Contextualizing peacebuilding activities to local circumstances

Local-level peacebuilding in South Sudan, Liberia and Haiti

Niels Nagelhus Schia and John Karlsrud

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Acronyms

CA	Civil Affairs
CAO	Civil Affairs officer
CSB	County Support Base
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CST	County Support Team
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPKO	Department for Peacekeeping Operations
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
HQ	Headquarters
HoFO	Head of Field Office
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PAKBAT	UNMIL's Pakistani battalion
QIP	Quick-Impact Project
SRSG	Special Representative of the (UN) Secretary-General
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Executive summary

This is the final and comparative report summarizing the findings from the three field reports that have constituted the project *Contextualizing peacebuilding activities to local circumstances*. This project was conducted as a comparative study of UN local-level peacebuilding in three countries – Haiti, Liberia and South Sudan.

When initiating this study, the research team chose the Civil Affairs section of UN peacekeeping operations as an entry point. The Civil Affairs section seems especially pertinent as it is a section which is usually deployed wherever a peacekeeping mission has established presences, and is tasked, *inter alia,* with acting as an intermediary between local authorities and populations, as well as with the rest of the UN peacekeeping mission and other UN actors.[1] The data underlying this report were generated during four weeks of fieldwork in each country, between August and November 2011. In addition to observations, surveys and focus groups the research team conducted a total of 195 extended interviews. It is our hope that the findings presented here will be both interesting and useful for academics, practitioners and policymakers alike.

As regards the academic field, it may be noted that our findings oppose the traditional critique of liberal peacebuilding, which has argued that poor delivery and slow implementation are propelled by a Western rationality that dominates the peacebuilding efforts of the international community, seeking to apply standardized liberal peacebuilding solutions in supporting countries emerging from conflict and focusing mostly on the national level. For practitioners and policymakers in the UN and member states, our aim has been to raise awareness of the importance of local-level peacebuilding, and to indicate some challenges and innovations related to this aspect. From our fieldwork, we have seen how peacebuilders put a premium on understanding the local political dynamics, recognizing themselves as part of the political 'game'. The peacebuilders we spoke with were very aware that their projects and other forms of support, while formulated as part of a liberal peacebuilding agenda, could be useful tools to build relationships and advance their agenda.

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[1] Civil Affairs is the UN component most consistently present in the field in UN peacekeeping operations. It is one of the largest civilian components in UN peacekeeping, with more than 1000 staff members deployed globally to facilitate the implementation of peacekeeping mandates at the subnational level. CA officers frequently act as space-makers for other actors to fulfil their roles and peacebuilding activities.

The project has found that UN components to some degree do contextualize their peacebuilding activities to local circumstances, especially as regards the subnational level. Our consultations included government officials, but also traditional officials and other members of the local population. The local level of the UN has been strengthened through organizational innovations, and field offices provide an institutionalized infrastructure for contextualizing peacebuilding to local circumstances.

For development specialists and practitioners in the field this will come as no surprise. Friction between the actors in the field is bound to be a continuing feature of peacebuilding and support to post-conflict reconstruction. Thus, rather than concentrating on tensions and turf battles, we have chosen to focus on connections between the actors in the field. Friction and tension is not necessarily a negative feature, because it can spark innovative and contextualized approaches to peacebuilding.

However, we also found considerable room for improvement. Despite good intentions, multilateral support and projects often tend to be poorly coordinated, internally and with other international and national actors, and at times in direct competition: this creates duplication, low implementation rates and ultimately results in suboptimal outputs and impact. In the individual case studies and policy briefs, we have included specific recommendations to policymakers in the missions as well as the UN Secretariat and member states.

'Some things in Liberia are quite different and it just doesn't work based on international best practices. That's where we assist our international partners with providing context.'[2]

1. Introduction[3]

This project has investigated how the United Nations is undertaking *local-level peacebuilding*. Our entry point has been the Civil Affairs (CA) section of the UN's DPKO, currently is one of the fastest growing civilian components of peacekeeping. The project has used this entry point to see how various missions implement their mandates and contextualize international guidelines to national and local circumstances. Further attention has focused on how UN peacekeeping organizes its activities on the local level and working together with local authorities, other UN agencies and development actors.

UN peacekeeping operations have not only expanded their scope during the past decade, taking on various substantive tasks, but have also extended their reach to all corners of the countries where they are deployed. In these locales, UN Civil Affairs Officers (CAOs) are most frequently deployed, providing the UN with a presence on the local level. They are part and parcel of the efforts of the UN and the host state to establish security and the delivery of core services. The rationale for making the connection between Civil Affairs and local-level peacebuilding is grounded in the evolving understanding that 'peacekeepers are peacebuilders'[4] and should implement early peace-building tasks.[5]

Fieldwork was conducted in Haiti (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti – MINUSTAH), Liberia (United Nations Mission in Liberia – UNMIL) and South Sudan (United Nations Mission in South Sudan – UNMISS). While the empirical focus of this report is on the

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role of CA, it will frame these within the wider UN engagement in local-level peacebuilding in the three countries. The overall objective has been to examine how the activities of these actors are contextualized to local circumstances. In a UN peacekeeping context, the CA section, as the component most consistently present in the field, is often set to perform the very challenging job of serving as intermediary for all these actors. CAOs act as the intermediaries between the local population and local government, and the mission itself, frequently acting as space-makers for other actors to assume their roles, including peacebuilding activities.[6]

Through our field studies, we witnessed a will among external actors to analyse and understand the local political economy and reflexivity on their own role in this political economy. We also put the spotlight on various strategies employed to further peacebuilding goals through the use of assets such as helicopters and other infrastructure, development of small-scale projects to increase buy-in of the larger peacebuilding agenda, and so forth. In our view, the current challenges for the UN to adapt its peacebuilding to local needs are not caused by some 'blind spot' as to the role as external providers of material and ideational resources, but by conflicting power structures and cumbersome processes which stem from the complexities of the field and are inherent in the peacebuilding project as such. Through our fieldwork, we identified several vital components and activities in the UN apparatus designed specifically in order to contextualize these activities. However both the coordination aspect of the support together with other development actors, and the technical expertise of the CAOs were described as rather *ad hoc* and in need of improvement. Going back and forth between rural areas and capitals in Liberia, Haiti and South Sudan enabled the research teams to trace this focus in three different countries from the field where the work was being implemented, to mission HQs where bureaucratic concerns often dominated the agenda.

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[6]   For policy documents on the role of UN DPKO on the local level, see e.g. United Nations (2008), *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines,* ('The Capstone Doctrine') Department of Peacekeeping Operations, New York: United Nations. Available at:
http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/Pbps/Library/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf; and United Nations DPKO (2008), *Policy Directive: Civil Affairs*, Department of Peacekeeping Operations; and Department of Field Support April 2008. Available at: http://www.undg.org/docs/8915/Civil-Affairs-Policy.pdf; UN (2008).

2. Background

Rather than searching for tensions between the global and the local, our focus seeks to show how processes pertaining to peacebuilding are *connected*. Within this perspective, *local people* in host countries are not regarded as helpless victims, or solely as actors of resistance: they are actors who play an active role in global processes, establishing global connections through everyday practices in post-conflict environments. The CAOs deployed in the field have the potential to play an important role in facilitating these connections. The CA section has evolved in parallel with the increasingly multi-dimensional character of peacekeeping and the need for the international community to engage with intra-state conflicts. Its activities and purposes emerged rather inductively as a response to the needs on the ground in the Balkans and elsewhere during the 1990s. In that period, increasingly complex civilian tasks in a wide range of various kinds of missions became a more substantial part of the UN's agenda than during the Cold War. The establishment of the CA section reflects both a shift away from traditional peacekeeping, but also the wide range of qualitatively different civilian tasks with which the UN has been gradually mandated. This inductive, or bottom–up, way of *becoming* a DPKO section characterizes what may be the distinguishing feature of CA today: its potential to respond flexibly to many and diverse needs in totally different places and settings. The component is designed to function throughout the various mission phases, and the evolving needs of mandate implementation. As such, it is meant to be able to constantly adjust and adapt its activities, in line with shifts in the surroundings and the situation changes, but also in relation to the capacity and presence of other international partners at the local level.

Propelled by the events and activities in the 1990s, the UN system recognized in the early years of the new millennium the greater need for governance assistance in order to build a more substantial peace in post-conflict countries. Soon several organizational initiatives that sought to address these challenges had been taken within the UN system. CA support to the host countries was increasingly emphasized by the missions themselves (e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi) and evolved '… to the point where "support to the restoration and extension of state authority" was officially articulated, in 2008, as one of the three core roles of Civil Affairs.'[7]

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[7] UN Lessons Learned Review on support to Core Public Administration Functions in the immediate aftermath of conflict. New York. (2012, at p. 18)

According to the Civil Affairs policy directive of 2008, its officers are deployed to facilitate the implementation of peacekeeping mandates at the subnational level. The policy outlines three main roles for CAOs in the field:

- cross-mission representation, monitoring and facilitation at the local level;
- confidence-building, conflict management and support to reconciliation; and
- support to the restoration and extension of state authority.[8]

These roles of course depend on the mandate and the stage of mandate implementation, but the importance of the CA component in the field is increasingly being recognized, mandated and utilized. This has resulted in the '...integration of the technical capacities of UNDP and political and operational capacities of DPKO in several countries'.[9] Such joint programmes have achieved success in restarting local government functions. These programmes have focused on re-establishing local functions, and involve a substantial local component.
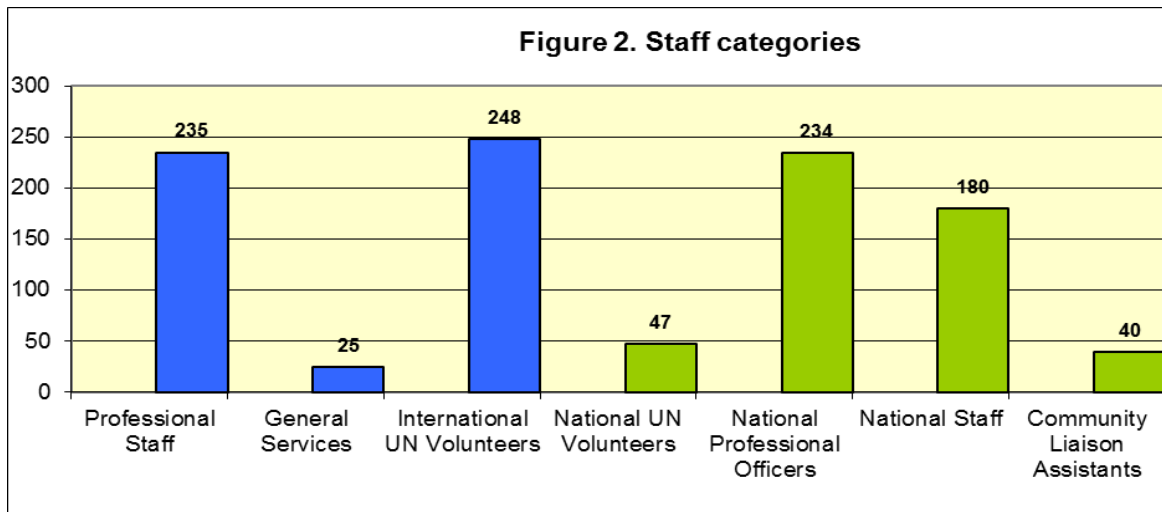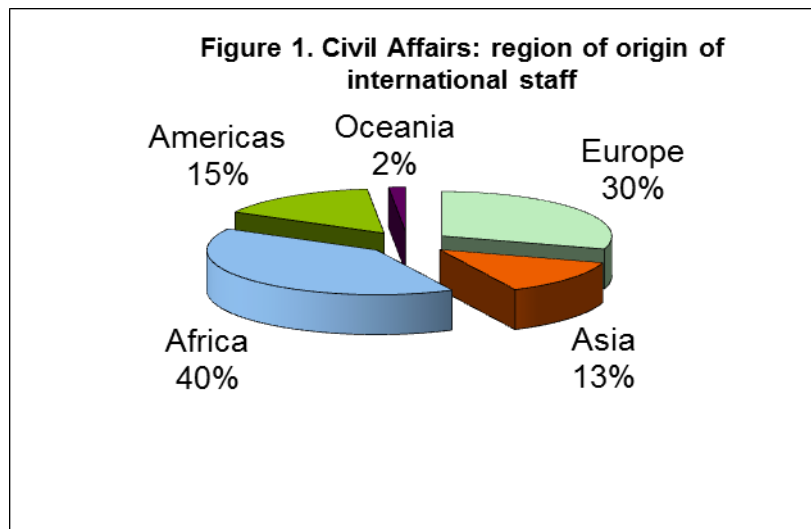
By contrast, the academic literature that criticizes the international community for being post-colonial, orientalistic and stuck in a Western rationality when deploying to a post-conflict country[10] rarely takes account of these components, designed specifically for adaptation to local needs and political realities, especially at the subnational level. A recent overview by UN's DPKO mapped the nationalities of what almost 1000 UN CAOs deployed to the field: the bulk of these officers were found to be African (see Figure 1).[11] Furthermore the number of national staff employed by Civil Affairs in the various UN missions is very close to the number of international staff in 2012 (see Figure 2). Although critics fail to acknowledge *who* the actors working for these organizations are and *where* they are coming from, Figures 1 and 2 here show that emphasis on local participation has largely been implemented within the CA section.

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8   UN, *Policy Directive: Civil Affairs*, April 1, 2008. New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, 2008: p. 3.

9   UN Lessons Learned Review on support to Core Public Administration Functions in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict. (2012, at p. 20) New York.

10   Philippa Atkinson, 'Liberal interventionism in Liberia: Towards a tentatively just approach?' *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 1, 2008, pp.15-45; Ole Sending, 'Why peacebuilders fail to secure ownership and be sensitive to context', *NUPI Working Paper Series 761*. Oslo: NUPI, 2009.

11   UN DPKO Peacekeeping Best Practices Sections' statistics (January 2012). By August 2012 the number of CAOs deployed to the field had risen to over one thousand officers deployed in 17 field missions.

Figure 1. Civil Affairs: region of origin of international staff

Americas 15%
Oceania 2%
Europe 30%
Africa 40%
Asia 13%

Figure 2. Staff categories

Category	Value
Professional Staff	235
General Services	25
International UN Volunteers	248
National UN Volunteers	47
National Professional Officers	234
National Staff	180
Community Liaison Assistants	40

In his article 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding', Roland Paris points out '(…) the emergence of what might be called a "hyper-critical" school (...) who view liberal peacebuilding as fundamentally destructive or illegitimate. (...) that the post-conflict operations of the past two decades have done more harm than good. Others go further, portraying these operations as a form of Western or liberal imperialism that seeks to exploit or subjugate the societies hosting the missions'.[12] Paradoxically, the critics he is referring to here seem to be stuck in a certain kind of rationality themselves: an academic tradition representing a paradigm that does not allow for the consideration of components that are designed with the purpose of adapting efforts to local circumstances.

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[12] Roland Paris, 'Saving liberal peacebuilding,' *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2, 2010, at p.2.

In general, empirical research on post-conflict countries has not been able to integrate the heterogeneity of international organizations with a focus on the subnational level. This gap is only slowly being filled. The UN components present at the subnational level that are designed to engage with local actors and deal with local conflict – such as the UN's CA section – are underrepresented in the literature, which too often is dominated by a perspective which somewhat simplistically lumps all international actors together under the term 'peacebuilders', without acknowledging the substantial pluralism of mandates and modes of interaction with local authorities and populations. Research has tended to centre on national policies and the capital regions, ignoring efforts on the lower, subnational levels.[13] By examining parts of UN peacebuilding/peacekeeping that as yet have received little attention, this report seeks to add heterogeneity perspectives to the literature.

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[13] See e.g. Severine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, in the series Failure of International Peacebuilding, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (No. 115) (New York: Barnard College, Columbia University, 2010); Hannah Neumann, 2011. 'Taking a microsocial perspective of impact of peacebuilding interventions on rural citizens: case study of a Liberian community', *Peace, Conflict & Development* 18 (December 2011): 47–67. http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk/dl/4%20Iss%2018%20Art%2028%20Final.pdf. Accessed August 12, 2012.

3. Methodology

This report is based on four weeks of fieldwork in each of the three countries, between August and November 2011. In total, the research team conducted 195 extended interviews. The research teams were composed of John Karlsrud, Niels Nagelhus Schia, Diana Felix da Costa and Hannah Neumann. In each country, national researchers accompanied the research teams – Saah N'Tow from John Snow Incorporated and Felesu Swaray from the Kofi Annan Institute at the University of Monrovia in Liberia; Gabrielle Hyacinthe from the National Democratic Institute in Haiti; and Philip Ohuyoro from the University of Juba in South Sudan.

The approach and methodology used throughout the research were anthropologically informed and qualitative. In addition to participant observation and interviews, the research team held informal discussions with UN Civil Affairs officers (CAOs), other substantive sections within the missions, UNDP staff, national-level government, local government and civil society organizations (CSOs). Focus-group discussions were also carried out in local markets, on university campuses and among rural villagers. Discussions aimed at outlining key experiences and challenges of UN's local-level peacebuilding, including strategies to contextualize the mandate. A broad range of people was interviewed in order to better develop a robust perspective on the UN's local-level peacebuilding. Discussions and conversations with a wide array of members of the local population gave us access to local expectations and understandings of the UN missions in general and CA more specifically. To further supplement this data, individual case studies were also explored.

3a) Challenges in methodology

The study offers some useful insights and reflections of the UN's local-level peacebuilding work in Liberia, Haiti and South Sudan, from the perspective of CA officers as well as local actors. However, it is not intended as a comprehensive account of UN efforts in local-level peacebuilding, nor of CA work in the three countries – not least given the highly localized nature of local conflict dynamics and responses.

While we enjoyed the great support and hospitality with the CA sections, we also made deliberate accounts to include local voices in our research. In each of the field visits we interviewed local state authorities and key partners of CA among civil society. The national researchers travelled independently and spoke with local religious lead-

ers, elders and representatives of civil society groups. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find many women in relevant local government positions and thus there is an overwhelmingly male voice throughout this research. Whenever possible, the team made an effort to speak with women, in order to add female voices.

4. 'Look closer!' – local peacebuilding in Haiti, Liberia and South Sudan

During our fieldwork in the three countries, we recognized that kudos and metis among the peacebuilders are connected to the ability to 'understand' the situation: the complex political game continuously played out between peacebuilders, the national government, politicians and the elite.[14] This is also a common theme on the local level. Peacebuilders constitute a heterogeneous group and are difficult to generalize, but most of them recognize that they operate in a political marketplace[15] where patrimonialism often lies firm beneath the veneer of a liberal state under construction.[16]

In Liberia, for example, organizational innovations in 2008 strengthened the decentralization of the mission and coordination between the mission, UNDP and the UN Country Team (UNCT).[17] In preparing for the exit of UNMIL, the country was in 2011/2012 strengthening the decentralization and coordination activities initiated in the rural areas by the UN. In collaboration with UNDP Liberia, they were establishing regional hubs throughout the country in order to enhance and contextualize the regional justice and security as well as infrastructure.[18] In Haiti, we saw that peacebuilders often functioned as guarantors and facilitators when local officials wanted to communicate their needs to the ministries in Port-au-Prince. In South Sudan, the UN was embarking on an ambitious plan to set up presences across the country that are to function as a portal and a platform for humanitarian and development efforts by UN actors, Government of South Sudan (GoSS) local officials, humanitarian actors and NGOs.

The increasing activity of the UN at the local level warrants further attention. Our observations indicate that in UN local-level peacebuild-

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[14] 'Broadly understood, metis represents a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment. [...] The emphasis is both on [...] ability to adapt successfully to a constantly shifting situation and on [...] capacity to understand, and hence outwit [...] adversaries.' (James Scott (1998) 'Seeing like a state' page: 313. Yale University,)

[15] Alex De Waal, 'Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace,' International Affairs 85, no. 1, 2009, pp.99–113.

[16] Ole Jacob Sending makes a similar point in his new book, *The Field of Peace Building: Archimedes in Africa*, Oslo: NUPI, forthcoming.

[17] See Neumann and Nagelhus Schia: Contextualizing Peacebuilding to local circumstances – Liberian case-study field report. Oslo, NUPI. 48 pages. Security in Practice 6 · 2012

[18] In 2011/2012 local NGOs with experience in awareness raising on human rights and rule of law issues at the community level was employed in order to sensitize communities on the concept of the hub, its facilities, relevance and how the people could access the services.

ing, particularly through the activities of the CAOs, there seems to be awareness of the complex political economies in which they are situated. We also repeatedly found evidence of considerable independence on the local level. Our findings from the three countries we visited suggest ways on how local peacebuilding can contribute to strengthening lines of communication between rural areas and central government, but also by helping to facilitate and re-start other fundamental societal functions. In order to provide a basis for such functions, these activities may prove especially important in the early phases of the peacebuilding process. However there are challenges related to this, especially regarding the risk of creating dependency. Later in the report we will see how peace committees in one of the counties in Liberia got 'kick-started'. The very fact that Civil Affairs does not have very much money may help building local ownership and avoiding the dependency trap. In Liberia – currently in a transition phase where substantial attention and efforts focus on the need for the state apparatus to be able to maintain its activities and functions also at the local level – awareness of this aspect ranks high on the agenda.

5 a) Engaging with local actors – formal and traditional authorities, civil society

In Haiti, MINUSTAH had over 100 CAOs deployed across the country's ten departments. In Liberia, CA had 75 officers distributed across the country's 15 counties; and in South Sudan the number was set to increase from 100 to about 140 officers deployed during 2012. The CAOs encounter different challenges in their different host countries, but they all work on a daily basis with national, departmental and local-level officials. Through the CA section, the UN missions have a reach throughout the host countries that is not matched by any other UN agency or NGO. In the words of a CAO in MINUSTAH, civil affairs 'can feel the temperature on the ground'.[19] This impression was further strengthened by similar expressions encountered in the two other case studies. In Liberia, for instance, the CA section was repeatedly characterized as 'the eyes and ears of the mission at the subnational level'.[20] In many instances, the day-to-day interactions between CA and local authorities, and the ability of CA to channel needs and concerns of local authorities to national levels, have led to close relations and trust being established between the parties.

However, CA tends to engage more with local government authorities than with other non-state actors. This is a challenge that was acknowledged by several of the CA officers we met. It could result in a distorted picture of the challenges on the ground as CA tends to relay the challenges as local officials portrayed them.[21] Among civil society organizations (CSOs) there was also a similar problem of representation. They might claim to be representative of the local communities and various causes, but were often perceived by CA as having been set up merely to respond to the availability of Quick-Impact Projects (QIPs) and other funding.[22] Mapping in one region in Haiti indicated that there were many such community-based organizations, but they were very small and recently established.[23] Organizations in rural areas were seen as less supply-driven than those in urban areas. Churches were seen as heading initiatives that were perceived as enjoying greater legitimacy among the population.[24] Some of our CA interlocutors also felt it more important to engage with political parties on the local level than with CSOs.

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[19] Interview with CAO *Port au Prince, Haiti.*
[20] This expression was repeatedly used by CAOs in Monrovia and the counties in referring to their role within the mission.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Felix da Costa and Karlsrud, *UN Local . Peacebuilding and Transition in Haiti.* Oslo, NUPI. 51 pages. Security in Practice 4 · 2012
[23] Ibid.
[24] Neumann and Schia, *Contextualizing Peacebuilding Activities to Local Circumstances - Liberian Case-study Field Report.*

Also in South Sudan there is a danger of overemphasizing the efforts on the extension of state authority, which is part of the mandate of the mission, and not acknowledging that UN peacebuilders may also be involved in the authority struggle between traditional and informal chiefs on the local level, and newly appointed administrators. While the appointment of local officials should be seen as a step towards providing an accountable presence of the government on local levels that can provide security and basic services, such appointments can also be viewed as part of a patrimonial system where the victors share the spoils with loyal soldiers who have fought for independence.

Liberia is in a later phase of the peacebuilding process than Haiti and South Sudan and has started to implement the draw-down phase. Here, representatives from CSO umbrella organizations voiced concern with regard to the exit of the mission. They feared that, if support of CA was discontinued, the CSOs would be able to survive only with continuous international support. Without support, most CSOs are likely to decrease drastically, and it will be nearly impossible to establish new organizations. This concern may be taken to indicate either that not enough work has been done to establish a robust civil society community throughout the country, or that the mission has created a culture of dependency amongst the civil society groups in the country. Thus the challenges facing CA when engaging with civil society and other local actors are many and complex. Common problems are the pervasive lack of capacity, supply-driven orientation of activities, lack of broad engagement with non-state actors, lack of community ownership of local CSOs and their activities, and the risk of creating a culture of dependence.

5 b) Advancing liberal ideas?

Most peacebuilding programmes aim for the same goals – to deal with the key drivers of conflict, change the conflict dynamics, and prevent the use of violence as a means of tackling political, social and economic problems and injustices.[25] 'Conflict sensitivity' refers to the ability of an organization to:

> a) understand the context in which it is operating, b) understand the interaction between the intervention and that context, and c) act upon that understanding, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on the conflict.[26]

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25 Peter Woodrow and Diana Chigas, 2009. *A Distinction with a Difference: Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding*. Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, CDA Collaborative Learning Project. Cambridge, Massachusetts USA.

26 *See* International Alert et al., 2004. *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource Pack*. London: International Alert (available at www.conflictsensitivity.org).

According to Christopher Clapham, peacekeepers understand themselves as people who bring 'solutions' to the table, while the 'peacekepts' look at international intervention as resources that can be '(…) used by one or more of the internal parties to the conflict, in order to improve their own position within the conflict itself'.[27] Clapham further argues that the understanding of what purpose peacekeeping serves and for whom differs significantly between elites of fragile states and UN peacekeepers:

> Domestic combatants have a clearer and longer-term view of what they are trying to achieve; they are uncluttered – or uninhibited – by the value system within which the peacekeepers are operating; they are often very well aware of the domestic and international constraints on the behaviour of the peacekeepers, while suffering from few such constraints themselves; and they have a far better grasp of the local political scene.[28]

In their concept of the 'peacebuilding contract', Barnett and Zürcher emphasize the divergent understanding of the goals, and, perhaps most importantly, who the benefactors of peacebuilding are.[29] Peacebuilders 'want to implement reforms that lead to a liberal peace',[30] whereas local elites 'want to preserve their political power and ensure that the peace implementation process either enhances or does not harm their political and economic interests'.[31]

From our fieldwork we would agree with this understanding, but would also argue that peacebuilders utilize the material and ideational resources that they provide in a conscious manner to advance their peacebuilding goals.[32] One national CAO in South Sudan told us that lack of funding presented a problem for them.[33] To gain access and leverage with their peacebuilding agenda

> they [local officials] need to see something concrete. Now UNDP came on the ground with money, so it's all about UNDP, they have money, forget all about

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[27] Christopher Clapham, 'Being Peacekept,' in *Peacekeeping in Africa*, ed. Oliver Furley and Roy May, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, at p. 306.

[28] Ibid. p.308.

[29] Michael Barnett and Christopher Zürcher, 'The peacebuilder's contract: how external statebuilding reinforces weak statehood,' in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk (eds), New York: Routledge, 2009.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] See the country-specific reports from the project 'Contextualizing peacebuilding activities to local circumstances' (John Karlsrud and Niels Nagelhus Schia 2012) http://www.nupi.no/Virksomheten/Avdelinger/Avdeling-for-sikkerhet-og-konflikthaandtering/Prosjekter/Contextualizing-peacebuilding-activities-to-local-circumstances

[33] This argument was first developed together with Diana Felix da Costa and presented as a paper at the Annual International Studies Convention in San Diego, 2012. See Diana Felix da Costa and John Karlsrud, *Liberal Peacebuilding Navigating Hybrid Political Orders: Local Peacebuilding in South Sudan*. Paper presented at the annual ISA convention, San Diego 1–4 April 2012.

Civil Affairs! Anyway, it's not a competition but we feel vulnerable, how can we convince the government, if we can't provide anything concrete?[34]

But the lack of funding could also be turned into an advantage, as the following case-study on the development of county peace committees in Liberia will show.

Avoiding dependency – how Lofa county was kick-started

Civil Affairs doesn't have money. Civil Affairs has knowledge. Civil Affairs has contacts and it is present. That's what we are offering to the authorities and to other UN partners.[35]

In an interview with one of the UN staff in Monrovia we were told a story about how the UN helped villagers 'kick-starting' Lofa, a rural county in the north of the country on the border to Guinea, by facilitating a process which eventually resulted in the establishment of a county based peace committee. In 2007, Lofa county became a pilot for a new UN project in Liberia when the HQ in New York mandated UNMIL's Civil Affairs section to carry out 30 county consultative forums throughout the country. However, CA was not allocated a budget or any extra resources for this task: the sole funding the CA officers could ask for was for covering water and food expenses. On the other hand, only CA officers (CAOs) saw the *actual* budget. The water and food costs were kept low, to allocate more of this budget to transportation, crucial for the implementation and attendance to the meetings.

CAOs thus bent the rules in order to provide a platform which gave people in the county an opportunity to express their concerns: 'there was a great need for this, you could tell that people had not previously been listened to', said an interviewee in Monrovia, September 2011. Several other international and national interviewees also followed up this view. While this could be seen as an example of 'organised hypocrisy' and divergence between plan and action, we would argue it is a positive one, where working-level officers circumvent or bend rules and regulations to achieve an end result beneficial to the overall mandate of the mission.[36]

On the ground the mandate was *translated* into practical arrangements. Due to the scant budget and resources the facilitator role of the Civil Affairs became especially prominent. When CAOs first arrived, the villagers would meet them with a whole range of demands: 'we want UNMIL to do a,b,c,d…'. Hearing these requests the CAOs

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34 Interview with National CAO, Torit Eastern Equatoria State.
35 Interview with International CAO, Monrovia.
36 Nils Brunsson, The Organization of Hypocrisy – Talk, Decisions and Actions in Organizations. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2002.

would reply that they had no resources and could only provide transportation. Our interviewee had pressed the villagers even further, asking at one of the meetings of the county consultative forums:

> what do you do if UNMIL leaves tomorrow and you are all on your own? Yes, we are strangers, we will leave, PAKBAT [UNMIL's Pakistani battalion] will leave and you will be left on your own, what do you do? Is there something you can do before this happens?[37]

The villagers then suggested setting up peace committees. That marked the beginning of a project which now has resulted in well-established peace committees in all the 15 counties of Liberia, corresponding with the district commissions and working with the political districts. These peace committees serve as focal points, and are called upon to mediate on a range of issues such as land disputes, ethnic and religious tensions and gender-based violence. Through the CA section in Lofa the UN had played the role of facilitator. The mandate had indeed been produced at UN HQ in New York, but allowing *adaptation* resulted in an interpretation and contextualization of the mandate so that it could fit with the local circumstances.

The UN's peacekeeping missions have limited means of providing funding for concrete projects, as they are generally limited to supporting capacity development through the numerous substantive officers they have on board in areas like reform of the judiciary and security sector, and human rights. Missions do have quick-impact projects (QIPs), limited to $25,000 or sometimes $100,000, as was the case in both South Sudan and Haiti. QIPS are small-scale and time-consuming and may ultimately lead to less effort being expended on conflict prevention, reporting and other mandated tasks. Thus, a challenge related to an extended use of QIPs is that they may distract the officers from their primary function. On the other hand, QIPs are used explicitly to improve the mission's standing on the national, state and county levels. The project funds are small compared to those of other international actors such as the World Bank, but their advantage is that they can be allocated to single projects in one area, and do not have to be spread throughout the entire country.

In addition, UN peacekeeping has access to significant logistical resources that can be used to bring government officials to remote areas, establish the presence of national authorities and facilitate national dialogue and conflict resolution on the local level. In most missions, UN Civil Affairs maintains a gatekeeping function for mission flights: it can approve/reject proposed candidates put forward by local officials, other sections within the UN peacekeeping mission, and the UN

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[37]Interviewee, Monrovia, September 2011.

agencies, funds and programmes. Although this meant allotting substantial amounts of time to processing travel requests, some of the UN officers also saw the potential leverage that this could give them.

The examples given here all come from the 'UN family', but through our informal discussions with other international actors, it was clear that they also were very aware that their projects, while formulated as part of implementing the mandate, could also serve as useful material and ideational resources to local elites. Resource capture was acknowledged as part of the game by our interlocutors, who generally had a clear understanding that they provided material resources and legitimacy to the partners they would support in a particular activity.

5 c) Everyday frictions in peacebuilding

However, when we move from the micro-level and a focus on the CA section to a more macro-perspective on multilateral support as such, projects can often seem poorly attuned to local needs. Furthermore it is clear that they in many cases are badly coordinated with other international and national actors; at times they are in direct competition, creating duplication, low implementations rates and ultimately resulting in suboptimal outputs and impact.[38]

The field of peacebuilding is particularly exposed to these dangers, as the concept is frequently defined and understood differently, depending on which actor you ask, even within the UN. There is still significant resistance to expanding the mandate of peacekeeping operations to take on peacebuilding tasks. On the other hand, in the past ten years, peacekeepers have effectively become peacebuilders, and there is now firm guidance from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscoring this point.[39] Still, aside from the QIP funds, peacekeepers do not have funds included in their budgets for project implementation – a point much lamented. In practice, many staff members manage to circumvent this problem, making the most of the scant funds at their disposal. The availability of mission flights and other logistical means should not be underemphasized either, as these resources give significant leverage to the substantive activities, in addition to the political leverage that the UN mission and its SRSG enjoys, representing the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council on the ground.

The government, other UN actors, multilaterals, bilateral donors and NGOs are to a certain degree dependent on the logistical and other resources that the UN mission has available. In our view, instead of

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[38]   See for instance: de Carvalho and Nagelhus Schia, (2009) *Nobody Gets Justice Here!* NUPI-working paper: 761. 25 pages.
[39]   UN, *Progress Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict*; and UN, *Peace: Keep it. Build it*: p.10.

competition, this could serve as a fruitful basis for a symbiotic relationship between these actors. Enabling UN missions to use part of their funds towards substantive projects should thus be carefully considered, so as not to create the seeds of further competition and duplication among external actors.

However, when we consider the complexity of the peacebuilding project, with the interface of the many different agendas, actors and cosmologies, it becomes clear that this is a field where friction is bound to be a continuing feature. From our findings, we would argue that this is not a negative feature, but rather a productive one that can spark creativity and innovative approaches between international and national actors, as was the case with the county peace committees in Liberia.

County Support Bases in South Sudan
UNMISS is planning to set up 35 County Support Bases (CSBs) in the ten states of South Sudan, from 2011 to 2013. According to Hilde Johnson, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of UNMISS, these will serve as 'a platform and a portal for local authorities',[40] as well as for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, to extend state authority and deliver services to the local population. The CSBs are building on the experience of the field offices, the County Support Teams (CSTs) and the Head of Field offices (HoFOs) in Liberia,[41] and seek to promote efforts aimed at providing presences that can be used by all national and international actors at the subnational level.

These County Support Bases carry a great promise to the local population, a promise that the mission would be wise to heed. Unless their presence can be paralleled with service delivery and can result in real peace dividends for local populations, the result may be anger and loss of confidence in peacekeepers and local authorities alike. The CSBs will thus be a prism through which to follow and measure how well the international community and the government in Juba are managing to instil the trust and confidence needed to achieve 'real' peacebuilding from the ground up in South Sudan. While all actors should have sober expectations as to what the UN can realistically be expected to achieve with only a few CSBs in a country the size of France, the CSBs will clearly be an initiative that merits continued and careful scrutiny by the international and research communities alike, as a potential example of the UN providing a platform for cooperation between national and international actors.

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[40] Interview with Hilde Johnson, SRSG UNMISS, Juba, October 2011.
[41] See Neumann and Nagelhus Schia, 2012, *Contextualizing Peacebuilding to Local Circumstances: Liberian Case-study Field Report* (pp. 40–41).

In post-conflict countries, government institutions usually face a capacity challenge, and tend to import international consultants.[42] Many of our interviewees mentioned the need for international actors to continue their collaboration with local stakeholders also after the consultations processes have ended. Furthermore, many informants highlighted the importance of giving clear feedback to those who are being consulted, especially as to whether their suggestions are possible or not. Follow-up processes on major consultations also seem important, especially with regard to local perceptions of the international presence.

It is true that local ownership in countries hosting a peacekeeping mission is being challenged by the substantial international presence, requirements and standards. All the same, we could see from the cases in Liberia, Haiti and South Sudan that policy and mandates (or peacebuilding activities) are often interpreted and manipulated (or contextualized) at the subnational level in order to fit with the practicalities and needs on the ground.

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[42]   See for instance Benjamin de Carvalho and Niels Nagelhus Schia, 2011, 'Local and national ownership in post-conflict Liberia – Foreign and Domestic Inside Out?' *NUPI Working Paper 787, Security in Practice 3*. Oslo: NUPI.

6. Conclusions

The literature to date has focused on the role of resource capture and elites. How peacebuilders interact on the local level is still significantly under-researched. From our fieldwork, we have seen how peacebuilders put a premium on understanding the local political dynamics, and how they recognize that they themselves are part of the political 'game'. We would thus argue that there is a need for a more nuanced view of the interaction between external actors, local elites and other stakeholders. According to Piccolino and Karlsrud,

> [i]n Africa, local elites' and weak governments' resistance and manipulation of international peacebuilding should be seen as fitting in the *longue durée* dynamics of insertion in the international system. Although evidently weak, post-independence African states have been able not only to survive, but often also to resist to the countless and – at least on paper – very intrusive forms of economic and political conditionality applied on them in the course of the last decades.[43]

From on our fieldwork, we would argue that many peacebuilders are more cognisant of the material and ideational resources involved, and are willing to use these to leverage liberal goals. Joining O.J. Sending, we would argue that

> By omission or commission, students of peace building thus tend to equate the financial and military resources of peace builders with the power to shape outcomes. Because of the privileging of peace builders' behavior to explain outcomes there is a related tendency to read unity and homogeneity into the behavior of peace builders.[44]

There is clearly a symbiotic relationship between peacebuilders and national elites, and this is being replicated at the local level. The acceptance of the liberal agenda that peacebuilders are imposing is balanced with the ability to capture resources. This is the supra-level friction between international and national actors, but below this, there are various more nuanced friction-sites – between international actors and between national actors, and in the interaction between these.

When scholars such as Autesserre criticize 'liberal peace' as a Western concept unable to adapt to local circumstances,[45] these writers may well have fallen victim to the same kind of worldview they are

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[43] Giulia Piccolino and John Karlsrud, 'Withering consent, but mutual dependency: UN peace operations and African assertiveness', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 11:4, at p.451.

[44] Sending, *The Field of Peace Building: Archimedes in Africa*: p.5.

[45] Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*.

trying to criticize in the first place. As shown in this report, the international personnel we interviewed were very much aware of the importance of local efforts and the need to build peace on national foundations in order to effect successful transitions. Our fieldwork was conducted both at the central level in the capitals as well as in rural and semi-rural areas of the countries we visited. The divergences between these different levels revealed that it is far more difficult to contextualize peacebuilding activities at the national level than at the subnational level. As this report has shown, there are indeed sections, programmes and agencies within the UN family that are actively trying to contextualize peacebuilding activities at the subnational level.

The supporting role of the missions, the many contextualized programmes we identified and the high level of awareness of the need to build on local forces among the UN staff we interviewed – all these constitute findings that oppose the traditional critique of liberal peacebuilding. The scholars who have put forward such critiques argue that it is the specific rationality of the international community's peacebuilding efforts, basically manifested in a *one size fits all solution,* that is the reason for poor delivery and ultimately failure of peace operations. However, several peace operations are indeed succeeding. In the course of the first decade of the 2000s, peace had been achieved in many areas where the UN had been involved, as in Bosnia, Burundi, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan and Timor Leste.[46] Furthermore, our three-nation fieldwork has shown that not only Civil Affairs but also other components in the UN are making important efforts to contextualize peacebuilding activities to local circumstances, especially at the subnational level

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[46] See Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

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