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**The Security Needs Assessment Protocol:
Improving Operational Effectiveness through
Community Security**

Derek B. Miller and Lisa Rudnick

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Security Needs Assessment Protocol (SNAP) project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is working to improve operational effectiveness—meaning the impact and sustainable success of any undertaking designed to effect social change in a community—in humanitarian, development and security operations by improving the design of field-level activities that pertain to community security.

The project aims to create a systematic and rapid means of assessing local security problems as they are understood by community members themselves. This Protocol could be applied by interested agencies to conduct cooperative cultural research in the community, and then use the knowledge gained to better align resources with local needs.

This report addresses the effectiveness of field operations. These may take place across an entire state, but they are most commonly carried out at the sub-state level and the area of operation may or may not cross international borders. These areas may be villages, towns or cities, or they might be municipalities, counties or chiefdoms. This report uses the term “local level” to refer to locations of operations, or else levels of analysis, that are sub-state—as distinct from global, regional or national. It uses “locale” to refer to particular places.

The term “community” is often used in two different ways. It is sometimes used to discuss a place, such as a neighbourhood, village, town or city. But the term is also used to discuss a social grouping, such as a religion, tribe, ethnic group or profession. The ambiguity of the term can be problematic when trying to understand what exactly is being discussed. Operational agencies most often use the term to refer to a place or else a level of operation (community level versus state level, for example), but they might use the term to mean an ethnic group, tribe or simply a group of people who live in a particular location.

In this report, the term indicates groups of affiliated people, noting that there can be many communities in the same locale, living among one another, and that individuals can be members of many communities, even those with conflicting identities. However, the term “community security”—which is a central theme in this report—will have a dual meaning. It refers to security in a particular place, but also among a group of affiliated people.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The agendas of agencies working in the humanitarian, development and security domains are converging on the effort to make operations more effective. Agencies in all three domains are making changes to both organizational behaviour and their field-level relations with communities. This theme of operational effectiveness is playing an important part in policy discussions both inside and outside the United Nations.

Organizations as dissimilar as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the US Army Training and Doctrine Command are now suggesting that local-level security problems need to be addressed holistically and in a culturally informed manner in order to achieve greater operational effectiveness. A range of operational agencies—sometimes with extremely different mandates, even to the point of producing tension in the field—are advocating strikingly similar solutions to achieving greater local ownership of field operations to this same end.

Within the United Nations, humanitarian and development actors are working hard to bridge gaps in funding mechanisms and project cycles so that aid beneficiaries will not have to wait for development assistance to begin once emergency relief has ended. The Consolidated Appeals Process of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for example, is a tool used by aid organizations to jointly plan, implement and monitor their activities. In bringing humanitarian and development aid closer together, the line separating humanitarian work from development work becomes blurred. And as development actors, such the United Nations Development Programme, become increasingly involved in the implementation of projects that touch security issues—such as small arms collection, landmine awareness-raising or curbing human trafficking—the line separating humanitarian and development work from security blurs as well.

As the three domains become less distinct, and as the need for operational effectiveness grows, a crucial challenge is to understand community security from the vantage point of community members themselves, and to then use this knowledge to enable the design and planning of culturally attuned operations. It is here that operational agencies reach a common impasse—the problem of *how*.

We believe that this impasse may be surmounted by cooperative cultural research, which appears—following a review of over 100 assessment tools and guidelines used inside and outside the United Nations—to have not yet been applied to this challenge.

STRUCTURE

Chapter 2, *Convergence*, is based on the SNAP project’s research between 2004 and 2007 and documents how humanitarian, development and security agencies are responding similarly to the need for operational effectiveness, and in doing so have come to identify community security as a key element. As a result, these actors are converging on the same places, on the same relief or aid practices and on the same premise of why these practices should yield better results.

Chapter 3, *The Impasse*, illustrates how these actors, having identified community security as a key to operational effectiveness, face a challenge in terms of how to gain local knowledge and then apply it to their operations. Examining UN operational agencies, we explain that this impasse results from three factors. First, at the policy level, the emphasis has been on internal, organizational efficiency, taking attention away from external, operational effectiveness. Second, at the organizational level, agencies have greatly improved their systems for learning lessons from the field and applying them to future operations. However, differences between communities are often of greater import than commonalities, thus making best practices difficult to implement and potentially counterproductive. Third, agencies lack adequate tools for engaging the cultures in which they operate. Beyond participatory or descriptive approaches, there is no current UN assessment tool prioritizing cultural research to understand security from the vantage point of the community members themselves.

Chapter 4, *A Way Forward*, introduces SNAP as a systematic and rapid means of gaining local knowledge about community security problems,

to the end of designing more culturally attuned, and thus more effective, operations. We detail some of the constraints under which research and project design must operate in the UN system, and how SNAP can help achieve greater operational effectiveness within such constraints. Details are provided on how we can move from documenting “our perceptions of their perceptions” of security, to a deeply local appreciation of security as understood by the community itself.

Chapter 5, Final Thoughts, is a brief summary of the main points: that operational agencies are converging on common practices and a shared understanding that community security is key to improving operational effectiveness; that an impasse is faced on how to address community security in different cultural contexts because generalized best practices and guidelines can be difficult to apply to particular social systems; and that SNAP is being developed to gain local knowledge, cooperatively with the community, so that agencies may apply this knowledge to programming, and thus achieve greater operational effectiveness.

CHAPTER 2

CONVERGENCE

Humanitarian, development and security operations are often carried out in the same locales and among the same communities. In some cases, this is because natural disaster has created a humanitarian crisis that has also exacerbated political tensions, thereby requiring some security-sector participation. In other cases, as in post-conflict peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, lingering humanitarian problems exist after a war, requiring emergency relief, while development specialists simultaneously work on rebuilding the civilian and governmental infrastructures all in the context of an armed peacekeeping contingent.

Local-level security problems can take many forms. Among others, these include problems of landmines and explosive remnants of war, human trafficking, the misuse of small arms and light weapons, child soldiers and gender-based violence.

There is a range of legally or politically binding international agreements drafted and signed by UN Member States that provide direction for them and operational agencies in trying to ameliorate such problems. A short list includes:

- the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (generally called the Mine Ban Treaty or the Ottawa Convention);
- the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; its Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition; and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;
- the Programme of Action to Combat, Prevent and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects;

- Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects;
- the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and
- Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

These international agreements and others provide direction for the mandates and policies of operational agencies. But it is important to recall that agencies are not addressing these problems simply because of these agreements. Rather, they face these problems in the conduct of their daily work in environments of insecurity at the local level. Because such problems are local, they could hinder the successful conduct of operations. This can happen either because they present difficulties for the operational agencies themselves, such as in gaining access to aid beneficiaries, or because they are so disruptive to normal community life that the failure on the part of agencies to address them can significantly diminish or undermine the value of an operation.

As operational agencies direct more attention and resources to analysing and responding to local-level security matters, their policies and programming solutions are starting to share more in common. We refer to this trend as convergence.

Agencies involved in operational work, and those that support them financially and politically, are in the midst of rapid and wide-ranging change in policy, organization and field-level management. These changes can be seen in efforts to mainstream new thematic topics, such as small arms and light weapons, gender, or conflict sensitivity. The result is new funding and budgeting solutions, new and overlapping international agreements, changing definitions of Official Development Assistance and new organizational efforts that increasingly shift responsibilities for programming from headquarters to field-level practitioners. In response, there are new programming tools and guidelines being developed to help manage these processes, and new research programmes undertaken to assist their evolution.

As the parameters for operations in the three domains change, it is harder than ever to describe a particular project or activity as purely a humanitarian, development or security task. Mine clearance, for example, is a security activity conducted by trained personnel, but the work may be funded through humanitarian budget lines by donor governments and conducted by private firms, while mine risk education is carried out, for example, by the United Nations Children’s Fund or the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The delivery of food aid may be funded as humanitarian relief and carried out by the World Food Programme, but efforts are also made to link emergency relief to early recovery by humanitarian and development agencies. As the delivery of food aid is expected to abide by the ethos of “do no harm” in the context of conflict-sensitive approaches to the delivery of assistance (that is, the delivery of aid should not cause or aggravate conflict in or among beneficiary communities), this requires that humanitarian relief engage in new forms of conflict analysis implicating security issues.

Meanwhile, militaries and private military companies are trying to “win the hearts and minds” of local communities in counter-insurgency operations by providing relief or delivering what are essentially development projects (for example, the building of infrastructure, creating jobs and so forth). UN peace missions are similarly recognizing that, as one report stated, “The ability to sensitise a mission to the perceptions, expectations and attitudes of local [communities] is directly related to a mission’s success”.¹

In the following sections, we look separately at the agendas of the humanitarian, development and security domains to see how each is prioritizing issues of operational effectiveness, and how each is increasingly concerned with addressing community security as a means of achieving it.

HUMANITARIAN ACTION

[Goal 4,] addressing security related concerns more effectively, focuses on the myriad security problems confronting refugees. The breakdown in social and cultural systems, the separation from or loss of family members and community, and the impunity with which perpetrators of crimes against refugees act, render refugees, and particularly refugee women and children, vulnerable to abuse. All too often, refugee women endure rape, abduction and trafficking; refugee children, especially

girls, are frequently subjected to sexual exploitation, violence and abuse; and armed groups and national armed forces frequently target refugee children and adolescents for forcible recruitment.²

UNHCR, *Agenda for Protection*

In 2000, the issue of security—in the context of protection work—was squarely placed on the humanitarian agenda by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR launched a wide-ranging dialogue on refugee protection called the Global Consultations on Refugee Protection. This resulted in the 2002 *Agenda for Protection*, which consists of six goals that can be assisted directly by multilateral commitment and cooperation. Although the Agenda is particularly concerned with refugees and internally displaced persons, and is therefore not an overarching document for all humanitarian action—as the Millennium Development Goals are for development—it is nevertheless a leading international humanitarian document and sets forth a specific agenda that is endorsed by UNHCR’s Executive Committee, comprising 61 states, and that was welcomed by the UN General Assembly during 2002.³ And as refugees and internally displaced persons suffer many hardships found in other humanitarian relief settings, the Agenda functions as a high-level reference for the direction of humanitarian action today.

The Agenda for Protection makes addressing “security related concerns” one of its six goals. What is notable is how the notion of security is now being related to matters of “protection”—a term that derives its technical meaning from the rights and obligations afforded to non-combatants in international humanitarian law. In order to further UNHCR’s capacity to improve security for beneficiaries, the Agenda specifically recommends UNHCR “to develop practical tools, including operational guidelines that include procedures and standards ... and to work with ... partners in their pilot application in certain specifically identified refugee situations.”⁴

In 2002 and 2003, three separate evaluations were conducted of UNHCR operations; some 150 recommendations followed. On 8 May 2003, UNHCR’s Division of Operational Support produced a document entitled *UNHCR Response to the Three Evaluations/Assessment of Refugee Women, Children and the Community Services Function*. The document summarized the recommendations on project planning and analysis:

The three reports agree on the need for a comprehensive monitoring and co-ordination system. This will enable UNHCR to have a detailed assessment of needs, resources and of risk factors facing populations and sub-groups. The reports propose the development of a common UNHCR situation analysis tool that will provide the basis for field level planning and programming and would feed field and refugee concerns into country-level strategic planning exercises and decision-making. Furthermore the reports suggest the development or adaptation of practical tools, and the allocation of small budgets, to enable community services and other field staff to conduct baseline assessments, surveys and participatory research.⁵

In 2006, UNHCR introduced its “Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations”. It makes notable strides toward making beneficiaries design *partners* and uses participatory approaches to help increase what UNHCR calls “situation analysis”.

The tool was designed specifically for UNHCR use, but this orientation to community security and participation is shared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). For 2007, OCHA’s Policy Development and Studies Branch, for example, focused on three themes: developing a humanitarian policy agenda, fostering strategic and operational coherence and improving accountability and effectiveness. Though security is not specifically addressed in regard to operational effectiveness, OCHA’s coordinating role through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations’ Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs ensures that security matters—and cooperation with security actors—are a central concern.⁶

A recurring theme in humanitarian discussions is the need to increase effectiveness. A principle means of doing so is by increasing dialogue and cooperation among both partner agencies and beneficiaries. References to greater coordination among humanitarian and development agencies can be found as early as General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991, *Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations*:

There is a clear relationship between emergency, rehabilitation and development. In order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development, emergency assistance should be

provided in ways that will be supportive of recovery and long-term development. Thus, emergency measures should be seen as a step towards long-term development.⁷

Although the theme is not new, the efforts to change policy, organizational conduct and field-level practices are. Given the general emphasis on participation, project design and security, it seems reasonable to conclude that assessing and responding to the particular security needs of specific communities in a cooperative manner will further emerge as a valued operational practice among a range of humanitarian actors.

DEVELOPMENT

Security, including “human security”, is a critical foundation for sustainable development. This implies protection from systematic human rights abuses, physical threats, violence, and extreme economic, social and environmental risks, and territorial and sovereignty threats. It is a primary pre-condition and goal for poor people to make a lasting improvement in their lives.⁸

OECD–DAC, *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the objective driving globally coordinated development efforts. There are eight goals drawn from actions and targets found in the Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by 189 nations on 8 September 2000. By 2015, they have committed themselves to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

The Millennium Declaration, from which the goals are derived, lists “peace, security and disarmament” as one of the categories for special attention and, among the various topics discussed, it specifically pledges the adopting states to “make the United Nations more effective in maintaining peace and security by giving it the resources and tools it needs for conflict prevention, peaceful resolution of disputes, peacekeeping, post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction.”⁹

The MDGs themselves, however, do not mention peace, security or disarmament—they are neither mentioned as goals to achieve nor noted to be significant to those that are listed.

The United Nations traditionally separates development and security issues in its committee system. The First Committee addresses disarmament and international security, and the Second Committee discusses matters related to economic growth and development. The Third Committee deals with a range of humanitarian and social issues including human rights.

Through this system, the United Nations classifies topics and provides forums for their debate. It is politically contentious to bring topics that are traditionally reserved for one forum into another. For this reason, among others, security and development have been, and remain, distinct topics that are negotiated separately.

However, the convergence on local-level security problems is nevertheless seen in multilateral processes and the placement of such topics in each of the UN committees is often contested. An issue area that has both challenged the traditional distinctions in the committee system and also helped bridge the three domains of operational work as they pertain to security has been small arms and light weapons.

The 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All its Aspects is a politically binding document signed by all Member States. It recognizes that “the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation ... have a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences and pose a serious threat to peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable development at the individual, local, national, regional and international levels.”¹⁰

General Assembly Resolution 60/68 of 2005 notes the importance of the Programme of Action and calls upon states to address more effectively the humanitarian and development impact of small arms and light weapons, “in particular in conflict or post-conflict situations”, by developing “comprehensive armed violence prevention programmes integrated into national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies”.¹¹ It further directs attention to the roles played, vis-à-vis small arms and light weapons, by peacekeeping operations, national regulation in post-conflict

situations, women and women's organizations, and the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children in armed conflicts. Although the Programme of Action was negotiated in the First Committee, its content clearly crosses traditional lines.

Another example of the convergence of development and security at the multilateral level is the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, which was coordinated by Switzerland, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Core Group of twelve other countries.¹² The Geneva Declaration was signed on 7 June 2006 by 42 countries and, at the time of writing, some 30 others had subsequently signed in a series of regional meetings. It begins by stating that, "Armed violence destroys lives and livelihoods, breeds insecurity, fear and terror, and has a profoundly negative impact on human development. Whether in situations of conflict or crime, it imposes enormous costs on States, communities and individuals."¹³ The regional agreements that have been signed as part of this global initiative all have different language, but the central tenets remain the same.

Through such initiatives, the distinction between development and security issues is narrowing at the policy level. Such multilateral efforts provide an opportunity for those working to advance the MDGs and international security alike to direct special attention toward the achievement of positive social change in environments of conflict or insecurity.

Apart from issues of security, there is a parallel multilateral process underway that is centrally concerned with aid effectiveness, which refers to maximizing the impact from the resources put into global development. A seminal agreement in this regard is the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The Paris Declaration was negotiated and agreed at the 2005 Paris High-Level Forum.¹⁴ The 112 signatories recognized that while the volume of aid must increase, so too must its effectiveness. They resolved to take "far-reaching and monitorable actions to reform the ways [they] deliver and manage aid".¹⁵

Aid effectiveness is a broad rubric for discussing the useful and appropriate expenditure of resources. It is concerned with issues such as corruption, financial management, transparency and the successful creation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies. Though not addressed

explicitly in the Paris Declaration, aid effectiveness also implicates operational matters as most development activities are ultimately carried out among local communities in developing countries, or are directed to strengthening state institutions that ultimately affect daily life for such communities. Greater operational effectiveness in development work, therefore, will promote greater aid effectiveness.

Whereas Resolution 60/68 and the Geneva Declaration are drawing international attention closer to local-level security problems and their impacts on development and humanitarian activities, the Paris Declaration is actively promoting the effective use of aid, which also concerns operational efforts by development and humanitarian agencies. These two agreements, however, have yet to be seen as mutually supportive.

If the signatories of the Paris Declaration explicitly recognize that aid effectiveness is linked to operational effectiveness, and that operational effectiveness requires attention to local-level security, then interesting possibilities open for greater collaboration between these separate international processes on the grounds of a shared concern for effectiveness in contexts of insecurity.¹⁶ Such recognition could galvanize international attention and assist in providing high-level guidance to the improvement of community security and operational effectiveness.

SECURITY

The ability to sensitise a mission to the perceptions, expectations and attitudes of local populations is directly related to a mission's success, and effective management [of relationships with the host government and society] is an important problem-solving tool. ... [T]his lack of two-way communication between mission and society allows minor incidents to take on major importance and impact, and in extreme cases, can derail a mission.¹⁷

*Report on Integrated Missions:
Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*

Peace operations are growing more complex, partly due to the realization that the three domains of operational work are intertwined, and thus difficult to address separately. This has resulted in the development of the "Integrated Mission" concept, which can be seen, for example, in

the mandates and operations of the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi and the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone.¹⁸

Whether conducted by national militaries, regional alliances or UN peacekeepers, peace operations involve a wide and increasing range of thematic concerns that require new forms of cooperation among a variety of agencies and stakeholders. This was acknowledged by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his report *In Larger Freedom*, wherein he noted that UN peacekeeping missions have developed an “integrated understanding of the many different tasks involved in preventing a recurrence of fighting and laying the foundations of lasting peace.”¹⁹

Military organizations, as they pursue undertakings beyond their traditional roles, must also come to terms with the many facets of peace and security. For example, the mandate of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence in Kosovo is based on Security Council Resolution 1244, which tasks NATO, in addition to security roles, to support and coordinate closely with the work of the international civil presence.²⁰ In Afghanistan, the role of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force is even more complex, given protracted combat with insurgents at the same time as trying to achieve its mission objective, which is to support the Government of Afghanistan “in expanding its authority to the rest of the country, and in providing a safe and secure environment conducive to free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and the reconstruction of the country.”²¹

In the effort to accomplish such a range of tasks, a new type of thinking is starting to pervade NATO operations, though the origins of this new approach come from an older wave of work among NATO’s member states. Afghanistan is a case in point, where NATO forces there are engaged in what have been dubbed “three-block wars”:

A soldier serving in Afghanistan ... may have to perform police-like tasks as part of a peacekeeping patrol. He or she may then become involved in humanitarian activities. And later, he or she may be engaged in a lethal exchange of fire, all in the course of the same day. Soldiers need to be equally proficient in all these tasks. Moreover, they themselves are expected to operate in multinational formations.²²

The three-block war is a metaphor for the integration of missions that is increasingly part of modern warfare. How to engage successfully in such

missions is a growing concern. As addressed in Canada's International Policy Statement of 2005:

The image that captures today's operational environment for the Canadian Forces is a "three-block-war." Increasingly, there is overlap in the tasks our personnel are asked to carry out at any one time. Our military could be engaged in combat against well-armed militia in one city block, stabilization operations in the next block, and humanitarian relief and reconstruction two blocks over. Transition from one type of task to the other can happen in the blink of an eye.²³

The US Army is now involved in a concerted effort to re-conceptualize its strategies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Based on experience in these two theatres, a new field manual for counter-insurgency operations was released in 2006.²⁴ The second chapter (out of eight total) addresses the integration of civilian and military activities; the guidelines are interesting from the point of view of convergence:

Success requires military forces engaged in [counter-insurgency] operations to—

- Know the roles and capabilities of U.S., intergovernmental, and host-nation (HN) partners.
- Include other participants, including HN partners, in planning at every level.
- Support civilian efforts, including those of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs).
- As necessary, conduct or participate in political, social, informational, and economic programs.²⁵

Discussions of three-block wars and the field manual on counter-insurgency operations both bear remarkable similarities to thinking on integration within the United Nations, which has helped set new directions for its own operations.

Yet, one of the chief problems in conducting the types of operations that focus on civilian populations is that militaries generally do not understand the cultural environment they find themselves in, and so are unable to properly operationalize their goals in either peace missions or during hostilities.

Similar thinking and planning are prominent in the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, which is making similar observations to those of humanitarian and development actors when it comes to operational effectiveness. Currently, its Foreign Military Studies Office is developing what it calls the Human Terrain System:

This system is being specifically designed to address cultural awareness shortcomings at the operational and tactical level by giving brigade commanders an organic capability to help understand and deal with “human terrain”—the social, ethnographic, cultural, economic, and political elements of the people among whom a force is operating. ...

In the current climate, there is broad agreement among operators and researchers that many, if not most, of the challenges we face in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted from our failure early on to understand the cultures in which coalition forces were working. ...

[I]t is glaringly apparent that commanders need a culturally oriented counterpart to tactical intelligence systems to provide them with a similarly detailed, similarly comprehensive cultural picture of their areas of operations.²⁶

Convergence is taking place, therefore, not only among humanitarian, development and security actors, but also military organizations with different tasks and mandates. We turn now to the three elements that characterize convergence.

THREE ELEMENTS OF CONVERGENCE

Looking across the three domains of operational work, three elements to the convergence can be identified.

Place

The first element is *place*. Increasingly, we see humanitarian, development and security operations converging on the same places. This is because complex emergencies, stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction all commonly require services from each domain. There are also many cases, especially in recent years, when staff security is so severely threatened that a military presence is required merely to enable humanitarian and relief operations. And, as described above, the very purpose of peace

operations and the means by which they are conducted require an overlap of military and civilian activities; the latter usually include a humanitarian or development component.

Practice

The second element is *practice*. As early as 1992, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali acknowledged that “Increasingly, peace-keeping requires that civilian political officers, human rights monitors, electoral officials, refugee and humanitarian aid specialists and police play as central a role as the military.”²⁷ In looking at international humanitarian, development and security actors, it is clear that all three domains engage in some of the same practices to accomplish their missions. In this context, practice refers simply to social actions of operational significance. A list of practices common to operational agencies may include distributing food, inoculating children against disease, conducting household surveys, guarding convoys, consulting with members of civil society, collecting weapons or building infrastructure.

Premise

The third element is *premise*. Premises are the foundational, often implicit ideas that make meaningful action possible among a range of people or institutions. One powerful reason that practices are converging is because humanitarian, development and security actors are operating from a shared premise about how to make their work effective.

As noted above, UNHCR has recognized that it is essential to address security matters in their protection work, and have subsequently introduced a participatory assessment tool to create more cooperative relations with communities as they design protection services.

Development work has encouraged deeper participation and cooperation through capacity-building since the mid-1990s. A 1994 UNDP report, analysing the results of the previous 30 years of capacity-building, found that “By virtually every criterion UNDP Capacity Building projects had failed to meet their objectives. Sustainability was alien or non-existent.”²⁸ These findings renewed efforts to increase local ownership of development projects in order to make national capacity-building more sustainable. Though the validity of this assumption is open for discussion, the point remains that development agencies have been operating on a shared

premise that greater local ownership will yield improved relations, and therefore greater effectiveness.

In regard to security operations, we see how militaries and UN peace operations share the common notion that better cooperation with civil society is essential to achieving their goals, and that community security must be maintained to gain ground on mission objectives.

These examples demonstrate what SNAP has observed in a review of some 10 years of analytical tools for programme design used by humanitarian, development and security agencies.²⁹ Across the three domains of operational work is a common premise that greater local participation and local knowledge yield greater ownership, thus making operations more effective and results more sustainable.³⁰ That the notion is self-evident to those working in all three domains is indicative of this shared premise and of convergence itself.

CONVERGENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We have discussed the convergence of international actors on the same places, using the same practices, on the basis of a common premise. We have also explained that the motivations leading to this are quite different according to how humanitarian, development and security agencies pursue their roles. There are efforts underway both inside and outside the United Nations to capitalize on this convergence and to manage and allay its negative effects.

What we have not discussed, however, is how the actions of all these operational agencies are understood by the local communities themselves, how this might affect our own understanding of what is taking place, and how that might inform the United Nations' operational conduct.

A 2005 study conducted by the Feinstein International Famine Center at Tufts University investigated whether or not peace support operations (PSOs) and assistance agencies (AAs) "tend to define security in their own terms, with little cross-referral, and that the security needs, aspirations and priorities of the local communities are imperfectly understood by both the military and humanitarians."³¹ The study reported that, in the three places investigated (Afghanistan, Kosovo and Sierra Leone):

PSOs, AAs and local communities constitute three distinct but overlapping worlds, with significantly different understandings of peace and security. As regards the outside actors—that is, PSOs and AAs—some of these differences, as would be expected, are due to institutional mandates, agendas, and functions. Others are due to their limited interest in, and analysis of, local community perceptions. Local communities have their own histories, agendas, idiosyncrasies and perceived needs as well.³²

In recognizing the difference between how external actors and local communities perceive security, a valuable contribution is made to setting an agenda for renewed attention to the cultural differences in the way different communities understand security—be they communities of practitioners or communities in locales.

And yet, as the study just mentioned notes, the study itself was about perceptions, including those of the researchers. “It [was] not about objective security rigorously measured, but rather about subjective security as perceived by those involved. In most cases, the degree of variance between the perceptions recorded here and the actual realities is not known.”³³

If the task at hand is merely to note that differences exist, then current tools and methods can provide this. But if the task is to understand security as it is understood by local communities themselves, then a cultural barrier can be encountered in that there are different ways of communicating and making sense of the world. As stated by the UK Commission for Africa, “The trouble is that although we all use the same terms, we often do not mean the same thing by them.”³⁴

Fixed definitions that fail to account for cultural variation can undermine the possibility of inter-cultural communication. This was also found by authors of the Feinstein study, who noted that:

While the terms of reference for the research request the report to specify the “definitions” used by each of the three sets of actors, we found that as we reflected upon our data, what people had articulated were “understandings” rather than definitions.³⁵

Designing services for local communities cannot be founded on *our* perceptions of local communities if they are seriously intended to have ownership. What is needed rather are “understandings of understandings not

our own”, that is, trying to comprehend the perspective of the community in their cultural manner.³⁶ Failure to make this transition—from our own understandings of the local, to the local view of the local—will mask the underlying social systems that we engage on a daily basis in operational work.

As the reasons for local practices vary, and the common terms we use to describe them can hide local meanings, operational agencies of all types are reaching a common impasse when trying to achieve better operational effectiveness through participation and ownership in the absence of a means to overcome this conceptual problem.

Notes

- ¹ Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent and Karen von Hippel, *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*, UN Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, 2005, p. 35.
- ² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The Agenda for Protection*, 2002, p. 14.
- ³ General Assembly, *Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa*, UN document A/RES/57/183, 6 February 2003, op. para. 7.
- ⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The Agenda for Protection*, 2002, p. 63.
- ⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR Response to the Three Evaluations/Assessment of Refugee Women, Children and the Community Services Function*, 2003, p. 10.
- ⁶ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It was established in June 1992 in response to General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on strengthening humanitarian assistance. According to OCHA, “The Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) is one of four Committees created by the Secretary-General in the framework of the UN reform, with the aim of enhancing the coordination between UN agencies in various humanitarian sectors. Chaired by the USG, the Committee, composed by UN executives at the highest level, adds a political, peacekeeping and security dimension to humanitarian consultations. ECHA meets regularly to consider UN humanitarian

policy and operational matters." "Inter-Agency Standing Committee/ Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (IASC/ECHA) Secretariat", OCHA, <http://ochaonline.un.org/ocha2006/chap1_4.htm>.

- ⁷ General Assembly, *Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations*, UN document A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991, annex, para. 9.
- ⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development–Development Assistance Committee, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*, 2001, p. 19.
- ⁹ General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, UN document A/RES/55/2, 8 September 2000, para. 9.
- ¹⁰ United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*, UN document A/CONF.192/15, 9–20 July 2001, § I, para. 2.
- ¹¹ General Assembly, *Addressing the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation*, UN document A/RES/60/68, 6 January 2006, pre. para. 2, op. paras. 1, 1(a).
- ¹² The Core Group members are Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, Finland, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand and the United Kingdom. For more information on the Geneva Declaration, its goals and signatories, see <www.genevadeclaration.org>.
- ¹³ *Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development*, 7 June 2006.
- ¹⁴ The forum was entitled *Joint Progress Toward Enhanced Development and Effectiveness: Harmonisation, Alignment, and Results*. It was hosted by the Government of France in Paris on 28 February–2 March 2005. For more information see <www.aidharmonization.org>.
- ¹⁵ *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 2 March 2005, para. 1.
- ¹⁶ SNAP first presented this idea in its background paper, *Security Needs Assessments and their Role in the New International Security Agenda*, 2007.
- ¹⁷ Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent and Karen von Hippel, *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*, UN Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, 2005, p. 35.

- ¹⁸ For the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi, see Security Council, UN document S/RES/1719, 25 October 2006; for the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone, see Security Council, UN document S/RES/1620, 31 August 2005.
- ¹⁹ General Assembly, *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all. Report of the Secretary-General*, UN document A/59/2005, 21 March 2005, para. 155.
- ²⁰ Security Council, UN document S/RES/1244, 10 June 1999, op. para. 9(f).
- ²¹ "NATO in Afghanistan", NATO, <www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/040628-factsheet.htm>.
- ²² See Jeffrey Schwerzel, "Transforming Attitudes", *NATO Review*, no. 2, 2005.
- ²³ Canadian Department of National Defence, *Canada's International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, 2005.
- ²⁴ US Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, document FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, 15 December 2006.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2-1.
- ²⁶ Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow and Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: a CORDS for the 21st Century", *Military Review*, September–October 2006.
- ²⁷ United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*, UN document A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992, para. 52.
- ²⁸ Thomas Hopkins, *Handbook on Capacity Assessment Methodologies: An Analytical Review*, United Nations Development Programme, 1994, p. 1.
- ²⁹ A list of these tools and guidelines reviewed is provided in the annex.
- ³⁰ Note the similarity to theories of governance and democracy.
- ³¹ Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, Ian Smillie, Ted van Baarda and Anthony Welch, *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding the Perceptions of Local Communities, Peace Support Operations, and Assistance Agencies*, 2005, p. 52.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- ³⁴ Commission for Africa, *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa*, 2005, p. 122, in reference to the central importance of culture in policymaking.
- ³⁵ Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, Ian Smillie, Ted van Baarda and Anthony Welch, *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding*

the Perceptions of Local Communities, Peace Support Operations, and Assistance Agencies, 2005, p. 52.

³⁶ See Chapter 4 and Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Basic Books, 1983.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPASSE

This chapter examines the impasse that field practitioners are reaching on how to make operations more effective through working cooperatively with local communities. In Chapter 2 we illustrated the convergence of humanitarian, development and security actors using examples from inside and outside the UN system. In this chapter, attention is turned fully to the United Nations.

Following a review of international agreements that promote community security, organizational tools that assess and guide operational action, and consultations with 10 UN agencies,¹ we note three challenges to achieving greater operational effectiveness:

- At the policy level, the highest-level UN panels and Secretary-General reports have strongly emphasized the need to create a more effective United Nations system capable of “delivering as one”, but the means with which effectiveness is promoted is more oriented towards internal organizational efficiency rather than cooperative operational effectiveness with local communities.² This may be diverting creative attention from the task of aligning UN resources with local needs, even as the United Nations becomes a better internally managed institution.
- At the organizational level, operational agencies of the United Nations have greatly improved their systems for learning lessons from field operations and turning them into guidelines for future efforts. However, these efforts to produce “best practices” and tools for analysis are generally driven by mandates and international agreements, and therefore thematic concerns, whether those be small arms and light weapons, landmines, child soldiers, human trafficking, refugee protection or the host of other matters in which community security is implicated. As the mandates are already supplied by agreements and policies, there is no demand-driven approach that starts with a focus on community security itself, and

then works upward to mobilize resources appropriate for local needs. By analogy, this is akin to a medical team being staffed only by specialists without anyone available to provide a basic diagnosis in order to identify which specialists a patient should consult. Moreover, this makes it impossible to work in close cooperation with the patient to design appropriate treatments that are not problem-specific, but rather benefit health more generally.

- Finally, it is widely noted that agencies face a common challenge in bringing cultural understanding to bear on project planning generally, and on security issues in particular. This is especially acute when operational effectiveness is dependent on local ownership, and that ownership is to be built in cooperation with local communities. Part of the difficulty is that, at present, there is no assessment tool in the United Nations system that is designed to provide knowledge about the range and local meanings of community security needs as they are understood by local communities themselves.

We address the three challenges of the impasse in order.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS

At the highest levels, UN operational agencies are guided by policy directions set from the Secretary-General's office. These policies are usually informed through a series of reports produced by High-Level Panels. There has been no High-Level Panel on community security or operational effectiveness. However, there is a report from 2004, by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, entitled *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*.³ This remains, to date, the highest-level report addressing international security and the United Nations' role in supporting it through its range of modalities. The scope of this report is vast and considers the composition of the Security Council all the way down to field-level staff security.

The High-level Panel had been requested by the Secretary-General "to assess current threats to international peace and security; to evaluate how our existing policies and institutions have done in addressing those threats; and to make recommendations for strengthening the United Nations so that it can provide collective security for all in the twenty-first century."⁴ In the foreword to the final publication, the Secretary-General emphasized the need to consider security across a host of UN practices as the problems

were no longer distinct to the traditional security sphere of actors such as the Conference on Disarmament or the Security Council. “We can no longer afford to see problems such as terrorism, or civil wars, or extreme poverty, in isolation. Our strategies must be comprehensive. Our institutions must overcome their narrow preoccupations and learn how to work across a whole range of issues, in a concerted fashion.”⁵

Two years later, in November 2006, another report was produced on UN reform by the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence, which submitted a document entitled *Delivering as One* to the Secretary-General. In the letter of transmittal the authors wrote that the report “puts forward a series of recommendations to overcome the fragmentation of the United Nations so that the system can deliver as one, in true partnership with and serving the needs of all countries in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals.”⁶

The range of proposals is described as follows:

Our proposals encompass a framework for a unified and coherent United Nations structure at the country level. These are matched by more coherent governance, funding and management arrangements at the centre. ... In all areas, our proposals identify the comparative advantage of organizations and delineate functions, roles and responsibilities. We have formulated mechanisms that would enable policy consistency and strategies to modernize business practices for better performance and accountability. We have renewed our commitment to put into practice the principles of good multilateral donorship, and to ensure adequate, sustained and secure funding for organizations that upgrade their efficiency and deliver results.⁷

Taken together, both reports provide a clear, common emphasis on comprehensive policies, holistic approaches to engagement, and the need for institutions within the system to work in a concerted fashion toward shared ends.

Despite the shared orientation of the two documents, and the fact that *Delivering as One* was published two years after the first report—providing sufficient time for the first to ground the inquiry of the second—the latter report makes no reference to the former, and the focus given to security by

the Secretary-General in the first report was not advanced as a means by which the various UN agencies could “deliver as one”.

This is unfortunate given the importance placed on security matters in the first report, but also unexpected seeing as the second paragraph of *Delivering as One*—under the section “The Case for Reform”—prominently notes that “More conflicts are within states than between them, and the risk of terrorism and infectious disease illustrate that security threats travel across borders.”⁸

At the highest levels of UN policy-making, community security and operational effectiveness are not addressed to the degree to which they could be. The spirit of these reports provides ample room for operational agencies to address these concerns, but the letter of the reports does not provide concerted guidance. It is therefore left to the individual agencies—working on a host of community-level security problems in light of convergence—to devise their own solutions.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Following a review of UN assessment techniques for community security needs, SNAP hosted an Inter-Agency Dialogue on Security Needs Assessments in May 2007. This meeting followed a series of bilateral conversations and interviews with most of the attending agencies.⁹ This roundtable discussion provided agencies with an opportunity to share information on their own assessment practices and the direction in which they were going to strengthen their capacities to assess community security needs and tailor unique responses in order to improve their operations.

It was noted by participants that most agencies are only just beginning to conceptualize approaches to local-level security, or community security problems, and feed those approaches into new guidelines for operational conduct. There are efforts to devise new best practices (or good practices), programming tools or guidelines for improving community participation in security or protection activities. In the pursuit of this goal, many organizations make use of lessons learned from the field to create new best practices, often written in consultation with external consultants and researchers, and to create new guidelines or programming tools for the organization as a whole in the global application of its mandate.

These efforts are motivated by a range of experiences, and work is seldom coordinated among agencies, except in working groups on thematic topics.¹⁰ What is clear from the review of analytical tools, programming guides, interviews with headquarter staff, and also with field staff in several countries, is that no UN operational agency reviewed or consulted for this study was found to have a systematic or rapid means of assessing the range of security needs in a given community, or a formal process for incorporating local knowledge of community security into service design. Cultural research in support of community security was not part of any process.

For reasons explained in the previous chapter, the operational agencies that attended the Inter-Agency Dialogue are increasing their attention to community security issues, and several are devising operational guidelines to assist with programming in this regard. What is notable is the similarity in which different agencies learn from field experience, turn those lessons learned into best practices, turn best practices into programming guidelines, and then instruct project designers to use those guidelines in different situations and contexts. It is therefore worthwhile to review this process and consider its applicability for producing security needs assessments that are intended to assist service design.

Once an agency has designated a person or unit to address community security matters, the process usually begins with field experience itself.¹¹ Lessons are learned from individual field missions, and these lessons are then generalized into a set of best practices for the future conduct of operations. Once best practices have been adopted, they are commonly transformed into guidelines or programming tools used to teach staff. This process for organizational learning is described in the 2007 report of the Secretary-General on Peacekeeping Best Practices. Although set in the specific context of peacekeeping, we find the description to be a good rendering of the process throughout much of the UN system:

The sharing and issuance of written guidance on best practices aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of modern peacekeeping operations by providing a common approach to staff and institutional partners from numerous cultural and professional backgrounds; promoting continuity in a context of high staff turnover; increasing accountability by articulating institutional standards and expectations; and disseminating peacekeeping expertise through knowledge-sharing and training.¹²

It continues, "To be 'learned', lessons identified need to be validated and endorsed by the Organization in the form of standardized guidance materials, and guidance needs to be disseminated and its implementation monitored."¹³

This process of learning, standardizing and then teaching is common in the UN system, independent of the domain of operational work. Different UN agencies have evaluation or policy units to assist this process. For the Department of Peacekeeping Operations it is the Best Practices Unit, which "links the identification and sharing of best practices in the field to the development of guidance materials (policies, guidelines and procedures) that reflect those lessons."¹⁴

The need for better organizational learning for peace operations was suggested in 2000 in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, which said that missions have much to gain from sharing best practices, applying lessons learned and referring to a body of guidance that transmits tested methods of carrying out peacekeeping tasks.¹⁵

The strength of the best practice approach is that it transforms general lessons into general guidelines for future action. This is a noteworthy contribution to any organizational process that needs to improve its functioning through learning. This success has been hard earned, at least in the case of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. As noted in the Secretary-General's report on Peacekeeping Best Practices, "one important shortcoming of that methodology was the lack of a process for converting lessons into policies and procedures that could guide subsequent operations."¹⁶ This is precisely what the Best Practices Unit is trying to overcome, and it reflects a general tendency on the part of other agencies as well.

Despite these efforts, there is nevertheless an impasse reached when the objective is not organizational efficiency, but rather operational effectiveness. The terms efficiency and effectiveness are so commonly found together that it is easy to glance over their differences. But in specifying the difference, we can see some of the challenges that remain to be addressed in bringing cultural research to bear on project planning.

Efficiency refers to "doing things right", and is primarily an internal exercise. An organization becomes efficient when all its parts work together to create

a well-managed and cost-effective system. However, an efficient system is only effective if it is “doing the right things”. Effectiveness is a measure of outcomes. Though hardly desirable, an agency can efficiently do the wrong thing, much as a good driver can head the wrong direction. Likewise, an agency can do the right thing but inefficiently. To be truly effective, one needs an efficient system doing the right thing. The emphasis today, however, remains on efficiency, although there is much talk of outcomes and effectiveness. This is seen in how agencies try to improve their conduct through learning and guidelines for the benefit of internal process.

Best practices are indeed well suited for developing efficient systems. However, a problem arises when we appreciate that each global organization works in various cultural systems, and it is what makes security problems different from one community to another that is most important when designing activities specific to a community. The methods used to create more efficient systems, which emphasize commonality across programmes, therefore provide little support when trying to design effective, specific services when the key operational concern is difference, or uniqueness.

For operations at the local level—which usually are under-staffed, are under political pressure to deliver and have limited resources—the distance between generic policy guidelines and actual field realities often leads to ad hoc solutions designed from the bottom up.¹⁷

If agencies assume they know how best to achieve positive social change prior to learning whether those assumptions taken from best practices are applicable in a given locale, this can undermine the process of analysis, cooperation and operational design for community security. The needed shift in orientation can be imagined as one in which a best practice is to have a “best process”. One best practice is to build and utilize a process for cultural research during the service design stage, so that organizational guidelines can be properly applied and advanced in different cultural contexts.

THE IMPASSE

Cultural research is widely used in the fields of public health, psychology, marketing, product design and communications. It is, however, extremely rare when applied to security matters, and is not used in the UN system to meet current challenges of operational effectiveness. It is noteworthy

that no agency interviewed for this report mentioned cultural research as an approach they were considering to apply to community security.¹⁸ However, many individuals within UN agencies—both at headquarters and in field offices—expressed strong interest in doing so during our meetings and interviews.

The definition of “learning” given in the Secretary-General’s report on Peacekeeping Best Practices, which encourages standardization, may pose a problem to agencies unless “best processes” become integrated into best practices. What if a field lesson regarding resettlement practices among the Mende community of Sierra Leone, for example, does not—indeed, cannot—generate standardized guidance materials for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or any other organization? What should be done if the experience of weapons collection among the Albanians, or resettlement of displaced persons among the people of the Terai in Nepal, or community policing in southern Sudan is not generalizable, and therefore cannot form the basis for any recommended programmes among any community other than that from which the lessons were learned? And what if such cultural learning is actually central to operational effectiveness?

There has been organizational learning about these experiences on the part of people who have addressed these problems programmatically. And yet, there are no best practices for community security among the Mende and no formalized lessons learned on cooperative resettlement in the Terai of Nepal. And, as there is no applied cultural research being done *before* the project is designed in order to align with local cultural systems, there is nowhere for gained knowledge to be applied if it is too culturally specific and cannot help to inform a general process of organizational standardization.

In cases such as those just mentioned, there is a relationship being formed, and a dialogue taking place, between international actors and local communities. This inter-cultural communication now develops through trial and error, rather than by informed guidance. This same point was made in the 2001 United Nations Development Programme report *Development Effectiveness: Review of Evaluative Evidence*. In explaining what is considered an overall improvement in project design from 1987 to 2001, it states that:

the factors that have contributed to this extended process of improvement include simple trial and error in development assistance

projects; decentralized project design to the field level, where country offices with a far more intimate understanding of needs can liaise directly with project beneficiaries; and greater appreciation of the fundamental importance of stakeholder involvement in project development and implementation.¹⁹

These factors are indicative of the trend toward closer interaction and cooperation with target communities, but it should be noted that “trial and error” is not an optimal pathway to operational improvement. But, given the absence of attention to local cultural systems, this is what might be expected.

Unless the likely impact of a proposed project on community security is understood as the local community would understand it, then the term “participation” merely indicates an attempt at local ownership, not a serious goal and element of operational conduct, organizational learning or project design and planning.

The state of affairs in current assessment tools used in the UN system to address security is that those things which are culturally specific, non-generalizable and distinctly particular are simply not a subject for intense learning, nor are they the basis for project design and planning of field operations. Instead of a committed process to engaging different cultures and social systems, and trying to reach cooperative arrangements in order to build more stable and secure environments from the local level upwards, agencies instead try to generalize and standardize their field experiences, thereby systematically failing to build cultural knowledge at the organizational level.

The impasse we have now reached on operational effectiveness is that the tools and processes used to generate knowledge about community security were never designed to attend to cultural variation in aligning available resources with local needs. In the absence of such tools and processes, some important steps to advance peace and security could be difficult to take.

Notes

- ¹ These were the United Nations Development Programme (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations Mine Action Service), the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.
- ² See in particular, General Assembly, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility*, UN document A/59/565, 2 December 2004.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid., note by the Secretary-General, para. 3.
- ⁵ See in particular, General Assembly, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility*, UN document A/59/565, 2 December 2004, p. vii.
- ⁶ General Assembly, *Delivering as one: Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment*, UN document A/61/583, 20 November 2006, letter of transmittal.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid., para. 2.
- ⁹ See note 1.
- ¹⁰ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee established Cluster Working Groups in 2005 with the aim of ensuring sufficient global capacity, predictable leadership, strengthened accountability and improved strategic field-level coordination and prioritization. There are cluster working groups on protection, emergency shelter and early recovery, among others.
- ¹¹ The term “community security” is used by SNAP and the United Nations Development Programme, but other agencies may refer to violence reduction, community safety, public health or a variety of other terms that all share a common orientation to problems of violence at the sub-state level.
- ¹² General Assembly, *Peacekeeping Best Practices: Report of the Secretary General*, UN document A/62/593, 18 December 2007, para. 1.
- ¹³ Ibid., para. 5.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., summary.

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- ¹⁵ United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN document A/55/305–S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, para. 229.
- ¹⁶ General Assembly, *Peacekeeping Best Practices: Report of the Secretary General*, UN document A/62/593, 18 December 2007, para. 4.
- ¹⁷ See, for example, Derek Miller, Daniel Ladouceur and Zoe Dugal, *From Research to Roadmap: Learning from the Arms for Development Initiative in Sierra Leone*, UNIDIR, 2006. This publication first introduced security needs assessments, and described the operational constraints of project planners from the field-level perspective.
- ¹⁸ Following the Inter-Agency Dialogue, four agencies are now engaged in collaborative work with SNAP to advance their own operational planning.
- ¹⁹ During 2007, SNAP contacted the United Nations Development Programme for an explanation on how the quality of project design was determined. Following three months of communication, this information could not be determined.

CHAPTER 4

A WAY FORWARD

In the preceding chapters we discussed how convergence at the operational level among humanitarian, development and security actors has led to calls for the improvement of operational effectiveness. We have explored how a focus on organizational efficiency alone as the means to achieve that goal is insufficient, and how a new focus on community understandings of local-level security could make a significant contribution to improving operational effectiveness across all three domains of work. Finally, we explained that to gain knowledge about community understandings of security in the places where beneficiaries work and live requires a way of addressing culture that can be of benefit to operational planning and design.

Current operational planning is characterized by approaches that are designed to be independent of, rather than account for, cultural variation. Yet, that knowledge of culture is central to understanding local security from the point of view of communities. This is a precondition for creating sustainable security solutions. Therefore, alternative approaches to the assessment of local-level security—that treat culture centrally and seriously¹—should offer one way beyond the present methodological impasse, and present new opportunities for improving operational effectiveness.

In this chapter we discuss the value of giving local knowledge² a central role in addressing local-level security. We then introduce the Security Needs Assessment Protocol project, which seeks to develop and test an approach to assessments of local-level security that has cultural research at its core, with the goal of assisting the design of field-level services. We detail some of the operational constraints under which research and project design must operate in the UN system, and then we explain how the method being devised is a response to the common goal of operational effectiveness within such constraints.

SECURITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

The formulation of the methodological impasse identified in the previous chapter is premised upon the assertion that present approaches to local-level security and operational effectiveness cannot address local, or cultural, knowledge. To say that we must pursue cultural knowledge about local-level security requires, as discussed above, making an explicit shift from a primarily internal focus on agency processes, practices and activities, to one that includes an external focus on the local systems of meaning and practice that shape everyday life in target communities. It also means moving away from using predetermined thematic categories to designate security concerns (small arms or human trafficking, for example), to using local systems of meaning and practice as the source for the relevant and intelligible categories of concern in a given community.

Putting local knowledge at the centre of our approach allows us to focus explicitly on learning what such practices are, how they are done and by whom, but from the point of view of community members and their local systems of interpretation. This usefully poises us to learn about local conceptions of security—to learn about what counts as security and also, importantly, *why*. Such knowledge is a benefit for the planning and design of a range of operations because successfully influencing the way things are done or understood in another community in a sustainable way requires some sense of local meaning and practice. This is crucial for developing solutions to problems of local-level security because community systems of knowledge provide the basis upon which community members conduct themselves, and upon which they evaluate and respond to the actions of others. Therefore, the ability to more effectively address the needs of community members that pertain to security turns upon our understanding of such systems and our ability to cooperate with them.

The Security Needs Assessment Protocol project seeks to design and test a way of conducting assessments of community security that puts local knowledge squarely at the centre of the assessment process. On the basis of such knowledge, SNAP seeks to make explicit the range of security-related problems, faced in particular communities, that are relevant to the operational activities agencies undertake. This is done by systematically and rapidly assessing local security problems—as they are understood by community stakeholders themselves—by using local experience and explanation as a guide. While keeping the security concerns that are

relevant to UN operations in mind, SNAP focuses on local knowledge in order to allow local practices, concepts and meanings of security to come into view, for the benefit of operational design.

The Protocol would be employed to generate explicit knowledge about actual local-level security needs of communities in a systematic and rapid manner, create a transparent and rigorous means of interpreting those local findings for the benefit of project design and planning, and negotiate those findings with standing agency practices and programmes to provide vital and now-absent information on which to build more effective and efficient security-related projects.

BASIC GOALS, PARAMETERS AND CONSTRAINTS

In developing our approach to learning about the kinds of locally grounded security knowledge discussed above, we have been fundamentally concerned with ways to conduct social and cultural research of the highest quality possible within the context and constraints of an assessment mission.

In recent years, many approaches have been devised to support the need of agencies and others undertaking work in local communities (non-governmental organizations, for example) to conduct qualitative field-based research within the time and resource constraints of assessment missions. Most have a consistent set of core challenges they must respond to:

- *Time—How can we conduct an assessment as quickly and efficiently as possible?* The window of opportunity within which some assessments must be conducted can be very brief; for example, some assessments are reported as having been carried out in as little as three days.³ This can be for a variety of reasons, including the political, environmental and the institutional.
- *Money—How can we conduct an assessment as economically as possible?* Because of the relatively low priority of research activities in the context of agency work (as opposed to activities directly involved with the delivery of aid and assistance), funds available for such use can be tightly restricted. Lean budgets simply do not include a margin to permit hiring more staff or conducting more research, especially when perceived as add-on activities to mandated tasks.

- Personnel—*How can we conduct an assessment that puts as little additional burden as possible on field staff?* As the need to understand social and cultural phenomena in more rigorous ways becomes increasingly critical to the conduct of humanitarian, development and security work, there is a disconnect between the range of expertise traditionally drawn upon (and currently necessary) in the conduct of such work and the present need for certain kinds of information to support it. As a result, staff are regularly called upon to incorporate new areas into their work, and to engage in research (whether it is called this or not), for which they have little or sometimes no training, in order to perform jobs that are increasingly complex.

In the context of the constraints of time, money and personnel, SNAP has concluded that the best way to generate local knowledge in order to assist agencies in the design of activities for building local-level security is to create a service dedicated specifically to the generation and provision of cultural knowledge about security among communities receiving aid or assistance.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are currently no assessment tools dedicated to understanding community security, nor any that are informed by cultural research. Though such learning may occur in the course of conducting other forms of assessment (such as of conflict or of livelihoods), knowledge about the security needs of communities is essentially a by-product—not a focal concern. When produced in this fashion, such learning is often unused and thus lost, having no “basket” in which to put it. Further, this means that much learning about the security needs of community members is simply not taking place.

On the basis of a review of literatures, an evaluation of tools, and a pre-test of data generation techniques conducted in the field, we believe the best way to gain knowledge about local-level security is to apply an approach to the problem that:

- is inherently collaborative;
- takes local systems of practice and belief as its focal concern;
- systematically generates descriptive data about social practices at the community level;
- is grounded in a solid theoretical basis for understanding culture;

- provides a rigorous framework for performing locally grounded analysis; and
- through its application can lay the foundation for gaining actionable knowledge about local-level security.

What is crucial is the ability to account for community activities on the basis of community understandings, and to do so in such a way that can contribute to our own understanding of the security of communities across contexts, especially as a basis for action in particular contexts. Approaches found in anthropology, sociology, communication and other related fields are highly developed for conducting rigorous socio-cultural research, and while these at present are not typically applied to the particular problem of local-level security, some are in fact exceptionally well suited and ought to be employed.

SNAP has drawn selectively from this range of approaches in order to incorporate the features listed above into the development of a protocol for the conduct of security needs assessments. The Security Needs Assessment Protocol includes a consultative process between SNAP and interested agencies for the identification of field-level challenges encountered as a result of local-level security issues, a field component for the conduct of highly collaborative data generation and analysis, and an integrated field team structure that can contribute to local capacity-building. In addition, work has begun on a cooperative approach to using local findings produced by the Protocol in the design of interventions where local-level, community security is a concern. In 2008, the Protocol is being field-tested and refined.

THE SNAP PROCESS

Security needs assessments are conducted to support operational agencies in improving operational effectiveness through the better alignment of agency goals and resources with the local-level security needs of communities. SNAP pursues this goal by providing rigorously generated and practical cultural knowledge about community security needs for use in programming and project design.

A security needs assessment becomes relevant for agency work at one of two points in a project cycle: prior to the design phase of a new activity for which community security is a concern, or when improvements are

being sought for an existing activity that has been challenged by issues of community security.

The SNAP process is designed as a service, and is based on a consultancy model. It proceeds through several phases.

Phase I: consultation

SNAP works in close consultation with the client agency to learn about the agency's needs regarding security in a particular community. In this phase SNAP works with the agency to ascertain what kind of information is needed, and for what purpose. For example, what area of engagement does the agency wish to improve? What kind of undertaking is being considered or is experiencing difficulty? Is there a particular area of interest (for example, geographical or practical)? On the basis of this consultation, SNAP develops a research plan which identifies areas of focal concern for the client agency that will be attended to with the field assessment.

Phase II: field assessment

The field assessment is a complex research activity that is estimated to take approximately 12 weeks to conduct. During this phase, the SNAP field team, which is comprised of international, national and local team members, conducts pre-field work, carries out the field assessment in situ and produces an interpretive analysis. The goal of the analysis is to learn about the "cultural logic" of security in use among community members, and it is produced through the collaborative application of the approaches to cultural research mentioned above. Rendered in the form of a Field Report, this analysis serves as the basis for the next phase of the SNAP process.

Phase III: translation

During this phase, the SNAP team reviews the needs and goals of the client agency, as stipulated in the consultation phase, against the local findings and claims developed in the Field Report. Examining the two together, SNAP looks for ways to align standing agency practices and goals with local systems of practice and belief in order to improve the design of operational services so that they may be more effective in a given community. This analysis is rendered in a Summary of Findings and presented to the client agency.

Phase IV: service design

In the final stage, the SNAP team and client agency work together to create innovative solutions to the integration of standing agency practices and goals with local systems of practice and belief in the design of services for a community.

A RESPONSE TO THE GOAL OF OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The SNAP process just described provides agencies conducting operational work with a cooperative process for integrating knowledge about community security needs into local-level operations in order to make them more effective. It does this through collaborative activities with both the client agency and the local community, through the application of interpretive approaches to cultural research to the problem of local-level, community security, and by providing support for using this knowledge in the development of project and programme design.

The utility of local findings about community security that could be produced through a SNAP field assessment is potentially wide ranging. This can be seen from an example drawn from preliminary data generated during a pre-test of some elements of SNAP's field protocol conducted in Ghana in June 2007.

For this pre-test, the authors and six Ghanaian researchers from the University of Accra, Legon, travelled to northern Ghana, where tensions were still being felt in the aftermath of the Dagbani conflict. Though violence had ceased, the view of many community members was that matters had not been resolved, and could erupt in violence again. For nine days, this field team conducted research using the SNAP framework, producing a rich set of preliminary data.

Before turning to the data, we must issue a caveat. It is important to note that the local findings discussed here are preliminary findings—that is, they are the result of only the initial steps of a security needs assessment as conducted by SNAP. A full analytic cycle has not been performed on the data, nor have the findings discussed below been fully interpreted at this stage. Therefore it is reasonable and appropriate to expect that the kinds of findings possible for the full field assessment component of SNAP will be considerably more sophisticated and able to offer more depth.

With this in mind, we now turn to a description and discussion of the local findings.

An immediate and important finding was that the term “security” does not exist in Dagbani. Instead, the use of the key term “protection” and an associated vocabulary of terms, translated as “peace”, “disunity” and “violence”, was observed.⁴

In our interviews and conversations, this vocabulary appeared to be employed in terms of a cultural logic (that is, a system of terms, meanings and beliefs used when people talk about certain issues that direct their actions), of which we were able to get a preliminary idea. It is important to note that the following terms and explanations are closely or directly derived from participants’ own speech. They are not mere summary explanations by the authors. This formulation was presented back to community members for input, which they confirmed as a reasonable and intelligible description of their lives. It is this process of learning, consultation and relearning from the community that ensures SNAP is generating findings about local knowledge rather than merely our own perceptions of their perceptions.

As such, these terms represent the first steps toward understanding a kind of “folk theory” of security in this community, which may be presented as follows:

- there are many kinds of protection: physical, spiritual, social, economic, health-related and so forth;
- even if you do not think that you need to protect yourself, you do, because you are a member of a family or a community. That is, people depend on you, so you need to be well (healthy, protected) in order to support them and fulfil your obligations to them as a family/community member. At the same time, the actions of others can have consequences for you (as a member), including negative or detrimental consequences, so you must always be on guard;
- some of the main things people must protect themselves against are rumours (*nama fila*), lies and “useless talk” (*yali yali talk*).⁵ Such things cause disunity (*nangbang kpeni*) and mistrust, and have a range of “bad effects”, for example:
 - families and marriages are torn apart;
 - social occasions are attended by fewer people;⁶ or

-
- you cannot work with your neighbours, and thus suffer economic consequences;
 - these not only create disunity and mistrust but, in such a context, can lead to violence at the local level (because one is a family and community member). For example, one might be shot, beaten or have a house burned down as a consequence of rumours, lies or useless talk; and
 - in order to protect oneself against the bad effects, one should:
 - “have big ears but a small mouth”;
 - be very careful about what one says; and
 - speak the truth and be cautious about what others tell you.

From these aspects of a community understanding of security, a number of important things can be learned:

- there is a cultural logic around “protection” (a term that emerged as more relevant and significant than “security”);
- this logic involves concepts, norms, rules and values about specific forms and practices of social action as well as social organization;⁷
- this logic is “widely accessible, highly intelligible, and commonly shared”,⁸ indicating that it is a phenomenon of cultural communication; and
- while this logic is applied by community members to matters related to the Dagbani conflict per se, it also transcends it.⁹

Taken together, these preliminary findings suggest that further study along the lines developed here will indeed yield rich insight into local practices and understandings of security. It is not only likely but probable that each community has a cultural logic relevant to security, and that this logic, or elements of it, are available to be learned. Importantly, it is also very likely that these logics differ.

From this brief example from Ghana, we can note that the Dagbani logic of protection, as described here, turns upon a particular conceptualization of the person, and how such a person is related to others in the community. Suggested here is a view of the person as a member, which can be contrasted with other cultural views, for example, of the person as a unique individual. The person-as-member is always (and already) part of a network of benefits and obligations that inhere in the connectedness described in the cultural logic of security. It is worth noting that the acknowledgement of a certain

social organization, which in turn points to a particular constellation of values and beliefs—about communal life, about conflict and about grounds for action—emerged in the context of investigating a logic of security.

This suggests that what people do in this cultural context, that pertains to protection as they see it, is shaped by and understood according to such beliefs. Learning what these are and how they animate Dagbani life would appear crucial for efforts endeavouring to address issues of community security. This example helps to point out that it is of special importance for agencies working at the local level to understand the range of practices interpreted as security from the point of view of community members, for it is likely that these do not always align neatly with the a priori categories currently used to address security. For instance, although it is well known that there are small arms issues in the Dagbani region, this did not emerge in any of the field data, while *nangbang nyeni* (unity) and its opposite *nangbang kpeni* did. A primary goal of SNAP is to learn about the range of security concerns experienced and expressed in and by a community, whatever these may be, so that this can help us understand how security can be improved in communities—in the eyes of those communities.

The pre-test demonstrated to the field team that application of the SNAP framework to the question of community security, even in this abridged form, can generate information useful to the planning of a range of operations.

Folk theories of security, like that encountered in the Dagbani region, allow us to elicit a set of parameters for programme design that, we contend, can help foster local ownership on the part of members of specific cultural communities if incorporated into project planning and design. Cultural logics about security attend not only to the kind of security problems local communities identify and face—such as small arms or gender-based violence—but also to the means by which the community members may be receptive to addressing them with international actors, such as UN agencies.

Though only derived from a test-period that is one quarter of the normal research period for a security needs field assessment, and not subjected to a full cycle of analysis, what we have learned thus far from the initial sketch of a Dagbani folk theory of security outlined above indicates a range of implications that pertain directly to project design and planning concerns where community security is an issue.

During the pre-test, the Dagbani term *nangbang nyeni*—“speaking with one voice”—and its attendant practices were spontaneously and frequently employed, evoked in a variety of interviews, applied to a range of social contexts and used by male and female community members from a range of social positions. Indeed, use of the term suggests a shared view about people and community, which is central to the conduct of life. Incorporating key Dagbani orientations, such as *nangbang nyeni*, into the design and implementation of local-level activities could improve alignment of such operations with community understandings and ways.

For instance, the UN Framework Team on Conflict Prevention is operating peace-building centres in the Dagbani region. These centres have been viewed as a model of success by the Framework Team and the Ghanaian government. However, findings from the pre-test direct us to ask whether, in not attending to local systems of “speaking with one voice”, and absent knowledge about local concepts and practices of protection, the centres may be creating an external, alien and parallel process to peace-building that, at best, is bringing new approaches to the local community but, at worst, is creating a system that only seems functional because traditional systems are still working independently and invisibly (from the perspective of the centres), thereby creating the illusion of impact. Four community members noted to SNAP researchers that the centres were only respected because “they gave unemployed people something to do”, rather than for building peace. This is an instructive finding in the context of efforts to create local ownership of peace-building processes. More research is needed to determine whether the centres engender local ownership or whether they only appear to do so. Such information is key to understanding local impact.

Indeed, two members of the field team who come from the Dagbani community speculated that using local concepts in the design and planning of peace-building activities could potentially help generate ownership in, and better sustainability of, such efforts.

The experience from Ghana, as well as insight from the literature that grounds SNAP’s research approach, suggest that successfully influencing the way things are done or understood in another community in a sustainable way requires some sense of these native premises and meanings about “security” that in turn can and must influence cooperative solutions for creating security in communities.

By gaining knowledge in a cooperative manner of these local systems of belief, implementing agencies and donors:

- are put in a new position to understand problems of security as they are understood by community members themselves;
- see new options for local security strategies that may be invisible from the vantage points of the implementing agencies, donor governments or other non-community members;
- can develop security-related policies that are responsive to local needs and ways of creating security, rather than imposing otherwise reasonable solutions, but yet that are not culturally grounded (thus giving no basis for understanding why they might work); and
- can formulate policy more likely to be accepted and supported by community members.

Importantly, this can be achieved in close cooperation with both local community members and local UN country teams. This means that country teams do not need to wait for programming guidelines or the setting of best practices in order to gain immediate and applicable knowledge for designing operations in the context of, for example, Development Assistance Frameworks.

By working in close collaboration with the SNAP team, the country team may be in a new position to engage the following key questions. Given local findings:

- what extant policy strategies are recommended and which are not recommended?
- what changes need to be made to policy strategies?
- what is the best way to implement agency goals? and
- what kinds of activities can best address the needs of communities?

Though the currently available findings are only preliminary in nature, they point to a rich and varied domain of knowledge pertaining to security of communities. They also indicate that this knowledge is something that can be learned and used. In 2008, SNAP will be working to develop and refine the ways such knowledge can be generated and interpreted for use by agencies engaging in operational work at the local level. We believe that incorporating such knowledge into the design process can help improve the

effectiveness of operations, but also help build the positive outcomes sought by humanitarian, development and security actors—and by communities.

Notes

- ¹ Meaning that such an approach should take culture as a focal concern, and should be grounded in a rigorous theoretical tradition explicitly developed for the study and interpretation of cultural practices.
- ² Drawing from Clifford Geertz's use of the term, we use "local knowledge" to refer to the cultural knowledge *of* communities, as opposed to knowledge *about* some locale produced from another point of view. This is to say we are interested in "understandings of understandings not our own", as Geertz put it, rather than understandings of places not our own, but from our own point of view. See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Basic Books, 1983.
- ³ James Beebe, *Rapid Assessment Process: An Introduction*, AltaMira Press, 2001.
- ⁴ Each term listed here in English represents a cluster of Dagbani terms that emerged in informants' speech. The cultural logic is presented here in conversational terms (as opposed to the evaluative, analytic terms we will use in the conduct of analysis and interpretation), and is meant to characterize the local "common sense" as we understand it at this early point.
- ⁵ *Yali yali talk* was translated for us as "loose talk", or "talk that has nothing, because it leads to nothing but disunity". Presently, such talk produced in relation to the chieftaincy dispute can easily become violent. The utterance "We're waiting for the chance to slaughter you again" was offered by one interviewee as an example of such talk.
- ⁶ Social occasions is a term used to refer to weddings, funerals and "outdooing", or naming ceremonies for babies. These are central to social life in Ghana, allowing for the cultivation and maintenance of social networks.
- ⁷ Note that this logic is particular to the cultural community in question. No suggestion or assumption is made that it is universal. It is precisely such locally distinct folk theories or cultural logics that SNAP is designed to identify and learn about.

- ⁸ Donal Carbaugh, "Comments on 'Culture' in Communication Inquiry", *Communication Reports*, vol. 1, 1988.
- ⁹ That is, while the Dagbani logic of protection, as described here, was used to discuss the conflict in some instances, it was also employed by community members we spoke with to discuss other experiences and issues as well. The logic can be broadly applied in this fashion because it attends most directly to premises of social organization, beliefs about the person and beliefs about the place of such persons in it, all of which help to shape social action across a variety of contexts.

CHAPTER 5

FINAL THOUGHTS

The implementing agencies of the United Nations are converging on a shared recognition that operational effectiveness requires new and creative attention to the security needs of communities and the beneficiaries of aid and relief. Recent experience compels us to understand that when we enter communities, we become part of the social systems unique to culturally and politically complex environments. Though engagement in communities is guided by the ethos of “do no harm”, this alone is not enough to provide the guidance we need on how to manage our relations in diverse communities, and to provide the services that we intend without causing unintentional harm. We can and should build on that ethos, however, by striving to create more practical and cooperative relations with the communities in which we operate, and thus more sustainable solutions for challenges encountered in them, by grounding our interventions in local cultural knowledge.

As humanitarian, development and security practitioners converge on the operational need for such knowledge, new systems will need to be put in place that not only respect the local context, but that are deeply committed to learning about it—about those things that are particular, distinct and non-generalizable. There is a wide-spread process within UN agencies to learn from field operations, distil the lessons learned, generalize from those experiences and thus create best practices, in order to create teaching tools or guidelines on the basis of those best practices. Such systems are an excellent contribution to organizational efficiency and building systems of universal applicability. But where context-dependent knowledge is of central importance, this approach is less useful. Designed for the express purpose of developing procedures that are independent of context, this approach to best practices cannot learn about and respond directly to the particular security needs of culturally distinct social systems. Consequently, we recommend that cultural research into community security be treated as a “best process” which constitutes a best practice. With such a process available, it can function as a service in support of field operations.

Presently, learning about community security remains driven by a top-down process of trying to operationalize international agreements on security-related themes, such as small arms, landmines, human trafficking, child soldiers, organized crime or gender-based violence. Compared to 10 years ago, today there is a host of international agreements directing both humanitarian and development work to consider the special security concerns of communities and beneficiaries, and to design and plan projects that can take these needs into consideration in the pursuit of relief, recovery and sustainable development. But it must be appreciated that communities, no matter their location or form, do not divide their daily lives according to these themes.

Our indicator-intensive systems of measurement and classification do not allow for much learning about these ways and the systems of value and belief that animate them. And when they are used as a basis for determining the best course of action, what seems—and indeed may be—a reasonable course of action in one part of the world can appear relevant for another part of the world. But the mistaken assumption here is that activity trumps place: that weapons collections programmes, for example, are weapons collections programmes, whether in Bosnia or Sierra Leone. While this is a politically viable position, experience has taught us that local context has a great deal to do with the success or failure of the implementation of best practices. This immediately demands attention to local knowledge as detailed in the previous chapter. The design and planning of field operations can indeed be guided by the spirit of best practices, but ultimately they must align existing resources to local ways of getting things done. Otherwise, our goal of sustainable outcomes will be severely and interminably challenged.

SNAP has learned, over almost three years of research and consultation, that there is a wealth of particular approaches to understanding culture that can be brought to bear on the task of assessing security needs of communities. Anthropology, sociology, communication and other related fields offer rigorous and systematic means of generating and interpreting local knowledge that can be reasonably rapid once they are engineered to be used within the UN system and toward the end of service design for community security. The express purpose of such approaches is to generate local knowledge as it is understood by community members themselves, not as perceived by international actors through interviews and workshops, for example. When such knowledge about security becomes our goal, and we ask community members “Do we understand correctly? Are we

getting this right?”, then a new foundation for the cooperative design and execution of operations is laid.

The Security Needs Assessment Protocol seeks to adapt extant techniques used in interpretive cultural research to learn about the range and meanings of community-level security problems to assist in the design and planning of more effective field operations. The pre-test conducted in northern Ghana demonstrated that such an approach can indeed produce new understandings of local security needs and provide insight about possible solutions that perhaps were not apparent even to community members prior to the study. This in no way guarantees the success of new operational plans to build peace or security. However, it does point the way to new, explicit and cooperative possibilities that are transparent and effective. As such, SNAP may prove to be a special contribution to helping operational agencies address the impasse now reached on how to incorporate cultural knowledge into project design, thus responding to the distinct security concerns of communities and thereby raising the likelihood of being more effective, and ultimately, providing sustainable outcomes.

ANNEX

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ACRONYMS

MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
SNAP	Security Needs Assessment Protocol
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research



The Security Needs Assessment Protocol project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research is working to improve operational effectiveness—meaning the impact and sustainable success of any undertaking designed to effect social change in a community—in humanitarian, development and security operations by improving the design of field-level activities that pertain to community security.

The project aims to create a systematic and rapid means of assessing local security problems as they are understood by community members themselves. This Protocol could be applied by interested agencies to conduct cooperative cultural research in the community, and then use the knowledge gained to better align resources with local needs.

UNIDIR