



UNDERSTANDING
AND IMPROVING
ENGAGEMENT WITH
CIVIL SOCIETY IN
UN PEACEKEEPING:

*FROM POLICY
TO PRACTICE*



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS
AND DEPARTMENT OF FIELD SUPPORT

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May 2016

*United Nations Departments of
Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support
Policy, Evaluation and Training Division
Policy and Best Practices Service
New York, NY 10017*



United Nations, 2017

WWW.UN.ORG/PEACEKEEPING

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project has been made possible through the generous sponsorship of the Government of Denmark. The project was undertaken by the Civil Affairs team of the Policy and Best Practices Service (PBPS) in the United Nations Departments for Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO/DFS). The team is very much indebted to the many DPKO-DFS representatives who gave their time for the online survey of practice and who generously shared their knowledge, experience and expertise during interviews conducted with them. The team is equally grateful to the personnel of the UN peacekeeping missions in the United Nations Mission in Liberia UNMIL, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and to representatives of United Nations and other international agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academic think tanks who provided important inputs to inform the field research.

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PEOPLE AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS OFTEN RISK THEIR LIVES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OTHERS. THEY SPEAK OUT EVEN WHEN KNOWING THEY COULD BE SILENCED FOREVER. THEY HIGHLIGHT PROBLEMS THAT OTHERS IGNORE OR MIGHT NOT EVEN KNOW EXIST. THEY PROTECT OUR RIGHTS.

– UN SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON,
HIGH-LEVEL EVENT IN SUPPORT ON CIVIL SOCIETY,
23 SEPTEMBER 2013

THE DETERMINATION AND INTEGRITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS BRING ME, AND PERHAPS BRING TO YOU, A SENSE OF HUMILITY, A FEELING OF A GREAT AND POWERFUL DEBT BEING OWED, AND THE WILL TO CONTINUE WORKING FOR THE EQUAL AND INALIENABLE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF EVERY HUMAN BEING.

– ZEID RA'AD AL-HUSSEIN,
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS,
OCTOBER 2014



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CONTEXT

The last decade of UN peacekeeping has witnessed growing high-level consensus on the importance of involving civil society in achieving sustainable peace in conflict-affected situations. The latest and most prominent indication is the strong emphasis placed by the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report on the need for a shift in the UN peacekeeping ‘mindset’ towards a more “people-focused” approach that includes civil society actors to help address emerging security threats and peacebuilding challenges. Indeed, time and again, civil society around the globe has demonstrably proven that citizens can be

more than victims of armed violence, passive bystanders to human atrocities, or spoilers to peace processes: for instance, women's groups in Liberia have organized peaceful dialogue across ethnic divides; the Inter-Religion Council in Sierra Leone brought warring factions to the negotiation table; Rwandan NGOs organized peace camps and soccer games for mixed Hutu and Tutsi teams; Nepalese NGOs documented human rights violations; international peace brigades have protected trade union leaders in Colombia; a religious community helped facilitate peace negotiations in Mozambique. These are but a few of many examples of how civil society actors can play a strong role in support of sustainable peace processes in conflict-affected environments. Indeed, today the main question is no longer *whether* civil society has a role to play in building a sustainable peace in conflict-affected states, but *how* it can realize its full potential as an interlocutor for peace and stability. An equally important question from a peacekeeping perspective is *how* United Nations peace missions can better engage with civil society partners and local communities in such settings to achieve the same goals

within the auspices of their Security Council mandates. This report is an attempt to begin answering some of these pertinent questions and better understand the synergies between civil society actors and UN peacekeeping missions in conflict-affected contexts.

KNOWLEDGE GAPS IMPACTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Despite growing interest in civil society and progress made in the UN policy agenda, civil society inclusion by UN missions lags in practice. There is little systematic analysis of its potential and challenges from a UN peacekeeping perspective, and limited operational guidance for Civil Affairs Officers in the field on how to best support it. Specifically, there are arguably three interrelated gaps in policy and practice:

- **There is no conceptual consensus within the United Nations and among its partner donors and stakeholders on what 'civil society' means as an operational concept**, often resulting in cognitive dissonance in the field about whom to engage

with during different phases of conflict in support of peacebuilding mandates;

- **To date, there has been scarce empirical evidence of how peacekeeping missions engage with civil society** in a systematic and coordinated manner during different phases of conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. There is currently a wealth of only largely descriptive case study accounts of context-specific civil society engagement initiatives, in addition to extensive scholarly literature on the overall impact of international development and humanitarian programmes run by NGOs on conflict contexts.
- **Civil society engagement by UN peacekeeping missions historically tends to be ad hoc** and dependent in large measure on personal interests and networks of mission staff. Little analysis has been conducted across peacekeeping missions of how missions identify or define their civil society interlocutors and work with civil society actors in support of an agenda for peace. There is little systematic guidance on how to map and analyse civil society actors, their

interests, incentives, institutions, limitations, risks, and critical enabling factors for participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes.

In order to address these knowledge gaps, this report attempts to synthesize new empirical data collected from UN peacekeepers in missions and Headquarters for this study with scholastic research undertaken over time. It aims at developing a better understanding of current practice, challenges, and opportunities available for effective civil society engagement within peacekeeping missions and building a conceptual base that outlines their synergies with effective United Nations peacekeeping mandate implementation.

The study team adopted a largely qualitative mixed methods approach, which included an in-depth desk review of primary and secondary data, about 150 semi-structured Headquarters and field-based key informant interviews, and an online survey of 1,890 United Nations Departments for Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO-DFS) respondents at Headquarters and in the field. The study team also conducted an in-depth desk review of key primary documents, including

internal UN DPKO-DFS policy documents and a review of United Nations Security Council resolutions and mandates over a period of 10-15 years. In addition, the team undertook a literature review of relevant secondary data, including academic, policy journals and think tank materials. The semi-structured interviews included United Nations personnel from civil affairs, human rights, and political affairs components as well as interviewees from relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, international and national NGOs, academia and think tanks. Finally, the study team carried out field interviews with three peacekeeping missions – United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

THE PILOT TOOLKIT

Based on feedback from extensive practitioner field and United Nations Headquarters interviews and gaps identified in the survey findings, the report offers a simple pilot toolkit to help peacekeepers better identify and strategically map

relevant civil society actors and their key roles during different phases of conflict, considers the critical factors that are likely to drive or impede civil society engagement, and highlight risks (if any) that may merit special consideration.

The primary goal of this toolkit is to help mission staff shift from a decision-making environment where civil society engagement is largely ad hoc and based on personal relationships, towards one where the decision-making process and development of engagement strategies during different phases of conflict is more strategic and in line with overall mandate objectives.

The pilot toolkit does not aim to replace the invaluable contextual understanding gained through local knowledge and networks built and nurtured by field staff, especially national staff. The toolkit also recognizes explicitly that the challenges of engaging inclusively and effectively with civil society in conflict-affected settings are by necessity context-specific. Strategies to improve mission engagement with civil society as well as local communities in general will always present trade-offs which need to be recognized and actively managed through prioritization and sequencing.

Specifically, management of these trade-offs requires identifying the specific political, institutional, and/or organizational risks presented by a particular engagement strategy and selected modality, and working actively across mission components and with mission leadership to formulate strategies that can manage these risks in a nimble and flexible way and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. We focus specifically on the questions below, which merit close strategic and operational consideration in peacekeeping contexts.

WHOM SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH?

The first question focuses on the **definition** of civil society and the identification of actors on the ground that can legitimately claim to represent it. A tricky and complex task in any context, this becomes even more challenging in conflict-affected situations, where multiple actors compete for power and resources in an environment that is still chaotic and prone to violence. The report offers a pilot definition of 'civil society' in Section I to help conceptually broaden our perspective on actors traditionally considered part

of civil society, to include a wider spectrum of informal actors, including marginalized groups, women's groups and youth, as well as those who may often be viewed as potential spoilers to peace processes.

WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

The second question concerns the **rationale** for civil society's involvement in building an environment conducive to sustainable peace. While most peacekeepers fully subscribe to the idea that civil society's contribution is important, their views of the 'why' differ within and between various mission components, at times sharply. This is an important question to consider because the rationale for civil society engagement among peacekeepers directly influences the role that civil society is expected to play vis-à-vis the mission, as well as the timing of its engagement.

IN WHAT WAY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

The third question looks at which **role** (or roles) are best played by civil society in a post-conflict setting. Civil

society engagement is a broad umbrella term, encompassing a myriad of activities and functions. What is civil society's comparative advantage vis-à-vis other actors such as the government or other donors? Where should we include civil society, and where, perhaps, should we not include them during different stages of the mission life cycle?

WHEN SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

Finally, there is the question of the **timing** of civil society engagement by UN peacekeeping missions. Conflict-affected settings are fluid and volatile, and building a sustainable peace is a highly time-sensitive yet long-term endeavour. What is the best time for UN missions to engage with civil society so that roots of conflict are mitigated, peace dynamics are fostered, and national and local capacities for peace are strengthened?

These questions are not new, but they are still difficult to answer.

In various ways, they reflect the kind of issues and dilemmas that the peacekeeping and indeed the larger peacebuilding and development community have faced for decades when engaging with civil society in conflict-affected

environments. Much has been learned already, although little has been collated into comprehensive guidance for peacekeeping missions. It is thus crucial to reflect and build on lessons emerging from UN missions' experiences in engaging with civil society and local communities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Missions need to engage more systematically with civil society at all levels.

The mission mandate provides the best starting point for improving systematic engagement with civil society. By underlining the importance of engagement with local communities in the mandates of peacekeeping missions, the process of collective ownership among different components of the mission for engaging civil society actors representing these communities can be enhanced from the very beginning. This would also facilitate access to financial resources that are necessary to develop and sustain community engagement strategies that can help build the mission's relationship with civil society and support capacity building for civil society actors

operating in local communities. This would help build conditions conducive to sustainable peace and to participating more effectively in wider political processes. Lessons learned from previous engagements must be taken into account.

2. Missions need to appreciate the impact that conflict had on civil society.

Civil society merits unique consideration in conflict-affected contexts. Within any conflict-affected environment, civil society actors can mobilize to play a potentially powerful role either to escalate conflict or facilitate its peaceful resolution, depending on their interests and motivations. Indeed, civil society actors are not neutral bystanders in violent conflicts. They have the potential to be interlocutors and enforcers for peace or spoilers in fragile peace processes. Conflict also dramatically changes the operating environment and severely constrains the political and legal space available for civil society.

Moreover, not all civil society actors have the same goals and interests in conflict-affected environments. Peacekeepers need to better understand their

different motivations, goals and networks to better leverage and partner with them. Accordingly, civil society mapping efforts are important to be able to establish who can be leveraged as positive influences for peace, as well as who may be implicated as parties to conflict. Identifying and supporting the right mixture of civil society groups that are effective, enjoy public trust, and have social capital across many identity groups in such contexts can be very challenging. There is a need for better analysis and mapping of civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts.

3. Missions need to engage with a broader spectrum of civil society actors.

Missions need to better understand the wide ecosystem of civil society actors that operate in conflict settings. Civil society encompasses more than just Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs, extending to include a wide spectrum of individual societal actors and informal societal networks stirred to collective action around common goals. Missions should make an effort to ensure an "inclusive-enough" process, while recognizing that inclusiveness can never be exhaustive and that it is not only about

actors, but also about issues. Peacekeeping missions can play a key role in building civil society's capacity to promote sustainable peace by supporting its manifold roles as negotiator, mediator, and advocate.

Inclusion of all under-represented populations, such as people with disabilities and religious, ethnic, linguistic minorities, youth and women as important civil society actors that must be informed, consulted with, and empowered remains essential for sustainable peace. Exclusion of any of these key groups risks seriously hampering peace and security efforts. Indeed, youth and women tend to be heard only in relation to a narrow selection of issues, such as implementation of gender or livelihood projects. As vital segments of society (often composing the majority in post-conflict countries), youth and women should be included in the analysis, design and consultation phases of all peace processes.

4. Community engagement should be continuous and systematic rather than ad hoc and sporadic.

Often, community members are consulted once only and

do not hear how their input is used, making them reluctant to participate in future consultations and leading to dialogue fatigue as they answer the same context-driven questions from different international stakeholders without much feedback on how the engagement process can benefit their key constituents most affected by the conflict – i.e. the local communities. Even when community engagement is conducted, the voices of people who are not linked to any institution are not always reflected.

It is a lesson learned time and again that UN peacekeeping strategies that do not reflect and address the concerns of community members are not sustainable in the long run. Effective information feedback loops in conjunction with active consultations are critical. Local civil society also has an important monitoring and accountability role that is not always put to use. Local civil society has first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground, and can contribute to early warning systems and also monitor the impact of peacebuilding activities throughout project cycles as well as once the United Nations leaves. Although it can be difficult, access to rural

areas is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all voices.

5. Missions require operational guidance to better map and understand the value, roles and risks involved in engaging with civil society.

An institutional approach is necessary to inform the development of improved engagement with civil society. Given that the study found that engagement between peacekeeping missions and civil society has largely been driven by personality and individual commitment of peacekeeping personnel, more institutionalized policy guidelines are necessary in order to maximize civil society's potential and set community engagement strategies that involve civil society participation and capacity building within the larger mission planning context and on a sustainable footing. This effort requires that a structured mechanism be established to facilitate dialogue and communication between civil society and the leadership of peacekeeping missions on a systematic basis.

6. Missions should invest in building civil society capacity to contribute to the peace process.

The approach to improving engagement with civil society requires missions to consider capacity-building investments to enhance the functioning of civil society as a critical pillar to support peace processes. This requires a shift in policy emphasis to underline capacity building as an important complement to the technical and logistical assistance that has largely defined the scope of engagement between peacekeeping missions and civil society to date. Capacity building of civil society should enable them to undertake their unique roles in conflict situations more effectively, including improving key functions such as protection of civilians, early warning, monitoring and information-sharing, and facilitating public participation in wider peace processes. Missions should also support the networking, coordination and sharing of experiences, good practices, and lessons learned between civil society actors.

7. Peacekeepers should work in partnership with civil society to bridge the gap between missions and local communities.

The frequency and modality through which mission leadership identify and engage with civil society are highly variable across missions and contexts. Civil society actors are well-placed to facilitate outreach by peacekeeping missions to the wider population. Civil society representatives are not innocent bystanders but actors who have affected or have been affected by the conflict. Civil society actors with the capacity to mobilize local populations can serve as conduits for informing and educating the population on the mandate of peacekeeping missions and to facilitate confidence-building with the local population. Peacekeepers need to adopt a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society, one that recognizes their influence within their communities – whether positive or otherwise. It also requires a recognition of the capacity of civil society to serve as partners, capable of providing essential information to peacekeepers based on their knowledge of the operational environment. This approach should also enable

peacekeepers to recognize any political divisions within or among different civil society actors as a result of the conflict, which could work to undermine the peace process.

8. Missions should encourage more constructive engagement between government and civil society actors, both at the national and local levels.

Significant feedback was received from UN partners as well as civil society actors that peacekeeping missions should make greater efforts to encourage constructive dialogue between civil society actors and the government, which is a key area where peacekeeping missions have a comparative advantage to support more positive state-society relations.

9. We need to engage more constructively with civil society-led efforts on community security needs.

Engaging with communities is not only an opportunity for the United Nations to learn about their security needs, but also to explain in practical terms what the United Nations can and cannot do. Issues raised by

local civil society actors that might be critical of government should not be ignored by the United Nations, but rather be acknowledged and addressed.

10. Missions need to develop suitable tools based on more rigorous contextual analysis to identify and map civil society actors.

Conflict analysis informed by local voices is necessary before, during, and after UN peace operations to understand the context, comprehensively address the challenges, and ensure that there is lasting impact and 'Do No Harm'. The report found that context-specific conflict analysis is rarely carried out, and even then, local civil society perspectives are rarely incorporated. Civil society engagement often occurs in a strategic analysis vacuum, is not well connected across components, and does not necessarily always feed upwards to contribute towards overall conflict analysis and decision-making processes.

There is a need to better understand the wide eco-system of civil society actors that operate in conflict settings. Not all civil society actors have the same goals and interests in

conflict-affected environments. Peacekeepers need to better understand their different motivations, goals and networks to better leverage and partner with them. Analysis should be carried out in active partnership with all relevant mission components and donor partners with a civil society engagement role in conflict settings and with a focus on the quality of the process as well as the product. This could be incorporated into social analysis, conflict analysis, or other socio-political analyses. At a minimum, it was noted that there is a need to have a mission roadmap or strategy for engagement with civil society at national and sub-national levels that aligns with mandated priorities and ensure more strategic and focused engagement. The pilot toolkit offered in this report is one step in addressing this gap in policy.

AUDIENCE

The primary audience for this research is UN DPKO-DFS peacekeeping personnel supporting civil society engagement for peace processes and peacebuilding in conflict-affected situations. It is anticipated that the work will be of interest to the broader UN peacebuilding

community, including academia, international governmental organizations (IGOs), NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSOs), UN agencies, funds and programme staff, who would benefit operationally by having a better conceptual understanding of civil society engagement while operating in conflict contexts for their respective country peacebuilding programmes; and governments hosting peacekeeping missions that seek to strengthen state-society relations in post-conflict environments.

VALUE ADDED

This report encourages peacekeepers to think not only about what to support, but also about why, how, and when to provide support, taking political feasibility into account. It does not offer magic bullets or quick fixes to existing challenges in finding and engaging with effective civil society partners in conflict contexts. Rather, it aims to make a unique contribution to knowledge in the following ways.

- **contributing to a shared conceptual understanding of civil society** within the UN peacekeeping community using a political economy lens;

- **better informing policy and practice**, through the identification of feasible, realistic recommendations;
- **supporting risk management and actor mapping** by helping to identify the critical factors that are likely to drive or impede civil society engagement for peacebuilding in the future;
- **broadening the scope for dialogue between the United Nations and its partners**, including host governments, bilateral and regional partners, and civil society actors around key political challenges and opportunities at the national and local levels for working together in peacebuilding;
- **promoting coherence across DPKO-DFS around a common understanding** of the underlying political and economic processes shaping civil society engagement by UN peacekeeping in conflict-affected environments.



UN Photo/Iason Founten



INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

The last decade of UN peacekeeping has witnessed growing high-level consensus on the importance of civil society for achieving sustainable peace in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Although national governments have the primary responsibility to protect civilians and prevent violence, due to the complexity, scale and nature of conflict, no single actor – including national governments – can ensure sustainable peace and stability on its own. Instead, a comprehensive ecosystem of societal actors working in tandem with the host state and international community is needed to achieve a durable peace. In this process, a wide spectrum of civil

society actors can play a critical role in helping to: address the root causes of conflict; prevent violence and protect civilians; facilitate and support wider political processes to bring peaceful resolution of specific conflicts; and reconcile and transform war-torn societies in the aftermath of conflict. In his 2001 report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (S/2001/574), the United Nations Secretary-General stresses that “the primary responsibility for conflict prevention rests with national Governments, with civil society playing an important role”. This principle is also supported by both the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly through resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1366 (2001) and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 57/337 (2003) that both recognize the important supporting role of civil society in addressing and preventing violent conflict. The recent 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) also emphasized the need for a shift in the UN peacekeeping ‘mindset’ to a more ‘people-focused’ approach that includes civil society in order to address emerging conflicts and mobilize partnerships to support sustainable political solutions.

The increasingly complex nature of violent conflict has dramatically increased the cost of conflict borne by ordinary citizens, compelling civil society to act. In most cases, unarmed civilian populations are often targeted by warring groups, with non-combatant civilian deaths making up the vast majority of all conflict-related fatalities. This is in addition to forced displacement of civilians, targeted abduction of women and children either to serve as coerced soldiers or for purposes of systematic conflict-related sexual violence, environmental destruction, the collapse of already fragile local economies leading to further impoverishment and instability, and the enduring legacy of crippling mistrust, fear and societal division within local communities suffering from years of devastation. In such circumstances, civil society actors are often motivated to step up and take action by using their agency and organizing power to help prevent conflict and find peaceful alternatives to stop ongoing violence affecting local communities.

Civil society’s potential in conflict-affected environments is not always well understood. While its roles in humanitarian relief, service delivery and

human rights protection are well documented, what is less well known are the myriad ways in which civil society can contribute towards preventing conflict and building peace. Civil society has the potential to play an important role during every stage of conflict given that they often live alongside local armed actors, understand the local political, social and historical context, and tend to enjoy a degree of legitimacy among local populations.

Civil society’s roles are diverse, depending on the context.

Civil society actors have the potential to play a wide spectrum of roles, including: advocating on behalf of local populations; highlighting situations of injustice, corruption and human rights violations; providing early warnings; preventing emerging violence; and serving as an information conduit for local communities when public communications infrastructure is destroyed or disrupted. Civil society actors can also help enable positive local conditions conducive to peace talks, support political mediation processes as a neutral monitor and/or actor representing civilians impacted by the conflict, and hold the main parties to the conflict accountable to the agreed upon

peace settlement to ensuring that peace is consolidated in an inclusive and accountable manner. Moreover, civil society actors at the international, national, and local levels can contribute greatly towards setting a global policy agenda for good governance and helping war-torn communities reconcile peacefully and build trust when conflict has ended.

Indeed, today the main question is no longer *whether* civil society has a role to play in addressing conflict in conflict-affected states, rather *how* civil society can realize its full potential as an interlocutor for peace between the state and local communities. A related area that consequently also merits better understanding is *how* UN peace missions deployed in such settings can better engage with civil society to support conditions conducive to sustainable peace and stability.

To date, civil society efforts explicitly aimed at supporting UN missions in wider political processes have not been well-documented. Violent conflicts are not transformed by peace agreements alone; they need a grassroots commitment to address ongoing problems peacefully through political means without resorting to

the use of force. Civil society can be uniquely influential in sustaining this commitment by helping provide the conditions conducive to stability, leading the necessary public participation that can underpin official political negotiations at the national level, and providing recommendations that can effectively address the local dimensions of wider conflict contexts. Moreover, civil society actors often enjoy credibility as neutral participants in peace negotiations since they are perceived as either non-partisan or multi-partisan (e.g. comprised of people with links to all the conflict parties), with the interests and needs of non-combatant civilians being their primary concern. In addition, civil society-led local peace and reconciliation processes also enjoy greater credibility because they are perceived as societal actors working from within local communities to help enable ordinary people articulate what they really need from the state and help diverse identity groups within these communities find enough common ground from which they can come together and work collectively as a society to (re)establish peaceful co-existence.

Civil society actors can also be a powerful tool due to their

ability to direct attention to the underlying causes of conflict that need to be addressed nationally if a sustainable and just peace is to emerge. Civil society actors typically draw upon detailed local knowledge of the specific dynamics and developments that can trigger conflict escalation. By utilizing credible (and usually independent) civilian monitors, they can help provide information and nuanced situational analyses in real-time on the conditions on the ground adversely impacting local communities. As a result, civil society is more likely to be accepted by the conflict parties and other stakeholders participating in mediation processes because of their perceived neutrality and credibility. As part of these negotiations, civil society actors can also offer recommendations explicitly aimed at fostering confidence building in local communities towards the peace process. They can work with local communities, including disarmed groups, to implement the ensuing peace agreements in a sustainable and tangible manner.

In addition, civil society can play an important role in sustaining peace agreements reached by the parties, including by raising awareness and educating the

public about the agreement.

Given their unique access to and trust with local communities, civil society can help spread accurate and timely information both about the costs of continued conflict and the opportunities and means to seek a resolution through constructive engagement between the main parties to the conflict. They can provide accurate information to local communities about peace agreements negotiated at the national level and help communities interpret the impact of these agreements on their day-to-day welfare and security. This can help engender a sense of public ownership from the bottom up of the peace process that can be crucial for consolidating public support across communities, if well coordinated, for the peace process itself. Conversely, if the public and organized civil society have been excluded from the process or believe that it has not addressed their real needs, they are less likely to be invested in the peace process and thus less likely to work actively towards its implementation. Without a broad public constituency in support, there are few safeguards against those who want to derail the agreement.

CODIFICATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The last decade has witnessed increasingly consistent high-level consensus within the United Nations and among its partners, including Member States, peacekeepers, other practitioners and scholars

about the important supporting role that civil society can play in conflict-affected settings. Accordingly, improving UN engagement with civil society as part of wider political processes and post-conflict recovery and stabilization has featured prominently in UN Security Council debates and other multilateral forums on political transitions from conflict and fragility to peaceful and resilient states. For instance, see the table, *Key Policy Documents*, below.

KEY POLICY DOCUMENTS ON UN ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY (2004-2015)

- 2004** The 2004 Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations (A/58/817) underlines the need for the United Nations to deepen its engagement with **a plurality of civil society actors in all forms** – beyond the political elite cadre – and become more outward-looking in its orientation beyond its traditional intergovernmental role.¹
- 2005** The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action both commit partner countries to “deepen engagement with **civil society organizations as independent development actors in their own right** whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector”.²
- 2009** The 2009 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict (A/63/881-S/2009/304) reiterates that “local and traditional authorities as well as **civil society actors, including marginalized groups, have a critical role to play in bringing multiple voices to the table** for early priority-setting and to broaden the sense of ownership around a common vision for the country’s future”.³

¹ A/58/817 (11 June 2004) : We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance: report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relation (Cardoso Report): <http://undocs.org/A/58/817> and <http://undocs.org/A/58/817/Corr.1>

² OECD (2005b).

³ United Nations (2009).

KEY POLICY DOCUMENTS ON UN ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, 2004–2015 (CONTINUED)

- 2011** The 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, envisaged as a compact between fragile and conflict-affected states, international development partners *and civil society*, also underlines the need for “support to global, regional and national initiatives to build the capacity of government and **civil society leaders and institutions to lead peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts**”.⁴
- 2011** In addition, the g7+⁵ further recognizes the importance of civil society actors in its endorsement of the New Deal noting that “**constructive state-society relations, and the empowerment of women, youth and marginalized groups [...] are at the heart of successful peacebuilding and statebuilding**”.⁶
- 2011** The World Bank’s 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development also emphasizes **civil society’s role in restoring confidence and sustaining the momentum for recovery and transformation**, reinforcing the important role of civil society as a fundamental development partner to consolidate a durable peace.⁷
- 2013** In 2013, the United Nations Security Council (S/RES/2086) unanimously endorsed a multidimensional approach to peacekeeping, which aimed at facilitating peacebuilding and preventing state relapse into conflict. It emphasized that **multidimensional peacekeeping missions “may be mandated to...facilitate consultation processes among local population and civil society to help them contribute to national processes and discussions”**.⁸
- 2014** The 2014 UN Integrated Planning (IAP) Policy reiterates the importance of civil society in UN peacekeeping by requiring that mandatory strategic assessments undertaken by all missions should include consultations with “**relevant interlocutors...including, to the extent possible, national authorities, civil society, and other local representatives...**”⁹
- 2015** Last, but not the least, Goal 16 of the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals includes ensuring “**responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels**” as one of its key targets to help “**promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**”.¹⁰

⁴ **The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States** is a key agreement between fragile and conflict affected states, international development partners and civil society to improve current development policy and practice in fragile states. Countries committed themselves to pursuing more political ways of working to address the root causes of conflict and fragility, and to channelling investments in fragile states in line with basic but adapted aid effectiveness principles. It was crafted and signed by more than 40 countries and organizations at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness on 30 November 2011 in Busan, Republic of Korea. More information, see: www.pbsdialogue.org/

⁵ **The g7+** is an international, inter-governmental organization made up of 20 countries affected by conflict that aims to forge pathways out of fragility and conflict, and to enable peer learning on how to overcome special development challenges faced by fragile states, achieve resilience and advocate collectively for better international policies to address the needs of conflict-affected countries. Member countries include: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, San Tome e Principe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo and Yemen. More information is available at www.g7plus.org/

⁶ See www.g7plus.org/en/new-deal/document

⁷ World Bank (2011).

⁸ UN Security Council — S/RES/2086 (2013). Available at www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2086.pdf

⁹ IAP Handbook (2014: 15-16).

¹⁰ A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. See www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E; and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

UN SECURITY COUNCIL MANDATE LANGUAGE ON CIVIL SOCIETY (1990–2015)

- Include civil society representatives in political dialogues: SCR 2226 (2015) and SCR 2162 (2014) on UNOCI;
- Support civil society participation as part of national and local reconciliation, and social cohesion facilitation: SCR 2227 (2015) and SCR 2164 (2014) on MINUSMA;
- Promote interaction with civilian population to identify security threats to the public: SCR 2149(2014) on MINUSCA;
- Support civil society participation to promote inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation process: SCR 2100 (2013) on MINUSMA;
- Support civil society development to promote political inclusion: SCR 2095 (2013) on UNSMIL;
- Support civil society development to promote political inclusion: SCR 2040 (2012) on UNAMSIL;
- Support civil society participation in the electoral process: SCR 1917 (2010) on UNAMA;
- Support civil society participation as part of national reconciliation and political dialogue facilitation: SCR 1856 (2008) on MONUSCO;
- Support civil society participation as part of national reconciliation and political dialogue: SCR 1756 (2007);
- Assist in strengthening societal capacity for human rights promotion, protection and monitoring: SCR 1704 (2006) on UNMIT;
- and Support civil society participation to promote and advance political reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities: SCR 814 (1993) on UNOSOM.

PROGRESS IN POLICY BUT LAGGING IN PRACTICE

Despite growing interest in deepening civil society engagement, and progress made in the UN policy agenda, civil society engagement by UN peace operations has continued to lag in practice. Historically, Article 71 of the United Nations Charter gives civil society the right to consult with the United Nations. The Article states that “the Economic and Social Council may take suitable arrangements for consultation with

non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence”. However, Article 71 does not mandate regular UN consultation with civil society actors in conflict-affected countries. Research shows that while UN Security Council resolutions mandating peace operations have included (see table above) – albeit somewhat equivocal – directives for UN peace operations to support civil society in undertaking a variety of functions toward the promotion of peace and security, none specifically mandate UN missions to directly engage and consult

with local communities, or indeed with civil society actors, *on a regular basis* in the field.

This gap in mandate language, combined with an overall limited understanding within UN missions of the tangible value of civil society engagement, has historically led to the lack of an institutional incentive within UN missions to develop a systematic approach for regular mission engagement with civil society actors on issues of peace and security. As a result, engagement between civil society actors and peacekeeping missions has been

historically sporadic and ad hoc at best, depending on individual head of mission interest and staff commitment. Moreover, host governments may oppose direct UN engagement and capacity-building support for civil society, especially those perceived to be hostile to the state, as infringing upon their state sovereignty, thus further complicating internal UN mission incentives for civil society engagement.¹¹ Indeed, according to Campisi and Pereira's 2015 report on civil society engagement for UN peacebuilding, despite the growing spectrum of civil society actors emerging in conflict-affected settings, the overall political space for civil society engagement with the United Nations has indeed shrunk over the last decade."¹²

As civil society actors themselves readily admit, civil society is not a panacea for community engagement.

The mere existence of civil society cannot be equated with active and inclusive public participation in conflict prevention, reconciliation and wider political processes. Indeed, although civil society actors are frequently understood as

¹¹ United Nations (2015:66).

¹² Campisi and Pereira. (2015: 15).

IT IS CRITICAL TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS MEANT BY 'CIVIL SOCIETY', WHICH SOCIETAL ACTORS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES, AND CLARIFY THESE ACTORS' ROLES AND INDEED THEIR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN SERVING KEY FUNCTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROMOTION OF PEACE AND SECURITY THAT CAN COMPLEMENT UN MISSION MANDATES.

key interlocutors for peace between the state and local communities, they may not always inclusively represent all identity groups in the population. Indeed, it can be challenging for peacekeepers to identify and access civil society representatives who truly speak on behalf of all local people. As the 2015 HIPPO report points out, there is a tendency among peacekeepers to engage with a small network of individuals who speak English or French, and use jargon familiar to the international community, but who may lack a genuine local constituent base.¹³

¹³ HIPPO Report, p. 66

KNOWLEDGE GAPS IMPACTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

The HIPPO report highlights that civil society engagement continues to pose a significant adaptive challenge for UN peace missions in the field.¹⁴ It is not always clear who best represents communities at the local levels or how peace operations can support civil society. Recent efforts such as the deployment of national staff as Community Liaison Assistants (CLA) or the roll-out of local perceptions surveys have demonstrated that better community engagement is not just a matter of deploying additional national staff or programmes in the field to engage with local authorities or traditional community structures. It is equally critical to understand which civil society actors should be engaged with by mission representatives and clarify these civil society actors' roles and indeed their comparative advantages in serving key functions in support of the promotion of peace and security that can complement UN mission mandates. The research thus proposes to address three interrelated

¹⁴ Ibid.

gaps in our knowledge that may help achieve this objective:

- There is no conceptual consensus within the United Nations and among its partner donors and stakeholders about what 'civil society' means as a concept, which often results in cognitive dissonance in the field about whom to include and engage with during different phases of conflict.
- To date, there has been scarce empirical evidence that traces how peacekeeping missions engage with civil society as part of their mandated activities during different phases of conflict beyond the largely descriptive array of individual case study accounts of context-specific community engagement activities.
- There is little systematic analysis of civil society's potential, actors, interests, incentives, institutions, limitations and critical enabling factors for positive participation in addressing the root causes of conflict, protecting civilians, preventing violence, peaceful reconciliation within communities, and wider political processes at the national and local levels.

 **ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY SPORADIC AND AD HOC AT BEST, DEPENDING ON THE INDIVIDUAL HEAD OF MISSION'S INTEREST AND STAFF COMMITMENT.**

Little guidance is currently available to peacekeepers about how to identify, select and engage with the wide spectrum of civil society actors in support of creating an environment conducive to sustainable peace. Indeed, civil society engagement by UN peacekeeping missions historically tends to be *ad hoc* and dependent in large measure on personal interests and networks of mission staff.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to help address these knowledge gaps, the main objectives of this research are to develop a better understanding of the concept of 'civil society', current practice, challenges, and opportunities available for effective civil society engagement within peacekeeping missions, and to build a pilot toolkit with operational guidelines that can better

aid peacekeepers in determining their synergies in engaging with civil society actors to help build a durable peace within the context of effective mandate implementation.

With these objectives in mind, in 2013, the PBPS Civil Affairs team initiated a study to better understand current practice for civil society engagement in UN peacekeeping contexts. The study also offers a set of strategic and operational considerations and recommendations, which in turn may help lay the groundwork for the development and promulgation of operational guidelines that may help peacekeepers to design and implement more strategically aligned and sustainable civil society engagement activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study team adopted a largely qualitative mixed methods approach, which included an in-depth desk review of primary and secondary data, about 150 semi-structured Headquarters and field-based key informant interviews, and an online survey of 1,890 DPKO-DFS respondents at Headquarters and in the field. The study team also conducted an in-depth desk review of key

primary documents, including internal UN DPKO-DFS policy documents (e.g. end of assignment reports, after action reviews and lessons learned documents), and a review of UN Security Council resolutions and mandates over a period of the past 15 years. In addition, the team undertook a literature review of relevant secondary data, including academic, policy journals and think tank materials. The 150 semi-structured interviews included UN personnel from civil affairs, human rights, and political affairs components, among others, as well as interviewees from relevant UN agencies, funds and programmes, international and national NGOs, academia and think tanks. Finally, the study team also carried out field visits to three peacekeeping missions, namely the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Throughout the research process, the study team has endeavoured to ensure the relevance of this research project to a larger peacekeeping audience through the engagement of multiple stakeholders and by relating the case material to the broader policy and scholarly

literature on peacekeeping to ensure its added value. As with any research endeavour, there are a number of methodological challenges and trade-offs. Steps have been taken to overcome these challenges without compromising on the quality and rigour of the research process.

VALUE ADDED

This report encourages peacekeepers to think more broadly and inclusively about what is meant by 'civil society' and who should be included as part of civil society. It also offers a pilot toolkit with a set of nuanced questions to help them determine why, how, and when to provide support to civil society actors, taking mandate support, political feasibility and risk of association into account.

This report does not offer magic bullets or quick fixes to existing challenges in finding and engaging effectively with civil society partners in conflict contexts. Nor does it discount the breadth and depth of engagement activities undertaken by various individual peacekeeping missions vis-à-vis civil society in various conflict settings. Instead, the report aims to make a unique contribution to

UN peacekeeping knowledge in three simple ways:

- contributing to a shared conceptual understanding within DPKO-DFS of what is meant by 'civil society' and how it can contribute to promoting peace and security in conflict-affected contexts.
- promoting coherence across DPKO-DFS around a common understanding of existing UN practice and challenges faced in civil society engagement as part of mandated activities and an improved analysis of the underlying political and societal dimensions shaping civil society in conflict-affected settings;
- supporting better planning and analysis that enables peacekeepers to take a more strategic approach to civil society engagement by piloting a simple toolkit to help peacekeepers identify relevant civil society actors and their key roles during different phases of conflict, consider the critical factors that are likely to drive or impede civil society engagement, and highlight risks (if any) that may merit special consideration.

AUDIENCE

The primary audience for this research is UN peacekeeping personnel involved in community engagement in conflict-affected situations. It is anticipated that the work will be of interest to the broader UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding

community, including academia, international organizations, NGOs, and other civil society actors (including formal and/or informal organizations, networks and individual actors), UN agencies, funds and programme staff. All of these stakeholders would benefit

operationally by having a better conceptual understanding of civil society engagement and the options for appropriate modalities of engagement while operating in conflict contexts; and governments hosting peacekeeping missions in post-conflict environments.

SECTION SUMMARY

Section 1 begins by positing that one of the challenges for UN multidimensional peacekeeping in engaging effectively with civil society is that there is no conceptual clarity within and outside the United Nations about *what* we mean and *who* we include in the term ‘civil society’. It attempts to address this gap by piloting a more inclusive and relational definition of the term “civil society” as one of the principal loci of connectivity between the state and society.

Section 2 offers insight into why civil society engagement is important for UN peacekeeping based on feedback provided by peacekeepers through the aforementioned peacekeeping survey, interviews, as well as a comprehensive desk research.

Section 3 provides an overview of how UN peacekeeping missions identify and engage with civil society actors based on the above survey of practice among peacekeeping personnel and elaborates on a few gaps in policy and practice.

Section 4 helps explain why civil society engagement merits more careful consideration in conflict-affected contexts from a political economy perspective and suggests the need for improved contextual analysis and planning on how to select and engage with civil society actors in conflict contexts.

Section 5 then discusses key challenges and risks in policy and practice faced by peacekeepers in engaging with civil society in conflict-affected environments to provide further context on why better guidance is needed for peacekeepers engaging with local communities and their civil society interlocutors.

Section 6 offers a pilot toolkit that can guide peacekeepers to better contextually analyse and map the various roles of the available spectrum of civil society actors in any given conflict setting to help improve their engagement with civil society and the local communities they seek to represent.

Section 7 concludes by offering a few insights on lessons learned and recommendations.

SECTION 1

SECTION 2

SECTION 3

SECTION 4

SECTION 5

SECTION 6

SECTION 7



UN Photo/Basile Zoma



PROVIDING CONCEPTUAL CLARITY:

*WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AND
WHOM DO WE INCLUDE IN
THE TERM “CIVIL SOCIETY”?*

LACK OF OPERATIONAL CONSENSUS ON THE MEANING OF ‘CIVIL SOCIETY’

Identifying and supporting civil society in conflict-affected contexts can be challenging, chaotic and often politically sensitive.

No two communities are the same; each is represented by a complex array of different societal actors with diverse goals, concerns, incentives, structures and institutions. Indeed, to date, the very concept of civil society remains obscure, complex and contested. Most field practitioners operate on the general principle of “you know it when you see it” when identifying civil society partners and interlocutors. While this can serve as a practical rule of thumb in the field, part of the challenge is that there is no conceptual clarity

about what the term 'civil society' means. This is reflected in the cognitive dissonance among field practitioners about *whom to include* and *for what purpose* when planning national and local conflict prevention and/or peace sustainment activities. Is it national-level NGOs with human rights agendas, community-based associations such as labour unions, women-led cooperatives for small businesses, identity-based advocacy groups such as youth groups, or marginalized ex-combatant groups that are potential spoilers to the peace process? Civil society encompasses all of the above and more. For the purpose of this report, it is thus useful to first clarify the definition of civil society as a concept before seeking to better understand its role in conflict-affected contexts and the best use of its nexus with UN peace operations for building a sustainable peace.

UN peacekeepers have a very diverse understanding of what encompasses the term "civil society". Survey results suggest that the boundaries defining civil society in peacekeeping environments are fluid and porous, and are still a topic of debate. Indeed, on average, in the absence of a firm definition, a working norm appears to have



THERE IS NO CONCEPTUAL CONSENSUS WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS AND AMONG ITS PARTNER DONORS AND STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT WHAT 'CIVIL SOCIETY' MEANS AS A CONCEPT, OFTEN RESULTING IN COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN THE FIELD ABOUT WHOM TO INCLUDE AND ENGAGE WITH DURING DIFFERENT PHASES OF CONFLICT.

developed within UN missions wherein 'civil society' includes any and all organizations and individuals that claim to speak on behalf of the local population. The recent 2015 HIPPO report highlights that it can indeed be very challenging for peacekeepers to identify civil society actors that genuinely speak on behalf of local people. This results in a tendency to engage with a small network of known civil society actors who can converse in English or French, and who may share a good understanding of international assistance jargon, but who may or may not always enjoy an authentic support base in the local communities they claim to represent.¹

¹ Ibid.

Survey results also show that most peacekeepers tend to prefer civil society actors that have traditionally served as community-level peace enforcers (e.g. human rights defenders, women's and youth groups), and are less likely to include those typically perceived as potential spoilers to peace processes (e.g. political parties, ex-combatant groups). Faith-based organizations, sexual minority groups and political organizations received moderate support from respondents. In addition, most peacekeepers tend to favour formally organized or registered groups (e.g. NGOs, associations, community committees, interest groups) over informally organized groups, networks and individuals (e.g. traditional, religious leaders and gatherings of women). This highlights a problem in current understanding among peacekeepers of who is part of civil society and what purpose different civil society actors, including ex-combatants, armed actors, informal groups and networks, serve in conflict-affected environments.

When selecting civil society actors, the survey findings reveal that peacekeepers predominantly attribute positive characteristics such as: "promote human rights", "advocate for community needs and

priorities to government” and “advocate for gender equality” and leave out those who may serve as potential spoilers to wider political processes. However, spoilers are also part of civil society, thus suggesting that a purist notion prevails in peacekeeping about the nature and scope of civil society.

Field interviews also reflect a complementary dissonance within and across missions about what the definition of ‘civil society’. For instance,

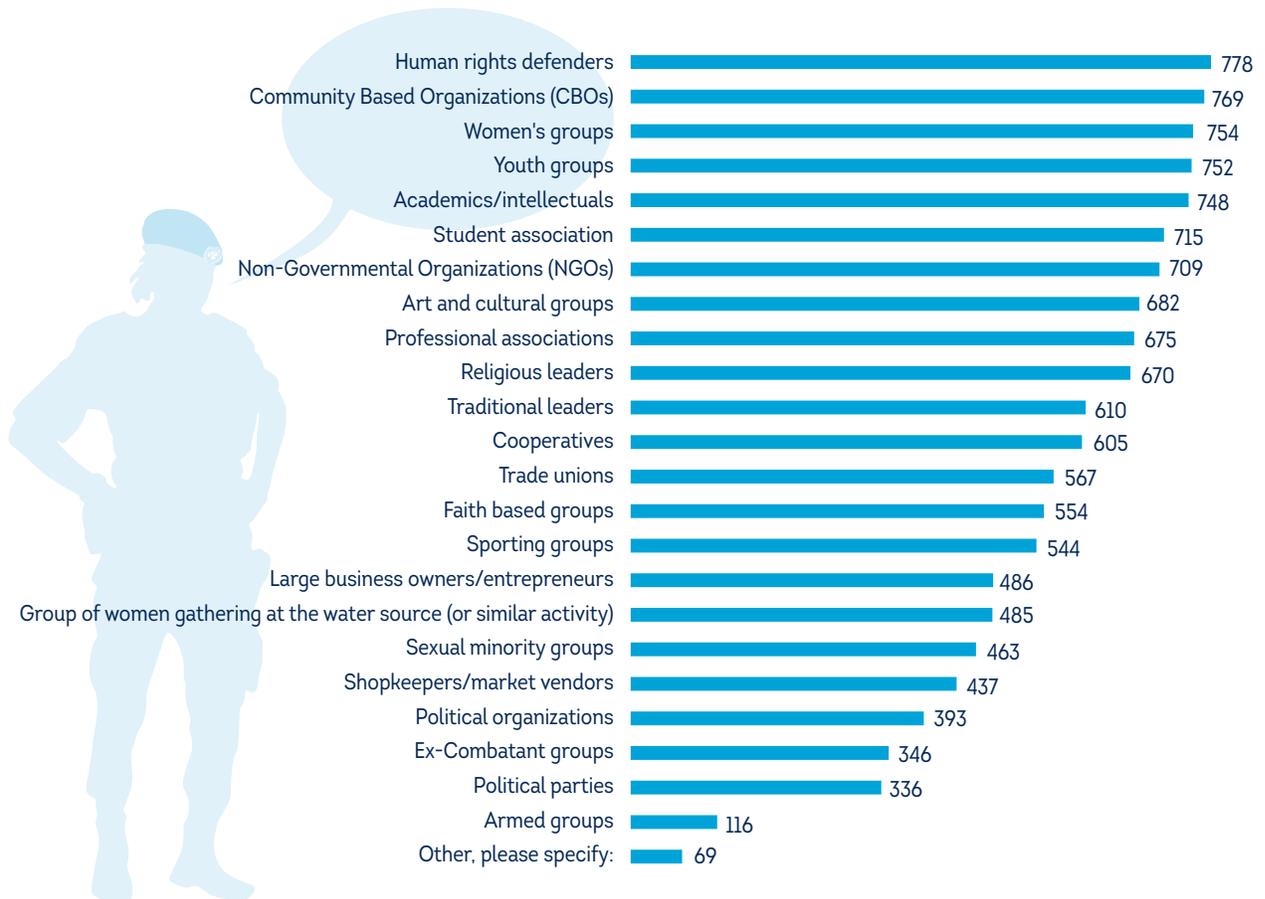
the civil society experience in Afghanistan has had rather mixed reviews, with NGOs often understood to be synonymous with civil society itself.² When civil society is included, the engagement is often regarded as lip service, with insufficient time to allow for their proper consultation or preparation. In this case, it has indeed been difficult to conceptually define ‘civil society’, which translates

² *ibid*, 35.

as *Jama-e-Madani*, in terms of who is part of civil society and who is not in Afghanistan. Indeed, this term was not even widely recognized until 2001.

MISSIONS SHOULD BE CAREFUL TO NOT DEFINE CIVIL SOCIETY ‘FROM THE OUTSIDE’ IN WAYS THAT DO NOT NECESSARILY CONFORM TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF HOW CIVIL SOCIETY IS ORGANIZED IN THE GIVEN CONFLICT SETTING.

Figure 1: Which of the following do you consider to be part of civil society?



The paradox of defining civil society “from the outside” based on a Western liberal definition that does not necessarily conform to the local context is not specific to Afghanistan alone. Literature shows that outsiders working in non-Western contexts tend to look for formally structured civil society groups that reflect their own liberal notions of what civil society ought to look like. This approach is risky because it can lead to the de facto exclusion of the majority of the wide ecosystem of civil society actors, including traditional civil society actors, and a misguided attempt to “build civil society from the outside” in a way that is divorced from the local political and social context.³

Aid donors often play a powerful role in shaping the direction, purpose and identity of civil

 MISSIONS NEED TO DEVELOP A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT ENCOMPASSES CIVIL SOCIETY ACROSS VARIOUS COMPONENTS, ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE THAT HAVE A COMMUNITY-ORIENTED ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING MISSION MANDATES.

society, raising key questions about who and what civil society represents and to whom it is accountable.⁴ Indeed, some have described the dilemma of an externally manufactured civil society as “attempting to modernize a state which has been based on traditional societies without compromising the very values and relationships which will be relevant to the development of the future state.”⁵ For instance, donor partners may apply a selective approach in selecting whose interests and issues are to be represented at civil society fora convened to solicit civil society participation in post-conflict peace and political processes. Donors tend to select well-known NGOs – just one type of civil society actor – as representative of the wider eco-system of civil society since NGOs often tend to be the most familiar and palatable to donors who are outsiders in these settings. This may lead to a tendency for donors to perpetually support NGOs at the expense of other actors. This kind of attention may then inadvertently confer NGOs unwarranted public legitimacy as externally selected interlocutors to speak on behalf of local communities, thus making them

even more influential than other civil society actors, who are perhaps more representative.⁶

In MONUSCO, a former Senior Gender Adviser explained that civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a fluid concept that is constantly evolving and must be considered within the country’s historical context to appreciate its complexity. In this example, the peacekeeper explained that civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo includes three broad categories: victims; community leaders who want to contribute to solving the country’s problems; and those who contribute to these problems. Each of these categories has specific needs, and the mission should engage with all three types of civil society partners. However, a former civil affairs officer from the same mission preferred to view civil society from a different lens, dividing it into two groups – instead of three – based on different variables, where the first group is made up of actors that reflect the ‘opposition’s position’ that voices citizens’ concerns on behalf of the population, criticizes government policies, and holds the government to account for its performance.

³ Pouligny, B. (2005: 498).

⁴ *ibid*, 39.

⁵ *ibid*, 37.

⁶ Van den Boogaard (2011:33).

Members of this group could include the losing parties in the conflict, but also a wide range of other actors. The second group is made up of service provider actors that deliver basic services such as education and health that the state is unable to provide to the population. In addition, the civil affairs officer explained that civil society in the

DRC must also be understood in terms of the population demography vis-à-vis the conflict's historical context. Civil society actors here tend to be skewed towards younger actors who have grown up in the post-Mobutu era under conditions of instability, war and power struggles, thus having different perceptions, expectations and

incentives when dealing with the state and indeed the UN mission.

Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the DRC are but two examples of differing perceptions within missions of what constitutes civil society and consequently should be included as part of it across mission components with a

CIVIL SOCIETY DEFINITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Interviews of field practitioners in Afghanistan revealed different ways of understanding and categorizing civil society.

- **Based on their activities or affiliation:** When interviewed, both UN and civil society actors in Afghanistan described civil society actors as being divided into three categories: those that deliver services as implementing partners of aid programmes; those that are focused on advocacy and cultural activities; and, those who are members of "traditional" civil society, namely local shuras. These shuras are informal in the western sense, but are highly influential in impacting how local communities perceive and respond to violent conflict. Indeed, they are considered to be the most important civil society actors whose buy-in is essential for implementing any kind of conflict resolution activities. However, these same actors are also the most difficult for international actors to engage with for community engagement purposes.
- **National versus subnational:** Another colleague from a developmental UN agency in Afghanistan said that, Afghan civil society was defined differently at national versus subnational levels, and that a definition of civic, not civil, society was employed to be inclusive of business groups.
- **Based on their relationship with the state and key actors in the political process:** A different colleague noted that, in some Afghan contexts, traditional actors like elders may be influential members of civil society, whereas in others they may be perceived as too closely aligned with the state and therefore enjoy less influence with local communities. As such, modern elements of civil society seem to have emerged alongside traditional civil society actors in Afghanistan, including formal and/or informal community councils and religious networks. In addition, inclusion of traditional civil society actors in wider peace processes is greatly determined based on whether they are known to those managing the wider political peace process at the national levels.

A number of UN and civil society sources explained that the current structure of "modern" civil society evolved over a number years in Afghanistan, largely based on the changing approaches and priorities of external donors. In the 1980s, for example, extensive funding was available for NGOs for the delivery of services, especially humanitarian assistance, most of whom were therefore established as implementing agents. Following the 2001 US invasion, many of these actors transformed into construction companies to implement infrastructure projects funded by the United States and other donors. In the post-2010 transition period, some civil affairs officers reported that many of these actors have returned to sector-based service delivery roles with the expectation that donor funding would move back towards humanitarian assistance and development projects.

community-oriented mandate. Other challenges in defining civil society in complex conflict contexts are discussed below.

In countries where traditional elites are also important stakeholders in political settlements at the local levels, it becomes challenging to demarcate their role as civil society actors from their relationship with the government in power. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, an ONUCI civil affairs officer highlighted this as an important dilemma that traditional leaders pose for the mission in its efforts to engage with civil society. Particularly at the local level, traditional leaders tend to be highly dominant, and the mission must engage with them in order to achieve results in local communities.

While these traditional chiefs may not consider themselves a formal part of the government, nonetheless, they must comply with formal political guidelines wherein their local authority falls under prefects and sub-prefects representing the state at the subnational levels.

In addition, given their near-hegemonic influence within the communities they represent, these leaders tend to inhibit the growth of other civil society actors in these communities,

particularly those that might advance a different social or political agenda from their own, including, for example, women's groups or those representing non-dominant ethnic groups that may wish to change the social status quo. This raises the question whether or not missions should even consider traditional elites in such contexts as genuinely representative members of civil society due to their de facto dominant societal role given their proximity to the state apparatus since they may be considered to have too close a connection to government to legitimately represent the interests of society.

In addition, there is often a blurring of lines between civil society groups and partisan political elites in countries with relatively nascent democratic cultures. A civil affairs officer in MONUSCO noted that defining and mapping civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is challenging due to the blurred lines between civil society and partisan political actors. For example, during the establishment of independent democratic institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission and the National Commission for Human Rights, the seats reserved for civil society were hotly contested



MISSIONS MUST DEVELOP A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF WHICH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TRULY REFLECT THE INTERESTS AND NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

between the government and opposition political parties, both of which lobbied vigorously to ensure that the civil society representative chosen was 'on their side'. In another example, when MONUSCO supported a national dialogue between the Presidency and civil society actors, the majority of attendees from civil society were explicitly affiliated with either the incumbent or opposition political parties. In addition, in some cases, the alignment of some CSOs/actors with political parties was perceived to help facilitate their access to influential individuals (peace promoters or spoilers) to advance the peace agenda. This directly contrasts with the assumed neutrality of civil society actors in wider political processes, highlighting the need for peacekeepers to have a nuanced understanding of the limitations and advantages of identifying civil society actors that actually represent local communities and not just the political elites.

Similarly, there appears to be a blurring of lines between civil society and government at the local levels where formal roles are not necessarily clearly defined and local capacity is often weak. For instance, a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) civil affairs officer noted that, while local government officials are not technically part of civil society in Afghanistan, the two groups occupied very similar roles when interacting with the central government. The central government, which sought to concentrate power in the capital, approached local and district councils with hostility. Without their own budgets, these local authorities – like their civil society counterparts – have little power to implement programmes independently, thus affecting their relationship with centres of power in the capital on their attempts to be included in decision-making processes. Staff in MONUSCO also found the boundaries between civil society and government in the DRC to be very porous at the national level, but for different reasons. They noted that civil society is seen as a 'breeding ground' for politicians, many of whom transition back to roles in civil society after their

government careers are over. There are soft informal rules for making this transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; for example, a politician should wait six months before returning to civil society. Nevertheless, the result is that civil society actors tend to be closely aligned to political parties.

Within such complex contexts, survey findings show that UN peacekeepers tend to identify and engage with civil society on an *ad hoc* basis in the absence of streamlined guidelines on how to identify and map civil society. Findings reflect a lack of clarity on how missions decide which actors legitimately represent all sections of society, including marginalized groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, and disenfranchised groups, such as women and unemployed youth, as part of a cohesive, strategic vision to engagement with civil society. The decision of when, how, and for what purpose UN missions should engage with civil society actors is generally determined by mission personnel on an *ad hoc* basis, in consultation with national staff and partners who are familiar with the political and social environment, be it at the national or local levels.

LITTLE CONSENSUS IN ACADEMIA ON WHAT ENCOMPASSES 'CIVIL SOCIETY'

There is no universally accepted definition of civil society among academic scholars, NGOs and donors that encompasses the wide diversity of national and local civil society actors that can play a role in promoting sustainable peace. Over time, donors and scholars alike have introduced a plethora of definitions and interpretations to best capture what is meant by 'civil society' based on differing paradigms, historic origins and country contexts that lack conceptual consensus. Some prefer *institutional definitions* that focus on different types of structures and modalities for collective action – including loose, informal groups and semi-structured groups to formalized ones that are legally constituted and registered. Others focus on more *community-based definitions* in an effort to guard against conflating civil society actors with NGOs, also known as the third sector. Additional approaches include *actor-based models* that focus solely on actors and their identity, and *function-based models* that focus on functions of

civil society as they relate to democratization in different cultural and societal contexts.

This diversity is reflected in the wide spectrum of definitions used by various multilateral actors involved in post-conflict stabilization and conflict

prevention. For instance, the Civil Society Index (CSI), developed by CIVICUS,⁷ defines civil society as the “arena, outside the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests”.⁸ The World Bank uses an institutional approach developed by a number of leading research centres in referring to ‘civil society’ as a “wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations”.⁹ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) defines civil society as the “sphere of autonomous associations that are independent of the public and

 MISSIONS TEND TO ENGAGE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ON AN AD HOC BASIS IN THE ABSENCE OF STREAMLINED GUIDELINES ON HOW TO IDENTIFY AND MAP CIVIL SOCIETY.

for-profit sectors and designed to advance collective interests and ideas”.¹⁰ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) employs a more actor-based approach in defining civil society actors as “individuals and groups who voluntarily engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests, purposes or values that are compatible with the goals of the United Nations: the maintenance of peace and security, the realization of development, and the promotion and respect of human rights”.¹¹

The European Union (EU) considers CSOs to include: *all non-State, not-for profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organize to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic ... they include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs.*

Among them, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, foundations, research institutions, gender and LGBT organizations, cooperatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media. Trade unions and employers’ organizations, the so-called social partners, constitute a specific category of CSOs¹².

The African Development Bank states:

The CSO comprises the full range of formal and informal organizations within society.” According to the Bank’s official definition, “Civil society encompasses a constellation of human and associational activities operating in the public sphere outside the market and the state. It is a voluntary expression of the interests and aspirations of citizens organized and united by common interests, goals, values or traditions, and mobilized into collective action either as beneficiaries or stakeholders of the development process. Though civil society stands apart from state and market forces, it is not necessarily in basic contradiction to them, and it ultimately influences and is influenced by both.

Definitions and perceptions about the nature and scope of

⁷ Civicus is an alliance of civil society organizations that aims to strengthen civil society’s contribution to positive social change through sharing knowledge about the state of national civil societies

⁸ www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_Methodology_and_conceptual_framework.pdf

⁹ World Bank (2013).

¹⁰ UNICEF (2003).

¹¹ OHCHR (2014: 3).

¹² European Commission (2012:3)

UNDERSTANDING OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THIS STUDY

This report broadly conceptualizes civil society as one of the principal loci of connectivity through which the state and society operate and interact with each other. It is — at its core — a political space for voluntary, uncoerced, organized collective action by a wide spectrum of societal actors motivated by shared interests, values, and purposes to advance common ideas and objectives.

civil society in volatile contexts among practitioners, donors, and scholars are shifting.

While civil society undoubtedly has a vital role to play in advancing and consolidating sectoral reforms in areas such as health, education and the environment, civil society is increasingly recognized as encompassing far more than a mere “third sector” dominated by the NGO community focused on service delivery. Indeed, viewing civil society mainly as a means through which sectoral or policy objectives can be achieved minimizes its significance as an actor has to create conditions conducive to sustainable peace and democratic and accountable governance. While none of the above definitions and approaches to understanding civil society are wrong per se, a broader definition is necessary to best capture that entire spectrum of civil society actors present and active in conflict-affected contexts.

PILOTING A MORE RELATIONAL AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AND WHO SHOULD WE EMBRACE AS PART OF CIVIL SOCIETY?

Civil society thus configured is neither separate from the body politic, market and society, nor subordinate to them. It allows for diverse societal values, interests and institutions to freely engage and interact with each other, where they may demand and contest political, governance and development goals and performance vis-à-vis the state.¹³ It embeds the causal arrangements that determine the crisscrossing of both intended and unintended outcomes resulting from interaction between the state and society to achieve desired polit-

ical, social, and developmental outcomes in specific contexts.¹⁴ This dichotomy of intended and unintended outcomes has a direct impact on efforts to build and rebuild positive state-society relations, especially in fragile post-conflict contexts. Some key aspects that follow this relational conceptualization of civil society are provided below.

The state and civil society are interlinked and interdependent.

Civil society cannot be understood in isolation from the state—the two are interdependent. While civil society as an entity is indeed distinct from the state, family and market, its boundaries with these spheres are often complex and blurred. In addition, although independent from the state, civil society is oriented towards, and interacts closely with, the state and the body politic.¹⁵ Indeed, the political, legal, and regulatory environment defined by the state directly shapes the scope and reach of civil society actors. Civil society, in turn, is one of the key links – or principal loci of connectivity – between the state and its citizens, in promoting shared values, accountability, transparency, good governance.

¹³ World Bank (2007).

¹⁴ Pabst and Scazzieri (2012).

¹⁵ World Bank (2006:3).

It also serves as the main channel for information-sharing about state performance for the wider populace.

Civil society is a mirror of existing societal dynamics.

Civil society can be divided and exclusive along societal cleavages of ethnic and religious identity, social class, power, hierarchy and gender as the population it seeks to represent. For instance, in historically patriarchal cultures, civil society may often be led by male leaders from dominant groups in society with their own interests, incentives and informal institutions, with the potential exception of women's

and minority groups that are organized along their own agendas in direct contrast often to the male-dominated ones.¹⁶

Civil society is a diverse and ever-growing ecosystem of individuals, communities and organizations. Civil society does not represent a homogenous or unified sub-set of society, but is as diverse as the people and issues around which it is organized.¹⁷ It is populated by a fluid spectrum of diverse formal and informal societal actors that can vary in size, influence and geographical

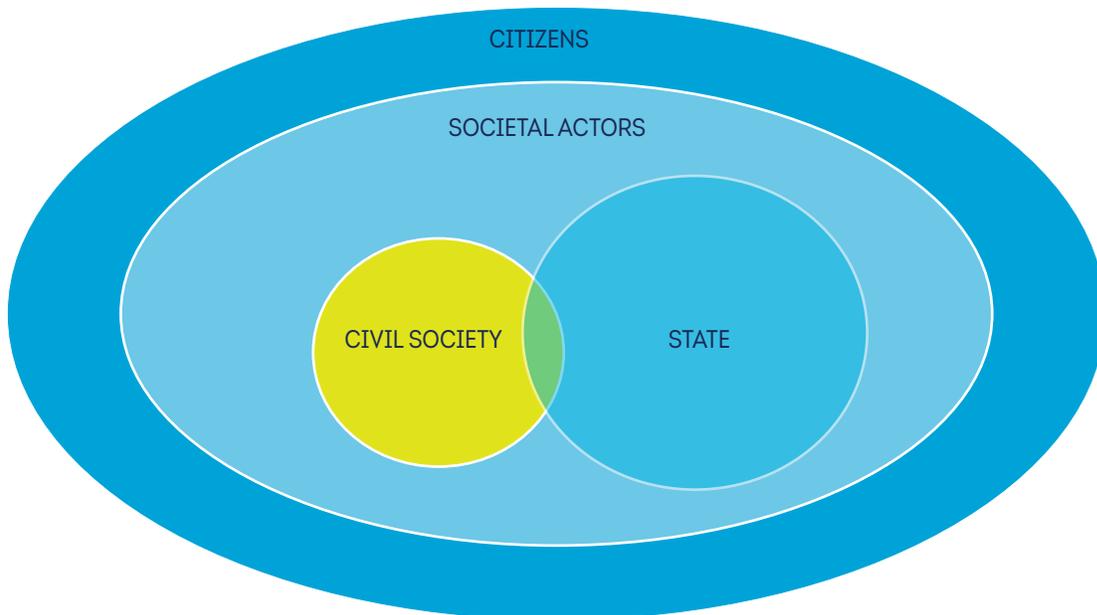
reach. These actors may organize themselves in groups, networks or movements that move along a flexible spectrum of formal and informal networks and institutions, ranging from formally structured, registered and hierarchical CSOs (e.g. NGOs) to informal, amorphous, spontaneous and horizontal social movements (e.g. grassroots movements and the Arab Spring).

Much of the scant literature on typologies of civil society in conflict contexts focuses heavily on civil society organizations, but this is not reflective of the ecosystem of civil society. Many civil society

¹⁶ Paffenholz and Spurk (2006: 22).

¹⁷ Pabst and Scazzieri (2012:2,7).

Figure 2: Civil society



actors often begin as an informal network of like-minded individuals and increasingly become more organized as their institutional capacity, resources and influence grows.¹⁸ According to the African Development Bank, “ ‘civil society’ is the collective noun, while ‘civic groups’ are the individual organizations that constitute the sector.” These civil groups, or what is more commonly understood as CSOs, include, but are not limited to, a myriad of civic organizations including: NGOs (especially those directly supporting peace processes or capacity building); human rights organizations, social justice advocacy groups, consumer rights groups and peace networks’ special or collective interest group organizations (e.g. faith-based organizations, cooperatives, women’s associations, youth clubs, people’s professional associations, trade and labour unions); community-based organizations (CBOs); institutions and initiatives (women and youth groups, farmers’ associations, self-help groups, traditional leaders, religious groups, grassroots movements and organizations of indigenous peoples informal networks and associations); and informational and educational CSOs (e.g.

¹⁸ OECD (2005a: 2).

independent radio, television, print and electronic media, journalist associations, research and academic institutions and think tanks).¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that the distinction between these categories is not always clear or rigid, and many civic groups or CSOs fit into more than one category.

However, civil society encompasses more than just CSOs and NGOs, extending to include a wide spectrum of individual societal actors and informal societal networks stirred to collective action around common goals. Indeed, in 2011 the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report highlights that individuals in 88 countries (home to half the world’s population) took part in mass citizen action during 2011.²⁰ This diverse collection of individual societal actors and informal networks includes, but is not limited to: **online individual groups and activities** including social media communities that can be “organized” but do not necessarily have physical, legal or financial structures; **social movements** of collective action and/or identity, which can be online or physical; **religious leaders** who unite in support of

¹⁹ UNICEF (2012: 7); World Bank (2007:11); African Development Bank Group (2012).

²⁰ World Economic Forum (2013).



CIVIL SOCIETY IS A DIVERSE AND EVER GROWING ECOSYSTEM OF INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND ORGANISATIONS, INCLUDING FORMAL AND INFORMAL ACTORS AND POTENTIAL SPOILERS TO THE WIDER POLITICAL PROCESS.

social causes; **thought leaders**, including male and female academics, lawyers, teachers and politicians seeking to promote a social cause; **social entrepreneurs** employing innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes; and **social leaders** organizing grassroots activities at local levels, including former combatants organized in a non-violent manner.

Civil society includes potential spoiler groups that merit consideration in community engagement strategies.

The fact that peacekeepers identified societal actors that might be considered potential spoilers (e.g. ex-combatants, political parties) *less frequently* as part of civil society in the aforementioned survey implies a risky assumption within UN peacekeeping that civil society actors are mostly always good or benevolent, which is not

always the case. Civil society, as a mirror of existing societal dynamics, often contains societal elements that may fail to always act in the interest of the common good. Indeed, some civil society actors may display undemocratic, self-interested or even potentially harmful behaviours or motivations. Some may be motivated purely by financial or political interests, and may not genuinely represent the interests of the constituencies they claim to represent.²¹

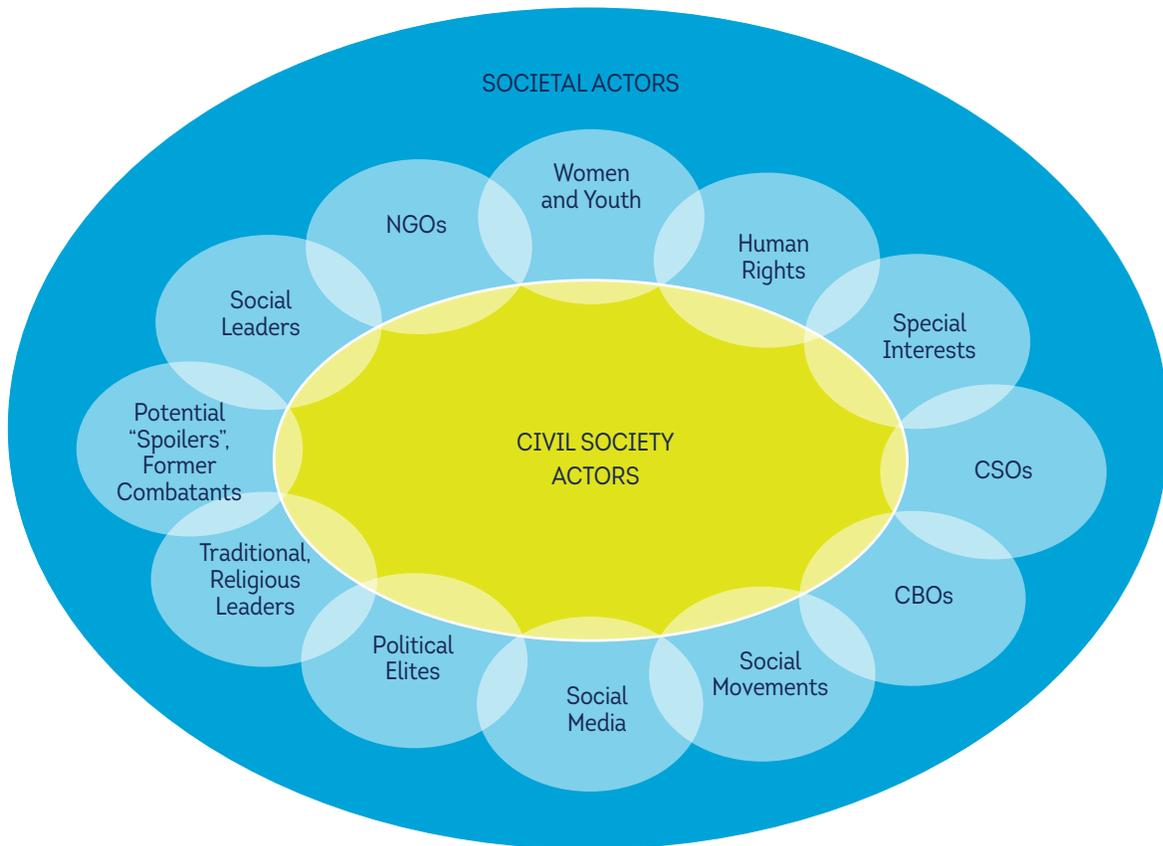
²¹ Lamptey (2007:10).

The identification of a civil society actor as a spoiler does not necessarily preclude a peace-keeping mission from engaging this actor. On the contrary, inclusion in peace efforts and wider political processes can be an important part of that civil society actor’s transformation from a spoiler to an interlocutor for peace. Insurgent groups and other armed factions often have formal or informal affiliations with civil society, some of whom may seek popular representation in elections during political transition periods, while

others may change their roles to become part of civil society and attempt to influence the political process by lobbying the government and participating in popular discourse. While it is crucial to not exclude these actors from peace processes, it also remains important to remember that inclusion of such actors may confer unintended legitimacy to them as credible members of civil society speaking on behalf of the public.

Given that civil society actors do play a role in influencing

Figure 3: Civil society diagram





**CIVIL SOCIETY
ENGAGEMENT SHOULD
NEVER REPLACE
WIDER ENGAGEMENT
AND OUTREACH
ACTIVITIES WITH LOCAL
COMMUNITIES.**

opinion and perception, serving as local interlocutors between peacekeeping operations and the local population, it is important to properly understand the motivations that underpin their work. Any mapping of the civil society actors to be included in the development of a community engagement strategy must thus take into account an assessment of their individual motivations, their institutional and reputational strengths as well as to what extent they deliver upon the promises to the communities they purport to represent before determining whether they should be included or not in engagement efforts.²² In addition, given that not all civil society actors necessarily have genuinely benevolent intentions towards the communities they represent and may or may not be accountable to the public reaffirms that civil society is not a panacea for community engagement. Civil

²² Lamptey (2007:10).

society engagement should therefore never replace the importance of consultations with the public at large – for either the government or the international community like peacekeeping operations.

IMPROVING HOW WE IDENTIFY AND CATEGORIZE THE VAST ARRAY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Technological innovations are dramatically shifting the operational scope, nature and context of civil society. Civil society today has the potential to reach even the remotest and most marginalized communities as they experiment with new technological and organizational forms of outreach and communications in low-income, fragile and conflict-affected countries. Information and communication technologies have also opened up new spaces of power, influence and association to new configurations of civil society actors. This has led to a significant expansion of the civil society ecosystem online and has enabled a wider range of informal, digitally-connected networks to be built within its political space

across geographical, social and physical divides.²³ These networks allow greater numbers of societal actors that are not always easy to identify and map to aggregate and collectively address societal challenges.

Indeed, networked citizens have started to change the interface and expectations of civil society empowerment.

Since 2010, there has been a renewed energy of citizens' expression and participation in different forms around the world, including: the Arab Spring revolutions; the Occupy Movement as a response to growing inequality; citizen protests against austerity measures in Greece and Spain; and the For Fair Elections protests in the Russian Federation. While these informal networks and social movements, enabled by mobile and social technologies, mark a new understanding of what is meant by 'civil society' and indeed signpost a new era of community engagement, traditional institutions of organized civil society have continued to expand their scope to play critical roles as supporters, facilitators and interlocutors of wider political processes. However, these roles are not always transparent, with

²³ World Economic Forum (2013).

easily understood motivations and alliances, for example, unions in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, and the establishment of labour outreach committees by the Occupy Movement.²⁴

One useful way to help frame the nature, interests and scope of various civil society actors is to group them into various categories based on some of the following variables (this is a pilot list and is not exhaustive):*

- **Structure and organizational form** – What is the internal composition? How large and representative is civil society? Who are the key actors with influence? (formal vs. informal association for collective action, membership vs. non-membership, community-based vs. NGO);
- **Legal status** – incorporated vs. non-incorporated, registered vs. unregistered;

- **Financial status** – What resources do they command? – self-supporting, membership supporting, locally/nationally financed vs. grant/international donor dependent;
- **Functional areas of interest/operation** – Service delivery, monitoring, intermediation/facilitation, policy advocacy, peace research, human/civil rights and governance and watchdog functions;
- **Scope of operation** – grassroots, local/municipal, national, regional, or international;
- **Areas of work** – social, political, and/or environmental.
- **Character** – network, coalition, unitary organization, or actor-based – women/youth/lawyers associations;

- **Environment** – What kind of political, socio-economic, cultural and legal environment does civil society exist in? How are these factors enabling or disabling for civil society?
- **Religious status** – religious or secular;
- **Values** – What are the values that civil society practices and promotes? What impact does civil society have in pushing its agenda?

The final variable – values – recognizes that civil society does not necessarily include benevolent or peaceful societal actors, and thus the values that they espouse in any given context must be understood to know whether their inclusion is compatible with the aims and principles of the United Nations or not.

²⁴ Ibid.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

In considering these variables, UN peacekeepers may also ask themselves the following questions to better understand each actor's (individual, network, or organization) strategic context and core concerns*:

- Who are the main civil society actors and groups at the national and/or local levels depending on context?
- What are their comparative advantages in contributing positively towards conditions conducive to sustainable peace in violent conflict and post-conflict contexts?
- What is their level of representativeness and what is the scope of their constituency (broad or narrow)?
- What is the impact of their values and ideas, including political ideologies, religion and cultural beliefs, on their goals, purposes and policies?
- What are their interests and incentives (particularly for politically aligned civil society leaders — male and female), and how do they generate outcomes that may encourage or hinder peace?
- How is their role evolving, if at all, in light of the volatile social, political and economic context?
- What is the interplay between formal institutions (e.g. rule of law, elections) and informal institutions (e.g. social, political and cultural norms or "rules of the game") and how do they each play a role in shaping human interaction within these groups?
- What is their degree of alignment with the state and the political parties in government, and how does it contribute to or hamper the peace process?
- How, if at all, is their relationship with other stakeholders changing, and what is driving this shift?
- What trends should be added to the list above that are particularly important for their work?
- What new players, models of relationship or activity are these actors considering that this could affect conditions conducive to peace and stability?
- How is their organizational or community base changing in terms of structure, preferences or behaviour?
- What do you feel might be fundamentally disruptive to their ability to achieve their outcomes?
- If you could sum up all these thoughts into a central "strategic concern", what would that be?

**This set of variables and key questions to consider in identifying and mapping civil society actors is incorporated into the pilot toolkit offered in Section VI.*



UN Photo/Hien MacLine



OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICE IN UN PEACEKEEPING:

WHY IS CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT FOR UN PEACEKEEPING?

Civil society is an essential constituent partner in a state's transition from conflict and fragility to sustainable peace and resilience.

While civil society actors alone are seldom, if at all ever, able to transform violent conflict into peace, it is difficult, if not impossible, for governments and donor partners to foster a durable 'positive peace' without engaging local communities in conflict-affected societies. Conflicts are not transformed by peace agreements between political elites alone; they also need a commitment to peacefully address, through political means, ongoing drivers of conflict at the national and local levels. A sense of public ownership of the peace process can help foster this kind of commitment from the main parties to the conflict and can be crucial to its durability. If the public and civil society actors representing them feel that they have been excluded from the peace process or believe that it has

not addressed their interests or needs, they are less likely to work actively towards its implementation, including maintaining pressure on the main parties to the conflict to hold fast to their commitment to the peace process. Without a supportive broad public constituency, there are few safeguards against those who may want to derail peace processes and/or hard-won peace agreements.

As one of the principal loci of connectivity between the state and local communities, civil society actors bring a number of strengths to supporting peace processes. Some of these strengths include, but are not limited to: their expert local level knowledge acquired from long-term engagement in local communities; their capacity to support changes in how political elites and local populations respond to conflict; and their ability to direct public (and indeed global) attention to the underlying causes of conflict that need to be addressed if a sustainable and just peace is to be supported. Civil society actors hold the potential to serve as a neutral actor that can help facilitate peaceful dialogue between warring groups. They play a crucial role in representing local voices in peace negotiations and helping communities

impacted by violence articulate their needs and expectations during peace processes. They also play an important role in raising public awareness of the costs of continued conflict and the opportunities and means to seek a way out through constructive engagement with all the main parties involved in the conflict. They have the added advantage of being able to work with different identity groups divided by war within the same communities to find common ground from which they can work together to reconcile past grievances and establish or re-establish peaceful co-existence. Their strongest advantage seems to stem from a combination of their perceived neutrality during a conflict, and their sense of collective agency and generative ability to elucidate what is possible and how it can be achieved in ways that are consistent with common values and ideals that can bring together different identity groups and divided communities devastated by long years of conflict.¹ Indeed, today the main question is no longer *whether* civil society has a role to play in addressing conflict in conflict-affected states, rather it is *how* civil society can realize its full potential as an inter-

¹ Barnes (2006), cited in Gourlay (2006:45).

locutor for peace between the state and local communities.

An important question that consequently also merits attention is *how* UN peace missions can better engage with local communities and their civil society representa-

tives. The 2015 HIPPO report emphasizes the need for UN peacekeeping missions to become more “people-focused” and specifically recommends that missions develop improved community engagement strategies. This reflects high-level policy consensus that a wide range of mandated activities can benefit from a focus on improving effective community engagement, a large part of which includes working more inclusively with civil society actors that organize and represent the interests and expectations of local communities. This is best complemented by mandated activities that have clear synergies with the strong supporting role of civil society, such as the protection of civilians, monitoring and provision of early warning on human rights violations and escalating violence in local contexts, public information, local situational analysis, and support to peaceful reconciliation activities in the aftermath of conflict.

Little analysis has also been conducted thus far of how missions identify and work with civil society actors in support of mandate implementation and wider political processes.

To fill this gap in understanding, with the generous support of the Government of Denmark, the Civil Affairs team in DPKO-DFS launched an online survey of 1,890 DPKO-DFS respondents at Headquarters and in the field, supported by about 150 semi-structured individual Headquarters- and field-based key informant interviews. The main purpose of this exercise was to develop a more nuanced understanding of current practice, challenges, and opportunities available for UN peacekeepers to engage with civil society as part of their mission mandates to create conditions conducive to sustainable peace. The semi-structured interviews included UN staff from civil affairs, human rights, and political affairs components as well as interviewees from relevant UN agencies, funds and programmes, international and national NGOs, academia and think tanks. Finally, the study team also carried out field interviews with peacekeepers in three UN missions, namely United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), United Nations Operation in

Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The Civil Affairs team sought to answer three broad-ranging questions, namely:

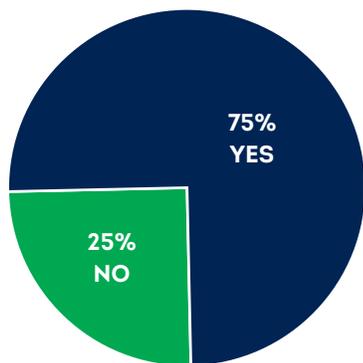
- 1. Why is civil society engagement important for UN peacekeeping?
- 2. How do peacekeepers engage with civil society actors?
- 3. What process, if any, guides peacekeepers in identifying and categorizing the wide spectrum of civil society actors to support mandate implementation and wider political processes, and how (if at all) do they determine which civil society actor to include and for what purpose?

WHY DOES CIVIL SOCIETY MATTER FOR UN PEACEKEEPING?

Findings reflect scarce previous empirical evidence that traces why and how peacekeepers systematically engage with civil society as part of their mandated activities during different phases of conflict. For the most part, there

is a largely descriptive array of individual and dispersed case study accounts of context-specific civil society engagement in various peacekeeping contexts. While considerable engagement does occur between mission staff and civil society, efforts in other important areas tend to be less developed. This is particularly true as regards feeding information and situational analysis gathered from local-level engagement upwards into national-level decision-making processes, such as mission planning. Part of the challenge is the fairly weak language used in defining 'inclusive national ownership', 'community engagement' and 'public consultation' in individual mission mandates. Another challenge is the lack of practical guidelines on how to include civil society so that it may contribute to implementing policies and individual mission mandates, including for core business processes such as situation analyses and reporting, and supporting wider peace negotiations. In addition, civil society engagement is also challenging since peacekeepers who wish to engage with civil society can often face considerable sensitivity from host state actors, at both the national and subnational level, which reduces internal mission

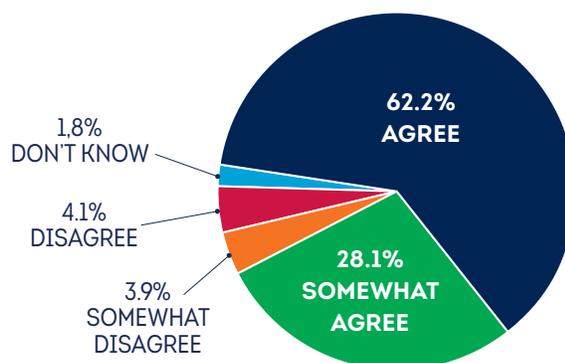
Figure 4:
In your mission, has the impact of civil society actors on the peace processes been worth the cost of the mission's efforts to engage, strengthen and support civil society?



incentives to include civil society in peace processes.

A majority (75 per cent) of DPKO-DFS survey respondents believe that engaging and supporting civil society actors on principle is worth the transaction cost borne by peacekeeping missions in engaging with, strengthening, and supporting civil society (see figure 4). Indeed, 62 per cent of the respondents supported the notion that civil society has the potential to play a significant leadership role in a post-conflict country (see figure 5). Peacekeepers also noted civil society holds the potential to add value in a number of ways, including: supporting national reconciliation, contributing to conflict prevention and stability at the local level;

Figure 5:
Can civil society play a leadership role in a post-conflict country?



supporting inclusive political settlements and peace negotiations; enhancing the mission's situational awareness on the national and local context; and contributing to a greater understanding of local perceptions of and confidence in the peace process, the government and the mission's mandate (see figures 4 and 6). This situational awareness can then help to recalibrate mandate implementation and public information strategies as necessary.

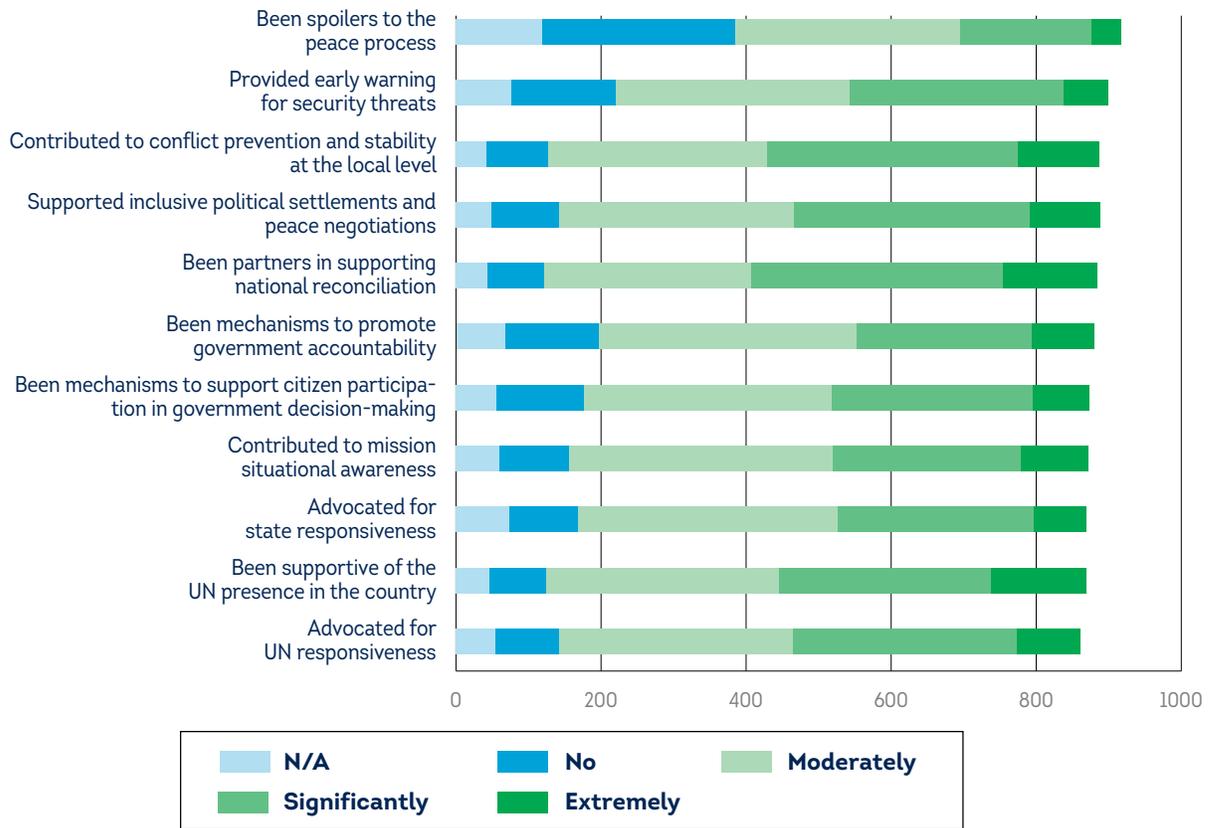
However, despite policy buy-in, there remains an overall lack of consensus in practice on the tangible utility of civil society for building a sustainable peace in the aftermath of conflict.

The effectiveness of civil society is sometimes questioned because it is extremely difficult to determine the effect of

specific initiatives on the wider conflict dynamic. When asked whether they believed civil society is always a force for good, only 36 per cent 'agreed', 41 per cent 'somewhat agreed', 11 per cent 'disagreed', and 9 per cent 'completely disagreed' (see figure 7).² This lack of consensus between survey respondents on the potential role of civil society as interlocutors for peace and good governance vs. spoilers of peace may partly germinate from a lack of conceptual clarity on who should be part of civil society and what roles civil society actors, including potential spoilers, can play in supporting wider political processes and post-conflict stabilization activities.

² Most number of respondents for this question in terms of UN Missions included personnel from UNAMID, MONUSCO, and UNMISS.

Figure 6: In your mission, what are the reasons for which civil society actors have been important?

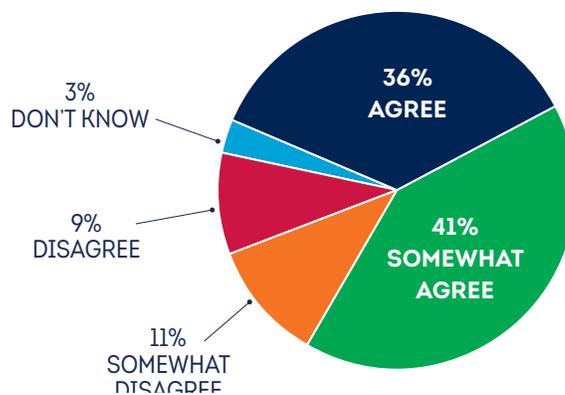


The perceived impact of civil society on supporting a durable peace may also vary depending on the extent and nature of interaction each mission component has had with various civil society actors. For example, all DPKO-DFS respondents from Child Protection, Formed Police Unit (FPU), Gender and the office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (O/DSRSG). The office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General indicated that engaging civil

society actors was worth the cost borne by their missions. However, about 20-24 per cent of respondents from uniformed components, including Brigade/

Military, Military Observers, Security and the United Nations Police (UNPOL), indicated that the cost borne do in fact exceed the benefits of supporting civil

Figure 7: Do you agree that civil society is always a force for good?



society actors. Surprisingly, 33 per cent of respondents from Electoral Assistance, 27 per cent from Civil Affairs, and 27 per cent from Human Rights components agreed with their military peers that the cost borne by their missions did indeed outweigh the benefits (see Figure 8). Given that each of these components interact closely and regularly with civil society and local populations as part of their mandated tasks, the way they perceive the tangible utility gained in engaging with civil society actors has implications on their interest and efficacy in engaging with local populations.

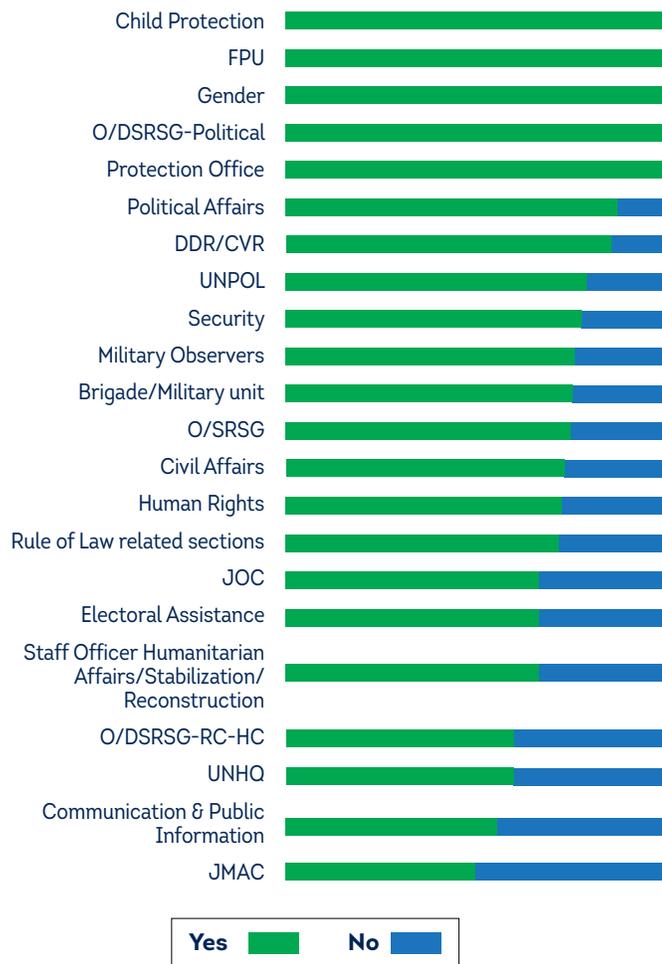
Despite the scepticism, a level of awareness exists that missions are not maximizing their engagement opportunities with civil society and must adopt a more proactive approach.

For instance, one peacekeeper stated that “the mission has failed to actively involve civil society in the reconciliation process, additionally political parties and individuals with ‘self-centred’ objectives have taken the lead not for the better of the population.” Another respondent said that “engaging CSO leaders has not gone beyond regular meetings. Focus is on governmental actors and buy-in from government,

so civil society sometimes gets excluded especially when government doesn’t want them to be involved”. One of the recommendations from the field reflects emerging consensus in the literature, namely that “engagement with civil society needs to be scaled up, both in mobilization and in capacity development for greater impact on the peace

process. Interaction between the government and civil society also needs to be facilitated more.” One respondent emphasized the importance of engaging with civil society actors early in the mission’s lifespan to provide insights and contacts to support the development of relationships as the mission expands. Another respondent from MINUSTAH

Figure 8: In your mission, has the impact that civil society actors have on the peace processes been worth the cost of the mission’s efforts to engage, strengthen and support civil society?



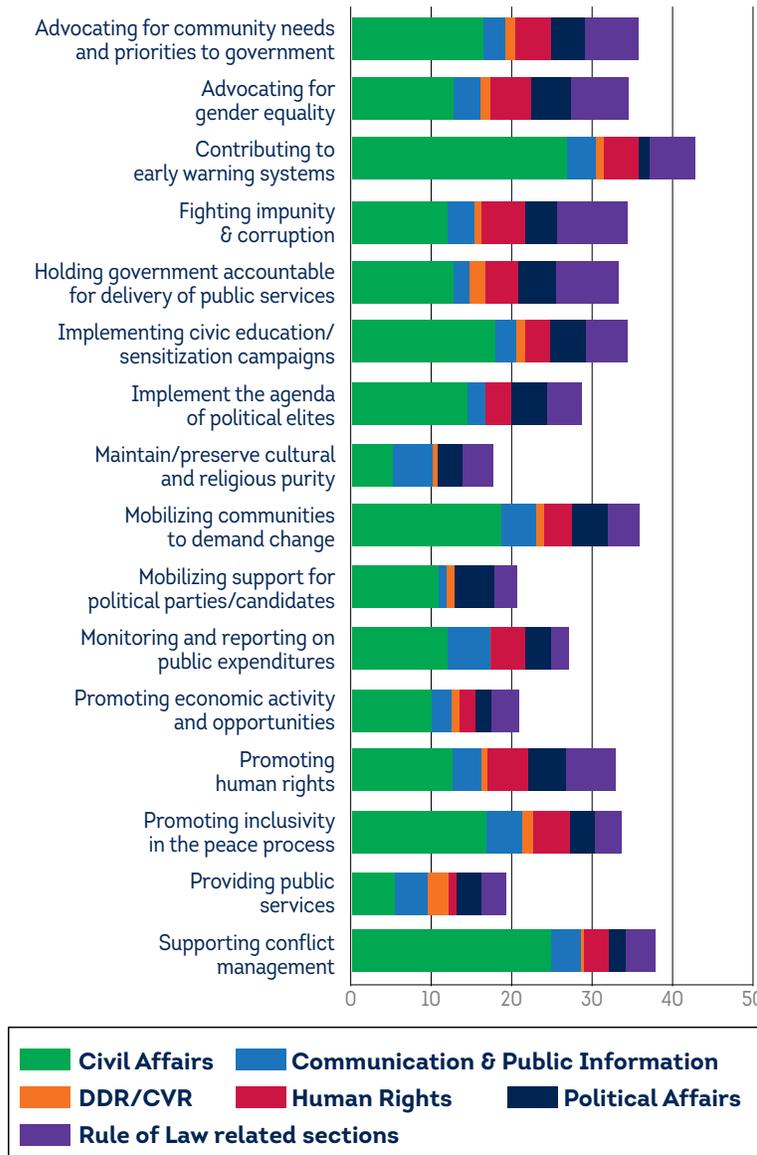
suggested that some of the most influential actors from Haitian society in the mission of implementing mandated tasks did not hold public office, but assisted behind the scenes without public recognition. Several respondents found the engagement with civil society actors worth the

costs through enhancing their coordination and monitoring capacity at the local level.

On the perceived role of civil society actors, survey respondents indicated that 'promoting human rights' ranked first, followed by 'advocating for community needs and

priorities to government' and then 'advocating for gender equality'. Among the responses, 'advocating for community needs and priorities to government' was the only function relevant to state responsiveness and accountability that received a high degree of responses; the lack of prioritization of other roles in this area suggests either a lack of understanding of the role of civil society, a lack of mobilization of civil society or a lack of perceived effectiveness of civil society in this area, or a combination of some or all (see figure 9).

Figure 9: Understanding of civil society's role by substantive components.
In your mission, what are the main roles of civil society?



PEACEKEEPERS' RATIONALE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

To ensure a more durable and lasting peace

Civil society actors can help to pressure conflicting parties to reach agreement, increase popular understanding and support for peace processes, ensure the inclusion of marginalized voices and support implementation of peace agreements.³ Experience has consistently shown that peace can only be defined and

³ OECD (2005a: 3).

achieved by the citizens of a country; it cannot be imposed from the outside. Peacekeepers and parties to a conflict need to understand what peace means for the people of a state so the solutions to a crisis are not defined externally. It is therefore unsurprising that a

comparative analysis of conflict resolution initiatives conducted by the NGO Conciliation Resources concluded that peace processes that ensure public participation, directly or through representative or consultative mechanisms, enjoy greater domestic legitimacy,

i.e. legitimacy in the eyes of the population as distinct from legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, and are more likely to result in durable peace. By contrast, 'elite pact-making' processes that focus purely on brokering agreement between belligerent groups were found to have the potential to alienate the population and delegitimize the post-conflict order.⁴

PEACEKEEPERS' RATIONALE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

- To ensure a more durable and lasting peace.
- To facilitate greater understanding among local populations on the mission and its mandate.
- To increase the prospects of inclusive national ownership, including gender-inclusive peace processes.
- To include the public in national planning processes.
- To help promote a secure environment, including providing early warning and conflict analysis support and protecting civilians.
- To contribute towards security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and the rule of law.
- To promote and protect human rights.
- To promote state responsiveness and accountability towards its citizens.
- To help restore and extend state authority.
- To enhance national and local situational awareness to increase effectiveness.
- To contribute an understanding of local perceptions and expectations to mission planning processes.
- To help assess mission progress towards mandate implementation and associated benchmarks.
- To enhance strategic communications and messaging to local populations.
- To help deliver necessary public services when the state is either unable or unwilling.

To facilitate greater understanding among local populations about the Mission and its mandate

Civil society can play an important role in informing the population on the mission's activities and mandate that are often complex and poorly understood. Public confidence in and positive local perceptions of the UN mission are critical to its success. Given their credibility among local communities, it can be strategic to reach out to civil society actors to provide information about the mission's mandate and activities, and address rumours and local concerns. For example, in 2013, during the Armed Forces of

⁴ United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (2015).

the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) operations against the March 23 Movement (M23), MONUSCO established an outreach group to provide more systematic information on the mission mandate in relation to the offensive operations in the Eastern part of the country given that MONUSCO was involved in providing rear base and supply line support, such as delivering rations to the troops and evacuating casualties. The outreach group met with civil society leaders to inform them of the mission's role so that they could in turn inform their communities, which helped to counter negative public relations by involving civil society actors as a strategic part of the operation.

Indeed, this outreach may be an integral part of the mission's public information and outreach campaign. For instance, other public information components in missions have worked with civil affairs components to publish the magazine 'civil society today', highlighting successful partnerships that the mission has undertaken with civil society actors and profiling different civil society actors. Some missions also have a dedicated civil society forum radio programme, while others



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN ALSO PROVIDE SENIOR MISSION LEADERSHIP WITH ALTERNATE VIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES AS COMPARED TO THE GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS, THE LEGITIMACY OF THE GOVERNMENT, KEY CHALLENGES AND RISKS FACING THE COUNTRY AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS AND THE ROLE AND EFFICACY OF THE PEACEKEEPING MISSION ITSELF.

have created a resource centre for information exchange that is located outside of the UN premises for better accessibility. Civil society actors are also called upon at times to provide in-mission briefings on the local context and culture.

To enhance situational awareness to increase effectiveness

The failure to understand the local context can result in ineffective conflict management and prevention strategies and/or interventions that may exacerbate conflict dynamics or at best extend the status quo. For instance, by understanding the opinions and priorities of the local population, a mission can

assess the validity of claims by belligerent parties to represent the people and inform its strategy for engagement with these parties.⁵ In addition, civil society actors can help peacekeepers identify local-level, conflict-related issues that governments may not be aware of or not want to tackle, helping missions to be more sensitive and in tune with the perceptions of the local population. Civil society actors can also provide senior mission leadership with alternate views and perspectives to those of the government on the peace process, the legitimacy of the government, key challenges and risks facing the country at the national and local levels and the role and efficacy of the peacekeeping mission itself. This can help the mission more effectively design and tailor its strategies for intervention to local exigencies on the ground, taking into account local needs, priorities and capacities. However, senior-level engagement can also run the risk of lip service, especially if careful planning does not take place to ensure that the appropriate civil society actors are invited to meetings. Some said that it is possible to guard against

⁵ Irwin, Colin (2002): Gagliardone, Iginio; Stremmler, Nicole (2008). DPKO/DPET/PBPS. Local perceptions study.

this tendency by identifying civil society interlocutors for high-level meetings on the basis of issues and not personalities.

To increase the prospects of inclusive national and local ownership of peace processes

It is increasingly recognized that peace processes that ensure broad public participation, through direct representation or consultative mechanisms have greater local ownership and domestic legitimacy, and are more likely to result in a sustainable peace. The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012) identifies inclusion as a key guiding principle for successful mediation processes. As it was aptly put, “how can we pretend to build peace in societies where our actions de facto exclude the large majority of their members?”⁶ Historically, peace and transition negotiations have been exclusive processes limited to dominant political elites, including those in government and other main parties to the conflict. More recently, broad normative agreement has emerged on the importance of inclusiveness, in terms of the composition of stakeholders

⁶ Pouligny, 509.

and the range of issues covered, in peace processes.⁷ This normative value placed on inclusion is based on principles of equality that people possess valid, even if divergent, needs, grievances and interests that deserve to be reflected in any peace process.⁸ Additionally, it is increasingly recognized that peace negotiations between parties to conflict do not take place in a social or political vacuum; these parties may be unable – even unwilling – to address the complex ways in which other groups have been affected by conflict. The presence – and influence in many contexts – of so many civil society actors at the community level highlights their potential role in supporting the resolution of conflicts through local power structures.⁹

WHY DOES INCLUSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY MATTER TO PEACE PROCESSES?

Inclusion of civil society actors in peace processes is believed to yield a number of dividends, including: introducing important issues to the table; moving forward or generating

⁷ Does and McElligott, (2012: 1).

⁸ Packer (2013: 5).

⁹ Lamptey (2007:13).

momentum for a stalled process; advocating for humanitarian rather than military incentives for an agreement; increasing popular ownership and buy-in for a negotiated agreement; and strengthening accountability to the affected communities.¹⁰ Civil society actors can help create the requisite conditions for successful peace negotiations by: building confidence between parties; assessing public perceptions of the conflict and peace process and mobilizing public support; shaping the agenda; and setting the tone of discussions.

Conversely, the exclusion and alienation of sections of society from the political process or peace negotiations, or discrimination and horizontal inequalities can exacerbate the presence of spoilers, which have the potential to jeopardize the fragile peace brokered in post-conflict countries.¹¹ Even if peace processes are more complex and more time-consuming when they are inclusive, they may facilitate greater ownership, enjoy greater legitimacy, be more reflective of differentiated needs and grievances, and therefore result

¹⁰ ICAN (2014).

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (2012).

in more implementable and sustainable agreements.¹² The inclusion of civil society actors in peace processes is seen to add value since they may be more attuned to the impact of conflict on civilians and to grievances, and could derail any potential agreement. They can also help to promote buy-in among affected communities for any eventual agreement. While significant focus has been paid to the inclusion of civil society in peace processes, in practice, this has been ad hoc and inconsistent.

The reluctance to promote inclusiveness is not typically a result of a lack of belief in its inherent value, but rather a product of political expediency and time. It was often perceived that exclusive processes would be more efficient in producing an agreement. An obstacle to the operationalization of inclusiveness can also be “the resistance of some governments, donors and armed groups to include more actors in peace processes” to avoid perceived threats to their authority.¹³ Others have theorized that the exclusion of civil society is based on perceptions of their capacity, with

¹² Packer (2013: 12).

¹³ Does and McElligott (2012), Gibson (2001:2).



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN HELP CREATE THE REQUISITE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, THROUGH BUILDING CONFIDENCE BETWEEN PARTIES, ASSESSING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONFLICT AND PEACE PROCESS AND MOBILISING PUBLIC SUPPORT, SHAPING THE AGENDA AND SETTING THE TONE OF DISCUSSIONS.

assumptions made about ‘soft’ support for civil society and ‘hard’ support for governments.¹⁴ Another common prevailing argument has been that “those without guns don’t have power.”¹⁵

However, empirical studies have increasingly demonstrated that, when civil society is included in peace processes in a meaningful way, the resulting agreements tend to be more sustainable.¹⁶ In fact, a recent study shows that, between 2000 and 2011, one in five peace agreements failed within five years.¹⁷ Meanwhile,

¹⁴ *obid.*

¹⁵ Murphy and Tubiana (2010: 3).

¹⁶ ICAN Concept Note — Negotiating a Better Peace: Women and Civil Society at the Table.

¹⁷ Uppsala Conflict Data Program, December 2012, “UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset v.2.0, 1975-2011.

another study argues that the inclusion of civil society reduces the risk of failure of peace agreements by 64 per cent.¹⁸ Moreover, history shows that peace processes that are exclusionary in their negotiations more often than not remain exclusionary in their implementation.¹⁹ Restricting negotiations to the belligerents in a conflict proscribes the opportunity to shape peace agreements with the views of those who did not take up arms, but who were nonetheless affected by those who did.²⁰ One peace and conflict NGO noted that the inclusion of civil society at the negotiating table is not only to influence the discussions, but also, if a larger peacebuilding transformation process is to take place beyond an agreement, then it is civil society who will be its primary guardians. By only working through government elites and belligerents to a conflict, this tends to reify power dynamics and perpetuate conflicts rather than transform inequities, thus begging the question “Whose conflict is it anyway, at the end of the day?”

¹⁸ Nilsson (2012: 243-266).

¹⁹ “ODI (2009: 2).

²⁰ ACCORD (2009)..



MISSIONS SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO ENSURE AN 'INCLUSIVE-ENOUGH' PEACE PROCESS THAT INCLUDES A WIDE SPECTRUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS THAT REPRESENT KEY INTERESTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS IN SOCIETIES, MOVING THE FOCUS AWAY FROM ACTORS THAT ARE KNOWN AND EASY TO ENGAGE WITH TO KEY ISSUES THAT MERIT ATTENTION.

WHY IS INCLUSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PEACE PROCESSES CHALLENGING?

However, the controversy does not end at a determination of whether or not a peace process is inclusive. The inclusion of other stakeholders, such as civil society actors, is complicated by the very heterogeneity of civil society with its diverse array of interests, positions and profiles that it can encompass. This then begs considerations of “who participates, to what degree, at what stage and in what capacity.”²¹ In fact, inclusiveness can also lead to new types of ‘exclusion’ when determinations about who sits at the table are made.²²

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Does and McElligott (2012:5).

One of the key challenges of placing well-spoken civil society “elites” at the centre of representation efforts is that they may not be able to relate to grassroots constituencies.²³ Efforts must therefore be made to ensure an “inclusive-enough” process, while recognizing that inclusiveness can never be exhaustive, and that it is not only about actors, but also about issues.²⁴ A process can include all possible actors, but it will not be inclusive if the agenda is limited to the issues of concern to a few. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that civil society actors are not neutral bystanders in a conflict or mere peace enforcers; they also have the capacity to act as spoilers to fragile peace processes, and their inclusion can help to pacify any potential opposition they may present.²⁵

Inclusive peace processes are those that provide the political space for ‘authentic voices’ to advocate on behalf of the needs, interests and aspirations of affected parties or communities.²⁶ Inclusive peace processes may often involve multiple, overlapping efforts

²³ Murphy and Tubiana (2010: 13).

²⁴ Does and McElligott (2012:6).

²⁵ Lamptey (2007:5).

²⁶ Packer (YEAR: 1).

or conversations occurring in parallel, and not be confined to one process. Operationalizing inclusiveness entails “opening up the space for peacebuilding to drive several peace processes at the same time, which in their totality shape the levels of inclusion.”²⁷

This inclusion or participation can widen the range of issues that a peace process addresses, strengthen the potential for inclusive participation in the implementation of any agreement and facilitate some degree of reconciliation in the process between different actors.²⁸ Public participation is clearly not without challenges. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges of efficiency and focus, confidentiality may be another concern, as well as the inclusion of too many divergent voices that cannot be reconciled, and ensuring that participation pays more than lip service to inclusion by empowering marginalized voices, not creating new categories of exclusion.²⁹

²⁷ Does and McElligott (2012:2).

²⁸ ACCORD (2009).

²⁹ *ibid.*

HOW CAN MISSIONS ENSURE INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES?

There is no single or prescriptive model to public participation in peace processes. There are a number of different examples of civil society participation in peace processes, and how civil society can best participate must also be tailored to the specific context and needs. Different modalities for civil society participation include:

- representation through multi-party negotiations;
- consultative processes in parallel to peace negotiations; and
- direct (parallel) participation at the local level.³⁰

Some modalities for participation recognize that it is not feasible for everyone to participate meaningfully at the negotiating table or at the national level, but that there is greater scope for participation in parallel at local and community levels. The challenge, then, is how to ensure that these peace processes are aligned with and input into national-level processes.³¹ But these participatory processes at the

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

local level can offer important precedents and build momentum for national initiatives.

In some contexts, such as South Africa's all-inclusive multi-party negotiations, representative participation through political parties was pursued; in other countries as Guatemala, consultative mechanisms such as the Civil Society Assembly operated in parallel to the official track of negotiations, providing a platform for civil society to channel their views and formulate recommendations. Civil society in Guatemala worked with the Government to convene a national dialogue process and later served as a formal advisory group to the peace negotiations. In other contexts, more direct participation at local levels, such as Mali's inter-community meetings, resulted in local peace agreements that accumulated and contributed to ending the conflict.³² In Liberia, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Aceh (Indonesia) and Somalia, among others, civil society leaders mediated between parties, initiated ceasefires, and supported widening the space for negotiated solutions to the conflict.

³² *ibid.*

In Liberia, during the first war in 1990, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL-RfP) proposed the first blueprint for the Liberian Peace Process, which was later adopted by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as the ECOWAS Peace Plan for Liberia.³³ At the regional level in West Africa, women's groups from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, through the Mano River Women's Peace Network, sought to facilitate cross-border dialogue to secure a sub-regional response to the conflict in the region.³⁴

In South Sudan, following the outbreak of conflict in December 2013 and the subsequent peace negotiations between the conflicting parties in Addis Ababa, civil society actors formed a national consultative structure for inter-religious engagement in the peace talks, the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation, which helped to structure civil society's participation in the peace process. However, some civil society actors critiqued this platform, noting that it was not wholly impartial and that,

³³ Lamptey (2007:15).

³⁴ *ibid.*, 16.

rather than broadening the peace negotiations, was using civil society to advance the government's agenda. While much focus has been placed on the benefits that civil society mobilization can bring to peace processes, there are also dangers that civil society actors can be instrumentalized, or even formed, in order to advance the agenda of one conflicting party over another. Another civil society diaspora organization was created, Citizens for Peace and Justice, which, by convening like-minded civil society actors, sought to increase focus in the peace talks on the root causes of conflict.

WHY SHOULD MISSIONS PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO BEING GENDER-INCLUSIVE IN PEACE PROCESSES?

Inclusion in peace processes should, in theory, lead to increased opportunities for previously subordinated groups, such as women, to have a voice in shaping the discussions and is often the only way to get these groups at the negotiating table. However, the inclusion of women is not automatic. There is extensive empirical evidence to suggest that the participation of women in peace negotiations

OUT OF 585 PEACE AGREEMENTS CONCLUDED BETWEEN 1990 AND 2010, ONLY 92 CONTAINED AT LEAST ONE REFERENCE TO WOMEN, 16 MENTIONED THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS, AND 17 HAD EXPLICIT REFERENCES TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

and political settlements is vital to ensuring that gender-sensitive priorities are reflected in these agreements and thus generates more holistic, inclusive and, ultimately, durable peace agreements. Women bring a different, more comprehensive understanding of the causes of conflict and alternatives to conflict. UN Women has noted that the composition of participants in peace negotiations has a significant effect on the issues that are prioritized. The more women included in the process, the higher the likelihood that gender-sensitive issues such as health care, prevention of sexual violence, and women's political participation will be addressed by the subsequent agreements and settlements.³⁵

Despite the enshrining of these principles in Security Council resolution 1325, women are

still often missing from peace negotiations in official roles as negotiators, mediators, signatories and witnesses, among others. A sample of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 shows that only 4 per cent of signatories, 2.4 per cent of chief mediators, 3.7 per cent of witnesses and 9 per cent of negotiators were women.³⁶ It is hardly a coincidence, then, that out of 585 peace agreements concluded between 1990 and 2010, only 92 contained at least one reference to women, 16 mentioned the protection of women's human rights, and 17 had explicit references to sexual violence.³⁷ Gender-related civil society actors therefore play a key role in enhancing the inclusivity of peace negotiations and political settlements, ensuring the inclusion of issues of particular concern to women, and arriving at more holistic solutions to the conflict.

In order to promote the active inclusion of women and gender-sensitive priorities in peace negotiations, UN Women provides support to female civil society actors to increase their advocacy capacity. The agency helps to establish networks of gender-related civil

³⁵ UN Women (2012).

³⁶ *ibid.* (2012: 3).

³⁷ Bell and O'Rourke (2010: 941–980).

society actors and convenes mechanisms to bring these civil society actors together with decision makers and other relevant actors. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Women has supported the establishment of “peace tables” to engage with parties to the conflict to ensure that women’s rights and issues are on the political agenda. This strategy was employed in 2001 (by the then UNIFEM) to advocate for women’s formal participation in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, a national platform for political reform and reconciliation that initially excluded women. By raising the profile of women’s concerns, sensitizing participants on the importance of women’s involvement and creating a forum for harmonizing the position of women’s civil society, the initiative succeeded in placing gender issues on the official agenda and, eventually, including 36 women in the Dialogue.³⁸

In addition to including women in peace negotiations, women can play a unique and primary role in bringing warring actors to the negotiating table. For example, a senior United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo

³⁸ UN Women (2012).

(MONUC)/United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) official in the DRC recounted that during the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple rebellion* (CNDP) of 2007-8 led by Laurent Nkunda, the mission was not able to negotiate directly with the rebels because they were located in the deep bush and were not interested in communicating with the United Nations. In order to encourage the CNDP to enter into dialogue with the Government, the mission made contact with women’s NGOs in Goma, who were able to pass the message along through their informal networks to women living within the CNDP. When the CNDP eventually came to the negotiating table, they included two women in their eight-person delegation.

In addition to bringing a different perspective to peace negotiations, gender-related civil society actors can play a significant, active role in moving a peace process forward. This was evident during the peace negotiations in Liberia in 1993, when the Liberian Women Initiative brought together women from different social and regional parts of society to march in protest at the

stalled peace process. In 2001, the Women in Peacebuilding Network coordinated the Mass Action for Peace campaign at the formal peace negotiations, mobilizing thousands of women to barricade delegates in meeting rooms until they came to an agreement.³⁹ This and other women’s groups were eventually invited to attend the formal ECOWAS negotiations and became signatory to the peace declaration. The result was a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which reflected the will and intention of women, set gender quotas for members of the Transitional Legislative Assembly and included provisions for gender balance in the country’s transitional institutions. Another example occurred in 1999, when southern Sudanese women in the New Sudan Council of Churches arranged the Wunit Tribal Summit to end conflict being waged between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, a process that sets a positive precedent even if it did not achieve the intended result.⁴⁰

The transition from conflict to peacebuilding is an opportune moment to redefine a country’s gender roles and change

³⁹ United Nations (2010).

⁴⁰ World Development Report (2011)

societal relations. In the aftermath of conflict, therefore, civil society actors can play an important role in advocating for the rights of women in society and ensuring the protection and promotion of women's rights in the evolving national legal framework. For example, a senior political affairs officer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has highlighted that the creation of the Collective of Congolese Women for Peace and Justice was helpful in calling into question existing practices and attitudes towards women at the national level.⁴¹ The World Bank also works to foster close relationships between gender-related civil society actors and politicians and, like UN Women, advocates for the use of quotas to increase women's political representation.⁴² The World Bank's primary mechanism for this work is the Social Development Civil Society Fund, which provides direct financial support to the activities of civil society actors, especially those who are under-represented in the political sphere, particularly women and organizations representing youth and rural communities.

⁴¹ NATO (2013).

⁴² World Bank (2012).



THE TRANSITION FROM CONFLICT TO PEACEBUILDING IS AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT TO REDEFINE A COUNTRY'S GENDER ROLES, INCLUDING IN THE EVOLVING NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK, AND PROMOTE MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETAL RELATIONS.

External international actors, including the United Nations, can play an important role in facilitating civil society inclusion in peace processes in a number of ways, including: playing a convening role by sponsoring or hosting meetings; applying political pressure; providing financial support; offering training and technical skills to prepare civil society actors for effective participation; and creating a secure environment to enable this participation to be meaningful and constructive.

HELPING TO PROMOTE A SECURE ENVIRONMENT

One of the principal ways in which peacekeepers engage with civil society in support of mandate implementation is to promote a secure environment,

through ensuring a cessation of hostilities, protecting civilians from the imminent threat of physical or sexual violence, supporting the rule of law including through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) processes, promoting human rights and undertaking early warning and conflict analysis towards conflict prevention. The presence of a secure environment is viewed as a precondition to undertake many of the other tasks that peacekeeping missions may be mandated with, and the protection of civilians is the paramount priority for many missions; civil society actors can be important interlocutors in effectively undertaking these tasks. Without a secure environment, it is very difficult to create the space to consolidate peace by building governance institutions, restoring and extending state authority, and facilitating political inclusion, among other activities. Even more exhaustive, in its report "Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War and Building Peace," the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict divides civil society roles and functions in support of conflict prevention in 34 categories covering the spectrum of early warning, prevention, mediation,

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROMOTING A SECURE ENVIRONMENT

Examples of the wide spectrum of roles civil society actors (including women) can play to help promote a secure environment, including:

- bearing witness;
- addressing the root causes of conflict;
- reframing the conflict and changing perceptions;
- defining the peace agenda;
- mobilizing constituencies for peace;
- facilitating early warning and
- early response;
- undertaking civilian monitoring;
- back-channelling communication between opponents; and
- supporting unofficial dialogue processes and localised peace agreements.

monitoring, civilian peace-keeping and reconciliation. Within these areas, it defines civil society core functions as: bearing witness; addressing the root causes of conflict; reframing the conflict and changing perceptions; defining the peace agenda; mobilizing constituencies for peace; facilitating early warning and early response; undertaking civilian monitoring; back-channelling communication between opponents; and supporting unofficial dialogue processes and localized peace agreements, etc.⁴³ Given the differential security concerns that face men and women in many active and post-conflict contexts, women's organizations

⁴³ Barnes (2006), cited in Gourlay, (2006: 45).

can also advocate for different security priorities, such as economic security and access to health and education services. In some contexts, these needs, if unfulfilled, can become legitimate security concerns.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that, at the outset, if an environment is genuinely insecure or prone to active conflict, then civil society activity may also be curtailed or repressed. In situations of conflict, civil society actors with the power to effect change may have been disempowered and become fragmented, or have had to go underground and therefore only have a nascent presence. Some civil society actors may have become compromised and

be complicit in perpetuating conflict, while others may face such severe security threats that it may not be safe for them, or for third parties, to engage with them. Ensuring a secure environment will necessarily also cultivate an environment conducive to the expansion of political space and the development of a vibrant civil society.

PROVIDING EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT ANALYSIS SUPPORT

One of the primary ways in which civil society actors contribute to a secure environment is by providing the inputs and situational awareness to develop early warning and conflict analysis to prevent conflict. This is one of the key roles that civil society actors play vis-à-vis effective mandate implementation; civil affairs and Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) sections, in particular, in missions, are often engaged with civil society actors for this reason. Leveraging the involvement of civil society actors in early warning and conflict prevention helps to ensure the provision of real-time, accurate information. Conflict scholars have posited that "having access to as many eyes and ears could, in practice, surmount the two hurdles.

The inclusion of NGOs in the information gathering process could potentially overcome faulty analysis of the likelihood of diffusion and/or escalation of a conflict or complex emergency.⁴⁴ Civil society actors can sometimes occupy a tenuous middle space as a neutral conduit between conflicting parties in order to gain information and inputs on triggers and the potential escalation of conflict.



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS OFTEN OCCUPY A TENUOUS MIDDLE SPACE AS A NEUTRAL CONDUIT BETWEEN CONFLICTING PARTIES IN ORDER TO GAIN INFORMATION AND INPUTS ON TRIGGERS AND THE POTENTIAL ESCALATION OF CONFLICT

The report of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Armed Conflict acknowledges the important role that civil society plays in conflict prevention, while noting that the primary responsibility to prevent conflict nonetheless resides with governments. Therefore, it posits that supporting civil society in early warning and conflict analysis requires focusing on the interface between the early

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme (2005: 42).

warning activities of civil society and government response action.⁴⁵ While civil society actors can be useful interlocutors for gathering inputs to inform early warning and conflict analysis, they are less effective partners in triggering early response and often face challenges in ensuring that their warnings are heeded by government counterparts.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is advisable that any effort to develop civil society early warning capacities also focus on sensitizing governments to listen more to the inputs of civil society actors in order to ensure that early warning alerts are acted upon.⁴⁷ The European Union has emphasized the importance of a strong linkage with civil society groups in order to assess local ground truth and thereby enhance situational awareness and early warning.⁴⁸

There is a risk that engagement with civil society in support of early warning can take on an extractive nature insofar as the focus is on eliciting information and intelligence for the mission's own analysis, contextual understanding and decision-making.

⁴⁵ Executive Summary, Report of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Armed Conflict, A/55/985-S/2001/574 (2001).

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 46.

⁴⁷ *ibid*.

⁴⁸ Gourlay (2006: 14).

To prevent this engagement from becoming unilateral, it is important to ensure a feedback mechanism, to the extent that is possible, to inform civil society actors on the actions taken (if they can be revealed), including on the mission's own conflict analysis. In addition, some have suggested that efforts to make consultation and dialogue with civil society actors routine and systematic, rather than ad hoc to elicit early warning information when needed, may reduce the apparent political significance of the dialogue and make it seem less extractive.⁴⁹

SUPPORTING THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Civil society actors are frequently enlisted as critical partners in the implementation of one of the most prioritized mandate tasks: the protection of civilians. In situations where the state is either unable or unwilling to protect its civilians, civil society groups often bridge this gap during the conflict and its aftermath to protect human life, rights and property against threats from the main parties to the conflict, including the host government in some cases. Within the existing policy

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 28-29.



MISSIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT ANY EFFORT TO DEVELOP CIVIL SOCIETY'S EARLY WARNING CAPACITIES ALSO FOCUS ON SENSITIZING GOVERNMENTS TO LISTEN MORE TO THE INPUTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT EARLY WARNING ALERTS ARE ACTED UPON IN AN EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY MANNER TO PREVENT ESCALATION OF VIOLENT CONFLICT.

guidance on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping missions, civil society actors generally fall within the remit of supporting the implementation of tier III or creating a protective environment.⁵⁰ This engagement with civil society actors towards supporting the creation of a protective environment is often facilitated by Civil Affairs components, whose field presence at the local level positions them well to engage with local communities and authorities.⁵¹

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a consortium of 59 international and national civil society actors wrote to the Special Representative of the

⁵⁰ DPKO/DFS (2014).

⁵¹ DPKO/DFS (2012).

Secretary-General (SRSG) of MONUSCO in 2013 with recommendations on how MONUSCO could better protect civilians in the context of violence related to the Lord's Resistance Army. Among the issues they cited as contributing to insufficient protection, they pointed to inadequate consultation and information sharing with local communities and civil society actors, resulting in the mission left out of local information networks. To improve the situation, they recommended that the mission re-establish trust and information-sharing mechanisms with the population, including by increasing the number of community liaison assistants, and advised that personnel should be trained on how to consult with local communities and vulnerable groups. They also recommended increased support for community self-protection initiatives and for ensuring that protection measures were tailored and coordinated to specific community needs. As one civil society leader said, "[T]he success of MONUSCO's efforts to protect civilians depends on the mission's ability to communicate with them and earn their trust."

In South Sudan, for example, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) protection of civilians strategy describes a

principal protection of civilians' element of the Early Warning and Response System as:

continued engagement by Civil Affairs officers across ten states with conflict protagonists, grassroots communities, community leaders, civil society representatives, political classes, state and county authorities, and IDPs with a view to eliciting, mapping and interpreting conflict drivers" and "the development of collection of information processes to monitor these indicators, particularly by: strengthening early warning links with the faith-based and other civil society actors in partnership with the NGOs, local authorities; [and] using community police relations committees and other civil society groups including women's organizations.

It further argues that each UNMISS base should establish community and civil society contacts and leverage existing local networks to jointly assess protection and security threats faced by the local population so that the mission can adjust its operational plans accordingly. This local engagement is viewed as essential to understanding the protection threats and bolstering the protection measures that may already be in place.⁵²

⁵² United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilians' Strategy (2014).

Lessons learned studies on local community engagement in devising protection strategies suggest that it may be safer for peacekeeping missions to engage with civil society actors, rather than pursuing direct engagement with conflict-affected communities.⁵³ Using civil society actors as an intermediary with the local population can help to reduce the risks posed to conflict-affected communities by this engagement, while still eliciting the information needed to support mandate implementation and decision-making.⁵⁴ It is important to consider how, in an insecure environment, the engagement of peacekeepers with conflict-affected communities may actually place those communities at increased risk of being targeted, rather than confer any protection. Using civil society actors as an entry point can help to mitigate this risk.

PREVENTING AND/OR ADDRESSING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Engaging women's organizations can help to sensitize parties to a conflict on the

⁵³ Giffen et al. (2014: 6).

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 8.

different ways in which conflict affects women. UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2009) highlights “the need for development and strengthening of the capacities of national institutions.... and of local civil society networks in order to provide sustainable assistance to victims of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.”⁵⁵ For example, as part of its strategy to address the issue of sexual violence by rebels and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO has sought to raise awareness among fighters on the prohibition of sexual violence and the legal consequences for perpetrators. To do this, they distributed copies of UNSCR 1820 and the national law on sexual violence in the local language to women's organizations so that the information would filter through to those that are harder to reach due to geographic and/or linguistic barriers.

In June 2011, in order to promote a secure environment for women in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the NGO V-Day worked

⁵⁵ S/RES/1820 (2008), 19 June 2008.

with the local Panzi Foundation to open a community called 'City of Joy' to support female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in rebuilding their lives, through classes in self-defense and literacy and political and civic education.⁵⁶ In Iraq, the NGO provided funding to open the first shelters for women in the country and organized the distribution of donated satellite phones to Afghan women to facilitate communication in remote areas.⁵⁷

In post-conflict environments, many gender-related civil society actors underscore the urgent need to restore the rule of law and security for women so that they can seek legal remedy to crimes of SGBV. The re-establishment of the rule of law promotes a secure environment and allows women to seek justice and reparations for the crimes committed against them. UN Women operates the global United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, which allocates funding at the Headquarters level directly to projects that advocate for women's rights, prevent SGBV and support access to justice

⁵⁶ V-Day (2013).

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

for victims. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the Trust Fund has supported a local women's civil society actor to implement a project entitled "Transitional Justice: Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Ensuring Women's participation". The project seeks to address the justice needs of victims of SGBV through the provision of technical assistance and training to policymakers, the promotion of the processes of truth seeking and reparations, and consultation with women's civil society actors.⁵⁸

Even when considering security in the more traditional physical sense, women's civil society actors can advocate for the inclusion of women's security concerns in national and international strategies to protect the population. Priorities essential to promoting a secure environment for women that may not be covered by other actors may include protection from sexual and gender-based violence, assistance to survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict, and secured access of routes to water and food sources. In addition, some actors, such as Women for Women International, seek to promote a secure

⁵⁸ UN Women (2013).

MISSIONS SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO INCLUDE WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS TO ENSURE THAT PRIORITIES ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDING WOMEN WITH A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, WHICH MAY NOT BE COVERED BY THEIR MALE CIVIL SOCIETY COUNTERPARTS, ARE ADDRESSED IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES.

environment for women by enabling their economic self-sufficiency so that they can escape violent situations.⁵⁹

TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS SECURITY SECTOR REFORM, DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION AND THE RULE OF LAW

The Netherlands, the lead donor in security sector reform in Burundi, has used civil society actors in a variety of ways as part of an eight-year (2009-2017) security sector development programme that

⁵⁹ Women for Women International (2013).

takes a broad view of security governance that includes non-state, civil society and private security providers. When implementing traditional security sector reform (SSR) activities such as reintegration and reinsertion, a number of civil society actors have been contracted as implementing partners for specific tasks, while an umbrella civil society platform has been engaged to provide technical support and ensure coordination and harmonization among the partners. In addition, the programme provides training to civil society actors, including the media, local NGOs and victims' groups, on security monitoring. By engaging civil society in security sector reform, the programme seeks to bring about a change in society's values towards and expectations of their country's security services.⁶⁰

Community consultations, including through civil society engagement, can be key to successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes, including by supporting compliance with voluntary disarmament and reintegration phases.⁶¹ UNDP has underlined the

⁶⁰ McMullin (YEAR).

⁶¹ Pouligny (2005:498).

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT FACILITATOR ROLE FOR PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS WHERE INFORMAL/ TRADITIONAL JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS AND CUSTOMARY LOCAL PRACTICES PREVAIL OVER FORMAL ONES, GIVEN THEIR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS, PRACTICES AND ACCESS TO NETWORKS.

importance of generating alternative sources of income and livelihoods for former combatants during the DDR process and works with gender-related civil society actors towards this end. Illustrative of its engagement is the “1,000 Micro-Projects” programme, which was implemented in 26 key locations throughout Côte d’Ivoire. This initiative benefitted approximately 3,730 ex-combatants, including women and youth affected by the crisis, providing income-generating activities such as agriculture and handcraft, and highlighting the necessity to include female ex-combatants in DDR processes.⁶²

⁶² UNDP/BCPR (2013).

Women’s organizations can support greater inclusivity in essential post-conflict programmes to rebuild the security environment. For example, eligibility criteria for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes often discriminate against women by limiting participation to ex-combatants who possess and know how to dismantle a weapon. This excludes women who are associated with armed groups as forced ‘bush wives’, domestic helpers or field operations supporters, thereby depriving them of the financial and training packages offered to demobilized soldiers and leaving them susceptible to increased social stigma and poverty.⁶³ Following the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework in February 2013 between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group, MONUSCO brought together a number of women’s civil society actors to analyse the Framework for its sensitivity to the needs of women, particularly the elements of the document dedicated to the demobilization,

⁶³ UN Women (2012a).

disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants. The civil society actors agreed to call on the Government to ensure that women associated with armed groups – many of whom are unarmed – benefit from the specialized programmes planned in this area and also to develop gender-sensitive indicators for measuring the Framework’s implementation. The Government has since established national consultations on the peace process for which 100 of the 400 seats are reserved for civil society, in which women’s civil society actors have participated. A MONUSCO Gender Adviser reported that, although these women’s civil society actors recognize the importance of engaging with the state on these issues, there is a great deal of skepticism on the Government’s genuine interest in taking into account their views in policymaking.

An important element of promoting a secure environment is establishing institutions to guarantee the security of citizens. In this regard, the promotion of the rule of law is a vital element of post-conflict stabilization and “serves both to enable responsible national rule of law institutions to provide stability, accountability,

efficiency and oversight, and simultaneously to empower communities to claim their rights". Civil society actors can be integral partners in the restoration of the rule of law and the pursuit of transitional justice. For example, both the United Nations Office in Burundi (BINUB) Human Rights and Justice Division in Burundi and the UNMIL Human Rights Division in Liberia supported systematic consultations with civil society actors on different issues pertaining to the transitional justice process.

Many post-conflict countries feature pluralistic legal systems, with both customary and formal statutory justice systems that are generally recognized as legitimate mechanisms for the resolution of disputes and seeking redress for wrongdoings against individuals. In systems with weak state capacity and high levels of corruption, informal systems may be seen as more legitimate, especially in rural areas. However, informal justice mechanisms can also be exclusive and insensitive to the needs and rights of disempowered groups, such as women and minorities. As such, customary practices regarding justice can pose a major challenge to



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ADVOCACY ROLE IN PRESSURING GOVERNMENTS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND END IMPUNITY BY HOLDING PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS.

the equitable administration of justice and the rule of law. In the peacekeeping contexts where informal systems prevail, local justice mechanisms, including through traditional councils, civil society actors can play a more active role in exacting justice.

TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

The efficacy and credibility of the United Nations' human rights work is underpinned by the expertise, situational awareness, advocacy, community sensitization and mobilization, monitoring and reporting activities of civil society actors. Civil society actors help the peacekeeping missions to access vulnerable groups, promote wide consultation and monitor human rights

concerns.⁶⁴ Local and national human rights civil society actors are essential partners for human rights components of peacekeeping missions.⁶⁵ These partners promote rights through education, campaign for improvements and advancements both to local officials and national government actors, and support peacekeeping missions in identifying, monitoring and reporting on human rights violations. Many of these actors may not define their work in terms of human rights per se, even if they are focused on issues integral to human rights work such as accountability, non-discrimination, and rights for marginalized and vulnerable communities.⁶⁶

In turn, many peacekeeping human rights mandates have a capacity-building dimension in which peacekeepers are also tasked with strengthening the capacity of human rights advocates, including civil society actors, to be proponents for human rights in their society and undertake monitoring, investigation and reporting

⁶⁴ "Strategy Outline for OHCHR Engagement with Civil Society" Internal paper, Civil Society Section EDM, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (January 2013)

⁶⁵ OHCHR (2008) *Working with the UN Human Rights Programme: A handbook for civil society*. New York and Geneva

⁶⁶ OHCHR (2013:2)

activities. If adequately strengthened, civil society actors can play an influential role in pressuring governments to end impunity, hold perpetrators accountable and govern with respect for human rights. For example, in Liberia in 2008, civil society actors called for specialized police units and a dedicated rape court to be established to address human rights abuses perpetrated during conflict. In Haiti, meanwhile, civil society actors advocated against the trafficking of minors and orphans in internally displaced person camps.

There are many different examples of how peacekeepers may engage with civil society actors in support of promoting human rights. For example, in South Sudan, a draft UNMISS human rights strategy (2014) addresses the nexus of human rights and civil society when it calls for the “building of a vibrant and robust human rights culture among civil society actors, including journalists and human rights defenders, through training, mentoring and provision of human rights libraries and resource centres.” It calls upon all relevant mission components to support civil society actors in serving as human rights advocates, including with their government, and notes that it will

 **CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS FACE MANY CHALLENGES IN MANY CONFLICT CONTEXTS, INCLUDING THREATS TO THEIR SAFETY AND GOVERNMENTS ATTEMPTING TO CURTAIL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND POLITICAL SPACE AVAILABLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, MAKING IT CHALLENGING FOR MISSIONS TO ENGAGE WITH AND BUILD CAPACITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY, WHILE BALANCING THE UN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOST GOVERNMENTS.**

conduct training on a number of critical human rights issues, including freedom of expression and access to information.

In Burundi, the BINUB Human Rights and Justice Division encouraged the development of human rights civil society actors' collective institutional capacity by supporting the creation of internal national networks to disseminate information and deliver advocacy messages more quickly and with greater reach through regular meetings convened by the mission involving key actors in the defence of human rights. The strengthened link between national and local civil society actors improved

the protection of human rights at the local level by making current information and resources more accessible.⁶⁷

BINUB also sought to strengthen the capacity of human rights civil society actors within the larger framework of institutional protection actors by convening weekly meetings of all relevant protection actors in the country to provide a forum to exchange information on identified violations, support mutual understanding, and plan training events to strengthen civil society capacity to protect human rights. Joint monitoring visits organized through this forum resulted, in some cases, in on-the-spot redress by Burundian judicial and police authorities of irregularities in detention procedures.⁶⁸

In Liberia, UNMIL has highlighted numerous rights issues connected to the rule of law sector, including incidents of police brutality, poor prison conditions, and lack of respect for the rights of defendants. Over the past decade, the mission worked to increase the capacity of civil society actors

⁶⁷ BINUB: Director of Human Rights and Justice Division / Ismael A. Diallo (EoAR), 10 June 2008.

⁶⁸ BINUB: Chief of Human Rights Unit and Deputy Director of Human Rights and Justice Division / Yanine Poc (EoAR)

to monitor and advocate for human rights. The mission has supported the development of a National Human Rights Action Plan helping to organize regional consultations for civil society and traditional and county authorities. A key instrument for engaging Liberian partners on human rights has been the Universal Period Review (UPR) process, with Liberia's last report to the Human Rights Council having been submitted in 2010.⁶⁹

Since the UNMIT's human rights component was established, it has supported a broad range of CSOs in Timor-Leste, ranging from established human rights and women's NGOs in the capital of Dili, to community groups in the districts. UNMIT played a role in establishing a human rights civil society actor network on housing rights and issued a manual on monitoring economic and social rights. Following years of international support, UNMIT's Chief of Human Rights and Transitional Justice claims that "Timor-Leste now has an active civil society and several NGOs have a voice in Timorese public affairs."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ UNMIL: DSRSG Rule of Law / Louis M. Aucion (EoAR), 30 November 2012.

⁷⁰ UNMIT: Chief Human Rights and Transitional Justice / Wilbert van Hovell (EoAR)

While civil society actors are often viewed as allies in the struggle for the protection and promotion of human rights, Amnesty International has noted that they are often threatened in post-conflict settings, with governments attempting to curtail freedom of expression and their space to operate and organize. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and South Sudan, among other places, Human Rights Watch has documented that violence and intimidation have frequently curtailed the space of human rights civil society actors.

For this reason, OHCHR has a policy on the protection of civil society actors (2012), which notes that it is "first and foremost the responsibility of states to protect civil society actors, but when they are threatened and attacked because of their work to advance human rights, the international community has a responsibility to support and protect them."⁷¹ In fact, due to the prevalence of the problem, the threats posed to civil society actors are a standing agenda item for the Secretariat of the Human

⁷¹ OHCHR (2012).

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHARING INFORMATION WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT MISSION MANDATES AND PLANNING PROCESSES, INCLUDING ADDRESSING AND/OR CLARIFYING NEGATIVE RUMOURS ABOUT THE MISSION ITSELF OR ITS PLANNED ACTIVITIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Rights Council.⁷² The policy calls on OHCHR to protect civil society actors, not only human rights civil society actors, in line with the principles of and consideration for 'Do No Harm', confidentiality, security, sensitivity, and informed consent.

Even where they do not face violence or persecution, civil society actors may have vexed relationships with government authorities, making it a challenge for peacekeeping missions to engage them while also maintaining a strong relationship with the government. For example, despite the support that BINUB's Human Rights and Justice Division gave to facilitating consultations with civil society actors on the transitional justice process in 2007, which

⁷² Ibid, 8.

helped to foster a broader sense of ownership over the process, it became challenging to push the process forward in light of political concerns ahead of national elections.⁷³ The engagement with civil society actors becomes particularly challenging for mission-government relations when the issues that civil society actors raise undermine, question or compromise the legitimacy and authority of the government.

TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS TO MISSION PLANNING PROCESSES

Another area of mandate implementation where it has been suggested that civil society engagement and consultation are important is support to mission planning processes, especially concerning issues of drawdown, transition or other changes in the mission's presence. Consultations with civil society about mission planning

changes can at times help clarify rumours about how missions plan to implement mandated tasks, build public support for mandated activities, and identify entry points to engage with local populations through their civil society interlocutors. While it is a fine balance to avoid conferring too much legitimacy through consultation, even when inputs are not reflected in decision-making, the process of consultation helps to make actors feel that they matter. It is also important that the exit strategy of a peacekeeping mission be informed by the inputs of civil society actors given that their role in holding the government accountable to a continued progress in the peacebuilding process in the mission's withdrawal would become even more critical.⁷⁴

TO PROMOTE STATE RESPONSIVENESS

In the places where peacekeeping missions are deployed:

fragility and conflict [frequently] undermine the quality, quantity and consistency of government functions and essential services at precisely the moment when citizens are in urgent need of them. As a result, fragile

and conflict-affected states routinely forfeit a degree of legitimacy and accountability to their citizens, as well as to their external partners and donors.⁷⁵

Fragility has also been described as not just the erosion of a state's authority and capacity, but also a pronounced deterioration in the relationship between states and their societies.⁷⁶

In these post-conflict environments, it is critical that the national government re-establishes its presence countrywide and begins to increase its legitimacy with the population by demonstrating that it can govern, respond to and be held accountable to meet their needs and deliver services from security to water and food. The visible presence of state institutions and government officials can help reinstate state authority and legitimacy, and furthermore provides citizens with improved access to government resources and central government structures to deliver public services. The state may have been implicated in violence and conflict, and may have diminished credibility among the people. One of the critical roles that peacekeeping missions

⁷³ BINUB: Director of Human Rights and Justice Division / Ismael A. Diallo (EoAR), 10 June 2008.

⁷⁴ Lamptey (2007:26).

⁷⁵ UNDP (2012: 45).

⁷⁶ UNDP (2012: 16).

can play is fostering positive and constructive interaction between the state and society in host countries, with a view towards strengthening state institutions to be both responsive and accountable to citizens.

Too often, however, only the state, or government, is defined as a key stakeholder in governance and state-building processes. This definition must be expanded to include society at large, including civil society actors, increase ownership, and enable people to be part of the process and not just recipients of services. This is where civil society actors can play a critical role in bridging the government and the society by supporting more inclusive and consultative processes, engaging wider sectors of society in decision making and helping to articulate the voices of marginalized sectors of society where people may not be politically articulate, or have the capacity, resources or ability to otherwise be engaged in the processes that govern their lives.⁷⁷ Hence, civil society can help to improve the interplay between the citizenry and the state, inculcating civic awareness in the process and helping to ensure the

⁷⁷ Interpeace (2010).



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SOCIETY BY SUPPORTING MORE INCLUSIVE AND CONSULTATIVE PROCESSES, ENGAGING WIDER SECTORS OF SOCIETY IN DECISION MAKING AND HELPING TO ARTICULATE THE VOICES OF MARGINALIZED SECTORS OF SOCIETY.

representativeness and responsiveness of state institutions.⁷⁸

UNDP defines the core elements of promoting state responsiveness as “enabling the state to perform essential functions; rebuilding public administrative capacities; improving service delivery; re-establishing local government authority and local governance; enabling the rule of law, access to justice and the protection of human rights.”⁷⁹ Non-state actors, like civil society actors, have become increasingly influential, giving the wider population another means through which to express their concerns and contribute to the governance of their state. In its guidance note on civil society engagement in

⁷⁸ Van den Boogaard (2011: 38).

⁷⁹ UNDP (2012: 42).

governance, the World Bank recognized that civil society actors “can make important contributions towards ensuring that the views of local people are taken into account, promoting community participation, extending project reach to the poorest, and introducing flexible and innovative approaches.”⁸⁰ Specifically, civil society actors can help to promote state responsiveness through monitoring and reporting, advocacy and lobbying, raising awareness, and mobilizing society. Civil society actors are often considered an appropriate and effective vehicle for supporting the national government in translating national-level policies at the local level, especially where local authorities may not be present, and for mobilizing the population to become involved in the processes and institutions that govern their lives.⁸¹ For civil society actors to play these roles, however, a suitable enabling environment conducive to their engagement that provides for access to information as well as, ideally, access to interface with state authorities, must be in place. The genuine ability of civil society actors to play this role constructively has been

⁸⁰ World Bank (2009:6).

⁸¹ Lamptey (2007:9).

questioned by some who have asserted that “the ubiquity and importance of patronage for maintaining African governments raises serious questions about the ability of civil society organizations to maintain their autonomy from the state”, with this autonomy considered a precondition for being defined as civil society.⁸²

In a survey, when asked if civil society actors engage directly with government authorities, 55 per cent of respondents indicated that civil society sometimes, but not always, engages directly with government officials. With a comparative advantage of often having the widest reach in the country, sometimes exceeding that of the government, peacekeeping missions can play an important role here in facilitating greater interface between the government and the society at large, including through, *inter alia*, civil society representatives. In doing so, peacekeepers can support the fulfilment of a social contract, or a “dynamic agreement between states and societies on their mutual roles and responsibilities.”⁸³ Civil society actors play a role here in supporting the

fulfilment of the social contract through holding authorities accountable to govern and deliver essential services. The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States recognizes the instrumental role that civil society has to play in support of the development of a national vision and implementation of a plan to transition out of fragility.

While it is not always appropriate depending on the political context, some peacekeepers cited that an added benefit of conducting joint programmes with the authorities and civil society actors is the facilitation of state-society relations. The level of state responsiveness is difficult to measure, but can be measured indirectly through public perception surveys focusing on levels of popular satisfaction with government decision-making, service delivery and performance.

TO ENSURE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY TO ITS CITIZENS

A vibrant civil society is a key pillar of a democratic society, but to be effective, it must play an oversight role for the state; promote democratic governance, including through its own

internal processes; promote political participation by inculcating a civic ethos and educating citizens about their rights and obligations; facilitate constructive public debate; promote access to information towards holding officials accountable; and combat corruption.⁸⁴ In its report “Civil Society in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States”, Oxfam emphasizes the key role played by civil society actors in promoting state accountability, by expressing citizens’ viewpoints, especially the views of marginalized groups who may not otherwise be included in political processes.⁸⁵ Further, a strong civil society can serve as: a watchdog in holding authorities and officials accountable; a corrective against abuses of power and violations of human rights; a source of policy advice; and a facilitator of dialogue with disparate segments of society.⁸⁶

While peacekeeping mandates may place primary emphasis on support to strengthening government institutions, in order to facilitate the establishment of democratic structures, attention must also be paid to “strengthening civil society since the latter can support local-level peace

⁸² Murphy and Tubiana (2010: 6).

⁸³ UNDP (2012: 18).

⁸⁴ Government of Liberia (2012: 3).

⁸⁵ Oxfam (2013).

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 2013: 1).

building initiatives and monitor the exercise of accountable governance”.⁸⁷ Donors and international actors need to consider how they can not only contribute to civil society’s ability to support service delivery, but also to strengthen government accountability. Peacekeepers have noted the difficulty at times in maintaining balance and managing tensions between empowering civil society as a watchdog and encouraging civil society to advance government priorities and programmes, especially where this state-society cooperation is needed to increase service provision to communities. In this regard, some peacekeepers also felt that civil society actors could do more to proactively support state-society cooperation through providing information to government authorities on local community needs.

In some peacekeeping contexts, it was noted that the governments were strongly opposed to any promotion or discussion of civil society actors as watchdogs for accountability, whereas in other contexts, the challenge was linked to the lack of capacity among civil society actors to effectively play this role. In contexts where this issue creates

⁸⁷ Lamptey (2007).

tensions with government authorities, the mission seeks to make the government aware of programmes and planned activities in advance and to clarify any misunderstandings about intent so that they do not obstruct or oppose them. In some contexts, it was noted that the government is particularly secretive about issues regarding natural resources provision and concessions management and that if it were more forthcoming about the agreements being made, then communities would be better equipped to advocate for their own rights and livelihoods. Efforts were being focused here on both educating communities on their rights as well as encouraging greater transparency by the government. If the authorities were more forthcoming about how resources are being spent to deliver dividends to communities, then communities would also be more supportive in facilitating, rather than questioning, service provision. It was suggested that peacekeeping missions could leverage their political mandates to play a role in pressuring for greater accountability, transparency and information sharing through the line ministries at the national level. It was noted that in many peacekeeping contexts, which are also impoverished and fragile, there tends to be a degree of

donor dependency. Therefore, it can be difficult to persuade civil society actors to take an initiative or demand services from their own government or elected officials rather than international organizations that have usually provided for community needs.

In addition to promoting government accountability on service provision, civil society actors can also promote accountability or perform oversight functions in support of the rule of law to improve access to justice, ensure respect for human rights and develop community policing tools.⁸⁸ In some contexts, it was shared that civil society actors play an intermediary role between the police and the population by receiving complaints by the population and channelling them to the police to increase the latter’s ability to be responsive to and protect the population.

Civil society actors can also increase political accountability in decision-making and the passage of legislation. Some peacekeepers noted that Parliament in their host country calls upon civil society actors to give testimony on relevant legislation. While they said that this was generally a

⁸⁸ Gourlay (2006: 42).

box-ticking exercise and that the input was rarely taken on board, this engagement of civil society actors can help keep debate alive on some key issues and serve as an important accountability mechanism in increasing public awareness of the issues being discussed by their elected representatives. In this way, “civil society engagement is fundamental to change: it helps open space for debate, advances issues, shapes opinion, generates innovative initiatives, drives decision-making and reform processes, and mobilizes people to become involved in the processes and decisions that govern their lives.”⁸⁹ Some noted that the government’s inclination around major reform initiatives is to consult civil society – and this first step is positive in and of itself – but then the challenge becomes how to ensure that the inputs are integrated in a meaningful way. In this regard, civil society actors also have an obligation to ensure that they are organized, aligned and articulate in their messaging and make concrete suggestions, not merely criticisms, for government to consider and take on board. Oxfam’s Within and Without the State project in South Sudan gave impetus to

⁸⁹ OHCHR (2013:2,3).

the revival of the Civil Society Network, an umbrella organization of a wide variety of civil society actors, including women’s groups, which holds consultations on policies in the hope that this process will encourage policy-makers to better tailor legislation to citizens’ needs.⁹⁰

While the World Bank’s relationship with civil society actors and its footprint varies considerably from country to country depending upon the political context, the strength and capacity of civil society and the role of the government, it has, in recent years, sought to shift its focus more from the supply side – making governments more efficient and effective – to the demand side of empowering citizens to demand more of their governments. In addition to being efficient, it works to ensure that governments are also accountable and transparent. To this end, the World Bank has launched a Global Partnership for Social Accountability, as well as a Citizens Engagement Strategy.

Staff in peacekeeping missions reported that their cooperation with civil society actors helps to increase the political space for civil society actors to

⁹⁰ Oxfam (2013).



MISSION

ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS HELPS TO INCREASE THE POLITICAL SPACE AVAILABLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY TO ENGAGE WITH THE HOST GOVERNMENT AND HOLD IT ACCOUNTABLE, THUS EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF MISSION SUPPORT FOR BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY TO MEASURE STATE PROGRESS TOWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS TOWARDS ITS PEOPLE.

mobilize and hold government authorities accountable. It also helps to build local awareness and inculcate a civic ethos, generate confidence in nascent state structures and systems, and foster a culture whereby civil society actors and communities realize that they have a right to hold their government accountable and the government realizes that it too must be held to account.⁹¹ Strengthening the ability of civil society actors to promote state accountability and hold their government to account is sometimes challenged by the lack of internal governance within civil society actors themselves. Civil society actors

⁹¹ Gourlay (2006:49).

that lack internal democratic governance, in terms of their by-laws and constitution, their leadership and decision-making structure, and level of consultation with their members cannot then be considered a serious and legitimate agent for advocating for state accountability.⁹² Given these challenges, some efforts are also focused on building the capacity within civil society actors to play this role. For example, the World Bank works with civil society actors to educate them about the specific tools and methodologies that can be used to measure government performance from participatory public expenditure tracking surveys, to citizen report cards to social audits.⁹³

TO HELP RESTORE AND EXTEND STATE AUTHORITY

To build capacity and decentralize services at the local level, it is important to have capacity on the ground to measure the impact and progress of government interventions. Civil society actors may help to fill this void where there is inadequate

⁹² Government of Liberia (2012: 19).

⁹³ World Bank (2009), 18.

government presence at the local level, but this risks putting civil society actors in a position of supplanting, rather than supporting or holding accountable, the state. In Liberia, in counties with limited government presence, in the early days of its deployment, the peacekeeping mission used civil society as the entry point to restore the government's presence by leveraging the views of civil society to suggest and vet potential local representatives.

A senior mission leader in South Sudan emphasized that extending state authority into insecure areas in a way in which the legitimacy and credibility of state authority increases in the eyes of the population is crucial to stabilization. To support this process, it is crucial that missions provide direct support to and through the state and local governments so that government structures can actually take control for governing their territory. When externally funded services or development initiatives are delivered in newly secure areas through other actors, state authority is undermined. Support is also necessary in order for the Government to better interface directly with key stakeholders, such as youth (who can be the engines of

progress or discontent), women (who play a prominent role in binding communities together) and local peace-builders such as the church and civil society (who have played unique roles in South Sudan).⁹⁴

In Liberia, former UNMIL senior mission leadership has emphasized the importance of supporting the state to move services out of the capital and implement programmes with a community focus to engage local people and empower them to hold the government accountable.⁹⁵ In 2012, the mission supported this decentralized and participatory approach to governance through the development of regional security hubs, which were established throughout the country to provide forward bases for security forces and improve rural citizens' access to the formal justice sector. Strengthening civil society through both technical and financial support is a critical component of the security hubs, which has received extensive support from UNMIL. Civil society actors play several critical roles with the security hubs: as contracted service

⁹⁴ Grande (2012)

⁹⁵ UNMIL: DSRSG for Recovery and Governance/Jordan Ryan (EoAR).

providers to the hubs; as an entry point to assist citizens in accessing hub services; as a source of support to individual citizens in filing complaints against an individuals in the justice system; and finally, as the implementers of public outreach campaigns to improve community understanding of the justice and security sectors, the criminal justice process, and rights and responsibilities under Liberian and international law.⁹⁶

TO HELP ASSESS MISSION PROGRESS TOWARDS MANDATE IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSOCIATED BENCHMARKS

Another area where civil society consultation and inputs could add value is in the assessment of progress towards mandate implementation and associated strategic objectives, indicators and benchmarks. The Capstone Doctrine (2008) suggests that benchmarks should be developed in close collaboration with a number of stakeholders,

⁹⁶ UNMIL: DSRSG RoL/Louis Aucoin (EoAR) 30 November 2012.

 CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN HELP MISSIONS ASSESS THEIR PROGRESS TOWARDS MANDATE IMPLEMENTATION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS BY SHARING THEIR COMMUNITY-BASED INPUT ON MISSION PROGRESS TOWARDS KEY BENCHMARKS (ESPECIALLY THE ONES AIMED AT LOCAL COMMUNITIES) AT VARIOUS LOCAL LEVELS.

including civil society actors.⁹⁷ While this consultation must take place without fuelling the perception of undermining the role and authority of the host government, civil society actors may be in a position to share valuable inputs on progress towards key benchmarks that will support an assessment of countrywide progress and of how effective the mission has been in supporting key objectives. A government's perception of the extent to which its authority has been consolidated and extended countrywide may vary considerably from that of civil society actors, just as perceptions of progress towards delivering key peace dividends may differ.

⁹⁷ United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines, 88.

TO INCLUDE THE PUBLIC IN NATIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES

Political parties in post-conflict environments are often very weak, internally divided, and lack local effective representation at the local level. The fact that in many cases there was no culture of multipartitism adds to this intrinsic weakness. As such, needs, priorities and grievances of large segments of the population do not reach the level of national political discourse and may not be reflected in the platforms of political parties in their campaigns for election. Under these conditions, civil society actors can plan a key role in facilitating the inclusion of local needs and priorities in national governance processes.

In Liberia, the human rights component provides technical support to enhance the capacity of vulnerable and marginalized groups to address issues of economic, social and cultural rights. In 2012, the mission provided technical advice to the Liberia Civil Society National Budget and Human Rights Forum, an umbrella organization of ten civil society actors to participate in and monitor

the 2012-2013 national budgetary process.⁹⁸ This included a detailed analysis of the 2011-2012 budget from a rights-based perspective, which concluded, “that development planning is not proportional ... to a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction, rather its logic and measure are difficult to establish”. The Forum analysed spending at the county level, noting that “allocation to counties... shows huge disparities per county and lack of a clear standard for appropriation of money”. In July 2012, the Forum submitted a briefing note to the Joint Committee of the Legislature on Ways, Means and Budget, identifying human rights concerns, focusing on the right to education, the right to water and sanitation, and the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as funding for the national human rights institution. The note makes a number of recommendations to improve the substantive quality of the budget, such as by adding a budget line under the health ministry for health promotion and education, reprioritizing funding to focus on quality of services, and by allocating funding to promote the access of vulnerable groups of children

⁹⁸ UNMIL: DSRSG RoL / Louis Aucoin (EoAR)

 **MANY
PEACEKEEPING MISSION
PERSONNEL NOTED THE
NEED FOR RESOURCES TO
UNDERTAKE CAPACITY
BUILDING FOR CIVIL
SOCIETY ACTORS.**

to education. The note also makes a recommendation on the budgetary process, including to make allocations more transparent and accountable by clearly disaggregating spending by ministry and country, creating a mechanism for the direct participation of civil society in the budgetary process, and by making specific funding decisions.⁹⁹

Civil society actors are not necessarily automatic partners for post-conflict governments. Government politicians may perceive civil society actors as representing the political opposition and fear that they will attempt to distribute resources to groups other than those identified by the government as priorities. Peacekeeping missions can support the participation of civil society actors in national political processes, even when the government does not support their inclusion. For example,

⁹⁹ Liberia Civil Society National Budget and Human Rights Forum (2012).

after civil society complained that it had not been consulted in the process of preparing the Democratic Republic of the Congo Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2009, MONUC (now MONUSCO) supported the organization of a national symposium of civil society actors. With funding from a number of bilateral donors, the symposium brought together civil society actors from all regions of the country to consult on the development priorities identified in the Paper. Although they had not been invited to join the official steering groups established by the government to follow progress on these issues, the civil society actors agreed to form their own shadow working groups to provide input and advocacy in these areas. The symposium also provided an opportunity for the mission to sensitize civil society actors on their roles and responsibilities in the national development process, as laid out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. In practice, the informal, unofficial nature of these working groups proved to be an asset because they were less politicized and tended to be attended by technical experts rather than political figureheads. By the same token, however, the informal

groups were unable to access donor funding because they were not legally recognized by the Government.

For example, in Afghanistan, it has been shared that engagement with civil society actors at the provincial level can help to counterbalance the influence of elites in government. For example, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) encourages civil society actors to engage with local sector committees and thematic working groups that were set up to implement the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. While the membership guidelines for these committees explicitly exclude civil society from membership on these committees, UNAMA advocates for their inclusion their decision-making processes, notably the development of provincial development plans. UNAMA staff emphasized that, without the involvement of these actors in the planning process, government elites would likely plan projects in their own villages and give the implementation contracts to their families and friends.

Once local development plans are complete, UNAMA works to ensure that civil society

actors play a role in monitoring their implementation, and thereby support the provincial governor's oversight role. This role for civil society actors is normally formalized in the Provincial Development Plans, and monitoring plans are decided upon at monthly sector working group meetings. UNAMA civil affairs officers reported that, initially, this role was challenging because civil society actors behaved like police and insisted on being granted investigative access to projects. Over time, however, they have taken a less combative approach.

As is often the case, UNAMA regional offices do not have decision-making authority over local government, provincial development committees or civil society actors. UNAMA pursues its agenda by using its convening role to bring together government officials and civil society actors to increase civil society's visibility in decision-making processes. They also help civil society actors to learn about their roles and responsibilities laid out in the Afghanistan Subnational Government Policy and other institutional documents, and encourage government officials to adhere to these policies.

TO ENHANCE ADVOCACY AND BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY

Peacekeeping missions have worked with civil society actors to help them to better articulate and target their advocacy in order to be heard and taken seriously. Civil society actors can frequently use mission radio programmes as a platform in order to exchange views, debate policy issues and articulate their agenda.

While there are many different tools that peacekeeping missions can employ in support of civil society engagement based on the comparative advantages they offer, focus is often, at times disproportionately, placed on the lack of programmatic or dedicated funding – beyond quick impact projects – as a key deterrent for engaging effectively. Human rights components often have very nominal funds to conduct one- or two-day capacity-building workshops for human rights civil society actors, but these resources are insufficient for any long-term or even follow-up training needs.

When surveyed, many peacekeeping mission personnel noted the need for resources to undertake capacity building, in

addition to enticing civil society actors to attend workshops and meetings by providing resources to support their transport, sustenance and logistics needs. Instead of focusing on the mission's lack of resources, however, which is only reinforced by civil society's often singular focus on their own lack of resources, one peacekeeper suggested asking civil society actors "what can you do without money?" It was suggested that focusing on activities requiring no or little funding would lead them to consider their role without relying on donor resources; for example, to conduct advocacy on pending legislation, which do not require resources. It is also important, however, that missions clearly convey their mandate and what they can and cannot do to civil society actors in order to manage expectations and help direct civil society actors to where they can seek funding and capacity-building support.

TO HELP DELIVER NECESSARY PUBLIC SERVICES

Service delivery is the most contested civil society role in conflict-affected settings. In general, NGO provision of basic services is

a key characteristic of most fragile and/or conflict-affected states where the state is either unwilling or unable to deliver services. In conflict contexts, civil society can sometimes not only be more effective than the state in service provision, but may also be able to reach a larger percentage of the population, especially marginalized and excluded communities living outside the reach of the state and/or in areas controlled by armed non-state actors. The World Bank recognizes that civil society actors can become important channels for service delivery and other development programmes in post-conflict contexts, given that government capacity is prone to be weak or non-existent, leading non-state actors such as NGOs, religious organizations and tribal- or clan-based networks to assume this role. In this context, the Bank implements Community-Driven Development (CDD) Programmes in post-conflict environments, which facilitate access to services on the basis of collective actions. This in turn empowers local communities and promotes the principles of transparency, accountability and responsiveness of government. Annual lending for these projects averaged \$2.1 billion over the last decade and they are implemented in a variety of

sectors across 100 countries, focusing on areas such as government reform, transparency and accountability.¹⁰⁰

In crisis environments, it is often non-state and civil society actors, not state institutions, that deliver services to the population. In the recovery period, however, it is important to gradually shift this responsibility onto the state and lessen the overreliance on civil society actors, although care must also be taken to not disempower civil society. UNDP emphasizes that the handover of services to the government should be a gradual, planned process, reflective of an honest assessment of the government's capacity. Where civil society actors are used as a channel for service delivery when governments are unable to unwilling to provide essential services, support for this role must be balanced carefully with the need to avoid taking actions that supplant the state or deprive it of ownership.¹⁰¹ Where, however, civil society actors play this role and bring capacity and organization where the government is not present or lacks the capacity to act as a service provider, they are less of a check or watchdog for

¹⁰⁰ World Bank (2013).

¹⁰¹ OECD (2005a: 1).

government and more of an extension of it. The relevance of this function for civil society actors very much depends upon the state's capacity. In Cyprus, civil society actors perform almost no service delivery activities given that the state is functioning well, whereas in Somalia, due to the total absence of a state for nearly two decades, civil society actors have had to perform service delivery functions as a primary task.¹⁰² Thus, the state's effectiveness in fulfilling its functions such as protection or service delivery impinges on civil society's capacity to fulfil other functions. Service delivery can divert energy and resources from other civil society activities.

Where the national government is not present at the local level or does not have adequate reach into communities, civil society actors often support the identification of the needs of marginalized or vulnerable groups and convey them to national authorities. For example, women's civil society actors often bring a different perspective to civil society advocacy for state responsiveness. They may call on the state to be more responsive

¹⁰² Paffenholz (21).

to threats to women's rights and particular needs, such as reproductive health services, the protection of rights in the household, and vocational training. When governments are developing the initial programmes to respond to their populations' needs in the aftermath of conflict, women's civil society actors can play an important role in to ensure that women are neither excluded nor marginalized in the provision of services. In doing so, they facilitate the delivery of a peace dividend to a larger portion of the population, thereby building confidence in the post-conflict settlement. Accordingly, the World Bank has observed that women's civil society actors can help ensure that security gains in a country result in benefits for all segments of society, including women.¹⁰³ The Bank therefore engages with these actors in post-crisis contexts through the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, which provides grants, at an average of \$4,000, to civil society-led start-up activities aimed at promoting positive development outcomes.

Civil society actors can play a vital role in advocating for

¹⁰³ World Development Report (2011).

improvements in service provision, acting as service provider in accessing communities and providing mobile services where state infrastructure is weak or absent. One special aspect of service delivery where civil society actors may play an important role in post-crisis environments is access to justice. Some agencies increasingly focus on supporting local, traditional, informal justice systems in the immediate aftermath of conflict, rather than imposing weak formal institutions that in the short- to medium-term may in fact result in a decrease in access to justice. Work in this area thus requires a detailed understanding of the context. However, it should be considered that, in many contexts traditional informal justice mechanisms are not in line with international human rights norms. UNDP proposes that codes of conduct, training and work to standardize processes across the system should be superimposed onto the informal system.

It can be dangerous in peacekeeping contexts where the state is often fragile and its legitimacy not consolidated for civil society actors to assume the role of state to play the role of government as a service

provider and neglect their role as an accountability check on the actual service provider. When civil society actors assume the role of service providers, it also supplants the role of government and may lead government authorities and institutions to abdicate their responsibilities, rather than to be empowered to strive to meet them. It is important to build links between civil society actors and government to avoid creating competing service providers. Where a government needs support from civil society actors to assume this role, the linkages between the two should be strengthened so that – eventually – the government assumes the function back once its capacity is strengthened.

Accordingly to Paffenholz¹⁰⁴, while service delivery is an important service provided by civil society actors to marginalized populations in conflict-affected contexts, it is only relevant for peacebuilding purposes if peace is an explicit objective and the service delivery activity operates as an entry point for the aforementioned peacebuilding functions. For example, in Sri Lanka, an emergency education

¹⁰⁴ Paffenholz (2006)

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TEND TO ACT AS USEFUL ENTRY POINTS FOR THE MISSION'S CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIC EDUCATION AND SENSITIZATION ACTIVITIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WHICH ARE CRITICAL ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR SUPPORTING FREE, FAIR AND NON-VIOLENT ELECTIONS.

project in Northern Province that was created following the ceasefire agreement set up a project management committee that included the two conflict parties at the district level. Neither of these parties had been in dialogue with each other before. Thus, the education project committee was used as an entry point to create potential space for future social cohesion programming between these two adversarial groups.

Although under certain circumstances service delivery may be an entry point for peacebuilding, using civil society actors mainly as service providers may weaken their potential to contribute to wider peace processes. Support to non-state actors is erroneously equated with contributions to peacebuilding.

Given the tenuous nature of enabling environments in conflict-affected and fragile states, civil society actors involved in large-scale service delivery programmes find it difficult to engender the kind of civic engagement processes they are assumed to trigger by virtue of being non-state actors. In addition, engagement in public service delivery may attract talented and motivated citizens who would have otherwise joined social and advocacy efforts that could contribute to political peace processes (Belloni, 2006).

Civil society's effectiveness at delivering services as an entry point for peacebuilding depends greatly on whether the basic service and emergency relief provision includes excluded groups, including areas controlled by armed insurgents/rebels, and whether civil society is perceived as performing this function on behalf of the state or other external actors such as bilateral/multi-lateral donors and international governmental organizations (IGOs).¹⁰⁵ After large-scale violence ends or during periods of low violence, service delivery can be leveraged to create platforms of cooperation and

¹⁰⁵ World Bank (2006).

dialogue between previously adversarial groups.

TO SUPPORT ELECTIONS MONITORING AND ASSISTANCE

Many mandates of multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions include support to the organization and conduct of efficient and credible elections in post-conflict states as a mandated task. In peacekeeping contexts, elections often occur under less than ideal conditions, and yet tend to be high-stakes endeavours in a country's transition from conflict to peace. Elections are often foreseen in national transition plans and are frequently seen as a test of the country's emergence from crisis, the level of inclusiveness in national institutions, and the rule of law. However, post-conflict electoral contexts tend to be fraught with risks. The capacity of the national electoral management body may be limited and the quality of national infrastructure may create challenges for the timely organization of elections in all parts of the country. The country may have a weak democratic culture, with a large number of candidates and

political parties, a politicized media, and campaigning based on ethnic or religious affiliation, rather than on political agenda.

During the electoral cycle, civil society actors act as representatives of key groupings in the electorate including but not limited to those involved in supporting the election process. In particular, this includes organizations for persons with disabilities, religious organizations, youth organizations, business groups, human rights groups and trade unions.¹⁰⁶

The core policy of the United Nations on electoral assistance includes capacity building of civil society actors as one of the key areas in which the United Nations may provide technical and material assistance, with the objective of increasing the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. This includes assistance to civil society actors playing the role of domestic observer groups. Here, assistance can include the development of methodologies for observations, logistical support, and the development of networks of observer groups. Support can also be

¹⁰⁶ "United Nations Electoral Needs Assessments" Guidelines, United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs (11 May 2012).

given to promote inclusiveness in the electoral process, particularly the participation of under-represented groups, women's groups and persons with disabilities. This could include support to civil society actors that represent these interests, or to those that facilitate the participation of a broad range of social groups. Civil society actors can also be engaged to promote conflict prevention strategies related to elections, such as initiative to promote transparency and accountability in the electoral process. The United Nations must be careful, however, to not be perceived as observing the electoral process itself when it is also providing electoral assistance. Support to civil society actors should be designed and provided transparently, in an impartial and equitable manner, and in a way perceived to be politically neutral.¹⁰⁷

Civil society actors tend to be the key focal point and entry point for peacekeeping's contribution to civic education. Civic education and sensitization is key to supporting free, fair and non-violent elections.

¹⁰⁷ "Principles and Types of UN Electoral Assistance" Policy Directive, United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs (11 May 2012).

For example, in the lead-up to the 2011-2012 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO civil affairs provincial offices conducted civic education and sensitization on the electoral process by training civil society actors, including women's organizations, on the electoral law and the Code of Conduct for political parties, and on election observation, monitoring and mediation.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, during the 2011 elections in Liberia, UNMIL provided 125 CSOs, 41 per cent of which were women's civil society actors, small grants through the National Elections Commission to conduct civic and voter education activities in the counties. The organizations developed civic education materials that were vetted by the National Elections Commission for their gender sensitivity before being used in outreach activities. However, the effectiveness of this initiative was called into question since most of the recipients of the grants were based in the capital, Monrovia, with limited capacity to conduct activities in local areas across the country. Moreover, with its limited capacity, the Commission faced considerable

¹⁰⁸ Civil Affairs involvement in the electoral process (Sept-Dec 2011) (AAR)

difficulties in releasing funds sufficiently quickly to allow for the full implementation of planned activities during the one-month voter education period prior to the elections.¹⁰⁹

In the lead-up to the 2006 elections in Haiti, MINUSTAH was faced with a high degree of mistrust among political actors and very low public confidence in politicians. Since this threatened to negatively affect confidence in the electoral process and the credibility of the results, MINUSTAH initiated a *Commission Nationale d'Haiti sur le Dialogue National* to stimulate dialogue among different social and political actors on the elections. The Dialogue brought together political actors, CSOs and other community representatives to define a shared understanding of the democratic process.¹¹⁰ MINUSTAH also supported local level dialogue in the pre-electoral phase through the organization of 57 town hall meetings, intended to stimulate participation in the elections and offer a space for political

¹⁰⁹ Women's Political Participation and Integration of a Gender Perspective in the 2011 Electoral Process in Liberia (AAR)

¹¹⁰ MINUSTAH: DSRSG / Adama Guindo (EoAR)

dialogue between civil society and political candidates.¹¹¹

Specific emphasis was placed on the role of youth in supporting peaceful elections. Following a colloquium on peaceful elections in 2011, attended by youths from political parties and civil society actors, MONUSCO supported the *Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI) in organizing 26 youth forums in provincial capitals and "hot-spots" throughout the country. Over 1,300 young people from the main political parties including the majority and opposition parties participated in the forums, which advocated for peaceful elections and a process for ending the systematic use of children and youth during the electoral process.¹¹²

The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) supports democratization around the world by funding projects that strengthen the voice of civil societies, promote human rights and encourage the participation of all in democratic processes, including in post-conflict environments. UNDEF provides

¹¹¹ Survey of Practice: Civil Affairs support to the restoration and extension of state authority (2008)

¹¹² Civil Affairs involvement in the electoral process (Sept-Dec 2011) (AAR)

grants, primarily to CSOs, to fund projects aimed at strengthening democratic dialogue, civil society empowerment, civic education, freedom of information, and strengthening the rule of law.¹¹³ The Fund has a particular focus on promoting the participation of women in the democratic process. Projects funded along these lines include, for example, a grant to the *Association Femmes Soleil d'Haiti* to educate rural women in Haiti on democratic citizenship. The pro-

¹¹³ UNDEF Terms of Reference on 6 December 2013. see www.un.org/democracyfund/terms-reference.

ject addressed the inadequate access to civic information and low participation rates in the political life among women by training women in decision-making processes and supporting potential women election candidates.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in 2009, *Rede Feto*, an umbrella organization of women's rights organizations in Timor-Leste, implemented an UNDEF-funded project to increase women's participation in *suco* (village) elections.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ United Nations Democracy Fund (2012)

¹¹⁵ United Nations Democracy Fund (2007).

Throughout the electoral process, in addition to their civic education and mobilization roles, civil society actors can play an important role in monitoring elections and demanding remedial actions when irregularities or violations are observed. However, in environments where civil society is highly politicized, missions must be mindful that civil society actors may not be politically neutral enough to fulfill monitoring and reporting functions.

 **THE ABILITY OF LEADERS TO GOVERN AND TO EFFECT CHANGE ALSO DEPENDS ON A NETWORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS – AND THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE STATE AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS TAKES ON EVEN GREATER SIGNIFICANCE IN SOCIETIES RAVAGED BY VIOLENCE.** 

– WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT ON CONFLICT, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT (WORLD BANK, 2011)



Photo: Indranil Nag



OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICE IN UN PEACEKEEPING:

*HOW DO UN PEACEKEEPING
MISSIONS ENGAGE WITH
CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS?*

INTERNAL CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION VARIES FROM MISSION TO MISSION

Thirty-four per cent of peacekeepers surveyed for this study said that engagement with civil society actors was 'coordinated systematically' in the mission, whereas 55 per cent said it was only 'somewhat coordinated' and 11 per cent indicated it was 'not coordinated at all'. Civil affairs, human rights and political affairs components received the most support as the primary entry points for civil society engagement. Each section identifies its own civil society counterparts and forges and sustains its own partnerships based on its thematic needs. Civil affairs, human rights and political affairs components received the most support as the primary

entry points for civil society engagement. Overall, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) was also identified as commonly liaising with civil society actors across missions, but with a view towards identifying threats that could undermine the mission's work and the carrying out of early warning analysis. Survey results show that most missions have a designated focal point, generally one of the three components above and most often civil affairs, who support senior leadership engagement with civil society and undertake mapping, database, identification and analysis functions on behalf of other sections. For instance, in UNMIL, there is a dedicated officer within the civil affairs component who is responsible for serving as the official entry point for civil society to the mission and supporting senior-level engagement. Although not responsible for coordinating each mission component, this officer has a view on how all components are working with civil society actors, which helps him or her to provide the strategic overview required.

Inputs from different mission components indicates that most would not want a singular or central focal point for civil society coordination in the



THIRTY-FOUR PER CENT OF PEACEKEEPERS SURVEYED FOR THIS STUDY SAID THAT ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS WAS 'COORDINATED SYSTEMATICALLY' IN THE MISSION, WHEREAS 55 PER CENT SAID IT WAS ONLY 'SOMEWHAT COORDINATED' AND 11 PER CENT INDICATED IT WAS 'NOT COORDINATED AT ALL.'

mission per se, but would rather have devolved programme responsibility within each mission component. This flexibility, however, also bears the risk of contributing to a degree of a lack of coordination, information sharing and an ad hoc, rather than strategic posture of the mission vis-à-vis civil society, with each component potentially providing different messaging to civil society. It can also contribute to overlap and duplication in responsibilities, rather than efficiencies of scale.

At a minimum, it was noted that there is a need to have a mission roadmap or strategy for engagement with civil society at national and sub-national levels that aligns with mandated priorities and ensures more strategic and focused

engagement.¹ For instance, in the start-up of MINUSMA, the mission had developed a civil society engagement strategy, and a Support to Civil Society and Confidence Building Unit was created within the civil affairs component to support its implementation. While this Unit does not formally coordinate the work of other components with civil society actors who maintain devolved programmatic coordination, this Unit convenes monthly coordination meetings and supports the creation of mapping and database tools that are used mission-wide.

The issue of coordination between national and local-level engagement was also raised, especially the need for greater coordination and information-sharing between mission headquarters and field offices when mission components are visiting counties for the purpose of meeting with civil society actors. In particular, where there is not a singular entry point, several civil society actors – who partner with peacekeeping missions – have noted that, in parallel to the need for improved mapping of how civil society is organized, it would be helpful

¹ Babaud (2010: 7).

for them to have a mapping of the UN system in country to understand how to navigate it and who to contact for support or resources on any given issue. Along these lines, UNICEF and UNDP have produced guides for civil society on how to partner with them, which explain, among other things, their requirements and criteria for establishing a partnership and what types of support they offer. Such resources also help to manage expectations from the outset and can provide a type of “self-selection” mechanism, rather than having to externally identify and select partners.

The frequency and modality through which Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) meet with civil society is highly variable across missions and contexts. Feedback from peacekeeping personnel overwhelmingly points to the importance of mission leadership setting a tone for the mission overall from the outset that prioritizes engagement with civil society as a critical component of successful mandate implementation. In some missions, the SRSGs issued circulars to all sections and mission components on the importance of civil society engagement and designating

focal points for the mission in this regard. In UNMISS in South Sudan, for example, the SRSG formed a consultative group, comprised of well-respected South Sudanese elders, intellectuals and civil society actors, who provided an advisory and consultation function for the mission and helped to ensure that perspectives of civil society are considered in high-level decision making. Elsewhere, such as with UNMIL in Liberia, the SRSG hosts quarterly meetings with civil society actors on specific thematic mandate priorities. Participation at these meetings was determined following consultation with the National Civil Society Council and provides an opportunity for direct interface to exchange views, elicit inputs on issues facing the country and brief on mandate priorities. Such mechanisms to ensure regular, strategic dialogue require continuous investment to sustain, however, especially considering that many other demands and pressures face senior leadership.

The degree to which a mission prioritized and attributed added value to civil society engagement was, like many other aspects of mandate implementation, linked to the personality and profile of the

SRSG and based on personal, not institutional or strategic, priorities and preferences.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it was noted that it may be advantageous to have mission leadership who have some non-governmental experience for them to see the added value of such engagement amidst



THE DEGREE TO WHICH A MISSION PRIORITIZED AND ATTRIBUTED ADDED VALUE TO CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WAS, LIKE MANY OTHER ASPECTS OF MANDATE IMPLEMENTATION, LINKED TO THE PERSONALITY AND PROFILE OF THE SRSG AND BASED ON PERSONAL, NOT INSTITUTIONAL OR STRATEGIC, PRIORITIES AND PREFERENCES.

competing priorities. Where this engagement takes place, it can provide senior mission leadership with alternate views and perspectives to the government about the peace process, the legitimacy of the government, key challenges and risks facing the country and the role and efficacy of the peacekeeping mission itself. However, senior level engagement can also run the risk of lip service, especially if careful mapping and planning

Figure 10: In what context do you interact with civil society actors in your mission?



does not take place to ensure that the appropriate civil society actors are invited to meetings. Some said it is possible to guard against this tendency by identifying civil society interlocutors for high-level meetings on the basis of issues and not personalities.

It has been suggested that some prescriptive language in the mission mandate, even nominal, would make a difference here to avoid engagement being dependent upon the subjective preferences and priorities of the SRSG at the time. Such language could help to build the case for an institutional approach to civil

society engagement in order to establish dialogue and communication between civil society and mission leadership on a regular, systematic basis regardless of who the SRSG is at the time.² Where the SRSG is already supportive of civil society engagement, then such language would either provide him/her with additional leverage in order to prioritize this engagement or at worst would have no effect. Where the SRSG is not inclined naturally towards this engagement, however, such language could create a requirement, as well as an obligation for progress to be

² Lamptey (2007:25).

monitored and reported, and oblige him/her to comply. Even where this engagement takes place, a key question is how it feeds into integrated mission analysis and decision-making and what weight these inputs should carry.

WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS TOOLS AND MODALITIES (IF AT ALL) FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEKEEPING CONTEXTS?

In terms of the contexts in which peacekeepers interact with civil society, survey results suggest that most UN peacekeepers interact with civil society in context of

formal coordination meetings and consultations. Regular coordination meetings, civil society meetings/conferences to engage with peace process, and formal consultations/participatory planning received the most support (see Figure 12). However, survey results reflect a gap in systematic and strategic long-term planning about what roles are best served by civil society actors and when these functions are best supported during different stages of conflict. When the participants were asked to identify activities that they undertake with civil society actors, 'information gathering

about security threats' received the most support (see Figure 7); 'advocating on behalf of civil society actors to government' and 'support fundraising efforts for civil society actors' received the least amount of support (see figure 13).

CONVENING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS, INTERNALLY AND WITH OTHER ACTORS

Missions can leverage their convening role and political mandate to bring civil society actors together, including with other actors such as government and donors, and to

support information-exchange that can facilitate the formation of partnerships and matching of needs with resources. Prior or in parallel to peace negotiations, missions can convene a broad array of marginalized groups, including youth, women, potential spoiler groups, traditional leaders, and faith-based groups to help coordinate the participation of these groups in the peace process. Although different groups working in a small locale are likely to be in regular contact with one another, it is important to convene groups at the local level to ensure dialogue between communities, including a diverse array of

Figure 11: In your mission, what activities do you undertake with civil society actors?



actors and local representatives. It was also noted that peacekeeping missions can play a bridging role, providing space for civil society actors to meet with interlocutors whom they would not ordinarily have access to, whether international actors, donors, government authorities or even civil society actors from other contexts, to explore comparative lessons learned. Peacekeeping missions can also act as a conduit between local and national actors and global policymaking processes, such as the New Deal for Fragile States.

BUILDING PLATFORMS AND NETWORKS TO SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION

Linking national networks to international civil society and policy forums can improve national civil society actors' access to information on best practices, resources and technical capacity. Where national networks are not present, peacekeeping missions have played a role, as in Liberia, in supporting the establishment of umbrella groups and networks, which can increase the institutional support for civil society actors countrywide, especially vis-à-vis the government, and support information sharing and

collaboration. In doing so, they can also mobilize civil society actors to organize and pool their resources to have greater impact. Missions also frequently undertake mapping exercises and compile databases of civil society actors, which are useful tools to enhance coordination beyond the mission's own work.

SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT RELATIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

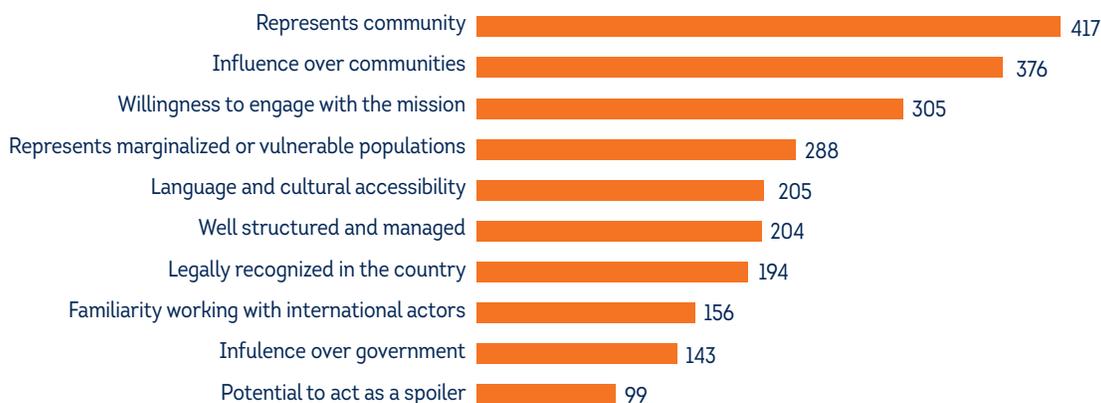
In particular, in contexts where the relations between government and civil society is fraught or non-existent, missions can help to improve relations through a convening role, as well as to leverage their political access to conduct messaging and outreach to government on the importance of governing inclusively. Support to the formal establishment of civil society through the passage of regulatory frameworks and legislation can also help in this regard to position civil society vis-à-vis the government by ensuring a more coherent and stable framework to guide civil society activity in the country. Missions can also support civil society actors in understanding how to be constructive counterparts for government through the provision of tools

for strengthening accountability. MINUSMA, for example, is conducting workshops for civil society actors on how they can contribute to government effectiveness. MINUSTAH is conducting training events for civil society actors on their own rights to expect and demand service delivery from their government in order to increase their ability to serve as an accountability check.

PROVIDING TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

While missions generally do not have dedicated funding for capacity-building activities for civil society actors, with the exception of nominal funds for human rights capacity-building work, training and capacity-building activities targeted at civil society actors, media, national governments, and security actors are becoming increasingly regular activities in peacekeeping missions. A review conducted by UNMIT of capacity-building activities in 2008 highlighted best practices for training activities conducted by missions. It noted that training and capacity-building materials need to be customized to the local environment, and local actors should be involved in their development. BINUB

Figure 12: In your mission, what do you consider the most important characteristics when choosing an interlocutor?



exemplified this best practice by adapting training kits customized for different target groups by taking into account issues such as native language, literacy abilities, knowledge of national laws and institutions, and available technology. Where possible, national staff members should facilitate or co-facilitate training in the national language. Missions have also undertaken valuable efforts to train local media and journalists in professional reporting ethics to support the development of an unbiased and independent media. Human rights components within missions sometimes build local human rights monitoring capacity by undertaking joint missions and investigations, where possible and appropriate, with human rights civil society actors. While

not all civil society actors would make effective or ideal implementing partners, missions can also employ civil society actors as implementing partners for quick impact projects, helping to build their project management, implementation and oversight capacities.

ASSISTING WITH LOGISTICS

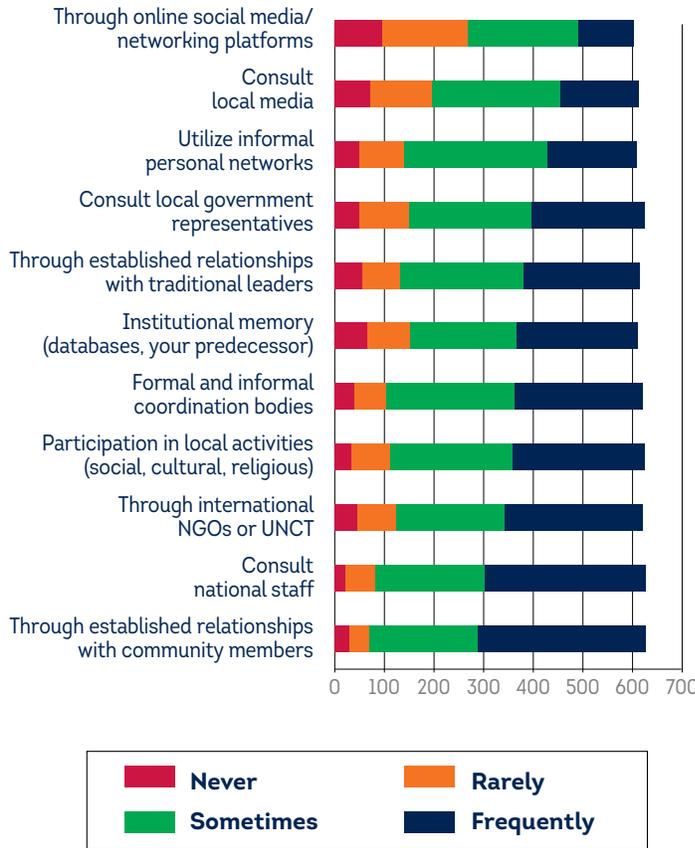
One key comparative advantage of peacekeeping missions, especially in contexts with limited transport and road infrastructure, is their logistics capacity. Peacekeeping missions can help to coordinate and mobilize civil society actors, either to have more of a national presence through meeting with counterparts in different parts of the country, or to support their ability to

hold government to account by enabling their interface with government authorities.

WHAT PROCESS, IF ANY, GUIDES PEACEKEEPERS IN IDENTIFYING AND CATEGORIZING THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS?

The online survey results diverge from interviews and desk research on how peacekeepers identify civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts. Survey results suggest that DPKO-DFS personnel in the field select civil society partners at the

Figure 13: In your mission, what methods have you used to identify civil society actors?



local level based mostly on their comparative advantage in potentially impacting local communities and less so in terms of their relationship with and influence on the host government. When selecting civil society actors to be interlocutors or partners, the most important characteristics for DPKO-DFS personnel, in order of popularity, were: **degree of representativeness; influence over communities; and willingness to engage with the**

mission. In contrast, the least important characteristics were: potential to act as a spoiler; influence over government; and familiarity in working with international actors. Interviews and desk research, however, suggest that the internal process for determining which civil society actors to include tends to be based largely on ad hoc considerations and local information networks, and is greatly dependent on institutional

memory caches within the UN mission’s field offices.

COMPARATIVE PRACTICE WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

A key question is the comparative advantage of peacekeeping vis-à-vis civil society engagement, especially in the absence of programmatic resources to undertake dedicated capacity-building efforts given its relatively shorter lifeline in a country compared with other UN actors.

In the survey of peacekeeping mission personnel, the skills that were identified as essential for engagement with civil society actors were capacity building and mentoring (66 per cent), conflict mediation and mitigation (65 per cent), information gathering and analysis (60 per cent) and advocacy (57 per cent). Given that UN agencies, funds and programmes have a comparative advantage in longer-term capacity development work with civil society actors, some have argued that peacekeeping missions should restrict the remit of their civil society engagement to umbrella networks and advocacy groups,

leveraging the mission's political mandate and convening power. Significant feedback was received from UN partners as well as civil society actors that peacekeeping missions should make greater efforts to encourage constructive dialogue between civil society actors and the government, and that this is a key area where peacekeeping missions have a comparative advantage to support more positive state-society relations.

Beyond peacekeeping, there are different comparative and good practices within the UN system on engagement with civil society actors that are worth noting. While different entities have their own funding and selection criteria and obligations, there is a need for an integrated approach to civil society engagement to ensure complementarity of effort across the United Nations and continuity in any engagement that peacekeeping missions undertake.³

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In 2000, UNDP set up a civil society advisory committee to

³ Lamptey (2007:21).

provide advice and strategic guidance to the Administrator and senior management on its future direction. This committee was comprised of 15 civil society leaders with expertise in substantive areas of focus for UNDP, who participated in joint UNDP-civil society missions to visit UNDP country programmes as part of their scope of work. Some country offices have followed suit in setting up national advisory committees comprised of prominent, effective and influential civil society actors to advise on programme implementation. The advisory committee helps to ensure that civil society engagement is structured and fully anchored in the country's overall strategy.⁴

UN WOMEN

Similarly, UN Women has set up civil society advisory groups at the global, regional and national levels to increase its strategic dialogue with civil society actors, and UN Women itself was created through the demands of women's civil society actors. Comprised of prominent civil society leaders, these groups provide strategic inputs on advocacy issues and thematic priorities, and

⁴ UNDP (2006: 31-32).

PEACEKEEPERS TEND TO SELECT CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL BASED MOSTLY ON THEIR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN POTENTIALLY IMPACTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND LESS SO IN TERMS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH AND INFLUENCE ON THE HOST GOVERNMENT.

support coordination of UN Women's engagement with civil society at all levels. An online Extranet was established to support interface between different civil society advisory group members. While the process of assembling these groups is subject to the same challenges and allegations that plague processes of identifying individual civil society partners, the nomination process is conducted in consultation with civil society networks and actors, with a view towards achieving a diverse membership with civil society representatives active at national and grassroots levels. An annual meeting between UN Women senior leadership and the civil society advisory groups takes place to facilitate exchange on UN Women's Annual Workplan and strategic direction for the coming year.

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND

UNICEF also has an NGO committee, comprised of 60 NGOs working on children's rights globally. As mentioned, it has produced the Civil Society Guide to Working with UNICEF, which provides key information that civil society actors need in order to consider engaging in a partnership or collaboration with UNICEF, including details on the memoranda of understanding that must be formalized.⁵

⁵ UNICEF (2012:1).

WORLD BANK

The World Bank has defined three types of interactions that it undertakes with civil society actors, including facilitation where the Bank provides technical or financial guidance and engages civil society actors in its work with client governments; bilateral dialogue and consultation with civil society actors, with the knowledge and support of governments; and partnerships with civil society actors.⁶

⁶ World Bank (2009: 16).

EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union has issued guidance and principles for engaging non-state actors in its work; established institutional backstopping capacity, including through a Civil Society helpdesk, civil society focal points and desk officers, to support its engagement; and offers training for its staff deploying to the field on how to work with civil society in its programmes.⁷

⁷ Babaud (2010:10).

 **PEACE OPERATIONS HAVE SOME WAY TO GO TO CREATE STRONG CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION WITH LOCAL POPULATIONS. THEY SHOULD MOVE BEYOND MERELY CONSULTING LOCAL PEOPLE, TO ACTIVELY INCLUDE THEM IN THEIR WORK. EACH PEACE OPERATION SHOULD WORK CLOSELY WITH THE UN COUNTRY TEAM AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS, TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT VARIOUS STAGES OF THE MISSION CYCLE.** 

– REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL INDEPENDENT PANEL
ON UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran



UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

CIVIL SOCIETY MERITS UNIQUE CONSIDERATION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

Within any conflict-affected environment, civil society actors can mobilize to play a potentially powerful role, either to escalate conflict or facilitate its peaceful resolution, depending on their interests and motivations. Civil society engagement in addressing problems that could generate conflict strengthens long-term social and political development of the country. If governments attempt to suppress the aspirations voiced through civil society, civil society leaders such as opinion leaders, traditional authorities and religious

leaders may provide the rationale and moral justification for violence to meet their needs. In addition, educational institutes and the media can shape local perceptions of events and advocate violence as the answer. Civic associations and political parties may mobilize their constituencies to rebel against the state apparatus.¹ It is imperative that peacekeepers engage local communities, including civil society as well as antagonist societal actors in dialogue to help develop common ground and mobilize their support to transform perceptions distorted by fear, misunderstanding and hatred.²

ARMED CONFLICT AFFECTS THE INTERNAL COMPOSITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In conflict-affected settings, civil society is often described as being weak, disorganized and ineffective. Therefore, it is important to better understand how it has been affected by the conflict in order to identify its actual strengths and weaknesses, and to set

¹ Barnes, 20. Is this Barnes 2005 or 2006

² Barnes, 21. Is this Barnes 20065 or 2006



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS ARE NOT NEUTRAL BYSTANDERS IN VIOLENT CONFLICTS. THEY HOLD THE POTENTIAL TO BE INTERLOCUTORS AND ENFORCERS FOR PEACE OR SPOILERS IN FRAGILE PEACE PROCESSES.

realistic expectations about the role that it can play.

Civil society actors are not neutral bystanders in violent conflicts. They hold the potential to be interlocutors and enforcers for peace or spoilers in fragile peace processes.³

Organized armed violence over a sustained period of time dramatically worsens the enabling conditions necessary for a vibrant civil society. Conflict affects civic life at all levels, changing attitudes and behaviour of individuals, shifting social perceptions between groups, limiting economic and social exchanges, and shifting power dynamics between communities, regions and indeed within society as a whole as security declines and stability disintegrates. It impacts on individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviour regarding trust and confidence.

Conflict also tends to change community structures and

³ Lamptey (2007:5).

strengthen bonding within identity groups, to the detriment of social cohesion across groups.

Conflict can polarize organizations along conflict fault lines and drive some to take sides in the conflict. Communities resort to kinship, tribal, religious and traditional political structures as a coping mechanism in the face of state fragility and conflict.⁴ Such patterns may continue after conflict when civil society is still highly polarized and not all actors are working to build peace.

Where the state is weak or captured by special interests, the influence of uncivil or violent non-state groups is likely to rise,⁵

limiting the impact of civil society peacebuilding efforts. In post-conflict settings, non-state actors with a vested interest in continued conflict are unlikely to accept ceasefire agreements and might contest the re-establishment of state authority.⁶ In addition, during conflict, some civil society actors are also likely to fall into the same camps as the conflicting parties.⁷

⁴ Bogner (2004); Pouligny (2005).

⁵ Belloni (2006); Schmidt (2003).

⁶ Strand et al. (2003).

⁷ Belloni, 2006.

ARMED CONFLICT TRANSFORMS THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Conflict dramatically changes the operating environment for civil society. Setting appropriate frameworks in support of civic engagement is a challenge for most governments, but even more difficult in fragile or conflict-affected settings where the host governments lack the political will and/or capacity to creating an enabling environment for civil society.⁸ In weak or conflict-affected states, relationships between citizens and state and non-state institutions are invariably seen through the lens of power and loyalties, and citizen trust and confidence in institutions in general tends to be very low. Insecurity and fear, induced by years of conflict, can hinder people from participating in civil society activities. CSOs are often suspected of subversion or collaborating with the enemy.⁹

Conflicts also pose a challenge for the autonomy of civil society actors. An example from southern Sudan illustrates

⁸ Cheema (2005).

⁹ Pearce (2005a).

the dilemma faced by NGOs in balancing between main parties to a conflict. In 1999, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), an arm of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), required NGOs to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) obliging them to operate in accordance with "SRRA objectives". World Vision International, a prominent International NGO, refused to sign and withdrew its operations (\$16 million) from Sudan, arguing that the MoU would violate 'Do No Harm' principles and its neutrality.¹⁰ This crisis is one of many similar examples that raises questions about how civil society actors must balance their mandate to reach marginalized communities while carefully navigating the line beyond which cooperation with rebel groups controlling access to local communities infringes on their autonomy and principles of neutrality in a conflict.

Conflict also severely constrains the political and legal space available for civil society (i.e. security, rule of law, judicial systems). As mentioned, conflict-affected countries are often unable to enforce policies and rules that affect civil society actors. In some cases, state

¹⁰ Riak (2002).

emergency powers or rebel control effectively supersede legal and institutional frameworks. In other cases, laws and rules are dysfunctional or discredited, or in the extreme, the state may have completely collapsed. In some cases, armed groups and/or local (state) authorities may contest the space of civil society.¹¹ In most instances, "civil society...tends to shrink in a war situation, as the space for popular, voluntary and independent organizing diminishes".¹²

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF ARMED CONFLICT IMPACT CIVIL SOCIETY

Although there are many individual case studies on how war and conflict can impact on community structures, groups and actors,¹³ there remains a large gap in empirical knowledge within the UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development community in understanding the political economy dynamics of how armed violence systematically impacts the operating

¹¹ Strand et al. (2003).

¹² Orjuela (2004).

¹³ Pouligny (2005).

space for civil society.¹⁴ In addition to the above characteristics, a few common patterns of disruptive change specific to civil society, in addition to the ones mentioned above, tend to be characteristic of conflict-affected situations, as follows:

- The state is either unable or unwilling to provide adequate security to the public.
- Rule of law institutions (including the judiciary, national and local police,) experience critical fissures, and the overall situation is characterized by complete or partial lawlessness;
- Formal state institutions and organizations that typically interact closely with civil society in peace time become weakened, hostile, or non-responsive.
- Critical infrastructure (such as roads, railroads, bridges, water, electricity, financial and banking systems, cellular and telephone service, Internet communications) is either disrupted or destroyed, severely crippling public communication and information exchange, and consequently greatly

diminishing the reach of civil society groups to the centre and their constituencies.

- A free and independent media is either censored or severely restricted, depriving civil society groups of one of their main communication channels to other civil society groups, the general public as well as state structures.
- Social capital and trust within communities disappears as people revert to “primary identity groupings” determined by kinship, tribal, religious, ethnic clan and/or political affiliation for protection and safety.¹⁵
- Basic human rights are suppressed, thus limiting even basic civil society activities (gathering in public spaces, freedom of movement and speech, right to information, etc.).
- Many civil society actors flee into exile, thereby weakening the capacity of organizations that remain (although in some cases Diaspora communities remain active from afar).¹⁶

- Civil society groups that do remain active risk being co-opted by political and ethnic elites to advance their own political agendas, which can reinforce societal cleavages and in some cases lead to the ‘de-civilization of society,’ and perpetration of violence against other ethnic groups (e.g. Bosnia-Herzegovina).¹⁷
- Civil society groups in conflict-affected countries are often forced by the political climate into a purely ‘third sector’ role as providers of social service delivery. They are driven away from their core functions of ensuring government accountability and advocacy given hostile government attitudes towards social advocacy and mobilization as compared to public service provision.
- If civil society groups are co-opted by elites, they can sometimes become deeply exclusionary and in some cases may further reinforce cleavages between different identity groups.
- CSOs in general do not always represent the full spectrum of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Indeed,

¹⁴ Goodhand et al. (2004).

¹⁵ Bogner (2004); Strand et al. (2003); Pouligny (2005); Stiefel (2001:265).

¹⁶ Paffenholz and Spurk (2006).

¹⁷ Rüb (2003).

beneficiary participation may be less widespread than commonly assumed.

- CSOs may develop a higher sense of responsibility towards foreign aid donors rather than their constituencies in local communities.
- Accountability and transparency of CSOs vis-à-vis their local constituencies tend to be weak in general and worsen during conflict. As legal frameworks in fragile and conflict-affected states do not always provide accountability mechanisms for CSOs, some fraudulent CSOs may take advantage of this vacuum to defraud communities.¹⁸
- Once the conflict ends, insecurity and fear induced by years of violence and instability hinder people from actively engaging or re-engaging in local community development activities as they remain wary of emerging political settlements and changing power dynamics at the national and local levels.¹⁹

Not all civil society actors have the same goals and interests in conflict-affected

¹⁸ World Bank (2005).

¹⁹ Pearce (2005).

environments. Peacekeepers need to better understand their different motivations, goals and networks to better leverage and partner with them. For instance, pre-existing sectoral civil society actors (e.g. women's organizations, faith-based groups, service delivery NGOs) often do not consider working on conflict as a part of their core focus, but who feel compelled to respond to the challenge that conflict poses for their constituents in part to ensure that their core concerns are addressed. These sectoral CSOs often call upon others in their wider networks to extend solidarity, thus helping to mobilize resources and make a powerful contribution to awareness-raising. Policy-oriented civil society actors (e.g. social movements, advocacy groups, international human rights watchdog groups) often focus more on addressing underlying structural problems that give rise to conflict in general through efforts aimed at policy reform and systems change. While they operate in conflict-affected settings, they are not always directly focused on efforts to resolve or transform specific situations of conflict. In addition, these actors tend to operate more at the macro-strategic national level. Finally, there are civil society actors who are primarily

focused on responding to specific conflict situations (e.g. peace and reconciliation groups). These are the groups that often interface most (and have the most synergies) with peacekeeping operations and other UN peacebuilding partners at the local levels. However, such groups may sometimes lack the requisite funding and resources as well as the operational capacity needed to reach impacted communities in a sustainable manner.

THERE IS A NEED FOR BETTER ANALYSIS AND MAPPING OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

Identifying and supporting the right combination of civil society groups that are effective, enjoy public trust and have social capital across many identity groups in such contexts can be very challenging. Research shows that peacekeepers operating in conflict-affected environments need to strengthen their contextual understanding of the internal political economy

dynamics influencing the interest, motivations and political space available for civil society actors. This is critical not only to assess their capacity and commitment to contribute towards sustainable peace, but also to identify potential obstacles, challenges and opportunities in the enabling environment for these societal actors. Even if peacekeepers avoid outright support to violent groups (armed factions, warlords, gangs), without improved analysis and mapping of civil society, they may inadvertently strengthen the partisan group and legitimize the wrong set of societal actors that do not represent the interests of local communities. Peacekeepers, thus, have to carefully identify, evaluate and partner with civil society actors that show a clear and credible commitment to their communities and towards building an environment conducive to sustainable peace and security. Below are some additional considerations based on survey, desk research and interview results that merit close attention:

BALANCING STATE-CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

In the aftermath of conflict where a government is seeking

to extend and consolidate its legitimacy, external actors such as civil society may come across as a threat to their reign. In such contexts, there may not be an appreciation by government of the constructive role that civil society actors can play in advancing a democratic culture and development agenda. However, it is also the case that, especially in places with a nascent or underdeveloped and weak civil society, some civil society actors do not know how to play a constructive rather than an antagonistic role, for the government. Peacekeepers have an entry point to potentially help develop civil society capacity and facilitate more amicable and mutually beneficial state-society relations in such environments.

In contexts with low democratic standards in terms of political space and participation, and where civil society may be repressed, it can, however, be politically sensitive to engage with civil society actors. Thus, the pursuit of civil society mobilization or engagement bears the risk of igniting tensions with the host state by creating an impression that the United Nations is “inciting” civil society and meddling in their internal affairs. At times this can even be compromising or detrimental to

civil society actors themselves, who may already face marginalization or even repression.²⁰

When asked what activities would present a risk to the mission’s relationship with the government, peacekeepers suggested that engagement with civil society actors in the areas of implementing quick impact projects, capacity building and mentoring, and promoting gender equality were seen as the most benign. In contrast, promoting the protection and space of human rights defenders, gathering information and promoting the participation and equality of marginalized groups were seen as the most problematic and politicized areas of activity.

Given the importance of maintaining host state consent for the mission’s presence and access, pacifying national authorities may sometimes take priority over ensuring adequate civil society outreach. For example, in Darfur, civilian staff in UNAMID described the tenuous balance that they must maintain between the government and civil society, including the necessity in some instances to vet civil society engagement activities and partners by

²⁰ Babaud (2010: 15).

government counterparts prior to engaging with them. This creates a dangerous precedent, however, insofar as the only actors deemed politically palatable to the government are conferred legitimacy as viable civil society partners.

Other international organizations also shared that they face a similarly difficult balance at times where their mandates emphasize the government as the primary beneficiary and thus prioritizing good relations with the host government is sometimes at the expense of fully consulting communities and civil society in the design and implementation of their programmes.²¹

In post-conflict contexts where the state's capacity and reach throughout the country is often weak at best, and it is actively seeking to consolidate its legitimacy, there is also a risk that missions may be unintentionally or unwittingly substituting civil society for the role of the government by engaging civil society actors directly for activities typically fulfilled by the state. For instance, where the presence of the state at the local level and the capacity of local authorities are weak, there

²¹ *ibid.*, 6.

is a risk in mobilizing civil society actors as service providers to fill this vacuum.²² Civil society actors may have greater presence in remote areas and be able to effectively deliver much needed services, but this then supplants the responsibility of the state. This strengthening of civil society must be in addition or in parallel to, rather than at the expense of, institutional capacity building of the state. To mitigate against this risk, one civilian peacekeeper with MINUSMA in Mali said that it is critical to ensure that the government is present during civil society engagement activities to ensure that capacity building of local authorities, not only of civil society, takes place and to facilitate positive relations between the two.

CREATING AN ARTIFICIAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONFERRING LEGITIMACY

In many post-conflict contexts, especially at the local or grassroots level, civil society is often very weak, with few actors or groups who are literate, who can reasonably satisfy international funding and reporting obligations, and who

²² Fisher (2003: 20).

are savvy in understanding how to navigate and access international support. The proliferation or mushrooming of civil society actors, or 'briefcase parties' creates competition within civil society for this limited funding, rather than collaboration and coordination in the spirit of the social cohesion that civil society is intended to facilitate. In this context, there is a tendency for international organizations, including the United Nations, to repeatedly work with the same likeminded actors. This leads the international community to play a role in shaping civil society as its 'mirror image' rather than working through existing structures. The international community confers legitimacy to civil society through our decisions on whom it partners with, whom it listens to and whom it funds. There can be a disproportionate focus on the 'organized part' of civil society, such as those actors who are registered formally.²³ The arrival of international NGOs in a context as recipients for bilateral and multilateral funding can also inadvertently divert resources from local actors.²⁴ International development expert William Easterly noted that "navigating

²³ Babaud (2010:14).

²⁴ OECD (2005a: 6-7).

complex funding requirements can obstruct civil society by imposing requirements that only the most administratively proficient are able to meet in full. This may result in the concentration of foreign funding among a narrow number of NGOs.²⁵ Moreover, donor preferences for funding civil society actors on a project basis give most civil society actors limited opportunities to cultivate the capacities to be competitive.²⁶

A recent Civicus report found that there was decreasing space for civil society actors to operate, with external agendas increasingly prioritized over local needs.²⁷ In this way, many civil society actors pursue donor-driven, rather than issue-driven, agendas, even changing thematic focus and at times their name in order to fulfil donor requirements when convenient and profitable. This results in the creation of civil society networks and capacities that are not self-sustaining when donors leave the country, and gives too much weight to donor and external agendas dictating the work of civil society actors. This emphasis on donor priorities, rather than the needs

of actual communities, can have an impact on local tensions and how communities perceive the civil society actors who purport to represent them.²⁸ This creates a dilemma for international actors of “creating entities ‘from the outside’ which are supposed to be ‘of the inside.’”²⁹ Efforts to strengthen civil society’s legitimacy can therefore actually inhibit or erode it.³⁰ Therefore, some civil society actors may actually seek to remain under the radar if being seen to be cooperating with the United Nations, or other international actors could compromise or imperil their platform.

Significantly, international and local mechanisms of legitimacy may actually be in conflict with one another; civil society actors may be perceived as internationally legitimate if they adhere to international norms and language, but they can only gain domestic legitimacy if they can promote the needs and priorities of their constituents even when these are at odds with international norms.³¹ In this way, external influence or engagement can “weaken the local legitimacy and effectiveness of civil society, as civil society adapts to the

requirements of, and becomes dependent on, external actors.”³²

This risk can be mitigated by not always engaging those who are like us, but rather those who may not speak our own language, be literate or be recommended within our network. Engaging these civil society actors, which are seen outside of our networks or less palatable to us, may actually have greater transformative impact in helping them to become more accountable and responsive than supporting those who mirror our own image. Identifying civil society actors to work with based solely on other international references reinforces this notion of an artificial civil society and reifies the legitimacy of a select few civil society actors at the expense of most. Some of those who might be the most difficult might actually be the most important agents of change on critical issues like reconciliation and have the strongest linkages to their constituencies to influence others.

SECURITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Both UN and non-UN actors have highlighted ethical considerations in engaging civil society actors during politically

²⁵ Nijssen, 5.

²⁶ “World Bank (2007:5)

²⁷ Poskitt and Dufranc (2011:3).

²⁸ *ibid*, 13.

²⁹ Van den Boogaard (2011:38).

³⁰ *ibid*, 41.

³¹ *ibid*.

³² OECD (2005a: 6).

sensitive or volatile periods, including the risk of endangering them or compromising their security through being affiliated with international actors. This is particularly the case for civil society actors engaged in protection or human rights fields. In such situations, it is important to be able to provide reassurance to civil society actors that the information they provide and their identities will be protected confidentially and to ensure that policies exist in the mission to enable this. Even in a permissive security environment, such reassurances may also be necessary in more difficult political environments where civil society actors may fear persecution by the government for collaboration with international actors.

The 2013 edition of the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) "Professional Standards for protection work carried out by humanitarian and human rights actors in armed conflict and other situations of violence" notes that actors seeking information "bear the responsibility to assess threats to the persons providing information, and to take necessary measures to avoid negative consequences for those from whom they are seeking information."³³

³³ ICRC (2013).



ACTORS SEEKING INFORMATION "BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ASSESS THREATS TO THE PERSONS PROVIDING INFORMATION, AND TO TAKE NECESSARY MEASURES TO AVOID NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE FROM WHOM THEY SEEKING INFORMATION." ICRC (2013)

Similar principles of confidentiality and protection of the sources are also recalled in the UN Policy on Human Rights in Peace Operations and Political Missions.³⁴ The ICRC guide also notes that humanitarian actors collecting sensitive information are ethically obliged to use that information only for the purposes for which it was collected.

ENSURING IMPARTIALITY

When engaging with civil society, missions must balance their agendas of supporting the peace process and fostering inclusive governance with the importance of maintaining their perceived impartiality. A staff member in MONUSCO noted that civil society actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo tend to be highly politicized and affiliated with political parties.

³⁴ United Nations (2011).

Accordingly, whenever the mission engaged with a civil society actor, it opened itself to criticisms that it was working to advance a particular political agenda. To mitigate this risk, the mission has endeavoured to take as highly a transparent, inclusive and formal approach to civil society as possible. For example, during its efforts in 2012 to assist civil society actors in developing input into the New Deal for Engagement on Fragile State, the mission established a civil society donors' working group comprised of the principal donors to civil society. This helped ensure a consistent and transparent approach to civil society among international actors, thereby protecting any one actor from accusations of bias. As one civil affairs officer pointed out, to ensure political neutrality, it can be as important to conduct dialogue with civil society actors informally and off the record, as it is formally through official mission activities, in order to minimize the political significance of the dialogue itself and the legitimacy that this interaction confers.



UN Photo/Abdul Fatai Adegboye



KEY STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

As civil society actors readily acknowledge, civil society initiatives are not a panacea for bringing about peace and security. There are numerous risks and challenges, including: inadvertently doing harm; disempowering and delegitimizing local civil society actors; legitimizing the wrong civil society actors; concentrating support on a few NGOs; and turning civil society actors into mere implementers and service providers. Challenges also arise from conflict-induced changes to the enabling environment for civil society and its own internal institutional complexities as discussed in the section above.

The study identified a number of strategic and operational challenges to working with civil society actors in peacekeeping contexts. Overall, survey results show that peacekeepers identified insufficient financial resources, security and logistical constraints,

a lack of government willingness to engage civil society actors and a shortage of skilled personnel as the key challenges to effectively engaging with and supporting civil society actors in peacekeeping contexts. Peacekeepers also identified the lack of an institutional culture of civil society as challenging, while others pointed to challenges in civil society's adequate representation of the population at large. In addition to these challenges, a number of bureaucratic factors intrinsic to the UN system such as security regulations, human and financial resource constraints, a lack of time and continuity also make the United Nations less than a nimble and flexible partner, which is often what civil society actors in these fluid contexts require.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

THE SHORT-TERM NATURE OF PEACEKEEPING MANDATES

By design, peacekeeping missions operate on a short timeframe, with no more than a year mandate, and are expected to demonstrate progress in quickly delivering

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FACED BY PEACEKEEPERS

The strategic challenges faced by peacekeepers in engaging effectively with civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts include, but are not limited to:

- the short-term nature of peacekeeping mandates;
- state-centric nature of peacekeeping;
- lack of understanding of the mandate;
- lack of a strategy for systematic engagement;
- identifying the right set of civil society partners;
- ensuring inclusive representation of civil society in meetings;
- overcoming suspicions among civil society actors of national registration rules;
- the impact of civil society engagement on mission decision-making and **prioritization**;
- managing tensions between the host government and civil society.

on benchmarks towards key mandate priorities. Planning cycles thus revolve around the annual renewal of Security Council mandates, which makes it difficult to invoke the longer-term perspective required to truly become familiarized with a context, build trust with national and local counterparts, and witness the impacts of one's capacity-building interventions. With peacekeeping missions envisaged, in theory, to be temporary presences, due to these short timeframes – combined with the difficult conditions in which missions deploy – staff turnover is often quite high, resulting in a lack of continuity

and institutional memory on the ground. This further augments challenges in fostering trust with civil society actors and in understanding the contextual nuances of one's environment. The short timeframe, combined with the lack of a strategy to guide systematic engagement with civil society actors results in interactions that are often based on personal ties and thus not sustainable. This also makes it challenging to ensure proper follow-up and consultation, which can make civil society conferences and workshops feel more like box-ticking exercises than

meaningful interventions that may yield a cumulative impact.¹

In addition, corporate planning and budgeting processes also result in a lack of financial flexibility to change and recalibrate mission strategies mid-implementation in order to respond quickly to developments on the ground.

THE STATE-CENTRIC NATURE OF PEACEKEEPING

With the consent of the host government as a key prerequisite for deployment, the mandates that peacekeeping missions are given are state-centric, prioritizing engagement with political elites and national authorities over that of engaging local communities. This begs the question of to whom peacekeeping missions are ultimately accountable. Where civil society actors are mentioned in mandates, it is often implicitly through references to “participatory or inclusive processes” or “facilitation of social cohesion”, and more of an afterthought than an imperative. This prerequisite of host state consent can put a mission in a difficult situation where it must prioritize

managing relationships with national authorities to ensure access at the expense of fostering more fruitful state-society relations, or strengthening the role of civil society in a society to ensure more inclusive political processes.

When peacekeeping missions are mandated to deliver on immediate ‘hard’ tasks, such as ensuring the cessation of violence, it is easy to undervalue longer-term, “softer” issues, such as laying the foundations for durable peace. Missions must strike a balance between the pressure to broker a national peace agreement expeditiously, and the need to build an enabling environment for the implementation of that agreement to take place and where conflict will be managed effectively in the long term. On this latter task, civil society actors are often viewed as the guardians of a fragile peace. Thus, efforts to ensure broad-based consultation and engagement with local communities in the negotiating process of peace agreements, while it may be time-consuming and cumbersome at times, may also increase the tenability of successful implementation. In the 2011 World Development Report, the World Bank responds to this challenge by

introducing the concept of “inclusive enough” coalitions, indicating that they “include the parties necessary for implementing the initial stages of confidence building and institutional transformation,”² but may not be as broadly representative of the population as would be desirable under less challenging circumstances. This concept provides a useful middle road that could be adopted by peacekeeping missions to support durable peace processes while working within the boundaries of their mandates.

THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE MANDATE

This state-centric focus can magnify perceptions of a lack of prioritization by a mission of civil society actors. As one civil affairs officer in MINUSTAH pointed out, “I don’t believe the Mission gave adequate consideration to the role of non-state actors in institution-building.” This can lead to a lack of clarity of the mandate among mission personnel and partners, as well as by both civil society actors and government. Civil society actors may be critical of the mission for a perceived disproportionate

¹ Van den Boogaard (2011:35).

² World Bank (2011).

focus on the government and not understand why they are not allocated equal focus and attention, without realizing that the mandate is foremost oriented towards the state. Conversely, the government may also be displeased by the mission's engagement with civil society and not appreciate the constructive role that they can play in institution-building and peace consolidation processes.

LACK OF A STRATEGY FOR SYSTEMATIC ENGAGEMENT

In many peacekeeping contexts, the lack of an overarching mission strategy to guide systemic engagement with civil society actors can result in ad hoc partnerships and interventions, with efforts to engage seen as isolated events or activities rather than as processes.³ Thus, rather than view efforts to engage civil society as cumulative – as they build capacity – they may be piecemeal and inconsistent in approach across different mission components. This may be reflective of an overall fragmented international approach towards civil society where, in some places, the mission, the UN country team, and international partners and donors may

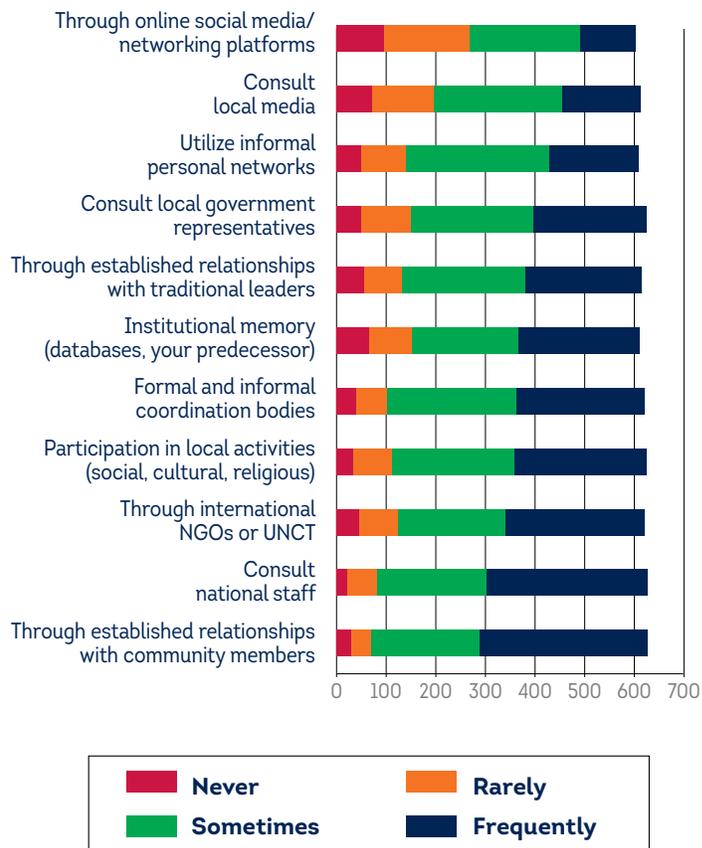
take on different approaches to supporting civil society. Some donors may have the funding to pursue engagement unilaterally, while smaller donors may leverage the mission and the United Nations to help coordinate their engagement and develop a unified work plan.

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT SET OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS

Identifying and supporting the right mixture of civil society groups that are effective,

enjoy public trust, and have social capital across many identity groups in such contexts can be very challenging. In response to a question on the methods used to identify civil society actors in a survey of peacekeepers, respondents said that they identified civil society actors most often through consultations with national staff (61 per cent), references from established relationships with community members or UN and NGO partners (59 per cent) and through formal and

Figure 14: In your mission, what methods have you used to identify civil society actors?



³ Lamptey (2007:20).

informal coordination bodies, such as umbrella networks (54 per cent). The survey revealed that international staff were more likely to identify civil society actors through formal and informal coordination bodies, whereas national staff frequently identified civil society actors through established community relationships and participation in local activities. Anecdotes from some peacekeepers suggest that governments and national civil society umbrella networks, at times, express discontent when international actors and donors seek out specific groups to work with, rather than channelling requests through them to guide the identification process.

ENSURING INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AT MEETINGS

One key challenge that peacekeepers frequently encounter in their engagement with civil society actors is when they are required to ensure representation of civil society at meetings. Established lists may be available specifying those to invite to workshops, but it is not always clear why these representatives were selected. However, their legitimacy is further reinforced each time these lists are

recycled to inform the selection process for meetings without undertaking a mapping exercise to understand the civil society landscape. An officer at the World Bank noted that the Bank is not only concerned with 'representation' to ensure that all civil society actors are engaged, for representation's sake alone, but also focused on engaging the civil society actors that are relevant to policy priorities. Its Citizens Engagement Strategy compels the World Bank to be more systematic in seeking civil society inputs, with country offices required to demonstrate their methodology for showing how they consulted stakeholders before funding is allocated.

While there is no perfect formula on how to select civil society actors to represent at meetings and official fora, there are some good practices across missions. Generally, it was noted that a safer way to determine representation is by planning thematic civil society partnership meetings and then identifying civil society actors who are particularly strong or effective within that thematic area. In some contexts, the chairpersons of national umbrella networks are invited to ensure broad representation of all CSOs, together with a focused selection of representatives of

a few national and grassroots civil society groups who have thematic experience in relation to the issue or topic of the meeting. Where an issue is contentious, it was noted that it is important to invite a wide range of civil society actors that reflect all opinions on the issue to ensure an inclusive and collaborative consultation.

Some staff noted the need to ensure representation from certain marginalized groups (women, internally displaced, youth, disabled, etc.) in every meeting given it may be the only context where their inputs and views are considered, and they may be marginalized even within civil society. Finally, it was noted that it is also necessary to take into account population demographics and to balance representation among different segments of the population to the extent possible.

OVERCOMING SUSPICIONS AMONG CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS OF NATIONAL REGISTRATION RULES

In many peacekeeping contexts, there is legislation and a policy framework in place to govern the registration of national civil society actors. Where this exists, a registration process

may require civil society actors to declare if they are political entities or not, and examines their structure, internal governance, finances, composition, mandate and record of activities. The registration process can help to confer legitimacy to civil society actors, especially vis-à-vis the state, and can

 **SOME CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS MAY FEAR THAT REGISTRATION WILL BE A PRETEXT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPOSE UNDUE OVERSIGHT OR CONTROL OVER THEM.**

help donors and international actors in the selection process to decipher who has been vetted and meets basic criteria.

There are legitimate reasons why some civil society actors may not seek to become registered with state authorities. In contexts where there is suspicion of the authorities, some civil society actors may fear that registration will be a pretext for the government to impose undue oversight or control over them. In addition, in some places, there is a cost – whether an actual registration fee or a cost to mobilizing and assembling the materials to fulfil registration requirements

– which may act as a deterrent for civil society actors, especially those at the local or grassroots level, to register. The lack of registration, from the vantage point of the government, can make state-society relations more complicated.

For instance, in Liberia, the Governance Commission and the National Civil Society Council are working together to facilitate workshops on internal governance strengthening for civil society actors to support them in being able to successfully meet registration requirements.⁴ Previously, there was a fee for civil society actors to register, which was perceived as a deterrent, but registration is now free of charge following the adoption of the NGO policy framework. The policy also requires civil society actors to narrow their sectoral focus, which helps in organizing the civil society landscape and avoiding a mushrooming of groups on particular issues when funding comes available.

Generally, depending on the political context, it is perceived that the existence of legislation on non-governmental actors, including civil society, is useful

to help ensure internal governance, as well as to confer a basic level of protection of the rights of civil society actors. With their political mandate, peacekeeping missions can play a role here to help advocate for the development and passage of such legislation where it is lacking. In Liberia, for example, UNMIL played an instrumental role in the passage of a national policy framework for non-governmental actors, which covered their registration requirements and reporting obligations. While this legislation was initially controversial and fraught with perceptions that the Government would use it as a tool to regulate civil society, the policy has helped considerably to clarify and streamline the accreditation procedures.

Not all formally registered civil society actors are active. Nepal, for example, has about 120 international and nearly 30,000 local civil society actors who are registered with the Social Welfare Council, a Government coordinating body, but it is estimated that fewer than 10 per cent of them are active.⁵

Peacekeeping staff generally said that they engaged with both registered and nonregistered

⁴ Analysis of the Mapping Study of CSOs in Liberia, 24.

⁵ UNDP (2005: 22).

civil society actors, albeit noting a preference for engaging with registered civil society actors in many contexts. OHCHR's policy is to engage with civil society actors irrespective of their national registration status, recognizing that such a requirement could preclude engagement with marginalized, grassroots, and rural civil society actors.⁶

IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT ON MISSION DECISION-MAKING AND PRIORITIZATION

A key challenge for peace-keeping personnel in engaging civil society actors is how to ensure that the inputs that are collected on their perceptions, priorities and needs contribute towards and impact upon mission-wide decision- and policymaking. It is not always clear what weight these inputs should carry when government views, more often than those of civil society, are reflected in mission reporting and influence the exercise of good offices. While there are challenges involved in managing this information internally and ensuring that engagement with civil society contributes to and

is reflected in mission analysis and decision-making, it is also important to ensure that the engagement is not unitateral, but that it is reciprocal by ensuring, where possible, that civil society inputs are taken seriously and channelled to the appropriate sources in the mission to have an impact.

Even where such processes are present, overall decision-making and priority-setting mechanisms within missions are subject to a range of internal pressures, including regular turnover of management and a lack of institutional memory, complex bureaucratic structures, highly-dynamic and insecure environments, and pressure from different components to focus on 'their' issues relevant to them. It is not always clear what the entry point would be for systematically integrating inputs that come from civil society engagement given that most mission official reporting is focused on information gathered from political elites and national authorities at the national level. Synthesizing information into succinct analysis that provides clear policy advice is challenging, and evidence shows that missions are not equipped to centralize information brought in by different components and analyse

them in a way that feeds directly into strategies and planning.

MANAGING TENSIONS BETWEEN THE HOST STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

While civil society actors are often viewed as allies in the struggle for the protection and promotion of human rights, Amnesty International has noted that they are often threatened in post-conflict settings, with governments attempting to curtail freedom of expression and their space to operate and organize. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and South Sudan, among other places, Human Rights Watch has documented that violence and intimidation has frequently curtailed the space where human rights civil society actors can operate.

For this reason, OHCHR has a policy on the protection of civil society actors (2012) where it notes that it is "first and foremost the responsibility of states to protect civil society actors, but when they are threatened and attacked because of their work to advance human rights, the international community has a responsibility to support and

⁶ OHCHR (2012: 4).

MAIN OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

The operational challenges faced by peacekeepers in engaging effectively with civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts include:

- Access to civil society actors at the local levels,
- Mapping civil society,
- Capacity and coordination of civil society,
- Presence of an enabling environment,
- Timing and sequencing,
- Expectations management,
- Lack of financial and programmatic resources,
- Need for better stakeholder and geographical mapping mechanisms.

protect them.”⁷ In fact, due to the prevalence of the problem, the threats posed to civil society actors are a standing agenda item for the secretariat of the Human Rights Council.⁸ The policy calls upon OHCHR to undertake protection of civil society actors (not only human rights civil society actors) in line with the principles of and

⁷ OHCHR (2012).

⁸ *ibid.*, 8.

consideration for ‘Do No Harm’, confidentiality, security, sensitivity and informed consent.

Even where they do not face violence or persecution, civil society actors may have vexed relationships with government authorities, making it a challenge for peacekeeping missions to engage them while also maintaining a constructive relationship with the government. For example, despite the support that BINUB’s Human Rights and Justice Division gave to facilitating consultations with civil society actors on the transitional justice process in 2007 – consultations that helped to foster a broader sense of ownership over the process – it became challenging to push the process forward in light of political concerns ahead of national elections.⁹ The engagement with civil society actors becomes particularly challenging for mission-government relations when the issues that civil society actors raise undermine, question or compromise the legitimacy and authority of the government.

⁹ BINUB: Director of Human Rights and Justice Division / Ismael A. Diallo (EoAR), 10 June 2008.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

ACCESS TO LOCAL LEVEL CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

There are many grassroots civil society actors in remote areas who may be difficult to access due to logistical constraints, poor infrastructure and limited transport as well as mobility options for civil society actors. This can require engagement with proxy groups at the national level as a conduit but then it is not clear how representative they are.¹⁰ One particular access constraint is often the absence of a space or facility where civil society actors can interface with the United Nations both formally and informally, and ensure a reciprocal, not extractive, information exchange and build trust.

Other access constraints include cultural and linguistic barriers that can make it difficult for peacekeepers to have meaningful, substantive interaction with civil society actors, even when possible, to meet them physically, on their own terms. Language barriers were cited continually in a survey as a primary challenge for engaging

¹⁰ Babaud (2010: 9).

civil society. Where this barrier was overcome by enlisting a language assistant, it was noted that this person needed to be not only capable, but also neutral (or perceived to be).

MAPPING CIVIL SOCIETY

How civil society is structured within the country can also be a challenge to meaningful engagement, depending upon how divided or fragmented it is, whether civil society actors are national or only localised in scope, and whether there are any organized umbrella networks or coordinating mechanisms. Assuming it is viewed as representative, an umbrella network can provide an important entry point to understanding and navigating the civil society landscape and identifying potential partners.

CAPACITY AND COORDINATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Closely related to the issue of how civil society is structured or configured in a country is its capacity level and degree of coordination. In a survey, peacekeeping personnel frequently cited poor coordination among civil society actors as a barrier for engaging the sector, especially at the local level. A

lack of coordination among civil society actors limits their ability to speak with a single voice on key issues and lobby government effectively. Consequently, supporting the establishment of coordination structures for civil society actors is a regular activity for missions. For example, a Civil Affairs Officer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported that, upon arriving in Mbandaka, Equateur Province in 2006, it became apparent there were three distinct representatives or coordinators of civil society: one representing faith-based organizations, one representing unions/syndicates and one representing community-based organizations. A number of groups, including youth, women and university students, were not represented in these civil society structures at all. He therefore worked towards establishing a single coordination mechanism for all of civil society in the province. While all parties eventually accepted this proposal, to date, no agreement can be reached on the appointment of a single representative, and the mechanism has not been established.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the umbrella or coordinating network has become embroiled in conflict over a highly politicized contest

between two individuals who hail from opposing political factions over its leadership seat. Thus, this umbrella network has had a divisive, rather than unifying, role for civil society and it has become necessary to circumvent the network in order to work effectively with civil society actors in the country. In Liberia, the United



ONE PARTICULAR ACCESS CONSTRAINT IS OFTEN THE ABSENCE OF A SPACE OR FACILITY WHERE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS CAN INTERFACE WITH THE UNITED NATIONS BOTH FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY, AND ENSURE A RECIPROCAL, NOT EXTRACTIVE, INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND BUILD TRUST.

Nations helped to support the establishment of the National Civil Society Council, which is now represented at the local level across the country, and has been instrumental in supporting the development of a regulatory framework for civil society in the country, as well as mapping and coordinating civil society along thematic lines.

These different experiences, however, point to the need for all coordinating structures to

be tailored to the local context. If civil society actors from different segments of society do not feel that their interests can be effectively represented by such a coordinating entity, then efforts to establish and strengthen umbrella networks may serve to provide the mission with a convenient interlocutor, but may also dilute the representativeness of civil society. An alternative to engaging with national-level coordination bodies identified by one staff member was to focus on building the capacity of individual civil society actors, allowing them to organize themselves more organically. Localizing the processes would ensure that civil society actors are more representative of communities and reduce the risk of being politicized.

Another issue that renders the coordination of civil society actors challenging is the tendency for the post-conflict period to be accompanied by a proliferation or mushrooming of actors, which increases competition for limited resources and makes them all less effective. In this situation, it generally has less impact to provide nominal support to a diffuse number of actors, rather than to encourage them to merge to pool resources

and increase their influence. Donors tend to precipitate a “veritable explosion in the local NGO sector, supported both by the ideology of promoting ‘civil society’ and the arrival of substantial funds”, which can complicate coordination and effective engagement and also change the incentives that motivate civil society actors.¹¹

Some other key constraints to the coordination of civil society that can make engagement challenging are resource-based, relating to their lack of transport access to attend workshops or programmes and their lack of a space or facility to organize and convene. Additionally, due to the lack of continuous, reliable funding, some civil society actors operate as ad hoc entities, halting their activities, disappearing and then re-emerging when funding becomes available, which can complicate sustained engagement. This can also generate a risk of civil society springing up in response to funding opportunities. As one peacekeeper noted, “in Kosovo, we have a project society, not a civil society”.¹² The capacity challenges may be differential

and more pronounced for localized or rural civil society actors than for national ones who may have access to international funding and capacity-building initiatives, and be savvy in navigating political processes.

In terms of their capacity, civil society actors in the places in which peacekeeping missions are deployed often lack staff with expertise and may have a limited understanding of the professional standards entailed in engaging with international actors and seeking funding. Their capacity is often uneven, lacking basic human, financial, organization and physical resources. They may also be deficient in their internal democracy, transparency and accountability. The tendency for strong civil society actors to often be absorbed into government further drains this capacity. While the low capacity levels provide ample training opportunities, it can also make meaningful engagement challenging. If they do not have the absorption capacity required to expand, to manage funds, or implement more ambitious projects, then international actors can end up with a narrower pool of civil society partners, creating the dilemma of further strengthening some actors at the expense

¹¹ Pouligny, 499.

¹² “Background paper: Voices of civil society (CSOs) on peacebuilding and statebuilding,” 7.

of others, as described above. One way that some UN agency personnel have suggested to navigate this challenge is to partner with more capable civil society actors in order to meet requirements but to require that they, in turn, identify one or more grassroots, local civil society actors whom they can work with in the implementation process to build capacity and encourage knowledge transference and partnerships.

Additional challenges include the degree of independence, or lack thereof, that civil society enjoys from government and how representative of and accountable to their constituencies they are. Simply ensuring civil society representation does not necessarily translate to representing the views of their constituencies if they do not have strong enough linkages to their base.

PRESENCE OF AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

There is often an expectation, or a double standard, that civil society actors be apolitical and neutral in the context of conflict.¹³ While there can be a tendency to romanticise the

¹³ Poskitt and Dufranc (2011:14).

civil society sector as more well-intentioned or altruistic than government or the private sector, it is also true that civil society is a microcosm of the larger societal context and as such can be just as discredited, compromised, politicized and divisive as the society at large.¹⁴ Civil society is foremost a product of the society in which it is developed and functions, reflecting some or all of the systemic problems and strengths of that society. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that civil society actors will necessarily be positive actors; they can also be spoilers to peace. For example, civil society actors were complicit in promoting hate propaganda around the time of the Rwandan genocide in 1994.¹⁵ Any engagement with civil society must therefore be based on a contextual analysis that maps civil society, identifies their strengths and weaknesses, and analyses how they fit into the context of power-relations more broadly in the country.¹⁶ Particularly in a context of active conflict with shifting allegiances and the increased possibility of civil society actors being instrumentalized for conflict,

¹⁴ Pouligny, 500.

¹⁵ OECD (2005a: 4).

¹⁶ Ibid.

one civil affairs officer in South Sudan pointed to the need to constantly reassess and re-map the civil society landscape to understand who remains truly independent and neutral.

The presence of an enabling environment for civil society engagement is influenced by numerous elements such as: the presence of a legal and regulatory framework; the dynamics between civil society and other actors such as the state; the political and institutional context; socio-cultural aspects like literacy, trust and tolerance; and security and economic factors like poverty and inequality. A repressive environment, for example, makes civil society engagement difficult and even risk at times, while an impoverished context can indicate that civil society actors lack any resources to organize and may be focused on basic human needs rather than their empowerment. The mere existence of civil society actors in some contexts may be perceived as a threat and they may be labelled “opposition groups” for any advocacy that contradicts official government policy. Beyond direct restrictions on political space for civil society to mobilize, restrictions on information or censorship and harassment of the media

WHEN ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS, THERE IS A RISK OF RAISING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS THAT THE MISSION WILL TAKE ACTION ON THE CONCERNS RAISED, WHEN IT MAY NOT HAVE THE CAPABILITY OR RESOURCES TO DO SO, AND WHEN DOING SO MAY NOT EVEN BE DESIRABLE.

can also reduce the ability of civil society actors to network and build coalitions, and have a platform from which to voice their views.¹⁷ An important starting point before engaging civil society should always be to understand the nuances of the context in which one works. It is also important to consider what the minimum conditions are that are required for civil society actors to work effectively, bearing in mind that lack of freedom of movement for security reasons or freedom of assembly and speech for fear of persecution may indicate that it is not only not viable, but also not ethical to engage civil society.

In conflict areas or areas that were recently in conflict, key priorities and challenges for civil society actors include defining

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 9.

their role, neutrality and carving out the political space to operate in. This credibility comes with time and impact as civil society actors play a positive role and build public trust. For their credibility to increase, it becomes important over time for them to be defined and driven by their own principles, and to be proactive and not reactive to donors.¹⁸

TIMING AND SEQUENCING

Civil society takes on different functions and roles in the transition from conflict to peace and in different phases of that transition: during conflict or its immediate aftermath, the focus may be on protection, advocacy or monitoring. Reconciliation, social cohesion and peace education are more long-term functions and require a basic enabling environment. A key challenge for civil society actors and supporting donors is to fulfil the right functions at the right time and to carefully adapt to phases of this transition as necessary. It is also important to ensure that the “state is capitalizing on the experience of civil society actors while building government

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 19.

institutions that can co-exist with a vibrant civil society”.¹⁹

EXPECTATIONS MANAGEMENT

Albeit unrealistic, engaging civil society actors invariably raises expectations that the mission will be able to “bring about change overnight” or to confer greater legitimacy to civil society actors and their concerns vis-à-vis the government. When engaging civil society actors, there is a risk of raising unrealistic expectations that the mission will take action on the concerns raised, when it may not have the capability or resources to do so, and when doing so may not even be desirable. It is a difficult balance to convey to civil society actors that they are important for the mission and its mandate implementation, while, at the same time, being careful not to elevate them to the same level as the government. Expectations for resources from civil society actors may be high, however, and it takes consistent messaging on the mandate to remind them of the mission’s role and to refer them to other sources for funding. The size and scale of a peacekeeping mission in country can create an inflated sense

¹⁹ World Bank (2007:13)

of what can be contributed in the absence of clarity on the mandate and what resources can be deployed in support of. In impoverished contexts where civil society actors are donor-driven, the tendency of some donors to give per diems to incentivize engagement can create perverse motivations and complicate the efforts of actors who seek to engage civil society without providing this benefit.

LACK OF FINANCIAL AND PROGRAMMATIC RESOURCES

Many peacekeeping mission personnel also noted the lack of programmatic or dedicated funding – beyond quick impact projects – as a key deterrent for engaging with civil society effectively. For instance, human rights components often have very nominal funds to conduct one- or two-day capacity-building workshops for civil society actors, but these resources are insufficient for any long-term or even follow-up training needs. Overall, peacekeepers noted the need for resources to undertake capacity building, in addition for attract civil society actors to attend workshops and meetings by providing resources to support their transport, sustenance and logistics needs.

Many missions cited inadequate financial resources to meet the urgent need to strengthen civil society's technical and institutional capacities within the national capital and in regional/local areas. There is no budgetary allocation to facilitate dialogue with civil society actors or ensure that political processes are participatory and inclusive, as mandates may often call for. An UNAMA staff member noted that the degree to which the mission will engage with a variety of different civil society actors depends significantly on budget issues. As budgets and logistical equipment such as vehicles have decreased in the mission, the number of actors that the mission can engage with has also decreased. While OHCHR has some limited funding for capacity building of civil society actors on human rights issues, a lack of dedicated, reliable funding for logistics, refreshments, and other programmatic needs entailed in supporting civil society actors and strengthening their capacities poses a constraint to meaningful and sustained engagement. Quick impact project funds can sometimes be used to support short-term capacity development through leveraging civil society actors as implementing partners, but

this is not always feasible or desirable given project time-frames and the complexities involved in managing funds.²⁰

NEED FOR BETTER STAKEHOLDER AND GEOGRAPHICAL MAPPING MECHANISMS

In particular, where there is not a singular entry point, several civil society actors, who partner with peacekeeping missions, have noted that, in parallel to the mapping undertaken of how civil society is organized, it would be helpful for them to have a mapping of the UN system in country to understand how to navigate it and whom to contact for support or resources on any given issue. Along these lines, UNICEF and UNDP have produced guides for civil society on how to partner with them, which explain, among other things, their requirements and criteria for establishing a partnership and what types of support they offer. Such resources also help to manage expectations from the outset and can provide a type of "self-selection" mechanism, rather than having to externally identify and select partners.

²⁰ Lamptey (2007:25).



UN Photo/Blagoje Grujic



PILOT TOOLKIT

This report has provided ample illustration of the important role that civil society can play in conflict-affected settings for peacekeeping contexts. Engagement between peacekeeping missions and civil society is undoubtedly an important strategy to complement government-level political processes for strengthening the peace process. If peacekeeping missions view their engagement with civil society merely as instrumental to short-term sectoral goals, they will miss many opportunities to strengthen an important keystone of state-society relations. Peacekeepers consulted during this study repeatedly recognized the important stake they have in engaging with civil society actors to sustain and support the peace process long after the UN peacekeepers are gone. An important starting point for effective engagement with these actors requires that they

be viewed not merely as victims of conflict, but as actors that are an important complementary partner to their governments.

Based on feedback from extensive practitioner field and UN Headquarters interviews, and gaps identified in the survey findings, the report offers a simple pilot toolkit to help peacekeepers better identify and strategically map relevant civil society actors and their key roles during different phases of conflict; consider the critical factors that are likely to drive or impede civil society engagement; and highlight risks (if any) that may merit special consideration. The primary goal of this toolkit is to help mission staff shift from a decision-making environment where civil society engagement is largely ad hoc and based on personal relationships, towards one where the decision-making process and development of engagement strategies during different phases of conflict is more strategically in line with overall mandate objectives

The pilot toolkit does not aim to replace the invaluable contextual knowledge gained through local knowledge and networks built and nurtured by field staff, especially national staff. The toolkit also recognizes



THE PILOT TOOLKIT DOES NOT AIM TO REPLACE THE INVALUABLE CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE GAINED THROUGH LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND NETWORKS BUILT AND NURTURED BY FIELD STAFF, ESPECIALLY NATIONAL STAFF.

explicitly that the challenges of engaging inclusively and effectively with civil society in conflict-affected settings are by necessity context-specific. Strategies to improve mission engagement with civil society, as well as local communities in general, will always present trade-offs that need to be recognized and actively managed through prioritization and sequencing. Specifically, management of these trade-offs requires identifying the specific political, institutional, and/or organizational risks presented by a particular engagement strategy and selected modality, and working actively across mission components and with mission leadership to formulate strategies that can manage these risks in a nimble and flexible way and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

We focus specifically on the following questions that merit close strategic and

operational consideration in peacekeeping contexts:

WHO SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH?

The first question focuses on the **definition** of 'civil society', and the identification of actors on the ground that can legitimately claim to represent it. A tricky and complex task in any context, this becomes even more challenging in conflict-affected situations, where multiple actors compete for power and resources in an environment that is still chaotic and prone to violence. The report offers a pilot definition of 'civil society' in Section I to help us conceptually broaden our perspective on actors traditionally considered as part of civil society, to include a wider spectrum of informal actors, including marginalized groups, women's groups, youth, as well as those who may often be viewed as potential spoilers to peace processes.

WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

The second question revolves around the **rationale** for civil society's involvement in building an environment conducive to sustainable peace. While most peacekeepers fully subscribe

to the idea that civil society's contribution is important, their views of the 'why' differ within and between various mission components, at times sharply. This is an important question to consider, because the rationale for civil society engagement among peacekeepers directly influences the role that civil society is expected to play vis-à-vis the mission, as well as the timing of its engagement.

WHAT ROLE CAN THEY FULFIL IN OUR CONTEXT?

The third question looks at which **role** (or roles) are best played by civil society in a post-conflict setting. Civil society engagement is a broad umbrella term, encompassing a myriad of activities and functions. What is civil society's comparative advantage vis-à-vis other actors (such as the government or other donors)? Where should we include civil society and where, perhaps, should we not include them during different stages of the mission life cycle?

IN WHAT WAY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

Finally, there is the question of the **modality** of civil society engagement by UN

peacekeeping missions. Conflict-affected settings are fluid and volatile, and building a sustainable peace is a highly time-sensitive yet long-term endeavour. What is the best modality for UN missions to engage with civil society so that the roots of conflict are addressed, peace dynamics are fostered, and national and local capacities for peace are strengthened?

Admittedly, these questions are not easy – but they are not new, either. In various ways, they reflect the kind of issues and dilemmas that the peacekeeping and indeed the larger peacebuilding and development community has faced for decades when engaging with civil society in conflict-affected environments. Much has been learned already, although little has been collated into comprehensive guidance for peacekeeping missions. It is thus crucial to reflect and build on lessons emerging from UN missions'

experiences in engaging with civil society and local communities.

In order to contribute to enhancing understanding, our thinking must be organized around the four questions outlined above.

- 1. We must begin with a critical analysis of the concept of civil society (what we could call the '**who?**' and **why** question) – its boundaries, dilemmas of inclusion/exclusion, and cultural specificity.
- 2. We can then continue by focusing on the role(s) that have been carved out for civil society in this context (the '**for what roles?**' question).
- 3. Finally, we can aim to determine, at least to some extent, the question of modality ('**in what way?**'), based on our growing understanding of at least some of the dilemmas faced by the peacekeeping community in this regard.

KEY QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY AND MAP CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

- WHO SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH?
- WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?
- WHAT ROLE CAN THEY FULFIL IN OUR CONTEXT?
- IN WHAT WAY SHOULD WE ENGAGE WITH THEM?

1. WHO? IDENTIFYING AND MAPPING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

START WITH A BROAD AND INCLUSIVE NOTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY BEYOND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS.

Given regional and cultural variations, as well as civil society differences in each country, a broad notion of civil society is essential. This will avoid ignoring other groups and help to overcome the current preference to support mostly capital-based national NGOs. External support should partner with a broad range of CSOs, selected according to the civil society peacebuilding functions to be strengthened, and based on a solid, empirically grounded understanding of the CSO landscape, roles, capacities and potentials.

In all cases, it is important that UN missions operating in conflict-affected environments seek to answer the following questions before designing national and/or local capacity-building initiatives that promote peacebuilding during or in the aftermath of conflict:

- Who are the main civil society actors and groups at the national and/or local levels, depending on context?
 - What are their comparative advantages in contributing positively towards conditions conducive to sustainable peace in violent conflict and post-conflict contexts?
 - What is their level of representativeness and what is the scope of their constituency (broad or narrow)?
 - What is the impact of values and ideas, including political ideologies, religion and cultural beliefs, on their goals, purposes and policies?
 - What are the interests and incentives of these actors in society (and particularly politically-aligned civil society leaders – male and female), and how do they generate outcomes that may encourage or hinder peace?
 - How is their role or mission changing in light of the volatile social, political and economic context?
 - What is the interplay between formal institutions (e.g. rule of law, elections) and informal institutions (e.g. social, political and cultural norms or “rules of the game”) and how do they each play a role in shaping human interaction within these groups?
- What is their degree of alignment with the State and the political parties in Government?
 - How is their relationship with other stakeholders changing, and what is driving this shift?
 - What trends should be added to the list above that are particularly important for their work?
 - What are the new players, models of relationship or activity that these actors observing that could affect conditions conducive to peace and stability?
 - How is their organizational or community base changing in terms of structure, preferences or behaviour?
 - What do you feel might be fundamentally disruptive to their ability to achieve their outcomes?
 - If you could sum up all these thoughts into a central “strategic concern”, what would that be?

UNDERSTAND THE SCOPE, NATURE, AND INTERESTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

- **Structure and organizational form** – What is the internal composition? How large and

representative is civil society? Who are the key actors with influence? – (formal vs. informal association for collective action, membership vs. non-membership, community-based vs. NGO);

- **Legal status** – incorporated vs. non-incorporated, registered vs. unregistered;
- **Financial status** – What resources do they command? (self-supporting, membership supporting, locally/nationally financed vs. grant/international donor dependent);
- **Functional areas of interest/operation** – service delivery, monitoring, intermediation/facilitation, policy advocacy, peace research, human/civil rights and governance and watchdog functions;
- **Scope of operation** – grassroots, local/municipal, national, regional, or international;
- **Areas of work** – social, political, and/or environmental;
- **Character** – network, coalition, unitary organization or actor-based (women/youth/lawyers associations);
- **Environment** – What kind of political, socio-economic, cultural and legal environment does civil society exist in? How are

these factors enabling or disabling for civil society?

- **Religious status** – religious or secular;
- **Values** – What are the values that civil society practices and promotes? What impact does civil society have on pushing its agenda?

2. FOR WHAT ROLE(S)? DETERMINING WHAT CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES ARE MOST RELEVANT FROM A PEACEKEEPING PERSPECTIVE

Little guidance is available to peacekeepers on how to identify, select and engage with the wide spectrum of civil society actors in support of creating an environment conducive to sustainable peace. Mission staff need to undertake a rigorous and systematic analysis of civil society's potential, actors, interests, incentives, institutions, limitations and critical enabling factors for positive participation in addressing the root causes of conflict, protecting civilians, preventing violence, peaceful reconciliation within communities, and wider political processes at the

national and local levels, among others. The pilot toolkit below offers an analytical framework for peacekeepers, especially those in mission components with a community-oriented mandate, to use as part of their context and situational analysis in developing community engagement strategies with a specific focus on civil society engagement (see **Table 1: Civil Society Mapping and Risk Analysis Matrix** below).

3. IN WHAT WAY? DETERMINING WHAT MODALITIES OF ENGAGEMENT ARE MOST APPROPRIATE DURING A GIVEN CONFLICT/POST-CONFLICT PERIOD

Finally, we can aim to determine, at least to some extent, the question of modality ('in what way?'), based on our growing understanding of at least some of the dilemmas faced by the peacekeeping community in this regard. The toolkit also offers a spectrum of five main engagement modalities – inform, consult, involve, collaborate and/or empower – to help mission staff operationalize their analysis into actionable

outcomes with clear goals and expectations for civil society engagement (see **Table 2: Civil Society Engagement Spectrum for Peacekeeping Contexts**).

The main criterion to identify when, why, with whom, and in what way to engage is that the burden-of-proof must include mission-specific questions and actions likely to be particularly important in the immediate context unless otherwise demonstrated by field input. The major implications of this approach are two-fold:

- **Selectivity is a must** – Whether in the analysis of key roles or modalities, or developing the civil society engagement strategy for a given mission considering the multiplicity of urgent

needs, the limited initial capacity and the need to focus mission support where it can do the most good.

- **Sequencing is key** – Consistent with the need to reconcile immediate urgencies in supporting civil society to actively participate in peace processes with the medium and long-term approaches to promoting civil society engagement for longer-term peacebuilding, engagement activities and modalities must be chosen and advanced in a way that complements available resources and adheres to mandate priorities.

Finally, this toolkit explicitly recognizes that the challenges of engaging inclusively and

effectively with civil society in conflict-affected settings are by necessity context-specific. Strategies to improve mission engagement with civil society, as well as local communities in general, will always present trade-offs that need to be recognized and actively managed through prioritization and sequencing. Specifically, management of these trade-offs requires identifying the specific political, institutional, and/or organizational risks presented by a particular engagement strategy and selected modality, and working actively across mission components and with mission leadership to formulate strategies that can manage these risks in a nimble and flexible way, and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Table 1: Civil Society Mapping and Risk Analysis Matrix

KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER FOR EACH AREA OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT	To facilitate greater understanding of the mission mandate and engender a more positive acceptance of the mission among the local population.
	Serve as a neutral partner in peace negotiations.
	To support mission situation awareness and conflict analysis and planning processes
	To help protect civilians
	Monitoring/ early warning
	Advocacy – to enhance strategic communications and messaging to local populations
	Advocacy – to enhance strategic communications and messaging to local populations
	Social cohesion and reconciliation
	Service delivery when the state is unable/unwilling to provide services
	To help assess mission progress towards mandate implementation and associated benchmarks
LINK TO MANDATE	How do these activities contribute towards implementing the mission’s mandate? What impact (intended or unintended) may these activities have on the mission’s mandate and political space vis-à-vis the host government and other parties to the conflict?
PRIORITIZE KEY ACTIVITIES	Identify specific areas of participation, in order of priority, that can support the given activities. Which (if any) of these activities are already ongoing?
UNDERSTAND CONTEXT	Assess the relevance of each activity along the three phases of conflict (i.e. <i>during armed conflict, windows of opportunity for peace negotiations, and post-conflict period</i>). How do these activities interact in different phases? Which ones are mutually exclusive or competing?
MAP KEY ACTORS	Identify key civil society actors with a comparative advantage in undertaking these activities. Which of these actors are already undertaking these activities at present?
CROSS-CUTTING THEME – GENDER	How will these areas of participation address the gender dimensions of conflict? Do your selected civil society actors represent women from the local communities?
EVALUATE RISK	What are (if any) some of the potential risks in engaging with these civil society actors/activities at this time? How can civil society support programmes be designed to minimize possible risks and negative impacts?
SELECT OUTCOMES	What outcomes do you hope to achieve to help assess the effectiveness of these priority activities? What is your timeline?
MODALITIES OF ENGAGEMENT	Given your analysis, at what level is it appropriate at this time to engage with the selected civil society actors? (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower)

Table 2: Civil Society Engagement Spectrum for Peacekeeping Contexts

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PRIMARY GOALS	To provide civil society actors with balanced and objective information on ongoing mandated activities undertaken by peacekeepers to facilitate greater understanding of the mission mandate and engender a more positive acceptance of the mission among the local population.	To gather accurate information on the local context, perceptions, and expectations in support of the mission's situation and conflict analysis and planning processes; to obtain civil society feedback on analysis, activities, alternatives and/or decisions; and to assess mission progress towards mandate implementation and associated benchmarks.	To work directly with local communities through civil society as a locus of connectivity between the state and society throughout the peace process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered; and to enhance strategic communications and messaging.	To partner with civil society to help build national and local capacity for early warning, monitoring, protection of civilians (where relevant), connecting the state and local populations, and developing concrete and sustainable solutions for peace and reconciliation.	To create space for civil society actors to take the lead in representing local interests in peace negotiations and other peace activities.
SETTING EXPECTATIONS	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, and listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and will seek your feedback on peace agreement drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and will seek your feedback on peace agreement drafts and proposals.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into peace negotiations and the final peace agreement to the maximum extent possible.	We will help implement what you decide.

 **NONE OF US ON OUR OWN, GOVERNMENTS INCLUDED, HAVE ALL THE FACTS, BEST IDEAS, OR KNOW ALL THE REASONS UNDERLYING THE PROBLEMS WE ARE TRYING TO SOLVE. WE CAN ONLY BENEFIT FROM COLLECTIVE WISDOM. AND SO IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO HEAR FROM ALL CONSTITUENCIES, ESPECIALLY MARGINALIZED VOICES, BEFORE MAKING A DECISION.** 

– PROFESSOR SIR NIGEL RODLEY,
CHAIRPERSON, UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE,
OCTOBER 2014



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran



LESSONS LEARNED AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. MISSIONS NEED TO ENGAGE MORE SYSTEMATICALLY WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AT ALL LEVELS.

The mission mandate provides the best starting point for improving systematic engagement with civil society. By underlining the importance of engagement with local communities in the mandates of peacekeeping missions, the process of collective ownership among different components of the mission for engaging civil society actors representing these communities can be enhanced from the very beginning. This would also facilitate access to financial resources that are necessary to develop and sustain community engagement strategies that can help build the mission's relationship with civil society and support capacity building for civil society actors

operating in local communities to help build conditions conducive to sustainable peace and to participating more effectively in wider political processes. Lessons learned from previous engagements must be taken into account.



MISSIONS SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO ENSURE AN "INCLUSIVE-ENOUGH" PROCESS, WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT INCLUSIVENESS CAN NEVER BE EXHAUSTIVE AND THAT IT NOT ONLY CONCERNS ACTORS, BUT ALSO ISSUES.

2. MISSIONS NEED TO APPRECIATE THE IMPACT THAT CONFLICT HAD ON CIVIL SOCIETY.

Civil society merits unique consideration in conflict-affected contexts. Within any conflict-affected environment, civil society actors can mobilize to play a potentially powerful role either to escalate conflict or facilitate its peaceful resolution, depending on their interests and motivations. Indeed, civil society actors are not neutral bystanders in violent conflicts. They have the potential to be interlocutors and enforcers for peace or spoilers in fragile peace processes. Conflict also dramatically changes

the operating environment as well as severely constrains the political and legal space available for civil society.

Moreover, not all civil society actors have the same goals and interests in conflict-affected environments. Peacekeepers need to better understand their different motivations, goals and networks to better leverage and partner with them. Accordingly, civil society mapping efforts are important to be able to establish who can be leveraged as positive influences for peace, as well as who may be implicated as parties to conflict. Identifying and supporting the right mixture of civil society groups that are effective, enjoy public trust and have social capital across many identity groups in such contexts can be very challenging. There is a need for better analysis and mapping of civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts.

3. MISSIONS NEED TO ENGAGE WITH A BROADER SPECTRUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS.

Missions need to better understand the wide ecosystem of civil society actors that operate in conflict settings. Civil society encompasses more than just CSOs and NGOs; it extends

to include a wide spectrum of individual societal actors and informal societal networks stirred to collective action around common goals. Missions should make an effort to ensure an "inclusive-enough" process, while recognizing that inclusiveness can never be exhaustive and that it not only concerns actors, but also about issues. Peacekeeping missions can play a key role in building civil society's capacity to promote sustainable peace by supporting its manifold roles as negotiator, mediator and advocate.

For sustainable peace, it is essential to include all under-represented populations, such as people with disabilities and religious, ethnic, linguistic minorities, youth and women, as important civil society actors that must be informed, consulted with, and empowered. Exclusion of any of these key groups risks seriously hampering peace and security efforts. Indeed, youth and women tend to be heard only in relation to a narrow selection of issues, such as implementation of gender or livelihood projects. As vital segments of society (often comprising the majority in post-conflict countries), youth and women should be included in the analysis, design and consultation phases of all peace processes.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SHOULD BE CONTINUOUS AND SYSTEMATIC RATHER THAN AD HOC AND SPORADIC.

Often, community members are consulted once only and do not hear how their input is used, making them reluctant to participate in future consultations and leading to dialogue fatigue as they answer the same context-driven questions from different international stakeholders without much feedback on how the engagement process can benefit their key constituents most affected by the conflict – i.e. the local communities. Even when community engagement is conducted, the voices of people who are not linked to any institution are not always reflected.

It is a lesson learned time and again that UN peacekeeping strategies that do not reflect and address the concerns of community members are not sustainable in the long term. Effective information feedback loops in conjunction with active consultations are critical. Local civil society also has an important monitoring and accountability role that is not always put to use. Local civil society has first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground and

can contribute to early warning systems. It can also monitor the impact of peacebuilding activities throughout project cycles once the United Nations leaves. Access to rural areas, although it can be difficult, is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all voices.

5. MISSIONS REQUIRE OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE TO BETTER MAP AND UNDERSTAND THE VALUE, ROLES AND RISKS INVOLVED IN ENGAGING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY.

An institutional approach is necessary to inform the development of improved engagement with civil society. Given that the study found that engagement between peacekeeping missions and civil society has largely been driven by personality and the individual commitment of peacekeeping personnel, more institutionalized policy guidelines are necessary in order to maximize civil society's potential and establish community engagement strategies that involve civil society participation and capacity building within the larger mission planning context and on a sustainable footing. This effort requires that a structured mechanism be established to facilitate dialogue and communication between civil society and

the leadership of peacekeeping missions on a systematic basis.

6. MISSIONS SHOULD INVEST IN BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE PEACE PROCESS.

The approach to improving engagement with civil society requires that missions consider capacity-building investments to enhance the functioning of civil society as a critical pillar to support peace processes. This requires a shift in policy emphasis to underline capacity-building as an important complement to the technical and logistical assistance that has largely defined the scope of engagement between peacekeeping missions and civil society to date. Capacity building of civil society should enable it to undertake its unique roles in conflict situations more effectively, including improving key functions such as protection of civilians, early warning, monitoring and information-sharing, and facilitating public participation in wider peace processes. Missions should also support the networking, coordination and sharing of experiences, good practices and lessons learned between civil society actors.

7. PEACEKEEPERS SHOULD WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN MISSIONS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

The frequency and modality through which mission leadership identifies and engages with civil society are highly variable across missions and contexts. Civil society actors are well-placed to facilitate outreach by peacekeeping missions to the wider population. Civil society representatives are not innocent bystanders, but rather, actors who have affected or have been affected by the conflict. Civil society actors with the capacity to mobilize local populations can serve as conduits for informing and educating the population on the mandate of peacekeeping missions and to facilitate confidence-building with the local population. Peacekeepers need to adopt a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society, which recognizes their influence within their communities – whether positive or not. This engagement approach requires the recognition of the capacity of civil society to serve as partners, capable of providing essential information to peacekeepers based on their knowledge of

the operational environment. This approach should also enable peacekeepers to recognize any political divisions within or among different civil society actors as a result of the conflict, which could work to undermine the peace process.

8. MISSIONS SHOULD ENCOURAGE MORE CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS, BOTH AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS.

Significant feedback was received from UN partners as well as civil society actors that peacekeeping missions should make greater efforts to encourage constructive dialogue between civil society actors and the government, and that this is a key area where peacekeeping missions have a comparative advantage to support more positive state-society relations.

9. THE UNITED NATIONS NEED TO ENGAGE COMMUNITIES MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY.

Engaging with communities is not only an opportunity for the United Nations to learn about their security needs, but also to explain in practical terms what the United Nations can

and cannot do. Issues raised by local civil society actors that might be critical of government should not be ignored by the United Nations, but rather be acknowledged and addressed.

10. MISSIONS NEED TO DEVELOP SUITABLE TOOLS BASED ON MORE RIGOROUS CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY AND MAP CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS.

Conflict analysis informed by local voices is necessary before, during, and after UN peace operations to understand the context, comprehensively address the challenges, and ensure that there is lasting impact and 'Do No Harm'. The report found that this kind of continuous context-specific conflict analysis is rarely carried out, and even then, local civil society perspectives are rarely incorporated. Civil society engagement often occurs in a strategic analysis vacuum, is not well connected across components and does not necessarily always feed upwards to contribute towards overall conflict analysis and decision-making processes.

There is a need to better understand the wide ecosystem of civil society actors that

operate in conflict settings. Not all civil society actors have the same goals and interests in conflict-affected environments. Peacekeepers need to better understand their different motivations, goals and networks to better leverage and partner with them. Analysis should be carried out in active partnership with all

relevant mission components and donor partners with a civil society engagement role in conflict settings, and with a focus on the quality of the process as well as the product. This could be incorporated into social analysis, conflict analysis, or other socio-political analyses. At a minimum, it was noted

that there is a need to have a mission roadmap or strategy for engagement with civil society at national and sub-national levels that aligns with mandated priorities and to ensure more strategic and focused engagement. The pilot toolkit offered in this report is one step in addressing this gap in policy.





RESOURCES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAR	After-action review
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
BINUB	United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi
CBO	Community-based organization
CENI	National independent electoral commission
CLA	Community liaison assistant
CNDP	National Congress for the Defense of People
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSI	Civil Society Index
CSO	Civil society organization
CVR	Community violence reduction
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EoAR	End of assignment report
EU	European Union
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
FPU	Formed Police Unit
HIPPO	High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
IAP	Integrated assessment and planning
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person

IGO	Intergovernmental organization
IRCL-RfP	Inter-Religious Council of Liberia — Religions for Peace
JMAC	Joint Mission Analysis Cell
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MINUSCA	United Nations Organization Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	United Nations Organization Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MONUC	United Nations Organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
O/DSRSG	Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
PBPS	Policy and Best Practice Service
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPLA	Sudan's People Liberation Army
SRRA	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SSR	Security sector reform
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMID	African Union — United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

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The Policy and Best Practices Service (PBPS) is an integrated resource that provides services to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, Operations led by DPKO and Member States. The function of PBPS is to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations through the exchange of good practices between missions, the development of policy and guidance material that reflects lessons learned and thematic policy support in selected areas (HIV/AIDS, Civil Affairs, Protection of Civilians, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Child Protection). PBPS also coordinates the network of Best Practices Officers in the field and the Knowledge Sharing Toolbox.

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