



Civilian-Led Support to People-Centered Security Sector Practices

Reflecting on lessons learned to
inform future action

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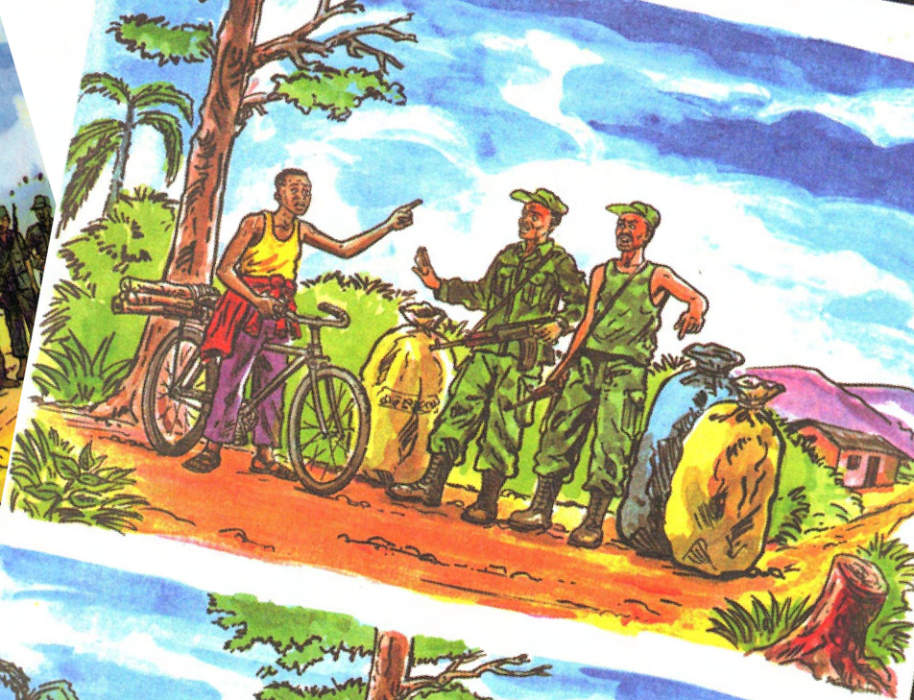


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Introduction

Efforts to improve security practices and address the population's security and justice needs in conflict-affected settings are challenging. The number and nature of actors involved in violent conflicts have expanded and fostered a complexity that is compounded by climate-induced and natural disasters, poverty, and rising inequality. In this context, it has become clear that military-only solutions to violence are insufficient as strict state-centric security assistance has not led to development and security gains: “local people – the consumers of security – need a voice” and “a ‘democratization of peace and security’ that harnesses civil society’s capacities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding through mitigating the drivers of conflict and instability” is fundamental.¹

People-centred security (PCS) is the security and safety of all individuals across all gender, socioeconomic, and cultural groups. PCS includes personal, community-related, and political security dimensions. Throughout this report, references to the security sector will include state security and defense forces (SDF), state oversight and management bodies, but also “non-state armed groups that play a role in protection of civilians, independent oversight bodies, the justice and rule of law institutions.”² Perceptions and experiences of security and justice vary with the different degrees of presence and power of the state, civilians, customary institutions, and armed groups.

This report aims to bridge knowledge gaps concerning what matters in PCS and how to address its challenges. In other words, what are the main challenges, what works, and what can we learn from previous programmes? The analysis will be conducted to inform future action. By exploring core themes for PCS programming, outlining ideas of what could be done to address them, and flagging specific

projects that faced (and addressed) challenges appropriately, the report intends to inform advocacy for more responsive, effective, and people-centred security sector policies and support.

Methodological remarks. The writing of this report was the result of in-depth desk research that included academic publications, policy briefs from international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as project reports and evaluations from on-the-ground implementations of PCS programmes. Further, key informant interviews were conducted with practitioners to harness their expertise and discuss the challenges and achievements they have faced in their work with PCS. Two validation workshops provided additional qualitative insight from stakeholders who work in the area, including partners of the [Just Future programme](#), under which this report has been produced.

The core analytical section focuses on six interconnected themes. After providing a brief background on the move from state- to people-centric security, the report will shed light on the core themes that emerged from the research. The report addresses the relevance of local ownership and inclusion of women and youth across the project cycle; the benefits of engaging state and non-state actors and how to ensure net positive results from their collaboration; the importance of placing relationship building at the forefront of PCS programming and of disseminating success stories; the need for flexibility in terms of resource allocation, project activities, and timelines; and the advantages attached to coordination across different stakeholders to ensure coherence in PCS.

Taking stock and the road ahead. After the analytical section II, the report culminates in a short overview of key findings, offering additional recommendations on how to move forward with PCS programming. It suggests that there is a need for a more comprehensive systematisation of security programmes through the mapping of existing people-centred strategies. The present report is seen as a starting point that paves the way for future efforts.

The analysis is grounded in practical examples from diverse contexts: This includes a focus on the six countries of the Just Future programme: Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger, and South Sudan. However, the report also draws on examples from different countries and regions to broaden its scope. At the end of the report, as Annexes, four case studies are discussed individually to offer more detail about PCS programmes, their challenges and successes.



Throughout the report, the examples in the blue boxes at the end of each core theme are connected to the considerations made in the solution-oriented bullet points and seek to reflect (some of) the suggestions made therein. The annex further contains case studies with more detailed practical examples of relevant civil society-led PSC interventions.



Challenges and Opportunities in People Centred Security

Background and Context

The road to people-centred security. The end of the Cold War marked a shift in international affairs. Its expected peace dividend was immediately questioned by a period of intense insecurity in the early 1990s. The severity and consequences of violence, which included genocides and a growing number of forced displaced people, made the narratives that siloed security and development untenable. A shift from a state- to a people-centric approach was required to better address threats to human well-being. The human security concept was a starting point – it expanded the notions of security beyond “freedom from fear”³ to include “freedom from want.” Though it was scarcely operationalised in practice, the human security concept succeeded in placing people as the cornerstone of the security discourse. However, its focus on people over the role of the state alienated many relevant actors. PCS is in many ways a response to these challenges and critiques. As a more focused and less ambitious approach, it maintained the centrality of the people while reinforcing the complementarity between top-down state-based approaches and bottom-up people-oriented solutions.⁴

Moving beyond hard security measures. As a result of this paradigm shift, it is now broadly accepted that initiatives in the security sector are not confined to the use of force nor focused exclusively on training and equipping SDF. Solutions ought to be meaningful locally: affected communities are at the forefront of the peace and security discourse, with the goals of strengthening resilience and local ownership becoming commonplace. A PCS approach should empower the local level and allow its members to “express their fears, needs, insecurities and vulnerabilities and [hold]

accountable all security and justice providers whether they are formal, informal or semi-formal actors.⁵

Yet, we still do not know how to get PCS right. The language on localisation and PCS has been mainstreamed across policy and programming documents. However, there have been challenges to its application on the ground and a broad lack of shared understanding on how PCS implementation really works. At the UN level, it has been argued that while the 2030 Agenda affirmed the “centrality of the PCS approach and established benchmarks for its realization” and its security programs are “characteristically rooted to language on people-centeredness,” practitioners “lack the tools, time, or experience to apply this to project implementation.”⁶ Overall, there is a need for further clarity on how PCS support can effectively reflect the needs of the people. This report aims to shed some light on what matters in PCS efforts and what we have learned from previous experiences.

Moving from state- to people-centric security in South Sudan⁷

A.1. **The process of moving towards a people-centred approach to security often faces setbacks.** An example from **South Sudan** attests to the nonlinearity of such efforts. Its security strategic framework remains “very state-centric” as the country is “still struggling to reconcile the legacies of the old regime with the need for a stronger focus on people and their empowerment and protection.” Yet, despite challenges, there are “policy frameworks that indicate that a people-centred approach could be achieved in the long term.” An example is the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. This document was seen as a foundation for a people-centred approach to security by “defin[ing] the role of the national level security and justice institutions as protecting their citizens, by enshrining the need for the **National Security Service to be representative of its population** and by ensuring that this inclusivity extends to **meeting the safety and security needs of all the people** under its purview.”⁸

SSR challenges in the DRC

A.2. Lessons from the field have noted **shortcomings** in PCS efforts. A paramount example of this lies in security **sector reform** (SSR) initiatives. SSR is “the political and technical process of improving state and human security by applying the principles of good governance to the security sector.”⁹ In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (DRC), a 2018 study concluded that the previous fifteen years of SSR efforts had “**largely been unsuccessful in building an effective or accountable security sector** ... Patterns of corruption, patronage, and impunity, embedded in both the security sector and wider political and governance structures, continue to block or undermine reform efforts.”¹⁰



The Relevance of Local Ownership

Local ownership is essential for PCS. A people-centred initiative requires it to be “shaped and driven by a representative set of local actors inside and outside the state.”¹¹ Despite recognised efforts to empower local communities, effective ways for them to influence and inform programming across its entire cycle are still elusive. The local is often used as a rhetorical tool and the international community has been criticised for continuing to favour formal technical expertise over local knowledge.¹² The creation of entry points for participation is thus fundamental: inclusivity is a necessary step to ensure the conflict sensitivity of any security intervention.

- The UN High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations stressed the relevance of adequate resourcing to conduct regular **“independent surveys of local perceptions ... [and] develop strategies for community engagement** at various stages of the [programme] cycle – from assessment, analysis, planning, implementation, review and evaluation” (see examples B.1 and B.2 and Annexes 3 and 4).¹³ PCS interventions need to go beyond the promotion of local participation and engagement and embrace local leadership and action – that is, with **communities involved actively in the design, implementation, and evaluation** of protection efforts.

Security and justice are not exclusive functions of the state: civilian actors are already involved in security and local communities have distinct, contextualised knowledge. No one is better placed than communities themselves to analyse their security challenges and needs. This represents a comparative advantage for civilian actors, who have unique access to their realities and should

thus “[inject] into security policy discussions key information and analysis that the [formal] security sector lacks but otherwise needs to make informed decisions.”¹⁴ Local communities are inherently part of the security system and often its members provide services such as community watches or ensuring that specific areas have illumination at night. Yet, their access and capacity to engage in dialogue with the authorities varies. State institutions can be absent, irresponsible, or even have little incentive to expand local ownership or capacities – as mentioned in a workshop to validate the findings of this report, sensitising the authorities to the importance of working with communities can be a prerequisite of PCS.

- **Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP)**, an NGO, have argued that **Unarmed Civilian Protection** – which refers to the direct protection of civilians by unarmed, trained civilians – offers “a pathway to more seriously engaging with local communities as leaders in their own protection and action.” The premise is to harness “the protection capacities and skillsets [that] are already in place and being enacted by communities themselves – with or without international humanitarian actors.”¹⁵ Indeed, the role of community members is key to effective **early warning and early response** mechanisms, due to the immediate access they have to contextual developments and ongoing threat (see example B.2).

Giving a voice to civilians in Afghanistan

B.1. In **Afghanistan**, a project led by the **Women and Children Legal Research Foundation** created **civic spaces for joint discussion between the police and people** on community needs and security challenges. Seeking to increase the police's responsiveness, accountability, and people-centred mechanisms, the team conducted **training** on gender-based violence, public awareness-raising campaigns, and **social protection activities** at the local level. As a whole, the project allowed community members to have a voice and participate actively in security-related matters. It also ensured the communities' "meaningful participation in evaluation and [the development of] a joint action plan for solving the security issues and problems."¹⁶

Community self-protection in South Sudan

B.2. NP has shown positive results in sensitive settings, such as **South Sudan**, where it **trains and works with 80+ community-based protection teams** – including women- and youth-specific teams, community groups who perform protection functions, as well as community members and leaders who are participating in dialogue or protection interventions. Around 2,500 **community members implement their own protection activities**, which include "patrols and accompaniments, prevention of and support for survivors of violence including SGBV, interpersonal and intercommunity conflict mediation, and **early warning** planning for potential outbreaks of violence."¹⁷



Including the Most Vulnerable

PCS as a gender-responsive and youth-sensitive approach. Despite the relevance of the local, it is challenging to identify and engage actors outside elite circles. Local communities and their representatives can be hard to reach and thus face stronger barriers to articulating their security and justice needs. This is particularly accurate for groups furthest excluded and marginalised, notably women and youth. Gender and age have a strong impact on access to security and justice services and the way individuals experience insecurity and injustice. While it is well-established that the inclusion of women and youth is paramount to the success of peace and security initiatives, “access to platforms they need to air their particular views is often restricted to them at the local level and all but denied in decision-making forums.”¹⁸

In addition, initiatives have been criticised for having a one-size-fits-all ethos that is based on age- and gender-based stereotypes: young men are portrayed as violent perpetrators and women as victims.¹⁹

- **Conflict, gender and age sensitivity should be mainstreamed** across PCS programming. This requires iterative and in-depth processes of conflict analysis with the ability to understand and respond to security and gender-specific needs and expectations. In SSR, **population and user surveys combined with monitoring and learning systems** that are conflict-, youth- and gender-sensitive would ensure that projects address the root causes of violence and insecurity associated with marginalised groups (see example C.2).
- The security sector should be gender and age-accountable and ensure young people and women participate in overseeing security-related initiatives.²⁰

Age and gender shape the participation in and experiences of security sector activities.

Even when security efforts are led by communities, there is always a risk that communities “accepted and perpetuated gender [and age] stereotypes, often resulting in the most vulnerable to violence being overlooked for protection.”²¹

- To counter these tendencies, **developing the capacities of youth and women** in peacebuilding and non-violent conflict transformation is important – whether individually or as members of CSOs (see Annexes 1 and 2). **Training and support** can increase the protective capacities of these groups through their own actions and shift the power imbalances and their fragile security situation (see example C.3). A staff member of an NGO interviewed for this report noted that supporting youth and women is also a means to build their confidence. Offering a **certificate in a public ceremony** at the end of the training sessions helps to legitimise their presence in decision-making forums.



Women and youth participation in PCS initiatives in Mali

C.1. A DCAF study highlighted the **role of women and youth in establishing peace and security and reducing poverty**. Women community members of the northern regions sought to strengthen peace through “favouring **dialogue to consolidate trust-building and justice and to manage disputes.**” The discussions that were promoted included representatives of different groups, namely women, young people, and community and religious leaders. The youth members further supported the process by “developing the **‘governance, peace and reconciliation’ roadmap through dialogue and awareness-raising initiatives** with civil society organisations.”²²

C.2. In **Central Mali**, **Search for Common Ground** supported local “peace ambassadors” to carry out mediation and inter-community violence prevention activities. Where **women and youth were formally or de facto excluded** from existing mediation and violence prevention spaces, the project recognised that their participation on equal footing as older men was crucial for meaningful impact. To ensure this, Search engaged with **local leaders to agree inclusion criteria** for the ambassadors, the **training for ambassadors incorporated the importance of and guidance for inclusion**, and ambassadors were supported to lead **outreach actions that promoted community acceptance** of the role of women and youth. The final report noted that young people and women increased their capacity to engage meaningfully with the communities and local partners and that the project helped combat gender-based discrimination.²³

Increasing the safety of girls and facilitating their access to education in Iraq

C.3. In **Iraq**, after the liberation of the district of Al-Ba’aj from ISIS occupation in 2014, violence was widespread and incidences of sexual harassment prevailed. To increase the safety of girls and facilitate their access to education, **NP** started to provide protective presence and conduct **regular patrols** around schools. Their **staff included women** and there were efforts to **raise awareness** of the harmful effects of gender-based violence with local groups, offering **training** for teachers on child protection. As a whole, the situation improved and rates of sexual harassment decreased while school enrolment increased.²⁴

Hybridity of State and Non-State Actors

Security and justice provision is spread among different actors. The provision of justice and security is not exclusively in the hands of the state and its formal bodies (e.g., state police, the military, or the judicial system). Especially in rural areas with lower levels of state presence, non-state actors have a fundamental role, from traditional leaders and customary bodies to religious institutions, non-state armed groups, and private security companies. Often, there is a hybrid combination of security and justice options available in a given setting, with rights-holders “choosing which system offers the best – or the least bad – outcome.”²⁵ The nature of these hybrid arrangements inevitably “shape[s] whether people feel safe and secure and whether they live in an environment where their basic human rights are respected and protected in a reliable and orderly way.”²⁶ Non-state actors can be regarded as more accessible and legitimate by local communities, due to links to their traditions and local values. The formal system can also be absent in remote areas, where informal mechanisms may offer more convenient, efficient, and timely services available to communities.²⁷

However, there are practical and political risks to working with non-state actors. For rights-holders, informal mechanisms can lead to more or less exclusion of certain groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, and non-state armed groups are often associated with human rights abuses, discrimination, or corruption. Policy-makers and practitioners struggle to “effectively engage non-state and hybrid actors and structures in security programming”²⁸ and “sometimes, NGOs are allergic to communicate with armed actors” due to the negative reputation associated with them.²⁹ Unfortunately, significant risks are often also present with the formal system.³⁰

- It is important to **establish frameworks for accountability** and to develop activities that **instil a culture of prioritising the safety and security of citizens** across all security and justice providers. These were conclusions reached by the **United States Institute of Peace** when analysing the activities of informal vigilante groups in Nigeria. These groups, whom the military relied on for intelligence gathering and operating checkpoints, were often accused of violent abuses, especially in border areas prone to lucrative smuggling activities.³¹
- **There is a need to strike a balance between immediate needs and longer-term goals.** Non-state actors can be in a better position or at least more involved in the provision of security at the local level – but this does not mean that formal authorities should be circumvented *tout court*. Reflecting on the complexity of hybrid scenarios, **SaferWorld** suggested that PCS efforts should explore “building coalitions between state and non-state service providers in order to benefit from the latter’s legitimacy among communities.”³² Furthermore, information sharing and coordination can leverage local and state capacities to promote a safer and development-prone environment (see example D.1).

Collaboration of state and non-state security actors

D.1. In the **DRC mining areas** of Luhihi and Nyabibwe, security sector governance is based on “overlapping and sometimes contradictory jurisdiction mandates.” **State security providers coexist with cooperatives established by the miners as self-protection structures.** The state actors “come to depend on hybrid security arrangements [because there are] simply too few police to cover their geographic area of responsibility.” According to a report by DCAF, a collaborative relationship has been fostered “through **joint participation in meetings and monitoring committees** [which] has contributed significantly to a **reduction in tensions** between the cooperatives and the police.” To ensure that these arrangements become more accountable and transparent in the eyes of the communities, the meetings ought to be “**open to participation by a broad set of stakeholders and monitored by civil society.**”³³

Hybrid security is an opportunity for PCS programming. Hybrid security is a reality experienced by many communities in their everyday lives. Leveraging their capacities for peace is thus logical for PCS initiatives. In other words, PCS should explore and seek to integrate strategies already in use by local populations. Programmes addressing non-state mechanisms exist, but sometimes struggle to incorporate clear understandings of “how they work and the expected impact of engaging with them.”³⁴

- Strong **mapping activities and local context assessments** are crucial across all PCS efforts to increase the knowledge of all relevant stakeholders, their respective roles, competencies, perceptions, and interactions, as well as the existing power dynamics in a given area of action.³⁵

- A collaborative strategy that can leverage local capacities is **community policing.** Community policing **brings together the police and communities to address issues of crime, safety and security.** When done right – “with the consent of the public and with the police accountable to them”³⁶ and being broadly representative of the area in terms of gender, age, religion, etc. – community policing can lead to community reconciliation, improve the relationships between communities and formal authorities, and contribute to the prevention of violence (see example D.3 and Annex 2). At the local level, **CSOs can benefit from international support to “plug funding gaps and provide trainings, guidance and tools to make community policing more effective** [and connect] communities with local, sub-national, and national authorities.”³⁷

Leveraging state and local capacities in PCS practices

D.2. In **Benin, local security committees** comprised, among others, of women, youth, traditional leaders, and local administration representatives, were created as the state realised it required their support to ensure the security of its citizens. The committees meet regularly to discuss and submit proposals to the commissioner, in order to **provide information** that can lead to the **prevention of future violence** – an early warning strategy.³⁸ Similar local committees on peace and security have been established in contexts such as DRC, Mali, and Niger. In **Mali, the Just Future Alliance** has helped operationalise these “Consultative Security Committees” as crucial inclusive and bottom-up coordination spaces through training for members and support for the creation and implementation of action plans.³⁹

D.3. To deepen links between authorities and conflict-affected communities, **SaferWorld** sought to **improve the cooperation between the police, local government and civil society in Tajikistan.** The projects strengthened and expanded community-based policing. **Community-police partnership teams and local crime prevention centres were established.** The joint identification, prioritisation and action planning of the police-public partnerships led to increased cooperation and trust: 79% of respondents to an evaluation survey reported “**incremental improvements.**” The **gender-balanced** composition of teams helped with issues that tended to be left untouched, such as domestic violence.⁴⁰

Communications, Relationship and Trust

The importance of prioritising relationships.

The safety and security of people hinges on the quality of relationships. Often, experiences of insecurity derive from mistrust between civilians and security forces. In different settings, trust deficits have curbed the ability of security-related initiatives to improve people's lives, because "relations between civilians and security officers present in their communities remain marked by suspicion and prejudice, continued predatory behaviour, and abuses."⁴¹ Facilitating effective community-level dialogue and cooperation between state bodies and civil society actors is one of the key roles of external actors employing a PCS approach.⁴²

- A PCS intervention should place improving the quality of the **relationships between communities and security providers as a central theme** that informs all programme design (see examples E.1 and E.3).
- PCS projects should be perceived as **mutually beneficial for civilians and security forces**. This requires a paradigm shift: "to consider security actors not as 'external' to the communities in which they are deployed, but as members of the community itself."⁴³ Because relationship building starts with people, programmes should, at an early stage, **identify agents of change among civilians and the different actors within the security sector** (see example E.3).



Awareness-raising and outreach efforts are fundamental for effective PCS.

Each security initiative can only reach a certain number of people. Changing the perceptions of larger segments of society requires the dissemination of information and success stories related to previous and ongoing projects. The more people become familiar with positive narratives of collaboration, the higher the impact of PCS programmes, which are often designed for small geographical areas. It is well established that the knowledge of positive intergroup interactions can expand the prejudice-reducing impact of activities even to those who did not directly participate in them.⁴⁴ As such, the progress achieved in improving relationships between different security-related actors and communities is better consolidated "if it is transmitted and explained in an effective way to the wider population."⁴⁵

- In terms of **visibility**, radio and information and communication technologies are known vehicles for the promotion of narratives in conflict-affected scenarios. These should be explored to contribute to positive changes in knowledge and attitudes towards "the other." For instance, **testimonies of participants could be broadcast on local radio stations**, or a video depicting the process and including participants' perspectives could be created and shared on **social media** platforms. To reach those without adequate internet access, the video could also be showcased in road shows through different areas of the country (see example E.1).

- When it comes to reaching regional or national actors, meetings could be organised with influential actors from civil society and decision-makers to explain what was done and the reasoning behind it (see Annex 2). It has been noted that even micro-processes “can be fed back into the political debate ... [and] thus become vehicles for change at the macro-level.”⁴⁶ For instance, a successful project could **trigger similar PCS initiatives in nearby communities** affected by the same (type of) violent conflict.
- Furthermore, **“awareness supportive materials should go together with activities that will help in providing knowledge and skills to communities.”**⁴⁷ That is, direct project activities with communities should also include the use of communication campaigns to increase their impact on the target population – for instance, through materials such as **brochures, posters, and billboards** that include catch-phrase messages.

Increasing awareness of PCS efforts

E.1. In the **DRC**, a project by **Search for Common Ground** engaged communities and the security forces to improve their relationship. The project included a wide range of communication efforts – **radio programs, participatory theatre, and comic strips** – to contribute to the shifting of attitudes and perceptions. These were complemented by “training to increase citizen understanding of the role of security actors and ways to engagement, as well as solidarity activities including community meetings known as Tribunes d’expression populaire.” As a whole, the project **increased accountability of the security forces and improved public perceptions of security.**⁴⁸

E.2. In **Serbia**, the **Belgrade Centre for Security Policy**, an independent, civil society-led research centre focused on the security sector produces **manuals, videos, and “CVs” or “IDs” of security sector institutions** and documents relevant issues to the safety of citizens and society. These are **“widely used by journalists** and shared with each new cohort of [Members of Parliament] to strengthen their understanding of security institutions and enable them to exercise effective parliamentary oversight over the provision and management of security.”⁴⁹

Promoting collaboration between civilians and security forces

E.3. In the **Central Sahel**, a series of NGO-led interventions aimed to promote communication, trust, and collaboration between civilians and security forces. **SDF leaders and community peace ambassadors** from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger were supported to facilitate dialogues for SDF and civilians to better understand each other’s challenges and safely share and analyse crucial security information. To **empower forces to interact constructively with communities**, SDF were also trained in conflict transformation, nonviolent communication, community outreach, and civilian protection and supported to train their peers in turn. Building on the improved relations, communities, SDF, and local authorities were supported to **jointly develop security, PVE, and stabilisation solutions** and plan collaborative **solidarity activities** bringing SDF and the wider community together.⁵⁰

Funding, Long-Term, and Adaptive Programming

You have to go slow to go fast. Security needs can be urgent and immediate action required to counter threats and address emergencies. This is often the reason behind donors' focus on training and equipping programmes. Yet, on their own, rapid remedies are insufficient. To be effective and prevent rather than cause further violence, they should be complemented by longer-term efforts to improve relationships between state and society and to ensure locally owned security sector solutions – which takes time. Put differently, while short-term action might be necessary, PCS implies sustained community-led engagement over a larger period of time and more flexibility in programmes in order to restore trust and collaboration. Longer-term, adaptable programmes are better equipped to respond to changes and maintain their relevance over time. In PCS, progress is inherently incremental and iterative: positive change should be understood nonlinearly as a continuum, rather than a final state that results from a specific intervention.

- **Overall, PCS initiatives require flexibility.** Fragile settings are volatile and the needs of communities change over time. Therefore, **regular assessments** of the contexts might demonstrate that local windows of opportunity close, while others open. The **length of the programmes should be adaptable** to respond to changes and a **degree of flexibility in outputs and outcomes** would limit the pressure on the implementing partners to continue activities and focus on goals that might be detached from the evolving reality on the ground (see example F.1).

- Despite the emphasis on long-term commitments, external actors should have **clear exit strategies** that ensure the continuation of safety and protection after the end of an intervention. Ensuring communities have meaningful roles across the intervention cycle plants the seeds for sustainability (see Annex 4).⁵¹

Doing more even when we have less. When mapping the spending patterns of donors in SSR, a study found that there is a “major surplus of projects with the aim of training and equipping at the expense of change processes with a focus on democratic governance in the security sector and beyond.”⁵² This goes against the above mentioned need for longer-term projects which are adapted to communities' needs and flexible to contextual changes. Furthermore, the resources that are allocated to people-centred security and justice issues are “likely to continue on a downward trajectory.”⁵³ As a result, there is a need to be more effective managing resources and targeting PCS efforts.

- Combining local knowledge with efficient resource allocation, it is important to **“develop funding instruments that are accessible for in-country organisations.”** These organisations, such as NGOs or research institutes, are better equipped to “maximise local knowledge, networks and legitimacy [and are thus better] value for money.”⁵⁴ Funding modalities should be designed to reduce competition and promote complementarity among implementing partners.

- The funding provided to partners should also be **flexible**. In practice, this means that funding mechanisms and **disbursements should be made easier**. Furthermore, as argued in a validation session, having emergency budgets dedicated to immediate and ordinary small needs that might come up during project implementation would be important. important.
- Interruptions of support to a given initiative, even when temporary, can hinder its success. To ensure impact in PCS, it is important to **“consider bridge-funding to strengthen the sustainability of achievements.”**⁵⁵
- The focus on prevention does not preclude the involvement and collaboration between the state and civilians. PCS programmes can explore the **role of security actors in routine community engagement and presence** to address and prevent local issues such as land disputes, domestic violence or theft.
- To ensure that programmes are better at preventing further violence, they need to be clearly grounded on lessons learned from previous initiatives. This requires **more robust M&E systems**. A clear commitment to **factual and methodologically rigorous** M&E ensures that subsequent policies and practices harness successes and avoid hurdles faced by previous efforts. In this context, Search for Common Ground developed the **Peace Impact Framework**. The framework guides practitioners in the identification of essential elements of peace and how to measure it and is the result of extensive consultations with communities and organisations worldwide. Its application aims to ensure that measurement efforts reflect what safety, security, peace and stability mean to communities and become more systematic across programmes and institutions.

A PCS approach focuses on prevention.

Dealing with threats to security and justice as they come does not address their underlying root causes nor prevent their recurrence. A community-oriented approach to service delivery in security considers socio-economic solutions, education, youth and women empowerment, and sustainable development. This is aligned with an expansion of the concept of security that is better adapted to the actual needs of communities and goes beyond militarised action and the use of force.

How more flexibility, time, and community involvement could improve a PCS project

F.1. In the **DRC**, a project aimed at improving the civil-military relationships was implemented in a context of instability. The implementation of planned activities suffered different **setbacks**. One of the challenges was due to the frequent rotation of elements of the armed forces. This forced the project team to **“start over several times”** the training activities. The evaluation report noted that these difficulties should be considered “an inherent part of any SSR program and **should lead to a strategic adaptation.**” Furthermore, the length of the project was considered to be “very short: 18 months interspersed with suspensions.” As a result, despite “undeniable improvements” in the behaviour of the armed forces and progress in civil-military relationships, the evaluators concluded that a **deeper change would require at least 3 years** and **stronger involvement of civilians and authorities in the management of project activities to increase ownership and the sustainability of the impact.**⁵⁶

Coordination

The relevance of coherent PCS policies and practices. Effective PCS programmes are not solely a function of the financial resources allocated to a certain country or region. Donors have different political objectives attached to their foreign assistance policies, international organisations and NGOs have a variety of philosophies and approaches to security, local communities are more or less involved in designing and implementing PCS initiatives, and the interests of potential recipients of support – from communities to state entities and non-state armed groups – are not always convergent. As such, given the plethora of actors involved in PCS initiatives, dialogue should support adequate coordination between relevant stakeholders and strategic coherence. This would help avoid duplication, a fragmented and inefficient approach to PCS, competition between agencies, implementing partners, and affected populations for resources, and contradictions and aggravated disputes and tensions between perceived “winners and losers” of each programme.

- **Strengthen coordination between the peacebuilding, security, and justice sectors.** While the boundaries are often blurred from the perspective of communities, there is a tendency for these sectors to be “siloes within aid agencies operating in fragile and conflict-affected situations ... [and therefore] opportunities are missed to build on the analysis and expertise found within the wider peacebuilding sector and on the links between security and justice and broader conflict dynamics” (see example G.2 and Annex 4).⁵⁷ **Donor coordination meetings and multi-donor funding strategies** could improve this situation and ensure clear identification of the needs of conflict-affected populations.

- **Invest in joint local context assessments and sharing of findings among international, national, and local players** (see example G.3). The relevance of understanding contextual nuances at the local level has been established as a cornerstone of effective PCS. It would be positive to **support joint situational analysis led by local experts**, including stakeholder mapping, conflict dynamics, and gender analysis. This could be conducted “in the framework of an **inception project mandated jointly by various donors**” aimed at a common understanding of the context and joint identification of needs and solutions that reflects the capacities and expertise of each donor. By expanding the efforts beyond the capital, programmes would be more adapted to local realities: “**area-based programming** fosters geographical complementarity between donors, instead of the cluster approach which leads to a multitude of avoidable gaps and isolated engagements in many countries.”⁵⁸



- **Ensure the coherence between programmes at the local and the national level.** Security sector projects at the local level tend to “prioritise community-based organisations for their partnership-building [while] national-level programming focuses on state institutions.”⁵⁹ However, to leverage better synergies between top-down and bottom-up approaches, efforts should be made to ensure **broad consultations of all relevant stakeholders** when designing PCS programmes. This will not only improve the coherence across programmes in a given area; it will also allow national and local projects to inform, impact, and reinforce one another, thus extending their benefits beyond their immediate targets (see example G.1).
- **Shared responsibility in management and oversight of the security sector.** States and civilians can leverage each other’s interests and competencies to improve the functioning of the security sector so that it “serves the interests of both the State and the communities and remains effective in dealing with emerging threats.” In this context, a system of **checks and balances** could have civilian leadership setting “the overarching objectives, rules and policy priorities [while the state’s security sector would] internally organise itself to deliver on those objectives” (See Annex 3).⁶⁰
- **CSOs should work on partnerships.** The space for civil society in fragile settings can be limited and access to information scarce. Furthermore, the capacities of different CSOs differ in terms of themes and geographies of expertise. To counterweight these challenges, CSOs should **establish coalitions or networks** that leverage their **complementary expertise** (see example G.3, see also Annex 3).

The challenging landscape of coordination among international actors

G.1. The **DRC** is one of the countries that has received **more security-related foreign support**. However, one of the core reasons for its so-called “disastrous results” is a “**lack of coordination among donors, agencies, and NGOs**, who often use incompatible or insufficient approaches.” An example is the training and equipping of military units by different bilateral donors “with incompatible doctrines and institutional structures.” As a result, these efforts ended up “undermin[ing] cohesion and the function of bodies working within the military to build a new collective ethos and approach.”⁶¹

G.2. On the **donor** side, a study on **funding mechanisms** and SSR policies and practices found that implementation is always split between different agencies, including departments of foreign affairs, development, defence and also justice and internal affairs. In the US alone there were 46 identified offices with SSR-related mandates. As a result, the study found that there is “**agency competition, haphazard funding decisions and ... incoherent epistemic interests and approaches** to SSR/G.”⁶²



Field snapshots that demonstrate the potential of coordination

G.3. During the validation sessions for this report, participants shared positive experiences related to horizontal coordination. The **West African Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN)**, coordinated by the West African Network for Peacebuilding, seeks to **strengthen linkages between the local, the national, and the regional level**. The WARN builds structures and channels of communication so that threats and potential solutions identified at the local level are shared and discussed with national entities as well as regionally, with ECOWAS. In the words of a participant, “the back and forth between bottom up and top down made learning and complementarity better.” In the **DRC, a citizen alliance for security governance** gathering CSOs engaging in SSR was created and links the local and national levels. The alliance “helped decrease duplication on the ground.”

G.4. The **European Union** funded the multisectoral programme “Interventions to Support Security and Stabilization in Niger” (**I3S Niger**). The programme included an ambitious focus on **coordination between different technical partners** working on stabilisation in the region, particularly the three I3S implementing partners. The programme sought to build **complementarity and coherence** between the capacities of technical partners, supporting security forces and local populations to address typical security threats, but also the socioeconomic needs of the population.⁶³ However, the interventions were initially **designed separately** and each needed to **adapt to priorities of different national agencies**. Through regular information sharing and meetings, as well as coordination with national bodies, the programme eventually realised “a concerted development of activities between the three program implementation structures.”⁶⁴ The programme also sought to improve **coordination among national governance and security agencies**. For example, **inter-command dialogues** brought together different military and internal security forces, leading to “greater complementarity, cooperation and cohesion between the various SDF corps”.⁶⁵ As a whole, the programme managed to “**bring people together and foster collaboration ... yield[ing] remarkable results.**”⁶⁶

Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

“Recognising that people’s security needs and how they seek services do not always involve the state or its actors, noting that the state and its institutions do not always protect the community or represent its needs and priorities, and finally admitting that in many contexts the social contract between the state and its people has become a challenge to governance, [security sector] programming needs a new roadmap for change.”⁶⁷

While there are still uncertainties around PCS programming, the report highlighted areas in which there is a growing consensus among stakeholders which form a solid basis for action going forward.

The centrality of communities as security sector stakeholders. One of the key takeaways from the analysis is the importance of identifying “tools to understand the security and justice needs, problems, expectations and priorities of the ‘hardest to reach people’ ... [to] avoid elite capture in the expression of needs and grievances.”⁶⁸ This goes hand-in-hand with the relevance attributed to local ownership and inclusive PCS programming, taking into particular account women and youth. Embracing PCS in a way that is conflict-, gender- and youth-sensitive is paramount to the success of initiatives and to the idea of doing no harm. This requires purposeful action to enable the capacities of different groups in society. Communities are active and central security stakeholders themselves: this report offered examples of unarmed civilian protection groups and other instances where communities provided services to address security challenges and needs. From the standpoint of external actors, good practices include training and support to increase the protective capacities of communities, mechanisms to ensure participation – from design and implementation to oversight – and continuously revisiting the perceptions of those affected by the programmes to make sure initiatives remain appropriate and relevant over time.

Leveraging the multiplicity of stakeholders in PCS programming. Talking about security and justice provision implies understanding and engaging with a variety of actors that range from state authorities to non-state armed actors and local communities. This hybridity of

security actors can have positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it can mean discriminatory practices and abuses against groups deprived of power. On the other hand, hybridity can offer communities more accessible justice and familiar practices associated with local traditions and values that promote their legitimacy. It is also a means to compensate for the absence of state presence, due to lack of capacity, willingness, or conflict. In this context, PCS programmes must be designed based on “thorough analyses of both state and non-state security provision and take a risk-informed approach to engaging with a wider range of actors in pursuit of realistic and effective pathways for change.”⁶⁹ Security sector initiatives should promote frameworks for effective accountability and mutually beneficial cooperation between state and non-state service providers.

It is all about relationships and trust. As a practitioner interviewed for this report noted, in peace and security “everything focuses and revolves around relationships ... that is the first thing we need to think about.” Experiences of insecurity are correlated with feelings of mistrust between civilians and armed actors. This impacts the daily lives of individuals but also the feasibility of PCS programmes that want to engage different stakeholders: transforming and strengthening relationships is felt beyond the formal end of programmes more than the material support that these might have included. Working on the quality of relationships is thus both an enabler of and a prerequisite for PCS. However, when fostering a

rapprochement between groups, it is crucial to anchor projects on the local preferences, needs, and existing community structures. Alas, “under cover of strengthening state-community relations, state institutions may squeeze out local bodies or turn them into instruments for state policy.”⁷⁰ To minimise these risks, PCS programmes should take an empowering approach to trust- and relationship-building, equipping community and state actors with the skills and opportunities for meaningful and constructive engagement and creating spaces for bottom-up and collaborative solution-finding. Communication and outreach efforts can also allow initiatives to change the perceptions of larger segments of people. Promoting collaborative narratives and clarifying roles and responsibilities of different players helps to manage expectations, consolidates trust, and opens space for further intergroup interaction. Programmes should thus include dissemination and visibility strategies, leveraging traditional and social media, as well as artistic formats like participatory theatre, and attempt to reach more isolated communities. To minimise these risks, PCS programmes should take an empowering approach to trust- and relationship-building, equipping community and state actors with the skills and opportunities for meaningful and constructive engagement and creating spaces for bottom-up and collaborative solution-finding. Communication and outreach efforts can also allow initiatives to change the perceptions of larger segments of people. Promoting collaborative narratives and clarifying roles and responsibilities of different players helps to manage expectations, consolidates trust, and opens space for further intergroup interaction. Programmes should thus include dissemination and visibility strategies, leveraging traditional and social media, as well as artistic formats like participatory theatre, and attempt to reach more isolated communities.

Thinking beyond the immediate needs.

Security initiatives were traditionally associated with armed forces. Threats and needs might be urgent and require immediate action – which

explains the focus on training and equipping security forces. However, PCS is about more than meeting immediate needs: it also wants to “cultivate new norms of behaviour to ensure that change is sustainable for the long term.”⁷¹ Given the time these changes require, PCS should have longer implementation periods and be flexible so that adaptations can be made along the way. Regular assessments of the contexts are required to ensure that activities maintain their relevance and that exit strategies can be carefully crafted. Furthermore, flexibility is also important with regard to funding. Given the volatility of fragile settings, funding instruments should adapt to the evolving circumstances while ensuring their accessibility to local civil society actors. Including communities in regular monitoring and evaluating progress and impact would help inform future activities throughout the project cycle and offer earlier warnings that allow for earlier responses.

Coordinate better. Another takeaway from this report is that the value for money allocated to PCS is increased when there is coordination between the multiple relevant actors. Besides donor coordination meetings and multi-donor funding strategies, effective sharing of information and joint local context assessments supported by local experts and authorities could benefit the strategic coherence and relevance of PCS initiatives. Donors and governments can coordinate these efforts before new rounds of programme development and should be explicit in their references to people-centred approaches. CSOs should also place cooperation ahead of competition and leverage each other's areas of thematic and geographic expertise in coalitions. Furthermore, the barriers between the local, national and international levels should be replaced by broader consultations across stakeholders. Together, these efforts should help to avoid a fragmented and inefficient approach to PCS and aggravated tensions between perceived “winners and losers” of PCS programmes.

Before (re)engaging in PCS	When implementing a PCS effort	After a specific PCS effort
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct independent surveys of local perceptions of needs and capacities • Develop strategies for community engagement • Mainstream conflict-, gender-, and age-sensitivity across activities • Ensure thorough mapping of all stakeholders and their roles • Explore opportunities for joint situational assessments and promote broad consultations • Identify agents of change and use their knowledge to inform programme development • Create the conditions for long-term and flexible programmes • Develop clear exit strategies that will not undermine sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct regular assessments of the local context and adapt activities accordingly • Allow communities and local CSOs to implement activities themselves • Continue training and supporting local actors and enabling capacities of all relevant groups • Prioritise relationships and foster collaborations between state and non-state actors • Use communication strategies to reach wider audiences and spread positive narratives of collaboration • Ensure flexible disbursement of funds and allow them to reach local organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time developing robust and methodologically rigorous M&E systems • Establish frameworks for accountability that are gender and age-accountable • Publicise the activities and results of the effort in other regions (e.g. radio broadcasts) • Engage at the national and local level to discuss lessons learned • For implementing partners, liaise with donors to consider bridge-funding • Use the findings to inform future programming more effectively

Table 1. Relevant elements for effective PCS

Paving the road ahead. The previous section identified the core themes that should be considered when dealing with PCS. Their discussion was permeated by examples from the field that helped to identify both what works and what ways forward could increase the effectiveness of PCS programmes. The research and analysis also identified gaps in knowledge. During the validation session, a participant noted the need to explore the different existing legal frameworks to better understand whether they are favourable to PCS efforts or require change. Further, while we can build on what has been done and on the capacities of the actors with whom we work, it has been argued that in the security sector programming there is an

“almost non-existent ability to learn from past experience.”⁷² One element that could support the systematisation and cooperation across security programmes is the comprehensive mapping of the existing people-centred strategies – this would, among others, establish “the body of evidence needed to begin closing the gap in awareness around non-state security actors’ role, including that of community members, in protecting human rights, social accountability, influencing national security and justice agendas, etc.”⁷³ The examples used in this report could be seen as a starting point for such an endeavour.



Annexes: Case Studies

Women Engagement with State Armed Forces in Mali



Before kickstarting the “*Women, Defence and Security. Women’s participation in security sector reform and confidence-building between the population and the defence and security forces in Mali*” project⁷⁴, Interpeace and the Malian Institute for Action-Research for Peace (IMRAP) conducted a vast process to understand what Malians thought were the main obstacles to peace in their country. Respondents stressed the relevance of trust (and lack thereof) between the SDF and the population. Their relationships were considered key for stabilisation, reconciliation, and sustaining peace in the region. The inclusion of women in the SDF and the improvement of relationships between them was seen as one of the most important mechanisms for supporting peace and security in Mali: having women as part of the SDF would decrease perceptions that

violent abuses would be committed by the security forces while increasing the potential to respond to the special needs of women – namely in terms of gender-based violence. Therefore, the project supported the role of women within the SDF and their overall engagement as a means to reduce the violent confrontations between civilians and state armed forces. The project had two core goals: to i) strengthen trust between the SDF and women by improving conditions for the recruitment and promotion of women within the SDF in Mali, particularly in the Mopti and Gao regions; and ii) to strengthen the participation of key grassroots women with different socio-political profiles in local peace structures linked to the implementation of the Peace Agreement in the Gao region and Bamako.⁷⁵

To achieve its goals, the project supported young women wanting to join the SDF by providing them with the necessary information about joining the military, organising awareness-raising and outreach efforts, strengthening their knowledge of local peace structures, promoting inclusive discussions with women and members of the SDF, and training women on the “peace circle” tool to increase social cohesion between women from different groups. This tool was grounded in inclusive and participatory discussions to overcome misunderstandings and mutual prejudice. The project also included dialogue initiatives to connect women from local communities to advocacy groups in the capital.

The final evaluation concluded the project had made “a major contribution to the emergence of female leadership within the SDF.” For the

women in the SDF, the project allowed them to better identify opportunities within their departments and helped them to negotiate with their superiors, “improving relations of trust between men and women SDF, raising awareness of their role and capacity within the SDF, and recognising the value of women SDF and their added value to activities.”⁷⁶ The impact of the project was also felt beyond the SDF, with strong increases in social cohesion between women from different groups.

The evaluators argued that the inclusive and participatory approach of this project was key to its positive results. The spaces for discussion it created led to “significant changes in the relationships between the SDF, women, and young women candidates [to join the SDF].”⁷⁷ This improved the trust between all stakeholders and provided clarity to women on the inner workings of the SDF. The training prepared women for the SDF competitive

examinations and some of the participants passed the tests and were in training to join the armed forces.

A conclusion from the project evaluators is similar to an argument presented earlier in this report: that to improve relationships between security stakeholders it is “essential that the expectations of both parties are realistic and clear ... A shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both parties, civilian and military, must therefore be developed.”⁷⁸ The project understood this relevance and conducted activities to support it: it organised “communication and open days” with the SDF to enable civilians to gain knowledge of their mandate and resources while promoting better intergroup relationships. Overall, the project responded positively to the needs identified by the communities and the activities were effective in addressing those needs.

Youth and Community Policing in Burundi



The project Tubiri Tuvurana Ubupfu: Strengthening Trust and Positive Relations Between Youth and Police in Burundi was implemented by Search for Common Ground. It provides an example of how PCS efforts can foster collaboration between the state and civilians, the inclusion of youth, and the involvement of community members in the implementation of security activities.

The project was implemented around the 2020 electoral cycle in Burundi as a preventive response to the intense political violence that had occurred during the 2015 elections, when the participants in incidents of violence had been primarily young. As such, the project focused on engaging youth from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and political affiliations and improving relations between youth and other segments of society.

In addition to youth, the project actively engaged police officers and mixed security committee members. These committees were community policing structures that were set up in multiple locations around the country, comprising representatives of the local administration, the police, the justice system, civilians and CSOs. In 2014, they were formally recognised and regulated. With some overlapping duties with local authorities and security forces, the committees aimed to “protect the population against political and economic threats, promote human rights and patriotic education, as well as ensure food security and reinforcing family planning.”⁷⁹ Despite the establishment of these mixed security committees, the 2015 elections showed that tensions between police and communities remained high, necessitating additional efforts.

The project had three interconnected objectives. First, it wanted to increase the capacity of existing policing structures to peacefully address tensions and conflicts in their communities. Further, the project sought to foster dialogue between communities and the police on sensitive issues. Finally, it aimed to establish positive narratives of collaboration between the police and the youth. To achieve these goals, the project combined conflict transformation, consensus building, and conflict and gender-sensitive community outreach activities. These included, among others, training of youth leaders, the police, and mixed security committee members on conflict resolution techniques, promoting youth-led community dialogue roundtables and small-scale initiatives to respond to the issues these discussion sessions identified, and producing and broadcasting radio programmes and TV spots that emphasised collaboration as a means to achieve security, tolerance, and inclusion.

The final report found that the project had achieved its intended results – capacity building, effective dialogue, and the creation of positive narratives with clear benefits for all target groups. The project “created awareness among

young people on peaceful conflict resolution tools, informed police officers of different laws on which they could tap when it came to reconciling parties in conflict and helped mixed security committee members to know the laws they should abide by and provided them with a clearer idea of what kind of conflict cases they should deal with.”⁸⁰ Stakeholders consulted by the evaluators unanimously considered that the project effectively connected people with different viewpoints and provided a safe space for productive interactions. Almost all of the youth (99%) and police officers (98%) were convinced at the endline of the incentives of engaging in regular dialogue to prevent violence, improving from around two-thirds at the baseline. The successful meetings and discussions organised as part of the project tackled the scarce opportunities for intergroup interaction. As a result, the project “positively shifted some patterns of collaboration between different groups of people, which opened up a space for information sharing, in particular between youth and the mixed security committees on one side, and mixed security committees and the police on the other.” In the words of a participant, the dialogues led some people to “divorce with their bad habits.”⁸¹ Recalling the relevance of trust in effective PCS, the project also led to improved perceptions of trust between youth and police. Further, the activities of the police became less discriminatory throughout the implementation of the project.

The success of the project owes to the emphasis it placed on local ownership, the meaningful participation of youth, and the prioritisation of relationships between security stakeholders. This also helped ensure its sustainability: according to interviewees, youth members who participated in the project continued to act as mediators within their communities. Some had been contacted by local authorities to become community leaders and support investigations on violations of civil rights by state officials at the local level – in other words, youth members were now participating in oversight activities and thus

increasing accountability in their communities. Police officers who received training in conflict transformation via the project expressed eagerness to become trainers themselves to continue building these capacities across the police force. The National Police General Inspectorate also requested that the modules delivered by Search for Common Ground be integrated in the national police training curriculum.

The support of radio programmes also contributed to the spread of the positive narratives of collaboration between police forces and youth. It is important to note that the project learned from previous projects in

the country with similar activities. Having projects segue logically facilitates the logic of longer-term planning and adaptation as implementation moves forward.

Finally, the evaluators reported how community-based security approaches responded to real needs and were effective in different contexts – but also required more political support. Noting that the project would have benefited from a stronger buy-in from and support of the Ministry of Interior, it was argued that donors could provide leverage when engaging with high-level officials and as a consequence minimise potential delays in project implementation.

Relevance of CSOs to Sustainable and Inclusive PCS in the DRC

The project “Together for Security – Improving Civilian Protection through Civil Society in the DRC” was implemented by Search for Common Ground to promote sustainable, inclusive, and accountable civilian protection efforts in security operations in the DRC. The project “supported local CSOs to develop and deepen relationships and trust with security forces, cooperate with them to improve accountability, and foster the sustainability of civil protection efforts through shifting norms linked to the roles of civilians and security forces around security issues.”⁸² It was based on the understanding of the relevance of local ownership to ensure that security threats to different groups are taken into account. In other words, security needs are gender- and age-sensitive and PCS programming is gender inclusive and accountable.

To ensure that civilians were at the heart of the project, CSOs were placed “at the centre of a

strategy to drive constructive engagement and advocacy for security sector accountability.”⁸³ The project sought to strengthen the relations of CSOs and security forces, promoting their cooperation on matters of accountability. The three main goals were to i) advocate for greater accountability in the security sector; ii) professionalise CSOs’ ability to engage and develop relationships and trust with security forces; and iii) improve civilian-security engagement in the DRC. To this end, among others, Search led human rights training for CSOs, held public discussion forums on security and human rights, organised closed-door meetings between CSOs and security forces, and conducted awareness-raising activities, including radio broadcasts. In general, CSOs received financial support, improved their capacities to address human rights and security issues, and reinforced their networking opportunities.

The evaluation concluded that the project “improved CSOs’ capacities to engage and collaborate with security forces.” The findings demonstrate positive changes in the ability to coordinate with the security forces and influence their action. Indeed, 100% of the respondents said that CSOs “are able to influence security sector policy and practice,” which represents a substantial increase from the 37 percent of civilians and 32 percent of security forces reporting so at the baseline. Further, results demonstrate increased levels of trust amongst the target population, who consider CSOs capable of ensuring accountability in the security sector. In addition, the project contributed to “initiating a change of perception on the relevance of security issues for women and the role of women, with concrete examples of women’s empowerment in a conservative local context.”⁸⁴

The positive results attest to the relevance of including civil society in PCS programmes. Strengthening local non-armed actors can improve relationships with those bearing the guns. In turn, this might lead to decreases in violence and abuses by the latter.

Improve Access to Justice in the DRC



To address tensions and conflicts, communities often create their own local security and justice mechanisms. A project from the DRC provides an example of civilian-led efforts to ensure “accessible, fair and non-punitive justice to those living in rural villages – communities for which the legal system works neither effectively nor in their best interests, and in which conflicts can quickly turn violent.”⁸⁵ It was implemented by a Congolese NGO, FOCHI, with support from Peace Direct, in South Kivu. This is a region that has been caught up in cycles of conflict since 1998. In a complex context with the presence of multiple actors and violence in a state of ebb and flow, issues of justice are harder to manage. The project was implemented bearing in mind the consistent critiques of the impunity that members of state and non-state armed groups have benefited in the area, even though there were “civilian-targeted flagrant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.” The formal judicial system, relying at the local level on overstretched *Officiers de Police Judiciaire* (OPJ), was considered “undeveloped ... [providing] little or no government authority.”⁸⁶

Despite some pre-existing local, national, and international attempts to counter this problem, the inadequacy of the investigative and justice system in rural villages in South Kivu remained. The Congolese legal framework allows for certain civil grievances to be resolved by communities themselves. As such, the project sought to strengthen communities’ ability to resolve their conflicts in a non-violent manner, improving justice outcomes, alleviating pressure on magistrates and SDF, notably the OPJ, reducing violence, and fostering collaboration and mobilisation for community development.

The project established *Barazas* in nine villages in 2010 to provide local conflict resolution through participatory processes of dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. The *Barazas* are peace courts that were set up to complement the national justice institutions: they were created in collaboration with, rather than in opposition to, the state justice system. This is aligned with the balance between state- and people-centred solutions to security and justice. Offering a less formal and more locally-owned

process, the Barazas build on pre-existing traditional structures and allow communities to “legitimately deal with the very large numbers of unresolved community-level conflicts which state institutions either do not reach or are perceived as less relevant to.”⁸⁷ Some OPJ did express reticence about the process, in response to which FOCHI established coordination mechanisms to ensure information was shared and relevant cases were transferred efficiently to the formal process.

Each Baraza is made up of four different groups of people, including a main committee of 5 individuals, a youth and a women’s group of around 10 persons each, and a general group of remaining Baraza members of the communities, approximately 100. The selection of roles is democratic and defined during community gatherings. The process in the Barazas is kickstarted when a member of the community brings an issue that has arisen in the village to the principal peace court committee. There are opportunities for sharing stories, fact-finding, and joint deliberation before reaching a decision – which can include a private or public apology, work commitments, money, and other non-violent solutions. Once the decision is accepted by all parties, there is a community-wide ceremony where the content of the agreed resolution is announced. Should a party not accept it, the case proceeds to a government magistrate and a FOCHI-paid lawyer represents the party at the local tribunal.

The project team supported community gatherings and peace court sessions, paid for transport and communication of staff and volunteers, conducted training and capacity-building of Baraza members, and led advocacy efforts through radio programmes, monthly bulletins, and theatre sessions. Specifically, FOCHI staff provided biannual training in mediation and conflict resolution skills, continuously monitored the work of peace courts, facilitated the creation of an all-female court in response to the low number of gender-based cases taken to the general peace court and ensured gender sensitivity throughout the

project, supported the involvement and reintegration of ex-combatants, led awareness-raising outreach events, among others.

Based on the three years prior to the project’s evaluation, the peace courts had successfully resolved over 1,500 cases, directly benefitting over 3,000 people and indirectly affecting 15,000 more. The conflicts were resolved rather quickly, at an average speed of 2-3 weeks per case. These facts led to the conclusion that the project had an “immediate stabilizing influence upon the communities [and] worked as an effective tool for future conflict prevention.”⁸⁸ The success rate of the Barazas in resolving conflict was very high, even when dealing with a variety of cases – from robberies to conflict over land and domestic violence. A large number of cases dealt with the return of people who had joined armed groups, often following some unresolved conflict in their home community. The Barazas were able to mediate resolutions of such conflicts, coordinate with the SDF to ensure formal DDR aspects, such as handing over any weapons to the DRC armed forces, and support the reintegration of the ex-combatants. Barazas also worked with formal security and justice actors on information sharing and prevention initiatives around cases of abuses by members of the SDF.

The majority of testimonies mentioned that there was less conflict and violence and that they felt more secure. Further, participants underpinned increases in collaboration between men and women, civilians and ex-combatants, and communities and authorities. In addition, at the time of the evaluation, there were 526 participants involved in community development projects, in what was considered an “impressive and demonstrative of active and mobilized communities working to improve infrastructure and public services.”⁸⁹ The projects, which focused on agriculture, sports, road rehabilitation, and others, were often a result of a peace court ruling. As a whole, the evaluators concluded that the Baraza project had a broad positive impact by “reducing violence and increasing collaboration, trust and self-empowerment – not only within

the communities themselves, but also between the the communities, local leaders and authorities, and the communities and local ex-rebel fighters.”⁹⁰

This project was implemented in communities that had been involved with other NGOs in the past. However, its level of mobilisation and participation surpassed previous efforts due to its strong reliance on community-led processes. The positive change was expected to be long-lasting: despite continuous problems in the surrounding eastern DRC, the Baraza communities’ non-violent conflict resolution laid the foundations for sustainable “pockets of peace.” At the end of the project, communities continued to engage in their own peace initiatives and the Barazas were looking to extend their reach to other communities, independent of FOCHI. In addition, magistrates have referred cases to the Baraza and provided training for the female courts. The peace courts are thus filling gaps and making justice more accessible.

The success of the Barazas is particularly important when looking into their costs – proving that we can do more with less. The yearly budget for the project was \$18,000.

Considering the average amount of cases dealt with by the peace courts, the total costs per case have been calculated to be \$27 – and not at the expense of those caught up in the conflict. Alternative mobile courts backed by international agencies, for instance, had costs of around \$3,000-4,000 per case. The evaluator argued that an estimated \$500,000 would be sufficient to expand the model to cover the entire South Kivu territory.⁹¹ This demonstrates that the effectiveness of PCS interventions is not always dependent on extremely large budgets. Further, this paves the way for scaling up validated initiatives such as the Baraza courts. Peace Direct had secured funding to continue working with FOCHI at the time of the report – a positive sign of continued support that also allows the team to adapt and learn from previous iterations. To illustrate, FOCHI was starting to experiment with radio clubs as a means to disseminate and strengthen the visibility of the Barazas, increasing “cross-community knowledge-sharing for conflict resolution strategies.”⁹² Despite the difficulties of working in such a volatile setting, increasing the number of pockets of peace suggests incremental impact in the region and could perhaps positively influence decisions at the regional and national levels.



Endnotes

1. Schirch, Lisa ed. (2016). Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum. Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute, p. 7.
 2. Ibid., p. 6.
 3. Sedra, M. (2022). A People-Centered Approach to Security. Seeking conceptual clarity to guide UN policy development. United Nations Development Programme, pp. 7-8. The UNDP 1994 Human Development Report put forth the human security concept by identifying seven areas of threat to human well-being that established a clear security-development nexus: economic, food, health, environmental, personal (physical), community, and political security.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Dazin, E.; Piccolo, P. & Moschini, M. (2023). People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, p. 7.
 6. Sedra, M. (2022). A People-Centered Approach to Security, p. 6.
 7. Throughout the report, the examples in the blue boxes at the end of each core theme are connected to the considerations made in the solution-oriented bullet points and seek to reflect (some of) the suggestions made therein. The annex further contains case studies with more detailed practical examples of relevant civil society-led PSC interventions.
 8. Dazin et al. (2023). People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform, pp. 30-31.
 9. Chappuis, F. (2023). Hybrid Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Reform. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. It means “making security provision, oversight and management more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, the rule of law and respect for human rights.” Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (2019). SSR Backgrounder Series, p. 1.
 10. Shepherd, B. & Mugula, P. (2018). The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform. Lessons from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Search for Common Ground, p. 19.
 11. Sedra, M. (2022). A People-Centred Approach to Security, p. 26.
 12. Ibid.
 13. United Nations (2015). Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People. New York: United Nations, pp. 39, 66.
 14. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (2023). Security Sector Governance in Transition: Civilian Oversight of the Security Sector. Sudan Policy Paper Two, p. 3.
 15. Nonviolent Peaceforce (2023). Localising Protection? Community-based strategies and leadership in the protection of civilians, pp. 1-2. Cf. “Unarmed Civilian Protection” on the Connexus platform.
 16. Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (unpublished report). Just Future – Achievement Case 2021.
 17. Nonviolent Peaceforce (2023). Localising Protection? Community-based strategies and leadership in the protection of civilians.
 18. Mottet, C & Inkesha, A. (2022). Improving our understanding of the role of defence and security forces (DSF) in the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in West Africa. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, pp. 72-73.
 19. Sedra, M. (2022). A People-Centered Approach to Security, pp. 22-23.
 20. Cf. Schirch, L. (2016). Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum.
 21. Nonviolent Peaceforce (2021). Moving Forward the Mainstreaming of Women, Peace and Security. in the ASEAN, pp. 2-3.
 22. Dazin et al. (2023). People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform, p. 9.
 23. Dounda, T. & Lewa, M. (2021). Evaluation Finale. Projet : « STD061 Anw Ko Hêrê ». Search for Common Ground.
 24. Cf. Nonviolent Peaceforce (2022). Protection to guarantee girls’ education How NP’s patrols enabled safe access to education in Ba’aj, Iraq. Policy Brief.
 25. SaferWorld (2021). Community policing in Central Asia. Lessons and experiences from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, p. 3.
 26. Chappuis F. (2023). Hybrid Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Reform.
 27. Bagayoko, N., Hutchful, E., & Luckham, R., (2016) Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority. Conflict, Security & Development, 16(1), p. 13.
 28. Sedra, M. (2022). A People-Centered Approach to Security, p. 31.
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29. Quotation from a practitioner interviewed for this report. Conversely, a participant in the validation session noted that at times CSO members “have been arrested because they were seen as collaborators with other actors.”
 30. For instance, when security forces are implicated in abuses, a donor that had supported them through training and equipping initiatives is subject to criticism: “the provision of equipment, weapons, or operational training poses potential reputational risks for funders who do not want to see their support misused.” Sheperd, B. & Mugula, P., (2018). *The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform*, p. 15.
 31. Ibrahim, J. & Bala, S. (2018). *Civilian-Led Governance and Security in Nigeria After Boko Haram*. United States Institute for Peace, pp. 5-6. Overall, it is not uncommon to see state and non-state armed groups participating in both criminal activity and its repression. Cf. Chappuis, F. (2023). *Hybrid Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Reform*.
 32. SaferWorld (2021). *A people-centred approach to security and justice*, p. 8.
 33. Chappuis, F. (2023). *Hybrid Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Reform*, pp. 7-10. See also the *Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights*.
 34. Dazin et al. (2023). *People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform*, p. 11.
 35. Bagayoko et al. (2016). *Hybrid security governance in Africa*, p. 16.
 36. SaferWorld (2021). *Community policing in Central Asia*, p. 2.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
 38. Mottet, C. & Inkesha A. (2022). *Improving our understanding of the role of defence and security forces (DSF) in the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in West Africa*.
 39. Lammers, E., & van Lierde, F, (2023). *Advocating for inclusive security in Mali “Top-down approaches have failed. It’s high time to turn things around.”*
 40. SaferWorld (2021) *Community policing in Central Asia*.
 41. Sheperd, B. & Mugula, P. (2018). *The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform*, p. 18.
 42. Cf. Sedra, M. (2022). *A People-Centered Approach to Security*, p. 29.
 43. Sheperd, B. & Mugula, P. (2018). *The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform*, p. 12.
 44. E.g., Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). *A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751–783.
 45. Sedra, M. (2022). *A People-Centered Approach to Security*, pp. 30-31.
 46. Kelman, H. C. (1998). *Social-psychological Contributions to Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in the Middle East*. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 47(1), p. 9.
 47. Matunde, C. (2022). *STAR: Strengthening Trust and Relationships between Community, Security, and Justice Sector Actors for Improved Security in Far North Cameroon Endline Evaluation Study in Mora*. *Search for Common Ground*, pp. 9-10.
 48. Cf. Sheperd, B. & Mugula, P. (2018). *The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform*.
 49. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (2023). *Civil Society, SDG 16, and Security Sector Governance: Promoting open government through strengthening access to information*. *Workshop Report*.
 50. Cf. Search for Common Ground (2020). “Improving collaboration between security forces and communities in the Liptako Gourma region”; Search for Common Ground (2021). *Program “Interventions to Support Security and Stabilization in Niger (I3S Niger)”*, pp. 3-4; Dounda, T. & Lewa, M. (2021). *Evaluation Finale. Projet : « STD061 Anw Ko Hêrê »*, Search for Common Ground, pp. 9-10; Africaid Conseils (2023). *Évaluation finale du projet « Nedew Ashika ! Demain ensemble” - Unis pour la paix à Kidal »*, Search for Common Ground, pp. 12-13.
 51. Nonviolent Peaceforce (2023). *Localising Protection?*, p. 4.
 52. Bärwaldt, K.. (2018). *Executive Summary*. In Bärwaldt, K (ed.) *Strategy, Jointness, Capacity. Institutional Requirements for Supporting Security Sector Reform*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
 53. SaferWorld (2021). *A people-centred approach to security and justice. Recommendations for policy and programming*, p. 3. In the validation session, participants noted the diminished space for CSO involvement and how the humanitarian sector tends to capture a larger amount of external funding to fragile settings.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 55. Dazin et al. (2023). *People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform*, p. 14.
 56. Grandjean, L. & Muipatayi, P. (2020). *Evaluation Finale. Lobi Mokolo Ya Sika II A Dual Approach to Effective SSR*. *Search for Common Ground*, p. 40.
 57. SaferWorld (2021). *Community policing in Central Asia*, p. 8.
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57. SaferWorld (2021). Community policing in Central Asia, p. 8.
 58. Dazin et al. (2023). People-centred Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform, pp. 12-13.
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 60. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (2023). Security Sector Governance in Transition: Civilian Oversight of the Security Sector. Sudan Policy Paper Two, p. 2.
 61. Sheperd, B. & Mugula, P. (2018). The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform, pp. 9, 19.
 62. Bärwaldt, K.. (2018). Executive Summary. In Bärwaldt, K (ed.) Strategy, Jointness, Capacity. Institutional Requirements for Supporting Security Sector Reform. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
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 83. Ibid.
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 92. Ibid, p. 66.
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