, as some experts cautioned that if every decision must pass through extensive public consultations, this could slow the implementation of urgent reconstruction tasks. In a Damascus workshop, one technocrat argued that while participation is vital, the government must also have the capacity to make swift executive decisions in moments of crisis (such as stabilizing the currency or importing wheat) without prolonged debate. The group discussed how to strike a balance between participatory democracy and decisive governance. One proposed compromise was to distinguish between long-term strategic decisions (which should be participatory) and urgent operational decisions (which the executive can make transparently but not necessarily through full consultation).

Another complexity arises when considering who participates and in what. For example, at the local level, power dynamics may shift among local councils, traditional leaders, and new activists. In some rural areas, traditional notables may dominate participatory forums, thereby marginalizing youth or vulnerable groups. Participants from various regions pointed to the risk of elite domination even in participatory processes; local elites (whether tribal leaders, militia commanders, or wealthy families) could end up steering “participatory” bodies to serve their own interests. This awareness reflects an insightful understanding that inclusion must be carefully managed in order to genuinely reach the marginalized. Some regions proposed rotating leadership within community committees or having independent facilitation of municipal council meetings to prevent the dominance of powerful figures.

The workshops also revealed a tension between national cohesion and local autonomy in the context of participation, wherein participants from Aleppo and Homs were enthusiastic about local decision-making, but some Damascus participants expressed concern that excessive local participation might fragment the national economic vision. They raised the question: how can it be ensured that locally participatory decisions remain consistent with national objectives? The concern is that, without coordination, participation could result in a patchwork of local agendas and potential competition or duplication. The group favored solutions such as establishing a national framework within which local participatory planning processes would operate, meaning the central government sets broad objectives (such as improving healthcare and strengthening agriculture) while regions decide on implementation within those objectives.

Key Actors

The key actors here are many, including the public itself, but more specifically, local councils and municipalities are the bodies at the forefront of enabling participation. Wherever they exist, they should be empowered and made democratic, and participants stressed the need to hold local elections early in the transitional phase to institutionalize grassroots popular participation. Syrians have not witnessed meaningful local elections for decades (with some limited exceptions), and doing so would establish legitimate bodies that give voice to communities.

Civil society organizations are also pivotal actors, as they can mobilize citizen contributions, conduct public consultations, and channel feedback to authorities. The workshops positioned civil society essentially as an intermediary for participation—a bridge between the people and the government.

For example, community organizations can organize open public meetings on local budgets. Media and information channels were also mentioned as facilitators of participation; free and independent media can inform the public about economic issues and government plans, enabling people to engage in debate. Some participants proposed creating an interactive online portal through which citizens can comment on draft economic policies, a form of e-participation platform (which also connects to transparency through digital tools).

The transitional government and ministries themselves are actors that must commit to participatory governance; if ministers and civil servants are not open to engagement, participation becomes merely nominal. The workshops, therefore, proposed training government officials in participatory methods and possibly appointing dedicated liaison units to interact with civil society and local authorities. International donors and UN bodies also play an important role.

Several participants noted that many donor-funded programs (such as UN or NGO programs) already apply community-driven development approaches, and these external actors can encourage emerging Syrian authorities to continue such participatory practices at the national scale. However, some cautioned that externally driven participation may be superficial if not rooted in local culture, and that approaches must be designed according to local context.

Pathways

Participants outlined practical steps to make participation effective. At the policy level, they recommended enacting laws or regulations that mandate participatory processes. For example, a local administration law could require municipalities to hold public sessions for budget discussions or for consultations with residents on development plans.

Similarly, at the national level, it was proposed that major economic legislation (such as a new tax law) be required to undergo a public feedback period from citizens.

At the institutional level, a key pathway involves building or strengthening bodies that enable participation. One concrete idea was to establish economic advisory councils at various levels; for example, a national economic council comprising representatives from business associations, labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, women's groups, and youth representatives, among others, that would meet regularly with the Ministry of Economy to submit proposals and observations.

Likewise, provincial councils could mirror this diverse composition, formalizing non-governmental stakeholder contributions to decision-making.

Education and capacity building were also considered essential, as people need to know how to participate effectively. Civic education programs (possibly run by NGOs) could train citizens in advocacy, teach communities how to organize around their needs, and educate officials on how to consult and respond. One idea raised in Homs was to launch community reconstruction committees in every neighborhood, tasked with identifying local needs and coordinating with engineers and officials, thereby giving residents a practical role in rebuilding their area (ECO-Hom).

Another set of proposals centred on using technology for participation, by creating online platforms or mobile applications through which citizens can report problems (such as price hikes or corruption), vote on development priorities, or pose questions to officials. Young participants in Aleppo advocated for this, noting that digital tools can expand reach (which is important in a still-fragmented country where not everyone can attend in-person meetings).

However, they cautioned that internet access must be improved, and that digital skills training may be necessary to avoid excluding rural populations or senior citizens.

Finally, participants stressed that participation must be accompanied by monitoring and accountability mechanisms. In this regard, if people provide input and nothing results from it, they will become disappointed; therefore, feedback loops are needed in which officials publicly respond to citizen recommendations (even if not all can be adopted) and explain their decisions. Participants view genuine participation as both a right and a means to improve policies, and they aspire to an unprecedented level of civic engagement in economic governance, while remaining aware of the challenges of representation, capacity, and coordination.

The emphasis is on structured and sustained participatory mechanisms to build mutual trust between citizens and the state.

4

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

Transparency: Building Trust Through Openness and Anti-Corruption

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Transparency: Building Trust Through Openness and Anti-Corruption

The transparency parameter, referring to the free flow of information about government operations and finances, was repeatedly emphasized as essential for breaking the cycle of corruption and mistrust in Syria's economy. Participants vividly recalled how the Assad regime shrouded major economic transactions in secrecy; many described the old economy as a black box in which only insiders knew what was happening with state assets, contracts, and budgets. In the context of the transitional period, Syrians view transparency as both a moral duty and a practical tool for preventing corruption, attracting investment, and enabling public participation. One participant from Aleppo likened transparency to a mirror for the national economy, saying



transparency is the mirror of the national economy,”

without it, neither citizens nor officials can accurately assess the state of public finances or hold anyone accountable.

In practical terms, demands for transparency were ambitious; all workshops agreed on the necessity of public finance transparency. For example, open budgeting was a common recommendation, and Aleppo participants insisted on



public budget transparency: periodically publishing details of revenues and expenditures so that citizens know how state funds are managed (ECO-Ale).

This represents a radical departure from previous practices, essentially meaning opening government books to public scrutiny. Homs participants added that, alongside annual budgets, any reconstruction funds and aid entering Syria must be tracked transparently to ensure they are not diverted. Given the expected inflow of international assistance, this was a significant concern; without transparency, participants feared a repetition of what occurred in post-war Lebanon or Iraq, where vast sums were embezzled by nepotism networks.

Another key dimension is transparency in procurement and contracting. Participants from all regions, particularly Latakia and Homs, emphasized that contracts for rebuilding infrastructure and for exploiting natural resources (oil, gas, and phosphate), as well as any public-private partnerships, must be awarded and executed transparently. They proposed publishing all tender announcements and results, the criteria used, and the companies involved.



As one participant in the Latakia workshop put it: sound economic governance requires transparency in procurement and contracting (ECO-Lat).

The objective is to prevent the old practice whereby crony companies obtained contracts without competition. In practical terms, this might involve using electronic procurement systems and independent observers to oversee the awarding of major projects.

Access to information was another dimension, with participants seeking a legal framework that guarantees the public's right to access government information. The Damascus workshop, influenced by some legal experts, specifically recommended issuing a freedom of information law



enacting and implementing a freedom of information law (ECO-Dam)

as one of the key proposed steps, arguing that this law should allow any citizen or journalist to request data (such as ministry expenditures or details on state-owned enterprises) and require government bodies to respond within a specified timeframe. In addition, participants viewed independent media and investigative journalism as fundamental to achieving transparency. Several participants mentioned the need to protect journalists who expose corruption by “protecting whistleblowers” (ECO-Hom) through laws that shield them from retaliation.

Transparency was also discussed not only as a government-to-public relationship, but also within the government itself.

One participant from Aleppo noted that even during the transitional period, factions or ministries may tend to monopolize information. There is therefore a need for an internal culture of information-sharing and coordination.

They pointed out that the lack of transparency between the central bank and the Ministry of Finance in the past had led to conflicting policies, and that, now with multiple actors involved, internal transparency is no less important. Transparency is linked to determining who owns the data, how it is constructed, who reviews it, and how it is used locally.

Some participants focused on the importance of developing indicators and measurement tools, as well as establishing a national matrix and local indicators.

Challenges and Contradictions

Adopting transparency is not a straightforward process, and participants acknowledged obstacles such as a deeply ingrained culture of secrecy.



As one expert in Damascus cautioned, transparency faces resistance within institutions accustomed to secrecy (ECO-Dam).

Mid- and lower-level bureaucrats may feel apprehensive about or unwilling to suddenly open their files, which could undermine transparency initiatives. Participants therefore discussed how to incentivize or enforce transparency among civil servants. In this regard, some proposed coupling transparency with accountability measures to ensure disciplinary action is taken when necessary.

Another complexity lies in data integrity: publishing data is insufficient if it is inaccurate or incomplete. For example, participants from Idlib and Aleppo, some of whom had backgrounds in information technology, raised concerns about the current state of record-keeping, noting that many documents were lost or destroyed during the war and that existing data may be unreliable due to years of manipulation. Entrenching transparency will therefore require rebuilding information systems first, such as reconstructing land records, budgets, and statistics with international assistance to ensure the accuracy of what is published. There is a risk that early transparency based on poor data could mislead the public or undermine trust.

A frank discussion also took place on balancing transparency with short-term stability; some expressed concern that full transparency about the economic situation could cause public panic or social unrest. If the government immediately reveals the true scale of debts or a list of war profiteers, this could trigger anger or despair. Participants in Homs agreed that the truth must be disseminated, but through carefully considered communication. Another tension emerged regarding security considerations; the new government may argue that certain information (for example, details of ongoing security operations or sensitive negotiations to recover assets) cannot be made public. Participants in Damascus acknowledged that some security exceptions are reasonable (military plans, for instance, cannot be published), but warned that “national security” should not become a blanket excuse for concealing economic information. They proposed establishing clear criteria for what may remain classified (perhaps defense-related matters and private personal data) and affirmed that everything else should be accessible to all.

Key Actors

The key actors most likely to endorse transparency are reformers within government—ministers of finance and economy, and others—who are committed to democratic, clean governance. Participants identified the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank as primary actors; if they publish detailed financial and monetary reports, this sets the general tone. In addition, an anti-corruption authority can function as a transparency oversight body, ensuring that government entities comply with disclosure requirements.

Civil society and the media are two critical actors in demanding and benefiting from transparency; NGOs can analyze budgets and communicate their findings to citizens in simplified ways (for example, by preparing citizen-oriented budget summaries). Investigative journalists can delve into published data to expose any irregularities. Indeed, participants frequently stressed the necessity of supporting an independent media as part of the transparency ecosystem:



supporting independent media and establishing national data platforms (ECO-IdI).

International institutions can also influence transparency; organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, if involved, will likely press for transparent public financial management as a condition for providing assistance.

Notably, participants (particularly from Aleppo and Homs) believed there was a role for digital technology companies or e-governance consultants in establishing user-friendly transparency portals, and even suggested partnering with countries that have implemented open government initiatives to benefit from their best practices.

On the other hand, actors who resist transparency were also identified, including central bureaucrats, corrupt businesspeople, and anyone who has benefited from an information blackout (such as those running smuggling networks or war-economy monopolies). One participant in Aleppo warned:



“corruption networks will resist the publication of data.” There is, therefore, a need for top leadership to act on this resistance through political will.

Pathways

The workshops laid out a clear blueprint for implementing transparency. The most prominent proposal was launching open data portals, a publicly accessible website (or multiple platforms) where key economic data is published in real time. For example, a budget transparency portal that displays allocations, expenditures, and project progress by region, updated quarterly, and a public procurement portal that publishes all tenders, bids, and contracts awarded.

Another pathway lies in the legal dimension, through passing a transparency and anti-corruption law early in the transitional period. Such a law would mandate proactive disclosure of specific information (budgets, the status of government institutions, etc.), set standards (e.g., requiring all ministries to publish quarterly reports), and establish an independent transparency monitoring unit to ensure compliance.

Technological measures were central to the agenda, such as digitizing government transactions to reduce human intervention (as previously mentioned under e-governance). Participants wish to see e-governance applied to matters such as tax collection (to eliminate intermediaries) and subsidy distribution.

In Homs, an electronic procurement system was proposed, in which bids are submitted and evaluated online anonymously, to curb favoritism.

Capacity-building is another pathway, through training civil servants in transparency standards and equipping each ministry with skilled communications staff who regularly publish information and engage with the public.

This is linked to the required cultural shift; the workshops even mentioned symbolic measures, such as an “open government” initiative in which the transitional leadership would hold weekly press conferences, publish declarations of their assets, and so on, to set an example to be emulated from day one.

Finally, participants called for community oversight as part of transparency, such as forming local oversight committees composed of citizens to monitor reconstruction projects on the ground and report any irregularities (e.g., funds disbursed without work being completed).

Combined with formal transparency, this community accountability approach forms a robust mechanism against corruption. The path toward transparency mapped out by Syrians is proactive and systematic, spanning laws and technical systems to cultural change and popular oversight.

Participants demonstrated full awareness of the difficulty of the task, as “resistance to change within institutions... and the absence of technical infrastructure” are real obstacles.

5

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

Development: Economic Recovery with Equity

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Development: Economic Recovery with Equity

The workshops painted a picture of development that is people-centred, inclusive, and sustainable, especially following a war that destroyed infrastructure, industries, and livelihoods. Syrians aspire not only to rebuild what once was, but also toward economic development that provides broad-based prosperity. Participants across all governorates emphasized several dimensions of development, such as immediate economic recovery (jobs, income, basic infrastructure), long-term sustainable growth (economic diversification, education, innovation), and human development (health, education, social protection). They frequently used the terms 'development' and 'recovery' interchangeably, indicating that reconstruction and development must proceed hand in hand.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of self-reliance and economic independence. In Aleppo, Syria's industrial hub, participants lamented how the war and previous policies had transformed Syria into an import-dependent nation, stating:



'An economy based solely on imports does not build an independent state' (ECO-Ale).

). They stressed that reviving local productive sectors is crucial, which means prioritizing agriculture and industry to reduce import dependency and create jobs. Indeed, agriculture was repeatedly presented as a lifeline; it was frequently noted that



'Syria possesses immense agricultural potential that requires genuine investment,' especially in discussions focused on rural areas (ECO-Ale, ECO-Lat).

Participants in Latakia emphasized that their governorate's economy is primarily rooted in agriculture (such as citrus, olives, etc.), and that with proper support, it could serve as a pillar for national food security and a source of export revenue:



'Supporting agriculture and its products... investing in the agricultural sector across various fields' (ECO-Ale, ECO-Lat).

They proposed ideas such as providing farmers with fuel, seeds, and modern irrigation to boost production. Similarly, in Homs, a governorate that maintained a mix of agriculture and industry before the war, the discussion focused on reviving manufacturing, repairing factories, and encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in food processing, textiles, construction materials, and related sectors to employ people and produce goods locally.

Job creation was identified as a paramount and immediate development priority. Across all areas, unemployment (particularly among the youth) was regarded as a critical issue that could undermine peace if left unaddressed. Participants proposed public works programs to rebuild infrastructure using local labor, alongside incentives for the private sector to recruit. They suggested emergency employment schemes for debris removal, road repair, and housing construction, funded by donors but executed by local workers to rapidly inject liquidity into communities. Another proposal involved providing concessional loans or grants to entrepreneurs:



'Millions of educated Syrian youth are unemployed; we need programs to integrate them into productive sectors' (ECO-Ale),

demonstrating a clear awareness of the importance of investing in human capital to drive development and curb emigration.

In parallel with economic revitalization, emphasis was placed on social development as an integral component of economic growth. Education and healthcare were frequently cited not merely as services, but as investments in Syria's future workforce and social stability. Participants in Homs described the war's impact on these sectors as a



'mass destruction of the educational and health systems... [leading to] illiteracy and dropouts among the war generation' (ECO-Hom).

This portrays a precarious situation which development must urgently address. Participants called for rebuilding schools, retraining teachers, and providing accelerated learning programs for youth who missed years of schooling. Similarly, reconstructing hospitals and clinics and ensuring that all areas, including remote villages, have access to primary healthcare, were considered developmental priorities on par with infrastructure. Basically, participants view human capital—the skills, health, and capabilities of Syrians—as the foundation of development.



"The human being is the true capital in the transitional period" (ECO-Ale).

This reflects a critical political-economy perspective that challenges dominant economic models focused solely on profit and GDP.

The themes of equity and balanced development emerged strongly. Many participants, particularly from historically marginalized areas (such as the eastern areas or rural Homs), emphasized that development must reach all areas and communities to be truly equitable. They recalled pre-war patterns in which Damascus and Aleppo were relatively more developed, while areas like Deir Ezzor and rural Homs lagged behind, contributing to a sense of resentment. Following the war, places like Aleppo city lie in ruins, while some coastal areas possess better infrastructure that remained intact; thus, an equitable approach is necessary to avoid fueling new grievances. There was a consensus on establishing a balanced regional development plan, potentially including preferential measures for the most affected areas. For instance, participants in Idlib, pointing to the dire state of their governorate, argued for the creation of special economic zones or dedicated reconstruction funds for the Northwest. Participants in Latakia noted that, although their infrastructure suffered less shelling, their rural coastal communities face high poverty rates and an influx of displaced persons that has strained resources; consequently, they also require developmental attention, rather than just 'glittery' projects in major cities.

Sustainability was also a core part of the developmental vision, not only environmental sustainability (addressed separately under the sustainability parameter), but also economic sustainability in terms of avoiding dependency on aid or rent. Participants spoke of their need for a diversified economy that includes integration into regional trade. Reference was made to Syria's strategic location and how, in a post-conflict stage, it could revive transit trade, tourism, and renewable energy projects, linking with neighboring countries in ways that achieve mutual benefit. However, they cautioned against falling into the trap of depending on a single resource or a single foreign patron. In the Damascus workshop, it was suggested that international support must be utilized cautiously while ensuring Syria retains its economic sovereignty:



'International support is essential, while maintaining the independence of economic decision-making.'

Challenges and Contradictions

The pursuit of rapid development is accompanied by numerous challenges and trade-offs, which participants discussed. One immediate tension lies in speed versus quality; there is immense pressure to demonstrate rapid improvements in energy, food, and employment to maintain public trust during the transitional period. However, moving too hastily (such as rushing construction without proper planning or environmental assessments) can lead to waste, corruption, or unsustainable projects. Experts in Homs warned of the risks of 'rushed reconstruction,' citing how the rapid flow of funds in certain post-war contexts has led to failed projects and uneven growth. They called for a deliberate approach that addresses urgent needs quickly while carefully planning large-scale projects. Conversely, others felt that any delay could cause disappointment. This debate points to the need for a phased development approach: achieving quick wins in parallel with laying the groundwork for long-term projects.

Another complexity lies in resource constraints; the list of developmental needs (from infrastructure to social services) is staggering, yet Syria's post-war economy is destroyed. Participants recognized that significant international funding and investment would be required, but they were also wary of the conditions that might accompany such aid (such as loans that could lead to debt or political obligations). For instance, some participants in the Damascus group expressed concern that over-reliance on foreign loans could mortgage Syria's future or impose painful austerity; they pointed to how some post-conflict nations ended up in debt traps. In contrast, others in Aleppo argued that Syria has no choice but to welcome all possible assistance, stating: "We need a true Marshall Plan." The fundamental contradiction lies in the desire for self-reliant development alongside the potential need for external capital and expertise. Consequently, participants proposed ideas such as prioritizing grants and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) over loans, and engaging Syrian diaspora capital to mitigate debt-related issues.

Questions also emerged regarding the balance between the roles of the market and the state. Under Ba'athist rule, Syria maintained a state-controlled economy, followed by a period of partial liberalization that gave rise to crony capitalism. In the workshops, some advocated for a 'Social Market Economy', essentially a market-based system with strong government regulations to ensure equity and provision of public goods.

They pointed to models such as the Scandinavian countries or Turkey's hybrid approach. However, others, particularly business leaders, called for a liberal economy to stimulate growth, warning that heavy state intervention could stifle entrepreneurship and overburden the national budget.

A clear contradiction surfaced: while participants demanded state investment in health, education, and support for farmers and workers, they simultaneously called for encouraging the private sector and avoiding a return to the state's former inefficiencies.

Another nuanced tension existed between environmental considerations and economic urgency within the developmental context. Many recognized that sustainable development should include environmental stewardship; however, there is a fear that immediate economic needs might overshadow 'green' considerations. For example, to restore electricity, would Syria revive old, polluting power plants or accept quick oil deals that might harm the environment? Some participants warned that Syria must 'rebuild in a greener manner' given its climate vulnerability, while others pragmatically pointed out that the country might be forced to utilize available resources (such as local oil, even if polluting) in the short term to jump-start the recovery.

Key Actors

While nearly every sector of society is an actor in development, specific roles were clearly identified. The transitional government holds a distinct leadership role in coordinating reconstruction and development projects, securing funding, and formulating policies. Participants emphasized the need for a competent economic team within the government (potentially through the establishment of a dedicated authority or ministry for reconstruction and development). However, they were clear that the government cannot act alone. The private sector is crucial — ranging from small-scale entrepreneurs to major investors — and chambers of commerce, industrial unions, and farmers' associations were cited as essential actors for mobilizing production and employment. In Aleppo, business representatives pledged to restart factories provided that basic support (security, electricity, and credit) is secured. The workshops often framed this as a partnership; the state must foster an enabling environment (through infrastructure, the rule of law, and perhaps seed grants) while businesses undertake the bulk of actual economic activity.

Donors and international agencies are also central actors; organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the EU, and Gulf states, among others, were expected to fund some developmental projects. Participants expressed a mixture of hope and reservation toward these entities, viewing donor involvement as necessary but urging coordination to avoid duplication and ensure alignment with Syria's own priorities. They called for the Syrian government to take the lead in donor coordination forums, drawing lessons from other post-conflict experiences where weak coordination led to the misallocation of resources.

The Syrian diaspora emerged in discussions as a powerful potential developmental actor. Many Syrians abroad could invest or bring their skills back to the country.



The Latakia workshop explicitly stated: “People with competencies and displaced persons will not return... unless a suitable environment is provided” (ECO-Lat).

Consequently, actors such as expatriate business networks or scientists could be engaged if conditions (such as security and incentives) improve. Furthermore, local communities and authorities are actors in development; the reconstruction of thousands of villages and towns will require local leadership, including local councils and community-based organizations (CBOs), for effective planning and execution on the ground. Participants view these as project implementers and channels to ensure that development meets local needs.

Finally, the issue of armed groups and security forces emerged. Development cannot proceed if fighting resumes or if armed actors disrupt projects. Therefore, integrating demobilized fighters into the workforce (perhaps through public works) is both a developmental and a security imperative. Some suggested transitioning former fighters into a reconstruction labor corps as a strategy to achieve stability and development concurrently.

Pathways

Several developmental pathways were proposed, such as the formulation of a National Reconstruction and Development Plan. Nearly all groups called for a comprehensive plan or vision to define priorities and phases. This plan should be developed through a participatory approach to identify key sectors for recovery (agriculture, energy, housing, water, etc.), funding requirements, and timelines. Recommendations included establishing a high-level committee or ministry to draft and oversee this plan, comprising experts and representatives from all regions to ensure balance.

A significant portion of the suggestions addressed infrastructure, such as repairing roads, bridges, and electricity, water, and telecommunications networks. Participants suggested starting with critical infrastructure that catalyze economic activity (e.g. major trade routes, power plants for factories, and irrigation systems for agriculture). They also urged the use of local labor and contractors to maximize job creation. Furthermore, public-private partnerships (PPPs) could be explored, provided they are transparently governed to prevent corruption.

Numerous practical ideas were put forward, including providing seeds, tractors, and subsidies to farmers to recultivate land (especially in Idlib, rural Homs, and the Hasakah plains). Proposals included establishing agricultural cooperatives and extension services to increase yields and link farmers to markets. For the industry, a common idea was the creation of industrial zones equipped with facilities and tax exemptions to attract investors to restart factories—for example, reviving the textile sector in Aleppo. Small industries and crafts should also be supported through microfinance programs.

To bolster development, participants listed policy changes such as currency and banking reform, stabilizing the Syrian Pound (perhaps through initial capital injections or temporary currency pegging), and revitalizing banks to provide business credit. Other measures included reforming customs and trade policies to protect emerging local industries in the short term (through carefully calibrated tariffs or anti-dumping measures), while eventually seeking integration into regional trade for growth. They also discussed tax reform to generate revenue for equitable development by implementing progressive taxes on high-income earners and luxury imports, while easing taxes on productive investments.

Recognizing the importance of human capacity, participants urged the launch of national training initiatives. Vocational training centres are needed to refine skills in construction and other fields to provide a workforce for reconstruction. In the long term, reforming school curricula to focus on critical thinking and skills relevant to modern economies was proposed, echoing the point: 'Updating curricula and providing required skills programs' (ECO-Hom). Additionally, programs were suggested to reintegrate former child soldiers or youth whose education was interrupted, to prevent the emergence of a 'lost generation.'

From the participants' perspective, development is incomplete without social protection programs. They proposed establishing social safety nets such as unemployment insurance (even in a modest form for job seekers), expanding public healthcare, and potentially a targeted cash transfer program for the poorest households. These measures would not only alleviate hardship but also inject funds that stimulate local economies (as poor households spend locally).

Many participants also proposed environmental and sustainable initiatives, such as integrating renewable energy (solar panels, given Syria's sunlight, to address electricity shortages sustainably) and reforestation projects (especially in conflict-ravaged areas). These initiatives can create jobs while improving long-term prospects. Sustainable water management was also noted as essential for agricultural development. Finally, the idea of establishing regional development funds or banks managed by local authorities also emerged to ensure that each area receives investment according to its needs. For example, a development fund for the Northwest (Idlib/rural Aleppo) and another for the Coast (Latakia/Tartus), etc., funded by donors but managed locally (with transparency safeguards).

Participants proposed two cross-cutting principles across sectors: development must be anchored in justice and transparency. This entails fair distribution (ensuring no area is left behind, and no group is unfairly favored) and transparency (ensuring communities are informed about upcoming projects and how funds are being utilized). Only then will development lead to the desired outcome - a stable and prosperous Syria - as a participant from Homs put it,



Employment opportunities and prosperity reach every Syrian, regardless of their background.

6

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition

Sustainability: Environmental Recovery and Cross-generational Justice

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Sustainability: Environmental Recovery and Cross-generational Justice

Although immediate economic recovery was the primary focus, participants also expressed clear awareness that development must be sustainable, able to endure without depleting resources for future generations. Discussions on sustainability took two main forms: economic sustainability (building a resilient economy capable of withstanding shocks and not perpetually dependent on unsustainable practices or foreign aid) and environmental sustainability (protecting and rationally managing natural resources — water, soil, air, and biodiversity — while addressing the environmental damage caused by the war). The conflict itself has inflicted significant environmental harm (oil spills, deforestation, debris, and pollution), and participants recognized that remediating this damage was an inherent part of economic policies.

A recurring theme was the importance of diversification and avoiding over-reliance on any single sector. In the context of sustainability, the Aleppo group spoke of 'economic diversification,' noting that Syria historically possessed a mix of agriculture, industry, tourism, and oil, but policy failures and the war disrupted this balance. They proposed reviving a multi-sectoral mix so that if one sector faces a downturn, others can sustain the burden. For example, they cautioned against focusing solely on oil and gas revenues (which might be tempting for quick liquidity) and instead suggested revitalizing agriculture and services to sustain the economy in the long term. Food security was also identified as a component of sustainability. Ensuring that Syria can largely provide for itself through a strong agricultural base supports both economic and social sustainability. The Idlib workshop specifically noted that “food security is part of sustainability,” urging investment in local crops and food industries to reduce dependency on imports or aid.

Environmental sustainability was discussed, particularly in Homs and Idlib, where participants pointed to pre-war mismanagement (such as groundwater depletion and the absence of pollution controls) alongside wartime damage that has left the country facing water scarcity, soil degradation, and pollution-related health risks. In Homs, they proposed that the reconstruction process incorporate the pillars of 'environmental sustainability and the circular economy.' The circular economy approach focuses on maximizing the reuse and recycling of materials. Such ideas sparked enthusiasm among participants as a means to transform destruction into resources for reconstruction while minimizing waste.

The issue of water management was raised in detail. The droughts Syria has experienced since 2000, likely exacerbated by climate change, remain vivid in the memories of older participants and were indeed among the pressures that preceded the uprising. Therefore, a sustainable future economy must manage water more effectively through methods such as modern irrigation, the rehabilitation of water infrastructure, and cooperation with neighboring countries on water-sharing. The Idlib group emphasized 'the preservation of natural wealth (environmental sustainability):



avoiding the institutionalization of common property where shared resources are depleted' (ECO-Idl).

This refers to how certain individuals during the war dug unlicensed wells or overgrazed lands, benefiting a few while exhausting common resources. Consequently, participants were calling for a governance approach that protects public resources.

All workshops highlighted renewable energy and modern technology as drivers of sustainability. Given Syria's abundant sunlight and suitable wind corridors, participants in Aleppo and Homs suggested investing in solar and wind energy projects to achieve long-term, cleaner, more cost-effective energy security after the initial investment. For instance, equipping villages with solar panels addresses electricity shortages and reduces reliance on expensive and polluting diesel generators. Similarly, the adoption of sustainable construction (including insulation and energy-efficient designs) was proposed for new buildings to lower future energy consumption.

Challenges and Contradictions

The pursuit of sustainability faces the harsh reality of a devastated economy. The fundamental contradiction lies between the short-term need to ignite growth, even through unsustainable means, and the long-term necessity of enforcing sustainable practices. In the oil sector, for instance, Syria possesses oil fields (primarily in the Northeast) whose rapid investment could fund reconstruction. However, burning more fossil fuels conflicts with climate sustainability, and poorly managed extraction could cause spills and environmental degradation. Some argued that Syria should not significantly expand oil production for revenue but instead pursue renewable alternatives and extract oil only at moderate levels, while adhering to strict environmental standards. Others countered that Syria's urgent financial needs might require a temporary, heavy reliance on oil and gas exports until other sectors recover, serving as a pragmatic — albeit unsustainable — bridge.

Similarly, in agriculture, a tension was observed between maximizing production and conserving resources. Water-intensive crops like wheat and cotton are essential and profitable, yet Syria's water resources are scarce. Transitioning to 'less thirsty' crops or modern irrigation is necessary but may reduce production in the short term or require expensive new equipment. Participants recognized these trade-offs; one suggestion to address them was to seek international technology transfer. For example, drip irrigation systems supported by donor programs could enable simultaneous increases in production and water conservation, reconciling short-term needs with long-term goals.

Another complexity emerged regarding the institutional capacity to enforce sustainability. Environmental regulations in Syria were weak before the war and collapsed during it. Re-establishing an entity such as the Environmental Protection Agency will take time. Meanwhile, various actors (local entrepreneurs, returning refugees rebuilding homes, foreign investors, etc.) may rush to exploit resources and rebuild quickly, potentially bypassing environmental safety standards. Some participants in Homs warned that without strong regulation, reconstruction could lead to unregulated mining for building materials or deforestation for timber, etc., repeating the mistakes of early post-war phases seen in other contexts. However, imposing overly strict regulatory oversight too early could stifle the needed urgent development if it becomes bureaucratic. This necessitates a gradual and flexible implementation with basic guidelines, followed by the development of standards over several years.

Climate change is a decisive factor complicating planning. Participants with technical backgrounds noted that Syria's climate is projected to become drier and hotter, making any development plan that ignores climate adaptation unsustainable. For example, continuing pre-war practices like intensive flood irrigation or building in flood-prone areas without adaptive measures would be disastrous. Nevertheless, incorporating climate adaptation (such as new drought-resistant crop varieties, flood defenses, etc.) requires foresight and often carries additional costs. It may be difficult to convince policymakers to allocate budgets for future climate resilience when immediate needs are so pressing.

Key Actors

Many of the main actors in sustainability overlap with those involved in development more broadly. However, with a specific focus on sustainability, the Ministries of Local Administration and Environment, Agriculture and Water Resources, and Energy will be at the heart of promoting sustainable policies. These should be established based on contemporary, forward-looking functions. Participants also highlighted the role of scientists and experts, calling for the mobilization of Syria's universities and research centres in fields such as agriculture, ecology, and engineering to guide sustainable practices.

Environmental civil society groups are vital actors that can raise awareness and hold the government accountable for its environmental promises. For instance, prior to the war, there were several local initiatives for forest conservation and pollution control; these could be revived, or new initiatives could be launched by young activists concerned with climate and nature. Participants encouraged empowering such groups to participate in reconstruction planning as an example of integrating public participation with sustainability.

International environmental organizations and UN agencies were identified as potential supporters that could provide technical assistance or dedicated funding for green reconstruction (some participants mentioned the possibility of tapping into global climate funds or post-conflict environmental remediation grants).

Local communities are also fundamental, as farmers adopt new methods and communities care for reforested areas. One suggestion was about involving communities directly in sustainability projects through incentives. For example, a community-led reforestation project was proposed in Idlib, where villagers are paid to plant and nurture trees, thereby linking livelihoods with environmental benefits.

On the potentially obstructive side, entrenched business interests may oppose sustainability if they incur high costs. For example, industrialists might resent new pollution controls that require investment in cleaner technology, or fuel traders may not welcome the transition to renewable energy.

In this regard, participants noted the need for education and dialogue with these stakeholders to align them with the vision, potentially encouraging them to adopt green technology through initial incentives or international aid.

Pathways

Several sustainability pathways were proposed, such as establishing green reconstruction guidelines. These would consist of standards that all major reconstruction projects must meet (such as mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for large-scale projects, and the use of sustainable materials where feasible). These could be mandated by law or, at the very least, strongly encouraged by donors through funding conditionality. Emphasis was also placed on launching pilot projects for solar farms or wind turbines, particularly in energy-deficient areas. One concrete proposal involved equipping public buildings (schools and hospitals) with solar panels through donor-funded programs, thereby reducing future electrical loads and demonstrating a commitment to clean energy. Others suggested exploring bioenergy from agricultural waste to achieve simultaneous waste management and power production.

It was also proposed to implement national programs for efficient irrigation (drip irrigation for farmers and the rehabilitation of lined irrigation canals to prevent leakage) and rainwater harvesting (small dams or village reservoirs). Furthermore, experts in Damascus suggested investing in wastewater treatment and its reuse in agriculture to address both sanitation and agricultural water supply needs. Reforestation and combating desertification were also discussed, noting that the war period witnessed significant deforestation (due to logging for fuel and conflict within forested areas, etc.). Participants suggested a massive afforestation campaign, especially in the highlands around Homs and Idlib, and along the coast, to restore ecosystems, prevent soil erosion, and encourage rainfall. In parallel, protecting existing forests was deemed essential; some noted that Syria could create green jobs by employing youth in tree-planting brigades, thereby linking development with reconciliation. Urban planning was highlighted by some participants to avoid unsustainable sprawl and car dependency (trends Syria was moving toward before the war).

Participants from Aleppo and Damascus called for urban reconstruction plans that include public transportation (such as rebuilding Aleppo with bus lines or eventual tramways), urban designs that preserve green spaces, and energy-efficient building codes. While this forward-looking approach may not yield immediate results, initiating planning now ensures that cities rebuilt from the rubble can become models of sustainable urban design rather than returning to chaotic growth.

Climate adaptation projects were also proposed, including the establishment of early warning systems for drought and community-based emergency plans (since drought can drive displacement and conflict).

These could be implemented with donor support but led by local knowledge. Most workshops focused on integrating environmental education into school curricula and on launching public awareness campaigns to help citizens understand the importance of, for example, water conservation and environmental cleanliness. Participants from Idlib shared local examples of communities organizing war-rubble cleanups or planting gardens, suggesting that if communities are empowered and informed, they can lead sustainability efforts themselves.

Furthermore, participants believed that demonstrating a commitment to sustainability could aid Syria internationally, potentially facilitating its reintegration into global frameworks and attracting eco-conscious investors or future carbon credit trading. Although such advanced ideas remain ambitious, they demonstrate that Syrians do not want to be left behind in the global shift toward sustainable development.

In the context of the Syrian transitional period, sustainability means avoiding the unsustainable exploitation of resources, neglecting of the environment, or building an economy on fragile foundations. The war has taught harsh lessons about vulnerability; as a participant from Latakia noted: 'Stimulating local development and sustainability go hand in hand' (ECO-Lat). If implemented effectively, the reconstruction process in Syria could become an opportunity to transition toward greener, more resilient practices rather than merely restoring a fragile status quo.

The sustainability proposals put forward by the workshops, while requiring strong political will and support, constitute an integral part of a vision for a Syria that thrives for generations to come.

7

Outcomes:

Comparative Approaches on Parameters of Economic Transition


Decentralization: Power Sharing for Local Empowerment and Efficiency

- Challenges and Contradictions
- Key Actors
- Pathways

Decentralization: Power Sharing for Local Empowerment and Efficiency


Decentralization means transferring significant powers and resources from the central government to regional and local authorities. It was one of the parameters discussed in Latakia, Homs and Aleppo. After decades of excessive centralization in Damascus and as the war has given rise to de facto local governance structures in different areas, many Syrians believe that decentralization constitutes a pathway towards more responsive governance and more equitable development to prevent the return of authoritarianism. Participants largely agreed that political and economic decentralization must be part of the new governance system.

The level and form of decentralization, though, were debatable (starting with administrative decentralization to local governance structures). The kernel of the issue was reflected in one participant's statement in Latakia,



Economic decentralization aims at improving the efficiency of services and driving local development. (ECO-Lat).

Empowerment of locals was a recurring demand among participants in Aleppo, who called for elected provincial councils to manage part of their budgets and make decisions on local projects.



Decentralization: enabling local administrations to manage part of the resources to meet their direct needs. (ECO-Ale).

This reflects a desire to allow governorates or municipalities to collect and spend funds in line with local priorities, rather than relying on the central government for every project.

. During the war, local councils in opposition-held areas learned to provide services through limited means. Participants wanted to integrate this grassroots governance into the national framework rather than dissolve it. In Homs, where some areas were under former regime control and others under opposition local governance, calls were made to institutionalize local participatory planning. Participants suggested that each governorate has an elected council with authority over sectors such as utilities, local roads, and education, and that those councils have some sources of revenue (such as local taxes or a designated share of national revenues).

From another perspective, decentralization was seen as a form of justice, especially for areas that felt they had been taken advantage of or marginalized under the unitary state. For example, people from the east of the country, which is historically rich with resources, felt that Damascus has been taking their oil and grains for little investment in return. Decentralization may guarantee a fairer share for them.

The Latakia workshop (a coastal area and oil terminal) included in its recommendations



rebuilding trust through delegating powers and resources to governorates. (ECO-Lat).

They associated this with national unity because when every area feels it has self-determination and receives its fair share, the country would stabilize.

Different models were discussed: some argued for a form of substantial decentralization within a unitary state, very much like 'administrative decentralization' enshrined in the current local administration law, but more extensive and more effectively implemented. Idlib's contribution was limited at this level, unlike Latakia and Homs, where decentralization was strongly supported, showing that the idea is largely attractive.

Challenges and Contradictions

Although attractive, decentralization poses several challenges. One of the main concerns was disparity in capacities, as the human or institutional capacities necessary for effective governance are not available in all areas at present. Some participants warned that introducing comprehensive decentralization immediately could lead to chaos or control of powerful local leaders. For instance, an expert in Damascus warned that if a war-torn governorate were swiftly granted full control, local warlords or militias might intervene to dominate the local government (especially if the elections were imperfect). Participants in Homs noted that local administrative capacities have been exhausted by the war and the displacement of professionals, suggesting that these gaps must be addressed through training, and potentially, temporary support from central ministries or international advisors.

Another contradiction between national parameters and local autonomy is evident in sectors such as education. Decentralization may entail that governorates control school curricula to adapt them to local culture, but this would lead to discrepancies in educational standards and even politicization unless it is regulated and controlled. Participants discussed which sectors must be decentralized and which must remain unified. Many believe that defense, foreign policy and monetary policy must remain centralized (for obvious reasons related to unity). On the other hand, sectors such as local infrastructure, agriculture and police may be local. The health and education sectors were most debatable, and a hybrid model (combining national standards and local administration) may be the solution.

It was emphasized that national cohesion must be preserved, stressing that decentralization must not be conflated with division. This is a particularly sensitive issue given separatist concerns (as some participants, for example, were concerned that if decentralization is taken too far, Kurdish areas may be more inclined to adopt the autonomous model following the example of the Kurdistan region in Iraq). Participants in Latakia explicitly stated, “Decentralization is not divisive federalism,” seeking to address concerns by framing decentralization as a means of efficiency rather than division.

Resource allocation in the frame of decentralization poses some difficult dilemmas. If richer governorates retain the largest share of their revenues, poorer governorates may lag even further, contradicting the principle of equity. To solve this issue, participants suggested a redistribution mechanism in which a certain percentage of the revenues from richer areas is allocated to a balance fund dedicated to poorer areas. They looked into models in which central governments undertake redistribution to ensure a basic level of service provision nationwide. This, however, requires trust as richer areas must trust that the redistributed funds are used properly rather than wasted by incompetent local administrations. Such trust is currently missing as one participant from Aleppo said he favored local control specifically because he had no trust that Damascus would redistribute resources equitably (citing past experience where wealth was concentrated in the hands of regime cronies). Overcoming this trust deficit is essential. Some constitutional guarantees regarding revenue sharing may be helpful.

Political will constitutes another form of complexity, as genuine decentralization entails that elites at the centre concede some of their powers, something that has historically proven to be challenging. Participants acknowledged that even a transitional central government may resist enabling local rivals. Therefore, some insisted on enshrining decentralization in the new constitution to safeguard the principle against the whims of leaders.

Key Actors

Key actors include local governance bodies, existing local councils and provincial and municipal councils. Strengthening these bodies is a prerequisite. The Ministry of Local Administration is also crucial as there is a need for a strong central ministry to oversee the transfer of power, capacity building and ensure consistency. Participants envisioned the ministry's role as more of a facilitator and regulator of local governments than a controlling supervisor. An independent committee may be established to monitor and guide the decentralization process.

Civil society and local communities are also actors who ensure that decentralization not only empowers local elites but effectively empowers the people. They can take part in local decision-making (as cited in the section on participation) and hold local officials to account. Interestingly, international donors were viewed as potential actors who may accelerate decentralization. During the war, many aid agencies channeled assistance through local councils or NGOs, bypassing the regime to a large extent. If donors channel reconstruction funds directly to local governments (with accountability mechanisms in place), this may accelerate decentralization by building local capacity and legitimacy. Participants pointed this out, warning that it must be aligned with a national plan to avoid uncoordinated reconstruction.

Furthermore, political groups and parties would influence how decentralization evolves. For instance, Kurdish political entities have their own vision of autonomy in the north east while, Arab opposition groups have differing positions. Regime-linked networks may try to maintain their influence in each governorate. The interaction between those actors would impact the degree and structure of decentralization. Ideally, there is a need for a broad political consensus (potentially through a national dialogue or a constitutional committee) to determine the framework for decentralization. Some participants proposed holding a national conference on post-conflict decentralization to discuss the details with representatives from all areas and groups.

Pathways

Many pathways were proposed within the framework of decentralization such as legal and constitutional reform aimed at enshrining decentralization in the new constitution, for example, by explicitly stipulating the powers of local authorities, guaranteeing local elections, and determining the responsibilities of the centre versus those of local authorities. Then, the local administration law would be updated or replaced accordingly to enforce those constitutional provisions. This may include regulating governorates' legislative powers over local issues, their financial powers (taxes, budget independence), and their administrative structure (governorates, districts, municipalities). Some participants suggested that powers be transferred incrementally. In the first phase, local council elections are held, and the councils are given an advisory role in planning. In the second phase, certain tasks are transferred to them, such as maintenance of secondary roads, management of schools and local clinics, etc., with allocated budgets. In the third phase, they are given more extensive powers and control over revenues. This incremental planning ensures that local entities are ready before they take on all responsibilities.

The importance of building local governance capacity was also stressed as a main pillar, resonating across all areas through training and institution-building at the local level. This includes training programs for new local officials on public administration, budget preparation and transparent governance. Each governorate may potentially be twinned with international partners or cities to receive technical assistance. For example, several EU or UNDP programs that second advisors to local councils for guidance were cited, as were efforts to develop local civil service teams and to encourage experts in the diaspora or from the capital to rotate into positions in other governorates to transfer knowledge.

On the other hand, mechanisms for financial decentralization were highlighted, including the establishment of a clear formula for resource distribution.

One proposal was that each governorate would retain a percentage of the revenues it generates (from local taxes and fees, and potentially from resource revenues), while the rest would go to a central fund. In addition, the central government would provide governorates with grants based on the population and development indicators.

For immediate impact, participants suggested allocating part of donor assistance directly to local governments and creating development budgets at the governorate level that the community can access and influence, thereby embodying decentralization in practical terms.

In addition, governorates may be authorized to collect some local revenues (such as real estate taxes and fees for local services) to promote self-reliance.

To address concerns about local abuse of power, proposals included establishing accountability bureaus at the governorate level or empowering local civil society to audit and report. The central authorities (or judicial authorities) could act as a safety valve. A delicate balance between autonomy and unitarity must be reached.

Therefore, the importance of a constitutional court or administrative court is to resolve disputes between the centre and localities.

It was also proposed that decentralization be implemented more substantially in one or two areas first, for example, by selecting a relatively stable governorate (Tartus or part of Aleppo, perhaps) and granting it extended powers to serve as a learning model. The experience could then be mainstreamed to other governorates. This could help mitigate the concerns by demonstrating achievement. Participants highlighted the importance of communicating with the public to introduce the definition of decentralization and launch a public awareness campaign that explains its merits (e.g. reducing red tape, customized solutions, local voice) and how national unity would be preserved to build societal support.

Decentralization would offer a vision for a new Syria that breaks with the over-centralized past, adopting empowered local entities that cooperate within a single national framework. If accomplished, this could address chronic grievances stemming from negligence and foster innovative competition between the areas. Nonetheless, its success would depend on delicate design, trust-building, and a constant balance between autonomy and cohesion. As one participant expressively summed it up:



Administrative and financial decentralization starts with a margin of autonomy to encourage local initiative without undermining the unity of the country. (ECO-Hom).

Discussion: Critical Analysis

According to the participants in the research, the vision of the post-conflict Syrian economy is consistent with the broader academic literature on post-conflict reconstruction, while also showing some nuance. In this section, we shall compare the outcomes of the workshops with the academic literature and other post-conflict contexts using critical analysis tools, including critical political economy and critical security studies, to assess the prospects and risks of the transitional period.

The parameters which emerged from the workshops of this study -namely governance, transparency, justice, participation, development, sustainability and decentralization- may, on the one hand, be seen as controversial issues stemming from the history of authority, power relations and political and economic systems before, during and after the conflict. On the other hand, they constitute a framework for the future of the socioeconomic contract. These parameters are not merely standard thematic issues. Rather, they are spaces in which actors interact regarding the type of production, wealth distribution, incentives, the economic roles of the state and the market, and the rights and obligations of citizens. Thus, formal and informal institutions become a space where these parameters are negotiated among actors to reach societal consensus, rather than being regarded as purely technical processes (Khan, 2010). Such interaction may consolidate the hegemony of the authority, the regime, and political, military, and economic elites over state institutions, thereby building the post-conflict system in a way that serves their own interests, thereby undermining the desired shift to overcome conflict and establish peace and stability (Hellman et al., 2000). Co-opting power for the interests of a small group would only exacerbate grievances related to exclusion from decision-making, deprivation of resources, and a lack of justice, which are drivers of renewed conflict. This makes remedying institutional and distributional issues pivotal to development and peace (World Bank & United Nations, 2018).

Participants in this research have disagreed on priorities (such as prioritizing lifting the sanctions and achieving overall stability versus prioritizing transitional justice and inclusion), geographical distribution (like believing that investment and reforms are concentrated in the centre while the peripheries face heavier burdens) and the state-market relation (for example, whether production-based economic revitalization required protectionist policies or openness as the best way to create job opportunities and investments). These disagreements are analytically important because they help predict the compromises or conflicts which usually lead to partial reform, appropriation or review of policies in the context of reconstruction.

Based on the political economy approach, which presents the parameters of economic transformation as spaces for engagement, overcoming the economics of conflict depends on the possibility of forming a broad coalition of forces in support of peace and sustainable development, which seeks to stop systems of plunder and seizure of wealth and resources, redirect resources to sustainable development, disrupt violence-centred activities, and build a system of incentives for productive activity and advocacy for those affected by conflict. However, experience suggests that conflict-benefiting elites, classes, or networks can resist inclusive institutional change, transforming the reconstruction process into a mechanism for consolidating political hegemony through the economic system (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003; Berdal & Malone, 2000). Much of the literature on Syria points to the dangers of harnessing reconstruction to reproduce authoritarian rule through the continuity of economic system mechanisms in times of conflict and the exploitation of reconstruction revenues (Heydemann, 2018; Daher, 2018). Many participants in this study emphasized the serious risks in the transitional phase of the authority's takeover of the economic system, and therefore highlighted the importance of inclusive governance, anti-corruption enforcement mechanisms, social justice, and local participation to avoid this co-optation of reconstruction opportunities.

The findings of this research also contribute to the debate on the concept of “liberal peace” in post-conflict contexts, which forms the basis for the traditional peacebuilding models that have dominated international practice since the 1990s, based on rapid institution-building, market liberalization, and supergovernance reforms in war-torn states (Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015; Chandler, 2010). This approach can have negative consequences when reforms are externally driven, ignore the political economy of the country in question, and do not enjoy legitimacy or societal support, leading to a failure of sustainable peace or development, a phenomenon that Richmond (2015) and others have called the “failure of liberal peace” (Pugh, 2005; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). The discussion in this paper focused on an economic vision that emerges from the bottom up and prioritizes inclusion, social justice, and local empowerment, which is consistent with what critical peacebuilding researchers call “local transformation.” The vision of many workshop participants regarding the parameters of participation, decentralization, and social welfare aligns with the concept of “post-liberal peace,” in which peace is built on local needs and hybrid institutions (central and local) rather than imported models (Bargués et al., 2023). For example, some workshop participants advised caution in rushing foreign trade liberalization and privatization policies, emphasizing the importance of fostering a conducive investment climate while also protecting local industries and ensuring equitable distribution. This attitude reflects awareness of imbalances evident in the experiences of other countries, such as Iraq after 2003, where comprehensive market reforms were implemented with little local participation, contributing to economic chaos and the marginalization of key societal groups (Heydemann, 2018). The literature suggests that the rapid liberalization of the Iraqi market, without providing a secure environment or consensus among social actors, has led to widespread corruption and fueled insurgency, thereby undermining the goals of the liberal peace (Dodge, 2013).

Participants seem eager to avoid this, emphasizing gradual steps (security and basic needs first, interim structural reforms) and consensus-building (a comprehensive dialogue on the economic system). But the differences were evident in the workshops, where external economic openness was presented as a problem affecting the interests of many segments of society. “Openness” can yield short-term gains through cheaper imports and investment prospects, primarily benefiting high-liquidity importers and businesspeople, while domestic producers and wage workers may face competitive shocks. On the other hand, selective protectionism and production-based recovery may support local employment, but may fall prey to monopoly unless credible procurement processes, competition policies and customs integrity are introduced. The political economy literature on peacebuilding highlights how liberalization packages that ignore distributive effects can deepen grievances and enhance the market power of entrepreneurs in a war economy (Pugh, 2005; Paris, 2004).

Thus, a more evidence-based public debate can avoid presenting participation and inclusion as merely a moral imperative, and instead treat them as mechanisms for building legitimacy and stability. Participation can broaden the information base needed to design policies, identify distributive grievances early, and foster partial social acceptance, but it can become a mere formality if decision-making power and economic decision-making control remain concentrated in the hands of a few. Participation is therefore a political outcome, not just a technical or formal procedure (Chandler, 2010; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). The importance of expanding economic policy discussions and outcomes was extensively discussed in the workshops to avoid co-optation and to prevent the creation of new grievances through exclusionary economic policies.

Rapidly moving towards a market economy, privatization, or liberalization of foreign trade may exacerbate conflict and deepen inequality, especially as asset plundering and monopoly continue (Paris, 2004). From the perspective of political economy, this caution may be understood, as attempts to separate markets from social protection and political accountability can create a backlash, violent social reactions, and crises of legitimacy (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Therefore, when workshop participants prioritize transparency, law-abiding institutions, and social justice, these priorities may be interpreted as prerequisites for any sustainable reforms to prevent market reforms from becoming tools of cooption and exclusion.

The parameters of justice and development can be analytically re-established by linking them to the dismantling of structural violence and participatory peace rather than to the loose term “good governance.” The research focuses on a peace in which there is no structural deprivation, as persistent social and economic exclusion can be a form of violence that undermines peace even after military operations end (Galtung, 1969). In this context, Amartya Sen's capacity approach provides a means of measuring developmental performance by expanding the actual freedoms of individuals, such as secure livelihoods, access to health care and education, and political participation, rather than relying on macroeconomic indicators alone (Sen, 1999). This proposition aligns with the international consensus in development that poverty eradication, equity, and sustainability are inseparable from the goals of long-term peace and stability (UNDP, 2015). It is important to note that “justice” and “development” are not parallel goals but complementary mechanisms, as equitable service delivery and the protection of rights can help reduce grievances. In turn, lower complaints and improved confidence can broaden the potential for economic efficiency and boost investment. In addition, the focus on social justice and reducing inequality is consistent with research findings indicating that societies with inclusive economies have a lower risk of violence recurrence (Haug, 2005).

Rice et al. (2006) suggest that high inequality and low incomes are associated with a higher risk of civil war. Many participants pointed to the risks posed by development disparity between governorates, between rural and urban areas, and between people who have been subjected to siege and displacement and those who have not been displaced or besieged, which contributes to exclusion and instability and justifies resorting to violence. Many participants also emphasized the importance of progressive taxation, rural development, and social welfare as direct attempts to address these structural problems. Critical security studies add a human security perspective, which means ensuring individuals are free from need and fear, a goal that is more appropriate than just state security or the persistence of the government. Participants in the workshops focused on the logic of human security, rather than the protection of the state per se, emphasizing protecting people's livelihoods, rights, and dignity as a path to real security (Owen, 2004).

International political economy in the transitional period is also central to the possibility of transforming these parameters into opportunities to overcome conflict. Many post-conflict experiences have seen economic governance structures built on the priorities of influential international or regional powers, donors, and aid mechanisms that may prioritize their interests, macrostability, or investment environment reforms, thereby marginalizing issues of justice, inclusion, and sustainability for conflict-affected societies (Pugh, 2005). Evidence from fragile states suggests that external actors often struggle to translate their commitments into practice, especially when risk aversion and short time horizons dominate program design (OECD, 2011). Experiences of peace-centred economic development confirm that economic programs can mitigate or exacerbate conflict, depending on whether the roots of conflict are taken into account (International Alert, 2021).

In the case of Syria, discussions reveal the risk of international and regional domination of economic governance through the political, military, and economic influence of many countries. In this context, many participants highlighted the importance of defending the independence of economic decision-making and enhancing the ability to negotiate with external powers by jointly identifying priorities and rejecting reforms that could be detrimental to production or distribution. The outputs of the workshops revealed a prominent example of distributive dispute in the Idlib workshop data, where the focus was on lifting sanctions first, albeit at the expense of justice or regional disparities (fees/taxes, investment allocation, and regulatory consistency). These differences are politically important, as uneven reconstruction profiles can entrench beliefs about exclusion and domination, reduce compliance with new institutions and rules, and perpetuate informal governance, undermining trust in transitional authorities.

The research provides results consistent with much of the literature, showing that reconstruction policy can become a tool of authoritarian rule, as the distribution of contracts, land, and licenses, as well as access to external funding, can entrench political control and produce new inequalities (Daher, 2018). Analyses of conflict-time economic systems also question the assumptions that war automatically resets economic governance and that wartime arrangements often adapt and persist afterwards (Heydemann, 2018). The importance of anti-corruption and transparency strategies lies in curbing the political use of reconstruction revenues, which requires institutional capacity and the rule of law, both of which are politically contested. Overall, the attitude of workshop participants indicates a focus on the importance of breaking the system of conflict economics through transparency and justice. This aligns with Pugh's (2011) "transformative approach" to peacebuilding, which not only rebuilds old structures but also radically changes power relations and economic norms. Participants focused on anti-corruption bodies, open budgets, and the prosecution of economic crimes, aiming for real transformation.

Rather than treating corruption and power grabs as mere secondary “administrative problems,” the results of the workshops suggest that the risks of power takeovers are structurally linked to how reconstruction contracts, licenses, customs, and government appointments are allocated. These policies and procedures create returns that can be used to consolidate undemocratic political power.

It should be noted that decentralization is not necessarily anti-appropriation or exploitation, as it may distribute power, but it can strengthen an exploitative economic system. Decentralization, therefore, needs to expand effective, inclusive participation to reduce the risk of conflict, but it may exacerbate conflict by reinforcing regional inequalities or enabling local elites to monopolize resources, making the results contingent on the building of accountability institutions and the availability of resources (Schou & Haug, 2005). The workshops focused on decentralization as an economic-political issue related to the distribution of power and wealth, the building of effective institutions, and accountability, rather than as a purely administrative reform.

The participatory workshops showed that governance, justice, participation, development, sustainability and decentralization were not proposed as totally agreed on principles, but as areas for disagreement and negotiation around the economic nature of the state, market constraints, role of civil society, type of external openness, distribution of resources between the centre and the peripheries, and sequencing priorities ranging between swift stabilization and transitional justice.

For example, there was some disagreement over whether recovery must start with rapid economic liberalization and investment attraction at the expense of protecting local production, or with a gradual pathway led by agricultural and industrial recovery coupled with social and regulatory guarantees. Another disagreement was whether decentralization constituted a gateway for local empowerment and geographical justice, or could -in the absence of rules for transformation and monitoring- reproduce disparity and fragmentation.

Another significant debate was the balance between dismantling corruption networks and the war economy, on the one hand, and maintaining the minimum level of administrative and institutional capabilities, on the other. Furthermore, debate emerged over the position of economic transitional justice: is it merged with reconstruction at an early stage by remedying issues of seized properties, illicit enrichment, and monopolies or deferred in favor of stability? Notwithstanding these disagreements, there were some relatively agreed-upon priorities, including, most significantly, dismantling conflict economics, restoring basic services, ensuring transparency and accountability, expanding participation, overcoming geographical disparities, and building a more equitable and sustainable production base. Based on these agreements and disagreements, the following recommendations are put forward not as a neutral technical recipe, but a practical pathway favoring the options which minimize the likelihood of coopting reconstruction, promote inclusive sustainable development, promote complementarity and engagement between the state, the market and civil society and support the independence of economic decision making and a fair and durable production structure (Khan, 2010; Hellman et al., 2000; Ballentine & Sherman, 2003; Paris, 2004; Heydemann, 2018; Daher, 2018).

The parameters elicited from workshops and the literature, from a political economy perspective, focus on the types of forces and institutions involved in the design and enforcement of economic transformation. This approach reframes transparency and anti-corruption measures as constraints on plundering and profiteering, reframes participation as a mechanism for legitimacy and stability, reframes development and sustainability as an expansion of capacities and limitation of structural violence, and finally, reframes decentralization as a design option that redistributes power with the risk of local appropriation.

Based on the outputs of the workshops, this paper shows that the design of the economic transformation process requires addressing historical grievances and political utilization of economic governance. This goes to say that rebuilding the Syrian economy is inseparable from renegotiating power, rights and distribution in the transitional period.

Policy Options

Reconstruction in a post-conflict economy must be seen as a debate on resources, law enforcement and power. Therefore, the parameters emerging from the workshops do not merely indicate the content of policies, but a strategy to combat cooption. Unless the dynamics of conflict economy are broken (smuggling, illicit royalties, monopolized or corrupt procurement, politicized licenses), funding reconstruction may promote the influence of authoritarian actors and reintroduce authoritarian rule through economic gateways. This diagnosis is consistent with findings from conflict economy studies indicating that war creates alternative systems for profit-making and protection that may outlive active fighting (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003).

The parameters emerging from the workshops may be used as contested political-economy options rather than as fixed normative obligations. It is highly likely that reconstruction policies redistribute control over major economic conduits, such as procurement, customs, licensing, public appointments, and service networks, to secure profits and influence. Where these conduits remain ambiguous, reconstruction funding may serve to reinforce the influence of authoritative bodies or monopolies, ultimately reproducing the 'economics of conflict' through public institutions. On the other hand, if these conduits are transparent and feasible, reconstruction may begin to minimize the spoils and rents that finance authoritarianism, domination, and violence, enabling a transition to inclusive development (Khan, 2010; Hellman et al., 2000; Ballentine & Sherman, 2003; Heydemann, 2018).

The following recommendations emanate from the issues agreed upon, as well as the ethical questions highlighted by the workshops, especially in relation to the role of the state, geographical disparity, the form of economic openness, economic transitional justice, and the relation between the centre and localities. The recommendations emphasize options that minimize the risk of co-opting reconstruction in terms of both institutions and resources, invest in geographic and class parity to avoid exclusion; adopt a production-based, inclusive recovery that avoids co-opting the rents of importation or monopolizing protected industries, and is based on decentralization designed as a system of participation and accountability.

- **On the short term (0-2 years):**

Stabilization and Trust Building

Tradeoff 1:

“Stability with anti-exploitation guarantees” vs. “Stability through unreliable intermediary”

Participants in the workshop established a clear link between legitimacy, restoration of services and transparent financial management. They viewed smuggling, monopoly and untransparent procedures as threats. In terms of short-term stability, the main risk lies in the fact that emergency arrangements, especially import and assistance channels and major procurements, may become exploitation gateways that empower corrupt intermediaries. Thus, it is likely that stability is more sustainable if it combines rapid restoration of services with arrangements that curtail rent-seeking and corrupt intermediation.

Short-term measures include creating transparent procurement procedures for ‘basic public goods’ such as fuel, basic foodstuffs and medication with auditable logistics and public disclosure of contracts and a complaint method that can be used in all areas. This would reduce the leveraging power in procurement and distribution positions. Preferably, priority must be given to the emergency social protection strategy and the launch of rapid labor-intensive programs (rubble clearance, municipal reforms, agricultural rehabilitation) designed to attract those engaged in armed action by providing civilian income alternatives. Wherever possible, these programs must be linked with demobilization and reintegration pathways. Another important measure is to invest in sustainability at an early stage as part of stabilization, rather than as a deferred measure.

This includes developing an approach to food sovereignty, protecting agricultural and natural resources, providing seeds and fertilizers, reforming irrigation methods, establishing preliminary controls on groundwater depletion, and restricting emergency food imports through a policy to revive domestic production. Low-income households, wage workers, farmers, returnees, IDPs, productive SMEs that rely on reliable inputs, and municipalities that can make tangible improvements are likely to benefit from these policies.

Operators of procurement, customs, checkpoints, royalty collection centres, exclusive import brokers, and networks that benefit from the non-transparent subsidy design will be harmed by these policies.

Possible measures to reduce the capacity of obstructors include linking emergency channels to independent monitoring and public reporting, designing multiple complaint channels, and conducting periodic third-party audits where possible.

Tradeoff 2

“Early adoption of horizontal justice” vs. “prioritization of growth centres without balance”

Inputs from some workshops show how investment centralization can spark political resentment that “all investments go to Damascus,” reducing compliance and encouraging investors and workers to move to the centre. In this context, a transparent framework based on selection criteria for early reconstruction projects, such as the severity of damage, the number of beneficiaries, the impact of restoring of services, and the allocation of a share of important projects to marginalized and most affected areas, could be put in place. Attempting to redistribute remittances to balance basic services (health, water, basic education) may help reduce regional disparities even before the enactment of the decentralization law.

Many would benefit from this policy, including marginalized and severely affected areas, local service users, and local contractors not linked to central networks. Losers, on the other hand, include the central bodies concerned with projects, contractors, who are in a position to benefit from the centralization of projects, and the controlling authorities, who benefit from the fragmentation of regional systems. Some measures may be introduced to mitigate opposition to the policy by publishing detailed expenditure and projects data for each governorate/municipality, establishing local monitoring committees with access to public data, and clearly asserting that financial balance is a stabilization tool rather than a tool for punishment or reward.

Tradeoff 3:

“A reform that maintains capacities” vs. “Administrative erasure”

Participants and experts in several workshops warned that rushed restructuring of ministries and the dismissal of employees may amount to ‘administrative erasure’, which could lead to the collapse of capacities and create new opportunities for nepotism. Measures in this policy include applying accountability to high-risk positions, maintaining the technical capacities necessary for service provision and operating institutions, establishing transparent recruitment and evaluation criteria to curb substituting competency for loyalty, and ceasing untransparent, arbitrary layoffs. Potential beneficiaries of this policy include service users, reformist technocrats, municipalities, and private-sector actors who use clear rules.

On the other hand, the policy would disadvantage networks of nepotism seeking to co-opt appointments and actors who benefit from institutional instability.

Some mitigation measures may be used to avoid obstruction, such as publishing recruitment criteria, protecting whistleblowers who report breaches, and separating technical service positions from politically sensitive positions in the initial phase.

Tradeoff 4:

“Participatory document for the transitional economy” vs. “Imposing an economic model with no transparency”

The transitional period requires opening a public space for discussion of the temporary economic framework for the first stage, including the role of the state in strategic sectors, the extent of state intervention in the market, the position of the private sector, and controls on investment, trade, and monopoly. This is to produce a preliminary document outlining the features of the economic system to address the ambiguity evident in the workshops and mitigate regulatory uncertainty, which hinders investment, fuels rumors, and reproduces informal arrangements. Declaring a participatory document would promote the adoption of transitional economic governance rules that strike a balance between social protection, production, and fair competition, to avoid unchecked liberalization or the reproduction of a rentier-monopolizing economy.

This document could serve as a preface to a roadmap to unify monetary, tax collection, customs, and licensing regulations and standards, while setting clear priorities, starting with basic commercial transactions, real estate registries, industrial registration, and bank transactions. This must take into account protecting local communities from shocks arising from the unification of procedures. This document would also contribute to establishing mechanisms for temporary registration of disputed properties or royalties, as well as for legal verification in affected areas. Rapid real estate reconstruction may exacerbate grievances if it is based on shady property rights or on actions carried out under coercion or forced displacement. Potential beneficiaries of this policy include consumers, especially the poorest and most marginalized; producers who are not part of the nepotism network; and reformist bureaucrats. It would, on the other hand, be disadvantageous for political elites and nepotism networks seeking to seize projects, resources, and power.

- **Medium term (2-5 years):**

Institutionalization and Inclusive Growth

Tradeoff 5

“Safeguarding reconstruction from exploitation” vs. “Reconstruction as rent distribution”

The political economy literature on appropriation indicates that formal reforms often fail when poorly implemented and when elites manage to direct rules and procurement processes for their personal gain (Hellman et al., 2000; Khan, 2010). In this context, the outputs of the workshops propose transparency measures (open budgets, indicators, monitoring) that can be regrouped into a policy package to safeguard reconstruction.

Safeguarding requires the establishment of an independent anti-corruption and procurement supervision system, with investigative capacity and a reliable legal path to penalize abuses, expand the digital management of public finances, and regularly publish audit results, requiring main contractors and larger procurements to disclose beneficial ownership and adopt the principles of open contracting for tenders and contract amendments. Reconstruction safeguards must be part of a strategy to build an institutional framework that ensures fair competition, prevents monopoly, and ensures decent work. Potential beneficiaries include the regulated private sector, citizens in beneficiary areas, reform coalitions, donors supporting transparency, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) currently facing unfair competition. The losers include politically protected brokers and profiteers of war and monopolies. Measures to mitigate resistance to change include gradual implementation, protection of investigators, inclusion of citizen complaint mechanisms, and linking external funding to transparent and verifiable outputs (published tenders, audit records).

Tradeoff 6:

“Integrating economic justice in the transitional period” vs. “Deferring justice to protect stability”

Participants explicitly discussed whether sanctions and economic priorities may substitute for transitional justice. The political economy approach views economic crimes (illicit enrichment, forced appropriation, monopoly) as part of a system of violence that can support exclusion and future conflict (Galtung, 1969; Heydemann, 2018; Daher, 2018).

To achieve the path of integration, an economic justice path that addresses real estate disputes, forced dispossession, and profiteering from war must be established while maintaining due process and establishing specialized mechanisms for real estate claims and transparent frameworks for compensation and recovery.

Beneficiaries of this policy include displaced families, victims of dispossession and looting, communities excluded from reconstruction, and legitimate investors in need of reliable property rights. Losers from this policy are those with disputed assets, wartime monopoly networks, and factions that fear scrutiny. Some action can be taken to mitigate policy risks by prioritizing the most influential groups first (large-scale divestment of property and strategic assets), establishing transparent appeals, and clarifying the chronology so that justice mechanisms do not appear to be arbitrary punishment.

Tradeoff 7:

“Production-based recovery with guarantees” vs. “Rapid unrestricted liberalization”

The workshop outputs include a strong discourse on production (“The economy is built by production, not imports”) along with calls for openness and investment; this disagreement means that there are different winners in alliances.

Polanyi's analysis warns that the separation of markets from social protection and accountability may lead to backlash and delegitimization (Polanyi, 1944/2001), while criticisms of post-conflict peacebuilding warn of rapid liberalization without institutional capacity (Paris, 2004; Pugh, 2005).

This option is accompanied by the implementation of targeted industrial and agricultural recovery packages (credit, energy reliability, logistics, training, SME incubators) with transparent selection criteria and antitrust rules, the adoption of flexible protections where evidence suggests that emerging industries are facing dumping, and the expansion of labor market policies in line with capacity-based development.

Producers, workers, SMEs, areas with agricultural/industrial potential, and investors returning from abroad seeking productive opportunities are expected to support this policy. While it is likely to be opposed by those who exploit import privileges and monopoles.

Tradeoff 8:

“Decentralization with equality and oversight” vs. “Decentralization as fragmentation or local appropriation”

Participants linked decentralization to participation and efficiency, but also noted the risks of fragmentation, conflicting laws, and the lack of clarity of revenue destinations in local councils.

It begins with the participatory development of a national formula for decentralization and the gradual implementation of fiscal decentralization, along with national standards for public services and transparency in local governance, including transparent local elections.

There is also the harmonization of basic economic rules between regions (business registration, licensing, procurement transparency, basic tax administration) to reduce regulatory chaos in the transitional period. This option benefits marginalized areas, municipalities, civil society, local SMEs, and communities that demand participation.

On the other hand, it would be detrimental to central elites, domineering local leaders, and those who benefit from fragmentation and governance inconsistencies.

- **Long term
(5+ years):**

Consolidating Peace and Prosperity

Tradeoff 9:

“Inclusive socio-economic development” vs. “Return to spoil-like central revenue allocation”

Socio-economic development is linked to anti-corruption measures, participation, and social security within a long-term, inclusive, and transparent development process enshrined in the constitution to insulate against potential political pressure.

This policy involves constitutionalizing socio-economic rights, transparency principles, the right to access information, decentralization rules, and defining the position of the state, public property, cooperatives, and municipalities in the economy within a regulated socio-economic framework. This policy would benefit most citizens, reformist coalitions, future governments seeking legitimacy and law-abiding investors.

Losers would include networks seeking a return on appropriation, plunder, monopoly, and nepotism.

Tradeoff 10:

“Sustainability and knowledge” vs. “Recovery built on resources and rent”

The workshops identified aspirations for sustainability, renewable energy and a knowledge-based economy. The capability perspective views this in terms of expanding real freedoms (education, health, secure livelihoods) rather than mere macroeconomic growth (Sen, 1999). Positive peace frameworks, on the other hand, view sustainable development as a restriction of structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Thus, the appropriate policy options are those related to long-term investments in renewable energy, adaptation to climate change, water management, high-value value chains, a knowledge-based economy, and linking education and vocational training to this new structure. Youth, women, workers, rural areas and new production sectors are potential allies for this policy. Those harmed by this policy, however, include those who profit from environmentally damaging economic activities, as well as those based on the exploitation of natural resources, in addition to elites who profit from monopoly, exploitation, and disparity.

The cross-cutting approach emerging from those recommendations is: inclusive processes governed by transparency and accountability. Every policy or project must be designed in consultation with stakeholders, managed with transparency and yield clear benefits for citizens. The recommendations are mutually reinforcing. For instance, rapid short-term gains would provide the legitimacy needed to carry out medium-term institutional reforms, which, in turn, lay the foundation for a long-term vision of prosperity and stability. Following this incremental roadmap, Syria could make the parameters identified by its people into a tangible reality while avoiding traditional pitfalls of the post-conflict era and promoting peace.

Ultimately, the success of this plan hinges upon the continuous political will of Syria's leaders and the continued engagement of Syrian society as a whole. The spirit of participation that shaped these recommendations must continue into their implementation as Syrian citizens remain vigilant, engaged, and united around their common goal of a free, just, and prosperous Syria.

Conclusion

Syria stands at a historic intersection as it emerges from the shadows of war and tyranny. Participatory workshops across Syrian areas have laid out a vision for a new economic system founded on good governance, social justice, broad participation, transparency, sustainability, development and decentralization. While being ambitious, this vision also reflects the profound understanding of lessons learned from decades of oppression and years of conflict. There is recognition that rebuilding physical infrastructure, important as it is, is insufficient, as Syria must also rebuild trust, legitimacy, and the social contract between citizens and the state. Workshops in Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Latakia and Damascus reflected a common aspiration for a democratic and accountable government that serves the people, for an economy that offers opportunity and dignity for all Syrians, and for a homeland that heals its divisions and does not relapse into old grievances.

Analyzed through a critical political economy lens, the outputs of the workshops confirm that the root causes of conflict in Syria, namely corruption, exclusion, inequality and oppression, must be directly confronted in the peace-building process. The recommendations in this paper aim to translate community aspirations into a tangible policy roadmap. In the short term, it focuses on stability in the communities, consolidating credibility through rapid improvements in services, anti-corruption measures and inclusive planning. In the medium term, it moves to institutionalize parameters through constitutional reform and strong institutions (including independent courts and elected local councils), and to promote broad economic revival that prioritizes community welfare and job creation. In the long run, Syria is envisioned as an established, peaceful democracy with a diversified, green economy and a cohesive society.

Comparative experiences and academic perspectives corroborate the wisdom and necessity of this approach. Countries that managed to transition from conflict have, in various ways, implemented parts of what Syrians are now demanding, such as genuine power-sharing, investing in human capital, and mechanisms for leader accountability. At the same time, the challenges ahead cannot be played down, as the country needs to overcome potential obstacles such as deeply rooted elite interests, the risk of inter-group competition, scarcity of financial resources, and geopolitical pressures. The crucial determinant would be whether the transitional period in Syria is truly Syrian-led and inclusive. The workshops themselves have been an exercise of participatory governance. With civil society, youth, women, business people and government employees all on the table, Syria can avoid the pitfalls of top-down peace processes, which crumble under local resistance.

Analyses in this paper show that the seven parameters are not isolated ideals. Rather, they constitute an integrated framework: transparency promotes participation and deters corruption; decentralization improves governance and promotes development; justice (both legal and economic) promotes social stability; and sustainability protects the resources upon which development is based. These components are interconnected in a virtuous cycle that could transition Syria from a conflict-torn past to a better future. The practical recommendations outline a phased pathway to turn Syria's economic vision into reality. Similar Syrian-led agendas must be promoted and developed to respect local priorities in governance and social justice, ahead of any foreign agendas.

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