A People-Centered Approach to Security

seeking conceptual clarity to guide UN policy development

By: Mark Sedra, PhD

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Foreword

This desk-based review is intended to serve as a starting for a wider dialogue within the UN system and beyond about how the PCS can be better operationalized in the field.

This paper will explore the challenges of implementing a PCS approach in line with the vision of SDG-16. It will break down and explain the various subsidiary concepts that have grown out of PCS thinking and been mainstreamed in it. Obstacles to the realization of PCS programming will be explored with some preliminary thoughts on how they can be overcome. The paper will show that while there are many challenges to the application of the PCS approach, it remains the best tool available to realize the ambitious vison of SDG-16 and the SDG-16+ roadmap.

Introduction

The idea that UN security programming should be people-centered has become a cornerstone norm of the organization. The UN's signature 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was explicitly launched "on behalf of the peoples" the UN serves rather than the member states that make up its ranks.[1] This is far from a superficial distinction and is part of a transformative shift from state- to people-centric thinking that has been underway at the UN since the end of the Cold War. This move to recognize people rather than states as the locus of attention for security assistance initially took the form of the human security concept. Although the human security vision influenced many seminal advances in international peace and security from the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel landmines to the Kimberly process on conflict diamonds, its wide—even amorphous—definition and its proclivity to challenge the principle of state sovereignty alienated many member states.

The people centered security (PCS) approach was defined in response to the critique of the human security agenda. It retained its focus on meeting the diverse security needs of men, women, boys and girls, but sought to engage rather than antagonize the state in pursuit of this goal. It narrowed the definition of security and justice to an essential core of issues and envisioned the role of donors to be that of a facilitator of dialogue between the state and civil society and a balancer of top-down and bottom-up reforms. At its core the PCS approach, which was firmly cemented in UN orthodoxy by the 2010s, aims to renew the social contract between the state and the population it serves. By charting the origins and evolution of the idea and outlining its core elements and subsidiary concepts, this paper aims to highlight the tremendous potential of the PCS approach as a driver of positive change in the peace and security field. This desk-based review is intended to serve as a starting for a wider dialogue within the UN

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system and beyond about how the PCS can be better operationalized in the field.

One area of security programming that has been particularly influenced, even shaped, by the PCS approach is security sector reform (SSR), an agenda that aims to transform security and justice institutions in accordance with democratic norms and principles. As the OECD DAC affirms, "at the heart of the security system governance agenda is the need to promote people-centered approaches to security."[2]

SSR was also the product of new thinking on the inextricable links between security and development. "Governance reform of the justice and security sector in crisis- and post-conflict environments", a 2003 UNDP report explained, is "one of the essential conditions, albeit not sufficient, for sustainable human development."[3] In many ways the trajectory and record of the SSR agenda over the past two decades represents a good case study to understand the potential of the PCS approach to deliver change and the implementation challenges that it faces. Accordingly, this paper pays close attention to the experience of SSR programming implemented by UN agencies and other international security stakeholders.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further crystalized the security development nexus, resolutely stating that "sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development."[4] Ahead of the release of the agenda in 2015, there was general recognition that efforts to realize the previous Millennium Development Goals had been "hampered by conflict, a lack of rule of law and weak institutions."[5] Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG-16)—to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"—represented a determination to rectify this shortcoming. SDG-16 was seen as one of the most ambitious of the 17 SDGs, with the potential to "have a multiplier effect" across the agenda.[6] Like SSR, SDG-16 was centered on people, an outgrowth of the agenda's pledge "that no one will be left behind."[7] SDG-16 represents an explicit commitment of the UN to the notion of PCS, providing a framework to mainstream the concept across its security programming. In the years following the release of the 2030

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agenda there was growing recognition in the international community of how SDG-16 was a key determinant of progress across the SDGs. This realization spurred a group of donors and civil society actors to launch a more expansive definition and approach to SDG-16, known as SDG-16+, that has presented a roadmap to accelerate progress in line with the PCS approach.

While the 2030 Agenda reaffirmed the centrality of the PCS approach and established benchmarks for its realization, the capacity of UN agencies to apply it still requires strengthening. UN security programs are characteristically rooted to language on people-centeredness, but many practitioners lack the tools, time, or experience to apply this to project implementation. Reflecting this disjuncture, it is very common for security programming designed and framed as people-centered and locally owned to evolve into state-centered, externally driven processes. This accounts for the decidedly mixed record of PCS initiatives in the field. The challenge of striking a tenuous balance between traditional top-down state-building objectives and bottom-up community empowerment has derailed many well-intentioned PCS programs.

This paper will explore the challenges of implementing a PCS approach in line with the vision of SDG-16. It will break down and explain the various subsidiary concepts that have grown out of PCS thinking and been mainstreamed in it. Obstacles to the realization of PCS programming will be explored with some preliminary thoughts on how they can be overcome. The paper will show that while there are many challenges to the application of the PCS approach, it remains the best tool available to realize the ambitious vison of SDG-16 and the SDG-16+ roadmap.

The Evolution of People-Centered Security

While notions of making people rather than states the core concern of the UN's security work had been percolating in policy and academic circles since the founding of the organization, it was the advent of the human security concept beginning with the 1994 Human Development Report that established the legitimacy of the idea. The end of the Cold War opened up space for novel and innovative ideas to address perennial problems like insecurity and poverty. Human security expanded the scope of existing notions of security, identifying seven areas of threat to human well-being: economic security; food security; health security; environmental security; personal (physical) security; community security; and political security.[8] It meant more than just "freedom from fear" but also "freedom from want", a shift that brought the concept into the development sphere and built on the emerging idea of a security-development nexus. The World Bank's 2002 Voices of the Poor study, which surveyed over 60,000 poor women and men from 60 countries, confirmed this connection, as the respondents consistently identified insecurity as one of the paramount obstacles to escaping poverty.[9] Drastically expanding the definition of security was a compelling idea as it endeavored to address the root causes of insecurity rather than only its symptoms, but implementing such an expansive concept that seemed to securitize almost everything was daunting. Accordingly, in its initial years the concept was often debated but infrequently operationalized, although its language and ideas began to seep into doctrine and programming at the UN and many member states.

In January 2001, the Commission on Human Security was established by the UN with the goal of fine tuning the concept, making it more operationally viable and raising awareness of its core principles. The Commission's 2003 report, entitled *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People*, referred to human security as the "means creating political, social,

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environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity."[10] It reaffirmed the idea at the heart of the concept that states can pose a potent threat to the security and livelihoods of people under their control. This was hardly revelatory but the formal recognition of this fact within the UN was ground-breaking at the time. To address this threat to humanity, the report recommended that human security focus on "upholding human rights, pursuing inclusive and equitable development and respecting dignity and diversity", all while building "the capability of individuals and communities to make informed choices and to act on their behalf."[11] It showed the complementarity between state-centric and human security, arguing "that securing people was the best way of securing states."[12] The report also sought to narrow the programmatic scope of the concept, arguing that its imperative was "to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment." That didn't mean addressing every conceivable threat to humanity, but rather to protect "people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations."[13]

After the publication of the commission report there was still reticence among many member states in the UN to fully embrace the concept. It continued to be seen as programmatically nebulous, overly idealistic and ill-equipped to confront conventional political and security crises. Perhaps most importantly, it was seen by many to contravene the principle of state sovereignty that undergirded the international system. While it may have faced pushback as a policy, it became clear to many that as an analytical framework it could "provide a more nuanced understanding of how perceptions of security and insecurity are produced in local contexts" allowing donors to develop a more "context-specific" picture of the security environment "that can be used in policymaking and the prioritization of interventions."[14]

Another benefit of the human security approach is its recognition of the need to prioritize vulnerable groups and its incorporation of a gender perspective. The Commission's report expressed "concern for people on the move and for women, children, the elderly, the disabled, the indigenous, and the missing."[15] Given the intrinsic importance of alleviating human suffering and deterring atrocities as a *raison d'être* of the UN and post-WW2

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international order, this unique focus on the everyday security of vulnerable groups was seen as critically important. But concern for marginalized groups was not solely a moral consideration; it was recognition that the exclusion of significant segments of a society could undercut war-to-peace transitions. Not only did human security provide, as Sara de Simone points out, "a way of including all people in geographically localized political processes, irrespective of their juridical status as citizens or non-citizens", it also made programming more sustainable and effective.[16]

Another landmark in the evolution of the human security concept and the eventual emergence of the PCS approach was the development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine by the Canadian-sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. R2P was strongly influenced by human security and was a reaction to genocides carried out in Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s. It offered, in some respects, a blunt force instrument to enforce human security through a reframing of state sovereignty. As the ICISS report put it, "state sovereignty implies responsibility and the primary responsibility for protections of its peoples lies with the state itself." Accordingly, "where a population is suffering, as a result of internal wars, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect."[17] While the UNSG's *High Level Panel on Threat's*, *Challenges*, and *Change* would endorse R2P in 2004 as an "emerging norm", it was always highly controversial. Its challenge to the principle of state sovereignty under the overarching umbrella of human security alienated many member-states, from North and South. Their concerns over the potential misuse of the concept appeared to be validated when it was employed by the United States to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequently by Russia to legitimize its incursion into Georgia in 2008. The discrediting of R2P, a concept many saw as a "strain of human security… legitimizing military intervention into other countries"[18] clouded opinion of the human security concept. By the end of the decade there was a notable shift away from human security, even if some of its core principles had already been embedded in UN policy and practice and continue to influence programming to this day.

With support for the original concept of human security flagging, the UN sought to redefine it in a manner that would moderate its ambitions and

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reassure states over its challenge to the principle of state sovereignty. In 2012, a UN General Assembly resolution defined human security as an "[a] pproach to assist member states in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people."[19] The statement effectively reinserted the state as the mediating agent between the UN and the people, undermining the resolutely bottom-up approach that exemplified earlier understandings of human security.

The PCS idea emerged gradually over time as a reaction to the unease over the human security concept. It is less a wholly new idea than a re-conceptualization of human security that features less ambition and a more pronounced role for the state. PCS endeavors to achieve a balance that the human security concept could not muster, between state- and people-centric security. In this new formulation the security of the state was not wholly supplanted by a preoccupation with people; rather a carefully calibrated, mutually reinforcing relationship of complementarity was proposed.[20] It is a mixing of top-down state-based approaches and bottom-up people-driven solutions. Some argue that "no real complementarity is possible because the distribution of power in the existing structure is too unequal."[21] Powerful states will invariably override the concerns of the people. Others hold that neither top down nor bottom-up approaches can succeed on their own, so some sort of amalgamation is essential. Alexander Gilder notes that top-down initiatives rarely trickle down to benefit average people and "no matter how much the UN chooses to focus on empowerment little can be done without the host state's support" for grass roots action.[22] This realization that the security interests of the state and people must be accommodated to make headway helped to establish the PCS concept as a compromise between the innovative and disruptive intent of human security and the conservative impulses of the sovereign state system. The human security concept was not discarded as a result of this policy evolution; rather it continues to serve as a philosophical reference point for the UN approach to security.

Once just a loosely defined cousin of human security, people-centered security received its own conceptual foundation with the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in 2014. The report advocated for a "renewed resolve on the part of United Nations peace operations personnel to engage with, serve and protect the people they

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have been mandated to assist."[23] Despite the advent of the human security concept more than two decades prior, this shift was needed because, in the words of one panel member, UN peace operations continued to be either "mission-centric (e.g. winning hearts and minds of local populations) or as appendices to various state-centric goals."[24] The UN was urged to forgo the idea that state and institution building is the answer to all problems and "strike a balance between top-down, externally prescribed peace and popular, locally prescribed peace."[25]

If there was any doubt about the primacy of the PCS approach within the UN it would be settled with the release of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development* in 2015. This "plan of action…to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions" emphasized the need for inclusive and participatory approaches to security and development that fostered engagement of citizens in all stages of programming "from the formulation and design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases."[26] UNDP explains how SDG-16 reframes the "social compact between state and society" ensuring "a match between people's expectations of what the state and other actors will deliver (the services contained in the other goals, for example, on health, as well as safety, rule of law and a fair justice system, legal identity, access to information and opportunities for participation) and the institutional capacity available within the state and other actors to meet those expectations."[27] It does not deny the critical role of the state but elevates people to the place of an equal stakeholder in the pursuit of security, peace and development.

With SDG-16 coming to be seen as a lynchpin for the success of the entire 2030 Agenda "a group of UN member states, international organizations, global partnerships, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders", dubbed the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, came together to develop a specific plan to achieve its core objectives. It established a *Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies* that covered all 36 SDG targets that "directly measure an aspect of peace, inclusion, or access to justice", only 12 of which were formally a part of SDG-16. This expanded strategy came to be known as the SDG-16+ and was first released in 2017 with a revised version presented at the High-level Political Forum and SDG Summit in 2019. The SDG-16+ reaffirmed the robust commitment of the wider 2030 Agenda to the PCS approach. The Global

Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (also known as the SDG-16 Alliance or the Global Alliance), a coordination platform established to oversee and facilitate efforts to achieve SDG-16+ targets globally, affirmed that "people-centered service delivery is critical to all the SDGs: from accessing education and health, to reducing inequality, to ensuring security, justice and the rule of law."[28]

Greater clarity was brought to the PCS approach in 2016 at the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey. The summit explored the challenges of operating along a triple nexus of programming—humanitarian-development-peace—in protracted emergency situations. It resulted in a commitment from global policy makers to implement a "new way of working".[29] The centerpiece of this "new way of working" was a renewed focus on building "the capacity and resilience of national and local actors—state and community".[30] This "localization" of assistance, avoiding donor-driven solutions, goes to the heart of the PCS approach which sees local norms, ideas and capacities as the only sustainable solution to local dynamics of conflict, fragility and underdevelopment. As Sultan Barakat and Sansom Milton note, "the local is also a natural place for working beyond silos as crisis affected populations tend not to operate with the same distinctions between sectors that structure the international aid apparatus."[31]

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Achieving this local turn in international security and development programming, reversing a longstanding trend toward externally driven, state-centric aid, has been fraught with challenges. For instance, Barakat and Milton explain that "realistic expectations and a clear, unsentimental assessment of local needs, capacities, and context" is needed to "'get the local right' in terms of its integration with national, regional, and international conflict responses."[32] Striking the right balance in security programming that will enable external stakeholders to empower locals and facilitate constructive engagement between the state and civil society has rarely been achieved in practice. To find this elusive balance policymakers and practitioners have created different formulations of the PCS concept to address conditions and challenges in particular implementation settings. This contextualization and targeted application of the broad notion of PCS, resulting in the emergence of several new subsidiary concepts, has paid some programmatic dividends but has also at times fostered confusion.

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Subsidiary and Complementary Concepts

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Given the broad scope of the PCS approach, several subsidiary concepts have emerged that represent programmatic adaptations designed to operate in specific contexts, such as urban or rural settings. While the proliferation of these sub-concepts and terms can generate confusion in the field for practitioners, they play an important role in contextualizing people-centered assistance. Other related concepts, such as human rights, gender and youth-based approaches to security have emerged to complement and reinforce the PCS approach. The following is a list of some of the most influential subsidiary and complementary concepts employed by the UN and other key stakeholders:

◉ Subsidiary Concepts

SOCIETAL SECURITY

The idea of societal security emerged concurrently with the human security concept and contributed to its intellectual origins. It emanated from a school of thought in international security studies referred to as the Copenhagen School. Like the human security agenda, societal security shifted the referent object of security from the state to society, which it defined "as the social unit that provides the primary locus of identification for its members." The society is an "identity community" differentiated objectively by factors like language and customs and subjectively by markers such as belief systems (religion) and common social structures (tribes/clan).[33] Accordingly societal security refers to the capacity of an identity community to preserve and secure itself from threat. As Barry Buzan notes, it pertains to "the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom".[34] The

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concept converges with state security in cases where an external threat from another state or non-state actor could threaten the "way of life" of a given community. But it diverges from traditional notions of state security in that it can also refer to domestic threats where rival identity communities or even the state seeks to disrupt the integrity of an identity community through any type of measure, from physical attack to restrictions on language and culture. Like human security, societal security was criticized for being conceptually fuzzy but succeeded nonetheless in moving the boundaries of the international security field.

COMMUNITY SECURITY

Community security was identified in the 1994 HDR as one of the seven dimensions of human security.[35] Similar to societal security, community security is concerned with protecting communities from stresses ranging from "direct attack", such as sectarian or ethnic violence, to the slow breakdown of traditional customs and practices.[36] UNDP would further develop the community security concept and lay a roadmap for implementation with a 2009 publication titled, *Community security and social cohesion: Towards a UNDP approach*.[37] The report expanded the remit of community security to encompass "both group and personal security, while focusing largely on freedom from fear."[38] Community security diverged substantially from societal security as it was not just concerned with threats to the overall integrity of the identity community, but the nature of threats to individuals and sub-groups within that community.[39] The concept also differed from societal security in its intent to accommodate and engage the state and state-building in its prescribed programming, noting that "a key focus is on developing inclusive political processes to manage state-society relations." [40]

UNDP's linking of "social cohesion" to community security added a new dimension to the concept. According to UNDP, "social cohesion is about tolerance of, and respect for, diversity (in terms of religion, ethnicity, economic situation, political preferences, sexuality, gender and age) – both institutionally and individually."[41] Increasing social cohesion means building the level of trust in government and within society between different

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groups, and the willingness to participate collectively toward a shared vision of sustainable peace and common development goals.⁴² It considers both vertical (state-centered) and horizontal (intergroup) trust and prioritizes the citizen-state relationship. Strengthening social cohesion then means:

① developing collaborative leadership skills and creating institutions for interaction, dialogue and problem-solving;

② supporting media, civil society and academic institutions to bridge or create links across divisions within society;
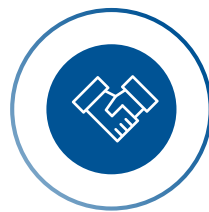
③ building interpersonal trust and interaction across groups in neutral, public spaces or other opportunities for healthy contact and interaction across lines of difference.

The prioritization of social cohesion as a pathway to community security emphasizes the imperative of integrating "security and development interventions" as well as mounting "coordinated and multi-sectoral responses to insecurities at the community level" and shaping enabling conditions for change at the national level.⁴³ In line with this approach, UNDP community security work includes a range of programmatic tools from traditional peace- and state-building responses—such as security and justice reform; Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration; small arms and light weapons control; and rule of law activities—to social capital strengthening initiatives—such as reconciliation processes; transitional justice schemes; initiatives to prevent violent extremism (PVE); and civil society promotion.

The international NGO Saferworld has championed the concept of Community Security, recognizing the plural and hybrid nature of security and justice provision in most fragile and conflict-affected contexts. According

to Saferworld, a Community Security approach "identifies and responds to local perceptions of security by working through both formal and informal systems – often acting as a bridge between them." It encourages "investments in transitional interventions that build upon existing capacities and sources of legitimacy, which are rooted not in legal or territorial rules alone, but in local perceptions and priorities." This approach "affirms the need for institutional and technical reforms, but rejects the idea that security is the sole preserve of the state." Instead, it advocates for "a shift away from investments in either the state or society and toward efforts to increase interactions and trust between them."[44]

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CITIZEN SECURITY

Citizen security is a variation on the idea of community security but with a specific focus on improving democratic citizenship as a lever to address persistent security problems. UNDP defines citizen security as "the process of establishing, strengthening and protecting democratic civic order, eliminating threats of violence in a population and allowing for safe and peaceful coexistence."[45] While the concept has been applied in different contexts around the world it has seemed to resonate most in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that is home to states with some of the highest rates of violence and crime in the world. For instance, the regional homicide rate in the region is more than three times the global average.[46] Efforts to combat this epidemic of violence in the 1980s and 1990s primarily relied on repressive police and judicial measures, dubbed mano dura (firm hand). The failure of state repression to significantly reduce the crime rate, coupled "with mounting evidence that policing, criminal justice and penal systems were poorly managed and underprepared", prompted local government and civil society leaders to start advocating for alternative approaches.[47] Beginning in the late 1990s governments in several Latin American and Caribbean countries, with support from NGOs, bilateral donors and multi-lateral organizations, began to implement citizen security projects that were not solely dedicated to "reforming law enforcement, justice and penal strategies, but also bolstering civic identity and social co-existence, social cohesion and collective efficacy."[48]

UNDP defines citizen security as "the process of establishing, strengthening and protecting democratic civic order, eliminating threats of violence in a population and allowing for safe and peaceful coexistence."

Like community security, citizen security programs go outside the confines of traditional peace and security programming, launching initiatives such as urban infrastructure renewal and civic education.[49] While some domestic actors in the region criticize the concept for being "soft on crime", it has developed a foothold due to its two core pillars: "the responsible state and active citizenship." Like the wider PCS concept, it recognizes that the state is the primary guarantor of security, but also acknowledges that in some contexts it lacks the capacity to fulfill that role, and in others has become predatory and corrupt to such an extent that it is perceived as a threat to the people. The effectiveness of Latin American citizen security measures to reign in "the more violent instincts of states" and advance human rights and civil liberties is one of the reasons why the concept has gained in popularity, both among domestic stakeholders and external donors.[50]

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A key element of the citizen security formula is the empowerment of local actors to engage and demand accountability from their government and security institutions. As Robert Muggah and John de Boer explain, "at heart, citizen security is mediated by the state but guided and implemented with active public involvement."[51] If implemented effectively it will strengthen democratic civic control of the security system, a core element of SSR, and bolster the prevailing social contract. Citizen security initiatives have sparked vibrant debate on other innovative measures to address organized crime, particularly surrounding the drug trade, including decriminalization and harm reduction strategies. The common experience with citizen security has also spurred, with support from external donors and civil society groups, regional dialogue on best practices.

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URBAN AND RURAL SECURITY

Urban and rural security programs adapt the PCS concept to the specific contexts of urban and rural environments. Considering the continued trend of urbanization globally—with 4.1 billion of the world's population currently residing in cities—a number expected to rise to 7 billion by 2050, accounting for two thirds of the global population—the need to tailor development and security programming to meet specific urban challenges is clear. The way cities are planned, populations distributed, and urban services provided has a decisive influence on security patterns and human welfare. As Scott

A. Bollens states, "urban policy interventions that stabilize and democratize the urban environment can enhance personal security from crime and violence and increase political security protective of human rights."[52] In addition to advancing policing and rule of law initiatives specific to urban conditions, urban security programs "utilize planning, spatial, and design interventions…to pursue human security."[53]

Establishing security and the rule of law in a rural setting demands a different type of intervention than an urban one. For example, in Colombia, rural areas were the epicenter of the country's conflict with the FARC guerilla movement and continue to be a locus of activity and control by drug-trafficking cartels and armed groups. In some parts of rural Colombia, a key element of security programming is removing landmines that will reduce injuries and fatalities and increase agricultural productivity to facilitate economic growth.[54] Efforts to combat the drug trade and organized crime have involved programs to provide alternative crops and livelihoods for farmers, with mixed success. Moreover, police and other public security actors have unique operational needs considering the terrain, population density and nature of the security threat. To address these issues, the 2016 peace agreement established 16 Territorially Focused Development Programmes (PDETs in Spanish) as a principal mechanism to address drivers of poverty and insecurity in rural areas. The PDETs represent action plans for rural development that are developed through inclusive and participatory processes in each jurisdiction. The implementation of the action plan is then overseen by an overarching Territorial Renewal Agency over a 10-year period.[55] Surveys have shown that residents of the PDETs strongly support the peace agreement, even though they view implementation as slow or non-existent. Levels of interpersonal and institutional trust are also still worryingly low, and in the 2021 survey wave, 38.5 % of respondents report that the conflict persists in their communities.[56] As the Colombian case demonstrates, the rural security lens has the potential to calibrate the PCS approach to address the unique needs and demands of rural communities. However, government commitment to implement the action plans is crucial.

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◉ Complementary Concepts

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Respect for human rights and the rule of law is an essential cross-cutting characteristic of PCS and its various outgrowths. In fact, the concept is guided by a doctrine of human rights protection and promotion called the human rights-based approach (HRBA). According to the HRBA, "human rights principles (universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability)" must guide "development cooperation, and focus on developing the capacities of both 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations, and 'rights-holders' to claim their rights."[57] The UN and a number of key bilateral donor stakeholders, such as Canada and Sweden, have endorsed the HRBA.[58] Every stage of security programming should be influenced by HRBA principles from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. The HRBA has also been useful for assisting security institutions to abide by key human rights principles when performing their functions. In particular, it helps ensure that law enforcement is conducted impartially and in the public interest, and that security forces prioritize consultation and transparency with the communities they serve. This reinforces the important notion that security forces must be accountable to people and communities in order to be legitimate and representative. The HRBA promotes the inclusion of communities in operational planning and debriefing so that security forces can learn to better protect the rights of communities and address their concerns. If members of the public trust security institutions, they will be less likely to oppose interventions by law enforcement officials and they will tend to be more cooperative, which invariably leads to more effective law enforcement.[59] In PCS programming and all its sub-concepts human rights and the HRBA is mainstreamed. This is certainly the case with the SDG-16+ Roadmap which places "a gender and rights perspective at the heart of efforts to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties."[60]

Respect for human rights and the rule of law is an essential cross-cutting characteristic of PCS.

The HRBA promotes the inclusion of communities in operational planning and debriefing so that security forces can learn to better protect the rights of communities and address their concerns.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACH

People experience insecurity and injustice differently, and access security and justice services differently, based on their gender, due to global, systemic gender inequality. The UN Security Council's landmark 2000 resolution on women, peace and security (S/RES/1325) recognized the link between gender inequality and peace and security, and identified the urgent need to incorporate a "gender perspective" to peace and security issues.[61] Today, the Security Council has adopted ten resolutions on women, peace and security (WPS)[62] which comprise the WPS agenda, five of which include specific references to SSR.[63] In addition to the WPS resolutions, Security Council resolution 2151 (2014) on SSR emphasizes the importance of women's equal and effective participation and involvement in SSR processes, of including more women in the security sector, and of vetting processes to exclude perpetrators of sexual violence.[64]

Despite this guidance and the framework for action, security and justice programming in many contexts continues to be implemented with a one-size fits all approach, characteristically overlooking the specific needs of women and girls, and without consideration for how to ensure their meaningful participation. The failure to address the exclusion of women and girls and tackle gender-based violence is frequently a driver of insecurity.[65] At a 2019 conference on SDG-16 organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the Government of Italy it was recognized that "just, peaceful and inclusive societies can't be achieved if violence against children and women isn't tackled through a multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach."[66]

In PCS programming a gender-responsive approach should be applied throughout the program cycle. This would include gender-sensitive analysis to help design and guide programming at its outset, steps to improve access for women to core security and justice services, policies to tackle gender-based violence, and meaningful efforts to increase the participation of women "in security and justice decision-making at all levels."[67] The bottom line is that security programming can only be people-centered if it provides a voice and representation to all segments of society. Conversely, good security sector governance is essential to the full implementation of the WPS agenda, including protecting women and girls from sexual and

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In PCS programming a gender-responsive approach should be applied throughout the program cycle.

gender-based violence and achieving women's full and equal participation in security and justice institutions and decision-making processes.[68]

YOUTH-SENSITIVE APPROACH

Another group in society that is often overlooked and excluded in the design and operationalization of security programming is youth. The approach taken to youth has often been dictated by age- and gender-based stereotypes, with young men framed as perpetrators of violence and young women as victims. Youth were typically excluded from consultations over the design of security and justice programming. United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security (YPS) passed on 9 December 2015, gave new impetus for efforts to engage youth in the UN's peace and security work. It "marked a fundamental shift in acknowledging the positive role young women and young men play in the maintenance of peace and security, and the importance of enabling their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels."[69] The resolution led to the release of a United Nations Youth Strategy[70] in 2018 and the 2020 publication of a Handbook on Youth Peace and Security, which offered practical guidance on how to apply a youth based approach to security programming. When you consider that one quarter of the young people in the world live in a setting affected by conflict or organized violence, and that those same young people are more vulnerable to the long-term psychosocial effects of conflict, the importance of this shift becomes abundantly clear.[71]

There is greater recognition today that investing in youth can have a multiplier effect for security and justice programming. It offers that programming a bridge to future generations, investing change processes with creativity, vitality, and long-term coherence. It is for this reason that the 2030 Agenda regards young people as "key agents of change" with 20 of its targets across 6 SDGs specifically targeting youth.[72] As with gender, the key to integrating youth in PCS initiatives is the adoption of a youth sensitive lens to analyze conflict settings and develop coherent programming.[73]

Many of the concepts described in this section overlap significantly and are often used interchangeably in the field. Community, citizen, urban and rural

As with gender, the key to integrating youth in PCS initiatives is the adoption of a youth sensitive lens to analyze conflict settings and develop coherent programming.

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security represent subsidiary contextualisations of the PCS framework, efforts to adapt it to different programming environments and needs. By contrast, the human rights, gender and youth-based approaches run through all the concepts, acting as a lens through which all PCS activity should be designed, planned, implemented, and assessed.

The more pragmatic and definable character of the PCS approach, as compared to human security, is one of its strengths. By bringing the state back into the process and narrowing the scope and breadth of activity, PCS is both less contentious and more realistic. Instead of seeking to wholly reimagine the social contract in countries around the world, PCS interventions seek to rebalance and strengthen social contracts between people and states. Although more pragmatic, PCS programs have nonetheless had a mixed record of implementation and face potent challenges in the years ahead. The next section will highlight and explain a selection of those challenges.

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Implementing a People-Centered Approach to Security

Local Ownership

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Balancing a Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach

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Implementing a People-Centered Approach to Security

Great progress has been made to firmly embed the PCS approach in the policy and doctrine of the UN and a variety of bilateral and multilateral donors. It is a cornerstone of the 2030 agenda, guiding the implementation of SDG-16+. However, the progress made in conceptual development has not been matched in implementation where the great promise of the concept remains largely unfulfilled. While there have been some implementation success stories, they tend to be ad hoc projects rather than systemic gains in particular countries and regions. This section will explore five challenges to PCS implementation: encouraging local ownership; balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches; managing hybridity; fostering inclusion; and advancing conflict prevention. Each area is integral to the PCS approach and have presented problems for implementation.

Local Ownership

Local ownership is essential for a people-centered approach.[74] First introduced in a 1995 OECD DAC report, the ownership concept "reflects a desire on the part of external actors to avoid undermining pre-existing local processes that may be the most effective response to local political questions."[75] Timothy Donais defines it as "the extent to which local actors… exercise control or influence over the initiation, design and implementation of reform processes."[76] For security and development programming to be people-centered it must be shaped and driven by a representative set of local actors inside and outside the state. Speaking specifically about the application of SSR processes, a 2010 OECD DAC report explained that "evidence across a range of different contexts suggests that a home-grown SSR process, no matter how imperfect or slow, will be more useful than

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an imposed process."[77] Most UN programs recognize the vital importance of local ownership. A report of the United Nations Development Group on capacity development asserts clearly that "the aim of capacity development support provided by the UN is to maximize effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and country ownership of development by ensuring that country level stakeholders can effectively, efficiently, resiliently and self-sufficiently manage and deliver intended products and services to their target groups."[78]

Despite the strong intentions to empower local ownership in the donor community, it has proven elusive in many contexts, with donor-driven programs persisting. Efforts to achieve a critical mass of local ownership have been encumbered by several factors including flawed methods to mobilize and measure ownership and the difficulty of ascertaining the legitimacy of prospective local owners. Eirin Mobekk shows how, "consultation and participation are not local ownership, although they can be part of the process. Nor is 'buy-in' local ownership; it is an external solution to an internal problem where externals seek to convince locals it is the right one for them."[79] Youseff Mahmoud, a member of the HIPPO panel, acknowledges in a 2019 essay that the UN's traditional efforts at building local ownership is problematic. He argues, if the UN listened with more "intent" to locals it would "come to the inescapable realization that building peace is what the local people do, not what outsiders do."[80]

Mahmoud also points out that "it is not easy to identify, outside elite circles, civil society representatives who genuinely speak on behalf of local people."[81] As a result, external actors often cultivate a narrow stratum of like-minded regime elites, often Western-educated technocrats, whose constituency and legitimacy in wider society is limited. This group also tends to be overwhelmingly male, reinforcing rather than transforming gender inequalities in programming outcomes. Finding and engaging legitimate local owners, even if they espouse views or positions antithetical to external stakeholders, demands a high level of local knowledge, political will and time, all of which are characteristically in short supply in countries undergoing political, economic and security transitions.

Balancing a Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach

What sets the PCS concept apart from both the human security agenda and more conventional state-centric security programing is that it seeks to balance the goal of strengthening state institutions and legal frameworks with the imperative of building a security and justice system that meets the needs of the population and gives them entry points for participation. Rather than contradictory it views these two objectives as mutually reinforcing and symbiotically connected. However, achieving this level of complementarity requires striking a tenuous balance between the twin objectives. A 2021 UNDP summary of an expert dialogue on PCS recognizes that "the complementarity between the top-down and bottom-up approaches finds its limitation often at the programmatic level, specifically in connecting the state-centric development model to the community development model".[82] For external actors to contribute to an environment conducive for such a difficult balance it must make progress in three interrelated areas: the facilitation of dialogue between the state and a broadly representative group of civil society actors; the development of a reservoir of local knowledge to facilitate contextualized programming; and the deployment of an effective outreach campaign for the general population.

What sets the PCS concept apart from both the human security agenda and more conventional state-centric security programing is that it seeks to balance the goal of strengthening state institutions.

BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE

For a peace and security program to be people-centered it must reflect local perceptions of threat and be built on endogenous capacities of governance, conflict-resolution and social resilience while recognizing that local perceptions are manifold and complex. While general best practices and lessons learned can be seized upon in the design of PCS programs, each geographic case will be unique. As a 2008 report of the UN Secretary General on SSR claims, "states and societies define and pursue security according to their particular contexts, histories, cultures and needs. No single model of a security sector exists."[83] Often in conflict-affected and fragile state contexts the state is also not the main provider of security and justice for most people. For example, the OECD has estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa more than 80 per cent of justice and security services are provided by non-state actors.[84]

Developing an understanding of the local context, Mahmoud says, requires a "capacity for rigorous analysis of local realities" and an understanding of the multiplicities of these realities that is often lacking in UN missions.[85] He goes on to acknowledge that too often "in the absence of such analyses, missions tend to resort to ad-hoc programmatic interventions that are not well thought-out or that unwittingly may do more harm than good."[86] This characteristically takes the form of the application of programmatic templates, with small variations, transplanted from one country to the next. This cookie cutter approach is anathema to the people-centered vision.

One reason why knowledge gaps exist is the tendency of the UN and other external stakeholders to favor thematic and technical expertise in their programs—in areas like disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, civil society promotion and police reform—over local knowledge—local history, culture, and languages. Missions in the security and development sphere should include geographic experts fluent in local languages, customs, and norms, preferably with some knowledge of local historical, socio-economic, and political circumstances. Without such a knowledge base to interpret the local context, Mahmoud claims, external stakeholders "tend to look at complex local problems through the lens of their expertise with supply-driven solutions at the ready."[87] The UN has developed guidance materials to avoid such tendencies, but, like other security and development stakeholders, have yet to fully arrest the problem.

Even when suitably qualified local staff are present in the field, the risk averse nature of many contemporary international agencies in insecure field settings, militates against representative data collection, with staff often confined to fortified compounds in major urban centers. And it isn't just the type of personnel that missions have on hand that matters, but the type of knowledge they collect. Assessing local perceptions to inform programming requires specific tools, like perception surveys and focus groups, as well as the capacity to capture differing perceptions disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, and other forms of identity. This must also all be conducted and analyzed through a gender-, youth- and conflict sensitive analysis lens.[88] In many cases such critical data collection and analysis tools are not employed—whether because of funding shortfalls, capacity limitations, time constraints or other factors—with the UN and other external stakeholders often relying on secondhand reporting and interactions with elite actors to

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assess public perceptions. The focus of the SDG-16+ agenda on increasing "investment in the knowledge, data, and evidence that is needed to inform decision making" reflects the gaps in existing data collection capacities and procedures that have marred programming.[89] The formation of the SDG-16 Alliance, whose mandate includes drawing together "data from all parts government, civil society and private sector" to assess progress in implementing SDG-16 is an encouraging development that could lead to critical improvements in data collection down the chain to the field level.[90] Equipped with improved data, practitioners will be able to better tailor programming to local needs and measure progress in a more precise and nuanced manner.

FACILITATING DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

One of the key roles of external actors in employing a PCS approach is to facilitate effective community-level dialogue and cooperation between state bodies and civil society actors. It is about bridging the divide between the state and society, fostering a collaborative approach that can form the foundation for a reinvigorated social contract. A 2021 Pathfinders report rightly asserts that in the aftermath of conflict "the 'bond' between states and people needs to be rebuilt." This requires "dialogue between organized parties, discussing and negotiating concrete deliverables".[91] UNDP has pioneered a number of effective ways to support this overarching goal.

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For instance, a 2019-20 UNDP rule of law project on *Enhanced Security, Safety and Protection at the Local Level in Yemen* established public consultations between state security actors and community representatives in eight districts of the country.[92] Those consultations significantly improved "police willingness to respond to community needs" and empowered community members to come together to address shared problems.[93] While the project was not large in scale, it successfully identified and took action to address locally-identified security concerns through locally-owned processes of change. The project built social cohesion and served as a conduit for cooperation between the state and communities.

In the east of Ukraine the UNDP sought to mobilize communities and foster cooperation with the state through the establishment of Community Security Working Groups (CSWGs) focused "on establishing cross-sectoral partnerships and bringing together as many stakeholders as possible in order to work together to address community security issues."[94]

These groups were broadly inclusive, with representation from a range of social groups within the community; local state security bodies; local governing authorities; NGOs; staff from critical social services such as health and education; influential community leaders; and donors.[95] The CSWGs served as an invaluable interactive dialogue platform for the authorities, community members and security providers, resulting in over 130 local initiatives to improve community security, social cohesion, inclusion and access to justice with support from a small grants fund.[96] As with the program in Yemen, the UN and its partners sought to bridge the gap between the state and communities in Ukraine, combining a bottom-up and top-down approach.[97] The practice of establishing deliberative bodies at the community level, bringing together a diverse group of state and civil society actors, has proven to be an effective mechanism to promote mutual trust and more healthy state-civil society relations. While the exact form such bodies take will vary based on context, this approach should be further developed and established as a core element of PCS interventions.

LOCAL OUTREACH

Implementing a PCS approach requires effective awareness raising and outreach capacity. The SDG-16+ Roadmap says that "professionals with skills in advocacy, communications, and network building are needed to guide the movement for peaceful, just and inclusive societies."[98] Advancements in communications technology marked by the proliferation of social media usage and smart phone ownership only increases the importance of having an effective local communication strategy. A 2016 UN Report affirmed that "effective mission-wide communication strategies can enable peacekeeping operations to build trust with local communities, manage expectations… and improve awareness of the work and contributions of UN personnel in

Implementing a PCS approach requires effective awareness raising and outreach capacity.

complex and challenging environments."[99] Such communication strategies must employ mediums that enable engagement with a wide cross-section of society, not just elite constituencies. More inclusive local outreach invariably fosters more durable and locally legitimate programming.

Progress made in facilitating dialogue between state and civil society actors can only be consolidated if it is transmitted and explained in an effective way to the wider population. Donors can play a critical role in establishing and maintaining this transmission line. It is the key to legitimatizing the renewed social contract. "Effective advocacy and communications" as the SDG-16+ Roadmap explains, will "strengthen the norms and values that underpin peace, justice and inclusion."[100]

Managing Hybridity

How to effectively engage non-state and hybrid actors and structures in security programming, so crucial to implementing a genuinely people-centered approach, is a question that continues to challenge policy-makers and practitioners. Bruce Baker and Eric Scheye show how there is no "clean demarcation between state and non-state justice and security" in many fragile and conflict-affected countries. Rather "a continuum of methods of resolving disputes and delivering security" tend to exist in such settings.[101] Contrary to notions of a blank slate in transition countries, scores of non-state norms, structures, and actors—whether community, tribal, kinship, sectarian, or commercial in character—provide security and justice services. Indeed, "security and justice, as it is experienced" in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, "is not just diverse or private, it is a complex pattern of alternative and overlapping security and justice agencies, which can be described from the public perspective as multi-choice."[102] For instance, Bruce Baker identifies eleven types of police organizations other than state police commonly providing local security in Africa: informal anti-crime groups, religious police, ethnic/clan militias, political party militias, civil defense forces, informal commercial security groups, formal commercial security groups, state-approved civil guarding, local government security structures, customary policing and courts, and restorative justice committees.[103]

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The appeal of non-state mechanisms to populations stems from their "physical, linguistic and cultural accessibility; legitimacy; efficacy; timeliness of decisions; low transactional costs; support for restitution and restorative justice rather than punishment and incarceration; and degree of participation afforded to disputants."[104] Conversely, state structures in fragile and conflict-affected countries can be ineffective, corrupt and even predatory. As Roger Mac Ginty argues, "many customary dispute resolution techniques are participatory and operate at precisely the community and local levels that top-down peace-making may fail to reach."[105] Moreover, these "methods hold the potential to achieve a grass-roots legitimacy that may be lacking from more technocratic…forms of dispute resolution that form the mainstay of Western-funded and designed peace-support programmes and projects."[106] Not only are non-state structures capable of providing basic public goods, but they often emerge as a reaction to the state's inability to do so.[107] They can serve as a counterweight to perceived state repression and predation, and fill governance gaps.

Engaging non-state actors and structures is not a panacea for insecurity and instability in fragile and conflict-affected countries. In fact, it can present a number of distinct problems around issues like human rights, accountability, gender inequality, minority discrimination and corruption. Indeed, "the type of security provided by localized, informal security systems is often based on discriminatory practices that favour armed groups, local elites and patriarchal systems of rule."[108] However, it is important to remember that these problems are not exclusive to the non-state sphere; rather they are common facets of conflict-affected and developmental states. There is an assumption that traditional non-state actors and structures, by virtue of their embedded cultural and historical role in communities, are static and unchanging. Quite to the contrary, they are constantly evolving and adapting in response to shifting cultural, political, and historical dynamics. Accordingly, thoughtful engagement with some of these actors and groups could prompt substantive changes to traditional practices that have hitherto violated human rights norms and democratic principles. Another myth is that non-state structures are irrevocably hostile to the state and innately view it as a competitor. It is not uncommon to see leaders of non-state bodies hold official positions within the state or to see state officials participate in para-legal or semi-formal security and justice mechanisms. The *World Bank's 2011 World Development Report* (WDR) admits that "a mixture of state and

nonstate, bottom-up and top-down approaches is a better underpinning for longer-term institutional transformation" in fragile and conflict-affected states than rigidly state-centric approaches.[109]

One particular role that the state can play in societies where there are complex, multi-layered security, justice, and governance structures, as Baker and Scheye propose, is as an accountability body "to monitor, license, and regulate the activities of non-state service providers."[110] Rather than strengthening the administrative and coercive power of the state directly through conventional state-building practices, external actors can "extend the scope of state control into areas where its influence is limited by means of negotiating relations of sovereignty with existing non-state providers of security."[111] By supporting hybrid, co-governance arrangements, external actors can indirectly foster an alternative type of monopoly of force, one based on a network of partnerships and compacts between state and society rather than on the hegemony of a central state.

The UN and other security stakeholders must further develop their methods and tools of engaging non-state and hybrid security actors as they represent a critical and inextricable element of the "everyday" security realities in many countries that must be acknowledged to realize the promise of the PCS approach. The WDR recognizes that "a different way of doing business is needed…to move away from simply tweaking current practices toward a fundamentally new practical set of tools to link development and security."[112] However, incentives within donor states have traditionally militated against such change, perceived as risky, alien and potentially harmful to donor interests. The embrace of a new incentive and risk calculus by external actors may be a precondition for the viability of a hybrid approach. Engaging non-state actors whose interests and worldview may diverge substantially from external interveners carries great risk for donors, but the reward—a more viable, stable, and sustainable security and justice system—justifies that risk.

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◉ Fostering Inclusion

Achieving genuine inclusion in security programming is fraught with challenges and does not guarantee success, but there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that "over the long term, more open and inclusive

states and societies tend to be more prosperous, effective and resilient."[113] As with many aspects of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding the impact of programming aimed at increasing inclusion depends to a large degree on the strength of the state. Alina Rocha Menocal shows how "all successful post-Second World War examples of long-term, inclusive development have been in countries with high levels of state capacity."[114] Accordingly, the PCS approach, which balances top-down processes to strengthen state governance with bottom-up programs to empower and secure communities, is well positioned to encourage inclusive change in conflict-affected and fragile countries.

A 2021 Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies report focusing on advancing inclusion identifies a three-part strategy to nurture inclusion through PCS programming. The first part calls for quick impact projects that deliver tangible improvements in the lives of the local population. This could include aggressive steps to reduce crime or halt abusive practices by state security forces in line with the HRBA. The goal is to provide an immediate peace dividend to the local population, thereby endowing the transition process with public legitimacy. Part two calls for activities to build solidarity through activities such as truth telling processes, community policing initiatives, and justice reform. The objective here is to build trust between the state and community, achieved through transparency about past crimes and establishing new accountability frameworks to guarantee that all people will be treated equally under the law. The final part calls for the establishment of structures to guard against abuses of state power, most importantly corruption and elite capture of state authority. Corruption and state capture represent a "crucial obstacle to building peaceful, justice, and inclusive societies…" fueling "grievances, weakening the legitimacy of institutions and eroding the social contract between people and their leaders."[115] One element of this guardrail against corruption and abuses of authority is carving out civic space for public protest and the expression of grievances, fostering a situation where the state views civil society not as a threat but rather a vital source of external accountability. The Pathfinders report rightly emphasizes that "the track record of countries that have successfully reduced inequality and exclusion shows that government reformers need countervailing pressure from civil society to sustain reforms."[116] These activities will consolidate trust between state and society, cementing a new social contract.

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The objective here is to build trust between the state and community.

The rapid growth in global inequality since the 1980s coupled with "increased capture of policymaking by the wealthy"[117] has contributed to a fraying of social contracts in many states around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened the crisis, further exposing the widening gulf between the global wealthy elite and the rest. These economic inequities frequently overlap with and accentuate divisions and institutionalized discrimination along ethnic, racial, religious and gender lines. Such trends of exclusion and inequality in the international system cannot be solved from the top down. Achieving a critical balance between bottom-up community-focused activities and top-down state-focused initiatives "will increase trust, both between citizens and the state, but also horizontally between identity groups…"[118] It is a key to unlocking sustainable peace and development.

Advancing Conflict Prevention

Target 16.1 of the SDGs calls for a significant reduction of "all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere". The most efficient and cost-effective way to achieve this objective is through the prevention of violence before it breaks out rather than the norm today of containing existing violence and conflict. Despite this seemingly straightforward logic and calls by UN Secretary General António Guterres to take violence prevention more seriously[119], UN member states have not pushed hard for a more comprehensive prevention agenda. A 2021 Pathfinders report on conflict prevention sought to quantify the potential impact of the rollout of a meaningful prevention agenda. It found that even a modes "25% increase in effectiveness of conflict prevention would result in 10 more countries at peace by 2030, 109,000 fewer fatalities over the next decade and savings of over $3.1 trillion."[120]

A major challenge to the prevention agenda within the UN system, as Céline Monnier details, is that UN prevention efforts and capacities are siloed and fragmented, divided into three separate tranches: armed conflict, violent crime, and violent extremism.[121] A single unified prevention agenda is needed to generate greater coherence, leverage scarce resources, and build broader political momentum. At the country level, an integrated prevention agenda would engage "multiple stakeholders—across the government,

A single unified prevention agenda is needed to generate greater coherence, leverage scarce resources, and build broader political momentum.

civil society, the UN, private sector, and so on—at all levels in multisector, multiagency, and integrated responses."[122] It aligns well with the inclusive PCS agenda described earlier in this section, combining top-down and bottom-up programming. It is at the local level that nascent risk factors for violence can be recognized and reservoirs of resilience reinforced. The SDG-16+ provides new impetus for the UN to reinvigorate the prevention agenda, treating it with the same urgency and importance as traditional practices of peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

Addressing the five challenges mentioned in this section will help to narrow the existing gap between the policy of PCS enshrined in grand strategies like the SDG-16+ and the reality of implementation on the ground. While program mandates and strategies in the field often call for elements of a PCS approach they characteristically do not translate into concrete action on the ground. The reflex of many external stakeholders in such settings is to employ a state-centric approach, a logic that often infiltrates and distorts security and development programming at all levels.

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Conclusion

The PCS concept is now widely accepted as a guiding principle of UN peace and security programing and a foundational concept for the SDG-16+ agenda. However, much work has yet to be done on refining programmatic tools to apply the approach more effectively in the field. Recent global trends, such as the worsening climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a steady rise in global inequality, has made the application of the people-centered approach both more relevant and complicated than ever. It remains the best policy framework the international community has to achieve the laudable goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely "peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels, and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions."[123] Decades of experience has shown that rigidly state-centric security assistance will not deliver these development and security gains, particularly to vulnerable and marginalized populations. This is why the human security agenda emerged. However, the perception that the human security concept was overly ambitious and undercut the principle of state sovereignty provoked a backlash within the international system and derailed efforts to achieve meaningful change for people. The PCS concept was a corrective to this problem. It recognizes the reality that the state is a key agent of change in conflict-affected and fragile states and must be brought into the PCS framework for it to succeed.

This paper has shown that despite the sweeping nature of the PCS concept, it has a distinct meaning and has evolved subsidary and complementary forms to guide application in different contexts. Achieving its promise requires the striking of a careful balance between bottom up and top-down processes of engagement, between efforts to strengthen the state

and activities to empower communities. The role of external actors is not to drive change in partner countries, as has so often been its inclination, but to facilitate and support this tenuous balance through the nurturing of dialogue and the funding of key initiatives that spring from it. Experience in difficult conflict-affected settings like Yemen and Ukraine shows that this tenuous balance can be achieved with thoughtful interventions. The record of the PCS approach, however, remains decidedly mixed. In most cases where setbacks occurred and countries slipped back into violence, programming veered away from people-centeredness and reverted to more conventional state-centric security logic. When conditions in conflict-affected countries become difficult the strategies of external actors have tended to slide toward expediency rather than double down on core principles. There is a need to develop new mechanisms of resilience to short-circuit this all too typical response of external actors.

The current turbulence in the international system has, as de Coning points out, "introduced a period of flux during which significant innovation and experimentation…is possible."[124] Through platforms such as the SDG-16+, new lessons learned and best practices for PCS can be developed and shared.[125] The opportunities for learning exchanges and cooperation are manifold. It is not a time to return to the old ways of state-centrism but to strengthen and refine the people-centered approach.

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