UN SUPPORT TO LOCAL MEDIATION:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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DPPA
Preventing Conflict. Sustaining Peace

MEDIATION SUPPORT UNIT
POLICY & MEDIATION DIVISION

"War is increasingly becoming more complex – and so is mediating peace." [1]

In his call for a surge in diplomacy for peace, made as he assumed office, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the changing nature of conflict and stressed the need for mediation practice to adjust accordingly.

Many of today's internal conflicts feature a deadly mix of fragmented actors and political interests, with strong interconnections across the regional, national and local levels. Within and beyond the United Nations, there is clear recognition that mediation has to move beyond political and military elites and more effectively include efforts at the local level to help build peace from the ground up.

As a direct response to the Secretary-General's call, over the past two years, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' Mediation Support Unit conducted a number of field deployments, reflection exercises and case studies on local mediation efforts. This publication summarizes early insights emerging from this line of work. It discusses some of the opportunities and challenges presented by the United Nation's engagement at the local level and its strategic relevance to the Organization's peacemaking efforts.

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[1] António Guterres, UN Secretary-General. Remarks to the Security Council Open Debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace. 10 January 2017.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Central African Republic
CVR	Community Violence Reduction
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JBCC	Joint Border Peace Committee/Court
JMC	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee
LPI	Local Peace Initiative
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR
MSU	Mediation Support Unit
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PRO	Peace and Reconciliation Office
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication summarizes insights from a series of activities organized by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' (DPPA) Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in response to the Secretary-General's call for a surge in diplomacy for peace and the priority he has set for the UN to increase its efforts to address conflicts at the local level. Over the past two years (2018-2020), MSU conducted a number of field deployments, reflection exercises including in-person workshops at UN Headquarters, and case studies. These sought to:

- **Deepen understanding of the UN's engagement at the local level** and its strategic relevance to the UN's peacemaking efforts;
- **Deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for pursuing linkages** between national and local mediation and dialogue processes;
- **Develop possible options for interlinking national and local political engagement** for conflict prevention and sustainable peace; as well as
- **Distil specific lessons from engagements** with traditional peacemaking approaches as well as on the inclusion of women in mediation efforts at the local level.

Based on this work a series of early reflections emerged, indicating the need to:

- **Identify and leverage the UN's comparative advantages:** Across different contexts, based on the type of presence, the UN can provide critical logistical, capacity-building, technical and good offices support to local level mediation initiatives. In many settings, the Organization has field presence as well as access to the highest circles of national and international decision-making. Its involvement can thus help solidify links between processes at different levels, bringing coherence to a multiplicity of concurrent mediation efforts. At the same time, it is critical that the UN weigh the potential risks of getting involved more actively. Sometimes, the best the Organization may do is to take a step back.

- **Enhance coordination across various levels of engagement:** Addressing local conflicts effectively requires an integrated approach both within the UN and between partners. Within the UN, there is a need to further elevate the understanding of local mediation across different entities in order to ensure buy-in and a more joined-up approach. Externally, while collaborating with partners, there is a need to identify roles and potential synergies with a view to strengthen overall engagement in support of lead mediators and their strategies.

- **Support national and local capacities and expertise to engage with local level conflicts**: Successful mediation requires specific skills, experience and a holistic understanding of the conflict system in question. The most significant resources for conflict resolution are the know-how and skills in the countries the UN is mandated to support. Building on, enabling and supporting the enhancement of national and local conflict resolution efforts, actors, and processes is thus a priority.

- **Strengthen knowledge development**: There are plenty, often undocumented, experiences of mediation efforts at the local level. Institutional learning and development of practice could help to further unpack and better understand some of the most critical topical areas around local mediation processes, often related to traditional peacemaking; the engagement and inclusion of women, youth or other often marginalized groups; the management of natural resources; and, on the design front, the identification, development and maintenance of linkages across different tracks of engagement.

- **Seek conceptual and analytical clarity**: At present, there are no agreed definitions in the UN system of what makes a mediation process distinctively local. Seeking further conceptual clarity to foster a common understanding of local mediation processes across the UN seems essential. There is also a need to develop a set of considerations or criteria that can help UN actors better assess the nature, risks and political significance of local mediation processes, as well as the prospects of pursing linkages with high-level mediation efforts as part of broader peace process design deliberations.

- **Develop a common vision**: There is strong recognition that UN conflict prevention and resolution strategies need to be comprehensive and inclusive in order to effectively contribute to an end in violent conflict and sustainable peace. Doing so requires process design that incorporates various levels and timelines, a flexible allocation of resources, and, where appropriate, the inclusion of engagement at the local level in mission mandates. This recognition challenges the UN to develop a stronger vision around its overall strategic role and approach to local conflicts.

Going forward, in close consultation with its partners, MSU will seek to:

- **Increase the collection and analysis of experiences of UN involvement at the local level**, and develop mediation practice therein;
- **Foster new partnerships and experts' networks** within the UN and beyond;
- **Continue to raise awareness** within the UN system and among Member States of the necessity to approach mediation in a more comprehensive manner;
- **Dig deeper into the key issue areas and design questions that appear most pertinent** when devising strategies to effectively address the multi-layered dynamics of today's armed conflicts; and
- **Provide targeted support to local level engagements** as deemed politically significant, relevant and feasible.

In an effort to share learnings and insights generated thus far, this publication includes (i) a series of reflections on local mediation, based on past activities and emerging insights; as well as (ii) the abbreviated versions of five dedicated case studies, featuring local mediation efforts in Afghanistan, CAR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and South Sudan.

UN SUPPORT TO LOCAL MEDIATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Introduction

Over the past two years (2018-2020) MSU has increased its engagement in local mediation initiatives, responding to the Secretary-General's call for a surge in diplomacy for peace,[2] and the priority he set for the UN to increase its capacities to more effectively address local conflicts. MSU activities include a series of reflection and learning workshops; the development of **dedicated case studies on Afghanistan, CAR, Myanmar, the Philippines as well as South Sudan**; as well as direct technical support to UN and non-UN partners to help address local conflicts or establish linkages with national level mediation or dialogue processes. This reflection piece summarizes emerging insights and recommendations in an effort to help further enrich and strengthen UN mediation practice.[3]

2. Background

Interest in local mediation has surged in response to **shifts in the global conflict landscape**. These include the growing regionalization and internationalization of conflict – evidenced by the emergence of regional conflict complexes such as the wars in Yemen and Syria; the rise in violent extremist groups; increasing violations of international standards of humanitarian and human rights law; as well as the multiplication and fragmentation of conflict actors and agendas.

Traditional, **high-level negotiation processes have struggled to adjust** to these global shifts, experiencing serious setbacks in their efforts to forge a negotiated agreement between conflicting parties. Within and beyond the UN, there is increasing recognition that **comprehensive, multi-layered mediation strategies are an essential precondition** to end violent conflict in an effective and sustainable manner. Local mediation is also sometimes seen as an entry point when high level negotiations have become deadlocked. As such, focusing on local mediation represents a logical step in efforts to reduce violence, protect civilians and enhance local if not nationwide stability.

With this in mind, MSU has been piloting an engagement strategy which aims to enhance the UN's abilities to enable the resolution of local conflicts in a way that is **strategic, collaborative, creative, inclusive and sustainable**. MSU's efforts in support of local mediation aim to:

- Strengthen the UN's ability to **effectively engage** with local mediation efforts both as a means to help resolve local level conflict as well as to strengthen formal mediation processes at the national level;
- Help improve **strategic coherence** of UN engagement at various levels, including by exploring the development of mission-wide strategies for linking local mediation efforts and national political strategies;
- Strengthen **UN staff awareness**, **understanding, and capacity** to effectively engage in sensitive local mediation processes;

- Make the UN's efforts at the local level **more visible in UN Headquarters**, among senior leadership and Member States; as well as
- **Capture knowledge** on challenges and opportunities around the UN's increased engagement in mediation efforts at the local level and **provide opportunities for exchange and learning**.

3. Conceptual Considerations

At present, there are no agreed definitions of local mediation across the UN system, which is indicative of the **need for more conceptual clarity and common understanding**. In considering what makes a process distinctively local, as opposed to national, the following dimensions may be considered:[4]

- The identity of actors and conflict parties (i.e. including local politicians, power brokers and communities);
- The nature of agendas (i.e. focusing primarily on local conflict issues);
- The identity of mediators (i.e. local mediators);
- The level of engagement (i.e. subnational or local level).

The level of **political significance** is another crucial element to consider in analysing and understanding local conflicts, for instance around:

- Their potential to be instrumentalized by political actors;
- Their distinct nature, and scope of reflecting national or regional level conflict dynamics;
- Their links to national or regional level conflicts and mediation processes;
- The scope and levels of violence they entail, and their potential to assist generating conditions for national processes to thrive if addressed effectively.

4. Local Mediation in Practice

In an effort to deepen its understanding of local conflicts, MSU developed a set of case studies intended to illustrate local mediation processes. The highlighted efforts addressed, among others, a land conflict between two communities in Surobi district in Afghanistan; a religious conflict in Bangassou in CAR; local level support to the implementation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar; a conflict between herders and farmers in South Sudan; as well as a tribal conflict in the Cordillera region of the Philippines.[5]

These cases are **intentionally diverse in terms of contexts, issues, parties, and mediation actors**, illustrating the difficulty of making generalizations.[6] In assessing the central characteristics and learnings of each case, several key questions emerge which should be considered when analysing opportunities and constraints for local mediation. These include:

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[4] Not all dimensions need to apply. Several combinations are possible depending on the nature of the process and context (e.g. the UN can be involved in local level mediation, even if not considered a mediator).

[5] Where appropriate, there are some in-text references to insights emanating from these case studies. Abbreviated versions of all case studies can be found in the annex of this paper.

[6] With a view to distil learnings applicable to the UN system, the majority of cases feature local mediation processes that have been supported by the Organization to differing degrees.

- **Why** should a mediation be considered? What are the objectives of such efforts and how can their effectiveness be measured?
- **When and where** should local mediation occur?
- **Who** are the appropriate mediators?
- **How** should the mediation be conducted? What ought to be its guiding principles?

4.1 Why: Linking Objectives and Impact Assessment

Involvement in local mediation may be motivated by a number of **moral, humanitarian and political objectives**. Intervention may, for instance, be driven by the need to reduce violent conflict in the short term and the potential to save lives by way of mediating, strengthening or assisting the implementation of ceasefire agreements. Beyond the moral imperative to reduce civilian suffering and save lives in the short term, the nature of contemporary conflicts – many of which experience high levels of fragmentation – suggests that **involvement in local processes may be a critical precondition to ensure the sustainability of efforts at the national level** in the longer term. Indeed, national processes cannot have the envisioned impact without ensuring that lower levels of conflict are comprehensively addressed.

Moreover, even when national political processes are deadlocked, **local processes may offer opportunities to reduce violence and create pockets of stability**. In other words, attending to local conflicts can generate a virtuous cycle which strengthens efforts at the national level; it can also prevent local conflicts from spilling over and spoiling national efforts. Part of the goal of getting involved can also be the creation of local infrastructures for peace. In the inter-communal land conflict in Surobi, Afghanistan, for instance, the key objective of intervention was empowerment and the creation of mechanisms that could address similar conflicts in the future.

Next to a moral and humanitarian impetus, financial and human resource constraints underscore the need to strategically think about prioritization of engagements. Identifying a **set of criteria that could help the UN assess and prioritize interventions** may be helpful to guide strategic decision-making. These criteria could, for instance, include:

- The nature of the conflict and its dynamics across different levels;
- The nature of the mediation mandate;
- A careful weighing of risks and opportunities;
- The nature of the UN presence on the ground and its relationships;
- Considerations of supply, demand and availability of resources;
- The comparative advantage of involvement; as well as
- The likely sustainability of the outcome.

Considerations of engagement should be linked to a proper **assessment of the anticipated impact**. In doing so, however, a number of difficulties have to be addressed, including the intangibility of 'success'; complications in the collection, tracking and processing of data (often compounded by high staff turnover, insufficient human resources, and the time intensive nature of mediation processes); as well as the difficulty of tracing the impact of local-level conflict resolution on broader national-level dynamics.

Strengthening efforts to conduct **joint conflict analysis and process monitoring** across the range of UN actors involved in a given conflict setting is paramount. A specific **analytical focus on linkages** across different levels of conflicts is needed in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of conflict systems and strategic options for engagement.

4.2 Where and When: Scoping Parameters that Affect Opportunities for Local Mediation

When assessing the broad parameters that affect opportunities for UN support to local mediation processes, three main elements seem to emerge as critical: the nature of (and linkages between) conflicts; the nature of the state; and the nature of the UN presence in country.

With regard to the nature of conflict, opportunities for local mediation may not be the same if the conflict is intercommunal or a centre-periphery struggle. Further, if local level conflict is emblematic of national level contestation, and if it is regularly instrumentalized by political actors, there may be more opportunities for local mediation than otherwise – as illustrated by the case study on land conflict in Surobi, Afghanistan, in which two tribes are pitted against one another; or the case study on conflict over cattle migration routes that span across several states in South Sudan.

Conflict ripeness and a minimal predisposition favourable to conflict resolution are additional critical considerations. UN missions often deal with protracted conflicts. **It is therefore important for engagement to come at the right time to push a process in the right direction**. When conflicts have gone on for a long time, this may induce 'conflict fatigue' which in turn may provide an opportunity for mediation. In the CAR case study, the success of the religious platform's mediation in Bangassou was partly because "people felt it was time to sit and discuss". Moreover, local mediation may be opportune in response to an urgent need, specifically in cases of security flare-ups, as well as in instances where the national level is paralyzed or deadlocked.

Next to the specifics of the conflict as such, the **nature of the state** seems to be an important variable when assessing opportunities for local mediation – depending on whether it is failing or failed, functioning but weak, or functioning and authoritarian. Where neither failed nor captured, as described in the Philippines case study, it is essential to acknowledge its presence in any local mediation effort. However, in situations where the national level is highly politicized, lower level engagement may allow for discussions around development or intercommunal/interpersonal conflicts to be conducted more easily.

The **nature of UN presence in country** may also affect opportunities for local mediation. In general, the UN's role, mandate and presence on the ground seem to matter - a multidimensional Peacekeeping Operation or Special Political Mission is quite different in nature and capacity from a primarily humanitarian or development-focused UN presence. The **UN's overall reputation amongst the broader populace as well as conflict parties** seems equally important, opening up or closing down opportunities to engage in local mediation processes. Moreover, where the UN works in support of the Government, its legitimacy may be dented by association if the national-level political actors are not perceived as representative.

4.3 Who: Identifying Appropriate Mediators

When seeking to **identity appropriate mediators in local mediation processes**, local government representatives, youth, women's groups, NGOs and traditional or religious authorities may offer potential entry points. The example of the CAR case study highlights the importance of identifying persons who have relationships with communities across conflict lines. In Bangassou, the connections that women traders and religious leaders had to and across communities proved extremely important.

Overall, wherever possible, **local actors ought to be the mediators. The UN, if considered plausible and of strategic value, can play a vital support and backstopping role**. A careful weighing of comparative advantages and the potential risks involved should guide considerations around the nature of UN engagement in support of local processes. In some instances, UN involvement might overwhelm or be detrimental to local processes, for instance by drawing unwanted attention, raising expectations or impeding the flexibility of approaches. Consequently, it may be best for the UN to take a step back and help identify other actors who are better placed to effectively engage with local mediation processes.

Recognizing that local actors may sometimes have the legitimacy but lack mediation expertise, limitations could be turned into opportunities. In South Sudan, for instance, UNMISS trained local actors to prepare them to participate in a mediation process. In so doing, not only did the mission support the mediation process as such, it also built skills that local actors would be able to use in future should the need arise. This experience echoed UNAMA's approach to involvement in LPIs where the mission relied heavily on national staff to build local capacity in a sustainable way.

A distinction may be drawn between UN mission and non-mission settings. In some contexts, as in CAR or South Sudan, the presence of a large Peacekeeping Operation and the proliferation of local conflicts create a context in which the UN is sometimes identified as the mediator by default. However, even as local actors and communities turn to the UN, field offices may be constrained in their ability to engage in these processes, as limited human resources and broad mandates can create significant time and resource constraints. In other contexts, as in the Philippines or Myanmar, community actors, NGOs and even academics tend to conduct local processes. In Myanmar, for instance, local actors are already fully engaged in different processes, and the UN can, at best, provide innovative forms of support. From a UN perspective, this underlines the need to identify actors working in the same space and to ask questions about the **comparative advantage that UN involvement in local mediation could bring**.

While there seems to be general agreement across the mediation field on the value of privileging local mediators and working with existing institutions, a question mark remains as to **what the UN should do when existing mechanisms are part of the problem**, for instance, reinforcing or perpetuating harmful local practices that violate fundamental human rights or present significant obstacles to effective local level conflict resolution.

4.4 How: Process Design Considerations

In thinking about process design two broad subsets of reflections may be considered: reflections regarding desired outcomes; and reflections regarding procedural decisions likely to increase the chances that these outcomes will be achieved. In terms of desired outcomes, local mediation processes may serve to further promote inclusion; bring the state closer to the people; and enhance the sustainability of conflict resolution engagements.

In striving for inclusion, the Afghanistan case illustrates the way a LPI can empower local mediators and strengthen local conflict resolution mechanisms. Here, the Surobi Working Group, which supports the conflict resolution efforts of the Governor, has functioned as a traditional Shura, providing arbitration and negotiating compensation between the villages of Chenar and Hussein Kheil. The Surobi case also illustrates the manner in which a local mediation process can provide opportunities for the inclusion of marginalized groups, in this instance, women.

The Afghanistan case study highlights in particular the importance of the **strategic use of language**. Initially, the women's group was called a "sisters" group – a term that made it more acceptable as it built on the traditional role of women as go-betweens in family conflicts. The women provided a back door for UNAMA, relaying the opinions and perceptions of armed groups and tribal elders who initially did not want to engage with the mission. Inclusion, moreover, does not only require reflections on whom to include but also how. The process of including women in the Surobi initiative meant letting them "set the pace and mark the road". This also prompted UNAMA to have UN Afghan women staff manage the process, which countered the notion of pushing an international or Western agenda.

Leveraging the normative commitments that countries may have made may be another strategy to enhance inclusion at the local level, as illustrated in the Philippine case study. Here, the Women, Peace and Security agenda was used to open space for women in the Kalinga Bodong Council process. Similarly, local norms can prove useful. In the Philippines, the fact that Bodongs (peace pacts between tribes) are inherited meant that, although the Kalinga Bodong Council is traditionally male-dominated, peace pact holders who did not have sons passed the role to their daughters, thus creating space for inclusion.

With regard to the relationship to national authorities, case studies underlined the **need to protect processes from harmful interference while taking available opportunities to engage with national authorities** and, in the process, bring the state closer to the people. In South Sudan, for instance, UNMISS field staff, were supporting the establishment of a new border committee to address conflict between herders and farmers, and strategically included the Government in their efforts to address cattle conflicts. As a result, while the mediation effort was led by communities, it was endorsed by Governors. Similarly, in CAR, the local mediation effort resulted in the establishment of a local Follow-up Committee which included a civil administrator among its members. This facilitated communication with the national Government in Bangui during the implementation of the deal, and thus helped restore state authority in Bangassou.

With a view to enhance the sustainability of local mediation processes, ensuring **local ownership** seems essential. In doing so, however, the phenomenon of "dealing with the usual suspects" has to be accounted for, as the UN risks dealing too much with western-educated elites who may not be the right interlocutors from a sustainability perspective. **Institution-building** emerged as another important dimension of sustainability across cases. Whether it be the establishment of a women's Shura in Surobi district in Afghanistan, a border monitoring committee to oversee cattle migration between Bahr el-Ghazal and Equatoria regions in South Sudan, or the creation of the Kalinga Bodong Council in the Philippines, processes that result in the building of **locally-owned legitimate institutions** seemed to have a greater chance of enduring. Related to the issue of institution-building, the need to **identify and build upon pre-existing mechanisms** also emerged as a critical factor. In the Philippines, the Kalinga Bodong Council built upon a long tradition of inter-tribe mediation; in Afghanistan, the Surobi process borrowed from the mechanisms of traditional Shura councils.

5. Linking Different Tracks of Engagement

Just as conflicts vary in type, level, intensity or duration, so **interlinkages between conflicts vary** as well. Some local conflicts are triggered by local issues with little or no connection to broader national dynamics. Others are either instrumentalized by national politicians or reflect broader national dynamics. But local instability can also have its own ripple effects, as illustrated in the CAR case study where conflict in Bangassou, the capital of Mbomou province, heightened tensions between Muslim and Christian communities in the national capital, Bangui.

Conversely, local processes can improve local stability while having little or no impact on national-level dynamics. For instance, the LPI in Surobi district did not involve negotiations between representatives of the Taliban and the Government. This does not, however, mean that there are no linkages at all. While a national-level political deal may consider dynamics in Kabul and other major centres, such a deal will have to be implemented in the entire country. Thus, **local level processes could be seen as preparing the ground for the implementation of a national deal**, lessening the risk that local instability could be instrumentalized by would-be spoilers.

Local level processes can also provide an **opportunity for local-national linkages**. In South Sudan, where Government officials have little contact with citizens, a conference organized to discuss the management of conflict around cattle migration gave the authorities an opportunity to forge relationships with their constituents. In so doing, the local mediation process contributed to interrupting a negative linkage between the national conflict and local violence: many youth have been mobilized from cattle camps to fight in the ranks of armed troops loyal to either Salva Kiir or Riek Machar; when a fighting round ends, the same youth usually take their weapons along as they return home, increasing the risk of militarization of local conflicts.

Another set of reflections revolves around **linkages within the UN system**. Inter and intra-UN linkages are essential to understand how local mediation efforts fit in the broader mandate of a mission or the work of UN agencies in a country. Synergies and complementarity of efforts are only possible where internal collaboration and information exchange between the different components of the UN system are actively fostered and practiced. For example, in a UN Peacekeeping Operation, **awareness of senior political leadership of the work being conducted in the field**, particularly under the aegis of the Civil Affairs section, seems critical to incorporate considerations about local conflict issues into high-level political processes. Conversely, **heads of field offices may not always have sufficient information on national level dynamics**, which can limit prospects and opportunities to link up engagements where appropriate.

Another opportunity that needs to be leveraged is **tying local mediation processes more explicitly into the UN Sustainable Development Goals** in an effort to ensure coherence and sustainability of efforts. This seems particularly relevant in transition contexts, where UN peace operations are phasing out and there is a need to ensure a smooth handover of implementation to the relevant UNCT.

Lastly, **linking efforts with partners** is critical. This includes partnerships with governments, donors, civil society actors, and other relevant stakeholders. The multiplicity of actors potentially involved in local mediation processes underscores the need for **a careful calibration of roles and a clear division of labour amongst mediation actors**, such as international and local NGOs or community, religious and tribal mediators. **In some settings, the UN might best serve local processes by withdrawing, and creating space for other actors to provide effective assistance**. Such organizational self-awareness is of course applicable to all involved in mediation endeavours.

6. What Role for the UN in Mediation at the Local Level?

Across different contexts and cases, the **UN acts as a convener, facilitator and trusted third party**. In the Afghanistan case study, UNAMA's role could be described as a "connector" or, more prosaically, a "mobile charger" with reference to the persistence of the mission staff to see through the local mediation process in Surobi. Parties reported that this determination was critical in their own decision to remain in the process in spite of obstacles.

As with UN involvement in national-level mediation, the Organization's **logistical ability** is significant in terms of the support provided to processes. The UN's role in facilitating transportation is highlighted by the South Sudan and CAR case studies. Other types of involvement include the **provision of support, advice and training**. UNAMA provided support to the mechanisms of traditional Pashtun mediation but it also provided advice on mediation, and training. Besides training, UNMISS mission staff played a role as catalyst by creating the conditions that allowed stakeholders to come together to discuss issues. The UN can also **amplify the impact of local mediation processes**. For instance, UNAMA's role in funding local radio programs allowed it to influence messaging about the Surobi LPI, thereby building constituencies in favour of the process in neighbouring valleys.

The UN's involvement at the local level carries a number of advantages. Because the Organization has field presence as well as ability to access and influence the highest circles of national and international decision-making, its involvement can **help solidify links between processes at different levels**, bringing coherence to a multiplicity of concurrent mediation efforts. In CAR, MINUSCA's representation on the Bangassou Follow-up Committee played such a role and helped with the implementation of national-level deals. MINUSCA was also able to conduct advocacy with donors to support local mediation efforts.

Another important asset is the UN's **technical expertise** in local processes. This is evident in the role that the UN played in Myanmar in support of the monitoring body of the ceasefire agreement between the Government and the Ethnic Armed Organizations, as well as, in South Sudan, the role UNMISS played in helping participants in the livelihoods conferences draw cattle migration routes, or the role that UNDP plays in implementing community violence reduction programs in CAR.

Some of these advantages can be a **double-edged sword**, however, notably in the case of resources. The ability of the UN to offer peace dividends can provide parties with incentives to engage, translating into greater leverage for the Organization. Yet too many resources may detract from the role of facilitator and turn the UN into a "project manager". **The expectation that the UN will bring resources to the table can backfire** when the provision of these resources becomes a pre-condition for participation in mediation processes, as has historically been the case in CAR.

UN rules and regulations can also serve as a constraint. One illustration of this was provided by the UNAMA case study: in Afghanistan's conservative society, tradition requires that women always be accompanied in public by men, particularly when they have to travel. However, even as UNAMA was working on creating space for women's inclusion in the Surobi process, rules preventing the mission from paying the expenses of male accompaniment threatened to undermine the its efforts. **The size of the UN's presence** in a given country can also be a disadvantage; it may, for instance, lengthen the chain of command and complicate procedures required before action can be approved.

7. Insights and Recommendations

Reflecting on UN support to local mediation process, there should always be **caution in making generalizations, as processes and types of UN involvement differ widely across different settings**. Still, some early insights and reflections may be considered when analysing, designing, supporting, implementing and/or monitoring local mediation processes:

- **Do no harm**: The cases considered illustrate the importance of the do no harm principle when assessing whether to engage in local mediation or not. It is critical that the UN evaluate its comparative advantage in a given conflict setting, and carefully weigh the potential risks of getting involved more actively. Sometimes, the best the Organization may do is to take a step back.
- **Local ownership**: Local ownership not only promotes the credibility of efforts and the responsibility of stakeholders for the process, but also increases the chances of achieving sustainable outcomes. Actors who are well connected across the conflict spectrum, grounded at the local level, and respected and trusted by conflict parties, will be best placed to facilitate local mediation processes.

- **Build on what already exists**: Another important consideration is to identify and try to build on what already exists in society, using and reinforcing existing structures and mechanisms; seeking acceptance and buy-in; respecting a locally determined peace; as well as taking decisions jointly throughout.
- **Support inclusive approaches**: Pushing for the inclusion of marginalized groups is paramount for effective and sustainable peacemaking. Youth, women, indigenous groups, victims, or other stakeholders are major actors of change that have to be meaningfully included in local decision-making and mediation processes.
- **Linkages**: To better understand and foster linkages across different levels of engagement, effective collaboration, including information sharing, between the field level and senior leadership is essential. Engaging relevant Government structures, local level stakeholders and mediation actors with access to various levels and processes, is also important. In combination, this may strengthen the UN's capacity to identify entry points that allow for linkages between local and national issues, or synergies with national priorities, and to carefully calibrate its own level of engagement.
- **The UN's role**: In local settings, the UN's footprint should be as light and complementary as possible. The Organization can play various roles to assist local processes, providing, for instance, financial, logistical or technical support, as well as potential political engagement. For the UN to effectively lead from behind, benefiting from the expertise of national staff is critical. Considering exit strategies, situated in the development of local capacities for mediation, is another important element to consider.
- **Partnerships**: While roles and responsibilities have to be clearly delineated among UN entities, strategic partnerships with external actors should be pursued in support of local mediation processes; this seems particularly true for settings where such actors may have comparative advantages in working at the local level, and more active UN involvement could become detrimental to their efforts.
- **Conflict analysis**: To enhance preparedness, cultivate entry points for support, and determine if UN engagement is warranted, joint conflict analysis, ideally conducted in field settings and specifically focused on linkages of conflicts and mediation processes, is of critical importance.
- **Measuring impact**: Indicators and measures of success of local processes do likely differ from what one would expect at the national level. The case studies illustrate the need to develop a refined monitoring and evaluation framework to better assess the impact of local processes and their aggregate impact on overall peace and conflict dynamics, including at the national level.
- **A principled approach**: Reflecting on the actual conduct of local mediation processes, it seems clear that the UN's involvement requires flexibility and creativity. It also calls for a principled approach whereby the UN's red lines and fundamental values, particularly with regard to the inclusion of women and the respect of human rights, are promoted and translated into local terms.
- **Resources and capacities**: As with national mediation processes, human and financial resources are needed for meaningful engagement in local mediation processes. Several skills will be required for UN staff to engage at the local level, including, amongst others, cultural fluency, linguistic abilities and experience with mediation.
- **Awareness and advocacy**: Lastly, to secure resources for this work, there is a need to continue raising awareness with mission leaders, who, in turn, are best positioned to advocate for engagement in local mediation at Headquarters. The importance and relevance of this work also needs to be stressed to UN Member States.

ANNEX: ABBREVIATED CASE STUDIES[1]

1. Afghanistan: UNAMA's Local Peace Initiatives   June 2019

I. Background and context

The broader context of the conflict in Afghanistan is challenging and complex. Whilst there is renewed hope for a settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, a negotiated agreement has yet to materialize. The U.S.-Taliban talks follow a narrow agenda focused on the external elements of the conflict. At the same time, intercommunal conflicts play out locally, exacerbating tensions and causing civilian casualties.

UNAMA has supported sub-national peace initiatives since 2013. These efforts have been formalized and reinvigorated over the last years. At present, there is a set funding stream, procedures, and staffing to support a multitude of LPIs, which are overseen by the PRO of UNAMA headquarters and carried out by UNAMA's field offices.[2] One LPI addresses an inter-village conflict in the remote Uzbin Valley in the Surobi area. The conflict includes multiple elements: it was first a land dispute, which began six or seven years ago after a period of severe drought. It was further aggravated when a violent clash between the two villages left one person killed and several wounded. Due to conflict repercussions, many families have left the village for other districts.

UNAMA's Central Region Office has actively supported the resolution of this conflict for over two years. This engagement has the primary intention of strengthening (or creating) local mechanisms that can seek a solution, and quietly supporting these mechanisms without taking the lead. At UNAMA's initiative, a Surobi Working Group was created to serve as the primary mediation entity between the two villages.[3] In parallel, UNAMA played a critical role in forming a Women's Peace and Reconciliation Working Group which, by way of engaging different community members, such as tribal elders and victims' families, plays a critical role in advocating for a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the festering conflict.

UNAMA's activities in Surobi have included conflict-resolution trainings for the core working group; meetings with local officials to explore avenues for resolution of the conflict;[4] the production of radio programmes to control messaging and build broader community buy-in; meetings with local youth groups to encourage collaboration and ease tensions between them; as well as giving support to the women's working group. A number of trainings also took place in Kabul.

Through considerable negotiation and encouragement, both villages eventually granted their power of attorney to the Surobi Working Group, which is the equivalent to agreeing to an arbitration settlement. The Working Group is yet to obtain the power of attorney directly from the families of the victims, and the villages are to agree to a guarantee amount.[5] Overall, however, observers note that the last two years of negotiation and public outreach have resulted in a remarkable shift in the mood, especially in areas where there was previously a strong call for revenge. Villagers now accept the idea of a negotiated resolution. Key stakeholders and community members all expressed optimism that an agreement could be reached soon.

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[1] Research for all case studies was conducted during the first half of 2019.
[2] In 2017 and 2018, UNAMA supported 27 LPIs.
[3] The Group, comprised of respected individuals who do not originate from the affected communities, is based in the District Administrative Centre and functions similarly to a traditional shura.
[4] E.g. when the District Governor changed – a key player in supporting the process – UNAMA met regularly with his successor to explain the ongoing efforts and obtain his support.
[5] This is what conflict parties will forfeit if they do not abide by the final settlement.

II. Key Reflections and learnings

Context-sensitivity: The Surobi LPI is illustrative of an initiative that has successfully built on local conflict-resolution mechanisms that are, as a result, now well-rooted in the community. In accordance with Pashtun conflict resolution practices, both villages agreed to an arbitration body, the Surobi Working Group, which works to help move the communities to a negotiated agreement. At the same time, under the LPI framework, UNAMA has worked with various local mechanisms to avoid the more discriminatory or damaging aspects of tribal practices, as, for example, some of these conflict resolution traditions clearly violate girls' and women's rights.

Inclusion of women: Initially facing opposition, the Surobi Women's Peace and Reconciliation Working Group has proved a success factor underpinning local level conflict resolution efforts. Over the last year, the group has grown to 25 members, and formalized itself as a council, or shura, with the clear commitment to remain engaged in the long term. The group has been active on subjects far beyond the Uzbin Valley conflict (e.g. urging women to obtain their national ID and participate in elections) and engage elders about avoiding negative tribal practices, such as exchanging girls as a means to resolve inter-communal conflict.

Building on and fostering a positive reputation: Although UNAMA tries to keep a low profile in their LPI projects, its contribution is seen and highly valued by elders, community leaders, women, youth groups, and others. This helps to further strengthen the positive reputation that the Mission has throughout the country, deepening its legitimacy by working at the local level, and opening up new entry points for local engagement.

Deepening understanding for local level conflict dynamics: As a result of engaging in very localized issues, involved UNAMA staff have a much closer understanding and appreciation of the local dynamics in their region. Various LPI projects are shaped in a way that builds strong relationships between UNAMA Field Office staff and the local communities. This provides an insight into the local dynamics in a way that more general monitoring practices cannot.

Implementing a "One UN" approach: The LPIs prove to be an opportune framework to implement the "One UN" approach. The Regional Team in Kabul has an LPI working group, for example, bringing in Agencies, Funds, and Programmes. PRO also encourages the Field Offices to involve and consult these other parts of the UN in the development of LPI proposals. The integrated nature of LPI programming and implementation support thus model an integrated approach of various UN agencies working on the ground in support of local conflict prevention and peacemaking.

Linkages: The Surobi case is an example of the multitude of local conflicts in Afghanistan that will not be resolved even if a national peace agreement is concluded. As is often true, a national agreement might result in some local conflicts worsening in those places where broader insecurity has kept the local problems contained. In places like Surobi, a national agreement may help to ease – but will not resolve – the fundamentals of a local conflict.

Preparing the ground: While a high-level peace process may not necessarily resolve local conflicts, local level engagements such as the LPIs can effectively complement peacemaking efforts at the national level, and prepare the ground for peace agreement implementation, for instance by an increased engagement in fostering social cohesion, building on the knowledge and networks gained from localized engagement.

2. Central African Republic: Promoting Local Dialogues in Bangassou   June 2019

I. Background and context

Since independence, CAR has had a history of mainly violent political transitions. In 2013, the predominantly Muslim Séléka coalition of armed groups deposed President Francois Bozizé. This prompted a backlash from the mostly Christian-animist self-defence Anti-Balaka movement. The sectarian violence that ensued caused widespread displacement and civilian casualties. The fragmentation of the Séléka and loose command-and-control structure of Anti-Balaka militias, along with the rise of non-aligned armed actors, further accentuated the crisis. Battles for access to natural resources, transhumance routes, land and waterways deepened the security crises. Numerous international bodies attempted to reduce the violence but failed to conclusively end the civil war.[6]

From its creation in 2014, MINUSCA was mandated to support national authorities to engage in inclusive local dialogues – acknowledging the limited ability of national peace processes alone to secure sustained reduction in violence or stabilization. MINUSCA is supporting dozens of local peace processes, which vary in the type of actors involved and the issues addressed. Preventing and reducing violence are the immediate objectives of all processes, which primarily focus on the creation of local de-escalation and prevention mechanisms.

In early 2017, changing dynamics in southeast CAR brought more activity of former Séléka groups to the area of Bangassou, which, despite the nationwide civil war, had remained largely peaceful. Clashes with Anti-Balaka-associated militias caused heightened tension between Muslim and Christian communities. These tensions erupted in the form of an attack by a local, Anti-Balaka-associated militia on predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods and on the MINUSCA base in Bangassou. The attack provoked mass displacement: 16,000 people fled to the DRC border, several thousand Muslims sought refuge on premises owned by the Catholic Church, and movement in and out of the town was restricted.

In response to the escalation of violence, MINUSCA supported various dialogue initiatives to deepen community understanding of the crisis, generate options for conflict resolution, and help build trust across conflict lines. In 2018, MINUSCA supported a mission of the Interfaith Platform – a coalition of religious leaders advocating for peace – to expand on existing efforts. Consequently, Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Imam Kobine Layama led a three-day consultation process involving all main stakeholders. This process provided a critical opportunity for participants to air their grievances; it also facilitated an agreement between the conflict parties, aiming to restore state authority, dismantle checkpoints, disarm armed groups, restart local businesses and assist IDPs. All signatories of the accord joined the Follow-up Committee – a body tasked to monitor agreement implementation.

The Follow-up Committee accompanied a process which was eventually able to reopen the main market and facilitate small-scale business activity – a major driver of social cohesion; dismantle barriers around IDP camps, allowing access for humanitarian assistance; facilitate the restoration of state authority; and persuade combatants to participate in CVR programmes.

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[6] Short-lived national peace agreements in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017 failed to end the civil war. The escalation of violence in 2017 prompted President Touadera to call for the fusion of the disparate international mediation processes, which led to the establishment of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR. This African Union-led process culminated in the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation signed between the Government and 14 armed groups in 2019.

II. Key Reflections and Learnings

Building upon local peace capacities: Before the mediation started, several factors weighed in favour of a peaceful resolution: A long tradition of peace and social cohesion existed in Bangassou; inhabitants demonstrated a strong collective will to make peace; local peace commissions, affiliated with the Interfaith Platform, already existed in 2014 to promote coexistence. The Interfaith Platform mediators –wielding moral authority and being natives of the prefecture – were able to effectively leverage such peace capacities to gain access to the armed groups, civil society and administrative authorities and eventually broker a peace agreement.

Offering viable alternatives: The promise of an alternative means of livelihood was a key determinant in bringing local militias and violent youth into the Bangassou dialogue process. The needs and interests of armed actors, especially when primarily economic in nature, were addressed through a creative, community oriented CVR and offered a viable "peace dividend". This was especially relevant as at the time national disarmament programmes were not designed to be inclusive of all local, non-state armed actors like youth militias.

Anchoring local peace accords with state authorities: In the case of Bangassou, the implementation of recommendations related to the restoration of state authority was largely facilitated by the local prefect who doubled as President of the Follow-up Committee. Including administrative officials in the Follow-up Committee helped to increase the legitimacy of the process and of local authorities in a context where the absence of the state has been a historically destabilizing factor. The ability of local authorities to access higher levels of decision-making also helped facilitate the implementation of recommendations directed to the state.

Linkages: Local conflicts in CAR – as illustrated by the Bangassou example – are not just replicas of the national conflict, and local armed actors are rarely just agents of national actors. The ability of those local armed actors to defect gives them significant destabilizing power over national actors and processes. Lack of investment in local issues and alignment of these local processes with the national process can undermine both. Investing in local processes creates a mechanism for dealing with multiple points along the chain of command. It ensures that local issues which animate conflict are addressed and help increase chances of a stable coalition in national negotiations.

Need for effective coordination: Some organizational problems posed challenges for the mediation process. Coordination between different actors was not always handled well. For instance, the Cardinal and the Imam designed the mediation process in Bangui, with limited consultation with the liaison team in Bangassou. Those with proximity to the situation did not advise on the process design. Likewise, during the implementation phase, engagements of the UN Civil Affairs Section with local communities were sometimes not properly coordinated with the Follow-up Committee.

Strategic Mission engagement: MINUSCA's political strategy on local dialogue engagement puts forth a comprehensive approach to national and local stabilization and brings to bear different Mission tools in a coherent framework. In Bangassou, while supporting local and traditional authorities as well as women to lead local conflict resolution processes, MINUSCA used its military and police capacity to weaken or remove spoilers, and CVR programming to disassociate youth from armed and criminal groups. Throughout the process, MINUSCA's political engagement and logistic and financial support were critical. The implementation of the deal proceeded well, in great part due to the constant facilitation of the MINUSCA field office which was repeatedly called upon to intervene to help the Follow-up Committee overcome differences.

3. Myanmar: Local Mediation through the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism   June 2019

I. Background and context

Myanmar's internal armed conflict is one of the longest standing in the world. It falls squarely into the typology of centre-periphery conflict and has pitted a dominant ethnic group (the Bamar) against multiple other ethnic groups (such as the Chin, Kachin, or Karen), most of which have long fought for independence. The national army, or Tatmadaw, which holds as one of its central tenets that the country must be kept unified, fought multiple independence movements mounted by other ethnic groups – often referred to today as Ethnic Armed Organizations.

Driven by decades of isolation, in 2011, the Tatmadaw undertook a process of gradual democratization. In 2015, the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, won a landslide victory in national elections.[7] Partial democratization was accompanied by an attempted peace process, constructed around a NCA, which was signed by the Tatmadaw and eight Ethnic Armed Organizations the same year. The NCA contemplated the establishment of a JMC at three levels (national, state and local levels). The core concept was that the conflict parties – together with civil society leaders – would co-manage ceasefire monitoring (dissuasive presence of joint teams), verification of complaints and conflict resolution (to de-escalate tensions).

The JMC mechanism was largely successful in helping prevent major lapses, but there were "hotspots" that threatened to undermine the ceasefire arrangements. One of these was in Hpa Pun – a remote area located in northern Kayin State, largely under control of the Karen National Union, one of the most powerful Ethnic Armed Organizations to sign onto the NCA. Tempers rose as the Tatmadaw announced a road refurbishment project in the area. The Karen National Union considered the project an existential security threat, as it would cut through the heart of its territory and allow the Tatmadaw to rapidly deploy troops to the zone. Within a matter of weeks, the situation escalated. The Tatmadaw sent large numbers of troops to begin working on the road. Some of the civilians living near the road work fled their homes out of fear of Tatmadaw presence. Ultimatums and threats were exchanged, and shots were fired by both sides. The Karen National Union and Tatmadaw were on a clear collision course, and the potential for direct and large-scale military confrontation was growing almost daily.

In 2018, responding to the escalation of tensions, the JMC agreed to dispatch two consecutive missions, comprised of civil society members and staff from its Yangon-based Technical Secretariat Committee. Shuttle diplomacy, involving separate meetings with both parties, aimed to establish the basic facts of the situation, open up a line of communication and de-escalate tensions. The JMC intervention was able to get local leaders to commit to avoiding confrontational actions and offered to bring the situation to the attention of the high-ranking officials in the Tatmadaw and Karen National Union leadership. Consecutively, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief met with top Karen National Union political and military leaders to specifically discuss the Hpa Pun road-building dispute. After several hours of exchange, the Tatmadaw agreed to temporarily halt construction and remove the troop presence though the coming monsoon season. This de-escalated the situation, and both sides stepped back from military confrontation.[8]

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[7] The Tatmadaw, however, did not relinquish control over the Military or Police, and maintains an automatic 25% allocation of military seats in parliament, giving it a permanent veto power over constitutional change.

[8] The Hpa Pun road refurbishment situation remains a sensitive point for the peace process, and in early 2019 the Tatmadaw reopened discussions on the matter. This has rekindled some of the previously existing tensions and fed into disappointment with the peace process. Eventually, the Karen National Union withdrew from the JMC mechanism and national peace dialogue mechanism.

II. Key Reflections and Learnings

Role of local mediators: The JMC mission was able to succeed because it incorporated local mediators who offered different skills or qualities to the situation. The first mission, headed by Reverend Saw Mathew Aye – a widely respected Karen leader of integrity and commitment – brought gravitas to open doors. His reputation arguably allowed him to gain access to the local Tatmadaw and the Karen National Union Commanders. Moreover, by incorporating members from the state and local committees, the JMC mission was able to offer credible knowledge of the local situation including the logistics of the road itself and nearby villages, as well as perspectives from the local population about the historical reasons they mistrust Tatmadaw soldiers and fear the potential security consequences of the road being built. This allowed the delegation to engage with the leaders on sure footing about the facts of the matter, as well as inject a human dimension into the conversation about the fears and concerns of the local population.

Role of women: The JMC did face some significant gender challenges, as the leadership structures of the Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations are largely male. The JMC consciously sought to compensate for this by involving more women as civil society members. 13 out of 37 civil society slots in state/regional and local JMC committees were filled by women (35%). In addition, the Technical Secretariat Committee made a major push on gender equality, and 51% of its 70-person staff is female. Although women did not participate in the JMC field work on the Hpa Pun situation, the Deputy Director of the Technical Secretariat Committee was a Kachin woman (Seng Pan), and she played a quite central role in developing a strategic plan for engagement as well as overseeing the operational aspects of the field work.

Role of the UN and partners: The Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations agreed to invite the UN to play a technical and financial assistance role for the JMC. Through UNDP, the UN would be allowed to provide training and advice but not play a role in the actual ceasefire monitoring. Over time, the UNDP Support Platform facilitated the delivery of several types of external expertise for the JMC, such as dedicated capacity-building on conflict mediation, focusing on delivering conceptual tools as well as raise awareness around less confrontational and more collaborative approaches. It is difficult to assess the extent to which the formal training contributed to the work of the JMC field mission, but it would appear to have contributed to these helpful activities and positive outcomes. On one level, members of the mission were exposed to mediation theory and basic mediation tools, and this appears to have informed their approach. At the same time, the training appears to have bolstered the JMC member's self-confidence in their own role in the JMC and given them self-assurance to both enter a potentially hazardous situation as well as directly engage with senior-ranking officials from both the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Union.

Linkages: Although the JMC has been unable to fully resolve tensions surrounding the road project, the deployment of teams did play a key role in opening up a negotiation process that ran parallel to military confrontation. This, in turn, created dynamics that helped draw in senior leaders with full authority to address the situation. The solution that emerged was temporary, but it successfully avoided what, at the time, appeared to be an increasingly likely lethal confrontation that would have had both a high human cost and major loss of credibility of the NCA process. In effect, this is a clear case in which efforts of local mediators opened a pathway towards a national level process with top-tier political leaders. On balance, the JMC offers a model of ceasefire monitoring with a variety of strengths and weaknesses. One positive aspect is that it creates an institutional platform for local mediators to play a role in de-escalating ceasefire-related tensions. In the case of Hpa Pun, local mediators appear to have played a significant role in preventing rising tensions from boiling over into outright military confrontation and buying time for a higher-level political process to initiate and de-fuse, at least temporarily, the situation.

I. Background and context

The Cordillera region of the northern Philippines is home to traditional peacemaking practices that aim to prevent and settle tribal conflicts which have pitted local communities against each other for decades. Most disputes that arise between or among tribes relate to land and water resource management, elections, violent crimes or anti-insurgency operations in light of a long-standing – and partially weakened – communist armed mobilization.[13]

Tribal conflicts in the Cordillera are addressed through the *bodong* system, a traditional practice of peacemaking that postulates a shared code of conduct or penal laws that govern – and if damaged, aim to restore – inter-tribal relationships. When a pact is violated, tribal leaders seek amends through negotiation and mediation in order to prevent or stop retaliations required by customary law. The mediation process, led by selected tribal mediators, usually begins with shuttle diplomacy, paves the way for direct negotiation between tribal councils, and typically ends with an agreement on the terms of dispute settlement, which – once achieved – is celebrated with a ceremonial feast.

The *bodong* system in the Cordillera has been interpreted as a preventive and protective mechanism that guarantees stability and the security of tribal members. Amid such customary practices, the Kalinga Bodong Congress, an intertribal assembly of roughly 2.000 elders, helps to further structure and strengthen traditional peacemaking practices. First convened in 1987, the Kalinga Bodong Congress acts like the legislative arm of the *bodong* system and serves as a pool of mediators who may be tapped to help settle tribal disputes. If conflicts arise, Kalinga Bodong Congress leaders can be asked to mediate, recall past events, or to dispense advice especially to the younger, upcoming tribal leaders. In this way, the Kalinga Bodong Congress provides a standing support system to the *bodong* institution, and acts as keeper of historical memory of *bodong*-related events.

In an effort to establish and uphold new norms to address concerns vis-à-vis national legislation, the Kalinga Bodong Congress adopted a prototype "law of the *bodong*" in the late 1990s. For instance, codified bylaws now entail provisions that seek to minimize the resort to killing as an act of revenge; impose welfare benefits for women-survivors of sexual violence; recognize the important role of women and youth in attaining peace; and actively encourage women and youth to be *bodong*-holders to hasten their leadership potential.[14]

The Kalinga Bodong Congress, as parallel structure to the local government system, has closely collaborated with provincial and regional government bodies. Moreover, as the provincial governor, municipal mayors and other government officials are often tribal leaders themselves, they are also Kalinga Bodong Congress members. Beyond such direct ties with local governance structures, the Kalinga Bodong Congress has partnered up with various NGOs that have supported its peacemaking activities (e.g. the local Catholic and Protestant churches as well as local peace advocacy groups).

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[13] By the late 1970s, the Cordillera region was embroiled by a nationwide Communist insurgency which aimed to overthrow the Marcos regime by means of a protracted people's war. The Cordillera People's Liberation Army CPLA, a local breakaway faction of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army, eventually entered a ceasefire and peace process with the Government, which led to the demobilization and reintegration of most of its members.

[14] In 2016, the first women tribal leader joined the Kalinga Bodong Congress' council.

II. Key Reflections and learnings

Building on what already exists: The Cordillera case illustrates how organic or homegrown mediation, as well as justice and reconciliation practices and institutions that are already rooted in society, can be nurtured and further strengthened with a more structured, convening organization such as the Kalinga Bodong Congress. Through the inter-tribal, province-wide organization, beneficial traditional practices and institutions have been affirmed but were also informed by new, gender-responsive and rights-affirming norms. Moreover, the social prestige of leaders in the Congress, their high degree of voluntarism, their deep understanding of the value of mediation, and the trust that they enjoy in their communities, were all important factors that made the Kalinga Bodong Congress an effective mover and convener.

Connecting traditional peacemaking and local Government structures: In situations where the state is neither failed nor captured, as in the Cordillera region, it is important to acknowledge the presence of local peacemaking practices in any subnational or local mediation effort, and to seek complementarity and linkages with state institutions where sensible. The integral links of the Kalinga Bodong Congress with the local Governments and national agencies through their member-allies in the provincial Government and their representation in official peace and development bodies are factors that have made the assembly, through its leading Council, an important and effective player in peace and policy deliberations as well as development activities relating to the region.

Reconciling customary and statutory legislation: Although there are conscious attempts to reconcile penal provisions in national laws with that of tribal pacts – and the *bodong* is generally perceived as helpful in attaining justice and reconciliation by tribes and local officials – reality shows that national law may still be bypassed in favour of customary practice. The Cordillera case illustrates the need to seek improved complementarity between customary and statutory legal systems, and the state institutions on a continuous basis.

Leverage normative commitments where possible: States differ in terms of the normative commitments they have made. Such commitments can affect opportunities for and the character of local mediation efforts. The Cordillera case serves as an example of how the national Government's commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) has made it much easier, in this instance, to include women in the Kalinga Bodong Congress and advance gender-sensitive provisions. Moreover, women's groups promoting the National Action Plan on 1325 have been able to sustain the capacity development of more women peacebuilders in the community.

Consider the need for sustained engagement: In situations of protracted conflicts and feuds, it seems important for engagement to come at the right time to push a process in the right direction. Equally, it is critical to acknowledge that the settlement of disputes can take a long time, requiring several visits to the injured party and many meetings with the warring tribes. Violence may not be averted if one party is unwilling to settle. Mediators and tribal leaders finance the cost of the process, which could exact a toll on personal resources. But with reparation delivered and the tribes reconciled, the restored peace brings immense benefits to the communities.

Evaluate the UN's comparative advantage: In non-mission settings, as in the Cordillera, NGOs, community actors, faith-based organizations or private individuals tend to be the ones conducting local mediation processes. Even though UNDP has had a peace portfolio in the Cordillera since the 1990s, it is not the main actor in this area. From a UN perspective, this underlines the need to identify actors working in the same space and to ask questions about the comparative advantage that a UN involvement in local mediation could bring.

5. South Sudan: A National Framework for Pastoralist Migration June 2019

I. Background and context

In South Sudan, cattle represent more than a source of food. They embody status and wealth, and are a key determinant of social, cultural and economic relationships. Cattle are often at the heart of intercommunal conflict between pastoral nomads and farming communities, resulting in very high numbers of civilian casualties. Through targeted reconciliation and mediation initiatives, UNMISS, led by its Civil Affairs Division, has sought to address subnational conflicts related to seasonal pastoralist migration.

To mitigate conflict over shared resources and tensions between tribes, UNMISS facilitated the development and implementation of a framework agreement on cattle management from May 2017 to March 2019. The initiative focused on five key regional states, notably, Western Lakes, Eastern Lakes, Gok, Amadi and Terekeka (Jonglei joined later). It brought together representatives and stakeholders from each of those states, including cattle keepers, community leaders, Government officials[9], women and youth leaders. The intervention included three distinct phases:

In a first, preparatory phase, stakeholders travelled to Aweil to extract lessons from a community led cattle migration management body which had successfully managed the annual seasonal migration flow from Sudan into South Sudan. Following this trip, UNMISS facilitated a series of initial meetings which provided stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on the Aweil migration experience and discuss those aspects which could be usefully replicated or adapted to the South Sudanese context. Eventually, participants agreed to establish and ratify a framework agreement on cattle management, creating the JBPCC – a forum tasked to regulate transhumance across the five designated South Sudanese states.

In a second phase, UNMISS supported the convening of a pre-migration season conference in which the JPBCC facilitated agreements on cattle migration between the five states, including the routes of migration and potential grazing areas. On the completion of the annual seasonal migration, a post-season conference was held, providing an opportunity for stakeholders to assess the functionality of the JBPCC. Following the relative success of the pre/post migratory conferences which significantly reduced clashes, provided a forum to address issues of common concern and reinforced trust between locals, community leaders expressed their strong desire to see the JBPCC mechanism expanded. Consequently, UNMISS convened an additional meeting in Nyiang County, Eastern Lakes, which resulted in an agreement to extend the JBPCC to also cover the "central migration corridor".[10]

Finally, in a third phase, UNMISS facilitated a series of meetings bringing together key state representatives[11] to clarify legal issues surrounding the JPBCC process, as it became apparent that there was a conflict of jurisdictions between the customary and statutory legal systems. Noting the good progress of the pastoralist conferences and the creation of community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, the meetings stressed the need for improved complementarity between customary and statutory legal systems, and the state, local and national Government institutions.

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[9] Incl. State Governors, Ministers, County Commissioners, as well as representatives from the Transitional National Legislative Assembly.
[10] Comprised of Gok, Lakes (east and west), Tonj and Leich (south and north).
[11] Incl. the Office of the Chief Justice, the Ministry of Justice and the Interior, as well as the South Sudan Local Government Board and the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission.

II. Key Reflections and learnings

Local Ownership: The initiative was owned and led exclusively by local actors with commitments of support from state, national and local authorities, UN and international partners to ensure sustainability. Customary chiefs, women and youth participated as key stakeholders. Critically, the initiative built on a similar community-led monitoring, compensatory and restitution mechanism which had proven effective in the past. Replicating and adapting key parameters to fit the South Sudanese context, the initiative enhanced applicability, acceptance and buy-in at the local level.

Inclusion of women: Throughout the initiative, special attention was given to ensure the involvement of women, including at the decision-making level. For instance, during the Nyiang County meeting, an entire day was dedicated to identify areas where women can have influence, make an impact and take leadership roles. Consequently, participants agreed that the number of women in the border committees should be increased, and that women should create their own community watch programme to assist the national authorities.

Sub-Regional approach: Focusing on sub-regional blocs widened the impact of the initiative as it incorporated and empowered local structures and sub-state level authorities to address a wide range of issues ranging from sharing of livelihoods and resources to law enforcement and criminality. The approach established 'islands of peace' (as framed by UNMISS), which represented successful models for replication throughout the country.

Inter-organizational partnerships and integrated mission approaches: Reinforced partnerships with national actors, international NGOs, and the UNCT allowed UNMISS to take advantage of additional technical expertise and maximize synergies of efforts. Within the Mission, the Civil Affairs Division (lead pillar) sought to include other components as required, under the overall guidance of the UNMISS Strategy on Communal Conflict Management, Reconciliation and Social Cohesion. This included the Gender Unit, Political Affairs, Human Rights, Civil-Military, as well as the Office of the SRSG/Mission leadership.

Leading from behind: UNMISS oversaw the "process design" aspect of the conferences and undertook shuttle consultations with key representatives from national and local authorities, and the wider community to gauge receptivity. Agreements were drafted outlining the respective roles of the community and local/state authorities. During the conferences, UNMISS provided direct logistical support, including air/road transfer for participants, and facilitated the development of the agenda and the conference agreements.

Accounting for linkages: Where deemed sensible, linkages between different processes, levels and issues where actively sought, accounting for potential benefits and risks involved. For instance, given broader ethno-regional sensitivities at the national level, an initial effort was made to depoliticize the pastoralist migration network, by way of emphasizing its community-based subnational characteristics. By the end of the process, however, participants elected to include commitments for signatories from the participating states to support the implementation of the national peace deal.[12]

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[12] Following the eruption of renewed fighting in Juba in 2016 and the proliferation of rebel groups, IGAD facilitated the signature of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan on 12 September 2018.