POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR SOCIAL COHESION IN AN AGE OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION

JORDAN

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

> "Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy, and it becomes impossible to deal with the existential problems of our times."
>
> – Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2021

The Shared Realities Project aims to address the eroding relationship between truth and trust that is playing out across the globe. The project supports stakeholders in developing new and enhanced understanding and awareness of the harmful feedback loop between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation (both on-line and off). In doing so, it works to build resilience and catalyze tangible action to shift from harmful to healthier dynamics.

This report gathers the perspectives of the participants who took part in the first iteration of the Shared Realities Project in 2023 in Jordan. The aim of this report is to begin to bring the feedback loop between social cohesion and mis and disinformation into view. It helps to reveal how the feedback loop manifests itself in people's everyday lives; how local vulnerabilities influence outcomes; and what kind of action is needed in response. To that end, this report consolidates and shares the learning gathered through this initial phase of work in Jordan.

Part 1 of the report shares a first version of scenarios for possible futures for social cohesion in an age of mis and disinformation in Jordan. Their purpose is to support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities for shifting the loop, based on a robust picture of the system and how it could play out.

One of the scenarios tells a story of a healthier future, while the other tells a story of a more harmful one.

The essence of the healthier future scenario is one of stability, government openness, civic engagement, and education. The essence of the more harmful future scenario is one of anger, closure, marginalization and exclusion, and repression.

An analysis of the two scenarios reveals the systemic conditions that would animate each scenario. This analysis brings into focus what can be seen with regards to what structures, beliefs, and values might underlie a healthier or more harmful future. This
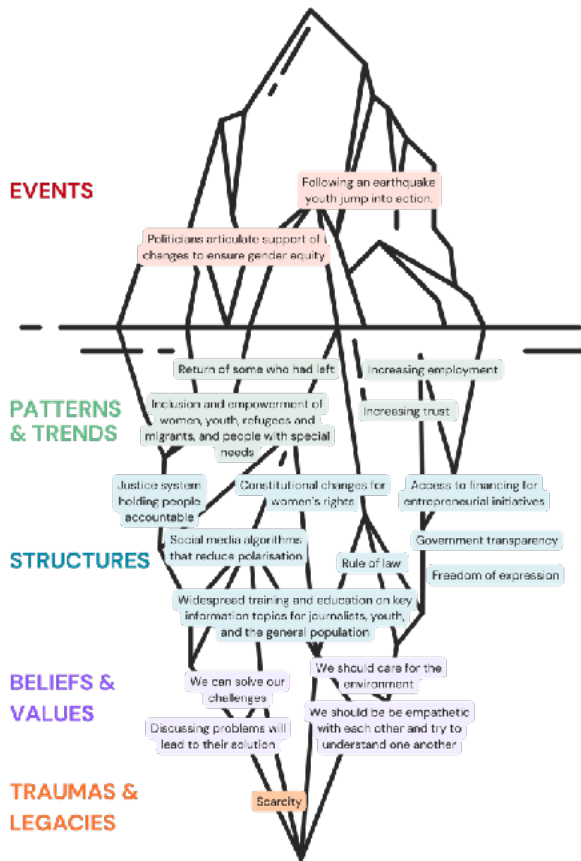
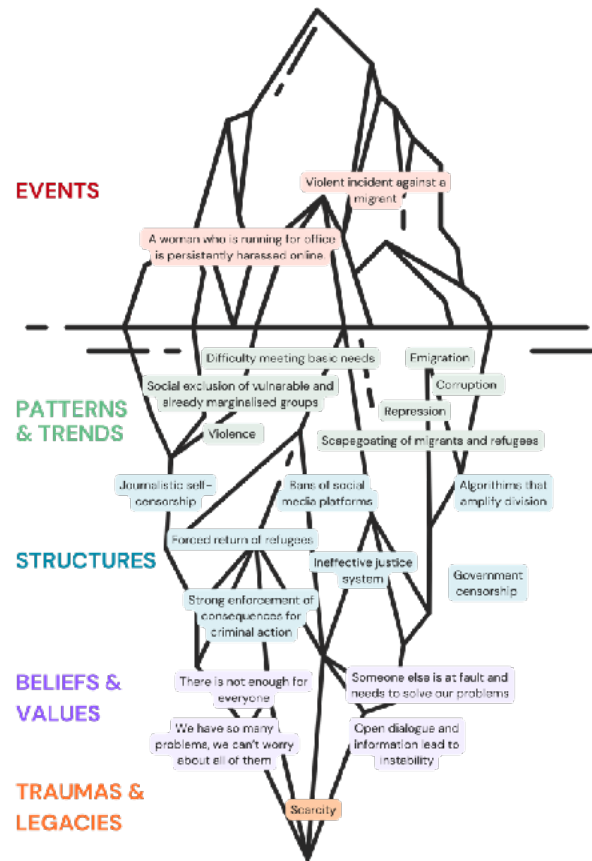*Figure 1: An iceberg diagram showing a Healthier Future in Jordan*

Figure 2: An iceberg diagram showing a more Harmful Future in Jordan

provides some initial indications of areas in which to focus interventions to shift from a more harmful to a healthier loop.

Part 2 of the report, shares what a group of stakeholders identified as the leverage points that they believe that, if addressed, could lead to healthier and less harmful loops. They identified six leverage areas in which they believe that action could help to shift the loop. The leverage areas that they identified are:

- education,
- economic empowerment,
- freedom of the press,
- government transparency,
- inclusive national identity,
- rule of law

Part 3 of this report details building blocks that the scenarios were built on. The building blocks of these scenarios are what people are most concerned about with regards to the future, and the key drivers that will determine the direction of the future. This section reveals, in greater depth, the perspectives shared by the

interviewees, and provides a foundation for thinking about other stories that might be told about possible futures.

The first building block is stakeholders' key concerns. These are the things that they care most about when thinking about the future of their country. Stakeholders identified issues related to social cohesion, such as trust, the inclusion and participation of key groups in society, as well as conflict, stability and violence as their main areas of concern.

The second building block is systemic drivers. These are the social, technical, political, environmental, and economic forces that will influence the future of the things that stakeholders care most about. The key systemic drivers that they identified include:

- What happens in the regional context
- The actions or inactions of key institutions
- The extent to which key needs are or are not met
- What narratives and information are circulating
- How key populations engage with the information and ideas that they are presented with

Part 4 notes the gaps in this report and suggests next steps. Useful next steps would be to engage the stakeholders who participated as well as a broader group of stakeholders in deep participatory processes in which, together, they can co-create an even more robust and illuminating view of the system dynamics, and key leverage areas. From that, a solid foundation for collaborative scaling and innovation could lead to impactful and lasting solutions. Some key areas for further investigation include deeper understanding of

- Social cohesion
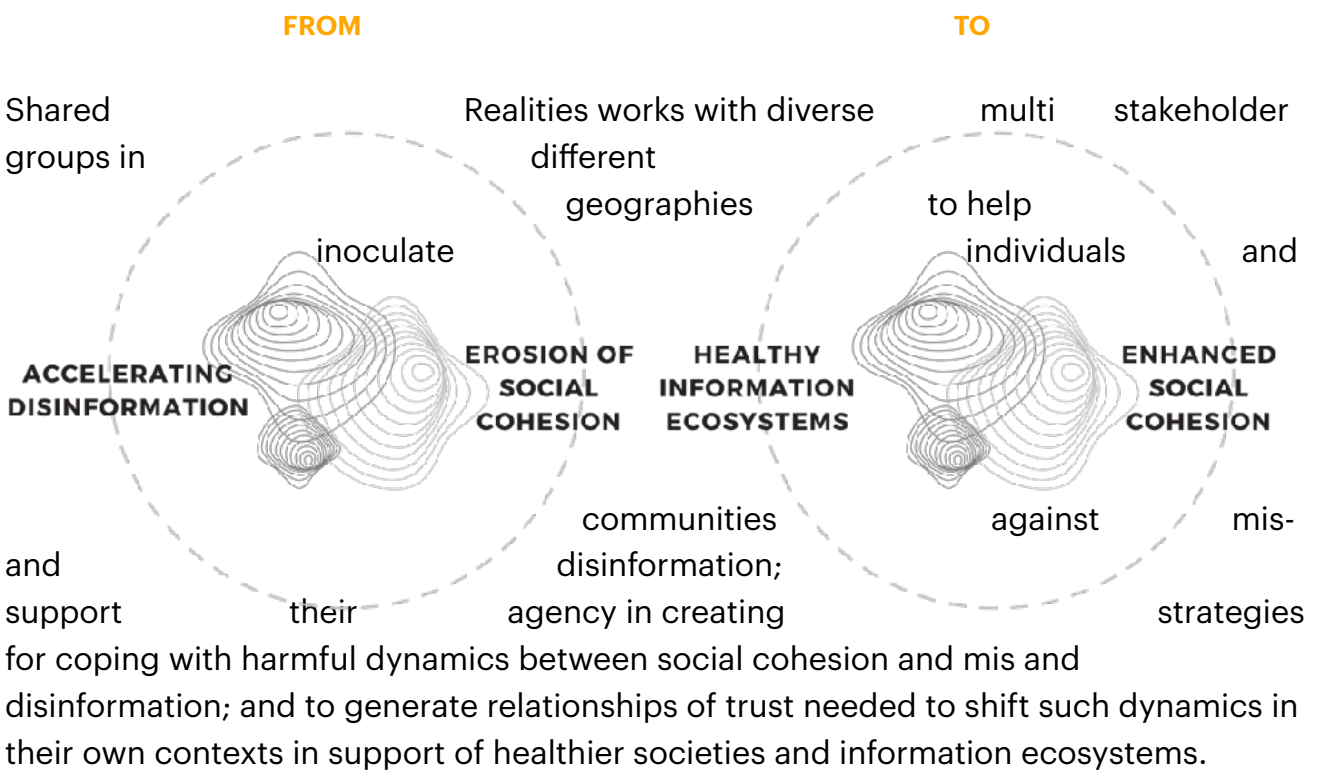- Information ecosystems
- Information economy
- Data and Technology
- Geopolitics

The appendix provides a broad selection of quotes that illustrate participant perspectives on the building blocks. Readers who want a deeper understanding of how stakeholders see the loop, its current dynamics, and its possible futures will find a greater level of depth, and detail in this appendix.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROCESS

The Shared Realities Project is an initiative of the **Reos Institute** aiming to address the eroding relationship between truth and trust that is playing out across the globe. By developing enhanced awareness and understanding of the dynamics between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation (both on-line and off), and creating new scenarios for possible futures for societies impacted by such dynamics, the project aims to build resilience to mis- and disinformation and catalyze tangible action to shift from harmful to more healthy dynamics.

FROM   **TO**

Shared Realities works with diverse multi stakeholder groups in different geographies to help inoculate individuals and communities against mis- and disinformation; and support their agency in creating strategies for coping with harmful dynamics between social cohesion and mis and disinformation; and to generate relationships of trust needed to shift such dynamics in their own contexts in support of healthier societies and information ecosystems.

ACCELERATING DISINFORMATION

EROSION OF SOCIAL COHESION

HEALTHY INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS

ENHANCED SOCIAL COHESION

The larger vision of Shared Realities as a program of work is to engage in three different ways :

1. Undertaking collaborative, systemic processes in different geographies and regions
2. Fostering cross-context learning
3. Influencing discussions at a global level

THE SHARED REALITIES LEARNING PROJECT

In 2023, the first iteration of Shared Realities was carried out in Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan, through a Learning Project. With the support of Porticus and the engagement of many collaborators, in each country we undertook the first steps of a systemic process to lay the groundwork for collaborative action towards healthy information ecosystems and enhanced social cohesion. In addition to this country-specific learning, we also conducted some initial cross-context learning for interviewees from the three countries by sharing the outcomes of this process. In this way the Shared Realities Learning Project endeavors to contribute to global knowledge about the loop.

This report represents a key achievement of this process. It is complemented by similar reports for Tunisia and Lebanon, a Cross-Country Report, which identifies similarities and contextual differences across the three countries, and a mapping, which identifies actors in each country that are already working to shift the loop.

In each country, the Shared Realities Learning Project brought together people from different sectors, professions, and life experiences.

By bringing together a diversity of actors who have different kinds of country-based knowledge, experience, and influence, participants were able to generate new understandings, and contextualized insights concerning how global drivers are playing out in each country. Further, this diversity of actors can begin to envision fresh opportunities and influential entry points for shifting the harmful feedback loops between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation in these different contexts.

PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The aim of this report is to begin to bring the feedback loop between social cohesion and mis and disinformation into view. It helps to reveal how the feedback loop manifests itself in people's everyday lives; how local vulnerabilities influence outcomes; and what kind of action is needed in response. To that end, this report consolidates and shares the learning gathered through this initial phase of work in Jordan.

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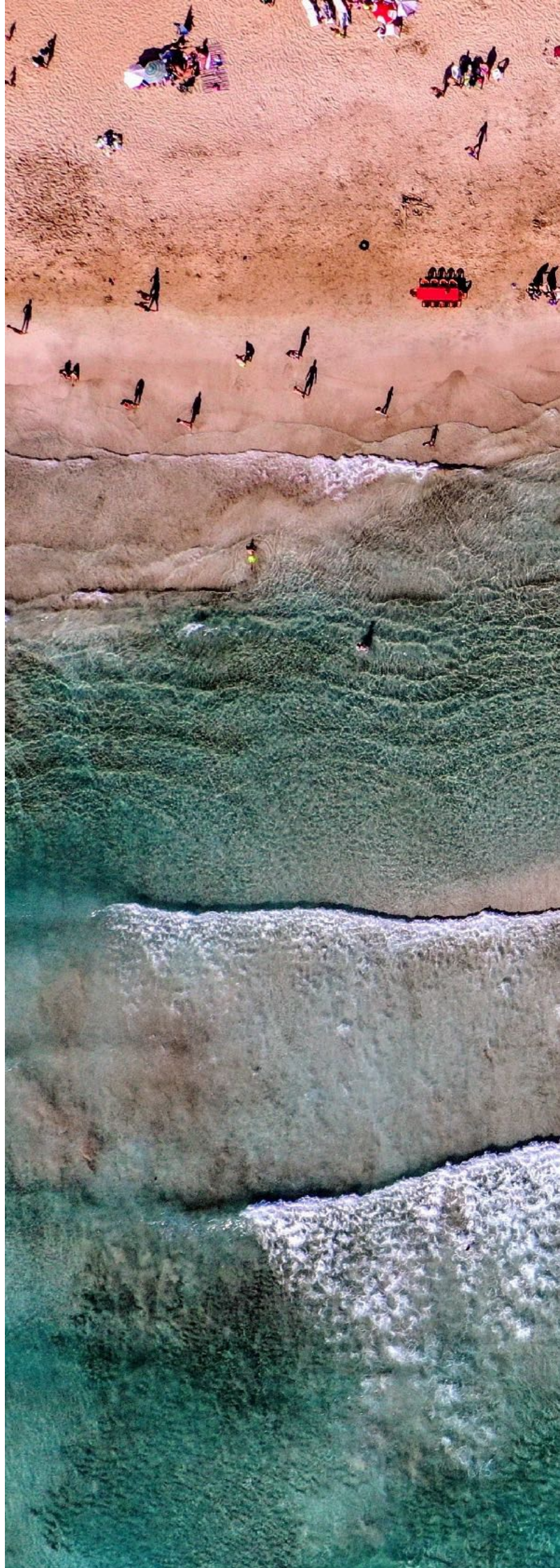
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APPROACH

To create this report, eight highly experienced experts were interviewed, with some individuals having 25 to 40 years of experience in their respective fields. Five of them work in the social side of the loop (refugees, immigration, social entrepreneurship, humanitarian crisis), one on the information side, and

two work at the intersection of these domains. One was a foreigner residing in Jordan with extensive regional experience, while another was originally from Jordan, but currently residing outside.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each expert, inviting them to use futures thinking to explore key themes with regards to the loop in their country. These semi-structured interviews were analyzed for common themes, which we next grouped into building blocks for scenarios for possible futures of social cohesion in an age of mis- and disinformation in Jordan (Part 3 of the report). These building blocks were then developed by a scenario writer into two different narratives (scenarios) of how social cohesion and mis-/disinformation could unfold into the future in the country (Part 1 of the report). These preliminary scenarios provide a starting point for shared systems understanding, which will be further elaborated through subsequent steps in the process in each country.

1.SCENARIOS

SHARED REALITIES PROJECT
[social cohesion and resilience in an age of information disorder]

1. SCENARIOS

Scenarios are stories about what could happen over the coming years based on the current reality and the dynamics around key certainties and uncertainties. They are not forecasts or predictions of what will happen. Neither are they visions, preferences, or recommendations of what should happen.

In a complex situation scenario development can be helpful as a way to lift the gaze beyond the current reality and to broaden perspectives beyond the most probable or feared trajectory.

Scenarios can help to expand the imagination, to discover different possibilities, and to restore a sense of hope and agency.

Further, considering different scenarios about the future allows for exploring the full space of future potential, without requiring agreement and without committing to specific positions. Scenarios enable us to deal with the reality that – although we cannot predict or control the future – we can work with and influence it.

The scenarios presented in this report are anchored in participants' understandings of and perspectives on the current situation of social cohesion and information ecosystems in Jordan. They offer different stories of how the future could play out between the present moment and the year 2030. These stories are neither the most healthy nor the most harmful scenarios that stakeholders in the country could imagine, but they are plausible scenarios of what the future could look like, based on this group of participants' knowledge, experience, and insight.

The scenarios aim to be relevant, challenging, credible, and clear. Their purpose is to support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities faced by Jordanian society and to stimulate dialogue and action among actors involved in different ways with Jordan.

In particular, the scenarios are intended to help people explore the question:

"What systemic factors, if changed, could shift the loop between social-cohesion and information from a harmful one to a healthier one?"

SCENARIO 1: A HEALTHIER LOOP

SCENARIO ESSENCE: STABILITY, GOVERNMENT OPENNESS, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, EDUCATION

In the world of the healthier future, in 2030, Jordan is a country of relative stability and prosperity. Other countries in the region remain turbulent, but Jordan continues to have a stable government. Though high levels of unemployment - especially youth unemployment - remain challenging, most people living in Jordan are able to get by.

This stability has been leveraged to further build Jordan's tourism industry. Christian holy sites have been further developed as tourist destinations, leading to some increases in the job market and economic participation.

Although unemployment remains a challenge, the increase in tourism, an increase in women's participation in the economy, and effective use in technology (including AI) are creating new job opportunities and have generated some improvement in employment numbers, but the official unemployment rate remains around 20%. At the same time, there is a strong entrepreneurial culture and network that is providing solutions and innovating.

Jordanian businesses, and the Jordanian government are investing in civil society initiatives. While international donors continue to provide some funds, there is a greater sense of agency and ownership of the future by Jordanians, and less sense of dependency. In this hopeful climate, Jordanians living abroad begin to return home, and the trend of emigration has stopped.
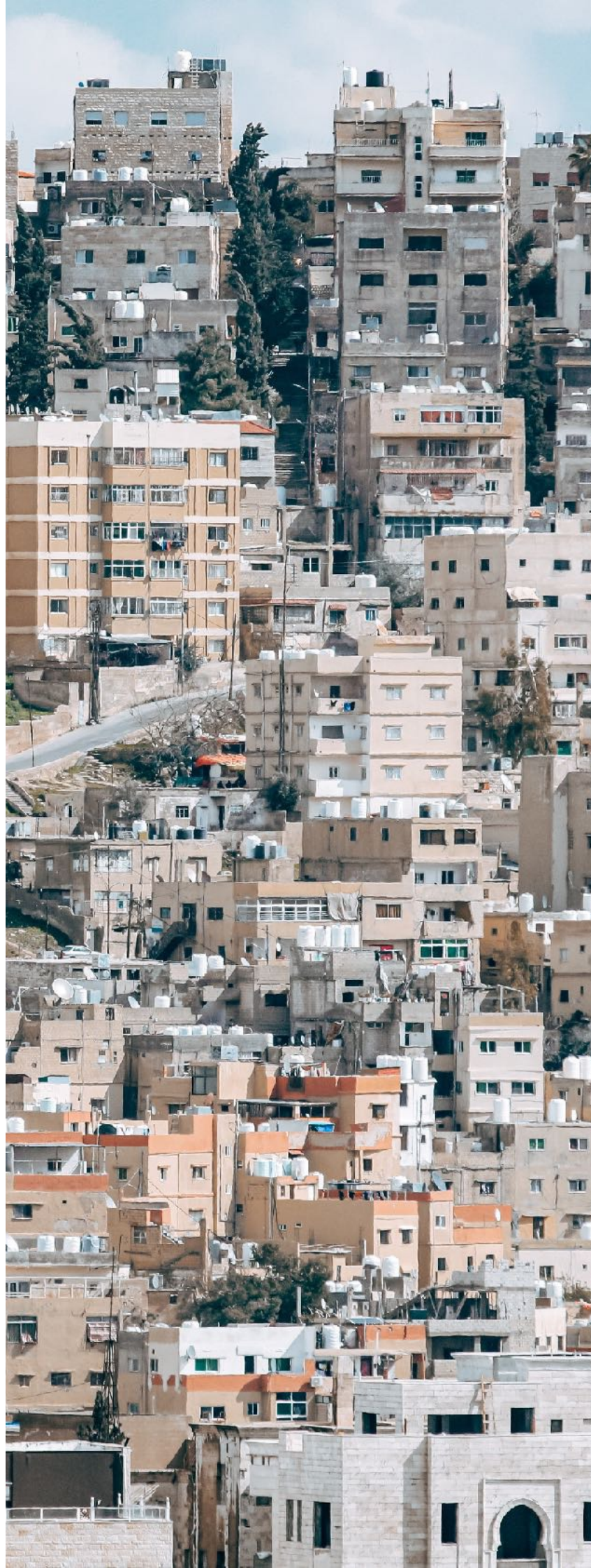
Despite its fears that this might lead to situations that could shake the new-found stability the country is enjoying, the government has decided to allow more openness in communication. To that end, there are policy changes in a range of areas that begin to create some limited but positive impacts. For example, changes to censorship policies and policies restricting freedom of the press lead to less self-censorship among journalists and create a more open and critical public dialogue. Charges of government corruption emerge in this more open information space, initially decreasing trust in the government. However, actions to respond to charges and address corruption along with other governance improvements start to build trust in the government. These changes and others enable more active public dialogue on key social issues and challenges. Because it is now possible to communicate and advocate more openly, civil society becomes increasingly effectiveness in addressing key social issues.

In addition, constitutional changes and judicial reform are improving the rights of women. As a result, women's participation in all domains of life increases. While women continue to face a great deal of harassment online, there is now sometimes effective legal action taken against egregious threats. The continued presence of harassment and trolling means that some women continue to restrain their online activities and public profile. However, feeling bolstered by support from many sides, many women also chose to engage fully in public life. Narratives and activities to build healthy masculinity are also becoming more common.

Advocacy for rights and inclusion for people with special needs leads to their increasing participation in education and the economy. Wide spread empowering narratives also lead to greater acceptance of this form of diversity.

There is joint and coordinated action to mitigate the impacts of water scarcity and climate change impacts. This includes campaigns and education to encourage people to connect with nature, and to grow their own food. As a result, though water resources are strained, they are managed well enough to mitigate negative impacts on peoples' wellbeing. Further, in many parts of the country, people are gardening and growing their own food more. As a result, food security improves, along

with wellbeing and a sense of agency.

There have been a number of developments and shifts in the information ecosystem in Jordan in the years leading up to 2030. Now well trained, Jordan's journalists are effectively holding government accountable, providing reliable information, and taking an active role in diffusing tensions and conflicts through their reporting. For their part, and in contrast to past practices, large-scale media outlets now promote empathy and engagement with their reporting,

especially during national and regional moments of tension.

Activities to improve critical thinking and media and information literacy are reaching many people across the country have led to improved information behaviors among many groups, especially youth. Fact checking and moderation are present on large media and social media platforms, and there are a number of civil society fact checking activities. Many people accept fact checking results. The global social media platforms have changed their algorithms to reduce their polarizing

influence. While harmful information continues to circulate across the information ecosystem, many people now pause and reflect before they share information, helping to reduce the scale and speed with which harmful information spreads.

Despite this, public discourse remains tense and often divisive on many issues, especially along the lines of conservative and liberal politics and values. There are some competing narratives with regards to the history of the country, but these exist in pockets and do not drive major divisions in society.

A large number of youth are engaging in programmes that promote empathy, self-knowledge, civic engagement, community contribution, and effective communication. These youth are a source of action and hope, and they promote and engage in dialogue in online and offline spaces. Their engagement provides a tempering and connecting influence in the information spaces where they engage. Some are also being trained in digital skills and creating new digital tools that are helping to prevent abuse and bullying online, and to promote improved access and engagement. There is also a strong youth voice for action on Palestine, including demands for increased dialogue about how to address, in the long term, the needs of Palestinians in Jordan and in the Palestinian territories. There is growing hope that there may be a desirable solution for the challenges facing Palestinians.

In this climate, messages of inclusion and solidarity increasingly spread, and refugees and migrants are included in society more and more. While they do not have the full rights of Jordanian citizens, they have rights to basic services and are provided with work permits, permitted to own property. Working in their fields of expertise enables them to increase their contributions to the economy and improve their economic integration.. They are welcomed in many social spheres, and in sports and cultural activities their civil society organizations have a welcomed voice.

While the world of a healthier future is one where there is hope and conditions are largely improving, there remain plenty of challenges. Divisions, mistrust, misinformation, harassment, and inequality persist. At the same time, there is action by many towards a better future and hope that such a future is possible.

The question is, will it be realized?

SCENARIO 2:
A MORE HARMFUL LOOP

SCENARIO ESSENCE: ANGER, CLOSURE, MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION, REPRESSION

In the world of the more harmful future, in 2030, people in Jordan are more susceptible to narratives that stoke feelings of division, mistrust, anger and violence. Marginalization and exclusion are more prevalent, fueled in part by the increased migration into Jordan resulting from regional instability.

Tourism is down, unemployment remains high, and with continuing increases to the cost of living people are struggling to meet their basic needs. With the continued global economic downturn, the government is challenged to meet all needs with the available resources. Criticism of the government by citizens is prevalent in social media, and there are protests in the streets. Some vocal critics are arrested and imprisoned, leading to further protests and further arrests.

In response to these pressures, the government becomes more closed. Government action and discourse focuses on foreign policy, curbing immigration, stopping crime, and obtaining support to deal with the economic crisis. Donor funds continue to be invested with the aim of supporting development. A downside of significant donor investment is that the

government is more attentive to donors than to actors within Jordan. As a result, civil society is relatively uninfluential.

The government implements country-wide bans many social media platforms and the use of certain artificial intelligence tools. This is done in an effort to reduce increasing criticism of the government that comes from civil society and the general public as well as high amounts of problematic information that circulate on social media, including hate speech, deep fakes, and misinformation, However, due to wide access to virtual private networks, these bans have little impact, and harmful and critical information continues to circulate easily and quickly.

Journalists in the country continue to self-censor significantly, and do not criticize the government, or discuss the military or religion. Journalists in Jordan are generally well trained in fact checking and verification. However, the vacuum of silence on many important issues leads to the easy spread of rumors and misinformation on topics related to the government.

Women who are engaged in politics or who are vocal about social issues are regularly harassed online, even receiving violent threats. This happens both on publicly visible social media, as well as with a larger volume happening through private messaging and other private channels. While advocates have sought legal action, there appears to be no legal ground to hold perpetrators accountable for this behavior, and social media

platforms continue to be unable to implement effective moderation of this phenomenon. As a result, women's participation in politics and in public life has decreased. This silencing continues to reinforce patriarchal tendencies in Jordanian society, leaving women with less access to rights, justice, opportunities, and resources, and to an increase in domestic violence.

The needs of people with special needs is barely discussed and as a result, there is minimal action to meet them.

Elevated levels of unemployment create an increase in exploitative practices, such as child labour. Youth are increasingly frustrated and angry that despite their effort and focus, they are not able to achieve their aspirations for their lives, or make ends meet. Images on social media and in films and television that show better lives contribute to this frustration and anger. Frustrated youth seek ways to numb, express, or avenge their feelings of injustice, driving an increase in drug use and radicalisation among youth.

While there have been some efforts at creating media literacy, and at inoculating youth against mis and dis-information and hate speech, these efforts have not been of an adequate scale to create a significant change in information behaviours. As a result, harmful information behaviours persist. These are fueled by tendencies towards anger and mistrust exacerbated by lack of opportunities and feelings of insecurity, fuel ongoing tension. Fact

checking and content moderation on public posts are implemented by the platforms themselves on most commonly used social media platforms, including on Arabic posts. This moderation is generally effective in slowing the spread of hate speech and mis-and disinformation on public posts. However, private messaging, WhatsApp, and other private channels remain unmonitored and continue to spread harmful threats, rumors, and narratives.

Additionally, narratives that blame refugees and migrants for the challenges of the country flow freely across the information ecosystem. However, calls to violence violate the community standards of most platforms and therefore promptly activate take-down procedures. Nevertheless, scapegoating narratives are pervasive across the entire information ecosystem (including both the media landscape and the information and communication practices of people). As a result, refugees and migrants face exclusion, discrimination, and sometimes violence in many domains. Some, especially Syrians, are forced to return to their country.

Many Jordanians also leave the country, looking for better opportunities and greater stability elsewhere. Many of those who leave are people with liberal politics and those with greater financial resources. Without this more liberal voice , public discourse becomes more conservative. Additionally, the exit of those people with more financial resources further contributes to the slow economy.

While the world of a more harmful future is one of worsening conditions, it is also one where there are many possibilities for something better.

Will Jordan manage to turn around this situation?

COMPARING THE SCENARIOS

The scenarios above describe two different contexts in which the loop between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation could play out in a future Jordan. The table below explores some of the implications of each scenario for how the loop could play out around the issues of key concern discussed by stakeholders.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
Inclusion and participation of key groups

HEALTHIER LOOP: Narratives about migrants and refugees which scapegoat these groups are present. However, they are balanced by narratives of solidarity. Spaces are created for dialogue and problem solving. Feelings of stress and frustration are balanced by feelings of hope and solidarity. As a result migrants and refugees are more included in society.

EXAMPLE: During an influx of new migrants, as frustrated citizens circulate scapegoating narratives, solidarity and problem solving narratives are also spread in ways that reach the same audiences. Conventional media and political leaders promote dialogue and shared problem solving. There is increased dialogue about how to address the challenge and increased inclusion of migrants.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Narratives about migrants and refugees which scapegoat these groups are prevalent and spread easily. Many groups within the population, feeling stressed and frustrated, embrace these narratives. As a result migrants and refugees are more excluded from society.

EXAMPLE: During an influx of new migrants, scapegoating narratives, spread primarily by frustrated citizens, circulate easily in social media bubbles, and are amplified in some conventional media. These lead to violent incidents in which migrants are the targets of attacks.

YOUTH

Inclusion and participation of key groups

HEALTHIER LOOP: Youth are increasingly well served by formal and informal education, including in domains such as media literacy and dialogue. The overall wave of civic engagement and openness to free expression create feelings of hope and empowerment. Youth are engaging in their communities, in entrepreneurship, in activism, and dialogue.

EXAMPLE: Following an earthquake youth jump into action. They use social media platforms to organize effective emergency responses, including helping those most affected, who are refugees living in camps. They work in collaboration with the government efforts. They provide food to the displaced and organize a platform to connect the displaced with people who open their homes. Emergency funds from international donors are used to rebuild quickly through local enterprises which hire youth.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Youth have poor access to education and jobs. At the same time, social media feeds them images of others living better lives. Narratives which blame migrants and refugees for the poor economic conditions are easily received by a largely agitated young population.

EXAMPLE: Following an earthquake there is little local action. Many victims receive little to no support until international humanitarian actors are fully activated. On social media there are complaints that circulate quickly among youth that migrants and refugees will receive the limited humanitarian support, leaving displaced Jordanians to suffer. This claim is untrue. Regardless, this leads to pressure by youth to ensure that Jordanians are taken care of first.

WOMEN

Inclusion and participation of key groups

HEALTHIER LOOP: Constitutional changes, improvements to social media moderation, and increased openness to civic engagement, and improving economy leads to increased participation by women in society, improved rights, and increased wellbeing.

EXAMPLE: In a municipal election a woman who is running for office is persistently harassed online. When faked compromising photos of her are released, there is a large movement of support of her online, which opens a larger national dialogue on gender equity and women's rights. Politicians articulate support of changes to ensure gender equity and launch a commission. She wins the race and becomes a leader in the movement for gender equity.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Government repression, social media platforms that allow for private harassment, and lack of economic opportunities leave women with less access to rights, justice, opportunities, and resources, and to an increase in domestic violence.

EXAMPLE: In a municipal election a woman who is running for office is persistently harassed online. When faked compromising photos of her are released, there is significant coverage in local and even national media of the incident, some of which casts doubt on her version of the story. There is little support for her, and she drops out of the race, dispirited.

PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Inclusion and participation of key groups

HEALTHIER LOOP: Advocacy, messages of solidarity, and subsequent action lead to greater inclusion of people with special needs in many domains of society.

EXAMPLE: A new education policy, which includes a section on the inclusion of people with special needs is widely consulted on through digital platforms and in-person consultations. The new policy is lauded as a significant step forward by advocates for people with special needs.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: The challenges of people with special needs are largely undiscussed. When in social and traditional media there are messages of advocacy, they are largely silenced

EXAMPLE: A new education policy is passed with no consultation. It does not include any measures for meeting the needs of people with special needs. Some critical messages on social media are censored. Others are met with disdain by people who say that the education system is not useful for anyone.

SHARED REALITIES PROJECT
[social cohesion and resilience in an age of information disorder]

EXAMINING THE SYSTEMIC DRIVERS PRESENT IN EACH SCENARIO

	Healthier Loop	More Harmful Loop
What patterns would repeat? What trends would we see over time?	• Inclusion and empowerment of women, youth, refugees and migrants, and people with special needs • Increasing employment • Return of some who had left • Increasing Trust	• Social exclusion of vulnerable and already marginalized groups • Repression • Violence • Difficulty meeting basic needs • Scapegoating of migrants and refugees • Emigration • Corruption
What are the structures that cause the patterns in this scenario?	• Government transparency • Justice system holding people accountable • Widespread training and education on key information topics for journalists, youth, and the general population • Constitutional changes for women's rights • Social media algorithms that reduce polarization • Access to financing for entrepreneurial initiatives • Freedom of expression • Rule of law	• Government censorship • Forced return of refugees • Strong enforcement of consequences for criminal action • Bans of social media platforms • Journalistic self-censorship • Algorithms that amplify division • Ineffective justice system
What are the beliefs, values, and assumptions that underlie the structures and patterns in this scenario?	• Discussing problems will lead to their solution • We can solve our challenges • We should be be empathetic with each other and try to understand one another • We should care for the environment	• Open dialogue and information lead to instability • There is not enough for everyone • Someone else is at fault and needs to solve our problems • We have so many problems, we can't worry about all of them
What are the traumas that persist and show up in this scenario?	• Scarcity	• Scarcity

2. LEVERAGE POINTS

2. LEVERAGE POINTS

"These are places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything."

— Donella Meadows

Following the presentation of these scenarios to a group of Jordanian stakeholders, the stakeholders were asked to identify leverage areas which, if shifted, could lead to a healthier, rather than more harmful loop. They did this by looking at the structure and beliefs and values levels of the Iceberg system maps above. The stakeholders identified six leverage areas of focus that they believe could help to shift the loop:

education, economic empowerment, freedom of the press, government transparency, inclusive national identity, and rule of law

Participants believe that cross-sectoral collaborative approaches would be needed in order to make progress across each of these leverage areas. They noted that the political leadership of the

country, including the Prime Minister and Parliament, can catalyze significant progress quickly through implementing changes. They also noted that civil society has a significant and important role to play in advocating for changes, and for innovating approaches that can effectively be implemented. Academia also has an important role to play in Jordan, in both research and in contributing to an informed population. The private sector has a role in supporting change, the media has a significant role in helping to inform people and to share messages, and international actors can bring expertise and knowledge from elsewhere. Further, they noted that showing action and changes on the ground would be critical to improving the trust that people in Jordan feel towards the government and the media.

LEVERAGE AREA 1: EDUCATION

The first leverage area that stakeholders identified for shifting the loop is reforming or improving education. As described in sections 1 (Scenarios) and 3 (building blocks), one fundamental way to shift the loop is to advance key skills and conditions through both the formal and informal education system. The skills to be advanced cited by participants include skills in: communication, peacebuilding, dismantling stereotypes, and advancing active citizenship. These changes would ideally be implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and civil society. They noted

that training teachers and updating teaching materials would be among key strategies needed to succeed in educational reform, given that, if teachers don't agree with the topics being taught, they can undermine the effectiveness of the teaching. They also observed that the proposed educational changes could help to disrupt the spread of mis- and disinformation, would build greater capacity for critical thinking, and for engaging across differences.

LEVERAGE AREA 2: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The second area that stakeholders identified as key to shifting the loop is improving economic empowerment. In particular, they noted that moving the approach to economic growth from one which relies on grant money to one which focuses on investment could provide a more stable economic future. They also noted that the country would benefit from a focus, not only on reducing unemployment, but on increasing decent jobs that pay well, and on destigmatizing vocational jobs, which are currently available in the country. They noted that these changes would reduce the experience of economic exclusion, poverty, desperation, and which feeds scapegoating and other divisive narratives. The stakeholders noted that the Investment Ministry and Finance Committee would be important actors in advancing this shift, and would need to collaborate with the private sector in order to create effective changes to the investment environment.

LEVERAGE AREA 3: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND LEVERAGE AREA 4: GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

The third and fourth areas that stakeholders identified as key to shifting the loop are closely related; freedom of the press and government transparency. They described both as key to creating accountability, to promoting engaged citizenship, and fighting extremism. They also noted that the absence of reliable, timely information relevant to the key concerns of people's lives generates mistrust in the government and other institutions,- and that mis- and disinformation often rush in to fill the void. This often includes information that can feed a more harmful loop. As such, creating an open information environment, in which journalists enjoy protections necessary for a more free and open press, could help them address such unmet information needs, , hold the government to account, and thereby contribute to the development of trust among Jordanians. Stakeholders saw the government as the key actor in advancing these changes.

LEVERAGE AREA 5: INCLUSIVE NATIONAL IDENTITY

The fifth area that stakeholders identified as key to shifting the loop is advancing a shared and inclusive national identity.

They noted that the country is, in fact, very diverse, in terms of religion, gender, country of origin, sexuality, and belief. At the same time, there is not a strong national narrative of being a diverse nation and of equal backgrounds regardless of identity. They shared that the advancement of a shared national identity that can encompass these differences could be very helpful in advancing the social cohesion side of the loop.

LEVERAGE AREA 6: RULE OF LAW

The sixth area that stakeholders identified as key to shifting the loop is improving the rule of law. Stakeholders noted that there are many laws which are vague or provide loopholes, which creates the sense that there is no real accountability and undermines a sense of trust in the system of government. They also noted that laws are inconsistently applied. They shared that creating a context in which rule of law is consistent is key to ensuring that people are treated justly, and that people can advocate for changes. Further, they noted that women in particular tend to be negatively affected by the lack of rule of law, which constrains their wider participation in society. They noted that putting in place consistent rule of law would enable better advocacy and action in a variety of domains relevant to shifting the loop. They saw stronger separation of powers within the government as a key step towards

improving rule of law, in addition to improving the way that laws are written.

3. BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE SCENARIOS

SHARED REALITIES PROJECT
[social cohesion and resilience in an age of information disorder]

3. BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE SCENARIOS

The two scenarios written above, of the healthier and more harmful loop, were chosen among the many that could be. These scenarios are neither the most healthy nor the most harmful that stakeholders in the country could imagine, but rather aim to reveal both helpful and harmful dynamics. In so doing they illuminate some features and dynamics while leaving others unexplored. For example, in both stories, there is regional turmoil, and there are well trained journalists. Neither story describes what is happening in other countries in the region specifically, nor the dynamics of elections or role of the monarchy.

The following building blocks are shared as an inspiration to guide the discovery of other possible stories.

The building blocks of these scenarios are the key concerns of people, what they are most troubled about with regards to the future, and the key drivers that will determine the direction of the future. They create a foundation from which we might tell other stories about possible futures. They also provide inspiration for thinking about and identifying other concerns and drivers.

The first building block is stakeholders' key concerns. These are the things that they care most about when thinking about the future of their country. Stakeholders identified issues related to social cohesion, such as trust, the inclusion and participation of key groups in society, as well as conflict, stability and violence as their main areas of concern.

The second building block is systemic drivers. These are the social, technical, political, environmental, and economic forces that will influence the future of the things that stakeholders care most about. The key systemic drivers that they identified include:

- What happens in the regional context
- The actions or inactions of key institutions
- The extent to which key needs are or are not met
- What narratives and information are circulating
- How key populations engage with the information and ideas that they are presented with

Throughout the following section, brief summaries of the perspectives that

stakeholders shared are provided. Some illustrative quotes from their interviews are also provided. A wider range of illustrative quotes is provided in the appendix.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: KEY CONCERNS

Stakeholders were asked about the key issues that they are concerned about when they think about the future of Jordan. The key themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in this section. Of all the key concerns they mentioned, several focused on social cohesion and inclusion.

1. INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN SOCIETY

Stakeholders shared that they are very concerned about how key groups will experience the future of Jordan. The groups that they expressed concern about were: Women, Youth, Refugees and migrants, People with special needs.

For all four of these groups they expressed concerns about economic participation and employment. For women, stakeholders expressed concern about their future participation in government, access to justice, their health, and their general status. With

"The challenges for refugees are limited economic opportunities, and social services. The question is whether the country is able to welcome them. Do we accept everyone equally and in the same way. Is Jordan capable of providing equal opportunities for Jordanians and refugees alike?"

regards to youth they expressed additional concern about how the younger generation is being educated, and their level of hope, trust, and attitudes. With regards to migrants and refugees they were concerned as to whether the society would make space for including them. With regards to people with special needs, stakeholders were also concerned about their inclusion in the education system.

"Many Jordanians are not connected or sharing in a feeling of social cohesion. Will people recognize that we cannot live alone and need the added value of these other people, and can live peacefully alongside one another."

Stakeholders also noted that the population of Christians in Jordan is shrinking, and that there are tensions with regards to their inclusion in society. Stakeholders also questioned the general level of social cohesion in the country.

2. CONFLICT, STABILITY, AND VIOLENCE

The second major concern expressed by stakeholders with regards to the future, is how conflict will be managed, and how much stability there will be. Stakeholders described Jordanian society as having some divides and tensions that have largely been managed peacefully. However, they see the potential for these divides and tensions to amplify, leading to damaging conflict, including violence.

"Youth can't find jobs and they're in the streets. You see a lot of drug abuse, you see a lot of frustration and anger at universities. We see students fighting against each other, which did not happen in the past. And when we know what the reasons are, we know it's really the social challenges, the frustration, it's lack of hope, lack of opportunities."

"Things don't seem to change, and I think that a lot of youth are losing trust in the government. I don't see it drifting towards extremism, but it could happen."

BUILDING BLOCK 2: SYSTEMIC DRIVERS

Stakeholders were also asked about what will influence the future of the social-cohesion and information loop in their country. Said differently, they were asked what systemic factors would drive the future of the loop in one direction or another. The most influential and most uncertain drivers are those that most differentiate how possible futures may turn out, and are thus key building blocks for scenarios.

Stakeholders identified many drivers that will influence how the future of social cohesion and mis and disinformation might unfold. Many of these drivers are interlinked and influence one another. The key uncertain drivers that they identified are:

- Regional politics and stability
- Government policies, programmes, and actions
- Economic health
- Environmental threats
- What information is circulating
- The influence of that information

SHARED REALITIES PROJECT
[social cohesion and resilience in an age of information disorder]

REGIONAL POLITICS AND STABILITY

Stakeholders see conditions in countries surrounding Jordan as being highly influential on its possible futures. They see that instability in neighboring countries:

- Sometimes poses an existential threat
- Leads to further in-migration of refugees
- Can fuel divisions within the country
- Can draw Jordanians into violence

Uncertainties that they raised include:

How will instability in other countries affect our future? They noted that if there is instability in neighboring countries it influences the stability of Jordan.

Will we receive more refugees from conflict in the region? One of the ways in which instability in the region impacts on Jordan is by driving people to seek safety during conflict, leading to further increases in the number of refugees in the country.

What will happen to Palestine? And how will it affect us? Of particular concern for them were conditions in Palestine and Syria, both of which have contributed large numbers of refugees in the country. Further, they noted that there are many people in Jordan who have strong engagement feelings and engagement in the ongoing tensions and conflict between Israel and Palestine.

"What is the narrative and attitude towards what is happening in Palestine and its impact on us? It's concerning because you have strong groups of Jordanians and Palestinians who are ready to fight and are ready to continue to defend. There are moves to normalize the regional dynamics, including ties between Saudi Arabia and Syria, UAE and Syria, and possibly Israel and Saudi Arabia. What does that mean for Jordan? And there are also youth who are strongly against this normalization. They feel that the government doesn't represent what people want."

GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMMES, AND ACTIONS

Stakeholders described government action, as well as the relationship between government and people as being a key driver in determining the direction of the future of the loop. While both local and national governments were considered important actors, stakeholders put more emphasis on the importance of the actions of the

national government. They noted several important roles that government action and inaction plays in influencing the future of social cohesion and information.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

Will the people trust the government? Stakeholders noted that there is currently variable trust in the government. One specific element of mistrust that they flagged is with regards to corruption.

Will the government create conditions for healthy information flows? Stakeholders described Jordan as a context in which there is censorship, both imposed and self-imposed. They also noted that government regulation of which platforms can and cannot be present in the country is not significantly impactful. They noted, for example, that Tik Tok has been banned in the country, but that many people continue to access it using VPNs.

"Current media laws are very restrictive. There is a lot of control over trying to build or have your own platform or website. Because of this, journalists apply a lot of self-censorship. Access to information is always a challenge as a result of the restrictions of government on the access to information."

Will the government act to make change? Stakeholders noted that as a centralized government the government has the ability to make change, They wondered if those changes would be implemented.

"As a monarchy and a constitutional monarchy, the solution lies at the top because this is where all the decisions are made. The political will has to be there to make all these things happen, which would be freedom of the press, freedom of expression, access to opportunities, to good education, women's rights, and all that. It can be done."

Will governance be inclusive? Stakeholders expressed the belief that greater inclusion in governance would have a significant positive impact on the future of social cohesion, but they described a context in which civic participation is limited and often difficult.

Will the government be repressive? Stakeholders noted that the regime does not have a history of violence, but that there are incidents of repression, including political prisoners. They wondered if that would diminish or increase.

What will foreign policy be? Stakeholders also wondered if foreign policy would be pragmatic and focused on serving the interests of the people.

ECONOMIC HEALTH

Stakeholders expressed great uncertainty about the economic future of Jordan. They could name economic assets and possibilities, such as increasing tourism, growing the entrepreneurial sector, and an educated, energetic, and young population. At the same time, they shared doubts about whether these possibilities would come to fruition.
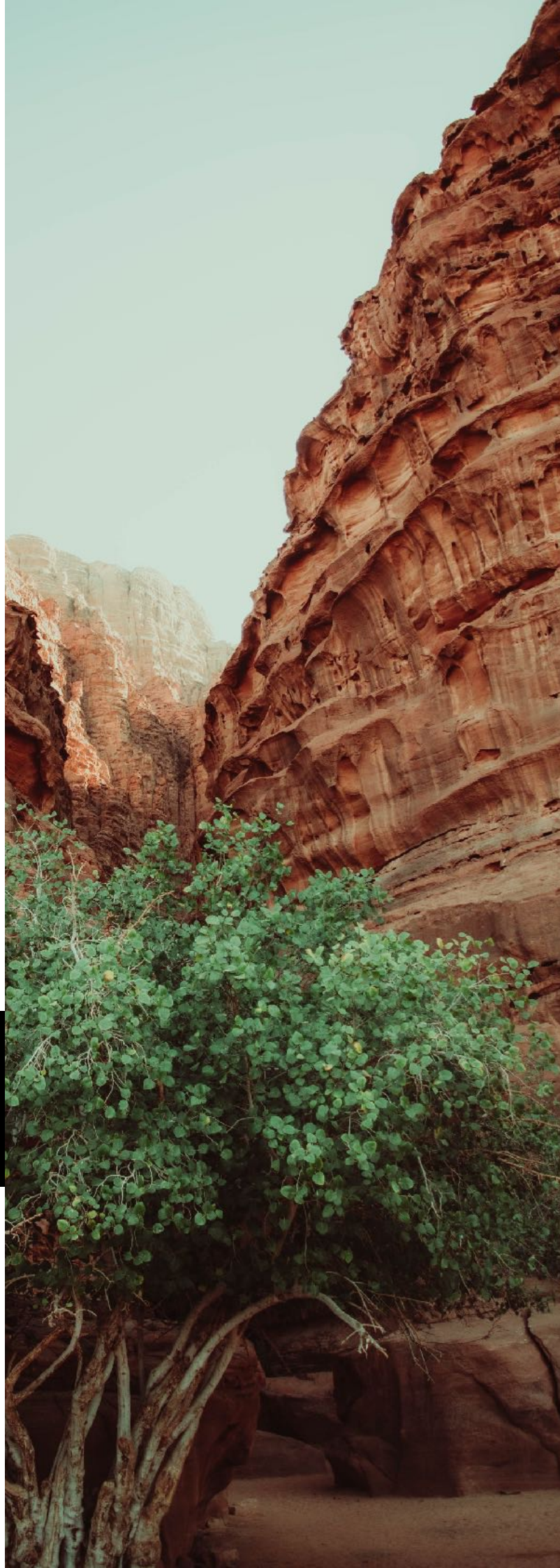
Will Jordan effectively leverage its assets to improve its economy? Among the particular opportunities that stakeholders named were cultural assets that could generate income from tourism.

Will people get out from under their debts? Stakeholders noted that the institutions of the country as well as the people are largely in debt, or dependent on grants. They wondered if there would be changes to help people to become more financially independent.

> *"Jordan has cultural heritage, deserts, dead sea, touristy places. Will they be properly presented, sorted out, and promoted worldwide?"*

Will people be able to meet their needs? Given the poor economic conditions in the country, region, and globally, they wondered if people would be able to meet their basic needs.

Will there be investment? Will there be donor funds? Stakeholders wondered what kinds of funds would be available,

and in what quantities.. They wondered if the country would attract investors and if donors continue to provide funds.

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stakeholders expressed concerns about access to key resources in Jordan. In addition to concerns about access to financial resources and jobs, stakeholders also shared concerns about the likelihood of water shortages in Jordan, the cost of desalination, and of the possible impacts of climate change on the country. They also shared visions of the positive possibilities of engaging with nature.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

How will we adapt to climate change? Stakeholders wondered how climate change it might impact on Jordan, and how the country would adapt to it.

How will we deal with water scarcity? Stakeholders noted that the country is already water-scarce, and that it does not control its own water sources. They wondered how this would affect the country.

> *"This is a country where we don't have any natural resources. Water is a big issue. I would like to see our water problem solved. We're going thirsty because water resources are controlled by other countries. Israel controls our water resources and Syria does that too. So we don't have it unless we desalinate, but desalination is costly."*

Will we be healed by nature? Stakeholders observed that one of the key elements needed for social cohesion is healing, and a feeling of connection. They wondered if connecting with nature might be part of creating that healing and connection.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE PRESENT

Stakeholders described the importance of information in driving different possible futures in Jordan. They described two elements of information ecosystems as being key to possible futures:

1. What information and narratives are present and circulating, and
2. How influential this information and these narratives are.

With regards to what information and narratives circulate, stakeholders raised the following uncertainties:

Will there be freedom of the press? Stakeholders observed that the media can play an important role in advancing a better future for the country. At the same time, they noted that currently the press is constrained, and there is a high level of censorship.

Will technology improve or undermine the availability of good quality information and analysis? Stakeholders noted that there is very high access to media technology with the vast majority having internet access. They also were observing that development in technology has the potential to create a healthier or more harmful loop. Specific technologies that they wondered about included artificial intelligence and algorithms on social media platforms.

"The elite youth have access to opportunities. And then there are middle class, lower middle class young people who are responsible, hard working, focused, but they can barely crack the surface towards opportunities. And the more that they are exposed to social media, the bigger the appetite they have in terms of expectations and aspirations. But they have very little means. What they are seeing is a make believe image of reality that doesn't really exist."

"What makes me optimistic is that journalists are also developing material and tools that will help people to get more prepared. But we needed to make it available to everyone."

Will there be regulations that effectively manage harmful information? Stakeholders wondered if and how regulations by the government and policies and approaches by social media companies might play a helpful role in shifting the loop. They also observed that some rules and regulations, such as the banning of specific social media platforms, were unlikely to produce effective change, given that people can access the platforms using virtual private networks.

Will information professionals effectively create reliable information? Stakeholders observed that there are many qualified media professionals in Jordan, and they wondered if those professionals would be able to create a context in which there is reliable information.

"In the capital where there is higher education, there is no fear of self expression. But when you go to the suburbs, there is fear due to the rural/ tribal system."

Will social media create greater expectations and frustration? Stakeholders wondered about the expectations and aspirations that social media is creating for people, and if those would generate feelings of frustration.

Will helpful information and narratives be more present? Stakeholders could imagine that more positive messages and narratives could positively influence society. They wondered if more positive narratives would be present and circulating.

Will people express their needs and beliefs? Stakeholders noted that self censorship can and does happen, even without government action. They wondered if people would be influenced by social norms to not express their true needs or beliefs.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION AND NARRATIVES

When considering the potential influence of different information and narratives, stakeholders regarded the capabilities and skills of the population for discerning and engaging with information as playing a central role.

They also noted how important public opinion and perspectives are in influencing the direction of the country and peoples' behaviour.

How well-educated will people be? Stakeholders saw education as very important in influencing peoples' behavior, understanding, and hope. They emphasized the importance of education, both for youth and for the larger population, for advancing critical thinking, media literacy, mindset, and empathy.

> *"What is forming young peoples' beliefs? For example about gender roles, economics, beauty standards? Do they have the tools and skills to navigate online spaces? What new norms are being created?"*

Will potentially harmful information lead to harm? Stakeholders observed that harmful information can circulate widely, and lead to harmful action, but does not always do either. They wondered if mis-and disinformation would circulate widely and if it would influence peoples' behavior.

> *"Misinformation spreads in vacuums where there is a lack of information. We need to be proactive whenever or or available and vigilant because when a rumor starts, we need to respond immediately. Rumors spread with vast speed compared to the replies, the response,or whatever comes after that. So we have to provide the information. Once the information is there, we will not have any rumors."*

4. GAPS AND NEXT STEPS

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GAPS

This report summarizes and builds upon the perspectives of the group of stakeholders who were interviewed and engaged in this country-discovery phase of the Shared Realities process. The learning shared is intended only as a representation of the views of this group. It is neither a reflection of the extent of expertise and awareness on these issues in Jordan today, nor a technical assessment of information ecosystems in Jordan. Rather, it paints an initial picture of the challenges and concerns on the minds of these stakeholders in relation to the future of social cohesion in Jordan, the systemic drivers in view for them, and therefore what leverage areas seem relevant to address in an effort to work towards a more positive future for social cohesion from their perspective.

Mis- and disinformation play an inherent and central role in social cohesion and conflict dynamics.

This has taken on new dimensions in the context of rapidly evolving digital communication technologies which present new challenges related to the scale, scope and speed characterizing our information ecosystems. Many of the key global drivers involved in this are still unfamiliar or even invisible to many of us. Therefore, Shared Realities endeavors to support stakeholders in recognizing a fuller range of global drivers that may be shaping dynamics in their own context, so that they may form a more complete picture of the challenges and opportunities for addressing them.

To that end, this step in the Shared Realities Process is accompanied by a curriculum, which provides stakeholders with a basic introduction to some of the key global drivers animating the loop between social cohesion and mis and dis-information. (Not all stakeholders participated in the curriculum.)

These are:

- Social cohesion
- Information ecosystems
- Information economy
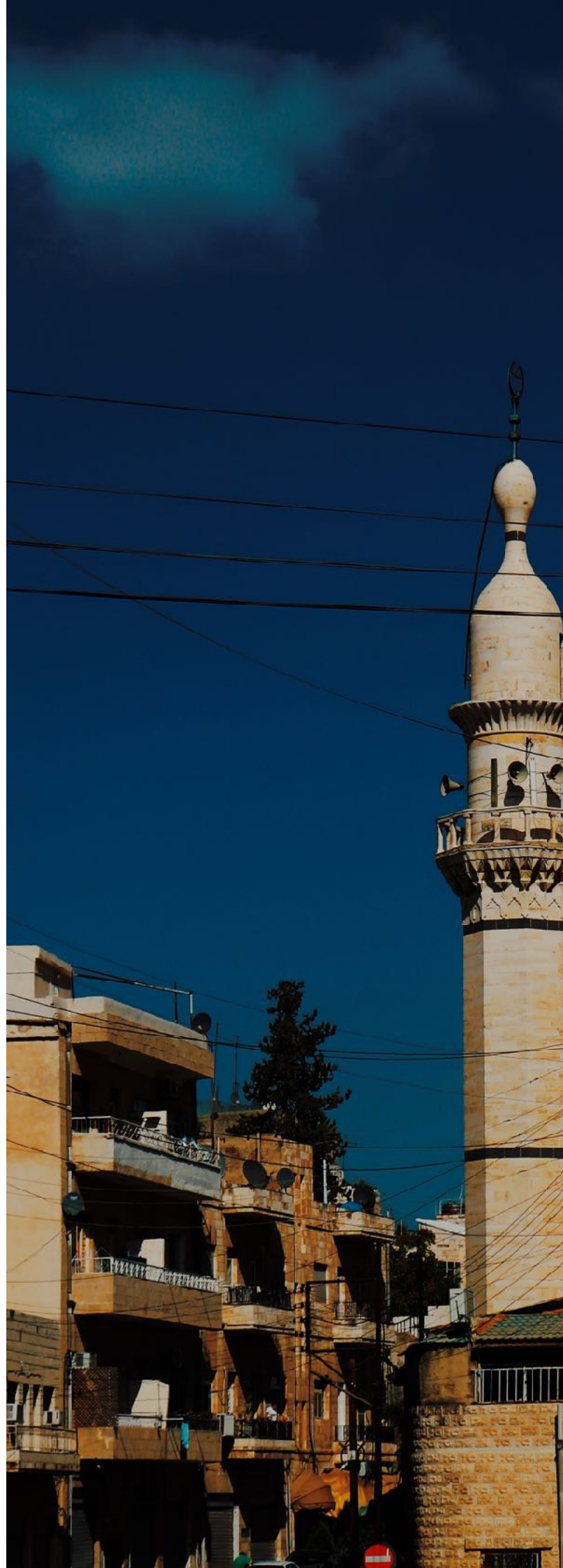- Data and Technology
- Geopolitics

These drivers were selected for the curriculum because they are both central and highly consequential to the dynamics of concern, but often either unfamiliar or invisible due to their highly technical, complex, and often concealed nature.

Some of these drivers emerged in discussion during this learning phase with stakeholders in Jordan, while others

did not. This could be for many reasons (including: the expertise, particular interests, or degree of awareness of the individuals involved; the small number of interviews conducted; the need to use an on-line and interview-driven approach; or the design of discussion guides, among other possible explanations). Nevertheless, these gaps point to useful areas for further learning and exploration with stakeholders in this context, in support of building pathways to a more positive future.

Of the drivers covered by the curriculum, social cohesion and related dynamics featured very clearly in the interviews, with attention being given to issues around inclusion, shared identity, trust and transparency.

Information ecosystems were substantively explored as a driver with a special focus on channels and information supply. People's unmet information needs and unanswered fears, and the resulting frustrations and suspicions, were also highlighted as fertile ground for mis and disinformation in Jordan. Stakeholders spoke about the crucial role of journalists in society, and the conditions (both regulatory and otherwise) which shape both journalistic practice and the nature of content produced. Further, useful reflection was given to the different information and communication practices among different groups, with mentions of the influence of "the tribal system," and of the role of digital literacy skills for both shaping such practices, and mitigating vulnerabilities to mis and disinformation.

Geopolitics were touched upon in terms of the influence of conditions in neighboring countries, but not in relation to mis and disinformation dynamics. The role of the state in Jordan itself featured more prominently in stakeholders' concerns about mis and disinformation. These are both important areas to explore further with stakeholders.

Although data and technology are indeed central drivers of the loop, these were not a focus of this discussion for the stakeholders engaged, though some speculation was voiced regarding the future of AI and how this could impact many things, including the loop. This would be a crucial area to explore further to gain a better sense both of what is in awareness for stakeholders, and also how these drivers are influencing social cohesion in Jordan.

Finally, it is notable that the information economy did not emerge in discussion with the Jordanian stakeholders. It may be that we did not speak to stakeholders with knowledge and awareness of this particular domain. It would be useful to engage such expertise in future steps. If such a perspective does not yet exist, this would be a useful space to explore.

OUTCOMES

This initial phase of Shared Realities in Jordan has:

- Provided stakeholders with a way of visualizing and discussing a key and consequential set of harmful

dynamics in their context shaping the future of social cohesion in Jordan and explored these in relation to their key concerns;

- Engaged them in an initial systems analysis to begin identifying the events, patterns, structures, midsets animating those dynamics;
- Worked with them to begin identifying the drivers involved, and potential leverage points for shifting the feedback loop to a more healthy one.

This has resulted in an initial systems mapping that can provide a good basis for a deeper transformative scenarios process.

In addition, the process created a much needed opportunity for stakeholders from different backgrounds and with shared concerns to connect.

Some of them cited the value and encouragement this provided, and how these new connections were already leading to new ideas and potential collaborations.

NEXT STEPS

As noted earlier in the report, the scenarios described in this document are two of many possible futures for social cohesion in an age of mis-and disinformation in Jordan. Useful next steps would be to engage the interviewees and other stakeholders in deeper process in which, together, they can co-create an even more robust and illuminating view of the systems dynamics, and key leverage areas. From that, a solid foundation for collaborative scaling and innovation could lead to impactful and lasting solutions.

5. APPENDIX

5. APPENDIX: COMPLETE BUILDING BLOCKS SYNTHESIS

The foundation of this report is the perspectives that stakeholders shared in interviews. These interviews were rich conversations in which stakeholders shared their understanding, experience, and perspectives. This appendix The

The foundation of this report is the perspectives that stakeholders shared in interviews. These interviews were rich conversations in which stakeholders shared their understanding, experience, and perspectives. This appendix provides a broader set of quotes than those included in the report above. Readers who want a deeper understanding of how stakeholders see the loop, its current dynamics, and its possible futures will find a greater level of depth, and detail in this appendix.

Please note that because interviews were conducted in several languages, some have been translated. Additionally, in some cases, these quotes have been slightly edited to clarify their meaning. However, special care has been taken to ensure that in translating and editing, the meaning intended by the interviewee is not changed.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: KEY CONCERNS

Stakeholders were asked about the key issues that they are concerned about when they think about the future of

Jordan. The key themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in this section. Of all the key concerns they mentioned, several focused on social cohesion and inclusion.

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN SOCIETY

Stakeholders shared that they are very concerned about how key groups will experience the future of Jordan. The groups that they expressed concern about were:

- Women
- Youth
- Refugees and migrants
- People with special needs

For all four of these groups they expressed concerns about economic participation and employment.

"People are suffering and living with the minimum level of food, security, housing..."

"Whenever the government is officially announcing the unemployment rate (28% which is huge), at the same time the unofficial unemployment rate between the youth reaches up to 56%."

"How can we support women, minorities, refugees, asylum seekers, and people with special needs to be financially independent?"

"There is misinformation and disinformation because our social media is filled with a lot of anger. When you

have so many people unemployed and sitting at home, and engage on social media, fueled by their agitation."

For women, stakeholders expressed concern about their future participation in government, access to justice, their health, and their general status.

"Women are fighting battles and in courts and we see there's not enough justice in the courts and judges are biased most of the time towards men"

"How can we make sure women are included in the labor market, in leadership positions, at a level of policy and decision making?"

"Women are not treated as equals. Women are treated as second class citizens. Will women be treated as equal with men? Including in the constitution?"

With regards to youth they expressed additional concern about how the younger generation is being educated, and their level of hope, trust, and attitudes.

"Regarding women and gender roles, there are many youth who are more conservative than our grandparent's generation. These ideas are coming from home, the education system, and other places"

"The youth under 30 years old make up 60% of the population of this country. The future of the youth is the future of this country. The youth are very

frustrated. They have high unemployment rates, dissatisfaction and frustration, and increasing radicalization."

"Jordan has a very young population. There is endless energy potential for growth. It is frightening that there is so much unemployment. It's frustrating. What happens after frustration is anger. If we don't use this energy, they (youth) will use it somewhere else."

With regards to migrants and refugees they were concerned as to whether the society would make space for including them.

"The challenges for refugees are limited economic opportunities, and social services. The question is whether the country is able to welcome them. Do we accept everyone equally and in the same way. Is Jordan capable of providing equal opportunities for Jordanians and refugees alike?"

With regards to people with special needs, stakeholders were also concerned about their inclusion in the education system.

Stakeholders also noted that the population of Christians in Jordan is shrinking, and that there are tensions with regards to their inclusion in society.

"There is a great deal of discrimination against Christians, treating them differently, poorly. We need to keep them in Jordan. Some of them are leaving and they're becoming a really tiny, number, and that's unfortunate. And this is

happening also across the region. They're being driven out in Iraq, they're being driven out of Israel."

Stakeholders also questioned the general level of social cohesion in the country.

"Many Jordanians are not connected or sharing in a feeling of social cohesion. Will people recognize that we cannot live alone and need the added value of these other people, and can live peacefully alongside one another."

CONFLICT, STABILITY, AND VIOLENCE

The second major concern expressed by stakeholders with regards to the future, is how conflict will be managed, and how much stability there will be. Stakeholders described Jordanian society as having some divides and tensions that have largely been managed peacefully. However, they see the potential for these divides and tensions to amplify, leading to damaging conflict, including violence.

"I think there's a lot that can be done at the top and they have tried. The thing is that it's a balancing act between trying to progressive and also thinking about the conservative, sectors of society,"

"Youth can't find jobs and they're in the streets. You see a lot of drug abuse, you see a lot of frustration and anger at universities. We see students fighting against each other, which did not

happen in the past. And when we know what the reasons are, we know it's really the social challenges, the frustration, it's lack of hope, lack of opportunities."

"Things don't seem to change, and I think that a lot of youth are losing trust in the government. I don't see it drifting towards extremism, but it could happen."

BUILDING BLOCK 2: KEY INFLUENCES

Stakeholders were also asked about what will influence the future of the social-cohesion and information loop in their country. Said differently, they were asked what would drive the future of the loop in one direction or another. The most influential and most uncertain drivers are those that most differentiate how possible futures may turn out, and are thus key building blocks for scenarios.

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REGIONAL POLITICS AND STABILITY

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- Sometimes poses an existential threat
- Leads to further in-migration of refugees
- Can fuel divisions within the country
- Can draw Jordanians into violence

Uncertainties that they raised include:

How will instability in other countries affect our future?

"Jordan is in a very precarious position. We have Iraq on one side, and we have Syria on the other, and then Israel. We have been mainly fighting an existential battle the last decades. There is just no stability."

Will we receive more refugees from conflict in the region?

What will happen to Palestine? And how will it affect us?

"Israel continues to be a huge threat to Jordan. It is evicting Palestinians, it is becoming more aggressive, and so the peace solution is no longer, I think, on the table. So we could end up being the alternative homeland for the Palestinians, which means that

Palestinians would be losing their right to, to their own land. That is serious. And it can be threatening to the whole region."

"What is the narrative and attitude towards what is happening in Palestine and its impact on us? It's concerning because you have strong groups of Jordanians and Palestinians who are ready to fight and are ready to continue to defend. There are moves to normalize the regional dynamics, including ties between Saudi Arabia and Syria, UAE and Syria, and possibly Israel and Saudi Arabia. What does that mean for Jordan? And there are also youth who are strongly against this normalization. They feel that the government doesn't represent what people want."

"Last year with the movement of settlers into Sheik Jarrah, there was a huge wave of social media interaction and engagement. In Jordan, you had thousands of youth run to the borders ready to go in and fight."

GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMMES, AND ACTIONS

Stakeholders described government action, as well as the relationship between government and people as being a key driver in determining the direction of the future of the loop. While both local and national governments were considered important actors, stakeholders put more emphasis on the importance of the actions of the national government. They noted several important roles that government action

and inaction plays in influencing the future of social cohesion and information.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

Will the people trust the government?

Stakeholders noted that there is currently variable trust in the government. One specific element of mistrust that they flagged is with regards to corruption.

"We see a lot of corruption and there's a lot of perception of corruption as well, which can be destructive."

Will the government create conditions for healthy information flows?

Stakeholders described Jordan as a context in which there is censorship, both imposed and self-imposed.

"Current media laws are very restrictive. There is a lot of control over trying to build or have your own platform or website. Because of this, journalists apply a lot of self-censorship. Access to information is always a challenge as a result of the restrictions of government on the access to information."

They also noted that government regulation of which platforms can and cannot be present in the country is not significantly impactful. They noted, for example, that Tik Tok has been banned in the country, but that many people continue to access it using VPNs.

Will the government act to make change?

"The government talks the talk, but do they walk the walk? There has been so much work in changing ministries, policies, institutions. It requires years of work to shift the way that those institutions operate to have meaningful impact on people's daily lives."

"As a monarchy and a constitutional monarchy, the solution lies at the top because this is where all the decisions are made. The political will has to be there to make all these things happen, which would be freedom of the press, freedom of expression, access to opportunities, to good education, women's rights, and all that. It can be done."

Will governance be inclusive?

Stakeholders expressed the belief that greater inclusion in governance would have a significant positive impact on the future of social cohesion, but they described a context in which civic participation is limited and often difficult.

"There are conservatives who demonize civil society, which is also very strong in Jordan, by the way. These conservatives demonize civil society and make it difficult for civil society to operate."

 "Continued marginalization of civil society organizations, women, and youth, will lead to negative outcomes; increasing frustration, increasing

violence, increasing discrimination, increasing hate."

"Public opinion impacts the regulations, but also how refugees are accepted."

"There are attempts to try to make national governance more inclusive. It requires a bottom up shift. People will resist changes. Making change requires being conflict sensitive to different key players to ensure that they are on board."

"Political participation is very important. It's important that people feel they can belong to political parties. Political parties are no longer banned and but people still feel apprehensive about joining political parties because in the past if you did join a political party, you couldn't find job. Even at universities, students are not allowed to join student councils and or if they did, they were not allowed to talk politics or religion or anything. They should be able to express themselves."

"The donor-driven mindset is embedded in day to day life. There is codependency and reduced productivity. There is a parallel system of donor dependent employment which is not sustainable. Local NGOs are given less importance than UNICEF by the government just because they are local. It leads to demotivation."

Will the government be repressive?

"How many political prisoners will we have?"

What will foreign policy be?

"I would like to know if Jordan is really being pragmatic in its foreign policy. Will it really diversify its relations and think more about the people and the interest of Jordanians?"

ECONOMIC HEALTH

Stakeholders expressed great uncertainty about the economic future of Jordan. They could name economic assets and possibilities, such as increasing tourism, growing the entrepreneurial sector, and an educated, energetic, and young population. At the same time, they shared doubts about whether these possibilities would come to fruition.

Will Jordan effectively leverage its assets to improve its economy?

"Jordan has cultural heritage, deserts, dead sea, touristy places. Will they be properly presented, sorted out, and promoted worldwide?"

"I think we should build on the relative security that we enjoy. Is the baptism site going to become the number one destination, tourist destination, and pilgrimage destination for Christians and for people who are interested in history, culture and to come and enjoy? I'm hoping so."

Will people get out from under their debts?

"Jordan is hugely dependent on grants and loans."

"What if the government forgave people's loans but asked people to go and do small projects, open their shops, be productive, and stimulate the economy. Instead of putting the money into the pockets of the banks?"

Will people be able to meet their needs?

"I think food, food sovereignty is very important, to garden our gardens and to be productive on the level of our own food, of our own lives."

Will jobs be created?

"What jobs will AI be doing? What will it replace? What will it be adding?"

Will there be investment?

"If we invest in people, educate them, give them the freedom to express themselves and be free to and, and fair, fair legislation, fair laws, then the people will become an inviting environment for investors to come and support this and create jobs."

Will there be donor funds?

"If the US decides to cut funds, good luck…"

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stakeholders expressed concerns about access to key resources in Jordan. In addition to concerns about access to financial resources and jobs, stakeholders also shared concerns about the likelihood of water shortages in Jordan, the cost of desalination, and of

the possible impacts of climate change on the country. They also shared visions of the positive possibilities of engaging with nature.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

How will we adapt to climate change?

How will we deal with water scarcity?

"This is a country where we don't have any natural resources. Water is a big issue. I would like to see our water problem solved. We're going thirsty because water resources are controlled by other countries. Israel controls our water resources and Syria does that too. So we don't have it unless we desalinate, but desalination is costly."

Will we be healed by nature?

"The possibility of living with nature might be one of the most healing elements in the future."

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE PRESENT

Stakeholders described the importance of information in driving different possible futures in Jordan. They described two elements of information ecosystems as being key to possible futures:

What information and narratives are present and circulating, and

How influential this information and these narratives are.

With regards to what information and narratives circulate, stakeholders raised the following uncertainties:

Will there be freedom of the press?

"Is Jordan going to have free press in ten years? Free press is key to what we're trying to achieve. Will we have the ability of people to express themselves?"

"Jordan is super-censored. You have people in the government whose job is to delete and moderate comments."

"The main responsibility of the media is to hold authorities accountable. And once they're able to do that, then we end corruption. We end monopoly on information. And if you have open information, democracy, and elections, then officials will be responsible for what they do and people won't be elected again if they mess up."

Will technology improve or undermine the availability of good quality information and analysis?

Stakeholders noted that there is very high access to media technology with the vast majority having internet access.

"There are institutions trying to invest in using AI positively, digitalization, etc. But it also takes action to prevent the harmful side."

"Artificial intelligence is now huge and the things that can be created with artificial intelligence can actually destroy societies. Unless we give people the skills to identify and to be able to not be

fooled by deep fakes and be more open to messaging and to videos and, and photos being able to fact check, it can be really horrible."

"What will the influence of international platforms and algorithms be? How will this affect the messages and content we are trying to reach out to the citizens of Jordan with?"

"What will be the impact from the growth of artificial intelligence? What will be the impact on societies and our stories, narratives, histories, and ethics?"

"I am not sure where AI tools are taking us. Those who control the AI tools, they see the world from a completely different perspective and paradigm than us."

Will there be regulations that effectively manage harmful information?

"There is a lack of political will to resolve what is happening. We are not regulating the spread of hate speech and negative use of social media space."

"Each individual has access to social media, so each can disseminate information. There is no system to censor it or get fined/imprisoned. It needs to be regulated in a way that you can be penalised if you share wrong information."

"Social media platforms, the companies themselves, need to be able to give the

people the ability to go after people who misuse this huge tool."

"After demonstrations Tik Tok was banned. But people are still on Tik Tok by using VPN's."

Will information professionals effectively create reliable information?

"There are many qualified media professionals."

"What makes me optimistic is that journalists are also developing material and tools that will help people to get more prepared. But we needed to make it available to everyone."

Will social media create greater expectations and frustration?

"The elite youth have access to opportunities. And then there are middle class, lower middle class young people who are responsible, hard working, focused, but they can barely crack the surface towards opportunities. And the more that they are exposed to social media, the bigger the appetite they have in terms of expectations and aspirations. But they have very little means. What they are seeing is a make believe image of reality that doesn't really exist."

Will helpful information and narratives be more present?

"Will our youth overcome the frustration they have currently? And see the media as an outlet, not just for frustration, but also positivity. Will they succeed in

leveraging these tools to find solutions for the problems in Jordan?"

"Where you have free press, diverse press media, where you have access to information, people have the information available so they can make smart decisions based on proper information".

"Can we spread positive narratives and encourage inter-sectional dialogues? Can we make the tone of the messages constructive?"

Will people express their needs and beliefs?

"In the capital where there is higher education, there is no fear of self expression. But when you go to suburbs, there is fear due to the rural/tribal system."

THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION AND NARRATIVES

When considering the potential influence of different information and narratives, stakeholders regarded the capabilities and skills of the population for discerning and engaging with information as playing a central role.

They also noted how important public opinion and perspectives are.

How well-educated will people be?

"If education continues to operate without adequate digital literacy, and

without language skills to be able to be up to speed with what is happening, things will get worse."

"Will people be more responsible and aware? Will they pause before they share? Will they leverage these tools to spread positive messages?"

"We need to change in the education system to shift the mindset. In the education system the young generation could learn on how to verify information, do due diligence, and raise awareness. Media sources would need to be verified. We could spread common sense."

"What is forming young peoples' beliefs? For example about gender roles, economics, beauty standards? Do they have the tools and skills to navigate online spaces? What new norms are being created?"

"People need to immediately check whether this is a rumor or this is a misinformation and be able to identify that and not share it. The first thing we say is ask the question and don't like it or don't share it. Once it stops with you, it's going to die."

"We need to nurture reading and the curiosity of the capacity to research using more decolonial tools like ethnographic research and forms of interdisciplinary practices that merge arts and sciences."

"Empathetic listening is a key skill."

Will potentially harmful information lead to harm?

"Misinformation has always existed, but what also exists in this part of the world is the conspiracy theories. These are destructive elements in society. This information can actually lead to death."

"Misinformation spreads in vacuums where there is lack of information. We need to be proactive whenever or or available and vigilant because when a rumor starts, we need to respond immediately. Rumors spread with vast speed compared to the replies, the response,or whatever comes after that. So we have to provide the information. Once the information is there, we will not have any rumors."

"Officials and politicians need to appreciate the value of information and share the information because they feel empowered by having the information. They don't want to share it because it gives them a sense of authority, but that's not the case, because it can destroy society. It can create tensions and it can make their lives miserable as politicians. They need to appreciate the importance of freedom of expression to a functioning society."

"Disinformation has had a huge impact on how we deal with the refugee crisis. Public opinion impacts long term wellbeing and regulations. Disinformation can be lethal because refugees don't have a voice. Disinformation takes away the focus from those in need, when they need it