UNDERSTANDING AND INTEGRATING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS IN MULTI-DIMENSIONAL UN PEACEKEEPING

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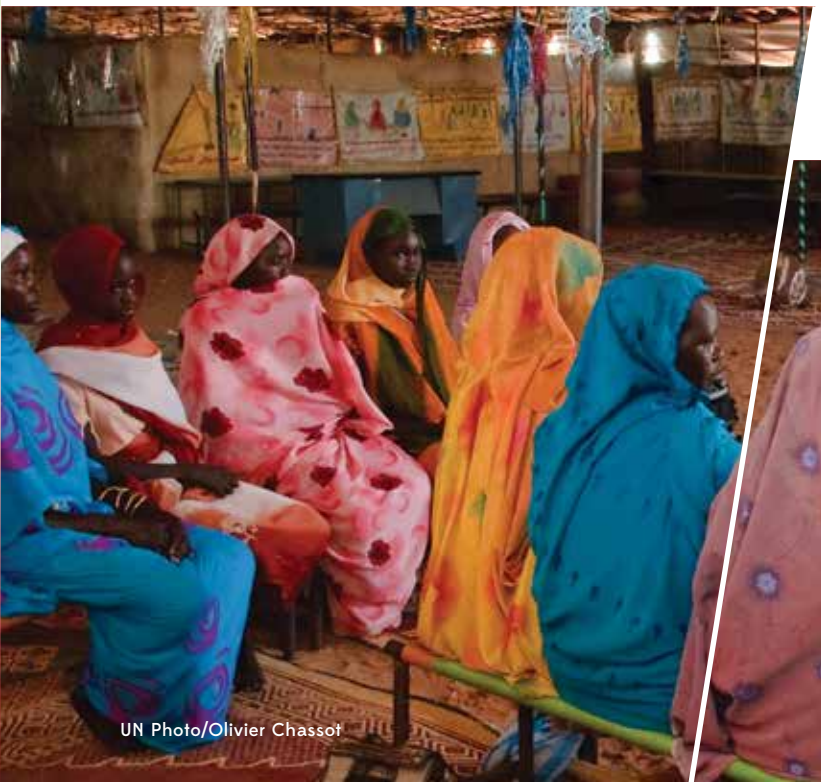
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Since "An Agenda for Peace" was penned by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Gali in 1992, the United Nations has acknowledged that efforts to bring about peace in fragile states must include strengthening the dialogue between state and society. Exclusion and marginalization are now generally identified as major conflict drivers, while inclusion is understood as a powerful defence against relapse into conflict. Today, these principles are enshrined in the 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, which calls on international donors to fragile states to align their aid with a single national plan which is country-owned and led, and developed in consultation with civil society.

In addition to supporting inclusive peace and governance processes, peacekeeping missions have long sought to understand a broad spectrum of local perceptions to gain a deeper knowledge of the context in which they operate. More recently, local perceptions of issues such as legitimacy have increasingly been adopted as a basis for measuring a country's progress towards stability and evaluating missions' mandate implementation. It is thus more important than ever that peacekeeping missions be equipped to gather perceptions from large segments of the population and incorporate this information into their work. Until recently, however, there was little evidence of peacekeeping missions seeking to understand local perceptions in a structured or systematic way.

In this context, in 2012 the Civil Affairs team of the Policy and Best Practices Service in DPKO/DFS, with the generous support of the Government of Australia, initiated a study and analysis of peacekeeping practice to strengthen the Departments' understanding of this field. Through an online survey, a code cable to missions, semi-structured interviews and a detailed desk review, the study surveyed the current state of practice across peacekeeping and the wider peacebuilding community. It identified challenges and best practices for gathering local perceptions and pinpointed examples of perceptions data being analyzed and incorporated effectively by peacekeeping missions, especially in MONUSCO, UNIFIL and UNMIL, which have gathered and analyzed local perceptions in innovative ways. In doing so, the study aimed to provide the basis for operational guidance which will assist peacekeeping missions in gathering and incorporating local perceptions in a more systematic, structured way so as to enable better decision making and more effective contributions to early peacebuilding.



UN Photo/Olivier Chassot

WHY PERCEPTIONS MATTER

There are three core arguments in support of the local perceptions to peacekeeping missions as they manage transitions from conflict to peace.

- **Inclusivity increases the domestic legitimacy and thereby sustainability of political settlements:** Limiting national dialogue to elites risks generating solutions that serve a narrow set of interests and fail to address root causes of conflict. Processes that ensure public participation enjoy greater legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

- **Public confidence is key to building sustainable peace:** Perceptions of vulnerability and threat are important factors in conflict and may not be visible through other sources. Understanding local perceptions enables missions to target efforts to build confidence in the peace process, as well as the mission itself.

- **Broader situational awareness and analysis increases effectiveness:** A mission's interventions are more likely to have a positive impact if they incorporate a wide range of local perceptions. Failure to understand the context can result in ineffective conflict management strategies that can exacerbate conflict dynamics.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PRACTICE IN PEACEKEEPING

The vast majority of peacekeepers consider local perceptions to be important to their work. While many engage in this type of work, they do it in an *ad hoc* or semi-structured way.

- **Why do peacekeepers seek out local perceptions?** Perceptions tend to inform short-term analysis on security threats and political developments as part of conflict management processes. Root causes of the conflict are rarely addressed.

- **How do they collect them?** Perceptions are often collected in an *ad hoc* and unstructured manner. There is little understanding of techniques or methodologies for collecting local perceptions, including how to apply a gender sensitive lens.
- **Whose perceptions are captured?** Current practice relies heavily on colleagues and standard mission interlocutors such as civil society representatives. Potential spoilers such as economic actors, armed groups and youth are rarely engaged for these purposes.

TOOLS FOR GATHERING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS

The study developed an inventory of direct and indirect techniques for collecting local perceptions used by peacekeeping missions and other international actors. Each has benefits and drawbacks and yield different levels of detail and representativeness. Generally multiple tools are employed concurrently and inform one another. The tools are 1) individual/in-depth interviews; 2) public meetings; 3) focus groups; 4) the network approach; 5) local media monitoring and analysis; 6) social media monitoring and analysis; and, 7) public perception and opinion surveys.

Large-scale public perception surveys came under particularly close analysis because of their increasingly prevalent use in monitoring phenomena such as legitimacy and perceptions and conceptions of security. For peacekeeping missions, surveys can be useful for a number of tasks, including designing programs and interventions, identifying trends, measuring progress against benchmarks and assessing the mission's reputation. Surveys must be designed, implemented and analyzed by technically qualified individuals and/or organizations and thus often require external technical support.

KEY AREAS INTO WHICH LOCAL PERCEPTIONS ARE INCORPORATED

The study identified the key ways in which peacekeepers use local perceptions.

- **Political analysis, strategy development, planning and benchmarking:** Missions can define more effective, responsive strategies and plan better programming by testing their assumptions and understanding local priorities. Perceptions can provide the data needed to set benchmarks and measure progress, especially on governance and security issues.
- **Protection of civilians (PoC):** Gathering perceptions of security is vital to preparing context-appropriate PoC strategies and reacting effectively to developments. Trend analysis can assist in identifying high risk localities for priority intervention.
- **Outreach, communications and confidence building:** Understanding perceptions of the mission and the peace process can inform more effective public information and outreach strategy aimed at increasing confidence in both.
- **Peacebuilding and statebuilding:** In line with the New Deal, missions can assist states in strengthening state-society dialogue, improving state responsiveness and ensuring accountability by assisting populations in articulating their needs to the state and supporting the state in conducting participatory planning and operating transparently.
- **Local level conflict management:** Understanding local perceptions of inter-community conflict is essential to the deep analysis necessary to effectively support local conflict management and resolution. Early warning can enable short-term, prevention-oriented interventions at the local level.

RISKS AND CONSTRAINTS

The study highlighted a number of constraints that are in many ways unique to peacekeeping and which limit missions' ability to fully incorporate local perceptions, as well as risks involved in collecting them.

- **Strategic level:** By virtue of their short-term mandates and planning horizons, missions are often not able to repeat perception research consistently over time, thus limiting the potential for broad trend analysis. Missions are also subject to political constraints in regards to how they collect information.
- **Operational level:** Peacekeeping personnel often lack the capacity to conduct rigorous perception gathering activities, which in some cases require advanced technical skills and involve serious ethical and security considerations. Once gathered, missions consistently face challenges in effectively managing information on perceptions and effectively integrating it into decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes nine recommendations on how missions can better gather and incorporate local perceptions, which could feature in new operational guidance on this subject.

1) Missions require operational guidance on the value, applications and limitations of local perceptions and how to collect and incorporate them into mission decision making in a rigorous and systematic manner.
2) Understanding local perceptions considerably enhances a mission's understanding of the national context.
3) Mission components should agree on common objectives and approaches for gathering local perceptions.
4) Information on local perceptions should be used in conjunction with other sources of information to "triangulate" conclusions.
5) Working with partners can improve the quality of data.
6) Perceptions should not be viewed as static and thus research must be an ongoing process.
7) In specific instances, especially in national-level monitoring and evaluation, peacekeeping missions should consider employing large-scale public perception surveys.
8) Peacekeepers should move beyond limited individual networks of sources for information on local perceptions.
9) While collecting local perceptions can build confidence, peacekeepers must be aware of and mitigate the risk of raising expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Peacekeeping missions have always sought to better understand the views, concerns and priorities of the host population in order to inform their work. Until recently, however, there has been little evidence of peacekeeping missions gathering information on local perceptions in a systematic, coordinated manner, and explicitly incorporating this information into decision making processes. In 2012 the Civil Affairs team of the Policy and Best Practices Service in DPKO/DFS, with the generous support of the Government of Australia, initiated a study and analysis of peacekeeping practice to strengthen the Departments' understanding of this field of practice and lay the groundwork for operational guidance. More specifically, the study sought to:

- Develop a better understanding of what is currently being done to incorporate local perceptions in peacekeeping and whether more could be done in this regard;
- Understand the challenges and obstacles to capturing and incorporating local perceptions;
- Establish what peacekeeping missions can realistically aim for given these constraints;
- Identify which methods peacekeeping missions can use;
- Explore how peacekeeping missions can learn from and work with others; and
- Ascertain what kind of guidance would be most useful for peacekeepers.

This report summarizes the findings of the study and makes recommendations for the development of operational guidance for peacekeepers on how to gather, analyze and incorporate information on local perceptions. Section 1 of the report is an Executive Summary which provides an overview of the study's findings and summarizes its recommendations. Section 2 explains the study's methodology and provides an overview of the policy framework in which peacekeeping missions undertake analysis of local perceptions. The section then details three principle reasons peacekeeping missions and the wider international peace, security and development community use local perceptions in their work. Section 3 provides an overview of current practice in peacekeeping, providing specific examples from missions and profiling the approaches of other organizations in text boxes. The section goes on to investigate the types of perceptions peacekeepers seek, from whom, and how. It then provides a detailed analysis of the areas of peacekeeping into which local perceptions are incorporated. Section 4 provides a brief summary of the study's findings and provides recommendations on the strategic use of local perceptions, operational considerations that should be taken into account when gathering such information, and key issues and dilemmas that peacekeepers must address while doing so. These recommendations are intended to feature in the operational guidance that results from this study.

UN Photo/Olivia Grey Pritchard

2.1 METHODOLOGY

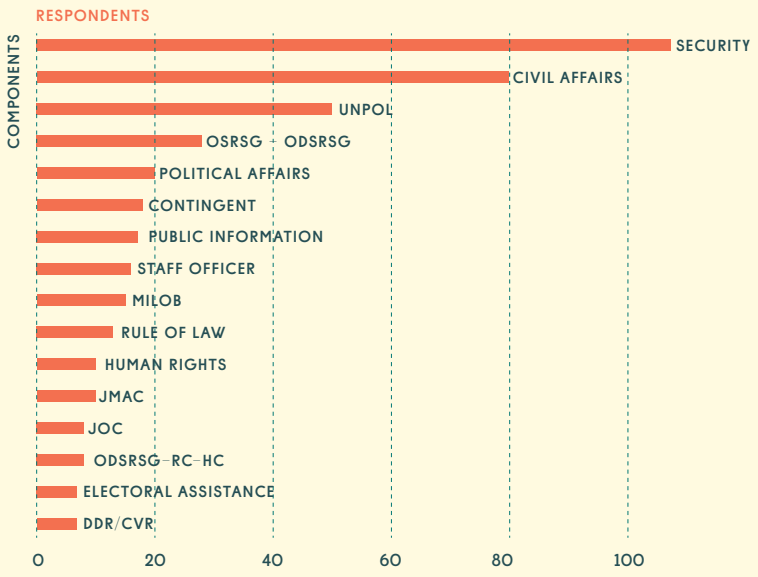
Research for the study was undertaken by the PBPS Civil Affairs team through a review of documents and online resources; an online survey among UN peacekeeping personnel in November 2012; semi-structured interviews with UN and non-UN actors; a facilitated online discussion on the Civil Affairs Network; a formal exchange of information with missions by code cable and a workshop involving practitioners and academics hosted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).[1] The input of a number of external partners during the workshop and throughout the report's drafting process was immensely helpful and is gratefully acknowledged by DPKO/DFS.

The online survey consisted of mostly closed questions and was distributed to all peacekeeping personnel to complete on a voluntary basis. Responses were received from a broad variety of personnel, but the analysis contained in this report was restricted to the 415 responses of personnel from the civilian substantive components, security officers, and the uniformed components. Relevant units thus include UNPOL, military officers, Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, Public Information, Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR), Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), and Community Violence Reduction (CVR). Because the survey was sent to all personnel and completed on a voluntary basis, the results are not necessarily representative of the relative sizes of these components. However, by limiting analysis of the results to these units, the survey provides a detailed look at how peacekeeping personnel who interact with the local population on substantive mission business view the issue of local perceptions in the context of their work.

[1] NUPI Policy Brief 13-2013 "What people think matters: understanding and integrating local perceptions in UN peacekeeping."

UN Photo/Tim McKulka

FIGURE 1 | BREAKDOWN OF ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS FROM SUBSTANTIVE CIVILIAN, SECURITY AND UNIFORMED COMPONENTS.



The semi-structured interviews with DPKO personnel also focused on personnel most directly concerned with capturing, understanding and integrating local perspectives in both headquarters and field missions, notably Civil Affairs officers, but also staff from a number of other substantive units, such as JMAC, the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Community Violence Reduction, the Civilian Capacities team at headquarters, and in peacekeeping missions. A number of non-DPKO/DFS practitioners and academics were also interviewed. A first draft of the research report was shared during a three-day workshop hosted by NUPI in Kampala, Uganda in early 2013, at which experts and practitioners shared their knowledge and experience of gathering and integrating local perspectives in post-conflict settings.

2.2 DEFINITIONS

Local: All people of the country in which a peacekeeping operation works. This includes ordinary citizens, youth, men, women, civil society actors, community and religious leaders, former combatants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees. It may also include members of the diaspora. Political elites are also included in this definition, though the implicit focus is often on popular perceptions, in particular the perceptions of less dominant actors and groups that are perhaps less immediately likely to be factored into the work of the mission.[2]

Perceptions: The ways in which situations, events and dynamics relevant to the conflict, the peace process or the peacekeeping mission's mandate are regarded by local people (including opinions, concerns, aspirations and priorities). Broadly speaking, information based on perceptions is distinguished from more "verifiable" types of data, such as mortality rates taken from hospital records or observations on the ground, by its subjective nature. This distinction, however, is to some degree artificial, as "objective" information almost always relies on subjectivities and statistics rely on assumptions and can be affected by bias.

[2] For methodological purposes, it should be noted that the study did not pre-define a universal definition of "local" and unsurprisingly found that there was no consensus on this. The two most common ways of understanding local in the responses were as "non-international" (i.e. national) or as "sub-national."

UN Photo/Martine Perret

2.3 MANDATE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Peacekeeping missions have always sought to maintain awareness, to some degree, of the views of the local population in order to enhance their understanding of the national context, plan interventions and identify risks to the mission or its mandate. Understanding the needs, concerns and opinions of the population became even more important in the post-cold war era, when the shift towards multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations saw missions mandated with complex peacebuilding tasks such as strengthening the state's ability to improve security and respect human rights, facilitating political dialogue and national reconciliation, and supporting legitimate governance. Only recently, however, have missions begun to consider strategies or practices for understanding local perceptions in a systematic way. Developments in peacekeeping doctrine, evolving mission mandates and advances in the international peace and security field necessitate that peacekeeping adopt a more formal, professionalized approach to local perceptions. Accordingly, recent years have seen a trend of missions going beyond the casual gathering of local perceptions towards a more targeted approach, relying on a larger set of tools and informing broader, more strategic peacebuidling interventions.

There is growing recognition in the international peace and security field that sustainable, durable peace requires a process that is inclusive of the concerns, aspirations and priorities of the population as a whole, not just elite power brokers. The 2008 publication "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines" (the Capstone Doctrine) states that, "missions must recognize that multiple divergent opinions will exist in the body politic of the host country. All opinions and views need to be understood, ensuring that ownership and participation are not limited to small elite groups." The role peacekeeping operations have to play in promoting inclusiveness is emphasized in the 2009 and 2012 reports of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, which underscore the importance of "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" and

UN Photo/Paul Banks

THE NEW DEAL

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding is a forum for political dialogue comprised of the G7+, consisting of 19 fragile and conflct affected countries, international development partners and civil society representatives. In 2011 a product of this dialogue, the " New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States," was presented and endorsed at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan.

The New Deal lays out a new way for the international community to work that is better tailored to the local context and the particular challenges of environments of fragility and conflct. It lays out five key peacebuilding and statebuilding goals to develop peaceful states and societies in a way that maximizes the ownership of the state and its population by strengthening the relationship between the two. These goals are:

1. Legitimate politics: Foster inclusive political settlements and conflct resolution;
2. Security: Establish and strengthen people's security;
3. Justice: Address injustices and increase people's access to justice;
4. Economic foundations: Generate employment and improve livelihoods; and,
5. Revenues and services: Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

The proposed indicators of progress against these benchmarks include many references to levels of satisfaction, perceptions of security and degrees of trust, reflecting the New Deal's emphasis on strengthening state-society relations, building confidence and creating palpable change for local populations. For example, one indicator of progress against the Legitimate Politics benchmark is "level of satisfaction with the quality of the election process and the possibility to participate in the political process." It is important to note that the monitoring methodology makes clear that data collected on such questions is to be combined with data from more objective indicators, such as level of electoral participation, to assess degrees of confidence and levels of domestic legitimacy.[3]

[3] International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Working Group on Indicators (2013).

highlight the critical role of local and traditional authorities, civil society actors and marginalized groups in this regard. Similarly, the 2011 independent review of United Nations civilian capacities in the aftermath of conflict and the related 2012 report of the Secretary-General, which highlights that, "supporting institution-building involves an inclusive process to determine priorities for the functions that build confidence between States and citizens and help to ensure sustainable peace." The fundamental importance of inclusiveness as a foundation of sustainable and durable peace has recently been endorsed by numerous governments through the "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" (see The New Deal; page 13), which calls for international support to align with a single national vision and plan to transition from fragility which is "country-owned and led, and developed in consultation with civil society."

While there has been much debate on how peacekeeping missions can contribute to this objective, one possible approach is suggested in the DPKO/DFS 2010 paper "Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding: Clarifying the Nexus" which highlights the role peacekeeping missions can play in bringing local voices into the national priority-setting processes. The paper underscores how peacekeepers can "support effective consultations and communication between state and society and, working closely with UN agencies and other partners, assist both central and local government in articulating priorities, plans and programmes, including through public dialogue and public information." This approach was enshrined in peacekeeping's policy framework in January 2013 when the Security Council passed a thematic resolution on peacekeeping stating that missions might be directly mandated to "support, peace consolidation and inclusive political processes and through their good offices, advice and support … facilitate consultation process[es] among local population and civil society to help them contribute to national processes and discussions…".[4] Understanding local perceptions and incorporating them into the core work of peacekeeping missions therefore becomes not only an important element of a better comprehension of the conflict and its dynamics, but also the baseline from which to develop strategies that promote inclusivity and reduce the chances of relapse into conflict.

In order for a mission to effectively support an inclusive process and promote an environment conducive to peace, it must enjoy the support and cooperation of the host population. A number of recent experiences have underscored the extent to which public confidence in a peacekeeping mission relates closely to confidence in the peace process in general, and affects the mission's ability to execute its mandate. This lesson is increasingly reflected in Security Council mandates, which now often underline the importance of the local population's understanding of the mission and its mandate. Security Council resolutions on the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, have called on MONUSCO "to ensure regular interaction with the civilian population"[5] and "raise awareness and understanding about its mandate and activities through a comprehensive public outreach programme.[6] Some missions have also been tasked with building confidence by supporting government outreach. In Afghanistan, for example, the Security Council has requested that UNAMA work at the local level to "facilitate inclusion in and understanding of the Government's policies"[7], while UNMISS is tasked with "advising and supporting the Government of the Republic of South Sudan on an inclusive constitutional process."[8]

[4] S/RES/2086 (2013)
[5] S/RES/1925 (2010).
[6] S/RES/2098 (2013). UNMISS, in S/RES/2057 (2012) and UNMIT, in S/RES/1704 (2006), have also been mandated communicate with the local population to explain their mandates and raise awareness of national political processes.
[7] S/RES/1917 (2010).
[8] S/RES/1996 (2011).

As peacekeeping has evolved in the post-cold war world, its methods and processes have become increasingly sophisticated and professionalized. Increasingly, Member States are insisting on a stronger reliance on evidence for making strategic decisions about peace and security interventions in conflict affected countries. For example, in 2006 the Security Council requested that MINUSTAH establish "consolidation benchmarks" that would be used to measure progress in Haiti and inform decisions about future configurations of the mission. The benchmarks included statebuilding goals such as establishment of legitimate, transparent, accountable democratic state institutions. Measuring outcomes such as legitimacy requires peacekeeping missions to employ new tools for data gathering, as legitimacy is a subjective concept.[9] Insofar as inclusivity and confidence are fundamental elements of peace processes and post-conflict peace-building, local perceptions offer new opportunities for more effective strategy setting, monitoring and evaluation.

[9] S/2008/586.

FINDING I

The policy framework for peacekeeping provides a strong basis for considering local perceptions in order to promote inclusivity in peace processes and post conflict governance, to build confidence in the mission and the peace process; and to plan and measure progress.

UN Photo/Tim McKulka

2.4 WHY LOCAL PERCEPTIONS MATTER

The online survey of peacekeeping personnel revealed that the vast majority of respondents believe that local perceptions are important to effectively carry out their work, as shown in Figure 2.

A range of arguments, many of which intersect, highlighting the importance for international actors and for peacekeepers specifically to take account of local perceptions in supporting transitions from conflict to peace. These can be summarized into three broad justifications.

2.4.1 INCLUSIVITY INCREASES THE DOMESTIC LEGITIMACY AND THEREBY SUSTAINABILITY OF POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

Experience has consistently shown that peace can only be defined and achieved by the people of the country themselves; it cannot be imposed from 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.

The notion that solutions identified by the fullest possible range of affected people will be more appropriate and enduring has its roots in international development practice and has increasingly been applied to peacemaking, peacebuilding and statebuilding work. Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond have warned that limiting dialogue to a community of like-minded officials, practitioners and national elites risks leading to a phenomenon of "epistemic closure" that prevents new ideas from entering the international aid and development discourse. In this scenario, policy options are developed without involving a wide range of interests and perspectives and are likely to be innately conservative and non-threatening to policy makers and others who benefit from the *status quo*.[10]

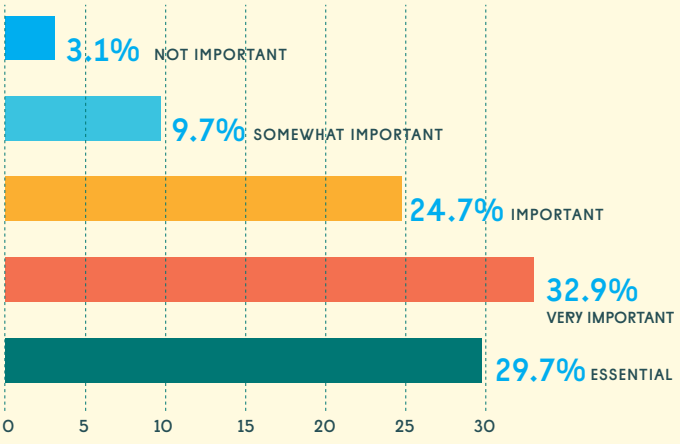
[10] Mac Ginty, Roger; Richmond, Oliver (2009).

It is therefore unsurprising that a comparative analysis of conflict resolution initiatives conducted by Conciliation Resources concluded that peace processes that ensure public participation, directly or through representative or consultative mechanisms, enjoy greater domestic legitimacy – that is, 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. Since not everyone can sit at the negotiating table, establishing mechanisms to capture a broad base of public opinion and feed into the process is necessary to facilitate greater public participation. In Guatemala, for example, a "Civil Society Assembly" consultative mechanism was established in 1994 to advise the official peace negotiators, allowing civil society to voice its views and formulate recommendations.[11]

Of course, an awareness of local perceptions is not sufficient to say that a process has been inclusive; the degree of inclusion in a peace process relies as much on the willingness of the parties around the table to listen to the voice of the people as on the mechanisms established to capture these voices. Information about perceptions shared in the public domain, if credible, can put pressure on the parties to be more representative and

[11] Conciliation Resources (ed.) (2002).

FIGURE 2 | IS HAVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS, NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IMPORTANT TO EFFECTIVELY CARRY OUT YOUR WORK?



accountable. In Northern Ireland, Colin Irwin argues that a key factor in the success of the peace process was the use of "peace polls." This consisted of testing the proposals and priorities advanced by the parties to the conflict in public opinion polls, and then making the results of these polls public (see Peace Polls, page 40). This added a degree of accountability for all parties and identified areas of common ground. It also brought transparency to the negotiations by testing all parties' claims to represent the will of the people.[12] Peace polls have since been employed in a number of conflicts, including Kosovo, Kashmir and Sri Lanka.

While it is difficult to attribute the success of a peace process purely to the degree of inclusivity, there is evidence that failing to effectively incorporate a diverse range of local voices can damage the legitimacy of the process. For example, after the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement accepted the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) in June 2011, a poll conducted by UNAMID revealed a clear division in the population's perceptions of the DDPD. Those opposed to it, including IDPs, refugees and those aligned with the non-signatories to the DDPD cited a lack of inclusiveness in the process that led-up to the signing as a primary reason for their opposition. The survey also revealed that a significant fraction of the local population was misinformed on the content of the Document. Based on these findings, the mission adapted its strategy for disseminating the Document, adding workshops which were attended by a broad array of stakeholders including local authorities, IDP and refugee representatives, members of civil society organizations, and pastoralists, among others. The dissemination process also established a consultative mechanism with key stakeholders from armed groups and the representatives of the Government of Sudan to elicit institutional support and political commitment for the DDPD.

[12] Irwin, Colin (2002).

UN Photo/WFP/Phil Behan

2.4.2 PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IS KEY TO BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Perceptions can be an important causal factor in the relapse into conflict. If one of the parties to the conflict perceives the other as willing and capable of returning to armed violence, they are more likely to retain their weapons, consider violence as a legitimate option, or even strike pre-emptively. Homer Dixon and Blitt argue that perceptions of relative inequality over access to renewable resources, rather than necessarily the objective extent of inequality, are a key driver of conflict.[13] Others have argued that a "commitment gap" or trust deficit is a powerful explanation for why many ceasefires fail – roughly three out of four.[14] Reducing the perceived threat of violence is therefore often a key objective of peacebuilding work.[15] Recent policy research has echoed these conclusions; the 2011 World Development Report argues that "low trust means that stakeholders who need to contribute political, financial, or technical support will not collaborate until they believe that a positive outcome is possible."[16]

While confidence-building is not an end in itself and real transformation of security, justice and economic institutions is required in the long run, strategic efforts to restore confidence in collective public processes as well as the government's ability to deal with violent threats and implement reforms are crucial.

[13] Homer-Dixon, Thomas F.; Blitt, Jessica (1998).
[14] Jones, Bruce; Elgin-Cossart, Molly (2011).
[15] Anderson, Mary B.; Olsen, Lara (2003) pp. 16-17.
[16] World Bank (2011) pp. 11-12.

The first step needed, in many contexts, is to focus on short-term feasible interventions which can be replicated over time to yield a large return. In this regard, perception research can be a very useful way not only of measuring the level of confidence in the institutions, but also of identifying those variables that are determining negative perceptions and act upon them to increase confidence.

Peacekeeping missions often work in environments where governments have limited legitimacy. In the early stages of peacebuilding, power may be hotly contested by other parties and the government may be in place as part of an interim arrangement pending elections. Understanding and integrating the perceptions of a wide range of people takes on a particular importance in such contexts. Interventions that facilitate public debate and allow an inclusive political process to unfold may result in outcomes with greater perceived domestic legitimacy in the longer term.

As with governments, public confidence in a peacekeeping mission significantly affects the mission's capacity to implement its mandate, and can be directly related to public confidence in the peace process. It is therefore critical that missions be able to identify misconceptions or negative opinions of the mission amongst the local population, so that strategy can be adjusted, if warranted, and appropriate public information campaigns and confidence building measures can be planned accordingly.

2.4.3 BROADER SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND ANALYSIS INCREASES EFFECTIVENESS

It is widely argued that international interventions are more likely to have a positive impact on local conflict and peace dynamics if they incorporate a wide range of local perceptions.[17] Failure to understand the local context can result in ineffective conflict management and peacebuilding strategies and/or interventions that exacerbate conflict dynamics.[18] 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.[19] In addition, many key factors in driving conflict – community membership, historic rivalries, ethnic hatred – are social constructions that are constituted at least in part by perceptions. For many researchers and practitioners, the subjective nature of perceptions and their potential to structure social realities and influence people's decisions and actions makes them an important component of analysis, as this information cannot be found elsewhere and may run contrary to more "objective" data.

The World Bank's 2011 World Development Report (WDR) on Conflict, Security and Development drew extensively on perceptions based data to inform its analysis and findings. The World Bank commissioned surveys of perceptions in six post-conflict countries and territories to provide more nuanced information on conflict dynamics that may not have otherwise been uncovered, such as the strong relationship between economic and justice issues. This research echoes the views of peacekeepers that gathering local perceptions increases the robustness of a mission's data on a situation. It also enables the mission to test its empirical data and challenge assumptions about what is needed in the country.

[17] Collaborative Learning Projects (2011). Saferworld; Conciliation Resources (2012). Irwin, Colin (2012).
[18] Gorus, Aditi (2013).
[19] Irwin, Colin (2002). Gagliardone, Iginio; Stremlau, Nicole (2008).

FINDING II

Inclusive post-conflct settlements that take into account the perceptions of the population, rather than only those of national elites and international stakeholders, enjoy greater credibility and public confidence. Local perceptions can bring a higher level of transparency and accountability to the peace process, broadening the basis of political, socio-economic and cultural aspirations that need to be addressed in the settlement as well as checking belligerent parties' claims to be representative of the people.

FINDING III

Perceptions of vulnerability often factor into relapse into conflct and are an entry point for actions to increase confidence. Fostering public trust is vital for post-conflct governments to retain and build legitimacy, and understanding local perceptions to broaden inclusivity in post-conflct governance is key for confidence building.

FINDING IV

Understanding local perceptions improves situational awareness by providing a nuanced understanding of the context that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Information gleaned from perceptions can be used to measure concepts such as legitimacy and credibility.

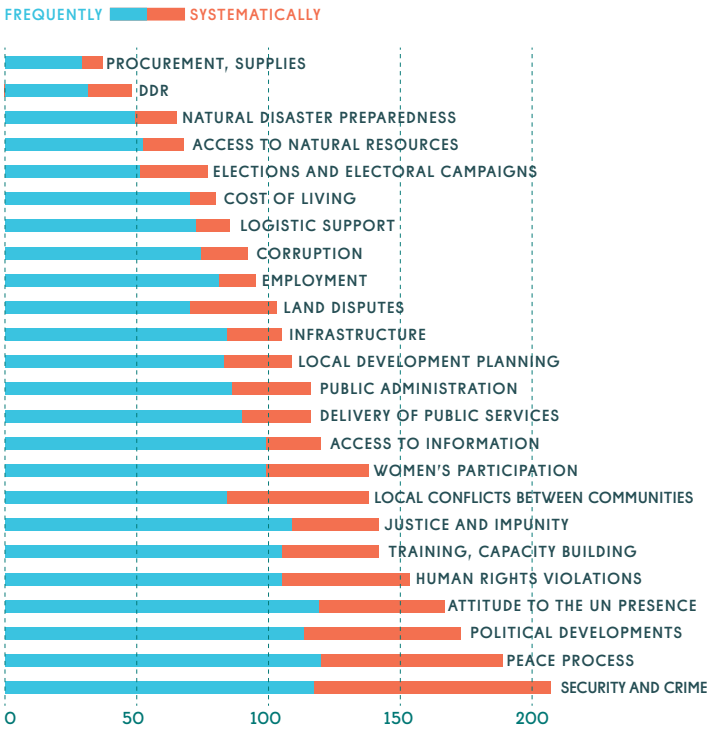
OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICE IN UN PEACEKEEPING

Eighty seven point three per cent of all survey respondents consider local perceptions to be important, very important or essential to their work. Despite having little technical guidance on how to gather local perceptions and incorporate them into analysis and planning, many peacekeeping missions do engage in this type of work, albeit often in an *ad hoc* or semi-structured way. This section provides an overview of current practice in peacekeeping missions, and also highlights in text boxes relevant approaches or techniques adopted by partners. It identifies the reasons peacekeepers seek out local perceptions, the types of information they search for, how they go about doing it, and from whom they solicit input. The section then looks at how, once gathered, these perceptions are incorporated in mission analysis and decision making. A number of key challenges are highlighted which were found to impede the collection and use of data on local perceptions, some of which are particular to peacekeeping, while others are innate to the activity. Finally, the section identifies the key applications of local perceptions to peacekeeping mandate implementation.

3.1 WHAT KINDS OF PERCEPTIONS DO PEACEKEEPERS CAPTURE, AND WHY?

In line with the preceding section and as shown in Figure 3, the survey found that the issues on which peacekeepers either systematically or frequently seek local perceptions include security and crime; the peace process; political developments; attitudes toward the UN presence; and local conflicts between communities. Some of the issues on which local perceptions are less frequently sought include DDR and natural disasters. It seems telling that a number of core issues in society did not feature more prominently. Whereas topical issues such as political developments, security and crime, and human rights violations are discussed frequently, peacekeepers rarely cover underlying issues such as employment, access to natural resources and corruption. Given that perceptions of the peace process are also covered very frequently, it is significant that some of the most common causal factors in conflict are often ignored.

FIGURE 3 | WHICH TOPICS/ISSUES DO YOU COVER WHEN GATHERING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS?



This finding is consistent with data on how peacekeepers use this information. As shown in Figure 4, peacekeepers appear to seek out local perceptions primarily to improve situational awareness and understand trends and threats. More than 70 per cent of respondents cited security threat analysis as an important application of local perceptions. Less frequently cited were applications that promote inclusive and participatory processes, such as feeding perceptions into national decision making and linking partners to the perspectives of local communities. Although local perceptions are also reportedly used to better

define strategies, the types of information collected, according to Figure 3 would suggest that these are tactical or operation strategies rather than high-level systemic strategies aimed at advancing the mission's mandate as a whole.

FINDING V

Peacekeepers tend to solicit local perceptions on short-term, immediate issues such as security incidents or political developments. Systemic, root issues in the conflict are more rarely considered. This information is used primarily to inform short-term analysis on security threats and political developments as part of conflict management processes and short-term strategies.

3.2 WHOSE PERCEPTIONS DO PEACEKEEPERS CAPTURE?

The survey of peacekeeping personnel asked respondents to indicate where they usually find information on local perceptions and what they consider the most relevant or valuable sources to be. As shown in Figure 5, the most commonly cited source of information on local perceptions among peacekeepers, both national and international, was their national colleagues: 66.2 per cent of all respondents indicated that they rely on their national colleagues, either frequently or systematically, to understand local perceptions. The second and third most commonly cited sources of information across all sections were local government officials (either frequently or systematically consulted by 55.3 per cent of respondents) and civil society actors (50.9 per cent). The importance of civil society is probably somewhat underrepresented as many respondents who choose to answer "other" listed youth groups, women's associations, etc., which would generally be included in the broader definition of civil society.

FIGURE 4 | FOR WHICH PURPOSES ARE LOCAL PERCEPTIONS IMPORTANT?

The least consulted sources of information across all categories of respondents were ex-combatants, militia and rebel groups, to which access is difficult and interaction limited to a few interlocutors within the mission. Slightly more surprising is the relatively low level of consultation reported with local journalists and the private sector. This trend is confirmed when results are disaggregated by component. Over 63.5 per cent of substantive staff who participated in the survey stated that they rarely or never consult the private sector or local journalists to understand local perceptions. The lack of interaction, in general, with the private sector appears to be another crucial gap in the understanding of the perceptions of a very influential section of society. Similar results are recorded among Civil Affairs respondents.[20]

In a follow-up question (see Figure 6), respondents were asked to indicate which source of information on local perceptions was the most relevant and/or valuable. The majority (55.1 per cent) stated that village or community chiefs were frequently or always a relevant source of information, followed by local officials (52 per cent) and local police (45.8 per cent).[21] When looking at the responses of the substantive components, "local police" were cited less frequently (the 6th most valuable source of information), below local development non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A specific look at Civil Affairs responses reveals a similar picture, with an increased emphasis on local officials (73.2 per cent of respondents see them as the most valuable source of relevant information), followed by village and/or community chiefs (67.9 per cent) and local development NGOs (53.6 per cent).

Among those seen as the least valuable and relevant sources of information on local perceptions are ex-combatants, taxi drivers and truck drivers.[22] Other neglected categories include traders and shopkeepers, university students, local journalists, people frequenting markets and unemployed youth. It is interesting that while the study found that the most important uses of local perceptions in peacekeeping missions include anticipating security threats and identifying developments that could negatively impact the peace process, current and former armed group members were found to be the two least common sources of information on local perceptions. There are a number of likely reasons for this, including proximity, security risks to peacekeepers and the communities themselves, problems of trust and political barriers that prevent peacekeepers from speaking to armed groups in some missions. Nevertheless, a number of surveys have been successfully conducted on the view of ex-combatants in peacekeeping missions.[23] Missions should consider making greater efforts, where possible, to gather information on the perceptions of such interlocutors in order to better understand their interests and grievances and inform mission strategies to advance the peace process.

[20] United Nations (2013a).

FIGURE 5 – WHO ARE YOUR INTERLOCUTORS WHEN GATHERING INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS?

[21] This number is likely inflated by the large number of UN Police personnel who participated in the survey.

[22] It should be noted that many reintegration programs involve schemes for ex-combatants to become moto-taxi drivers, creating therefore a close relationship between these two groups and maintaining an easily remobilized force in many post-conflict settings.

[23] For example, Blattman, Christopher; Annan, Jeannie (2011) on the reintegration of former children associated with armed groups in Liberia, and Humphreys, Macartan; Weinstein, Jeremy M. (2008) on ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.

Workshop participants stressed that peacekeepers may be missing potentially important perceptions of diasporas which can impact heavily on peace processes. In the Sri Lankan conflict, for example, C. Christine Fair argues that the Tamil insurgency could never have been sustained ideologically and financially without the influence of the diaspora. For Tamils outside Sri Lanka, the perceptions of political opportunity and the expectations of success that had originally mobilized the insurgency remained alive, despite increasingly unfavorable circumstances for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam inside the country.[24] Members of the diaspora, who did not have to live directly with the realities of what was happening in Sri Lanka, failed to understand the merits of various peace proposals.[25]

[24] Fair, C. Christine Fair (2007).
[25] Irwin, Colin (2012) p. 113.

When choosing their interlocutors, the vast majority of respondents claimed to take gender into account, but it seems this does not go much further than principle in many cases. In some components, almost 100 per cent of respondents answered that they collect information differently for men and women, but few could identify how this was done. The highest level of consistency was found in rule of law related sections, where 42.9 per cent claimed to collect perceptions of men and women differently and the same proportion also stated they use varying approaches in doing so. This statistic suggests that a gender sensitive methodology is in place and practiced in this component. This finding is concerning, given that it is now over a decade since Security Council resolution 1325 called on all international peace and security actors to explicitly consider the needs and priorities of women and girls during the implementation of peace agreements, understand the role of women in peacebuilding and measure the impact of conflict on women and children.[26]

[26] S/RES/1325 (2000).

FIGURE 6 | WHERE DO YOU USUALLY FIND THE MOST RELEVANT AND VALUABLE INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS?

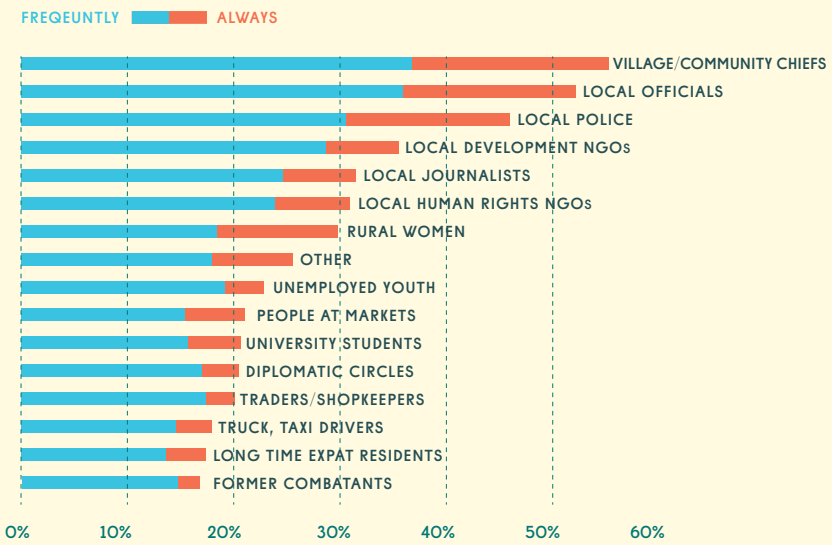
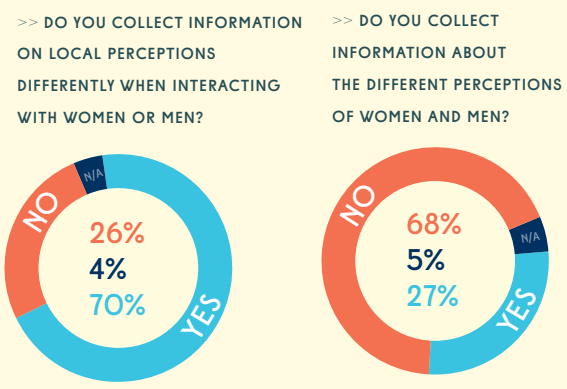


FIGURE 7: MEASURING GENDER SENSITIVITY IN THE COLLECTIONS OF LOCAL PERCEPTIONS



It appears that proximity and convenience may often be the most important factors in determining who peacekeepers consult on local perceptions. The three groups most solicited by peacekeepers – national colleagues, government officials and civil society actors – are all regular interlocutors with peacekeepers and, as such, would not necessarily require considerable additional effort to consult for the purposes of gathering perceptions. This could be interpreted as the integration of perception research into the regular, daily work of mission personnel. However, it could also indicate that local perceptions are largely collected in an *ad hoc* manner that does not entail additional time and resources. The lack of distinct gender sensitive approaches when consulting men and women further indicates the need for peacekeepers to build technique and structure into local perception gathering activities, which are currently mostly unstructured. In this case, operational guidance could assist peacekeepers in determining when different groups should be consulted separately, as well as how this should be done.

FINDING VI

Local perceptions are often collected in an *ad hoc* and unstructured manner that relies largely on national staff and existing local partners of the mission. There is little understanding of techniques or methodologies for collecting local perceptions, including of how to apply a gender sensitive lens.

FINDING VII

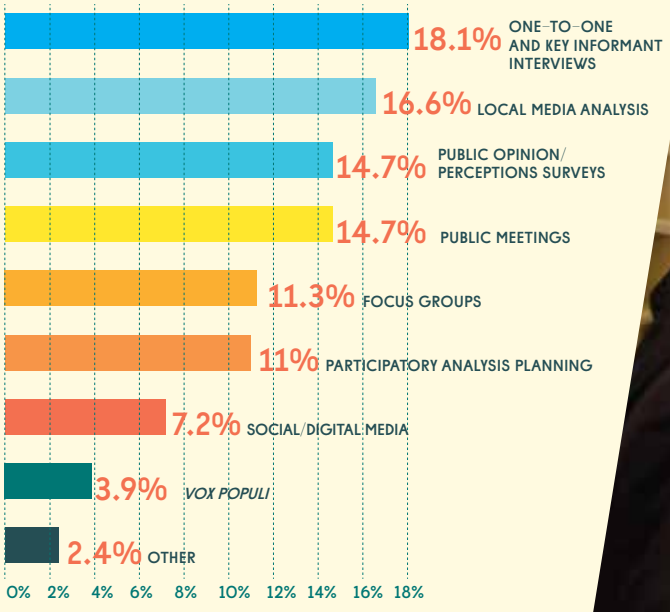
The perceptions of business people, intellectuals, youth, armed group members and other potential spoilers are under-studied. This could result in mission strategies or solutions that do not address excluded or marginalized perceptions, which in turn could negatively affect the sustainability of peace.

UN Photo/Blagoje Grujic

3.3 TOOLS FOR COLLECTING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS

This section provides an inventory of techniques for collecting and understanding local perceptions that are currently in use by peacekeeping missions and other international actors. As shown in Figure 8, the most commonly used techniques reported by field-based peacekeepers surveyed are one-to-one or key informant interviews, local media analysis, public perception surveys and public meetings. A smaller number of respondents mentioned focus groups, participatory analysis, social/digital media and *vox populi,* which is the practice of soliciting the views of "the man on the street" at random. Civil Affairs managers from UNIFIL, UNAMID and MONUSCO stated that their missions have a systematic approach to the employment of these tools, while a larger number reported a more *ad hoc* approach.

FIGURE 8 – WHICH TECHNIQUES DO YOU EMPLOY TO UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONCERNS, NEEDS AND PRIORITIES?



It is important to note that the division of these tools into discrete processes is somewhat artificial. Generally, missions will employ multiple tools concurrently. For example, a mission might use one-to-one interviews to learn about key issues in society, focus groups to develop appropriate survey questions on these issues, and a public perception survey to gauge the population's views on them. In general, the best research on local perceptions almost always combines a variety of approaches.

3.3.1 INDIVIDUAL/ IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The survey indicates that one-to-one interviews are most frequently used by peacekeepers to understand local perceptions, concerns, needs and priorities. An in-depth interview is a two way, usually face-to-face discussion during which the interviewer poses questions in a neutral manner and, based on the responses, probes the respondent with follow-up questions. The format for such interactions could range from formal, semi-structured interviews to more informal conversations that are nevertheless purposive in their motivation and conduct. Questions are open-ended to avoid one-word answers and allow participants expound upon their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

UN Photo/Iason Foounten

One-to-one interactions are often used to build relationships with local actors and establish trust. For example, in 2012 a protection assessment in eastern DRC carried out by Oxfam, the Stimson Center and Congolese civil society employed focus groups with local communities in conflict affected areas. Prior to the focus groups, Congolese civil society representatives conducted one-on-one interviews with local authorities to ensure the leaders accepted the process and consented to the researchers' presence. This approach also enabled researchers to undertake interviews with official and unofficial community leaders and state representatives separately from the focus groups. This method sought to increase the comfort-level of focus group participants to speak frankly and reduce the risk of reprisals from those in power that might be involved in or connected with those perpetrating violence[27] (see Box, page 42).

One-to-one interviews often yield the most detailed and in-depth information and allow the questioner to adapt lines of inquiry to the respondent. When combined with the network approach (see Section 3.3.4) this tool can, over time, provide a deep understanding of specific issues, unique perspectives and local political and security thought patterns. One-to-one interviews can be particularly useful in learning about the perceptions, priorities and intentions of individuals with the capacity to affect the political or security situation. Adopting appropriate precautions before, during and after one-on-one meetings allows for a higher level of confidentiality and increases the potential of discussing sensitive issues openly. However, without these precautions peacekeepers risk exposing their counterparts to potential harm as a result of being identified and targeted. Every effort must therefore be made to secure and guarantee the anonymity of the informant.[28]

Moreover, this approach also carries the greatest risk of distortion, manipulation and bias. There is a risk of assuming that perceptions expressed in one-to-one interviews are representative of local populations, when in fact these perceptions may be heavily dependent on the personal opinions and motivations of the interlocutor. One-to-one interviews may therefore be most useful in gathering deeper information on key issues identified through other means, but should not be considered representative without employing other tools.

[27] Oxfam (2012); Gorur, Aditi (2013).
[28] Mertens, Donna; Ginsberg, Pauline (2008).

3.3.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings, often called townhall or village meetings, are less structured than focus groups, though the agenda may cover a specific set of issues. Participation is usually broad as the objective is to capture a range of local opinions or views from the town or village in question. While public meetings endeavour to include a large swath of the local community, there is usually no set methodology for selecting participants. Townhall meetings are used by peacekeeping missions for a range of purposes, including providing information on and/or promoting discussion of key issues, such as peace agreements, peacebuilding priorities and mission activities.

Following a resurgence of violence in certain communities in Haiti, the MINUSTAH Community Violence Reduction (CVR) section organized a series of meetings to engage in formal discussions with local residents to understand their anxieties and their appraisals of the situation. Known as "community fora", community leaders, religious representatives, community-based organizations, civil society members and local authorities from CVR intervention zones come together to diagnose the root causes of community violence and discuss approaches to address these issues. Several participatory approaches can be used during a community forum, including brainstorming, mapping, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Community fora also allow CVR officers to stay in contact with active community members and gain key insights into the changing gang-related dynamics of CVR intervention areas. The fora serve to ensure legitimacy and help increase the local population's ownership of CVR-funded interventions.

The support provided by UNAMID Civil Affairs to the dissemination of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) is another example of how public meetings can be used to capture local perceptions in a structured fashion. In this particular case the mission supported the organization of 57 workshops across the territory soliciting the participation of 7,540 individuals form political parties, unions, local administration, youth and nomads, to name a few. Civil Affairs Officers attended the workshops

as observers and were able, through the use of an information gathering template, to register the perceptions of different local stakeholders compare perceptions across different communities and regions. This helped the mission plan activities to support its implementation, including the launching of the Darfur Internal Dialogue and Consultation, a main component of the Document intended to build trust among communities and create ownership. In practice, meetings are often used in UNAMID in the wake of security incidents to solicit local perceptions. The Civil Affairs section at mission headquarters often tasks the Civil Affairs field teams with organizing meetings with local interlocutors and provides the teams with a set of questions, topics and thematic issues to cover during these meetings.

Public meetings are common practice in many peacekeeping missions and often serve multiple purposes simultaneously, for example soliciting local perceptions while sensitizing a community to the work of the mission and promoting the observance of human rights. They are an important consultative mechanism, but it should be recalled that public meetings will generally be reflective of the local political structure and power dynamic and thus some voices may be excluded from the discourse.

3.3.3 FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is a qualitative research method that "involves discussing a specific set of issues with a pre-determined group of people."[29] Researchers should prepare a list of questions or discussion guide in advance and should identify a target group and recruit them using a non-random (purposive) technique. Participants are often selected based on the need to solicit opinions on issues that pertain to certain demographic groups such as former combatants or communities in volatile areas deemed to face particular protection risks. The group setting is intended to replicate natural social interaction, make participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences, and allow participants to control the direction of the discussion, to some degree.

Among non-UN international actors, there are many examples of focus groups being used for a range of purposes, often in combination with other techniques. For example, the 2012 protection assessment in eastern DRC conducted by Oxfam, the Stimson Centre and Congolese civil society actors (Oxfam's Protection Assessments, page 42) used focus groups and one-to-one interviews in tandem. In Lebanon, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, in cooperation with its local partner, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, conducted a focus group study to analyze and evaluate young people's perception of local government work.[30]

Focus groups appear to be a somewhat underused tool in peacekeeping missions considering that they have low logistical costs and do not require sophisticated sampling techniques or statistical analysis. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that successful focus groups require considerable technical skills, which could imply resources for training or outsourcing. Moderators must be able to balance the mission's objectives with the interests of the group members, encourage full participation from all members, and manage difficult or tense interactions between participants. The analysis of focus group discussion may be time consuming and complex, as questions are open ended. Nevertheless, although they are generally not representative of the entire population, focus groups can assist missions in understanding the perceptions of key groups of actors and designing interventions that are responsive to local concerns and priorities. In particular, missions can specifically target marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups whose perspectives may be underrepresented in other forums, such as townhall meetings.

[29] Hennink, Monique M. (2007), p. 4.

[30] Institute for War and Peace Reporting (2010).

UN Photo/Albert González Farran

3.3.4 THE NETWORK APPROACH

This tool describes an approach rather than a technique, as it incorporates a range of methods. A network-based approach involves regular contact with a range of local actors through formal or informal interaction with, for example, local authorities, community leaders, and civil society actors, and academics, as well as informal conversations with local people such as shopkeepers, market stall holders, taxi drivers, restaurant owners, and local journalists. The approach revolves around building relationships with local interlocutors through regular contact as opposed to approaching local people with a predefined set of questions. In a network approach, local perceptions are often gathered in the course of another activity. For example, mission personnel may meet with a local mayor to discuss the implementation progress of a Quick Impact Project and during the course of the conversation may discuss the mood in the community, including needs, concerns or perceptions of the security situation or the mission.

For short-term situation analysis and early warning, peacekeeping missions tend to rely particularly heavily on a network based approach because contact with local authorities and communities at the grassroots level is one of the most immediate means of gathering information quickly. Local staff are seen as essential in these efforts, both in soliciting and analyzing local perceptions, both through their own networks and by transmitting information on the perceptions of their own communities to international staff. Input from local staff may be informal or formal, depending on whether analysis of information on local perceptions is a specific task assigned to national professional officers, as can be the case in Political Affairs, Civil Affairs, Public Information, and Human Rights components. MONUSCO, for example, has institutionalized the use of local personnel in this way through the recruitment of Community Liaison Assistants (see Section 3.5.2.).

The network approach can be very effective in gaining regular access to information on political developments, early warning, and as an entry point to influence local actors. However, it is important to recognize the limits of the approach. Relying on the views of a relatively small number of actors increases the risk of manipulation and distortion of the information obtained in this way. Moreover, information received in this manner is also often short-term in nature and may have limited uses for macro trend analysis and strategic planning.

3.3.5 LOCAL MEDIA MONITORING AND ANALYSIS

Media monitoring and analysis could be described as an indirect way of gathering local perceptions, as it does not extract information directly from the subject. Instead, media analysis relies on information on current events articulated by news agencies – often controlled by local elites – to inform understanding of popular perceptions, but through the lens of a particular political perspective. This is particularly true in countries with less developed journalistic cultures and limited public media, where in general media analysis will not so much inform the mission of current local perceptions, but rather the opinion that elites are attempting to promote among their viewers/listeners/readers.[31] For instance, a Civil Affairs Officer from MINUSTAH explained that daily monitoring of the local radio by the mission's Public Information Office is useful not because the information is always accurate, but because it allows the

[31] Gagliardone, Iginio; Stremlau, Nicole. (2008), p. 1105.

mission to understand what issues are likely to become important locally and know who is propagating them.

Media monitoring and analysis involves not only reading and summarizing information contained in national media, but also identifying trends and key issues. Some missions have employed a practice of "coding" local media, wherein the material is skimmed and the most salient themes picked out and noted through standardized codes. This enables an analysis of trends across all media sources. Daily media monitoring can help missions identify issues that may require follow-up action with local counterparts. For instance, in the north of Kosovo, two local language assistants, one Albanian and one Serbian, are responsible for conducting media monitoring for the Head of the Office. Each morning they provide a summary of the main issues covered in the media, which gives an overview of the most pertinent daily issues and how locals are reacting to current events. This overview enables the Head of the Office to be aware of issues that may require follow-up and subsequently warrant reporting to mission HQ.

Media monitoring is an important and relatively low-cost tool to identify a range of perceptions on a variety of topical issues and their place in the larger discourse. However, these sources should be analyzed as perceptions held or promoted by elites in control of the media, rather than necessarily organic popular opinion. Shortcomings in the professionalism and ethics of local media operators may also inhibit the accuracy and representativeness of local perceptions in media sources.

3.3.6 PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND OPINION SURVEYS

Public perception and opinion surveys can provide quantitative data which can be used to establish baselines, gauge progress and identify trends.[32] Survey data can also be used to verify assumptions in ways that may not otherwise have been available to missions. For example, in 2013 the Stimson Centre partnered with the Sudd Institute, an independent South Sudanese research organization, to conduct a household survey in South Sudan on perceptions of priority threats, who perpetrates those threats, and who is most vulnerable. The survey also looked at perceptions of protection actors present in the area including UN peacekeepers and asked not only for the perceptions of these actors, but also the reasons behind them. This type of research may help unearth why different communities may have negative or positive views of a peacekeeping operation and identify steps the mission can take to address negative perceptions.

Public perception surveys have been carried out or commissioned by peacekeeping missions for a range of reasons, including informing communication and public information efforts, monitoring peacebuilding dynamics and progress towards mandate implementation, and early warning. UNMIT, for example, conducted two large surveys in 2010 and 2011. The first assessed the communications and media environment in Timor-Leste in order to improve its communications strategy. The second survey solicited views on public security to better understand attitudes towards national security institutions. MINUSTAH regularly conducts perception surveys that measure both perceptions of the mission as well as opinions on a wider variety of social, political and economic issues.[33] Similarly, non-DPKO actors are increasingly using perception surveys for a range of purposes, such as assessing service delivery in Bosnia and Herzegovina, understanding patterns and trends in local-

[32] The study did not cover the large area of work on public perception surveys conducted by bilateral actors and their militaries in the context of ongoing offensive military operations, such as the US government and NATO countries in Afghanistan.

[33] United Nations (2013).

UN Photo/Tobin Jones

level conflict and cooperation in rural Liberia, monitoring police reform in Sierra Leone, and investigating urban security in Haiti.[34]

In peacekeeping, the majority of large surveys are outsourced or done in cooperation with external partners. Partnership arrangements include commissioning expert consultants, working with local civil society actors, universities or research institutions, and partnering with other international actors to undertake joint research. In most cases, the decision to partner with other entities on perception surveys has been due to capacity gaps in relevant expertise and personnel within the mission as well as to ensure greater impartiality in the research and findings. Nevertheless, in most cases, missions have remained highly involved in the design of the research (for example developing questions for survey questionnaires) and the analysis of findings. Peacekeeping missions also tend to seek funding for surveys through external donors.

UNIFIL, for example, has worked with a Lebanese research consultancy to undertake regular local perception surveys in Lebanon. The surveys were initially funded by the British and Norwegian governments and subsequently through the mission's core budget. The survey questionnaire was translated into Arabic and national Civil Affairs Officers reviewed the translation in order to ensure that the true meaning of questions was retained and would be well understood by local communities. The survey was conducted by local enumerators trained by the consultancy firm, which was careful to select enumerators from the different sects within Lebanon (including Sunni, Shia, Christian, Druze) in order to mitigate possible bias in the data collection process. After each round of the survey, the Lebanese consultancy provided UNIFIL with both a written report and the raw survey data. The mission then analyzed findings within the broader socio-political and media environment to provide mission leadership, as well as peacekeeping contingents, with key findings and tailored recommendations.

[34] Mallett, Richard (2012).

As another example, at the time of writing MONUSCO was in the process of launching an ambitious research project involving regularly repeated perception surveys in partnership with UNDP, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and local universities. The project involves a strong capacity-building element whereby the international research institution will train MONUSCO staff and local university personnel in survey techniques and methods. Surveys will then be undertaken by MONUSCO's Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), who are Congolese nationals recruited on the basis of their language skills and their ability to interact with locals on the ground. The survey questions were formulated through a participatory process that included inputs from the UNCT, local mission staff, NGOs and government officials. The geographic areas covered will be those in the areas of responsibility of the Community Liaison Assistants, namely the areas surrounding forward MONUSCO military deployments, such as Company Operating Bases, Temporary Operating Bases and Static Combat Deployments. While the mission hopes to considerably increase its understanding of the views of the population, it is important not to ascribe an overly high degree of representativeness to the project's conclusions; in a country as large as DRC, important elements of the population in remote and highly insecure areas are virtually inaccessible to researchers.

While partnering with others on local perception research has many advantages, it also brings certain challenges. Working in equal partnership with other actors can be time consuming

because of the need for a consensus based process of defining objectives and questions and may involve resolving issues concerning ownership of the findings. Furthermore, attempting to meet the information needs of too many organisations or institutions at once may lead to overly long and complex questionnaires or studies that aim to tackle too many issues.

Perception surveys are increasingly seen by the peacekeeping and peacebuilding communities as a means of gauging vital but difficult to measure indicators such as trust and legitimacy in order to assess the quality of state-society relations. In line with the New Deal for Engagement with Fragile States, the World Bank report on Conflict, Security and Development, and the on-going work to develop the post-2015 Development Goals, public perception surveys are becoming more widely accepted as an appropriate measure of progress against some benchmarks, notably legitimacy, effective governance and security. As security and governance benchmarks are employed more regularly by the Security Council as a basis for decision making, it appears that large-scale surveys could become increasingly important tools for peacekeeping missions in coming years,

However, perception surveys are large-scale, costly endeavours that require large inputs of energy, technical expertise and, when assessing large-scale structural change, long time horizons.[35] In many cases, the use of surveys are most effective for monitoring and evaluation when they are built into initial program planning and combined with other forms of evaluation, such as process tracing, so that correlations between peacekeeping interventions and perceptions are more easily identifiable. Surveys can also use focus groups and individual interviews to help shape questions. As such, this tool does not always meet the time-sensitive needs of missions, nor will its execution always be possible within their operational constraints, such as the limitations on a mission's access to remote or dangerous areas, as discussed above. Where surveys are used, it is usually appropriate to outsource work to external partners with specific expertise and sufficient distance from the mission.

3.3.7 SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS AND MONITORING

Social media can be used to collect public perceptions in a number of ways. The first method involves monitoring social media websites to gauge the mood of segments of the population. For example, keeping an eye on what is trending on Twitter is one way in which peacekeepers can gain an insight into how people immediately respond to a particular event or news. In addition to Twitter, online forums provide an open space for people to post on different topics and comment on existing discussion threads.

With a few exceptions, social monitoring and analysis is not commonly used in peacekeeping as a means of understanding local perceptions. Whether or not missions use social media is likely to depend on a number of factors including local infrastructure and whether there is a local culture of using such a medium. One exception is Kosovo, where UNMIK Civil Affairs officers regularly follow the Facebook pages of various local groups in English as well as local languages. This monitoring provides insights into how locals perceive the ongoing political processes, supplying the mission with frank views and opinions of hardliners or spoilers who may not be as forthcoming in direct meetings with members of the international community. This practice also helps the mission monitor "non-accessible voices" of people affected by political processes. When security incidents take place, many local residents post their views on social media sites, which can be used as part of an early warning mechanism to gauge whether a situation is likely to escalate. The NATO troops and EU Police in Kosovo also reportedly follow these sites actively.

Another possible way of using social media and other online platforms is called "crowdsourcing." Crowdsourcing is the process of outsourcing tasks or questions to a large group by text messages on cellphones. People may be encouraged to participate with financial incentives, however, in many cases this is not necessary as people are keen to be involved in decisions that directly concern them. The survey of practice did not find any examples of crowdsourcing being used by peacekeeping missions but the techniques have been used by other actors in post-conflict and disaster contexts.

[35] Although new technologies such as mobile phone polling offer some less costly and time-intensive options

[36] OCHA (2011).
[37] Waldman, Annie P.; Verity, Andrej; Roberts, Shadrock (2013).

UNDP and OCHA have partnered with the voluntary and technical communities to create technological tools to follow crises, including crisis mapping in Haiti and Libya,[36] though it quickly became clear that there are ethical, security and privacy challenges that must be dealt with when using these technologies.[37] In Kenya UNDP has been active in using crowdsourcing for violence prevention by supporting the Uwiano project, which is managed by a consortium of government agencies and NGOs. During the 2010 constitutional referendum the Uwiano platform was used to run the Amani 108 project, a crowdsourcing program that allowed the public to text in information about election violence to the shortcode "108," and the information would be verified and then rebroadcast on the radio.

The level of connectivity amongst the local population varies greatly across peacekeeping missions and tends to be lower than developing countries in general, though infrastructure barriers are being overcome quickly around the world. To what degree a mission should employ social media as a tool to solicit or monitor local perceptions is therefore context dependent. In some contexts, monitoring social media is a useful and inexpensive means of registering the key concerns of a segment of the population. Emerging social media analysis trends, such as geotag analysis, are highly relevant to community violence reduction, mission conflict mapping and crisis response activities and provide a means of adding visual content to textual reports as a way of facilitating analysis. As with other tools, however, it is important to not assume that the views expressed on social media are representative of the entire population. It is also important that missions develop the technical expertise required to use the most relevant tools to monitor and analyze social media.

FINDING VIII

The tools available to peacekeeping personnel for gathering local perceptions generally yield either in-depth information or widely representative information. As such, multiple tools should be used together, in conjunction with other sources of information, to "triangulate" analysis.

FINDING IX

Large-scale public perception surveys can be useful for a number of peacekeeping tasks, including designing programs and interventions, identifying trends, measuring progress against benchmarks and assessing the mission's reputation. Surveys must be designed, implemented and analyzed by individuals and organizations trained in surveys and statistics and often require external technical support.

FINDING X

Focus groups may be an under-used tool for gathering local perceptions and testing programming and policy options.

3.4 TO WHAT EXTENT IS INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS INTEGRATED INTO MISSION WORK?

While the survey findings provide useful insights into whose perceptions are solicited and valued by field-based personnel, they do not tell us how these perceptions are used in decision making processes by mission leadership. Indeed, there appears to be a degree of frustration amongst field personnel who collect information on local perceptions and feed it up their chain of command, but do not see how this work affects missions' decisions and planning in a tangible way.

As shown in Figure 9, information and analysis on local perceptions is most often transmitted to decision-makers and other parts of the mission through standard channels for information sharing in peacekeeping missions, namely reporting and briefings. Although most survey respondents felt that information on local perceptions is used effectively by missions at least some of the time (see Figure 10), interviews revealed significant confusion and ambiguity as to how that process actually takes place.

One respondent commented that, "in this mission, I am not sure how the information is used. Within JMAC we ensure that our products are submitted to senior mission leadership. After that, we have to assume that they are then used to support the mandate." Another interviewee indicated that information on the perceptions of ordinary people or civil society tends to not be privileged by mission leadership in the way that information from local elites is, particularly in the development of political strategy. One respondent in UNMIK felt that the mission is not willing and/or able to adjust to the evidence provided by local perceptions: "often local perceptions are not in line with mission objectives so the mission ignores factoring such local views into its planning or forces local perceptions to fit its overall objectives." This is consistent with findings by external researchers looking at other missions, who argue that there is friction between HQ and the field, and that while there is "a premium on understanding the local political dynamics," acquired knowledge in the field is often not put to use.[38]

FIGURE 9 | HOW IS ANALYSIS ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS SHARED WITH OTHERS?

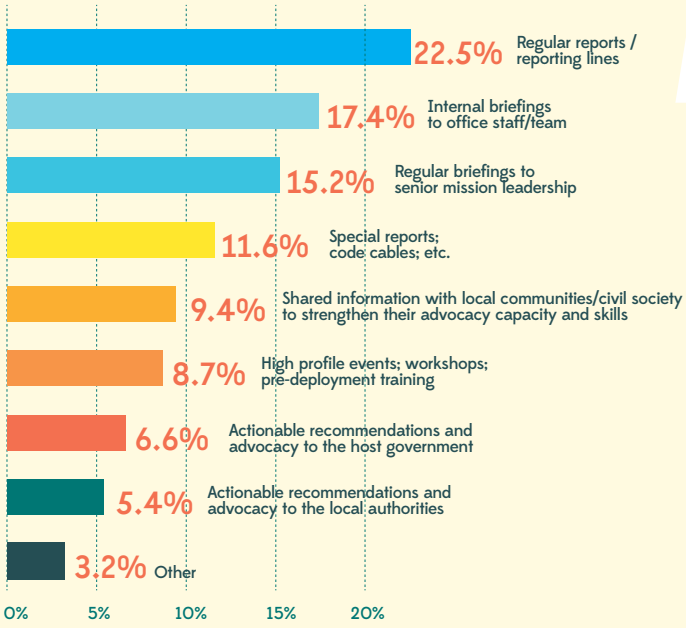
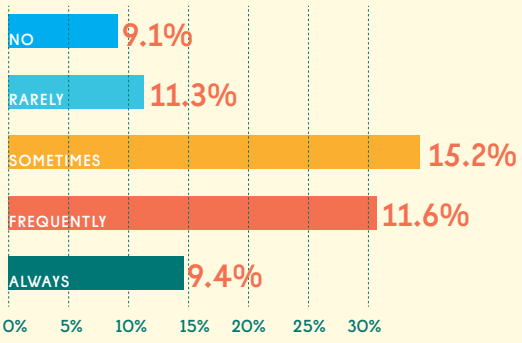


FIGURE 10 | DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE INFORMATION YOU GATHER ABOUT LOCAL PERCEPTIONS IS BEING USED EFFECTIVELY BY THE MISSION?



The online survey revealed a level of dissatisfaction regarding access to information about local perceptions. Just over half of all respondents (50.7 per cent) felt they did not have enough information on local perceptions, 46.3 per cent stated they were satisfied with the level of information, and 3.1 per cent indicated they did not need information of this kind. This suggests information management and institutional constraints confound the integration of local perceptions, rather than scepticism of their innate worth. It should be noted, however, that frustrations are not only expressed with the process of feeding the information from the bottom up but with a lack of awareness and responsiveness at the field level. For example, one respondent noted, "information sharing and information analysis does not seem to be widely disseminated to the lower operational level. Analysis of trends or projections of expected behavioural patterns seems to be only maintained at a strategic level and not at the operational level."

FINDING XI

Once gathered, local perceptions are usually incorporated into field-level analysis and reporting and are transmitted to mission leadership. However, it is not clear to those collecting and analyzing it how this information, once received, informs decision making.

[38] Schia, Niels N.; Karlsrud, John (2013).
See also Felix da Costa, Diana; Karlsrud, John (2012).

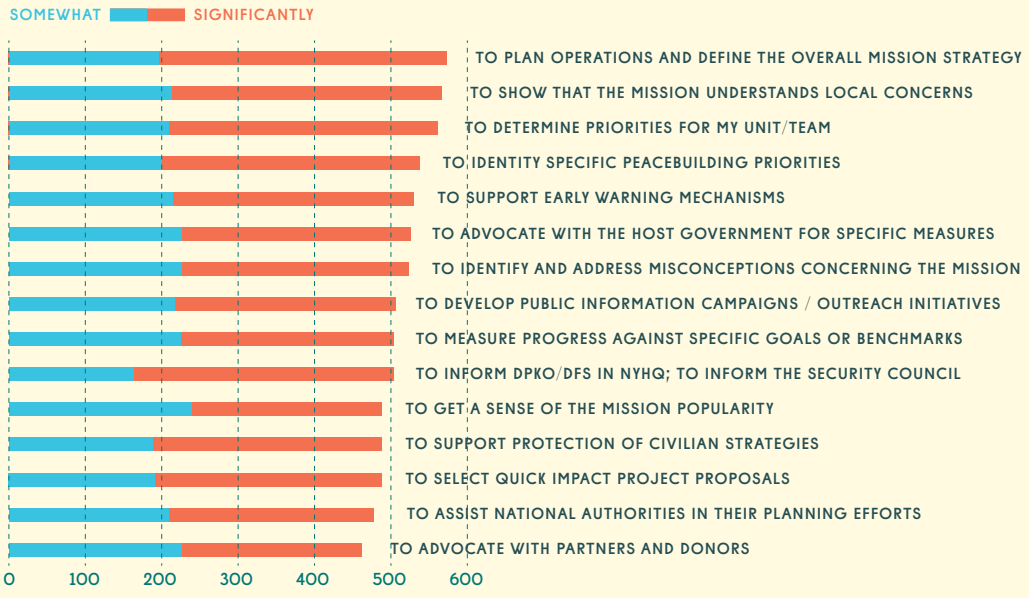
UN Photo/Martine Perret

3.5 KEY AREAS OF PEACEKEEPING INTO WHICH LOCAL PERCEPTIONS ARE INCORPORATED

This section examines in more detail how local perceptions are integrated into some of the key areas of work in peacekeeping missions. It focuses primarily on current practice in UN peacekeeping but also draws on the work of other actors to highlight approaches, lessons and good practices that could be applied more broadly.

As figure 11 illustrates, the online survey findings revealed a range of reasons why peacekeeping personnel consider local perceptions to be important as well as the primary areas of work into which analysis of perceptions is perceived to be incorporated.

FIGURE 11 | TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO WHAT DEGREE IS THIS ANALYSIS BEING USED?



3.5.1 POLITICAL ANALYSIS, STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND BENCHMARKING

According to the majority of survey respondents, one of the primary uses of local perceptions is "to define the overall mission strategy." However, there is little evidence of a systematic and structured use of information on local perceptions to inform the overall mission concept and its strategy. This is not to say that missions are oblivious to the opinions and perceptions of other actors than the political elites, but that these are usually sought in *ad hoc* and unsystematic ways to inform decisions on specific operational requirements (such as supporting elections, facilitating national priority setting and dialogue processes, and promoting legislative reform). Peacekeepers are clearly aware that understanding changes and developments in the local environment, including monitoring whether there has been progress toward peace and stability, is crucial to a mission's ability to devise an appropriate political strategy. However, rarely have missions captured and analyzed information on local perceptions in a way that enables them to identify trends and make strategic predictions. While a number of missions have made specific efforts, such as launching public perception surveys to supplement information and analysis generated through mission structures, this is currently not a standard approach in peacekeeping.

A more common example of how peacekeeping missions integrate local perceptions into their operational strategies is in UNMISS, where field-based Civil Affairs Officers gather local perceptions on current affairs through regular contact with local actors and then transmit them to mission headquarters through standard reporting. While information gathering in this manner is not standardized or systematized, UNMISS underscores the importance of this work in flagging-up differences between elite and community perceptions. This information aids the mission leadership in developing a deeper understanding of political and social developments in the country, and occasionally in alerting national authorities who may not have an accurate understanding of the prevailing sentiments in remote parts of the country. The approach adopted by UNMIL for conducting county level consultations on issues affecting the peace process between 2009 and 2012 was somewhat more structured. The Civil Affairs section established regular, budgeted focus group meetings across the country and systematically channelled information gained in this way through the JMAC to be flagged upward to senior mission leadership. Mission leaders would then approach the government on key issues determined to be important to the success of the peace process (see section 3.5.4).

THE WORLD BANK APPROACH

A number of international actors that operate in conflct affected contexts have well-established practices for gathering local perspectives or consulting communities as part of their programme planning and strategy setting processes. The World Bank's Community Driven Development (CDD) work, which is increasingly undertaken in conflct affected contexts, uses a social analysis model developed by the World Bank as a starting point. Analysis incorporates data gathered through a range of techniques and tools such as the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), as well as qualitative research methods, including, surveys focus groups and village meetings which seek to inform project development and programming. The World Bank also conducts extensive "client surveys" that are intended to feed into national level strategic planning for the Bank's portfolio in a specific country. It asserts that this analysis "provides spaces to incorporate stakeholders' views, establish participatory processes and inform the design of strategies for inclusion, cohesion and accountability."[39] While its methods and techniques for capturing local perspectives are well elaborated, it is difficult to find examples of how local perspectives have been incorporated in local level projects or country level strategic plans.

[39] World Bank (2011).

Failure to incorporate local perceptions in mission strategic planning may result in a mismatch between the priorities identified by the mission and the expectations of the population. For instance, an independent expert conducting research into local perceptions of security and the security sector in Liberia found that, contrary to the expectations of UNMIL, many people did not want to see more armed police in their communities because police were generally found to be corrupt and disruptive to their lives. These findings ran contrary to UNMIL's Security Sector Reform (SSR) strategy, which focused on increasing the number of police rather than the credibility of the police force. A careful analysis of evolving local perceptions on security, as national police forces were being deployed, and triangulating it with statistical data on crime and security would have allowed the mission to improve its assessment of the trade-offs of focusing on quantitative rather than qualitative efforts to deploy police officers in the countryside.

Some peacekeeping missions have sought to supplement the analysis produced by JMAC through large-scale regular public perception surveys, which generate quantitative data which is then used to establish baselines, track change and identify trends (see Section 3.3.6). Since 2007, UNIFIL has commissioned regular large-scale public opinion surveys, which include questions about people's perceptions of security as a means to identify

THE EUROPEAN UNION APPROACH

The European Union (EU) has sought to improve the way in which it engages in conflict affected contexts by commissioning projects that generate country based conflict analysis to inform its policy and programming. One such example is an eighteen-month project, undertaken by the NGOs Conciliation Resources and Saferworld which aimed to bring perspectives of communities affected by conflict and instability to a wide range of decision makers in the EU and its Member States, as well as national decision makers in-country.[40] The project used participatory conflict analysis and sought to build the capacity of local actors to articulate their needs, views and ideas to decision makers and inform EU programming in conflict affected contexts. The project also included advocacy training, in-country meetings with national and EU officials and brought local actors to Brussels and other EU capitals for face-to-face meetings in order to support communities to voice their opinions on the conflict and possible solutions directly. In doing so, the project aimed to raise awareness among local actors that their views and ideas are legitimate and to convey to policymakers the need to listen to local voices. This approach moves beyond simply extracting local opinions and perceptions and seeks to engage local people more directly, not only in choosing programming, but also possible solutions to the identified conflict issues and dynamics.

[40] Saferworld; Conciliation Resources (2012).

priorities and track public confidence in the state's provision of security. Findings are analyzed in the broader socio-political and media environment and triangulated with qualitative information gathered through direct interaction with local communities and authorities. The first survey findings were taken as a baseline and subsequent surveys are used to measure changes in perceptions. Trends identified in this manner are an essential tool for formal mission planning processes, selecting new Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), and briefing incoming military personnel on the local political context and cultural sensitivity. The survey findings are also shared with the government and members of the UN Country Team (see Section 3.6.2 on security and ethical issues that must be taken into account when considering sharing survey information with other actors).

The data solicited through large-scale public perception surveys commissioned by UNIFIL is also used to shape and inform military tasks. An instructive example arose when locals in one area started blocking the roads to prevent troops from accessing the area. When research revealed that the residents were dissatisfied with the presence of noisy tanks in their community, the mission replaced them with lighter military vehicles and the locals subsequently unblocked the roads. Measures have also been put into place by UNIFIL to mitigate local discontent with military operations by having peacekeeping troops inform local populations in advance of operations and explain their intention and purpose.

In DRC, MONUSCO has led efforts to initiate a series of public perception surveys to inform stabilization and peace consolidation efforts of the mission, UN Country Team, local universities and government actors (see section 3.3.6). The project, which will be undertaken in coordination with UNDP and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, which specializes in perception based research, aims to provide national and international stakeholders with reliable data on patterns and trends in the area of human security, peacebuilding, rule of law and access to justice, and protection, including early warning. It will include baseline surveys and a series of polls with the local communities on their perceptions of security, protection and the performance of related public institutions.

Public perceptions can be used to create benchmarks and monitor progress as a basis for decision making. In 2012, as part of the Liberia Peacebuilding Program's Justice and Security component, the Liberia Peacebuilding Office carried out a public perception survey in three pilot counties that will be covered by a new regional hub for justice and security service delivery. The Office's objectives for the survey were twofold: first, to collect empirical data so that the operational plans of the services operating from the hub would responsive to community needs; and secondly, to create baselines which can be used to assess the impact of the hub over time. The survey's results yielded useful recommendations for planning that may not have come out through other processes, such as the importance of ensuring that reforms are mindful of the community's reliance on traditional methods of dispute resolution. It also provided valuable data on security, such as respondents' perceptions of their own levels of security which, when repeated over time, will provide a basis for evaluating peacebuilding in Liberia.

Similarly, in response to Security Council resolution 1925, which decided "that future reconfigurations of MONUSCO should be determined on the basis of the evolution of the situation on the ground,"[41] the mission established a joint security assessment process with the Government of DRC to assess the security situation on a district-by-district basis. As part of the process, joint assessment teams travelled to local communities to assess local perceptions of progress against indicators, including the capacity of the state to protect the population and the consolidation of state authority. The data gathered through this process then served as the basis for negotiations between the mission and the government on a joint assessment of the security situation in eastern DRC at the district level, which in turn served to assess progress against the benchmarks at the strategic level.[42]

Local perceptions are therefore most useful to mission strategy setting when they are viewed as fluid and dynamic. When repeated over time using the initial survey as a baseline, surveys of local perceptions can identify trends and provide early warning of upcoming issues.

[41] S/RES/1925 (2010).
[42] S/2010/512.

PEACE POLLS

Between April 1996 and February 2003, nine surveys of public opinion were conducted in support of the Northern Ireland peace process by increasing party inclusiveness, identifying issues and language, testing party policies, helping to set deadlines and increase the overall transparency of negotiations through the publication of technical analysis and media reports.

The parties were given as much ownership of the research as possible so that they would take the results seriously. Questions were designed to test party policies as a series of options or preferences from across the social and political spectrum. The moderating voice of 'the silent majority' was thus given expression while extremist positions were demonstrated to be marginal with little cross-community support. From the drafting of these questions to sample design, ethics, timing and publication, the program of research was decided by all the parties.

Results of the surveys were made publicly available in their entirety, effectively giving the wider community a "seat at the negotiating table" and preventing any selective analysis of the results. This inter-track activity that extended across the political spectrum to all the major parties, civil society and the public at large helped to build a consensus for the Belfast Agreement that lead to a successful referendum and subsequent period of increasing stability.

By increasing the scope of interlocutors from party negotiators to community representatives in general - parliamentarians, academics, journalist, NGOs – the strategy of giving ownership of the research to the local people was extended to the analysis of conflicts in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kashmir, Sri Lanka and Sudan, among others.[43]

3.5.2 PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Understanding changes in the operating environment is crucial to mission efforts to identify security threats, including threats to the safety of civilians. Situation analysis and monitoring security trends are among the primary reasons that peacekeeping missions gather and analyze local perceptions.[44] The key ways in which missions monitor the situation for threat analysis purposes are through regular contact with networks of local interlocutors. The Joint Operations Centre (JOC) provides an overview of short-term events while the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) is responsible for analyzing events over a longer period of time, from one week and beyond, including through direct contact with local communities and authorities.

[43] Irwin, Colin (2002).
[44] See Figure 4.

Field-based personnel who interact with local communities and authorities on a daily basis play a central role in conveying information on threats to civilians. It is important to note that in many cases early warning may not be the primary objective of meetings or interactions with local communities, but information relevant to threat analysis is obtained in the process. In UNAMID, for example, local perceptions gathered through the DDPD dissemination process (see Section 2.4.1) are also used in threats analysis. In Abiyei, UNISFA has established 17 Joint Security Committees (JSCs), comprising the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities and UNISFA representatives, in order to ensure participation and local ownership in relation to security issues. The JSCs focus on the implementation of local security arrangements and the peaceful return of IDPs and nomads while also providing information on threats.

After being criticized for having insufficient early warning capacity in eastern DRC, MONUSCO introduced a range of measures in 2010 to improve communication with local communities and incorporate local perceptions and concerns into conflict mapping, early warning and threat analysis efforts. This included deploying 202 Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) alongside UN military components at the company or platoon level in 71 locations in eastern DRC. While acknowledging risks of bias resulting from affiliations that CLAs may have with particular members or sections of the local society, the mission has found CLAs to be crucial to its ability to understand and integrate local perceptions, though it is too early to fully assess the impact of this initiative. The CLAs facilitate communication with the local communities, authorities, build confidence and ease access to local networks, thereby allowing a deeper understanding of the local context. CLAs send daily reports to the Civil Affairs component, which are compiled and subsequently analyzed. Local staff also participate directly in the analysis, which produces a higher quality product given their expertise in the local context.

DPKO/DFS guidance on developing PoC strategies highlights the importance of local perceptions and emphasizes that, "sustained dialogue with the local population is required to identify the threats posed to them and their vulnerabilities and to understand how the mission can support existing protection capacities within the local community."[45] MONUSCO highlighted the importance of local perceptions in both situation analysis and response as well as the development of longer-term strategies to protect civilians. As part of its PoC risk assessments, MONUSCO personnel gather and integrate information on local people's perceptions of their own security, which is then analyzed together with data on population movements, human rights violations, and the ability of national security institutions to effectively execute their

[45] United Nation (2011b).

UN Photo/Albert González Farran

UN Photo/Myriam Asmani

FOCUS GROUPS INFORM OXFAM'S PROTECTION ASSESSMENTS IN DRC

Oxfam, a key protection actor in DRC, has used focus groups and interviews to gather local perceptions since 2007, which helps to assess the security environment and inform their protection strategies. In 2012, Oxfam worked with the Stimson Center and Congolese civil society organizations to publish an assessment of perceived security and insecurity created by the state and its armed forces and the effect MONUSCO has had on the protection environment. Based on these perceptions, the report makes recommendations for how the mission can improve its protection operations and enhance communication with local communities.[47]

As part of the protection assessment, Congolese civil society partners used focus groups and one-to-one interviews. Focus groups were preceded by consultations with community leaders and local authorities in order to gain consent and secure access to communities. Individual interviews were conducted separately from focus groups with village chiefs, members of the Congolese armed forces, police and the intelligence agency in order to capture the perspectives of local leaders, increase the comfort level of focus group respondents to answer questions in a frank manner, and to mitigate risks to the researchers and subjects.

The villages and focus group participants were selected through a series of two-day workshops wherein participants selected research locations, including villages controlled by the Congolese state and administrative authorities, villages controlled by the Congolese armed forces, those controlled by armed groups and where control fluctuated between groups. The aim was to enable the researchers to better understand how different types of control might affect views of the security situation. Within these categories, some villages were selected because they were near a main road and some because they were isolated. Some of the selected villages had a MONUSCO presence, such as a nearby base or regular patrols. Villages were also selected based on established relationships between the Congolese civil society partners and the communities, to ensure they could be accessed without putting partners or communities at significant risk.

In the selection of focus groups at the workshop, Congolese civil society partners identified the most significant threat that each village faced and the groups most vulnerable to that threat, for example displaced men and displaced women. The exercise was repeated to identify the second most significant threat and who was vulnerable. These criteria was used to select participants when the research was implemented.

After each focus group discussion, the Congolese civil society partners participated in a debriefing workshop where they analyzed initial findings, identified lessons learned and proposed next steps. Analysis and insights were fed into the assessment report. The report makes recommendations to local regional and international actors, including the peacekeeping mission, on how to better protect civilians.[48]

[47] Van Damme, Stephen; Oxfam (2012), Gorur, Aditi; Stimson Center (2013).
[48] Ibid.

responsibilities. A Civil Affairs Officer from MONUSCO stated that perceptions of security are a particularly important indicator in evaluating the security situation because they may reveal concerns not otherwise observable through visible facts on the ground. For example, an individual may express that they feel very safe despite the presence of rebel groups nearby and the absence of protective security institutions. If the mission does not speak to this person, it will not be in a position to understand the reason he/she feels safe and will not be able to respond effectively. This illustrates the importance of not only listening to what local people say about the security situation, but also understanding the sources and causes of their perceptions.

MONUSCO's highly structured approach to capturing local perceptions for PoC threat analysis is not common to all peacekeeping missions. Interviews with personnel from other missions indicate that it is sometimes helpful to use a more informal approach when soliciting local perceptions in order to avoid raising unrealistic expectations. A respondent from UNMISS explained that the mission's need to gather local perceptions related to the security situation must be balanced with risk of raising unrealistic expectations among the population that the mission will take immediate action when in fact it may not have the capability to do so.[46] A respondent from MONUSCO also acknowledged the risk that structured approaches such as surveys may raise the expectations of the local population. This is mitigated by CLAs, who are responsible for communicating what the mission can do in response to the information they gather.

3.5.3 OUTREACH, COMMUNICATIONS AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Effective communication with the host population and government is an important component of a peacekeeping mission's political strategy. As a respondent from the DPKO/DFS Public Affairs Section explained, the mission's "messaging" should be based on its political "positioning" and form part of the overall political strategy. Public information and outreach efforts support the political strategy by reinforcing the mission's position on key issues, informing local communities about mission activities and demonstrating that it is listening to the local population. In this way, the communications

[46] While UNMISS' current approach to understanding and integrating local perceptions has to date been more informal than that of MONUSCO, mission personnel underscored that perceptions are critical to the implementation of its PoC strategy, particularly in terms of the mission's credibility as a source of protection and for timely early warning of threats. Plans are underway in UNMISS to implement a more systematic approach to integrating local perceptions in its PoC strategies. This includes the recruitment of CLAs, who will feed local perceptions into the planning of military patrols and the development of PoC action plans, which will involve consultation with local communities in order to analyze threats and identify appropriate responses.

UN Photo/Basile Zoma

strategy builds confidence in the mission and, by extension, the peace process. Public information and community outreach strategies may include awareness raising or addressing misconceptions about the mission and its mandate as well as broader issues around peacebuilding and the peace process. These activities are often complementary to activities aimed at gathering local perceptions and in many cases can be conducted concurrently.

Information on perceptions is used to help missions identify key local issues and concerns as well as the most effective modes of communication for the context. Communications strategies include public information efforts that use print, broadcast and social media, as well as public statements by the Head of Mission or spokesperson. Outreach work, such as townhall meetings or one-to-one interviews, is carried out to establish direct, two-way communication with communities. Some missions have also established radio programs that offer an ideal platform to reach out to a broader range of local stakeholders and influence their perceptions. This might require some creativity, such as when a producer of Radio Miraya in UNMISS realized that women were not calling in their programs because few had access to telephones and consequently set up a mobile broadcasting van to reach out to women and increase contribution rates of female listeners.

designed to effectively communicate the process for UNMIL's drawdown and eventual closure and to build the population's confidence in national institutions. The strategy aims to empower Liberia's security institutions to take the lead in addressing local community fears and expectations associated with the mission's drawdown by making mission communications resources available to them, such as the mission's radio station. UNMIL has also assisted national authorities in organizing townhall meetings to speak directly with the affected populations.

Another longstanding tool at the disposal of peacekeeping missions are Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), which are intended to build confidence in the mission in the short term, thereby improving the environment for effective mandate implementation over the longer term.[49] In Mali, MINUSMA has, from the beginning of its operations, understood the strategic importance of maintaining a positive image amongst the local community and has thus prioritized QIPs for the rehabilitation of water and electricity systems in areas surrounding its new offices and military bases. However, due to the general absence of adequate tools to measure the impact of QIPs, the assumption that they contribute in a real way to confidence building remains largely untested.

Examples of how local perceptions are used to improve the mission communication strategy or confidence building initiatives include one in UNAMA, where the Spokesperson would regularly

[49] United Nations (2013a).

UN Photo/Albert González Farran

poll Public Information staff around the county for the most difficult questions they had been asked that week and provide the top five key questions to the Senior Management Team as a type of quick *vox populi*. In Timor-Leste, UNMIT conducted a large-scale survey on communications and media in 2011 to assess the information and media landscape and improve future communications efforts. Public perception surveys commissioned by UNIFIL in Lebanon include questions about how the mission is perceived as well as the way in which people would like to be informed about its activities, which help orient the mission's public information and outreach strategy.

When planning communications strategies and confidence building measures, it is important to understand that local perceptions are often highly dynamic and affected by a range of factors, some of which may not be obvious. Workshop participants highlighted how, through efforts to gain a deep understanding of local perceptions, peacekeeping missions can identify the "ecology" of perceptions in the country – that is, the process by which perceptions are created and changed – and thereby plan the most effective public information initiatives.[50]

In addition to communication and outreach on the peace process, peacekeepers in UNMISS, UNOCI, MINUSTAH, and, as noted

[50] Higate, Paul; Henry, Marsha (2009).

GIVING THE PEOPLE A VOICE: THE AFROBAROMETER

A number of NGOs in this field are attempting to capture, analyze and publicize local perceptions in order to give local people a voice in governments' and international donors' priority setting processes. A notable example is the Afrobarometer research project, which conducts regular, nationally representative surveys in a range of countries across Africa. Surveys aim to measure popular perspectives of the social, political, and economic environment, including how government and state institutions and the political system are perceived by local communities in terms of effectiveness, inclusiveness and trust. Users of the survey findings have included African governments (for example, direct input to Ministry of Finance budget planning in Ghana and briefings for new government officials in South Africa after the 2009 elections) and international organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP, which have used the findings to assess democracy/governance indicators, contribute to budget preparation processes, and to support government strategy development. Survey topics include the demand for and satisfaction with effective, accountable and clean government, judgments of overall governance performance and social service delivery. While Afrobarometer surveys are not undertaken in many of the countries in which UN peacekeeping missions are deployed, its role in many developing societies is of relevance to missions with peacebuilding mandates.

above, UNIFIL indicated that being able to effectively understand and respond to local perceptions and misconceptions regarding the mission and its mandate are essential to maintaining its credibility and legitimacy. For example, UNMISS stated that the local population often has unrealistic expectations concerning what the mission can do to protect them and emphasized that it is important to understand local expectations in order to devise targeted strategies to communicate the mandate and capacity of UNMISS. This, they underscored, is crucial in order to maintain mission credibility and legitimacy and its ability to effectively implement its mandate.

IN 2006, UNIFIL was granted a new more robust mandate and significantly larger troop presence in the wake of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The mission recognised the potential for local apprehension regarding the new role of the mission and initiated a series of public perception surveys (see Section 3.3.6) to gauge how the mission was viewed and the level of understanding about its mandate. Based on the finding that local communities perceive the international troops to be insensitive to their culture and local ways, the mission initiated cultural sensitivity training for the incoming soldiers and a "Blue-line Briefing" conducted by the Civil Affairs officers in which

UNDP'S COMMUNITY SECURITY AND SOCIAL COHESION APPROACH

One of the key pillars of UNDP's "Community Security and Social Cohesion" approach to programming is enhancing local governance and local institutions by strengthening the voice of communities and enabling citizens to better articulate their concerns.[51] The approach, which seeks to support local communities in voicing their concerns to national policy-makers, aims to support the development of more effective states that are accountable to citizens for service delivery. It involves bringing together state and civil society actors to identify causes of insecurity and potential responses to them. The approach centres on participatory needs assessments, planning and accountability, which include analysis of a range of key thematic elements, such as people's perceptions of social cohesion/exclusion, sources of insecurity, risk vulnerability, police, justice and other services. Analysis incorporates a diverse array of qualitative and quantitative data in order to identify key risk factors in the community and ensure that "objective" data of incidents, events and causes is married with the declared views of community members. Community-level concerns or impacts are then brought to macro level policy-makers by way of intermediary levels of government and civil society.

[51] UNDP (2009), p. 24.

troops are sensitized to local culture and behaviour. Troops are expected to take this information into account during their operations in order to not raise tensions and dissatisfaction among the local communities.

Similarly, surveys conducted by MINUSTAH highlighted the prevalence of a perception that the mission is financed by the Government of Haiti, which threatened the mission's legitimacy. In recent years, MINUSTAH Public Information Officers have executed multiple outreach campaigns focused on improving the reputation of the mission. A handbook was developed focussing on MINUSTAH's achievements, including Quick Impact Projects and how mission assets have been used to assist the national authorities. Anderson and Olsen emphasize that in peace processes it is important to manage local perceptions, including through the media, in order to minimize the potential of negative publicity on the process.[52] They recommend involving the media early on in the process, which they note provides a greater opportunity for proactively encouraging a positive public opinion of the mission.

However, as one MINUSTAH respondent argued, not all misconceptions can be dispelled through proactive communication strategies and there are cases where the responses provided by peacekeeping will be unsatisfactory: "when an important bridge allowing access to a town is damaged by a hurricane, the mission will use its air assets to continue operations in what many will perceive as a disregard for the needs of the local population [...] countless reconnaissance missions [will] inspect the damage [...] without taking action [...] until the local population finds a temporary solution which we will use with our heavy trucks." Similarly, despite UNIFIL's communications efforts, the mission continues to observe a discrepancy between the mission's mandate and what the local population expects of it. For example, many members of the population in southern Lebanon expect UNIFIL to protect Lebanon's sovereignty and perceive Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace as evidence of the mission's bias and failure to implement its mandate.

3.5.4 INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING AND STATEBUILDING

Although supporting the restoration and extension of state authority is central to many peacekeeping mandates, the online survey found few specific references to the importance of local perceptions for peacekeepers in this work. However, a number of the activities described by peacekeepers interviewed for the study fall under this aspect of the mandate. A number of missions highlighted a gap between the perceptions of needs, concerns and priorities of communities and their capacity to voice their opinions to local or national authorities. Missions can help support the restoration of state authority through strengthening state-society relations and helping governments to be more responsive to local communities. For example, in Haiti the central government lacks the resources to regularly reach out to the local population and local authorities in remote rural areas. MINUSTAH Civil Affairs teams on the ground in these regions assist the local governments in communicating with their constituencies by facilitating the set-up of townhalls in order to provide a forum for communicating their views. Later, in the lead-up to the 2011 elections in Haiti, the Civil Affairs section organized candidate debates in communities around the country, where they were well received, particularly in rural areas.

Similarly, In Liberia between 2007 and 2012 the UNMIL Civil Affairs teams in the field held regular consultations with local communities at the county level, including through two-day consultation processes where Civil Affairs officers initiated focused discussions on key topics affecting the peace process. These meetings provided a space for open discussion, where locals could freely express their views and opinions through open-ended questions.[53] The meetings included up to forty participants who were identified based on the mission's desire to solicit opinions on specific topics, such as land rights or health services. Based on the focus group discussions, the Civil Affairs team drafted a report for headquarters including an overview of the key issues raised during the meetings. This report was then used as the basis for advocacy with national authorities. In this way, the mission raised

[53] Neumann and Schia point out the role of Civil Affairs as an "important space-maker between the local population, non-state actors and government authority on the sub-national level."(2012, 31).

DFID SURVEYS TO MONITOR POLICE REFORM IN SIERRA LEONE

In its guidance on monitoring evaluation in fragile and conflct affected situation, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) highlights how surveys of public perceptions can be used as a supplementary source of information when national administrative data systems are weak. DFID notes, however, that in conflct affected situations, public perceptions may be highly volatile and should be interpreted with care.[54] In Sierra Leone, DFID has been supporting a Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP), which provides an integrated reform and investment strategy for the various ministries and agencies that make up the justice sector. Among the goals of the strategy is to support improved effectiveness, accountability and public trust in the police force, in particular through the introduction of community-based policing.

Because the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the national statistics agency are largely ineffective at collecting data on the justice sector, the project's Coordination Office commissions an annual survey of public attitudes. The survey tracks a number of performance indicators on police reform, including public perceptions of the security situation at the community level, trends in crime rates, personal safety, levels of satisfaction with police performance, relations between the police and the community, public willingness to collaborate with the police, and personal experience of police misconduct or corruption. The survey is designed to support both management of the reform effort and improved public awareness. It is published in the form of a Justice Sector Survey, alongside empirical data on police structures, geographical deployment, human resource strength and caseloads.

The survey has picked up dramatic changes in public perceptions of police over the life of the JSDP. Overall, the proportion of people declaring themselves to be satisfied or very satisfied with police performance increased from 26 per cent in 2007 to 60 per cent in 2008. However, in certain areas the trend was reversed, with more people believing the police had become politicized. DFID notes that, while perception surveys are useful, care needs to be taken to disaggregate the results, and be aware of the possibility of large, short-term fluctuations. The JSDP provides support to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on how to make use of the data gathered from the survey to improve its oversight of the police.

[54] DFID (2010), p. 5 (non-verbatim excerpt of DFID case study).

awareness within the relevant ministries about the ways in which local communities perceived ongoing developments.

In the Western Bahr El Ghazal state of South Sudan, UNMISS has found that while the government does consult local populations on certain political decisions, the people picked for these consultations tend to share the ethnic background of state government members and systematically support their proposals. A consequence of this narrow approach to consultation occurred during the national decentralization process in 2012, when the state government's failure to consult the wider population on a decision to relocate the Wau county headquarters away from Wau town resulted in a fierce backlash from Wau residents. The incident bred distrust and resentment between the state government and the affected communities, especially marginalized sections of the community who felt particularly excluded from government decision making.

As a rule, peacekeeping missions tend to focus more on relaying local perceptions to the political leadership of the country rather than on facilitating direct interaction between communities and the central government. However, there are a limited number of examples of field-based personnel facilitating dialogue between communities and local authorities and political elites, as noted in the case of MINUSTAH.

As discussed above, there is a growing recognition among practitioners and policy-makers that understanding public perceptions of domestic legitimacy and trust in institutions and government can be as important as empirical assessments of their capacity and effectiveness. This is especially true in the context of peacebuilding, where public confidence in the process is critical. The World Bank argues that perception based polling to measure citizen confidence over time could be an important part of measuring citizen priorities and citizen trust in government.[55] The proposed indicators for measuring legitimate politics, one of the key peacebuilding and statebuilding goals of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, include perceptions of representation and effectiveness of government, civic engagement and the extent to which people can participate in the political process at the local level and have a say in key decisions (see The New Deal, page 13).[56]

Beyond the cessation of armed conflict, an important element of missions' political strategies is how they will support the broader peacebuilding process, including engagement between local populations and national governments. The role peacekeepers can play in helping to articulate peacebuilding priorities through

[55] World Bank (2011), p. 204.
[56] Measures include the population's level of satisfaction in the political system's inclusivity, and effectiveness participation and satisfaction with elections.

UN Photo/Ky Chung

effective consultations between state and society is highlighted by DPKO/DFS in its 2010 paper "Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding: Clarifying the Nexus." The paper notes that peacekeepers, in close cooperation with UN agencies and other partners, "can assist both central and local government in articulating priorities, plans and programmes, including through public dialogue and public information."[57] Some peacekeeping missions report that they do this by relaying perceptions gathered at the local level to the central government as well as by facilitating direct interaction between civil society and the state. However, the survey indicated that this is the least important use of local perceptions for peacekeepers (Figure 4, page 22). One respondent recalled that during the 2011 elections in Liberia, local civil society organizations, including religious ones, approached the mission leadership to express their lack of confidence in the chairperson of the National Election Commission "but the mission did not follow up on the issue with the national leadership. This led to heightened distrust and eventual riots in which at least one person died." On the other hand, UNMIL played an effective role in facilitating the inclusion of local needs and perceptions into government planning during the development of Liberia's 2008-12 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) by channelling the information gained through the county-level focus groups into this process.[58]

Another entry point for building peace in post-conflict environments is the reintegration of former combatants. Capturing and incorporating local perceptions is increasingly viewed as an important tool for assessing the impact of DDR initiatives.[59] A respondent from DPKO's Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) emphasised that changes in local perceptions are a crucial indicator of the successful reintegration of ex-combatants into communities, as reintegration often demands changes in the attitudes both sides harbor towards each other. If ex-fighters do not socially integrate into society, the probability of them returning to violence is high.[60] Accordingly, perception surveys are now being carried out to assess DDR initiatives in West Africa, with questions including: "In your opinion, should ex-combatants be allowed to be among the leaders of this community?" "should ex-combatants be allowed membership in community associations?" and "would you welcome an ex-combatant into your family through marriage?" The psychosocial dynamics of reintegration are slowly being accepted as a key factor in successful reintegration processes, and as such monitoring and evaluation of DDR using perceptions-based research is now being undertaken in UNOCI and UNMIL.

3.5.5 LOCAL LEVEL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A number of missions use local perceptions in order to intervene more effectively in local level conflict management and dialogue efforts. Understanding local perceptions when mediating a land conflict, for example, can help field officers ensure that they are engaging all the relevant parties, actors and interests in the conflict. In MONUSCO, local perceptions are fed into conflict analysis, conflict mapping, the identification of sustainable solutions and monitoring and evaluation. In 2012 the mission organised a series of fifteen workshops at the provincial and local levels in order to analyze the local intra/inter-community tensions and identify which conflicts carry the greatest risk of escalation, identify priority zones for intervention and better coordinate responses.

The UNOCI Civil Affairs section gathers local perceptions in order to tailor its reconciliation and dialogue initiatives to the needs of the local population. It has used a "community dialogue caravan," which is a figurative way of describing the ensemble of mission components, international and local actors joining in organized activities set each time in a different village. The aim of the caravan is to initiate separate discussions with traditional village leaders and community representatives to identify perceived strengths and weaknesses of, threats to and opportunities for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. This process, repeated in the several villages affected by

[57] United Nations (2010a).
[58] The potential role for peacekeeping missions in facilitating more formal state-society dialogue through participatory planning is clearly an important entry point for the incorporation of popular perceptions into early peacebuilding. Participatory planning, however, requires a structured process, by which civil society gathers, distils and advocates for the views of the local population, and is thus outside the boundaries of this study. The role of peacekeeping missions in facilitating state-society relations in this manner will be covered by an upcoming project due to be published by PBPS in early 2014.
[59] United Nations (2010b).
[60] Interviews with personnel from DDR sections.

intercommunity conflicts and/or tensions, provides the basis from which to promote a meaningful dialogue between stakeholders and derive consensual solutions to disagreements and tensions. However, in using this approach missions face an inherent challenge in listening to and understanding a large volume of local views and concerns and managing expectations that the process can resolve them all.

In the period following the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence in February 2008, UNMIK's mandate was narrowed to focus primarily on the protection of the rights of minority communities. To execute this mandate, UNMIK analyzes local perceptions on a wide range of issues, including on the environment for the return and integration of IDPs, the security situation in minority and ethnically mixed populated areas, freedom of movement and access to services, among others. Mobile field teams collect information from local communities on a daily basis, and this information enables UNMIK to coordinate proactive interventions by international actors, local authorities or civil society. In April 2012, UNMIK, in partnership with the UN Kosovo Team and the European Union, established the International Human Rights Working Group on Incidents Affecting Non-majority Communities. The initiative arose from the need for a mechanism to formally consider communities' perceptions of their own security and to raise awareness amongst all major international stakeholders of the problems faced by the communities in their day-to-day life. The Group has become a powerful tool for encouraging the legislative and executive pillars of government to take stronger action to safeguard the rights of minority communities.

As part of MINUSTAH's Community Violence Reduction (CVR) strategy, community forums are organized in order to engage marginalized communities in priority areas for action. These forums have clear objectives that include identifying current local concerns about the use of violence in the area, understanding the security situation and the nexus between violence and youth, and identifying the main actors to involve in the process. Participants are selected from a broad segment of society including: community leaders, religious leaders, grassroots organizations and local authorities. MINUSTAH subsequently commissioned an external evaluation to assess the impact of a CVR programme, including household interviews with nearly 4,000 respondents on issues such as their perception of implementing partners and how they worked at the local level, as well as perceptions of the mission.

A survey respondent in Darfur highlighted the risks associated with ignoring local perceptions when trying to understand a problem: "in 2010, mission headquarters commissioned Civil Affairs to conduct a survey to gauge the extent of land occupation claims by the IDPs in Western Darfur [...]. The questionnaires [were] formulated at the mission HQ level [and] asked direct questions about whether IDP families [could] access their land [...], were people occupying it, etc." The questionnaires were then distributed through the IDP sheikhs, but the results were very disappointing, with low response rates and poor information quality. Despite some warnings, the mission had not factored in that "fear among IDPs was rife" and the question of land occupation was a very sensitive issue. If these concerns were taken into consideration, the questionnaire would have been designed using a less direct approach, and may have yielded better results. The mission could have also developed and communicated research protocols to ensure the safety of respondents, such as not recoding names or locations, managing data securely, anonymizing results, etc. (see Section 3.6.2). Survey design and methodology is another area where collaboration between peacekeepers and experts with specific technical expertise could greatly improve the quality of data on highly sensitive issues in conflict affected countries.

FINDING XII

To date, missions have only marginally tapped into the potential added value of local perceptions in supporting inclusive peacebuilding and statebuilding goals. However, there are clear opportunities to be seized through partnerships and by more systematically capturing and integrating local perceptions in peacekeeping work to support the restoration of state authority and the strengthening of state-society dialogue.

FINDING XIII

Missions' political strategies can be informed by local perceptions in a variety of ways ranging from *ad hoc* analysis on divergences between elite and local opinion to structured monitoring of the progress of the peace process against benchmarks. Local perceptions are most useful when they are seen as fluid and dynamic and monitored over time.

FINDING XIV

Local perceptions have the potential to enhance threat analysis for the protection of civilians.

FINDING XV

Local perceptions can assist missions in identifying strategic confidence building measures, such as campaigns to correct misinformation, strategic Quick Impact Projects, and initiatives to improve missions' reputations.

FINDING XVI

Local perceptions should be systematically considered when planning local level conflict management initiatives.

3.6 CHALLENGES FOR CAPTURING AND INCORPORATING PERCEPTIONS IN PEACEKEEPING

If the arguments in favour of incorporating local perceptions into peacemaking and peacebuilding are so persuasive, why then do peacekeeping missions not gather perceptions more systematically and feed them into strategy setting and planning processes? The study identified a number of challenges and pitfalls to capturing and integrating local perceptions, some of which are unique to peacekeeping while others apply to conflict affected contexts more broadly.

3.6.1 STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

SHORT-TERM NATURE OF PEACEKEEPING MANDATES

By nature, peacekeeping missions operate on short time frames and are required to deliver on their mandates quickly. Planning cycles are based on Security Council mandates, which are usually renewed on an annual basis. Although the mission in South Sudan is now planning on a three-year horizon, most missions typically have little choice but to plan on an annual basis or less. This urgency lends to a tendency for missions to focus on political elites to deliver peacemaking and peacebuilding results rather than engaging local communities, which is more time consuming. When peacekeeping missions are required to deliver on immediate "hard" mandated 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 expediently, and the need to build an environment where conflict will be managed effectively in the long term.

This is not always easy. Broad based consultation and engagement with local communities often slows down the negotiating process and increases the number and complexity of issues being discussed. In the 2011 WDR, the World Bank responds to this challenge by introducing the concept of "inclusive enough" coalitions, meaning that they "include the parties necessary for implementing the initial stages of confidence building and institutional transformation,"[61] 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.

PEACEKEEPING OPERATES WITHIN STRATEGIC POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS THAT MAY LIMIT MISSIONS' ABILITY TO RESPOND TO LOCAL PERCEPTIONS

Given that peacekeeping objectives and tasks are derived from Security Council resolutions, in some cases there may be limited scope for missions to change and adapt in response to local perceptions. For example, a mission's mandate might not focus on the key issues or drivers of conflict with which the public is preoccupied (disenfranchisement, land rights etc.). United Nations peacekeeping is an intrinsically political endeavour that incorporates many competing political perspectives on the appropriate relationship between the government, society and the population. This impacts the political context in which local perceptions are gathered and considered by the mission. Missions sometimes also lack the financial flexibility to change and adjust strategies mid-implementation, and are constrained by corporate programmatic planning and budgeting processes.

ISSUES SURROUNDING CONSENT

In accordance with its foundational principles, UN peacekeeping missions are deployed with the consent of the parties to the conflict, including the state. This can mean that efforts to bolster the voice of local communities in situations where

state-society relations are strained can be highly politicized. Managing relationships with political leaders is an important aspect of peacekeeping work and it can be difficult for missions to maintain this engagement, while bringing in other voices on politically sensitive issues. Peacekeepers are continually required to bear in mind and take account of their continuing access to ruling elites when encouraging inclusive processes.

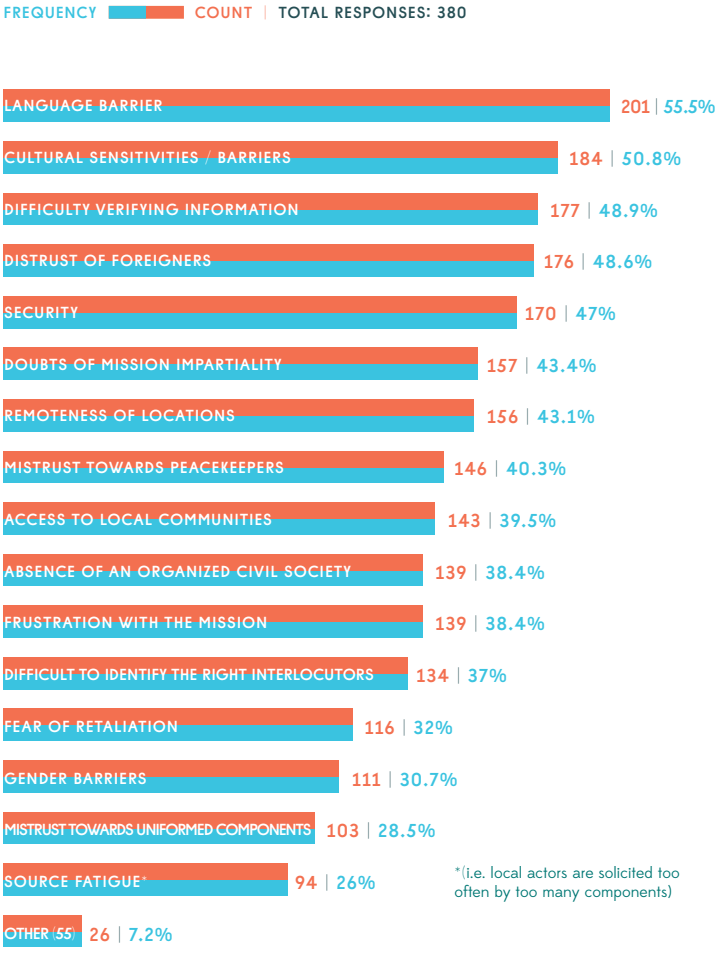
3.6.2 OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

As Figure 12 shows, the key operational challenges to gathering local perceptions identified by peacekeeping personnel in the online survey include cultural and language barriers, difficulty verifying information, mistrust toward foreigners and doubts about mission impartiality, security, and issues related to access.

A breakdown by component highlights that these challenges differ widely across different fields of work. In the case of Civil Affairs, the main challenges appear to be access to sources, whether in terms of physical access to remote areas or difficulties in accessing organized sources of information such as the civil society. "Doubts of mission impartiality" may indicate a lack of confidence in the mission as a whole or, as was raised by a number of interviewees, that the information people tell the mission is affected by how they perceive the mission personnel asking them the question. Uniformed personnel in particular might receive different information than independent researchers. On the other hand, Human Rights Officers clearly see "frustration with the mission," "doubts on the mission impartiality" and "fear of retaliation" as the main obstacles to their ability to access reliable information on local perceptions. This finding is not surprising in light of the sensitive nature of the information they regularly seek.

UN Photo/Martine Perret

FIGURE 12 | WHAT ARE IN YOUR EXPERIENCE THE MAIN CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED WHEN GATHERING INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS?



RISK OF CREATING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Soliciting local opinions, concerns and priorities inevitably raises expectations that the mission will be able to "bring about change overnight," though this may not be realistic. Some Civil Affairs Officers identified to the need to develop strategies and adopt postures that manage expectations about the mission's capacity to effect immediate change. In relation to the protection of civilians, guidance notes by UNHCR and WHO on participatory assessments in emergency contexts similarly emphasize the importance of explaining clearly to participants the scope, objectives and limitations of information gathering in order to avoid bolstering expectations that the exercise will lead to an immediate response.[62] When conducting surveys, for example, these issues should be addressed in the preamble of the questionnaire. Some mission staff recommended that information on safety and security should not be requested from local people unless the mission is prepared to respond to their concerns with concrete action, while others emphasized the importance of following up on work to understand perceptions with public information campaigns to correct misperceptions of the mission.

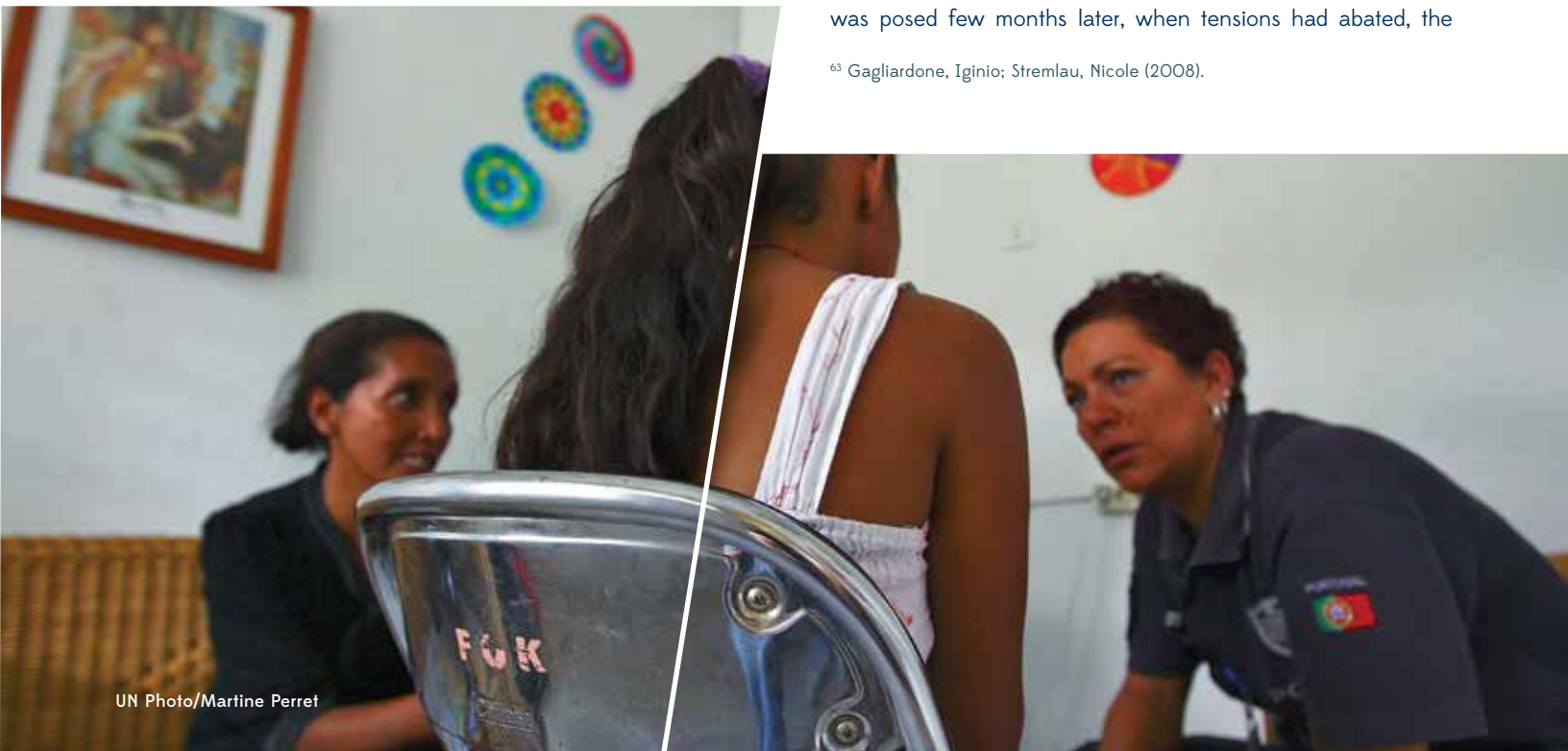
[62] UNHCR (2008), 62; WHO (2010), p. 14.

RISK OF MANIPULATION AND DISTORTION AND VOLATILITY OF PERCEPTIONS

As researchers Gagliardone and Stremlau have pointed out, public opinion research can easily become politicized and manipulated, particularly in post conflict contexts. Parties may interfere with the surveys if they have an interest in the results by, for example, intimidating communities into providing certain answers.[63] Populations in many peacekeeping environments may be particularly susceptible to what the authors term "assessment fatigue," wherein subjects lose patience with repeated questions from researchers and provide answers they think the researcher wants to hear, or even wilfully misleading answers. Subjects in areas affected by long-term conflict or humanitarian disasters may become aware of the effect of their answers and thus change them in order to maximize the "payoff" for their community.

Researchers must also be mindful of the potential volatility of local perceptions and the importance of considering the timing of perception gathering activities. One respondent from UNIFIL noted that when the residents of southern Lebanon were polled immediately following an incursion by Israeli armed forces, improving security was found to be the first priority for the majority of people. However, when the same question was posed few months later, when tensions had abated, the

[63] Gagliardone, Iginio; Stremlau, Nicole (2008).



UN Photo/Martine Perret

priority had shifted to job creation and economic development. This phenomenon serves as an important reminder that local perceptions should be part of, rather than constitute, the basis for situation analysis and strategic planning and should incorporate multiple approaches and tools. Perceptions are most instructive when they are "triangulated" with other sources of information.

SECURITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Both UN and non-UN actors have highlighted ethical considerations in conducting public perception research during sensitive or volatile times, including the risk of endangering respondents and researchers and of negatively affecting peace processes. One interviewee suggested (rightly or wrongly) that UNAMID's reputation within the international development community suffered in the mission's early years because it developed a reputation for sharing information gathered from individuals in a way that did not sufficiently take into account the possible repercussions on these individuals' security. Researchers can also endanger the security of respondents who, by being seen to be interacting with peacekeepers, can become a target for perpetrators or reprisal attacks. Asking questions without appropriate training risks worsening trauma, especially for children and victims of sexual and gender based violence.[64]

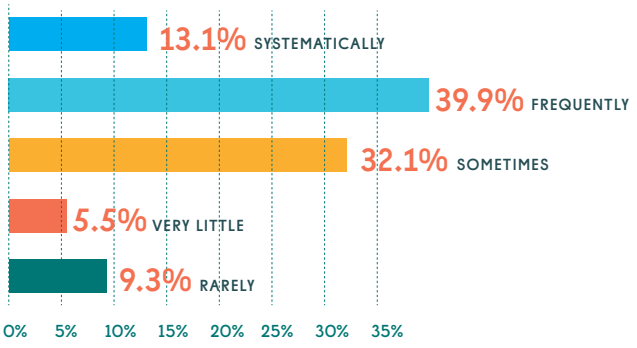
The 2013 edition of the ICRC's "Professional Standards for protection work carried out by humanitarian and human rights actors in armed conflict and other situations of violence" notes that actors seeking information "bear the responsibility to assess threats to the persons providing information, and to take necessary measures to avoid negative consequences for those from whom they are seeking information."[65] 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.[66] Researchers must of course also consider whether it is safe to carry out their work in a particular area; large swathes of the territory are virtually unreachable in many peacekeeping missions. 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.

[64] For a review of social science research ethics see Mertens, Donna and Ginsberg, Pauline (2008).
[65] ICRC (2013).
[66] United Nations (2011).

DIFFICULTIES IN MANAGING INFORMATION

Once collected, missions also face a number of challenges managing this information internally and using it to contribute to mission priorities. Peacekeeping missions often receive large volumes of information on local perceptions in different formats and through various mission components that may have distinct perspectives, competing priorities and different information collection methodologies and standards. Information on local perceptions may be extracted from reporting on other issues and is thus by nature often *ad hoc* and non-systematic.

FIGURE 13 – WHEN YOU REACH OUT TO LOCAL ACTORS TO GATHER THEIR PERCEPTIONS ON CURRENT EVENTS/ DEVELOPMENT, DO YOU USUALLY COORDINATE WITH OTHER COMPONENTS/SECTIONS/UNITS OF THE MISSION?



UN Photo/Isaac Billy

This problem may begin at the stage of gathering local perceptions. As Figure 13 shows, the majority or respondents claim to coordinate with other parts of the mission when gathering local perceptions. However, when disaggregated, these responses show that this coordination happens primarily in upstream parts of mission headquarters, such as the offices of SRSG, DSRSG and the DMS/CMS. Frequent coordination among substantive sections is significantly lower, ranging from the 47.7 per cent of Civil Affairs, 33 percent of Political Affairs and 15.4 per cent of Public Information. These components are instead much more likely to coordinate only sometimes. This could indicate that different mission components are asking different questions and delivering data in different forms, making upstream compilation, synthesis and analysis difficult.

CHALLENGES INTEGRATING PERCEPTIONS IN MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

Even when systematically collected information exists, the overall decision making and priority-setting mechanisms within missions vary enormously and are subject to a range of pressures, including regular turnover of management, complex bureaucratic structures, highly-dynamic and insecure environments, and pressure from different components to focus on "their" issues. It is not always clear what the entry point would be for systematically integrating data on local perceptions. Some efforts have been made to mitigate this risk. Although the purpose of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) is to "ensure that missions have in place a capacity to collect and synthesize multi-source information to produce medium and long-term integrated analysis, as the basis for enhanced mission planning and decision making," the rationale of its work is delineated somewhat more narrowly in terms of enabling "senior mission leaders to identify, prevent and/or respond to current or emerging threats." It also "supports contingency planning and strengthens the ability of senior mission leaders to be informed and understand developments on the ground."[67] Its central analytical function suggests that JMAC may be the appropriate hub for the coordination, collection and analysis of information on local perceptions; in some missions the role of JMAC has been broadened to accommodate this function to some degree. 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 analyze them in a way that feeds directly into strategies and planning. The link between JMACs and planning units differs from mission to mission.

However, there have been experiences where efforts to consolidate information management and analysis on perceptions have been successfully carried out. In UNMIL, JMAC provides analysis according to priority information needs set by the SRSG and convenes a Joint Information Collection Group that includes military and civilian sections that interact with the local population. The priorities set by the SRSG, however, are based on threats to mandate implementation, rather than a broader understanding of how local perceptions could inform the priorities of the mission more holistically. To date, there is no consistent view across peacekeeping of what missions should know about local perceptions or how efforts to collect, analyze and report on them should be coordinated.

[67] United Nations (2010c).

NEED TO AVOID SUBSTITUTING THE ROLE OF THE STATE

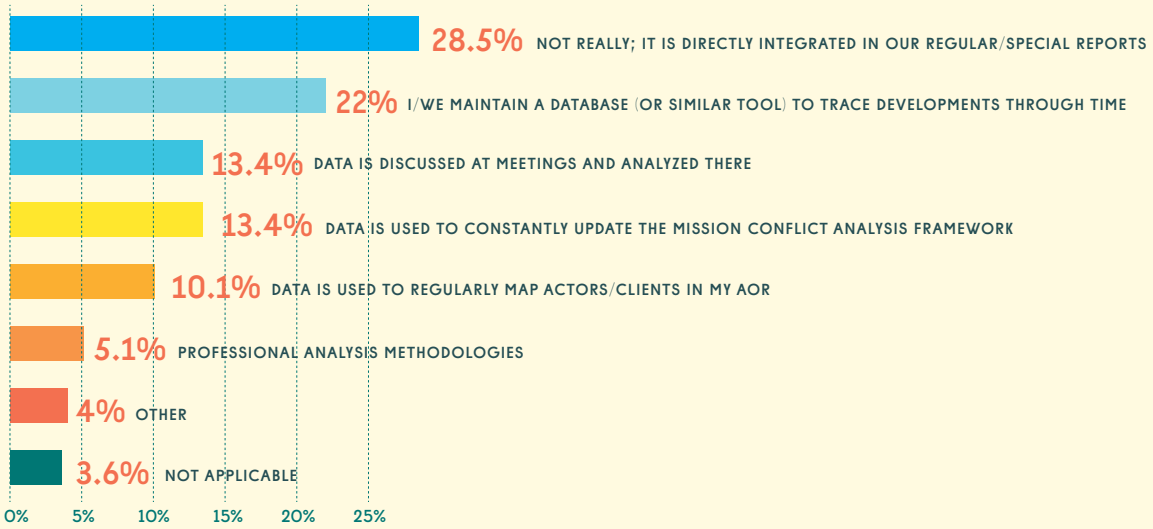
Local perceptions of the security situation, peace process and state authority are of keen interest to peacekeeping missions. They are also relevant to the promotion of dialogue and accountability between the state and its population. However, the state may have limited capacity to collect perceptions at the sub-national level and the central government may lack the resources to conduct outreach in all areas of the country. This activity is well within the mission's mandate to support the restoration and extension of state authority in the country. However, in such situations missions must walk the fine line between assisting the government in communicating with the population and substituting an endogenous mechanism for sustainable dialogue between the state and society.

Missions can mitigate this risk by involving state and civil society representatives in developing and implementing, where appropriate, outreach strategies and engagement tools, and by disseminating the results. For example, in DRC MONUSCO and the UNCT have partnered with the Ministry of the Interior to conduct a survey on perceptions of basic service delivery in eastern DRC as part of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy's (ISSSS) evidence-based decision-making process. Partnering with the ministry provides the United Nations with direct access to government data and enables the efficient gathering of the data required by the ISSSS for effective planning, while creating an opportunity to place the government in a leadership position and improving the quality of its own planning data.

LACK OF CAPACITY, TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

While many peacekeeping personnel claim to regularly incorporate local perceptions into their work, not all report using a systematic process or formal methodology to do so. As shown in Figure 14, only 5.1 percent of respondents reported using a formal data analysis methodology, while 44.5 per cent reported inputting the information into a database, actor map or conflict analysis framework. 41.9 per cent of those surveyed reported that local perceptions are integrated into their work in a general sense through reporting and analysis, or analyzed in team discussions. This result highlights the unsystematic approach that peacekeeping often takes to local perceptions, in that no formal guidance exists to instruct peacekeepers on how to use local perceptions and that staff are not trained in a methodology, both of which might improve quality and consistency of information across missions.

FIGURE 14 – USE OF GUIDANCE AND/OR METHODOLOGY IN INCORPORATING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS



FINDING XVII

In some cases there is a risk of tension between a mission's need to gather and incorporate local perceptions and the need to maintain a positive working relationship with the government. There is also a risk that by engaging local populations, missions may be unintentionally substituting the role of the government. These risks require careful balancing.

FINDING XVIII

Gathering local perceptions is a complex technical skill that carries significant risks. To date, this function has largely been carried out by peacekeepers with little formal methodology, guidance or training in this area.

FINDING XIX

Information gathered on local perceptions is subject to distortion and manipulation, and is inherently volatile and dynamic. As such, information obtained in this manner should always be used in conjunction with other sources in order to draw conclusions.

FINDING XX

Missions face practical challenges in integrating local perceptions into assessment and decision making processes. A lack of consistency in the content and format of information across mission components makes information management difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Across peacekeeping, there is significant potential to improve the effectiveness of mission's mandate implementation strategies by understanding local perceptions. By factoring local perceptions, along with other sources of information, into decision-making processes and strategy setting, missions can design interventions that are responsive to the needs of a larger portion of the population. This applies to a broad range of interventions, from the protection of civilians to local conflict management to public outreach and communications. Similarly, by supporting the integration of local perceptions into peace processes and governance systems, missions can contribute to a more sustainable, durable peace.

At present, peacekeeping missions often make use of local perceptions in a relatively informal way to inform situational awareness, threat assessment and short-term operational responses. A more structured approach would, over time, allow missions to harness the full potential of local perceptions to inform high-level strategy setting and measure strategic progress. A number of innovations in mission, notably MONUSCO, UNIFIL and UNMIL, have provided valuable examples of how this goal can be met across peacekeeping.

The processes for gathering local perceptions range from individual interactions at the local level to large-scale, systematic polling. In their efforts to gather perceptions, peacekeepers need to move beyond their immediate interlocutors and target peripheral and marginalized groups in order to gather the broad range of perceptions necessary for inclusive decision-making. In many cases, this requires tools and technical skills that most peacekeeping personnel do not possess, pointing to the need for training and operational guidance on the tools, processes and challenges for gathering local perceptions, as well as occasionally outsourcing perceptions research.

Once gathered, missions require a centralized unit that is mandated and equipped to collect and analyze local perceptions recorded by various mission actors. Without an explicit mechanism for incorporating perceptions into decision-making, they risk being marginalized by other sources of information.

This study's findings provide a strong basis for developing operational guidance for peacekeeping missions on the gathering and incorporation of local perceptions. The following recommendations reflect some of the key findings of the study on the strategic use of perceptions, operational considerations and dilemmas that missions should consider.

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MISSIONS REQUIRE OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE ON THE VALUE, APPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND HOW TO RIGOROUSLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY COLLECT AND INCORPORATE THEM INTO MISSION DECISION-MAKING.

The study found that in some missions there is lack of clarity regarding the value, uses and limitations of gathering and integrating information on local perceptions. The perceived value and credibility of the information on local perceptions is also likely to affect how it is collected and reported on by field-based personnel and whether or not it is integrated into mission planning. Providing peacekeepers with guidance could help strengthen mission's analysis of the local context and its capacity to support inclusive processes. DPKO should therefore initiate consultations within the Department as well as with external partners, including UN agencies, funds and programmes, and Troop/Police Contributing Countries, on a proposal to issue new operational guidelines on understanding and integrating local perceptions.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS CONSIDERABLY ENHANCES A MISSION'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL CONTEXT.

A good understanding of the evolving local context informs almost everything that a mission is mandated to do. There are areas for which an understanding of local perceptions is likely to be particularly important, including work done to:

- Develop political strategies, including on support to national priority-setting exercises;
- Plan and implement mandated tasks that involve working with the population (such as protection of civilians, conflict management, DDR, support to the restoration/extension of state authority);
- Prioritize activities aimed at maximizing confidence in the peace process;
- Design communication strategies to build popular confidence in the mission, mandate and peace process;
- Ensure the safety and security of staff and facilities; and
- Monitor and report on macro-level progress to the Security Council.

The full range of tools described in this study can be useful to develop the understanding necessary to support these efforts. Different tools, or combinations of tools, tend to be useful for different situations and purposes.

MISSION COMPONENTS SHOULD AGREE ON COMMON OBJECTIVES AND APPROACHES FOR GATHERING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS.

The study found that missions struggle to synthesize information on local perceptions across components and incorporate it into advice to senior management. Differences in the types and formats of information gathered by various mission components make it difficult to arrive at a synthesized overview of local perceptions. Instead, the information gathered by a component tends to remain within that component. Few missions have mechanisms for gathering, processing and analyzing this information across components. Even for those that do, it is not clear how this analysis is incorporated into senior management decision-making. All missions should have a functioning repository for information on local perceptions that feeds directly into analytical processes, such as JMAC assessments or Political Affairs analyzes.

INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS SHOULD BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO "TRIANGULATE" CONCLUSIONS.

It is important to bear in mind that no matter how well the mission understands local perceptions, this understanding does not, by itself, provide a formula for policy prescription. Rather, perceptions are one important factor among several that help missions to frame the problems that they need to address and to understand the environment they are working in. Perceptions can be particularly helpful in framing problems, gauging priorities and assessing impact. Combining perceptions based information with other sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data, will produce the most robust results. This is particularly true in fragile contexts, where data shortages can make quantitative measures unreliable and high levels of misinformation and subjective assessments may over-represent outlying perceptions.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS CAN IMPROVE QUALITY OF DATA.

Working with partners that have specialized expertise in research methods and techniques can improve the methodological rigour and generate more impartial analysis. The mission might be impartial but it can hardly be expected to be perceived as neutral; as a consequence informants are more likely to provide

genuine information when solicited by actors that they perceive to be more neutral and independent. The survey of practice found that working with local partners to conduct both survey and focus group research can be particularly effective in that it can provide the mission with perceptions and opinions of ordinary people who may be difficult to access in other ways. Local professionally trained partners can help the mission ensure the language and tone of the survey or focus group questions are appropriate. Missions should also seek to maximize the comparative advantages of different actors, including UNCT entities and humanitarians, in terms of access, perceived impartiality, technical expertise, etc.

PERCEPTIONS SHOULD NOT BE VIEWED AS STATIC AND THUS RESEARCH MUST BE AN ONGOING PROCESS.

Perceptions tend to be particularly volatile in conflict affected contexts and opinions can swing from one extreme position to another as events unfold.[68] Therefore, in order for public perceptions research to be meaningful in the long term, their collection must be an ongoing process, which can be a challenge in the face of finite mission resources and capacity.

[68] DFID (2010) p., 9.

IN SPECIFIC INSTANCES, ESPECIALLY IN NATIONAL-LEVEL MONITORING AND EVALUATION, PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS SHOULD CONSIDER EMPLOYING LARGE-SCALE PUBLIC PERCEPTION SURVEYS.

When missions seek to capture the mood of the entire population, public opinion surveys may be appropriate, as they are more representative. Quantitative survey findings can be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes, to establish baselines, gauge progress and, if repeated regularly, identify trends and measure impact. Large scale representative surveys tend to provide less depth but can be useful for gaining a broad base of public opinion on issues that have national significance.

However, surveys can be costly and time-consuming and may not be appropriate for all contexts. Surveys yield more useful data when repeated at regular intervals, and thus require a long time horizon to be employed to full effect. In addition, for many of the issues important to peacekeeping, traditional quantitative polling is not appropriate and may have negative consequences. For example, asking members of a community a list of questions about politics and economics might create suspicion and elicit guarded responses. For such issues, indirect collection of perceptions may be preferable. Listening to oral histories or

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asking about personal experiences, for example, may be more instructive than directly asking people to express an opinion on political leaders or national policies. Another approach is to involve political elites and members of the population directly in developing the questions for the survey.

PEACEKEEPERS SHOULD MOVE BEYOND LIMITED INDIVIDUAL NETWORKS OF SOURCES FOR INFORMATION ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS.

The study found that the most common sources for information on local perceptions are local colleagues, government officials and civil society actors, three groups with which mission staff would regularly interact, regardless of their need to solicit local perceptions. While these groups are likely well informed, relying solely on a limited number of established contacts can restrict missions' ability to understand the broad spectrum of local perceptions and can result in bias. Information mission received in this way may inflate the influence of "gatekeepers" such as those who speak the mission language, are used to dealing with mission personnel, and claim to speak on behalf of a certain group. Employing a combination of techniques, such as broad based public opinion research, focus groups and individual interviews, can reduce the risk of only hearing from groups that might be pushing specific agendas.[69]

A more structured, systematic approach to gathering local perceptions would complement information gained through the network approach by broadening the pool of interlocutors, covering a wider geographic area and increasing the diversity of perceptions and the degree to which perceptions may be considered representative of the population as a whole.

WHILE COLLECTING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS CAN BUILD CONFIDENCE, PEACEKEEPERS MUST BE AWARE OF AND MITIGATE THE RISK OF RAISING EXPECTATIONS.

Soliciting perceptions at the local level can contribute to the inclusivity of peace processes and increase the domestic legitimacy of governments and peacekeeping missions by rendering their work more representative and participatory. However, if not managed correctly, gathering local perceptions can raise expectation among the population which, if not met, could result in a loss of confidence.

[69] Gagliardone, Iginio; Stremlau, Nicole (2008).

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UN Photo/Albert González Farran

FURTHER READING

Advocacy Capacity Building Toolkit,
Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, 2011
This is a toolkit that was developed for staff involved in advocacy capacity building from the above organisations to use as part of the People's Peacemaking Project

Peace Polls
http://www.peacepolls.org/cgi-bin/greeting?instanceID=1

Local to Global Protection: Promoting local perspectives in humanitarian crises http://www.local2global.info/

SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) is an online tool that allows you to create and distribute free online, interactive surveys, questionnaires and polls. The free version is limited and does not allow you to download data reports. More advanced plans are available but come with a fee.

Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) is a more advanced survey provider and therefore makes it more suitable for large scale research and complex analysis.

World Association of Public Opinion Research
http://wapor.unl.edu/

World Public Opinion.org
http://worldpublicopinion.org/

World Bank › Social Analysis › Focus groups
http://bit.ly/16GVbgb

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ANNEX

ANNEX 1. CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS

I. The policy framework for peacekeeping provides a strong basis for considering local perceptions in order to promote inclusivity in peace processes and post conflict governance, to build confidence in the mission and the peace process; and to plan and measure progress. Page 15

II. Inclusive post-conflict settlements that take into account the perceptions of the population, rather than only those of national elites and international stakeholders, enjoy greater credibility and public confidence. Local perceptions can bring a higher level of transparency and accountability to the peace process, broadening the basis of political, socio-economic and cultural aspirations that need to be addressed in the settlement, as well as checking belligerent parties' claims to be representative of the people. Page 19

III. Perceptions of vulnerability often factor into relapse into conflict and are an entry point for actions to increase confidence. Fostering public trust is vital for post-conflict governments to retain and build legitimacy, and understanding local perceptions to broaden inclusivity in post-conflict governance is key for confidence building. Page 19

IV. Understanding local perceptions improves situational awareness by providing a nuanced understanding of the context that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Information gleaned from perceptions can be used to measure concepts such as legitimacy and credibility. Page 19

V. Peacekeepers tend to solicit local perceptions on short-term, immediate issues such as security incidents or political developments. Systemic, root issues in the conflict are more rarely considered. This information is used primarily to inform short-term analysis on security threats and political developments as part of conflict management processes and short-term strategies. Page 22

VI. Local perceptions are often collected in an ad hoc and unstructured manner that relies largely on national staff and existing local partners of the mission. There is little understanding of techniques or methodologies for collecting local perceptions, including of how to apply a gender sensitive lens. Page 25

VII. The perceptions of business people, intellectuals, youth, armed group members and other potential spoilers are under-studied. This could result in mission strategies or solutions that do not address excluded or marginalized perceptions, which in turn could negatively affect the sustainability of peace. Page 25

VIII. The tools available to peacekeeping personnel for gathering local perceptions generally yield either in-depth information or widely representative information. As such, multiple tools should be used together, in conjunction with other sources of information, to "triangulate" analysis. Page 33

IX. Large-scale public perception surveys can be useful for a number of peacekeeping tasks, including designing programs and interventions, identifying trends, measuring progress against benchmarks and assessing the mission's reputation. Surveys must be designed, implemented and analyzed by individuals and organizations trained in surveys and statistics and often require external technical support. Page 33

X. Focus groups may be an under-used tool for gathering local perceptions and testing programming and policy options. Page 33

XI. Once gathered, local perceptions are usually incorporated into field-level analysis and reporting and are transmitted to mission leadership. However, it is not clear to those collecting and analyzing it how this information, once received, informs decision making. Page 35

XII. To date, missions have only marginally tapped into the potential added value of local perceptions in supporting inclusive peacebuilding and statebuilding goals. However, there are clear opportunities to be seized through partnerships and by more systematically capturing and integrating local perceptions in peacekeeping work to support the restoration of state authority and the strengthening of a state-society dialogue. Page 52

XIII. Missions' political strategies can be informed by local perceptions in a variety of ways ranging from *ad hoc* analysis on divergences between elite and local opinion, to structured monitoring of the progress of the peace process against benchmarks. Page 52

XIV. Local perceptions have the potential to enhance threat analysis for the protection of civilians. Page 52

XV. Local perceptions can assist missions in identifying strategic confidence building measures, such as campaigns to correct misinformation, strategic Quick Impact Projects, and initiatives to improve missions' reputations. Page 52

XVI. Local perceptions should be systematically considered when planning local level conflict management initiatives. Page 52

XVII. In some cases there is the risk of tension between a mission's need to gather and incorporate local perceptions and the need to maintain a positive working relationship with the government. There is also a risk that by engaging local populations, missions may be unintentionally substituting the role of the government. These risks require careful balancing. Page 59

XVIII. Gathering local perceptions is a complex technical skill that carries significant risks. To date, this function has largely been carried out by peacekeepers with little formal methodology, guidance or training in this area. Page 59

XIX. Information gathered on local perceptions is subject to distortion and manipulation, and is inherently volatile and dynamic. As such, information obtained in this manner should always be used in conjunction with other sources in order to draw conclusions. Page 59

XX. Missions face practical challenges in integrating local perceptions into assessment and decision making processes. A lack of consistency in the content and format of information across mission components makes information management difficult. Page 59

ANNEX II. LIST OF GRAPHS AND BOXES

8.1 GRAPHS

1. Breakdown of online survey respondents from substantive civilian, security and uniformed components Page 10
2. Is having access to information on local perceptions, needs and priorities important to effectively carry out your work? Page 16
3. Which topics/issues do you cover when gathering local perceptions? Page 21
4. For which purposes are local perceptions important? Page 22
5. Who are your interlocutors when gathering information on local perceptions? Page 23
6. Where do you usually find the most relevant and valuable information on local perceptions? Page 24
7. Measuring gender sensitivity in the collections of local perceptions Page 24
8. Which techniques do you employ to understand local concerns, needs and priorities? Page 26
9. How is analysis on local perceptions shared with others? Page 34
10. Do you believe that the information you gather about local perceptions is being used effectively by the mission? Page 34
11. To the best of your knowledge to what degree is this analysis being used? Page 36
12. What are in your experience the main challenges/ obstacles encountered when gathering information on local perceptions? Page 54
13. When you reach out to local actors to gather their perceptions on current events/development do you usually coordinate with other components/sections/units of the mission? Page 56
14. Use of guidance and/or methodology in incorporating local perceptions Page 58

8.2 BOXES

1. The New Deal Page 13
2. The World Bank approach Page 37
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5. Focus groups inform Oxfam's protection assessments in DRC Page 42
6. UNDP's Community Security and Social Cohesion approach Page 45
7. DFID surveys to monitor police reform in Sierra Leone Page 46
8. Giving the people a voice: the Afrobarometer Page 48

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