

Peacekeeping Practice Note:

Community engagement

Policy & Best Practices Service
Department of Peacekeeping Operations - Department of Field Support

March 2018



UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

Table of contents

PART I: INTRODUCTION	3
1. Scope & purpose	3
2. Strategic objectives	5
<i>Box 1: Engagement & mandated tasks</i>	<i>7</i>
PART II: ENSURING COHERENCE	10
3. Assessing the context	11
4. Planning who does what	14
<i>Box 2: Mission concept in MINUSCA</i>	<i>16</i>
5. Involving stakeholders	17
PART III: IMPLEMENTATION	21
6. Consultation	22
6.1 Mapping & prioritization	23
6.2 Building relationships	24
6.3 Identifying information needs	25
6.4 Analyzing & reporting	26
<i>Box 3: PoC sites in UNMISS</i>	<i>28</i>
7. Goal-setting	29
7.1 Setting internal priorities	30
7.2 Shaping political processes	31
7.3 Managing risks	33
<i>Box 4: Action plans in C.A.R.</i>	<i>35</i>
8. Communication	36
8.1 “Mainstreaming” strategic communications	37
8.2 Establishing links with communities	38
8.3 Managing rumors & misinformation	40
Annex: Flowchart of key processes	42

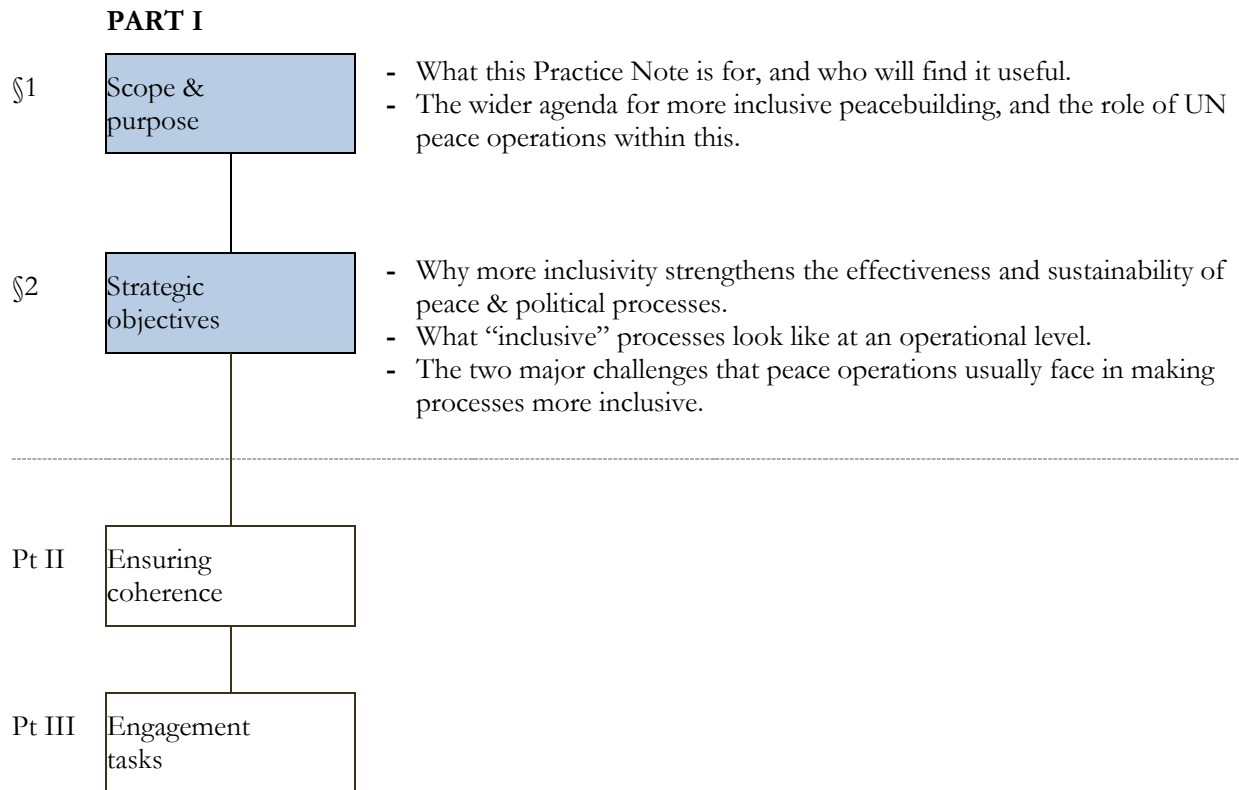
Part I:
Introduction



UN Photo/AFP

Part I is about strategic context. It summarizes the policy and practical reasons for more inclusive approaches in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and the specific implications for UN peace operations.

Overview



1. Scope & purpose



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

It is a basic principle that politics must drive the design and implementation of peace operations' mandates.¹ With this in mind, communities are key stakeholders. Whether a peaceful political process is sustainable depends upon its legitimacy on the streets and in the villages. Whether a UN peace operation's strategy is effective depends, in turn, upon these same factors.

The specific goal for this Practice Note can thus be stated simply. It is to help staff identify and support shared goals between (a) "track 1" stakeholders (i.e. governmental authorities and parties to peace processes); (b) national communities; and (c) the UN mission.

This is often not easy, nor will an approach ever be 100% satisfactory to all stakeholders. But there is always scope to do better. In the 2014 report on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict, the Secretary-General explained the vision as follows:²

In my last report, I stressed the importance of mechanisms for inclusive politics in post-conflict transitions. I cannot overstate their importance today. Promoting inclusivity can involve difficult choices and trade-offs

¹ United Nations, 'Uniting our strengths for peace: Politics, partnership and people. Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations', June 2015, p. viii.

² United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General: Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict', UN Doc A/69/399-S/2014/694, 23 September 2014, para 27.

regarding urgency, representativeness, effectiveness and legitimacy. There are times, for example, when a peacemaking approach must be limited to the actual belligerents and political elites. Yet, in order to sustain peace and uphold basic rights of political participation, subsequent mechanisms for broad participation need to be embraced, with the goal of increasing inclusivity over time.

To this end, what follows is a practical reference guide. We explain how engaging communities can strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of mandated tasks (Part I); outline how to map the strategic outcomes of engagement and “who does what” (Part II); and then summarize better practices to actually deliver (Part III).

The issues considered are relevant for all components of a peace operation, and there is no single “owner”. The contents will however be particularly relevant for those:

- coordinating mission-wide planning or political strategy;
- managing field offices;
- developing workplans for individual mission components; or
- leading Strategic Review or related processes.

Throughout, it should be emphasized that the Practice Note supplements rather than replaces existing guidance. Peace operations already do a great deal of work at the community level, as summarized briefly in Box 1 below, and there are many supporting policy resources on how to approach specific tasks. The focus here is on how these activities fit within a wider vision for inclusion of communities in political and peace processes.

2. Strategic objectives



UN Photo/Albert González Farran

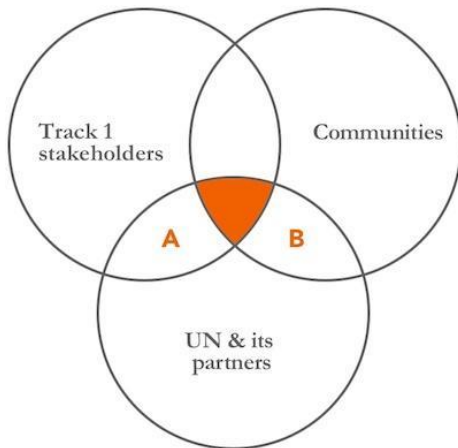
The starting point for this Practice Note is the importance of **inclusive peacebuilding**. This has recently been emphasized in the Secretary-General’s reports on peacebuilding (quoted in Section 1); in the Sustainable Development Goals (“peaceful and inclusive societies”); and in the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (“inclusive and participatory political dialogue”).

Two high-level reviews in 2015 underlined that this agenda is specifically relevant for peace operations. The Senior Advisory Group on Peacebuilding found that prevailing UN approaches “risked perpetuating exclusion”, and called for a renewed emphasis on “inclusive national ownership”. The concurrent High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) found that the UN tended to focus “on the capital and on a small political and civil service elite”. They went on to challenge colleagues in the field to “move beyond merely consulting local people, to actively include them in their work”.

There is a human rights argument for this, but also compelling practical reasons. The legitimacy and the effectiveness of a national peace process are fundamentally inter-dependent. A process that is unpopular, or does not address issues that are considered core priorities, can easily be ignored or actively resisted during the “implementation” phase. Alongside this, localized conflicts cannot simply be ignored in favor of what is happening in the capital. Inter-communal violence can have drastic consequences, and in a modern information environment “local” conflicts may not stay this way for very long. Incidents can lead to rapid reactions and escalations all around the country, or come to dominate national-level politics.

The core strategic challenges here can be summarized as follows. The ideal situation is that marked in Figure 1—where goals are shared between participants in formal political and peace processes; communities; and the UN and its partners. But this is not always achieved, and more often we find ourselves at points A or B.

Figure 1: Finding shared goals



Situation A might be labeled “top-down politics”. This is where the UN is supporting a formal peace process, or national political institutions, but these are not effectively engaging with the root causes of conflict at local level.

Situation B might be labeled the “ownership gap”. This is where a peace operation is trying to respond to local drivers of conflict, but without serious engagement from government authorities and other political stakeholders.

Both of these situations can damage the effectiveness, and the legitimacy, of peace processes.

A. Top-down politics

It is essential to work with legally constituted national authorities, and to engage with armed groups in appropriate cases. But this does not mean that we can stop there. In practice:

- Some social groups may not trust national authorities, or view them as illegitimate. In many cases they will refer back to a history of political marginalization of particular ethnic, religious, regional or economic groups.
- Some communities will not trust the interlocutors who claim to speak on their behalf in peace / political processes. This includes armed groups, but also “traditional” leaders or politicians who have lost credibility in the course of armed conflict.
- Some root causes of conflict may not be adequately addressed in formal political processes, due to a lack of perceived urgency or lack of understanding.

In short—we must be wary of situations where we are supporting national policy initiatives, or implementing provisions of a peace agreement, but not addressing what communities see as the most urgent issues. This is usually not sustainable. The UN may find itself being attacked for being too passive on key issues, or we may actually “do harm” if we are seen to be complicit in the exclusion of particular communities from political decision-making.

B. Ownership gaps

Conflicts and grievances that are important in specific regions, or for specific communities, are not always part of the national political agenda. Among other factors:

- Politically marginalized areas, or groups of people, may not be prominent in national-level policy discussions. Issues that are difficult or unpopular may be ignored in favor of easier targets.

- A “one-size-fits-all” approach at national level may not work well in some regions, or for some communities. There are usually important differences between areas in respect of conflict drivers, stakeholders, and the physical environment.
- National partners may simply have limited capacity in remote areas, and prefer to work in areas where they are better established.

This can leave the UN, and its local partners, dangerously isolated. Not all problems can be solved locally, and real progress in addressing local conflict drivers will usually depend upon enabling initiatives by national authorities, and/or armed groups. (These may include changes in policies, legislation, or key personnel; steps towards cessation of hostilities, demilitarization or demobilization; or opening the way for humanitarian and development initiatives.) Absent these measures, a UN mission can find expectations running well ahead of its ability to deliver, and become the target of public frustrations.

The central concern of this Practice Note is how peace operations can recognize when these challenges are present, and take concrete steps to address them. This includes the UN’s own activities, and how it utilizes its good offices mandate to “accompany” national stakeholders in their dealings with each other.

BOX 1: ENGAGEMENT & MANDATED TASKS

Integrated assessment & planning:	<p>The 2008 Principles and Guidelines emphasize that “multiple divergent opinions will exist in the body politic”, and UN strategy cannot draw solely on “small elite groups”. The 2014 handbook on Integrated Assessment & Planning notes that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic Assessment and Strategic Review processes must include “civil society and other local representatives” when analyzing the context. ▪ Country-level plans (Integrated Strategic Frameworks), must pay particular attention to non-state and civil society actors in settings where the legitimacy of the national government is contested.³ <p>Similar requirements are articulated in joint planning processes used by UN development agencies; and the Peacebuilding Fund.</p>
Situational reporting & analysis:	<p>All peace operations depend upon constant information-gathering and integrated analysis to enable them to respond to threats, and seize opportunities. Extending this to the community level is critical to understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how national-level initiatives are perceived, and whether they are leading to planned or unintended consequences; ▪ differences between different areas, and in many cases between religious confessions, ethnic groups, or genders; ▪ trends that are unrelated to national-level politics, but may still be very important and require a response.
Political institutions & national dialogue:	<p>The Secretary-General has argued that “all stakeholders should foster inclusion by establishing mechanisms for, and signaling commitment to, representative</p>

³ United Nations, ‘Integrated assessment and planning handbook’, IAP Working Group, December 2013, pp16, 22, 42-5, 81-2.

politics and participatory dialogue”.⁴ The rationale is simple—the legitimacy and the sustainability of a new political dispensation are closely connected. This is already well-understood during elections and the establishment of national political institutions. It has equal relevance during transitional processes such as national dialogues, “compact” processes as in Afghanistan or Libya, or Fragility Assessments under the New Deal.

Protection of civilians:

Communities are the first-responders for any protection threat. Current PoC policy notes that “actions to protect civilians should be planned in consultation with women, men, girls and boys of the local community and with a view to empowering them and supporting the mechanisms and community-based organizations they have established to ensure their own protection.” In practice this relies on tools such as Safety Committees, phone or radio-based Alert Networks, and Liaison Advisors embedded with military units. These support both consultation on perceptions and priorities, and a “proactive and on-going expectations management effort”.⁵

Inter-communal violence:

Effective response in this area depends upon formal (“Track 1”) dialogue, but also on direct action at the community level. Approaches have evolved to include information activities (“peace messages”); consultation to enable early warning of worsening tensions; and facilitation of negotiations for local-level ceasefires and reconciliation. Typically, peacekeepers also work to strengthen the capacities of local actors for conflict management, mediation and dialogue, while facilitating collaboration between civil society and local authorities for conflict analysis and conflict management.

Restoration of state authority:

Successful institution-building requires not only strengthened technical capacities, but also better relationships with all national communities. The importance of gauging the latter is emphasized in:

- Current guidance on perceptions surveys, and peace consolidation benchmarks.⁶
- Guidance from partner institutions, with UNDP’s 2012 handbook being one particularly detailed treatment.⁷
- The New Deal’s Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, which pair technical indicators with measures of public satisfaction and trust.⁸

⁴ United Nations, ‘Report of the Secretary-General: Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict’, UN Doc A/67/499-S/2012/746, October 2012, para 42.

⁵ United Nations, ‘DPKO/DFS policy: The protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, April 2015, p34.

⁶ United Nations, ‘Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners’ Guide to Benchmarking’, 2010; Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, ‘Guidelines: Understanding and integrating local perceptions in UN peacekeeping’, June 2014, pp 47-51. See also DPKO / DFS, ‘Peacekeeping and peacebuilding: Clarifying the nexus’, September 2010

⁷ UNDP, ‘Governance for peace: Securing the social contract’, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2012.

⁸ International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, ‘Peacebuilding and statebuilding indicators – Progress, interim list and next steps’, April 2013.

Rule of law & security institutions:

It is well-recognized that increased trust between state institutions and the wider population are core measures of success for defense, judicial and penal reforms. This means, in turn, that community perceptions must play important roles in planning and evaluation of effectiveness.⁹

Another point that bears emphasis is that informal and local-level institutions will often be regarded as more accessible, more trustworthy, and more reliable. This means that it is important to understand, at a minimum, the division of labor between formal and informal institutions at local level, and how expectations in this regard are shifting over time.¹⁰

DDR & CVR:

There are many contexts in which disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) cannot be guaranteed by top-down implementation of a Security Council mandate, or a formal peace process. “Second-generation” DDR thus often takes a bottom-up and/or context-based approach, and is sometimes accompanied by Community Violence Reduction (CVR) initiatives, targeting youth at risk of recruitment. Both depend upon careful research and analysis for specific armed groups, and their local economic and security contexts.¹¹

Responsible presence:

The HIPPO report (2015) emphasized that environmental impact should be mainstreamed into assessment and planning throughout the life of the mission. In this regard, the Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions sets out specific dimensions that should be taken into account.

⁹ United Nations, ‘Policy on Justice Components in United Nations Peace Operations’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, 2009; United Nations, ‘Policy: Defence sector reform’, DPKO / DFS, June 2011, para 15; United Nations, ‘The United Nations rule of law indicators: Implementation guide and project tools’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011.

¹⁰ United Nations, ‘Handbook for judicial affairs officers in United Nations peacekeeping operations’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, June 2013, ch 17.

¹¹ United Nations, “Second generation disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) practices in pace operations: A contribution to the New Horizon discussion on challenges and opportunities for UN peacekeeping’, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, January, 2010.

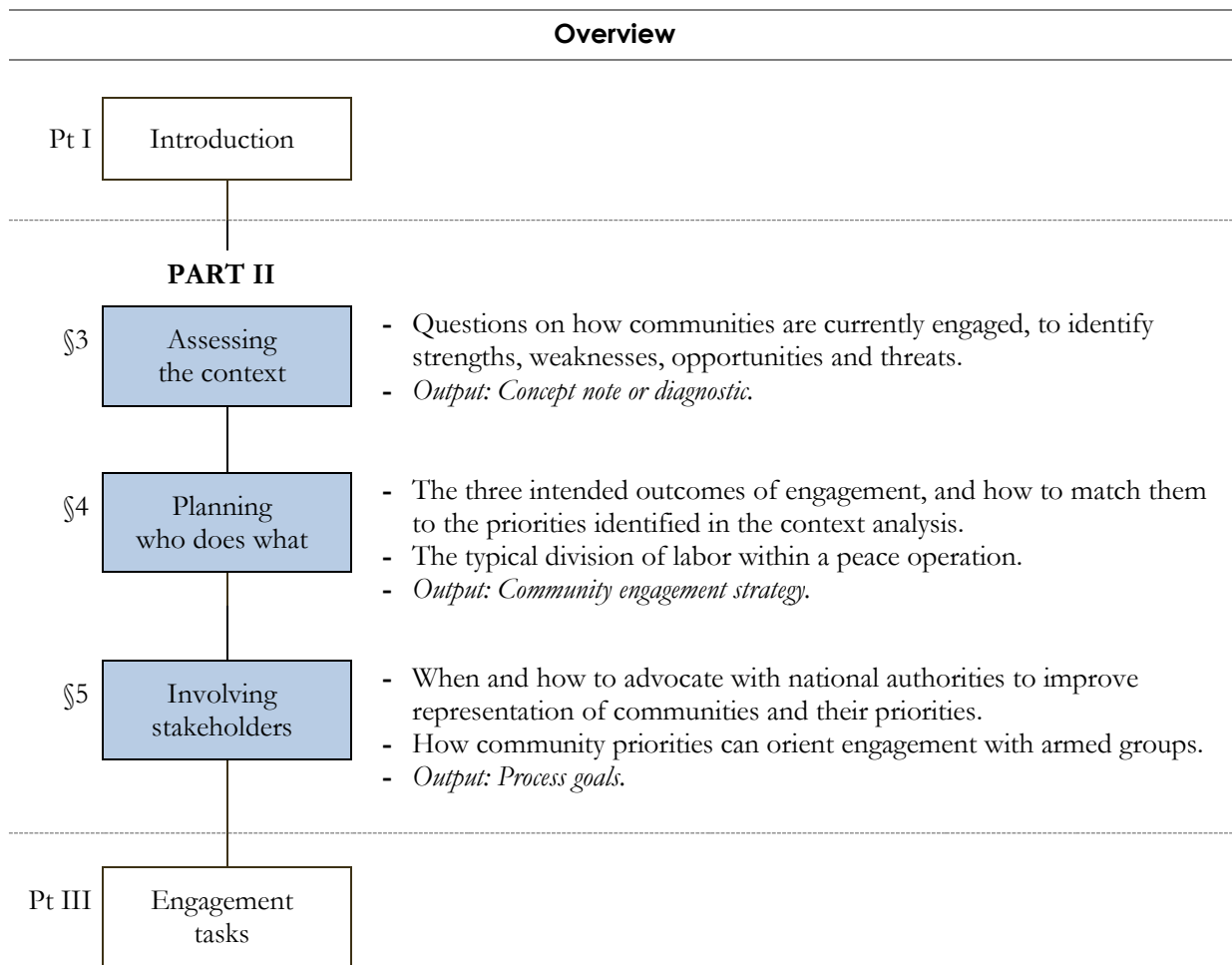
Part II: Ensuring coherence



Part II sets out a step-by-step process to review how a peace operation, as a whole, works with communities.

Our point of departure here is that community engagement is a cross-cutting issue, with implications for a wide range of mandated tasks. At a practical level, however, it may be helpful to designate a “pen-holder”, to coordinate discussion between relevant components and prepare initial drafts.

Options could include: (i) a joint team of Civil Affairs and Political Affairs; (ii) the Office of the Chief of Staff; (iii) Field Office Coordination (where present); or (iv) the Offices of the DSRSG(P) or DSRSG/RC/HC. Which option is best depends upon the circumstances and internal structure of an individual peace operation. The most important consideration is the ability to engage with internal stakeholders across different “pillars” and reporting lines—requiring both adequate human resources to do the work, and a clear designation of responsibility within the mission concept (or other strategic framework document).



3. Assessing the context



UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

This section sets out a short summary of issues to think about before identifying the intended outcomes of community engagement.

The suggested output is an internal concept note, or diagnostic, to facilitate conversation between all components of a peace operation. The underlying purpose is to identify those specific issues, amongst all those surveyed in this section, which should be addressed in the peace operation's community engagement strategy. The simplest way of thinking about this is the SWOT method, i.e. reviewing all significant community groups to highlight:

Strengths and Weaknesses in how they are currently engaged in the wider peace process, political dialogue, and the peace operation's own activities.

Opportunities and Threats going forward. How and where can different community groups be constructively engaged? What are the likely consequences if this does not happen?

Much of the relevant information can normally be drawn from existing sources, although this may require some "translation". These include:

- National consultations on governance and conflict, where these have occurred.
- Conflict analyses, at both national and local level. (Including of other institutions.)

- Strategic Assessments, Technical Assessments, and supporting planning documents.
- Civil Affairs work relating to conflict reduction / social cohesion.
- Historical or ethnographic literature on specific communities or regions.
- Human rights reporting.

(i) Peace processes and national politics

Political institutions in fragile and conflict-affected settings are almost invariably under significant stress. In some cases, they are transitional. In other cases, they are established following normal constitutional procedures, but their legitimacy is nonetheless challenged.

Stakeholders	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are national authorities transitional? Do they have legitimacy to set long-term directions? - Are there groups who argue they are lacking a real voice, or direct representation? - Are there organized political factions that are challenging the legality or legitimacy of national authorities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which are the most controversial political issues at the grass-roots level? - What is known on the historical grievances of minority communities regarding governance? - Have there been previous national consultations, or polling data, to give a direct indication of “what matters” for different communities?

(ii) Government authorities

Most of the mandated tasks summarized in Section 2 are about strengthening local institutions. Even where they go beyond this, such as for the protection of civilians, it is the host government which remains the primary duty-bearer. It follows that engagement with communities should always involve the question: Who does what? How can national authorities be involved to strengthen their ownership of the issues?

Capacities	Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do government counterparts accept the importance, in principle, of engaging the grass-roots? - Do national ministries have capacity for effective public communication? Do lower levels of government? - Are sub-national authorities able to consult with people at the grassroots level, including in remote areas? What logistical challenges are there? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there major development / recovery / peacebuilding frameworks in place? What provision do they make for public communication? Did they involve a public consultation phase? - What has been the track record in communication, and public consultation, for major political initiatives up until now?

(iii) Social / demographic factors

It is neither feasible nor useful to achieve an academic level of precision in describing community groups. Nonetheless, it is always essential to unpack a *geographic* community—an administrative region, a large

town—to understand where there are sub-communities who might have different material interests, or recognize different leaders.

Demographics	Interlocutors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the main ethnic, religious, or linguistic sub-communities? - Are these communities directly represented at different levels of politics, or are their perspectives otherwise taken into account? - How are women involved in existing political fora? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has the legitimacy of local institutions, including both “traditional” leaders and civil society, come into question during periods of crisis? - How representative are civil society organizations? Do they include membership outside of urban areas? - Are there groups that represent the interests of women, and/or disadvantaged minorities?

(iv) Information / media

The information environment is critical in crisis and post-conflict situations. Events tend to move quickly, violence or serious human rights violations may be a very real daily concern, and media are often weak or polarized. The consequence is that hate speech or violence can escalate rapidly in the aftermath of politically sensitive incidents. Conversely, any effort to build popular momentum and engagement depends in the first instance on awareness.

Media	Messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which communities are reachable by mass media (e.g. radio, or newspapers in urban areas)? How and when is it possible to distribute content via these channels? - How is it possible to reach the population in other areas? Are there cellular networks? - Which institutions have effective networks for distributing information? (e.g. religious institutions, social / development agencies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do illicit actors / spoilers engage in public communications? Do they restrict freedom of expression within their areas of influence? - Is it common for different factions to try to ‘spin’ violence and crises? How does information spread in the aftermath of a serious incident? - Do national authorities make active use of the available mass media? Do others?

4. Planning who does what



UN Photo/Astrid-Helene Meiste

This section outlines how to define a community engagement strategy at the level of a peace operation—identifying what is to be done, where, and by whom.

With regard to outputs: rural and urban communities are key stakeholder groups, and it is normally appropriate to recognize this at the level of the mission concept (or other overall strategy). This should outline the intended outcomes of engagement with communities; known priorities in respect of specific regions, groups, or issues; and the basic division of labor within the United Nations. (Box 2, below, provides an example of how this was approached for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic.)

More detailed analysis can then be contained in a supporting community engagement strategy, or incorporated into a mission's political strategy. This document should reference the challenges identified in the context assessment, as discussed in Section 3, and then address two main points:

(i) Expected outcomes of engagement

This Practice Note focuses on three major outcomes, which we summarize as follows.

	Consultation	Goal-setting	Communication
What we want	A clear and up-to-date picture of community priorities, and how current trends are perceived.	Peace processes, and political dialogue that address community priorities alongside those of elite stakeholders.	The UN and its partners are first, right and credible on issues that are important to local people.
What we do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop relationships at the level of sensitive communities. - Obtain community feedback on issues, problems, plans & possible alternatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapt UN initiatives and activities for “best-fit” with local / community priorities. - Advocate for political & peace processes to be responsive to community perspectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate before, during and after major initiatives. - Engage proactively with emerging issues and rumors.
What we say to partners	Community perspectives are indispensable to understand political & social dynamics, and for making sound decisions.	Addressing grass-roots priorities is essential for the long-term legitimacy and effectiveness of everything we do.	How initiatives and events are perceived is equally as important as what actually happens.

The challenge for those drafting a strategy is to “contextualize” these outcomes, by linking them to the specific opportunities and threats that have been identified in the context assessment. Indicatively, this could include a focus on:

- sensitive issues, political initiatives, or dimensions of a peace process;
- specific geographic areas or communities which are especially conflict-prone, or have been historically marginalized;
- government institutions which will need targeted support in their own engagement with the population; and/or
- known perceptions, rumors, and “spoiler” activities in the media.

It should be noted in each case that multiple kinds of engagement may be needed. Indeed, an effective community engagement strategy will include activities under all three headings, with the exact mix varying between different areas.

To give one example: A major initiative on a sensitive issue like citizenship or land rights will certainly require *consultation* at the grass-roots level on how communities will be impacted and whether the process is unfolding as planned. It is equally certain that careful *communication* efforts will be important to minimize rumors, misperceptions, and manipulation by spoilers. For some geographic areas, finally, the initiative may benefit communities unequally or be simply of little relevance in local conditions. Here we must look at *goal-setting* and what can be done about other drivers of conflict.

(ii) Division of labor

Which arrangements for “who does what” make most sense depend upon the structure of the peace operation, and it may be useful to reflect key responsibilities in relevant terms of reference or standard operating procedures.

Field offices, where they are in place, should play the lead role in consulting with communities (Section 6, below), and defining the UN’s specific goals at this level (Section 7). The range of stakeholders and interests is more manageable; the physical obstacles are smaller to “get out of the building” and talk to communities.

Moreover, political engagement in the local area is the full-time job of the UN's main interlocutors, rather than a small fraction of the portfolio of a national Minister. (Where field offices are not in place, these tasks can instead be approached via working groups for the relevant areas. This is often the case, for example, for Headquarters offices in capital cities.)

The senior management team also plays a key role in enabling results-driven community engagement. This is because many initiatives at a local level will require supporting action elsewhere, including for example:

- Political engagement with national authorities, armed groups or other interlocutors.
- Resource allocation in situations where reporting lines or decision authority pass through Headquarters rather than the field office (e.g. for Force contingents).
- Liaison with partners that do not have a presence in the relevant geographic areas. In many settings, this includes development institutions that have not established field offices due to security or political concerns.

“Whole-of-mission” coherence in this sense can be facilitated through a regular process to exchange between field and headquarters offices on the results of consultation or planning at a local level, and identify points for follow-up. (This is discussed in more detail in Section 7.1.)

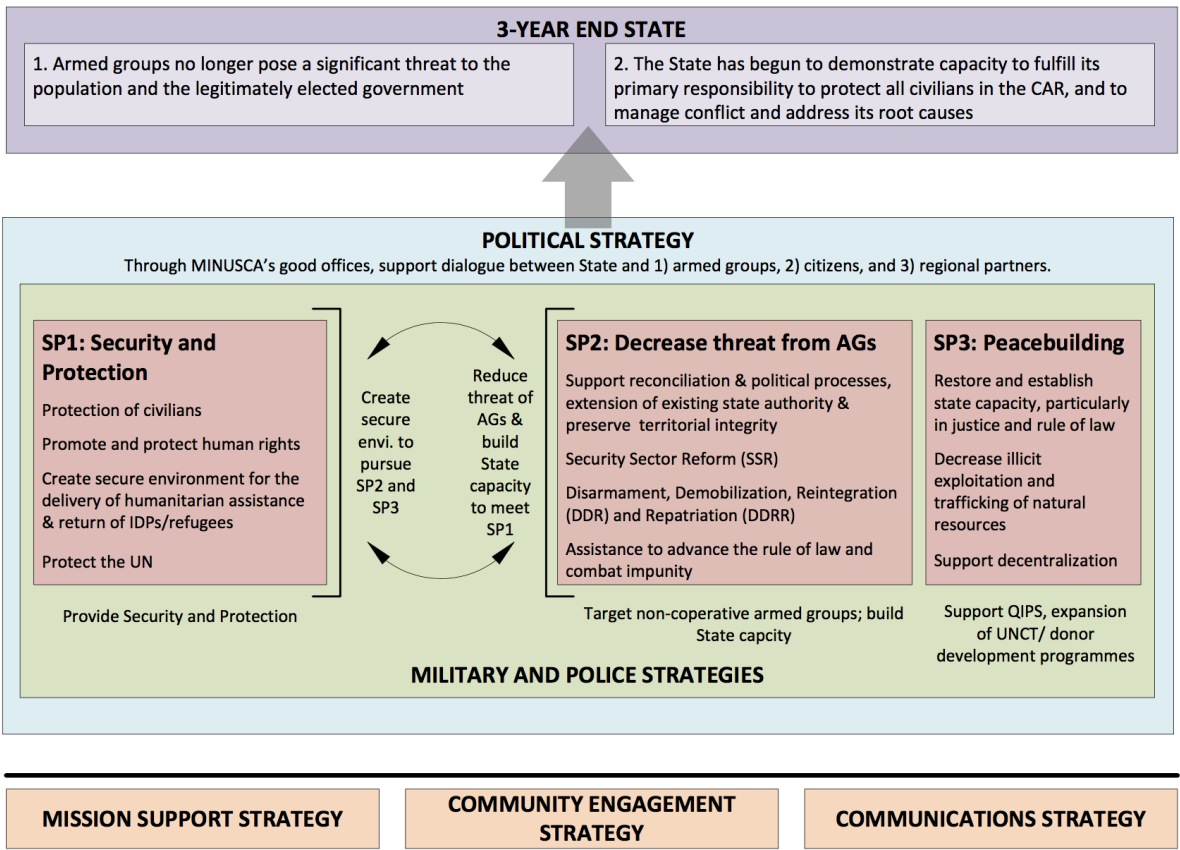
Box 2: Mission concept in MINUSCA

The mission concept for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for 2016-17 conceptualized community engagement as shown below.

The goals of the supporting community engagement strategy (CES) were to “seek communities’ involvement in MINUSCA decision-making and empower local actors to play constructive roles in managing tensions and peacefully resolving disputes”. This was prepared by a consultant working with a reference group comprised of substantive components of the mission.

The CES identified a range of specific challenges for MINUSCA and its partners, including:

- follow-through on popular consultations held in 2015-16;
- understanding the different perspectives and experiences of religious and ethnic communities (including between different parts of the Muslim population);
- differentiating the mission’s approach for an increasing regionalized conflict; and
- building the public visibility and engagement of the Central African government, particularly in areas that had historically been marginalized.



5. Involving stakeholders



UN Photo/Patricia Esteve

This section looks at how a peace operation’s work with communities relates to its engagement with other key stakeholder groups. This specifically includes government authorities; armed groups; and potential partner organizations.

The central importance of this topic has already been underlined in Part 1. The end goal is a more inclusive political or peace process. The UN being “out on its own” without the engagement of key national stakeholder groups, will not advance us very far towards this goal. Indeed, this may actually make the situation worse, if a peace operation raises expectations without engagement of the institutions that must be involved to meaningfully deliver.

The output for this section should be a short set of process goals, as part of the overall community engagement strategy. This means identifying the policy commitments, or changes in approach, that we would like to see for national authorities and/or armed groups. Basic “milestones” of this kind might then be fleshed out by a set of desirable behaviors, in respect of these stakeholders’ own consultation, planning, or communication at the community level, that can be monitored over time.

(i) National and local authorities

Most modern peace operations are mandated to support national authorities. Alongside this many specific mandated tasks, as summarized in Section 2, include a strong element of institutional strengthening and

capacity-building. In some situations, this can put the UN in a difficult position at the local level, as recognized in a recent survey of practice:¹²

Supporting the extension of state authority mandate has the potential to generate critical dilemmas for peacekeepers when the state is contested. When peacekeepers engage in assisting in the process of extending the authority of a contested state, they will be perceived as partial by a segment of the population and thereby undermining their role in the peace process.

There is no easy way to resolve these dilemmas. Grievances about governance at a national or local level often stretch back decades. National authorities may also have scant institutional experience in engaging communities, particularly in remote parts of the country. Developing those habits and experience will always be a gradual process, and not a quick-fix.

Within that longer process, however, the UN should seize opportunities to promote greater inclusivity. In 2000, Security Council Resolution 1325 called for increased representation of women at the decision-making level in conflict resolution and peace processes. In 2012, the Secretary-General urged that a similar lens be applied to other social groups:¹³

... all stakeholders should foster inclusion by establishing mechanisms for, and signaling commitment to, representative politics and participatory dialogue at the earliest possible stages of peacebuilding. My senior representatives should advocate and facilitate inclusion, with due consideration accorded to key political actors, gender balance and social diversity. This includes calling for space for marginalized groups to participate in political dialogues.

In many countries such requirements are incorporated into legal or policy frameworks, and it is important to understand the landscape in this regard. Beyond this we have already noted in Section 2 that similar goals are embedded in the New Deal for Fragile States and the Sustainable Development Goals, and are incorporated in many peace deals and transitional constitutions. It is appropriate for a peace operation to make reference to these instruments, and also to underline the pragmatic reasons for an inclusive approach (i.e. potential contributions to the effectiveness and sustainability of major initiatives).

Against this background, it is also appropriate to make the inclusion of marginalized communities a basic principle of UN technical support and capacity-building. This may include defining joint objectives for the partnership as a whole; setting pre-conditions for certain kinds of support; or building in specific kinds of practical support. The last of these points is discussed in more detail in Section 7.2, with possible kinds of support including:

- Identifying interlocutors. Missions can draw on an extensive field ‘footprint’ and, as a neutral party, may be able to access a wider range of interlocutors.
- Technical advice: for communications, for mediation and consultation procedures, and for the preparedness of all parties to engage with each other.

¹² Policy and Best Practices Service, ‘Presence, Capacity and Legitimacy: Implementing Extension of State Authority Mandates in Peacekeeping’, 2016, p4.

¹³ United Nations, ‘Report of the Secretary-General: Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict’, UN Doc A/67/499-S/2012/746, October 2012, para 42

- Logistics: removing practical barriers for government partners to engage with the population, including targeted support for transport, meeting spaces, or event security.
- Support and mentoring: for more inclusive policy processes, and for how to effectively use the public feedback that is available.

(ii) Armed groups

In many cases armed groups will resist engagement of the wider public that could undermine their role, even in cases where they enjoy significant support. The consequence, as the Secretary-General has noted, is that there can be “difficult choices and trade-offs regarding urgency, representativeness, effectiveness and legitimacy”.¹⁴ It may be necessary to accept arrangements, in the short term, that are far from inclusive.

At the same time, this cannot be the last word. As a 2017 aide-memoire on engagement with armed groups notes:¹⁵

“engagement – which includes a spectrum that extends from opening indirect channels to pursuing structured negotiations – may not always be desirable or even possible. Yet the “primacy of the political” in the UN’s approach to fragile and conflict affected States suggests that engagement should always be considered.”

What is possible, in this regard, is a much broader question than can be addressed in this Practice Note. (The document goes on to identify positive and negative indicators to help assess the prospects with any specific armed group.) The key point for present purposes that the objectives for engaging with armed groups should encompass (i) greater responsiveness to known community priorities, and (ii) greater involvement of communities in local peace processes.

The scope to do this will depend on the issue at hand. There is likely to be more room on humanitarian or social challenges, for example, than on questions regarding control of territory or how to reconfigure government institutions. A good illustration of this can be found in the case example for Section 7, on local-level “action plans” in the Central African Republic. Internal guidance emphasized that “prioritization of problems might not lead to the prioritization of objectives in the same order”. It went on to cite the example of Bangassou, where it was possible to re-open schools and sit national exams for the year, as an initiative that armed groups had no reason to oppose. It was hoped that same might be true for a number of other issues, notwithstanding that they did not figure in the initial agenda of government authorities or the spokesmen of armed groups.

(iii) Partner organizations

Peace operations do not necessarily have a comparative advantage at the local level. In many cases, there will be other actors with a more permanent presence, and greater knowledge of the local context. Where they are overlapping goals, it may be possible to develop partnerships towards the UN’s communication and

¹⁴ United Nations, ‘Report of the Secretary-General: Peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict’, UN Doc A/69/399-S/2014/694, 23 September 2014, para 27

¹⁵ DPKO/DFS, ‘Engaging with Non State Armed Groups (NSAGs) for political purposes: Considerations for UN mediators and missions’, 12 May 2017.

consultation goals. Indeed, this is probably essential in order to save internal resources for areas where there are few partners on the ground, due to adverse security or political conditions.

Options may include:

- International agencies supporting dialogue, or community-driven reconstruction / development / peacebuilding, at the local level. Often, they will be prepared to at least share information, and in some cases to collaborate on issues of common interest.
- Perceptions surveys: There are now several successful examples of externally-administered surveys administered by external partners, and tailored to the needs of peace operations. These present a range of technical issues, which are outlined in specific policy guidance on how to commission and manage such initiatives.¹⁶
- Civil society: Community-based organizations, religious institutions, trade associations and cooperatives have access to specific sub-communities that it may otherwise be difficult to reach.

In all cases, it is important to understand the “positioning” of partners (as discussed further in Section 6.2 below). Most organizations are better connected with some communities than others. Some are formally affiliated with political parties, or have direct or indirect links with armed actors. Any of these factors can skew the results of engagement in particular directions, and/or create the appearance of bias.

At an analytic level, one useful resource is the 2016 study on UN peacekeeping engagement with civil society. This includes a pilot toolkit to identify and map relevant different actors; consider what will facilitate or impede their involvement; and highlight risks that should be kept in mind.¹⁷

¹⁶ United Nations, ‘Guidelines: Understanding and integrating local perceptions in UN peacekeeping’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, June 2014, paras 43-50.

¹⁷ United Nations, ‘Understanding and improving engagement with civil society in UN peacekeeping: From policy to practice’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, May 2016, Section 6.

Part III: Implementation

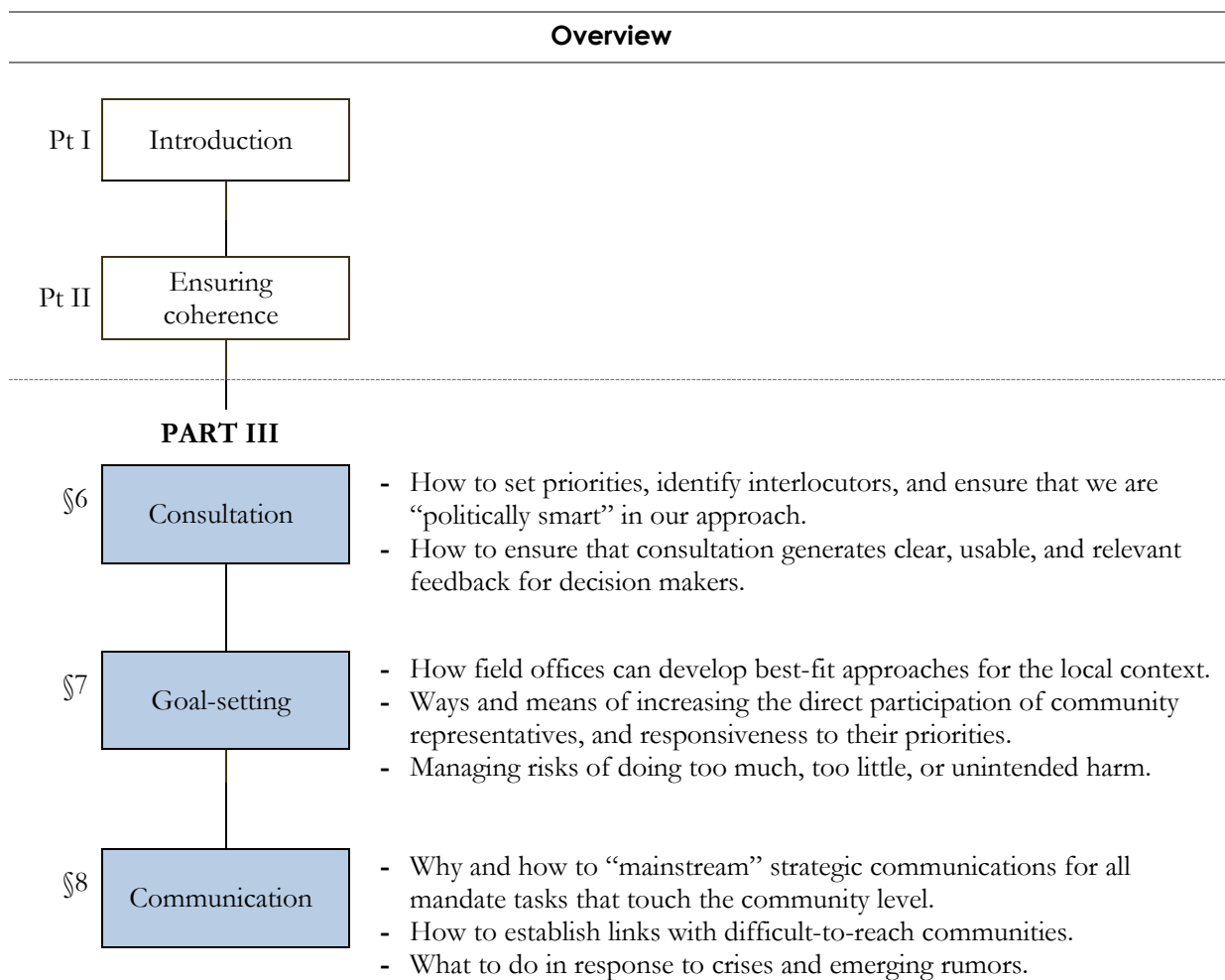


UN Photo/Isaac Billy

Part III focuses on the “how” of community engagement, and outlines better practices to achieve the engagement outcomes defined for the peace operation as a whole.

It is important to emphasize that this section does not replace existing guidance for the wide range of mandated tasks that involve direct engagement with communities. It rather focuses on how to integrate work with communities with the wider political and strategic vision for a peace operation. With this in mind the contents of Part III will be particularly relevant for:

- Field offices, who will be best-placed to lead on many of the tasks outlined below.
- Chiefs of substantive components, who are responsible to allocate resources and balance the priorities of different regions and national communities.
- Civil Affairs, who will often lead on technical aspects.



6. Consultation



UN Photo/Catianne Tijerina

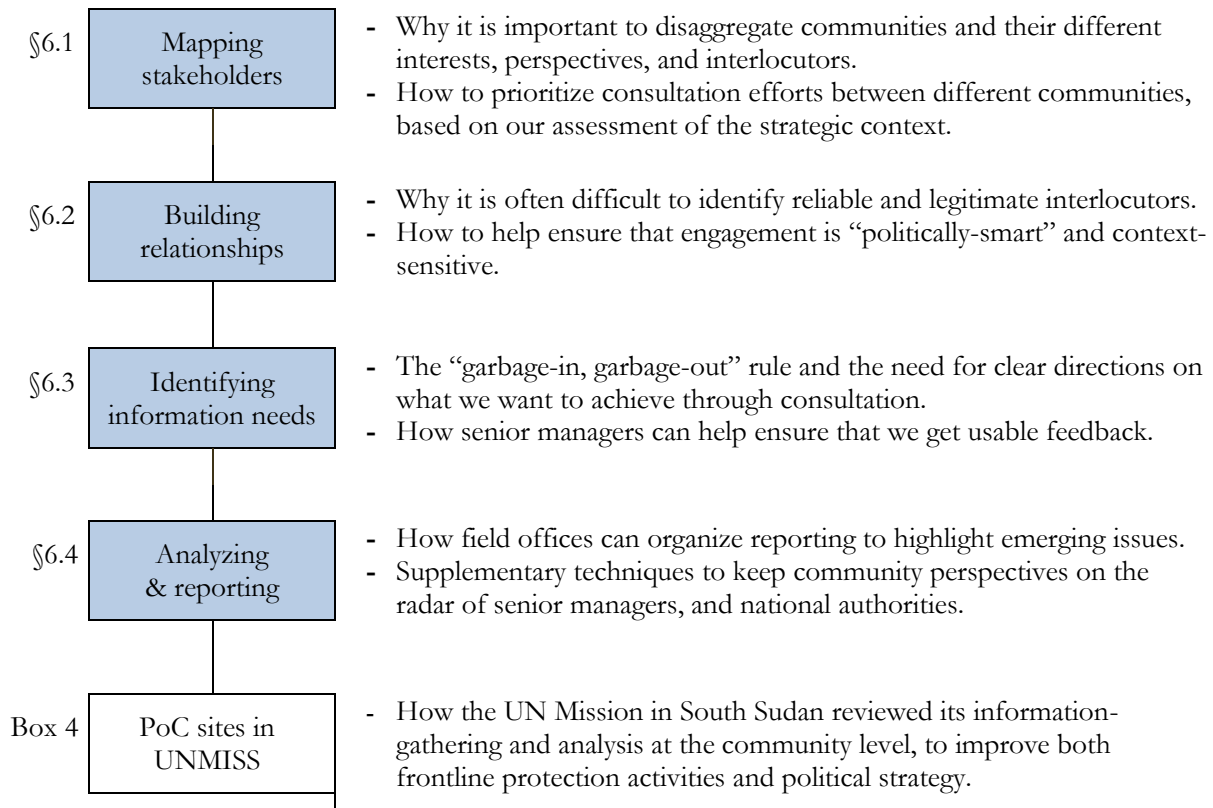
This section is about results-driven consultation. This means creating clear and effective entry points for communities; and developing clear and usable feedback for the peace operation.

The starting point here is that most peace operations have a wide range of contacts at the community level. Field offices, contingents, military observers, police, and “substantive” civilian components generate substantial reporting streams every day. In all cases a public information division interacts with journalists and the public; in some there is dedicated community radio; and in a few broad-based perceptions surveys.

Yet all this is not always well-utilized. Externally, our interlocutors are often frustrated by visits and workshops that do not lead to any obvious result, or by engagement on narrow issues that do not line up with communities’ own priorities. Worse, there is the risk of bias. The ways in which we engage at the community level, or are seen to engage, can easily give rise to the belief that specific communities enjoy too much influence. Internally, meanwhile, it can be difficult to know what to do with the results. In consultations for the Practice Note we heard repeatedly that feedback was “atomized”, unstrategic and hard to use. (Or as one manager put it, like “drinking from a fire hose”.)

With this in mind, we look at four key internal processes to improve coherence.

Overview



6.1 Mapping & prioritization

Community engagement is a sub-component of the mission’s wider political strategy. This means that it must start from a good understanding of different national stakeholder groups, and of those who claim to speak for them. At the local level, this means unpacking a geographic area to understand where there are different communities which have different material interests, or recognize different leaders. In the process, we must usually disaggregate groups lumped together in media coverage or political discourse—the “Muslim population”, the “Hema”, the “Hauts Plateaux”—to have a more nuanced understanding.

The goal here is not to aim for an academic level of precision, but rather to map out what an “inclusive-enough” process could look like. Useful questions may include:

- How have communities historically organized themselves within civil society, peace processes, or political dialogue?
- Are there ethnic, religious, or language groups that have historically been under-represented, or less organized?

- How does the UN’s context analysis at national level break down national communities, and issues of particular concern? (Section 3, above)

Within this broader landscape, it will usually be necessary to prioritize. Peace operations do not have the resources to engage everywhere, and good stakeholder analysis is essential to identify those communities which require particular attention. There are many resources publicly available for this.¹⁸ One simple approach is an interest / power matrix, as in Figure 2. This charts communities’ interests (or vulnerability) on key issues against the strength of their political representation, with the aim of prioritizing our own consultation efforts.

Figure 2: Power-interest mapping

Interests / vulnerability	High	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>
	Low	<i>IV</i>	<i>III</i>
		Low	High
		Power / representation	

The obvious starting point is Group I, who are most-affected but least-represented. These communities may need to be reached through direct engagement rather than relying on “track 1” processes and local authorities. (Including through the steps noted in Section 6.2-4.) Beyond this:

- Group II must be involved, but we must also be conscious of the risk that key decision-making for a shut out others’ interests. It is important to ensure joint commitments to an inclusive process.
- Group III are “context-setters”. They will need to be involved to create an enabling environment for engagement with other community groups, even if this is not a particularly high priority for them.
- Group IV, finally, might be lower-priority for the peace operation. It may be useful to discuss what can be done with humanitarian or development partners.

This is not intended to be prescriptive. What is important is that the UN understands community stakeholders, not the precise method by which this is done. It is also worth underlining that any mapping should be provisional, and updated along with changes in the situation, or in the priorities of the UN and its partners.

¹⁸ For a useful overview see: Bryson JM, ‘What to do when stakeholders matter: Stakeholder identification and analysis techniques’, *Public Management Review* 6(1): 21-53. Available at www.alnap.org.

6.2 Building relationships

It is rarely feasible to engage directly with a significant part of the population, outside of statistically representative surveys. For the most part, peace operations must work through intermediaries.

This always involves risks. It is a defining characteristic of fragile and conflict-affected settings that the legitimacy of political and social institutions has come under challenge. In many areas there will be serious conflict over who speaks for whom, and it should not be assumed that traditional leaders or civil society are “above the fray” in this regard. Some may have come into prominence only recently; others may play negative roles or be instrumentalized by armed groups or political spoilers. It is also common for gender roles, social expectations of youth, or urban/rural divides to have evolved quickly in the recent past.

The net consequence is that it can be difficult to identify the right interlocutors at community level. A careless approach can create confusion or deliver mixed messages, or leave the UN open to manipulation in favor of one group or another.

It follows that it is sensible to have a light internal process to ensure that the UN’s interactions at community level are conflict-sensitive and politically-smart. In essence this means (i) joint review of who different mission components are dealing with, (ii) pooling what we know about these people, and (iii) identifying gaps or problems for further action. Useful questions to ask will include:

- Has the legitimacy of local institutions, including both “traditional” leaders and civil society, come into question? How are they viewed by different local communities?
- How are women and youth involved? Is special support needed to ensure that they are involved substantively and seriously (within the framework of Security Council resolutions 1325 and 2250)?
- Are there other groups that are potentially marginalized *within* communities of interest? This might include ex-combatants, religious minorities, or the rural poor.

Where field offices are in place, it is heads of office who must lead on this to avoid “silos” and competition between different components of the peace operation. At a technical level, meanwhile, Civil Affairs (CAS) is usually best-placed to facilitate discussion. One of CAS’ generic functions is cross-mission representation, monitoring, and facilitation, and existing guidance and training provide practical advice on how to map community dynamics and identify reliable interlocutors.¹⁹ Component chiefs, and coordinators within field offices, should accordingly think through how CAS can best act as a “service provider” in this regard for the rest of the peace operation. Practical steps may include:

- Civil society analysis. Mapping of “who is who”, including history; affiliations; and an assessment of legitimacy and influence with relevant communities.
- Building and maintaining a wide set of relationships outside of current “hot spot” areas, to ensure the ability to quickly adapt as circumstances change.
- Facilitating periodic workshops amongst mission components, including uniformed components, to discuss their interlocutors at community level.

¹⁹ DPKO/DFS, ‘Civil affairs handbook’, March 2012, ch 9.

Alongside this, there are options to reduce our reliance on individual key informants. The “gold standard” here is a statistically representative perceptions survey to get clear feedback on the views of different segments of the population, on which specific policy guidance is available.²⁰ Other options include organizing periodic town-hall style events or public meetings; developing channels for feedback via SMS or radio; or simply taking opportunities for informal discussions with local people where they present themselves.

It is often also useful to work with external partners who have extensive contacts, or better yet a permanent presence, in particular communities. This might include collaborating on focus group or household-level discussions where the results can be shared with the UN; or on qualitative research with civil society or academic institutions.

6.3 Identifying information needs

It is important to “do our homework” prior to approaching communities. This means identifying the key issues or questions that we are interested in; how we plan to utilize the information that we obtain; and what has already been done.

In some cases, this will be straightforward, because community engagement is embedded in a structured planning process. Current guidance on Integrated Assessment and Planning states that Strategic Assessment and Strategic Review processes must include “civil society and other local representatives” when analyzing the context; and that country-level plans (Integrated Strategic Frameworks) must pay particular attention to non-state and civil society actors.²¹ Similar requirements apply to the development of Comprehensive Protection Strategies, and Women’s Protection Strategies.

Outside of this, the senior management team must take the initiative, and it is good practice to have a standing agenda item to define engagement priorities, both at Headquarters and in field offices. This entails:

- a horizon scan of upcoming decision, political processes and major events; along with a review of emerging issues and major incidents;
- preparing a short-list of “priority information requirements” to guide the UN’s routine interactions at the community level, and sharing this across all mission components;
- identifying particularly sensitive issues that will require specific consultation at the community level, and designating who will be responsible.

It is also useful to periodically revisit initiatives that have already been set in motion. As the UN’s 2010 guidance on benchmarks for peace consolidation explains, expert and quantitative benchmarks “may not validly state a change in the peace or conflict level as long as popular perceptions do not show the same trend”.²² To give some specific examples:

²⁰ DPKO/DFS, ‘Guidelines: Understanding and integrating local perceptions in UN peacekeeping’, June 2014.

²¹ United Nations, ‘Integrated assessment and planning handbook’, above, pp16, 22, 42-5, 81-2.

²² United Nations, ‘Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners’ Guide to Benchmarking’, 2010, p40.

- Protection of civilians: underlines that local perceptions “should be one of the most important indicators in defining the success of the mission’s role in providing protection.” These include overall trends in the security situation; feelings of personal security in everyday life; and the responsiveness of UN personnel.
- Rule of law and strengthening of state authority: The New Deal for Conflict-Affected and Fragile States gives equal prominence to qualitative and perceptions-based indicators. This is also true for Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and in current UN guidance on benchmarking for the rule of law.²³

6.4 Analyzing & reporting

Throughout the development of this Practice Note, the clearest single point of feedback on consultation at the community level was the need for analysis and reporting to be more “decision-relevant”. By this people meant less emphasis on events and individual interactions with people, and more on (i) emerging trends and perspectives for specific communities, and (ii) implications for the peace operation, national authorities, and other stakeholders.

The most important step here is the definition of clear information requirements, as discussed in Section 6. These can be used to provide a light structure for periodic situation reporting, or for ad hoc reports via the same channels. Beyond this, it is up to field offices (or staff covering geographic areas) to exercise leadership and advocate for emerging issues in their areas of responsibility. A 2017 survey of practice for field offices in peace operations identified a range of useful practices in this regard, including:²⁴

- Area-based assessments that represented the full mission perspective on particular “hot spots” or local communities (as discussed in Section 6.1).
- Delegation of routine incident reporting to a regional Joint Operations Centre, or staff playing this role, with the aim of leaving the Head of Office and Civil/Political Affairs free to focus on emerging strategic issues.
- Feedback on how major priorities and initiatives were playing out at local level, highlighting commonalities and differences between communities.
- Regular visits of field office personnel to mission headquarters, and vice versa, including strategic retreats for each of the major substantive components.
- Local Protection Plans informed by engagement on specific risks and needs faced by a community.

In addition to formal planning and reporting, it is possible to build community-level perspectives into the rhythm of day-to-day management. Perhaps the most common example is the “town-hall” style visit by senior leaders, with a less frequent practice the use of informal “citizen advisory boards” at the regional level. Both can be strengthened preparatory work with communities to help them sharpen and clarify feedback. A variation on this is to build in a presentation or *rapportage* phase for the peace operation’s

²³ United Nations, ‘The United Nations rule of law indicators: Implementation guide and project tools’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011.

²⁴ DPKO/DFS, ‘Survey of practice: Field offices in peacekeeping’, October 2017, pp18-23

initiatives at community level, whereby national authorities and/or mission officials visit in the later stages to exchange with community representatives on the suggested way forward.

Alongside all this, the senior management team should consider how to encourage the constructive use of communities' feedback by national authorities. This can be a sensitive issue, insofar as it is not a peace operation's job to tell local officials what their own people are saying. Yet we have already noted in Section 5.1 that the principle of inclusivity is anchored in a range of international instruments, and for many countries in legislation or core policy frameworks. It is appropriate to offer support and advice to further and realize these objectives.

One striking example comes from Timor-Leste. Between 2007 and 2012 the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) accordingly facilitated hundreds of Democratic Governance Fora on topics including constitutional arrangements, major on-going policy initiatives, and electoral arrangements. Timorese officials were front and center at these events, with speakers including senior politicians (up to the President and Prime Minister), members of parliament, or senior civil servants. UNMIT was in an enabling role, helping to design the process, encourage participants, and arrange logistics in remote areas.

Examples from other contexts have included:

- Pre-electoral forums: where missions enable national electoral authorities and/or political parties to visit remote communities, build confidence in the process, and reinforce messages about the peaceful conduct of the process.
- Perception surveys: presentations of findings by technical partners to senior political officials, as well as on issues of particular interest for line ministries. In this regard, the best developed example so far is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a partnership between the UN Mission, UNDP, and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.²⁵

²⁵ See www.peacebuildingdata.org, for multiple iterations from 2014 onwards.

Box 3: PoC sites in UNMISS

In 2017 the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) organized an expert assessment and consultations around how it engaged communities. National-level dialogue was not advancing at that time, but there were still opportunities to engage with communities and local authorities, in order to “create a more substantial base for any political process at the national level while also helping to prevent and mitigate inter-communal violence at the local level”.

In this sense, community engagement was both “a frontline protection intervention and part of overarching political strategy”.²⁶ This process converged around a linked set of challenges:

Mapping & prioritization. There were significant differences between UNMISS’s engagement within the Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites located adjacent to mission bases, with surrounding communities, and with outlying areas. A key priority was to make these approaches more systematic. In practice this meant understanding the political, security, and socio-economic dynamics in different areas, identifying the major challenges, and defining the expected outcomes of engagement on this basis.

Some of the key points included:

- For PoC sites, clarifying the role and Terms of Reference of leadership structures for internally displaced persons, including how their feedback was utilized by UNMISS.
- How to ensure neutrality in the face of pressure from both government and armed groups to shape consultation in PoC sites, and ordinary peoples’ suspicions about this.
- For neighboring communities, grappling with perceptions that UNMISS invested too much of its resources in PoC sites, to the detriment of people outside these areas.
- Consultation mechanisms to drive “early warning and early action” for highly volatile areas.
- Goal-setting for relatively stable areas, including the scope for confidence-building measures or inter-communal dialogue.

Understanding interlocutors. A range of coordination mechanisms had been established within PoC sites, but these tended to reflect existing power imbalances within the community based on wealth, gender, and age. In some cases, women’s and youth groups were also in place, with the encouragement of UNMISS, but they experienced a range of formal and informal barriers to access formal decision-making such as language, and poor information-sharing.

A related issue was the need for careful analysis of UNMISS’s civil society interlocutors. Due to extreme political polarization, most civil society organizations (CSOs) were experiencing a great deal of pressure from government authorities and armed factions, and some had been actively coopted on one side or another. It was accordingly essential both to know “who was who”, and to properly assess the risks of engaging CSOs as partners.

Clearer information requirements. UNMISS had many contact points at the community level, including the Force, UNPOL (particularly within the PoC sites), Civil Affairs, RRP, and Public Information. It was clear that these needed to be better organised to reduce duplication, and to better integrate the results. This included agreeing on when and how different mission components would share information, and equipping them for “two-way communication” with the population on important issues.

²⁶ UNMISS, Strategy on communal conflict management, reconciliation, and social cohesion’, September 2017.

7. Goal-setting



UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

This section looks at how to ensure that that community priorities are reflected in peace processes and the wider political settlement, alongside those of formal stakeholders.

The purpose is perhaps best explained by recalling Figure 1, introduced in Section 2 above. Here, the goal is to work in the shaded space, which entails two challenges.

Figure 1: Finding shared goals



The first is ensuring that the UN's own support to stabilization and early peacebuilding is relevant and impactful at a local level. This requires translating a mission's overall mandated tasks into activities that address *specific* priorities and drivers of conflict, as learned through consultation with communities.

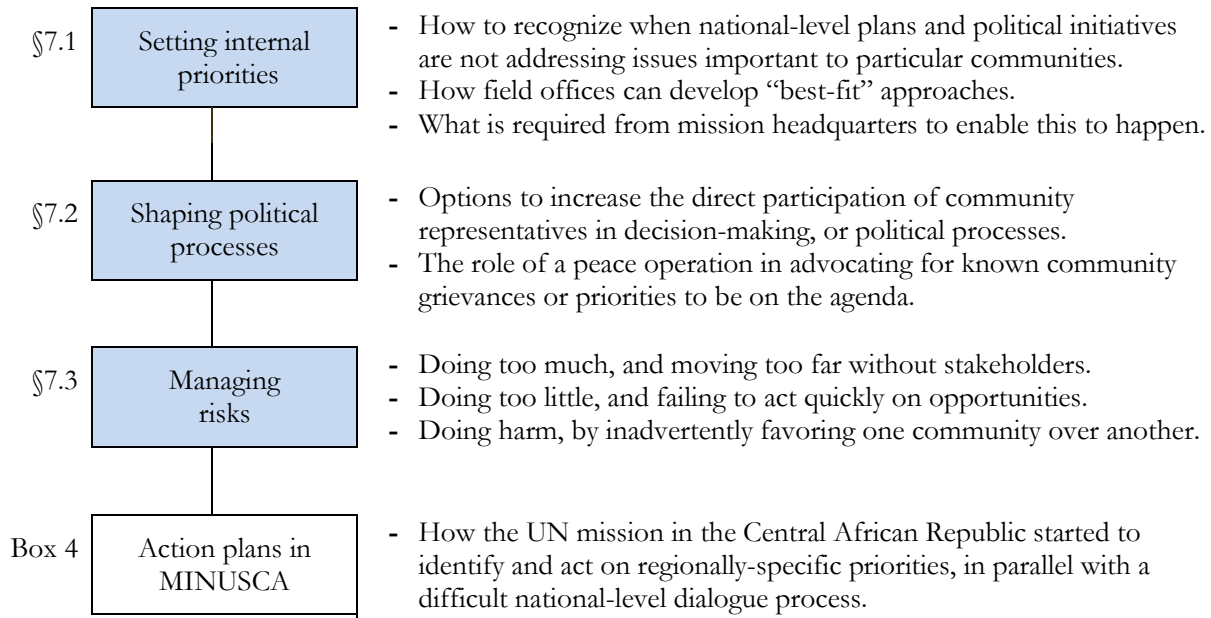
The second is using UN good offices, and technical expertise, to help bring political and peace processes into alignment with the priorities

of communities. This means advocating with formal stakeholders in these settings—office

holders, perhaps armed groups—for more inclusive processes and agendas.

In practice there will never be a perfect solution. Stakeholders have different and sometimes irreconcilable interests; the UN itself has limited resources. The goal, as noted in Part 1, is to progressively increase inclusivity over time.

Overview



7.1 Setting UN priorities

Most peace operations are mandated to play a catalytic role for a range of peacebuilding priorities. These include, non-exhaustively: the restoration of state authority; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), including community violence reduction; support to judicial and penal institutions; and security sector reform. These are often accompanied by support to wider processes, such as an Integrated Strategic Framework for the UN system, or aid mechanisms such as a Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment.

In each respect a peace operation’s contribution will be most effective, at local level, when it addresses:

- commitments and priorities articulated in local-level cessations of hostilities or peace agreements (where these exist); and/or
- priorities and grievances identified through consultation with specific communities (as discussed in Section 6).

This does not happen automatically. National-level plans or political initiatives are often “one-size-fits-all”, and this can result in de-prioritizing issues that are important to individual communities but not nationally prominent. Alongside this, it is easy to fall into bad habits. Most fragile and conflict-affected countries are

characterized by historical exclusion of particular groups or regions, and many by over-centralization and weak capacities outside of the capital. These weaknesses in the past can easily affect policy-making in the present, as new systems, habits, and capacities take time to develop.

Field offices, where they are in place, are usually best-placed to develop a “best-fit” approach (as discussed in Section 4, above).²⁷ The head of office should coordinate this process, and strive to ensure common goals and a clear division of labor between different components of the peace operation. Equally importantly, they should be the advocate of local needs for colleagues who are distant from the scene in the capital (or at UN headquarters!), and within the framework of national peacebuilding or development strategies.

The outputs of this process depend upon the context. In some cases, peace operations have developed standard operating procedures for planning at the level of field offices, for which this Practice Note should be read as a complementary resource.²⁸ In the case example for Section 7, in the Central African Republic, things were semi-formalized through the development of field office “action plans” for support to local peace processes. These provided a light structure for discussion within the field office, and between the field office and headquarters. Crucially, they also provided a point of focus for engagement with national authorities, armed groups, and other partner organizations.

One useful resource in this regard is guidance on Strategic Action Matrices, developed with the Center for International Peace Operations and intended to “help translate conflict analysis results into suitable interventions and targeted activities through a sequence of easy-to-apply, cumulative steps”.²⁹

	Topic	Key questions
1	Identifying entry points	Which “hot spot” areas need to be prioritized? Conversely, which areas can be sequenced later, or better addressed through humanitarian or development partners?
2	Assessing entry points	Which issues can the UN realistically and usefully tackle? What stakeholders (national authorities, armed groups, others) need to be engaged in order to do so?
3	Identifying interventions	What, specifically, will the peace operation do? (conflict mitigation, support, capacity-building, confidence-building) What will it ask other stakeholders to do, and how will we know if they’ve done it?
4	Designing activities	What will happen at the level of field offices, and/or headquarters? How does this link to other ongoing activities? How will we ensure coherence internally, and with external stakeholders? How will we track progress, accounting for the different perspectives of different communities?

²⁷ In the absence of field offices, this can be done “virtually” through working groups for specific areas.

²⁸ See e.g. MINUSMA, ‘Standard operating procedure: Management and operation of MINUSMA Regional Offices’, 1 December 2014.

²⁹ ZIF, ‘Strategic Action Matrix (SAM): A reference guide’, 2017.

7.2 Shaping political processes

There is an inherent tension in a peace operation suggesting how “country leadership” should be exercised. The UN does not dictate what peace processes, let alone policy priorities for a legally constituted government, look like. Nor does it always have viable tools to influence armed groups. In short, there is no guarantee that we will find a receptive audience.

At the same time, the basic principle is that the UN should advocate for inclusive political and peace processes. This is specifically required by the Security Council mandates of many peace operations, and encouraged by a range of international instruments (as summarized in Section 2). At a practical level, senior staff should identify advocacy goals around two issues:

(i) Opportunities for direct participation

It is not always easy to involve community representatives at a decision-making level, or in follow-up mechanisms. Peace negotiations, and major policy / reform initiatives, are already contentious and difficult processes. Adding more parties can increase complexity and duration; threaten confidentiality; and pose problems of how to select the right people. Perhaps most importantly, the mission’s “normal” interlocutors may resist. Experienced practitioners cited many cases—Darfur, Somalia, the DRC, Mali—where their day-to-day counterparts were adamant that the process should not be further expanded.

Nonetheless, there are options. In the first instance, peace operations can offer “track 1” counterparts a range of practical support to make it easier to involve civil society or community representatives. This includes:

- Help identifying and selecting participants. Missions can draw here on an extensive field presence and, as a neutral party, the ability to access a wide range of interlocutors. Any advice should be premised on careful contextual analysis, as discussed in Sections 6.1-2.
- Expert support to procedures, and the preparedness of all parties.
- Logistical support. Experience suggests that costs that are relatively minor for the UN can still pose a significant practical barrier for community-level stakeholders.

Alongside this, there are ways to participate beyond the negotiation table itself (or beyond the Cabinet meetings that set policy on key issues). The Broadening Participation research project, which ran from 2011-15 on this topic, suggested the following possibilities:³⁰

- Observer status at key moments, or the opportunity to make submissions directly.
- Direct representation in supplementary processes, such as recent National Dialogues in Guinea, the Central African Republic, or Yemen.
- Inclusive commissions that are either preparatory to formal discussions (as in Colombia) or following agreement (as with South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

³⁰ Paffenholz T, ‘Inclusivity in peace processes: Briefing paper for the UN High-level review panel’, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, February 2015. For another succinct overview see Paffenholz T, ‘Broader Participation Project’ Briefing Paper. Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, 2015.

- Mass action. This cannot easily be “steered”, and is certainly problematic for a peace operation to encourage—but can benefit from constructive engagement where it arises.

(ii) Incorporation of key issues into the agenda

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), noted above, emphasized that a gender perspective should always be incorporated in peace negotiations. This includes the “special needs of women and girls”; measures to support women’s peace initiatives and involvement in implementation; and protection of women’s human rights. These principles have been repeated in one form or another in the mandates of many peace operations, often supported by dedicated staff to ensure that women’s perspectives are captured and injected into decision-making. Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) calls for a similar consideration for the participation and views of youth in peace processes.

A similar principle applies to communities that have been historically marginalized, or otherwise lack a significant voice in peace / political processes. A good example comes from the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which deployed Local Community Officers (LCOs) across its area of operations from 1999 and 2006. Their primary focus was to maintain goodwill and cooperation between minority communities and new Kosovar institutions, in a context where trust between minority Serbs and the (overwhelmingly Kosovo Albanian) municipal and central authorities was extremely low. The LCOs provided direct feedback on how policy decisions were seen from the neighborhood level, both for local institutions and for UNMIK itself.

More generally, we can ask the following questions. In each case it is important to both understand the situation clearly ourselves, and to find avenues for constructive advice:

- In the case of formal peace processes: does that agenda match up with what we know about community grievances and priorities (as discussed in Section 6)?
- Where there have been consultative processes (such as National Dialogues), are there clear links with the agenda of national authorities, or of peace negotiations?
- Have national authorities articulated an inclusive political vision to the extent possible? Or are there issues that are critical for some communities, but not addressed in government policy?

7.3 Managing risks

There has been a great deal of writing on community-driven development, and participatory planning, over the last few decades. But a UN peace operation is in a somewhat unique position, particularly where it includes military contingents and/or is mandated to use force. Experience points to several issues that should be borne in mind when reading Sections 7.2-3.

(i) Doing too much

The reality is that the sustainability of a peace process depends much more upon what key national stakeholders are doing, than upon the UN’s activities. It is crucial to engage with this reality, rather than focusing on what we can directly control. In practice this includes:

- Identifying *all* necessary conditions for genuine progress on issues identified at the community level. This may include policy commitments from national authorities, or in certain cases from armed groups.
- Sequencing UN activities based on achievement of necessary conditions, including changes in the policies or behaviors of specific stakeholders, rather than simply implementing as fast as possible.
- Incorporating advocacy goals into the broader partnership with national institutions; and perhaps linking some forms of support to progress on key issues.
- Mechanisms for follow-up between relevant stakeholders, including mutual discussion of blockages and emerging issues.

(ii) Doing too little

Section 2 noted the risks of a “top-down” model—where we are supporting national policy initiatives, or implementing provisions of a peace agreement, but not addressing grievances on the ground. This can include the following situations:

- A peace process that is “stuck” at national level, but accompanied by a dynamic and violent situation in regional areas.
- A national-level political processes that takes several years to translate into tangible gains in any given area, due to the political difficulty of reform activities or limited capacities for implementation.
- Serious protection or human rights concerns that exist independent of the political situation.

In any of these settings, being too cautious or distant can easily damage the reputation and credibility of the UN, and that of national institutions. It is important to be opportunistic in addressing local issues, alongside and complementary to what is happening at the national level. This includes identifying issues that local authorities and/or armed groups may cooperate with constructive initiatives, or at least not oppose them.

(iii) Doing harm

We noted in Section 6 that the choice of interlocutors requires great care. This is doubly true when it comes to setting objectives for local-level peace processes. The UN can easily “do harm” if it supports a political agenda, or policy initiatives at local level, that are divisive or seen to be skewed in one favor of particular communities. The effect will be the same if some initiatives proceed due to favorable conditions, but others do not.

It is also worth underlining that UN peacekeeping missions sometimes operate in contexts where individuals or communities may face risks or reprisals as a result of their engagement with the mission. Care should be taken to evaluate any potential risk to those with whom the mission is engaging and to follow a ‘do no harm’ approach which does not put any interlocutors at risk.

BOX 4: ACTION PLANS IN C.A.R.

In 2017-18 the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) developed a number of “action plans” for support to local peace processes. This was led by field offices in regional centers including Bria, Bangassou, and Zemio.

A short guidance note developed at mission level emphasized that the focus was not on obtaining a ceasefire by any means possible, but on “clearly prioritizing objectives and seizing opportunities where they present themselves.” The underlying principle was that while national-level dialogue with armed groups was ongoing, at the field level the UN could not afford to be “too cautious or too distant” from urgent issues and ongoing violence, at the risk of damaging its reputation and political weight.

With this in mind, the action plans looked at problems and grievances that could be addressed in the short to medium term, without making unrealistic assumptions about progress in demobilization of armed groups and the political process at national level. The subject matter included:

- Security: COH, WFZ, free movement, transhumance/pasturage
- Political/administrative: Participation in decision-making; ongoing extension of state authority; and control of natural resources
- Community participation: ongoing information and participation; inter-community dialogue; and women’s involvement.
- Humanitarian issues: access; protection; return of IDPs
- Recovery & development: resumption and improvement of key services; accelerated engagement of the UNCT and other development actors.

With respect to process: Development of the *plans d’action* was coordinated by the heads of field offices, with support from focal points in Civil Affairs and Political Affairs. Considerable emphasis was placed on periodic follow-up by field offices themselves, involving relevant stakeholders at this level.

Early lessons learned have included the following:

Dependencies at the national level: A range of initiatives were blocked by lack of action in the capital, to authorize lower levels of government. This required engagement at the senior technical level, and for a few very sensitive issues at the highest political levels.

The need to be politically smart: Some early plans were unrealistically optimistic about the “political space” to act on important issues, and should have identified clearer advocacy goals for armed groups and national authorities.

Capacities: Field offices had few resources to dedicate to planning and reporting. In each case it was necessary to provide “surge” capacity from headquarters with expertise in these areas.

8. Communication



UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

This section supplements existing guidance on strategic communications and public information, with a specific focus on communities as a key stakeholder group.³¹

In one sense this is not a new topic. The importance of effective outwards communication for peace operations is well-recognized, with the conventional rationale well-captured in the 2008 *Principles and Guidelines* (“Capstone doctrine”):³²

If the parameters of United Nations activity are clearly laid out and explained to the local population and other target audiences, fear and misunderstanding will be minimized, disinformation will be corrected, and the impact of those who wish to damage the peace process through rumor and untruth will be minimized.

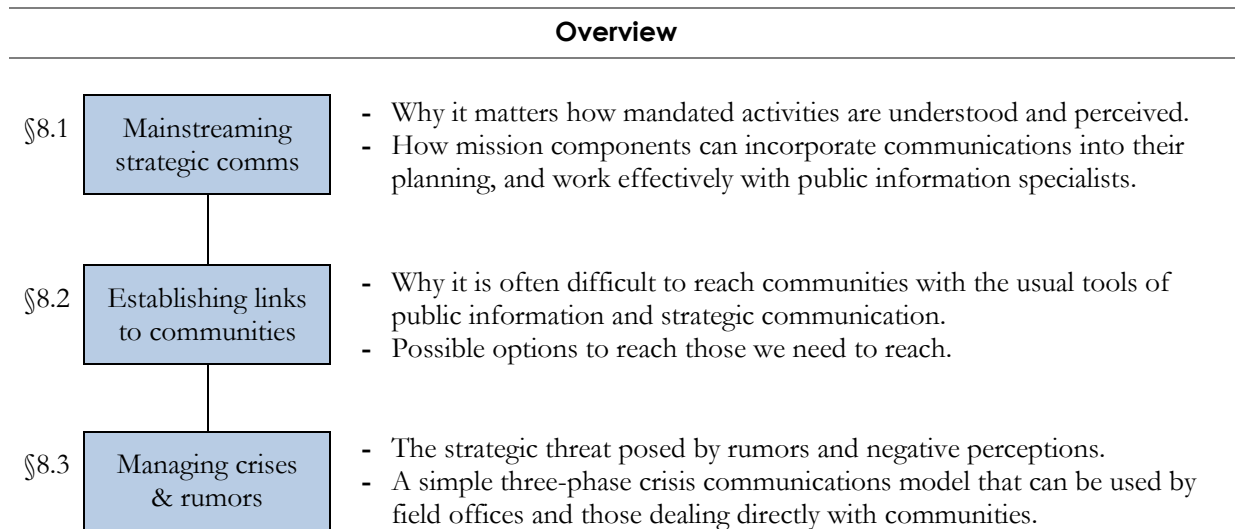
The challenge is that this model is outdated. The reality for most UN peace operations is not a well-defined “peace process” but rather a multi-dimensional effort to protect civilians, reform political and security institutions, extend state authority, demobilize combatants, and a range of other complex tasks. All this relies upon partnerships with transitional or national authorities that may face substantial challenges in public communication. What is more, it takes place in a contested information environment. Armed groups

³¹ Most importantly: DPKO/DFS, ‘Policy: Strategic communications and public information’, Ref. 2016.11, 1 January 2017.

³² DPKO/DFS, ‘United Nations peacekeeping operations: Principles and guidelines’, 2008, pp82-4.

and political actors have their own interests, and their own communication strategies to influence how events are perceived.

Against this background, we focus on three challenges that are specific to strategic communications with communities.



8.1 “Mainstreaming” strategic communications

Peace operations engage with high-stakes issues, where policy decisions taken elsewhere can have far-reaching consequences at the household and community levels. What is more, we often ask local communities to change behaviors and expend their own resources. Successful execution of the mandate implies that ordinary people will accommodate new government roles and responsibilities, reintegrate demobilized combatants in their midst, speak peacefully with yesterday’s bitter enemies, and organize themselves to work effectively with our own military contingents.

For any of this to happen, people need timely and accurate information. One topic that illustrates the point very well is the protection of civilians. As spelled out in 2015 policy guidance, it is vital to communicate what the mission can and cannot do in a given geographic area. Managers must allocate resources for a “proactive and on-going expectations management effort”, such that civilians can plan their day-to-day security based on accurate expectations, and not rely to their disadvantage on unrealistic ones.³³ This specifically includes real-time information on the mission’s own plans and activities. In many contexts it also includes real-time information on other known protection threats, such as the activities of armed groups or planned Government security operations (where feasible).

³³ United Nations, ‘DPKO/DFS policy: The protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping’, Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, April 2015, p34.

To take two further examples, a similar approach should accompany efforts to strengthen state authority and the rule of law. Such initiatives will encompass communities with very negative experiences with central government institutions. It follows that efforts to build legitimacy and effectiveness must confront suspicions, disinformation, and risks of misinterpretation. Clear messages are essential. They are, moreover, the foundation of any effort to involve communities in meaningful consultation (Section 6) or goal-setting (Section 7).

Yet we do not do this consistently. In consultations for this Practice Note public information specialists consistently noted that substantive components “tend to under-communicate”, and did not consistently formulate clear messages or fully utilize the available media channels. This is corroborated by a survey of policy guidance in areas like judicial affairs and security sector reform, which provide a great deal more guidance on reporting upwards to Headquarters than on communication outwards to the population of the host country.

At the practical level, the first principle is that substantive components, and senior management more generally, must incorporate public communication into their overall strategic planning. This includes the identification of key messages, how they will be disseminated and how to respond to emerging issues.

Where relevant, managers should also consider:

- how to delegate authority to the field office level to adapt communications to the needs and interests of specific communities;
- how to give national authorities as visible and prominent a role as possible, including through reinforcement of their own communications capacities; and
- how to empower field offices to communicate quickly and effectively in the event of crises, when it is not viable to rely on a centralized “spokesperson” model.

A second point to consider is how to make best use of public information specialists within the peace operation. It is a good practice to establish working-level process by which they can exchange with different mission components on upcoming initiatives, provide technical advice, and develop content for circulation through available media channels. One example in this regard comes from Radio Mikado, a component of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).³⁴ Here, content development:

... is done through a number of discussions with media, civil society leaders, officials in the Ministry of Communication, representative focus groups, populations in the Malian “grains” – social gathering points where people come together to talk about day to day life in their community and traditionally gather around a radio to listen to news and music. It is also done with MINUSMA section heads and heads of offices, UN agencies, and international partners as well as international media capacity building structures. In parallel, through close monitoring and evaluation of existing radios, their capacity and editorial lines, and their way of talking about the mission, Mikado FM is able to draw upon its research to elaborate a grid which reflects both the needs of the mission, its desired communication targets and objectives, as well as the needs of the Malian population both in Mali and abroad.

³⁴ MINUSMA, ‘Mikado FM: A Current Affairs and Magazine Radio’, 2015.

8.2 Establishing links with communities

Peace operations cannot be everywhere at once. When engaging with the population at large, we must thus think carefully about what existing channels of communication can be built upon.

What is most useful in this regard varies significantly with context. For most current peace operations, radio is by far the most widespread source of information. Behind this lie mobile telephone networks, while in some urban settings newspapers may also play a significant role. In still other situations, there may be no reliable mass communication tools. Experience demonstrates that communities that are politically or economically marginalized are frequently also disadvantaged in their access to information, including:

- remote rural areas where the infrastructure for radio broadcasts or cellular networks has never been established (or been damaged);
- communities with low levels of literacy, or whose languages are not widely used in the media;
- internally displaced people or refugees who have lost access to their usual sources of news and information.

In such situations we risk “doing harm” if we simply utilize existing mass media. This can create the appearance of bias, or even real inequities in different communities’ ability to engage with the UN. We also risk leaving ourselves with few options when a politically sensitive incident occurs and it is essential to quickly relay messages to affected communities, in the sense discussed in Section 8.2.

The implication is that it is prudent to map the practical means by which different communities can access information about the political and security environment, as an essential part of the broader context assessment (as discussed in Section 3). Consultations across missions have suggested a range of possibilities in this regard:

In-person engagement by UN personnel. This may include a range of mission components who physically interact with communities, notably Outreach, military observers, military contingents, UN police, and in very important cases Joint Assessment Missions or Joint Protection Teams. Generally, this needs to be prioritized for sensitive or high-priority areas, due to the cost and effort of reaching individual communities amidst a large area of operations.

A supplementary measure, first used in the UN Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), is the recruitment of the use of Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs). These are local civilian personnel embedded with the mission’s military contingents in forward operating locations. Among other responsibilities, they link the contingents directly with customary authorities, community-based organizations, business owners, and other key local actors.

In-person engagement by local partners. Where reliable partners can be identified, it is advisable to hand over communication on routine tasks and to complement the UN’s response when reacting to serious crises. This should be done with due regard for mapping of interlocutors, as discussed in Section 6.

To give one useful example, the UN Operation in Cote d’Ivoire (ONUCI) built its outreach strategy from 2005-10 upon four pillars: media, women, youth and traditional / religious leaders. The mission’s Public Information section then co-designed messages with these groups on peaceful conflict resolution, social cohesion, and human rights. It paired the messages with targeted skills training for local partners, both as a *quid pro quo* for their involvement, and as an investment in their ability to carry messages to the community level.

Investment in infrastructure. Subsidies to radio or cellular network towers are often a cost-effective intervention to improve protection efforts, enhance the effectiveness of political initiatives, and facilitate a range of other mandated tasks. In some cases, this has been supported through Quick Impact Projects; or through incorporation into programme support (with partners) for the restoration of state authority.

Relay systems. In some settings, delivery of messages by motorbike, or even passing traffic, is a well-established working method for local institutions. This may be a viable option in the absence of more sophisticated solutions.

8.3 Managing rumors & misinformation

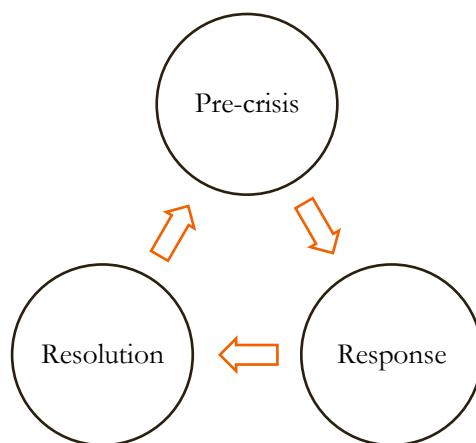
The “basic law of rumor” is that misinformation becomes more common when issues are important, and when the degree of uncertainty is greater.³⁵ Its truth has been demonstrated the hard way for many peace operations. Minor incidents escalate quickly when they are of a politically sensitive character. Violence spreads between towns, or trigger unrest in the capital, with surprising speed. Political and policy initiatives are interpreted in wildly varying and often negative ways by different communities, particularly on sensitive topics such as policing or demobilization of combatants. All the while, armed groups and political figures actively try to shape perceptions in their favor.

All this can represent a major strategic threat. Conversely, communities themselves represent the first and best way to interrupt negative dynamics. It follows that it is important to establish processes for timely identification and response for emerging rumors, misinformation, or grievances. (This is a topic that should be specifically addressed in standard operating procedures on crisis management, including the functioning of the Joint Operations Center or equivalent mechanism, and the focus here is on the community-facing dimensions.)

There are many “crisis communications” models in print and available online, but the basic elements are as described in Figure 3.

³⁵ Bugge J et al, ‘Rumor has it: A practice guide to working with rumours’, Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network, 2017.

Figure 3: Crisis communications



It is not possible to provide an exhaustive overview here, but practitioners suggested a “rough guide” to these tasks as follows:³⁶

I	Pre-crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a standing agenda item for senior management team. ▪ Encourage components with significant community contact to recognize emerging perceptions or issues, and escalate them. ▪ Define a protocol or standard operating procedure, including key relationships in communities and with national authorities.
II	Initial response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aim is “to be first, be right, and be credible”. Reduce uncertainty as much as possible with the information available. ▪ Allocate responsibilities for the peace operation, national authorities, and partners in the community. ▪ Prioritize information that assists communities to “help themselves”, to the extent possible.
III	Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update feedback, based on new information and/or reactions to initial communications. ▪ Explain what actions will follow to mitigate, rebuild, or correct problems. ▪ Facilitate discussion amongst stakeholders on causes, adequacy of the response, and what needs to happen next.

This model should be kept in mind at both the headquarters level, and those of field offices. Experience suggests that a centralized process will rarely be fast enough to engage with stakeholders in regional areas while a crisis is in motion. In most cases it will also be necessary to deal directly with local interlocutors, rather than relying on mass media. This implies the need for clear, advance delegation of authority to the head of field office, or other representative on the ground.

³⁶ There are many detailed resources on crisis communications. Indicatively see Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Crisis and emergency risk communication’ (2014).

Annex: Flowchart of key processes

This is a visual summary of the steps described in this Practice Note. Parts I and II relate to over-arching objectives and should be captured in short strategy documents, as noted. Part III relates to recurring processes that should be reflected in relevant terms of reference, or post descriptions of key staff.

