Working paper

Protection and peace in conflict-affected contexts: understanding the intersections

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Abstract

In conflict-affected contexts, addressing people's vulnerabilities before, during and after crises requires stronger complementarity across and between humanitarian relief, human rights, development programmes and peacebuilding. Despite several initiatives to enhance complementarity between the various actors, limited attention has been given to the intersections between protection and peace writ large. Given the common goals that bind them, what are the opportunities and challenges for protection and peace actors to jointly leverage their work, including their resources, tools and influence to enhance opportunities for reducing violence and sustaining peace in conflict-affected contexts? To answer this question, this study combines a review of the literature with a series of in-depth interviews with protection and peace actors to capture an understanding of conceptual and practical areas of convergence and divergence. The paper shows the various ways through which peace and protection operations complement, intersect and contradict one another in terms of how they are understood and practiced. It also identifies a number of important policy insights at the intersection between both spaces.

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Acknowledgements

Contents

Display items

Boxes

Figures

Executive summary

In conflict-affected contexts, addressing people's vulnerabilities before, during and after crises requires stronger complementarity across and between humanitarian relief, human rights, development programmes and peacebuilding. This aspiration for complementarity and coherence has manifested itself in a number of initiatives over the years, including 'linking relief, rehabilitation and development' (LRRD) and, more recently, the New Way of Working (NWoW) and the European Union's Joint Humanitarian and Development Framework. However, limited attention has been given to the intersection between protection, comprising the various roles, channels and tools used by humanitarian, development and human rights actors to contribute to the reduction of threats people face in a conflict, and peace, comprising both peacekeeping and peacebuilding. This is a gap that warrants closer attention, especially as crises around the world are becoming increasingly complex and long-lasting, and where protecting populations from violence is closely intertwined with supporting their aspirations for peace. According to the *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020*, over one billion people (16% of the world's population) live in countries experiencing protracted crisis, and the number of countries experiencing protracted crisis rose from 13 in 2005 to 31 in 2019 (Development Initiatives, 2020).

Given the common goals that bind protection and peace, what are the opportunities and challenges for protection and peace actors to jointly leverage their work, including their resources, tools and influence, to enhance opportunities for reducing violence and sustaining peace in conflict-affected contexts? To answer this question, this study combines a review of the literature with a series of in-depth interviews with protection and peace actors to capture an understanding of conceptual and practical areas of convergence and divergence. The paper shows the various ways through which peace and protection operations complement, intersect and contradict one another in terms of how they are understood and practised. It also identifies a number of important policy insights at the intersection between the two spaces.

Because of the wide scope of actors, channels and conceptual spaces incorporated within both fields, it is important to note here that this study is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of all intersections; instead, it is intended to tease out opportunities for complementarity and notable areas of tension, and in turn present ideas for the future direction of protection and peace programming in conflict-affected contexts. This initial study is meant to start a conversation on existing evidence on intersections between protection and peace, as well as feeding into a broader discussion that aims to explore opportunities, challenges and scope for complementarity and increased practical collaboration and complementarity between peace and protection actors.

Drawing on the literature and in-depth interviews, the paper puts forward seven key conclusions:

- **There are significant interdependencies between peace and protection across actors, sectors and operational spaces. However, they are not free from contestation and trade-offs.** These include the continued contestation between international and local peacebuilding approaches, as well as between human rights and humanitarian approaches to protection, and between peacebuilding and humanitarian protection, among others. Contestation is a barrier to furthering collaboration between peace and protection actors, but it can also provide opportunities for reimagining how each space can contribute to sustainable peace through the prism of complementarity and an emphasis on the comparative advantages of each actor.

- **Negative patterns of power and inequality continue to underpin the gap between international and local peace and protection.** In the international system, they manifest themselves in institutional racism, false localisation approaches and tick-box conflict sensitivity. At the local level, they include capacity needs, political polarisation and fragmentation and institutional and governance weakness. Nevertheless, complementarity within and between international and local actors is needed and, when it works, evidence shows that it is effective and generates better results for peace and protection outcomes.

- **There is a need to build on existing forms of cooperation between peace and protection actors. Various forms of collaboration are already happening at the operational level 'behind the scenes', but not in a consistent or systematic way.** There is scope for a conscious and deliberate approach to supporting collaboration between peace and protection actors, particularly one that draws on local knowledge and agency.

- **A locally-led and focused approach is needed to support complementarity between peace and protection actors.** Peace and protection actors share a broad understanding of personal and communal safety, as well as justice and fundamental human rights. Those can underpin a shared agenda of engagement in conflict-affected contexts.

- **Engaging with states productively remains a serious obstacle to strengthening collaboration between peace and protection actors. States contribute to and violate peace and protection.** There is also a clear tension between international approaches to peace and protection that remain state-centric and more localised approaches that facilitate joined-up engagement across a variety of actors.

- **The international funding environment plays a critical role in contributing to peace and protection, but it is not fit for purpose.** While some conflicts may require the deployment of multiple international instruments all at once, there is a reluctance to do so due to bureaucratic and financial constraints and this has had negative implications on the capacity to protect populations from harm and to contribute to sustainable peace.

- **Conflict sensitivity, as currently practised, often does not go far enough.** Respondents highlighted how protection and peace programming can result in unintended consequences or exacerbation of conflict dynamics when they do not draw on the local context. Programming on peace and protection continues to be donor-driven and financial channelling allows for international bodies to dictate how they want programmes designed, led and executed. There is a need for more in-depth and transparent monitoring and evaluation of how programmes and interventions interact with the conflict.

1 Introduction

Based on 30 interviews with international and local protection and peace actors, our analysis has confirmed the view that local actors commonly contribute to protection and peace concurrently, for instance by safeguarding at-risk populations from violence, while promoting and encouraging forgiveness, healing and social cohesion. For most international actors, by contrast, administrative, regulatory and institutional barriers prevent such synergies. While there has been increased attention on intersections and opportunities for collaboration between multiple humanitarian, development and peacebuilding and security sectors, such as the United Nations (UN) and World Bank's NWoW and the EU's Joint Humanitarian and Development Framework, with mixed levels of success, there has been limited focus on the intersections between protection and peace in specific. By this we mean protection, comprising the various roles and spaces occupied by humanitarian, development and human rights actors to contribute to the reduction of threats people face in a conflict, and peace, comprising both peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Despite 'nexus fatigue' (Hövelmann, 2020; Tawil, 2020; ODI Interviews), stronger complementarity between protection and peace actors may prove pivotal in improving the efficiency and sustainability of interventions, and in turn have a significant impact on reducing violence and advancing sustainable peace.

Another gap in the literature relates to the disjuncture between policy discourse and practice. As Hugo Slim pointed out in 2017, 'It is easy to think of a nexus in a policy department … It encourages key terms in policy speak like "synergies", "trade-offs", "inter-linkages" and "transmission channel" which break through "silos" and achieve "collective outcomes". We can easily use this jargon to write a policy, or even get a computer to write it. But what does it mean to make a nexus on the ground?' (Slim, 2017). While the literature has indeed identified synergies and trade-offs, it is the case that the articulation and implementation of complementary approaches to protection and peace, in general, are in their infancy (Amer et al., 2012). What does it mean to operationalise such an approach to protection and peace on the ground? What is the impact of having different funding streams, separate strategies and often different interlocutors at the operational level? How can international and local actors (including state actors, but particularly drawing on non-state actors, such as grassroots and civil society organisations) work with competing and multiple priorities and agendas to hit several different but interlinked goals at once? How do local, national and regional actors understand and interpret the links between protection and peace compared with international counterparts, and what can be learned from those differences to improve protection and peace outcomes?

This study is a preliminary stock-take of opportunities for and challenges to stronger complementarity between protection and peace in conflict-affected contexts, from the perspective of international and local actors. Based on a review of the literature on protection and peace approaches and 30 in-depth interviews with protection and peace actors from across a number of sectors, including humanitarian, development, human rights, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, this study addresses the following policy questions:

1. Given the common goals that bind protection and peace, what are the opportunities for protection and peace actors to jointly leverage their respective work, including their resources, tools and influence, to enhance opportunities for reducing violence and sustaining peace in conflict-affected contexts?
2. What are the challenges to stronger complementarity between protection and peace actors in conflict-affected contexts?
3. What do more complementary approaches mean for international actors and local/national actors, and how can they be operationalised?

While recognising definitional confusion, as discussed later, the study adopts a wide ranging definition of protection. Drawing on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) *Professional Standards for Protection Work* carried out by humanitarian and human rights actors (ICRC, 2009), the study defines protection broadly as the reduction of risks associated with a conflict, both personal and contextual. This could be through reducing the threats people face as well as reducing people's vulnerabilities to these threats through strengthening their capacity and agency. For peacebuilding, we also adopt a broad definition: measures designed to consolidate peaceful relations, and strengthen viable political, socio-economic, and cultural institutions capable of handling conflict, and to strengthen other mechanisms that will either create or support the necessary conditions for sustained peace (Interpeace, 2010).

1.1 Outline of the study

The study begins with an overview of key conceptual challenges and tensions. Drawing on the literature and perspectives of international and local actors interviewed for this study, it then explores areas of convergence and divergence in purpose and practice between peace and protection actors. The paper concludes with observations about remaining gaps and highlights opportunities for complementarity, including the need for further research.

2 Understanding protection and peace

What do we mean by protection and peace? Achieving conceptual clarity on protection and peace is a difficult task; they comprise a varied set of sectors, actors and channels for engagement. They also comprise a complex number of relationships and interdependencies often fraught with contestation. There are diverse and perhaps competing ways through which these terms are defined and understood, as well as the ways in which the two overlap (or not). 'Peace' and 'protection' are large domains within which definitions, priorities and understandings of core objectives and mandates differ. They sometimes engage with similar actors, and the two agendas have similarities in their core mandates of reducing violence – but to what extent they intersect is dependent on the way actions within these fields are defined.

> "Peace remains the best form of protection...where peace does not exist, or where it has been disrupted is where there is a threat to protection"
> Local protection and peace actor, Rwanda

The majority of the interviews conducted for this study saw respondents using terms interchangeably, often, for example, conflating human rights approaches to protection with humanitarian approaches, and vice versa. While this conflation of terms does not align with the more specialised and professionalised division of sectors, it does reflect the fluidity between peace and protection in practice, especially for front-line protection and peace actors and local actors. The term protection, for example, tends to be associated with humanitarian action (often referred to as 'humanitarian protection' or 'protection advocacy'). Humanitarians, however, are just one of many types of actors in a conflict-affected context (Fast, 2018). A number of other actors have formal or informal roles and responsibilities to provide protection for civilians, including the local population, but also 'human rights actors who monitor and report on harms and violations of human rights; diplomats who negotiate legal frameworks and peace agreements and hold duty-bearers to account; peacekeeping forces that increasingly have a mandate to protect civilians; and peacebuilders who work in and with local communities affected by violent conflict' (Fast, 2018). As for peace, peace actions include 'peacebuilding', 'peacekeeping' and 'peace-making'. This might be viewed along a chronological sequence – in the case of a direct armed conflict, the UN might aim to negotiate a ceasefire and a peace agreement (peace-making), and would then deploy a mission to help implement these agreements (peacekeeping) (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). After fighting has ceased, peacebuilding activities, such as supporting disarmament, reconciliation and elections, rebuilding state institutions, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and generally promoting a culture of peace, would aim to help maintain and sustain peace. Across all these contexts, peacebuilding actors may seek to strengthen relationships between people as well as enhance social cohesion and build trust in society. In practice, however, there is 'no magic sequence of peacebuilding' and there is a growing interest in exploring how to lay the foundations for peace even before a settlement is reached and to have 'people-centred priorities' driving programming and guiding the timing and sequencing of peacebuilding interventions in specific cases and contexts (Langer and Brown, 2016).

The lack of conceptual clarity is a common theme in the literature on peace and protection (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2019; Langer and Brown, 2016; ICRC, 2009). This study highlights two particular areas where this lack of clarity is most relevant to the discussion on complementarity: first, the contestation over purpose and practice across both fields, and second, the persistence of negative power patterns and inequalities that underpin both fields but also reduce opportunities for complementarity between various peace and protection actors, especially between international and local actors.

2.1 Contestation over purpose and practice

There are significant interdependencies between peace and protection across actors, sectors and operational spaces. Those, however, are not free from contestation and trade-offs. This includes the continued contestation between international and local peacebuilding approaches as well as human rights and humanitarian approaches to protection, and between peacebuilding and humanitarian protection, among others. Contestation is a barrier to furthering collaboration between peace and protection actors but it can also provide opportunities for reimagining how each space can contribute to sustainable peace through the prism of complementarity and an emphasis on the comparative advantages of each actor.

2.1.1 Peace: absence of war or conflict?

The extent to which peace is the absence of war or conflict remains a point of contention among scholars. Some scholars, like historian Michael Howard, have discounted the term 'peace' as a form of passivity and described it as a 'highly emotive term' that can be weaponised as a tool for 'political propaganda' (Howard, 2001). Others have argued that peace is much more than the absence of war and that it is, inherently, about supporting order and justice within society. This more proactive view of peace has been described as positive peace as opposed to negative peace (Cortright, 2008; IEP, 2019). Positive peace, as described by Galtung (1996), is about creating and maintaining an equilibrium for states that ensures stronger capacity for stability or self-restoration even if conflict occurs. Many scholars have also argued that peace is not the absence of conflict because contestation is a given in any society. It is the nature of conflict and level of violence that determines whether or not there is peace (Cortright, 2008). The Global Peace Index (GPI) defines peace as the relationship between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace is described as the harmony achieved by the absence of violence or the fear of violence. On the other hand, positive peace is described as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. According to the index, this relationship forms a complete definition of peace, combining both the lack of violence and/ or conflict and the active peace measures of institutions and social groups (IEP, 2019). Still, even as this definition seeks to be comprehensive, there is lack of clarity about how it could be implemented.

Peacebuilding can encompass a wide spectrum of engagement, from large-scale international interventions 'including state-building, security and development work, in countries immediately recovering from conflict' (Firchow, 2018) to work at the local level 'and relational work that attends

to the social fabric of communities affected by war', usually done by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Firchow argues that 'these different understandings of the same concept can speak past each other and drown each other out or, worse, not communicate with each other at all. This also makes studying and measuring peacebuilding challenging, since there is no common, cross-sector understanding of what exactly is included in efforts to build peace'. In the Middle East and North Africa, for example, a discourse on peacebuilding framed around ceasefires and peace agreements is losing credibility with local populations (Abouaoun and El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, 2021).

The UN Secretary-General's Policy Committee in 2007 defined peacebuilding as 'a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, by strengthening national capacities for conflict management and laying the foundations for sustainable peace. It is a complex, long-term process aimed at creating the necessary conditions for positive and sustainable peace by addressing the deep-rooted structural causes of violent conflict in a comprehensive manner' (UN, 2010: 48). This is a broad definition, but it revolves around the need to address the underlying structural factors of conflict in a strategic manner. As a consequence, there is considerable overlap in goals and activities along the spectrum from conflict to peace, with different activities taking precedence depending on the situation. Peacebuilding organisations tend to focus on strengthening relations and trust within a society, addressing inequalities and other grievances and strengthening the ability of local actors to prevent, mitigate and resolve conflict in a constructive and non-violent manner.

For their part, peacekeeping operations have prioritised the protection of civilians as a pillar of peace, and all multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations have a mandate to protect civilians (UNDPO, 2020; Howard and Dayal, 2018). Whether peacekeepers have been effective in their protective role has been the subject of much debate (Walter et al., 2020; Boot, 2000; Autesserre, 2019; Oladipo, 2017). Peacekeeping operations often involve third-party actors, including forces under the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), regional organisations such as the African Union or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), or multinational troops such as NATO (Fast, 2018). Peacekeeping forces can be police, civilian or military, and can be local, national or international. Norton and Weiss (1990) view peacekeeping as 'an interim step – a stop gap – to buy time for active diplomacy', while, to Sherry (1986), 'peacekeeping is the reverse of military action: it is the peaceful application of a military presence in the interest of a political process'. Peacekeeping actions are also shaped by varied tools and routes to engagement, including the principle of 'responsibility to protect' – which empowers international forces to intervene on a sovereign state's authority in cases of grave harm, and the 'Protection of Civilians mandate', which empowers peacekeepers to use force to 'protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence' (UN/S/RES/1265). A common thread in the literature is the shortcomings of including local actors effectively in peacekeeping operations and understanding their priorities and agency. Studies by Autesserre (2014) and Smirl (2011) have highlighted how peacekeepers' assumptions, spaces, and practices insulate them from understandings of peace in the communities through which they move. The concept of 'protective accompaniment' explores how international actors can collaborate with local actors to create new spaces for peace and security (Koopman, 2011).

2.1.2   Protection approaches and dilemmas

Definitions of protection rely on well-articulated legal frameworks (Clapham, 2016; Williamson, 2016). In the humanitarian sector the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) definition of protection is generally accepted, and human rights actors also conceptualise protection within similar legal frameworks. In humanitarian action, protection is defined as all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law – international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law – taking into account age, gender and social, ethnic, national, religious or other background (IASC, 2011). At the same time, however, many humanitarians are confused as to what protection means and how to do it (Fast, 2018), and there is a 'widespread perspective among humanitarians that they do not have a role to play in countering abusive or violent behaviour even when political and military strategies and tactics pose the biggest threat to life' (Niland et al., 2015: 27).

> " It is a complex situation, the way peace actors can engage with human rights activists because of the various threats. When you are advocating for something it is usually political and sensitive… So, it is sometimes difficult for peace actors to get involved with human rights work "
> Local peacebuilder, Northern Uganda

A key point of contention that remains is how to engage with the state. States are the primary duty-bearers for protecting their populations. However, as is the case in many conflicts around the world, both state and non-state actors can be perpetrators of violence against civilians. States can be violators of both protection and peace. Where states, whether through neglect or deliberately, fail in this responsibility, other actors, including local, national and international humanitarian, human rights, peacekeeping and peacebuilding actors, often step in (Fast, 2018), but they have different mandates and approaches that are often not aligned. They may also be in conflict with the state, as is the case in Egypt, South Sudan and Rwanda, where tight restrictions are placed on local civil society organisations, particularly those with a human rights focus (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

> " The government needs to be at the forefront of protection, providing protection for its people is not a favour, it should be a basic right for whoever is being affected by conflict…long term social protection investment is essential to prevent violence and ensure long-lasting peace "
> Local protection actor, Rwanda

In terms of action, protection can be preventive, responsive, remedial or environment-building, depending on the context (see Figure 1). At one end, 'hard protection' might focus primarily on protection from immediate violence (delivered by actors such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Global Protection Cluster). Human rights protection (international NGOs like Amnesty International

and Human Rights Watch, and a range of local NGOs/advocacy networks) may overlap, but focus more on a rights-based approach to well-being and basic needs. A 'soft protection' approach might focus on advocacy, justice and social cohesion, aiming to address the root causes of rights abuse, address accountability and promote a holistic view of safety and well-being. At local level, protection and peace actors can include armed actors, religious or faith leaders and networks, and tribal or kinship alliances. Family, kinship and social networks play critical roles in both peacebuilding and providing community protection. A disconnect between local and international protection approaches remains a challenge for achieving protection outcomes (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2019).

Figure 1 Egg model of protection

Response action
Pattern of abuse

Remedial action

Environment building
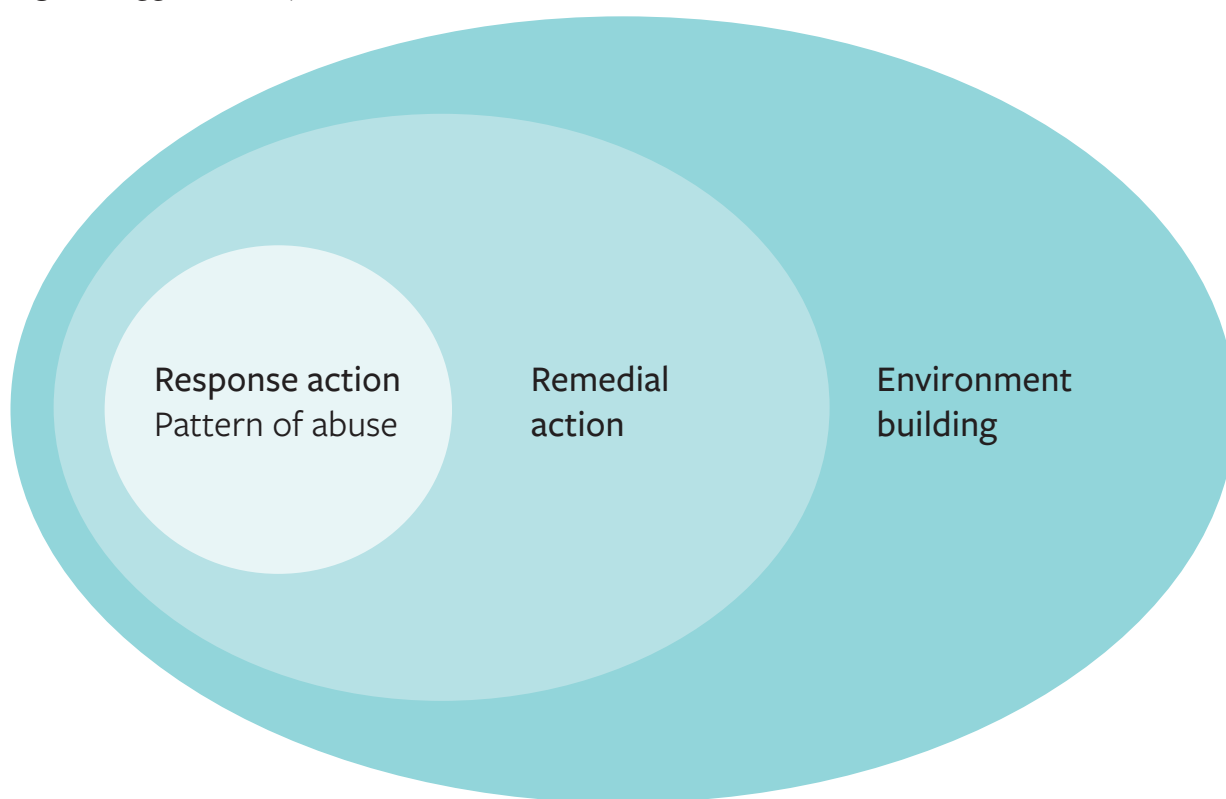
2.2 Patterns of power and inequality

Negative patterns of power and inequality continue to underpin the gap between international and local peace and protection. In the international system, they manifest themselves in institutional racism, false localisation approaches and tick-box conflict sensitivity. At the local level, they include capacity needs, political polarisation and fragmentation, and institutional and governance weakness. Nevertheless, complementarity within and between international and local actors is needed and, when it works, evidence shows that it is effective and generates better results for peace and protection outcomes.

The spaces in which local and international actors operate, as well as the relationships between then, are often fraught with contestation – 'both are potentially effective and harmful' and, as such, closer analysis and deconstruction is needed (Fast, 2018: 17). Both the literature review and the interviews conducted for this study pointed out barriers within the international system, such as institutional racism (Ali and Murphy, 2020; Parker, 2020) – recent calls to decolonise the aid sector are an example – and decision-making power gaps between headquarters and field offices (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2019), as well as 'false localisation' efforts that do not adequately engage local agency and that involve transferring risks to local actors while not ceding power as failures for both peace and protection action (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2020).

Studies about local protection identifies a variety of local protection and peace actors, including armed actors, religious or faith leaders and networks, and tribal or kinship alliances. Family, kinship and social networks play critical roles in both peacebuilding and providing community protection, but engaging them effectively is still limited (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2020). To bring value added, a nexus approach would need to address those asymmetries in power in a meaningful way.

The literature and interviews also pointed out the need to understand in what ways collaboration between peace and protection actors makes sense and how complementarity can be best articulated. Ensuring that the approach is aligned with the principle of 'do no harm' is critical and this too is context-specific and should be based on an understanding of local politics and conflict dynamics (often described as conflict sensitivity). One respondent working in a global human rights organisation with a protection mandate highlighted the importance of maintaining protection as a separate agenda from peacebuilding. This actor explained that they do not, and cannot, frame their work as 'peace' due to the risks of not being seen as neutral, though they do support peace aims ultimately through supporting accountability. The respondent noted that protection work can complement peace, saying 'it would be difficult for humanitarians working with governments to broker a deal to speak about [human rights] abuses, so we are able to complement this'. An example given was in Yemen, where 'we had close interactions with the aid community and donors. We were able to focus on documenting abuses while the others needed to focus on trying to end the conflict' – together, through complementarity, they were able to achieve some gains by focusing on their separate strengths and access points.

3   Perspectives of international and local actors

Overall, the majority of respondents for this study, international and local, across the peace and protection spaces, saw significant areas of intersection between peace and protection across sectoral divides, but they also saw a number of areas of divergence or tension. Complementarity was welcomed by all respondents, but what this means in practice remains less clear. Concerns around additional red tape and bureaucratic barriers associated with a more centralised approach to cross-sectoral work were also raised by a number of respondents. Respondents also highlighted the multiple layers of complementarity that need to be addressed: complementarity between international actors themselves, complementarity between international and indigenous or local actors and complementarity between local actors.

3.1 Opportunities for complementarity

Respondents, international and local, highlighted a number of ways in which collaboration between protection and peace actors is already taking place, as well as opportunities for improvement. This ranged from sharing intelligence to programmatic cooperation to performing both a protective and a peacebuilding role.

3.1.1   The 'nexus' is already happening 'behind the scenes', but not systematically.

A common thread across the interviews was the lack of deliberate or consistent engagement between these actors; opportunities for exchange were often spontaneous rather than planned or strategic.

In interviews, respondents generally saw significant areas of intersection between peace and protection. An international protection expert who has been in the field for over 20 years pointed out that this convergence in purpose is becoming more perceptible as protection operations slowly shift towards 'softer' protection issues and away from 'core' protection. According to this interviewee, protection is moving closer to peacebuilding. When probed further on this point, she explained her reasoning as follows:

> The whole concept of protection is changing. When I started with ICRC [20 years ago], it was about protection in conflict situations, but now it is shifting from protection in conflict to more general protection ... We are dealing less with core protection issues ... This is not a threat but a development, part of the evolution of the sector. Nowadays, protection is about the softer things. Access to housing, durable solutions, forced relocations, IDPs [internationally displaced persons], social cohesion [closer to peacebuilding].

While the majority of international protection respondents did not necessarily see this 'softer' engagement in protection as a departure from 'core' protection issues, it is a significant insight into the evolution of the protection space and poses interesting questions about how intersections between protection and peace are already forming at the operational level and across sectoral divides. One respondent pointed out that this convergence between peace and protection is already happening on the ground but lacks a 'systematic' or 'purposeful' direction:

> Intersections [between protection and peace actors] happen a lot on the ground, all the time. You have an up and running machinery of peacebuilders and protection actors, be it development, humanitarian or human rights actors. And they all cross paths and work together in one way or another. When you hit a town or an area, the players are the same and you have to go through them. The connections happen naturally. Are we doing it systematically? And in a purposeful way? That's what is needed.

A number of international protection and peace respondents saw behind-the-scenes collaboration as a space where complementarity and synergies are taking place and where stronger collaboration may be possible.

Box 1 Protection and peace in Somalia and Afghanistan

The work of an international human rights organisation focusing on forced migration in Mogadishu was mentioned as an example of complementarity between peace and protection. The respondent described how peacebuilders would call the organisation when they observed rights violations, and would advocate on behalf of affected populations when peacebuilders were not able to do so for fear of jeopardising the political process. The respondent mentioned how peace actors were brought into dialogue on how to advance protection goals on an informal level. Another protection actor provided an example in Afghanistan of protection work supporting peace aims through setting up community protection groups, facilitating meetings with Afghan security forces as well as the Taliban.

Those forms of informal exchanges and collaboration feed into conflict prevention strategies. As stated by one protection actor, 'both protection and peace actors will have a different view on context, so bridging them gives the fuller picture'. Protection and peace actors, international and local, held that a key to ensuring conflict prevention and sustainable peace is looking at the root causes of conflict. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission looked at poor governance, corruption and poverty in addition to specific acts committed during the conflict.

The activities of local actors, particularly NGOs, grassroots peacebuilders and civil society organisations, can often merge protection and peacebuilding. A peacebuilder from Northern Uganda explained how a joined-up approach is integral to their work at the local level:

> I think local actors like myself have to get involved in both as we know the challenges to the community and the threats. For example, being in conflict myself [as a former child soldier] I know what happened there, so I can advise others on how to protect themselves from recruitment into the conflict, and also spot signs of recruitment … for me, peacebuilding can teach people how to create sustainable peace which can lead to greater protection, for example from re-recruitment and make [sic] sure that children or others don't go back to captivity.

Local actors do not have to deal with the bureaucracy of institutional mandates, and can engage in activities which align with the needs of the local communities they work with and seek to protect. For peacekeeping operations, local actors highlighted that those tend to be confined to the role of peacekeepers, the military (national or regional) or UN bodies deployed in conflict areas with specific instructions to work in or on peacekeeping, and can be more inclusive of local actors. While local actors differentiate between the focus of these sectors/fields, they nonetheless engage in areas which are not always within their mandates – and have the flexibility to do so. For example, a local peacebuilder in South Sudan who works on community reintegration and social cohesion said that they also engaged in protection activities, particularly around gender-based violence, when asked to do so by the community. In the Philippines, where respondents reported multisectoral involvement and input into peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities, local peacebuilders are also delivering human rights training and education about laws and peace, which are deemed vital protection activities.

3.1.2   Peace and protection actors share an understanding of personal and communal safety.

Safety, in its various manifestations, is a core objective of protection operations. One senior UN protection official, for example, stated that, while there are a number of protection threats, such as climate change and other broader geopolitical shifts, 'the one single thing that is always the root cause of protection issues is physical harm that is reaching people in their homes'. For peacebuilders, while safety means reducing violence and supporting justice and social cohesion, it can be overshadowed by a more direct focus on reconciliation, inclusiveness and social cohesion (and, consequently, less of an immediate response to acute security threats).

For local actors, protection and peace were deeply interlinked through an understanding of safety that includes and goes beyond immediate safety from violence. This was a key difference between international and local perspectives on the convergence between peace and protection. Local actors' conceptualisation of safety was significantly more holistic and multifaceted, comprising food security, social protection and psychosocial support, and not just freedom from direct violence.[1]

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1   The authors recognise that freedom from fear and freedom from want as inherent to human security were core to the MDGs and are currently at the heart of the SDGs. UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report *New Dimensions of Human Security* is an example of this effort. However, the salience of those goals was more central to local actors than international ones interviewed for this study.

Box 2 Holistic understandings of protection and peace: reflections from Yemen, Rwanda and South Sudan

A peacebuilding actor from Yemen saw both peace and protection as linked to overall safety from harm: physical, psychological and social, especially for marginalised and vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly and the disabled, as well as the Yemeni minority *Muhamasheen* ('the marginalised ones') who suffer from caste-based discrimination. A protection actor from Rwanda described her understanding of protection as follows:

> One may look at protection as the provision of basic needs because you can protect those most vulnerable during vulnerable times, but protection goes beyond security matters. You protect communities through provision of basic needs. Social protection and basic needs go hand in hand. If those elements are missing, then you will of course continue seeing the cycle of unending violence because people lack their basic needs. If children aren't going to school, for example, then they end up being recruited into conflict, or in early marriage.

The respondent also mentioned how, in her view, 'peace remains the best protection, if we have peace then we don't need to have all these additional measures. But because violence has been there in the past, and wars aren't going to end tomorrow, we need to have both working together, protection and peace'. Crucially, she called for defining 'what protection means in wartime and what protection means in peacetime'. A peace actor from South Sudan also highlighted this convergence, saying that:

> Conflict-ridden community that's when a lot of atrocities happen, the more stable the community the easier it is to protect the community. That means that once a lot of focus is made on building peace … because I mean it's all interconnected stuff, so like the reason why someone needs protection is because that person isn't in a safe space, when you talk about peacebuilding you're talking about safety as well. All these programmes which are geared towards peacebuilding create an environment which means that gender-based violence will be decreased.

3.1.3   Peace and protection actors are united in desiring justice and human rights.

The relationship between justice, human rights and peacebuilding is embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which explicitly combines the promotion of peaceful, just and inclusive societies in Goal 16. The UN Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial relationship between human rights and peacebuilding specifically for the first time in 2017. Moreover, there is evidence that the existence of robust human rights protections can be a critical factor in creating an environment

conducive to stability and, ultimately, peace. The grounding of protection action in conceptions of human rights links to peace aims; as former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein put it: 'human rights are the fundamental basis for sustainable development and peace' (UNHCR, n.d.). This highlights a potential complementarity between protection activities and peace, with human rights underpinning both through the implementation of laws and policies (Hadjigeorgiou, 2020). As one international protection expert put it, 'The whole idea of protection is the protection of human rights. When we have to protect those rights in conflict situations, we call it protection. The core of peacekeeping is human rights. The way it's implemented can be different'. She added: 'Protection is everything but we're not aware of it. The World Food Programme is about the right to food and about access to food. UNHCR is about the right to shelter'.

International peace and protection respondents referred to justice and the assertion of fundamental human rights as essential to both protection and peace goals. Protection, for them, was about ensuring that victims of war crimes and other forms of violence find justice. Peacebuilding was also about ensuring that various vulnerable groups have *access* to justice. The peace versus justice debate (or the peace *before* justice debate) highlights the tensions and concerns in practice in the achievement of these goals, including how peace and justice actions are sequenced and how trade-offs are evaluated; in many conflict situations, peace mediators face the challenge of whether to compromise on obtaining justice for affected populations when negotiating with perpetrators of mass atrocities, who, for example, are often offered amnesty and immunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity in return for the cessation of hostilities (Mallinder, 2008; Rodman, 2011). Scholars and practitioners increasingly assert that the peace versus justice divide is a false dichotomy, as it relies on a narrow understanding of both areas; for example, achieving long-term sustainable peace requires some form of salient justice.

Box 3 Justice and peace in Northern Uganda and the Philippines

In Northern Uganda, while former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) soldiers were provided with amnesty under the Amnesty Act of 2000, the majority were also made to undertake the traditional restorative justice process of Mato Oput (literal translation: to drink the bitter fruit), to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness among the Acholi community (Baguma, 2012). One local peace actor from the Bangsamoro region in the southern Philippines explained how 'historical justice' was necessary to both protection and peace:

> The key challenge [to peace] is not the diversity or differences, but more historical injustices. This region here [Bangsa region] has the lowest access to resources, lowest literacy, has the poorest of the poor, lack of education ... the situation here is the way it is because of the system. The Philippines is 90–95% Roman Catholic; in the region where we are, it is predominantly a Muslim population. The system of governance affects how Muslims experience self-determination and also how history has impacted them.

As of now, they are celebrating and working and enjoying the peace dividends they have. However, there are still some other groups … many groups which can trigger individuals to be recruited [into conflict]. There are feelings of discrimination by the government … What makes peace a challenge is historical injustices and other pull factors, which would go against peace.

International peace and protection respondents saw the assertion of fundamental human rights as being at the heart of both protection and peace. 'I see protection as upholding people's fundamental rights and allowing them to realise their rights.' They also highlighted that their 'biggest concern at the moment is that protection frameworks are being undermined by the very states that set them up' and that 'core understandings of rights and protections are being eroded'. Respondents also called for a reassertion of justice and human rights for both peace and protection actors because 'the rise of populism has made tensions around the very basis of protection principles. Before, these were maybe taken as accepted, now we have to go one more step on re-establishing IHL [international humanitarian law] and the law of armed conflict'.

3.2 Challenges to complementarity

While there are clear areas of convergence, there are also areas of divergence between peace and protection.

Limited or flawed understandings of local priorities and needs as well as a limited awareness of national and subnational conflict dynamics were cited as other obstacles. Thus, while there has been greater attention to protection issues within the humanitarian system, support for community coping and protection strategies is still limited (Niland et al., 2015). Despite calls to 'decolonise' the aid sector, decision-making power and resources still reside within the international system, and international actors still do not sufficiently engage local agency or cede power (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2020). Interviewees pointed out that the more removed international peace and protection actors were from the local context, the more limited was the scope for complementarity and collaboration. Conversely, the closer they were to understanding the local context, the easier it was to identify areas for complementarity. While at the institutional level, complementarity may be lacking between peace and protection actors, at the operational level there were examples of information-sharing and collaboration, but this was done spontaneously and not in a deliberate or consistent fashion.

Several respondents mentioned pressure to deliver by donors and competition for funding. More localised approaches are hindered by donor timelines, funding structures, accountability requirements and the immediacy of results required by the international community; such a push for results often sees international actors designing programmes and activities and involving local actors at the implementation stage only, rather than in design and conception, resulting in

activities that are locally delivered, but not locally led or locally owned (Hayman, 2013; Interpeace, 2016; Lilja and Höglund, 2018). The imposition of models, programmes and frameworks that have worked in a particular conflict-affected setting which are then scaled and transferred to other post-conflict environments has been seen as inadequate by a number of local actors and war-affected communities. Finally, a basic lack of coordination, information-sharing and organisation between actors engaging in a conflict area is a hurdle faced by many. As one respondent reflected: 'One of the very big problems in conflict is the high level of disorganisation of those who are trying to resolve and alleviate it'.

A number of respondents highlighted an over-reliance on a traditional sequenced approach that sees protection as an immediate and limited response while regarding peacebuilding as a long-term engagement. Peacebuilding tends to be perceived as a long-term process of realising peace, and protection as an immediate 'firefighter' reaction. Humanitarian protection, in particular, was viewed as difficult to reconcile with peacebuilding because of the prioritisation of the principles of neutrality and impartiality over engaging in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities, which are perceived to be inherently political (Elhawary, 2012).

A key concern for both protection and peace is ensuring inclusivity, particularly of the most vulnerable groups: as one international protection actor put it, 'Whose security gets taken seriously? This is the case in the protection of women and engagement of women in peace – it often reflects power dynamics, just because some are included in these processes it doesn't mean they are inclusive'. In line with this, whose desires, knowledge and expertise get taken seriously, and how can these power dynamics be addressed to ensure affected populations are central in decision-making? The need for international peacebuilding efforts and interventions that are context-specific and align with local cultural, social, political and economic values has long been acknowledged by development and humanitarian actors, and advocated for by local actors (peacebuilding, protection, human rights advocates) (see Da Costa and Karlsrud, 2012).

For their part, local actors saw links between peace and protection as more obvious. Local peacebuilders saw themselves as involved in protection activities, such as providing refuge or education opportunities and safeguarding their communities from harm, and local protection actors saw themselves contributing to social cohesion and justice. As one local peacebuilder emphatically put it, describing how he also played a protective role in his community: 'I am the nexus!'. His story is not an exception.

3.2.1 Legal framings, mandates and programmatic parameters do not support engagement between various protection and peace actors.

Peace operations typically require the consent of the host state in order to operate (Labuda, 2020). Where the host state is perpetrating human rights abuses, the maintenance of this relationship for peacekeeping purposes can challenge protection principles, which mandate calling out and addressing abuses. As one observer put it, 'reconciling people-oriented protection

of civilians mandates and the state-centric logic of UN-mandated interventions ranks among the greatest challenges facing peace operations today' (Labuda, 2020: 1). According to an ICRC observer, 'efforts to achieve the right synergy between humanitarian action, development and peace efforts have again regained momentum globally. But they have also raised concerns within the humanitarian community about a shrinking space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action during armed conflict' (Guinote, 2020). Synergies between humanitarian protection and peacebuilding have been particularly difficult as humanitarian protection continues to be tied closely to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Moreover, international humanitarian law (IHL), including laws covering the conduct of hostilities, and international human rights law deal with issues of protection and peace in different ways (Cotterrell, 2005). For example, under international human rights law lethal force can only be used as a last resort and states have a positive obligation to protect civilians, but under IHL a combatant may kill an enemy soldier, taking into account principles such as distinction, necessity and proportionality. A recent study by ODI on humanitarian diplomacy and protection advocacy points out the lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of UN entities and leaders, inhibiting more robust engagement by UN leaders with conflict parties on their responsibilities to protect civilians (Bowden and Metcalfe-Hough, 2020).

Box 4 The 'mandate problem'

A number of respondents highlighted the prioritisation of mandates as a hindrance to stronger synergies. A former protection actor, now a peacebuilder, with a focus on Libya described how he was reprimanded for taking on a peacebuilding role while doing protection work. He described his experience as follows:

> I was in charge of a set of prisons controlled by militias in Libya. In a visit to one of the prisons after the 2011 civil war, I noticed serious violations of rights of prisoners. My mandate was to document and advocate but back then there was no scope for advocacy. Given my own relationships with stakeholders in this community, I veered off [my organisation's] guidance to lobby communities to release detainees. My line of argument is that this conflict will not last forever and you should release the prisoners (members of neighbouring community) in the spirit of peacebuilding. My management didn't appreciate the approach, but, for me, I believed in what I was doing. Those are communities that we are working with today. Had violations continued in this prison, it would've been much worse. The stabilisation unit in Libya distributed material goods without taking into account long-term needs and ramifications. Am I disrupting social cohesion by providing those services? This is a question we should all ask ourselves.

The ways in which mandates are developed, prioritised and interpreted in humanitarian protection often reflect the primacy of humanitarian principles in a response. As one respondent focusing on protection noted: 'It's difficult for us to do things jointly [with peace actors] – it is antithetical to our mandate. We do not promote peace, we do not promote ceasefires as it violates our neutrality. To comment on the violations with credibility, we do not engage in political work or "peace" work'. Equally, those working on peace may not want to work with protection actors; as one interviewee put it: 'they [peace actors] don't want to work with us because they want to work with the governments that [we] criticise'.

'Foundations are keen to see collaborations between human rights protection groups and peace actors – the challenge is that the joint proposal process is actually quite hard to navigate.' An international protection actor reflected on this, saying: 'On the humanitarian side, we don't want to be politicised but we confuse this with talking to people and disagreeing with them. How do we engage an affected population? How do we work with parliamentarians to drive reconciliation?'. There was, he felt, a need to 'take protection out of a humanitarian-only sphere'.

3.2.2 Fragmented and siloed funding, programme cycles and operational modalities hinder cross-sectoral collaboration.

The problems associated with sequencing and the prioritisation of one agenda or area of engagement over another – protection over peace, and vice versa – were raised a number of times by international protection and peace actors. This sequencing was not necessarily done intentionally. An international protection actor described how stabilisation, for example, has been prioritised in Iraq, but without ensuring that it is joined up with humanitarian and protection priorities, especially in areas liberated from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This is partly the result of a lack of coordination across sectors, as well as a lack of incentives for coordination from donors and competition between international actors over funds – 'We are measured by the size of our programmes and we don't invest in smart linkages'. The same donors could be funding both peace and protection operations, but do not require or invest in linking the two.

International and local protection and peace actors pointed to the sequencing of international engagement in conflict-affected contexts as an obstacle to complementarity. While some conflicts may require the deployment of multiple international instruments all at once, there is a reluctance to do this due to bureaucratic and financial constraints, with negative implications for the potential to protect populations from harm and contribute to sustainable peace. A former protection delegate to Libya who is now a peacebuilder reflected on his experience in both fields:

> Based on past experience in both spaces, I would simplify it as follows: protection actors are reactive; they come in after the fact. Peacebuilders are about the long term and being proactive. One reacts to the reality on the ground and another tries to change the realities on the ground. Protection is not enough. The values and principles of immediate response in protection

prevented me from taking action to prevent long-term harm. Peace is working on conflict, whereas protection is working in conflict. In protection, when we talk about human rights, it is about everyone's human rights. Same for peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Those principles cut across all of those spaces.

Box 5 Protection and peace in Nagorno-Karabakh

Conflict broke out in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020. Following six weeks of bloody clashes, Russia brokered a ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but the ceasefire is fragile and is unlikely to lead to sustainable peace if it does not include proper monitoring of human rights violations, more robust international engagement to protect civilians and humanitarian assistance. On the clashes, one respondent asked: 'Why couldn't you have human rights monitoring, a Security Council meeting, humanitarian aid and plans for a ceasefire agreement all at the same time?'.

Respondents also pointed out that, because of prioritisation and sequencing issues, there is limited understanding of how operations in one space affect the other. According to an international protection respondent, an example of this is the case of Syria, where, from a peacebuilding perspective, it made sense to support reconciliation between villages, but 'with families coming back – and the peace machinery brags about this – this process has created more tensions and crimes and violation of rights within those villages in a way that doesn't make peace sustainable. There is always a push to drive to a positive narrative, but then it creates rights abuses in the immediate term'.

A number of respondents also pointed out how they saw the prioritisation of protection as harmful to peace outcomes. One respondent said that, in Cyprus, the presence of peacekeeping forces, established to prevent a recurrence of fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, only prolonged the sense of an ongoing conflict. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), another respondent argued that the deployment of local police forces as a security measure can make people less secure as the predatory activities of these forces can lead to violence or insecurity. The political allegiances of the police force in DRC, which is not apolitical or neutral, as well as the integration of ex-combatants and militia groups into the force, has created mistrust among the Congolese people, who may feel more threatened than protected (Nlandu Mayamba, 2013).

3.2.3 Conflict sensitivity does not go far enough.

'Conflict sensitivity' refers to the ability of an organisation to: understand the context in which it is operating, particularly intergroup relations; understand the interactions between its interventions and the context/group relations; and act upon the understanding of these interactions, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts (Woodrow and Chigas, 2009: 1). In Haiti,

Liberia and South Sudan, Schia and Karlsrud (2013) found a willingness among international peacebuilding actors to understand and become part of the local political economy and understand conflict dynamics from a national perspective, but they are constrained in doing so by the complexities within the peacebuilding field and the competing, and conflicting, power structures of the UN and other international organisations.

A lack of conflict sensitivity was felt most by those local actors reliant on external funds and donors, but who find that this financial dependence allows international bodies to dictate how they want programmes to be designed, led and executed. One local actor in South Sudan commented that there is not always a commitment or desire to understand national conflict dynamics:

> Certain organisations have their headquarters in other countries and use those strategies that worked in those countries and try to implement it [sic] here in South Sudan. We are a very unique country in the way we do programmes here, which has been a hindrance because it becomes very hard for us to implement local-led solutions to locally-led problems, when somebody has already come from the conflict in Myanmar or conflict in Northern Nigeria for example, and they think that these models can also work in South Sudan based on their experience in these other countries and think 'let's try this approach'. People come with programmes based on other countries and think this could work in South Sudan. It might have worked for others, but I think most of the time it's going to be short term if the root causes of the problems are not addressed, so this becomes a hindrance for our work, as we want to present our solutions to our problems.

As in many contexts, the drivers of the conflict in South Sudan cannot be divorced from the structural violence which emerges from the local political economy, for example where patrilocal bride wealth-based marriages and local gender-based customs acted as a catalyst for conflict, and still dictate social relations in the post-conflict environment (Luedke and Logan, 2018); not addressing these dynamics in the implementation of peacebuilding programmes, and instead imposing activities which were successful in other conflict situations, highlights a lack of conflict sensitivity among international actors and organisations.

Box 6 External actors in Northern Uganda

In Northern Uganda, an NGO working on the reintegration of child soldiers noted that external actors, particularly international actors, often overshadow or complicate their efforts and can at times implement programmes or activities which are confusing to beneficiaries, do not take into account cultural or religious values or are very short-lived:

> In the work we do, we keep it very localised. Our work is to reintegrate former LRA combatants with the local community, address stigma and marginalisation and bring various Acholi groups together for social cohesion, so we don't get too involved with international actors or groups. Yes, sometimes they ask for information or they want to know the work you're doing, but we now focus on our priorities and the priorities of our beneficiaries. You know that we consult them in everything we do and we make sure that the programmes we are implementing are what they want and that they are sensitive to their needs. We do not exclude groups in our work, but we also do not get too involved in actors beyond the region as it complicates our work.

Wessells (2019) explores the 'do no harm' principle in relation to the reintegration of former child soldiers in Northern Uganda, an activity which derives from the peacebuilding framework but also serves a protective role in safeguarding children from re-recruitment. This work identified a number of failures with the delivery of reintegration programmes, including a lack of 'localisation'. Internationally trained staff at reception centres focused on Western understandings of post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma, and largely dismissed local expressions of distress such as *cen* (the angry spirits of the deceased, which many former child soldiers believed they were disturbed by). Many communities and former child soldiers were actually very fearful of these spirits and the impacts they could have on themselves and their families, but when cleansing and forgiveness rituals were requested reception centre staff instead told children to pray or attend counselling sessions in line with international standards. Local peacebuilding actors would then implement programmes which allowed for these cleansing and forgiveness rituals, in line with Acholiland values and practices. According to one local peacebuilder:

> To a greater extent, there are local actors whose contributions are very important. Considering we had the conflict here and a lot has happened, we are trying to get people together through forgiveness and reconciliation programmes – that involves the cultural and traditional institutions and leaders. Acholi people and our method of forgiveness and cleansing, Mato Oput.

The underlying drivers of divergence in practice between protection and peace were explained by the majority of respondents as a failure at localisation. International engagement is still not sufficiently driven and informed by local priorities, and lacks an understanding of local power dynamics, especially at subnational level. According to one international protection actor, coordination should already be happening locally if protection and peace actors truly understood and acted upon local priorities: 'The mechanics of coordination on the ground are there. Any smart programme officer would do area-based coordination across the various sectors. You just talk to everyone operating within the conflict and you should push in the same direction and in the right sequencing. You should give space for more local or closer to the ground decision-making'.

One way of ensuring better local engagement, he suggested, is for peace and protection actors to develop a core set of programmatic indicators that are mandatory and that valorise local needs, not just monitoring and evaluation tools. A number of respondents highlighted the need to rethink indicators of success as another area where progress on coordination can be made (a point also made by previous research by Interpeace (2016)). One local peacebuilder in South Sudan echoed concerns about the level of awareness international actors have of the local political context, describing how international actors 'come with an already perceived solution for the problem, when they don't actually know what the problem is. So the past years have seen institutions and other people just imposing what they think works for the community … rather than finding out what the community really needs to maintain peace'. He added that this has meant that local priorities are not reflected in programming, and that local engagement is at best tokenistic:

> So let's say the UN comes with a programme and they say 'OK, we're doing this peacebuilding programme and we need youth-led organisations to be part of this, and we want it women-led' but that is actually not the programme which addresses the issue on the ground. So, they're involving local actors to implement an already planned programme, not working with the local actors to identify the solutions to the local problems. So the local actors are being involved, but not involved in addressing what is really on the ground, they're just involved in implementing. You know UN comes with the money and institutions come with the money 'here's the money for you, and this is what we're going to do, and you're being involved', and we are local actors being involved, but it's really not serving the community or connected to what we need, because this is what is already there and people just end up being part of these programmes.

4 Conclusion

This study has highlighted areas of convergence and divergence between peace and protection across multiple sectors. It has shown the various ways through which peace supported and undermined protection, and vice versa. Not only were peace and protection disconnected at the operational level, they also contradicted one another, with negative implications for both the protection of affected populations from harm and for sustainable peace. A number of conclusions and policy implications emerge from the analysis, which are outlined below.

- **There are significant interdependencies between peace and protection across actors, sectors and operational spaces. However, they are not free from contestation and trade-offs.** These include the continued contestation between international and local peacebuilding approaches, as well as between human rights and humanitarian approaches to protection, and between peacebuilding and humanitarian protection, among others. Contestation is a barrier to furthering collaboration between peace and protection actors, but it can also provide opportunities for reimagining how each space can contribute to sustainable peace through the prism of complementarity and an emphasis on the comparative advantages of each actor.

- **Negative patterns of power and inequality continue to underpin the gap between international and local peace and protection.** In the international system, they manifest themselves in institutional racism, false localisation approaches and tick-box conflict sensitivity. At the local level, they include capacity needs, political polarisation and fragmentation and institutional and governance weakness. Nevertheless, complementarity within and between international and local actors is needed and, when it works, evidence shows that it is effective and generates better results for peace and protection outcomes.

- **There is a need to build on existing forms of cooperation between peace and protection actors. Various forms of collaboration are already happening at the operational level 'behind the scenes', but not in a consistent or systematic way.** There is scope for a conscious and deliberate approach to supporting collaboration between peace and protection actors, particularly one that draws on local knowledge and agency.

- **A locally-led and focused approach is needed to support complementarity between peace and protection actors.** Peace and protection actors share a broad understanding of personal and communal safety, as well as justice and fundamental human rights. Those can underpin a shared agenda of engagement in conflict-affected contexts.

- **Engaging with states productively remains a serious obstacle to strengthening collaboration between peace and protection actors. States contribute to and violate peace and protection.** There is also a clear tension between international approaches to peace and protection that remain state-centric and more localised approaches that facilitate joined-up engagement across a variety of actors.

- **The international funding environment plays a critical role in contributing to peace and protection, but it is not fit for purpose.** While some conflicts may require the deployment of multiple international instruments all at once, there is a reluctance to do so due to bureaucratic and financial constraints and this has had negative implications on the capacity to protect populations from harm and to contribute to sustainable peace.
- **Conflict sensitivity, as currently practised, often does not go far enough.** Respondents highlighted how protection and peace programming can result in unintended consequences or exacerbation of conflict dynamics when they do not draw on the local context. Programming on peace and protection continues to be donor-driven and financial channelling allows for international bodies to dictate how they want programmes designed, led and executed. There is a need for more in-depth and transparent monitoring and evaluation of how programmes and interventions interact with the conflict.

5 Recommendations

As explained in this paper, barriers to complementarity between protection and peace actors are multidimensional. Traditional piecemeal and linear approaches to encouraging collaboration are no longer adequate. As stated in the conclusion, those barriers are political (about power, and engaging with state and social actors), structural (about mandates, funding instruments and the broader international system) and contextual (about understanding and engaging with the local context, and conflict sensitivity). To address them, an iterative and holistic approach is needed, one that seeks to address multiple barriers at once and that creates opportunities for mutual understanding and discussion of areas of convergence and divergence. To this end, the paper puts forward the following recommendations:

International peace and protection actors should seek to improve their operational practice through peace responsiveness.

Strengthening complementarity between peace and protection actors can be addressed at the operational level of analysis, programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation through better conflict sensitivity and what is increasingly recognised as peace responsive approaches. A peace responsive approach advocates for organisations operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to deliberately design and develop peace outcomes through their technical programming irrespective of sector. This approach can achieve greater impact for complementarity between peace and protection actors in two ways. It can help increase the effectiveness of peace and protection actors through its more deliberate programming towards sustainable peace, capitalising on their comparative strengths. It can also help achieve greater programme effectiveness and sustainability through increased conflict sensitivity and ability to adapt interventions to the realities, relationships and capacities on the ground. It is worth highlighting here that a peace responsive approach is not about changing the mandates of protection actors, but rather about them seeking to better align their mandates with local realities in a manner that empowers local actors and contribute to the broader peace aims of other actors. By helping better sensitise interventions to local realities and empowering local actors to take a leading role in design and implementation of peace responsive approaches can help reinforce adherence to humanitarian and protection principles.

International and local actors should seek to establish a community of practice (CoP) on peace and protection.

Building on the recognition of significant points of intersection between peace and protection, international actors should seek to establish a CoP. The CoP would bring together a group of experts who possess both the experience and commitment to leverage cross-sectoral strengths and comparative advantages to support sustainable peace outcomes. Experts would be international, regional and local, from across the humanitarian, development, peace and security spaces. The CoP

could meet on a bimonthly basis, and can have a collaborative governance structure, with the chairing and agenda-setting of meetings rotated between the members. Through the CoP, members could discuss how specific interventions to increase collaboration between peace and protection actors can be implemented at the national and local levels, as well as spaces for complementarity between local and national authorities, civil society and international partners. The Global Protection Cluster, because of its international and local networks, could help coordinate this effort and/or identify other relevant IASC subgroups and/or forums to advance knowledge, learning and practice on what works at the intersection of peace and protection.

International financial institutions and donors should develop flexible and patient financing for collective outcomes across the peace and protection spheres.

Donors and international financial institutions are encouraged to develop flexible multi-year financing instruments that respond to and support long-term collaboration between peace and protection programmes in conflict-affected contexts. Those can be set up to support collectively agreed upon priorities and should have a focus on targeting and engaging local peace and protection actors to ensure relevance and adherence to the 'do no harm' principle. Multi-donor and pooled funds can be a pathway towards encouraging collaboration at the donor and programmatic levels. Tapping into the resources of Islamic finance can also be a channel for sustained funding across programmes. The success of the Refugee Zakat Fund is an example of how harnessing the strengths of Islamic philanthropy can be a means to provide protection support to refugees and enhance social cohesion in a sustained manner.

Local and national actors should continue mobilising in a structured way to engage in rigorous conflict sensitivity and to secure a nuanced approach to international engagement in conflict-affected contexts. International actors should act as an enabler of local agency through truly inclusive action and effective advocacy.

Local actors have been mobilising effectively for a better understanding of local needs and priorities. In Yemen, a Twitter campaign that translates to #YemenNGOBlackHole was launched by a number of Yemeni activists calling for transparency and accountability for humanitarian operations in Yemen. This has resulted in an injection of momentum into conversations about accountability and the merits and challenges of a collective approach to communication and community engagement in Yemen (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2020). Local actors should continue to mobilise for a stronger awareness of their context and consolidate networks to continue to put pressure on the international system to rethink its engagement in conflict-affected contexts across sectors and through an appreciation of the advantages of complementarity and collaboration between various actors. A parallel effort by international actors should seek to establish more inclusive ways of engaging local and national actors in programmatic and policy engagement as well as effective advocacy that speaks to local needs.

6 Areas for further research

While there is a growing literature on complementarity and how donors can incentivise more joined-up, coherent approaches, there is still limited engagement with how complementarity can be articulated in different contexts and by different actors (including humanitarian, human rights, peacebuilding and peacekeeping). More in-depth research is needed, including on understanding the power configurations underpinning the relationships between and across each set of actors. How have actors managed to work across these sectors in a meaningful way, and how have they dealt with the trade-offs and dilemmas inherent in this kind of crossover work? What are the key structural barriers and incentives– including power dynamics – that stand in the way of increased coherence and complementarity and how could they be overcome? How can international actors best encourage – or create the conditions for – this kind of nexus work?

Lastly, there is a need for more research on conflict sensitivity in difficult contexts, especially from an operational perspective. While the majority of respondents saw an enhanced understanding of conflict dynamics and translating this into complementarity between different actors, international and local, it was not clear how this can be operationalised for peace and protection actors across the wide spectrum of sectors involved. Another key conclusion from the study is that existing conflict sensitivity measures do not go far enough in terms of understanding how international engagement can meet the priorities of affected populations – and without exposing them to additional risks or negative effects on their economic, social and political context.

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