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Civil Affairs and Local Conflict Management in Peace Operations

**Practical Challenges
and Tools for the Field**

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Executive Summary

The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations is only the most recent example of growing political recognition of conflict prevention and the protection of civilians, in particular by non-military means. Support to local conflict management is key to the “field-focused and people-centered” approach identified by the panel as being critical to making peacekeeping more effective. By engaging with communities at the local level, bringing conflict stakeholders together or running early warning mechanisms, civil affairs teams work at the forefront of the effort to prevent the escalation of violence.

Since the early 2000s, most multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions have featured a sizable civil affairs component. For the 2015–16 period, almost 1,000 Civil Affairs Officers and several hundred Community Liaison Assistants are expected to be deployed for 12 missions worldwide. Civil affairs teams perform various tasks: building and maintaining relationships with local interlocutors, maintaining early warning networks, facilitating conflict resolution at a local level, supporting state authority in conflict management tasks, feeding knowledge about local conflict dynamics into the mission, coordinating with national and international NGOs, and surveying local perceptions of the security situation.

This toolkit focuses on support to local conflict management. It lays out the practical challenges faced by civil affairs teams in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the DR Congo (MONUSCO) in their daily work on local conflicts that might be familiar to the civil affairs staff of other UN missions. In the dozens of conversations, roundtables and workshops with UNMISS and MONUSCO civil affairs staff conducted for this toolkit, the challenges and good practices identified are mostly related to the management and organization of work, although some do address key issues of support to conflict management itself. The challenges broached address a wide range of actors: some lie largely within the responsibility of civil affairs leaders, while some require the active collaboration of other mission

components or concern issues of working with UN and NGO partners, host country authorities or other local stakeholders.

Within civil affairs, most of the wisdom collected from experienced colleagues in the field had a common thrust: a call to be more strategic. This means making time for good conflict analysis, using those insights to consciously set priorities at the expense of less important issues and employing the political instruments of civil affairs in service of these top priorities, should they be the facilitation of access to logistical resources, the political engagement of local leaders or major undertakings such as trainings or peace conferences. This is easier said than done. Constant external demands and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures leave little time to think or plan. But we hope that the examples collected from colleagues in the field provide some ideas for finding that time (i.e., by not doing certain other things) and using it productively.

Civil affairs is not an island. Many of its key functions are effective only in close collaboration with other parts of the mission. This cuts both ways: better conflict prevention and protection of civilians require greater support to local conflict management, which entails structural adjustments in a mission that enable a civil affairs team to make the most out of its unique capabilities and resources. Two of these adjustments are the establishment of budgets for “petty cash” and the prioritization of logistical resources for support to local conflict management. In some missions, a revision of security protocols as part of the larger UNDSS shift from risk avoidance to risk management might be necessary, even if it does not materialize overnight. In turn, if missions want to be better attuned to local political dynamics, they must invest in on-the-ground knowledge (e.g., by hiring Community Liaison Assistants, which is currently underway in a number of missions beyond MONUSCO) and feed the wealth of local analysis produced by the civil affairs community into mission-wide information channels and decision-making processes.

In working with the UN family and NGOs, both UNMISS and MONUSCO provide several models of coordination with partners on local conflict management. Form should follow function: the precise shape of a forum or working group should be determined more by the actors and context than by any particular model. Being more strategic, however, may require missions to make greater investments into filling a part of

the “peacebuilding gap” that civil affairs alone cannot make up for. As shown by the most recent efforts of MONUSCO’s Stabilization Support Unit, a mission may be able to translate its political convening power in the international community into channeling donor funding to priority areas, e.g., support to local conflict management by NGOs or agencies recognized for high-quality work at the local level.

“Local conflict” is rarely just local. The key challenges of preventing the escalation of violence have to do with calibrating engagement with those who happen to represent the state – some of whom may have a stake in the conflict themselves – and with hidden “spoilers,” who deny their role as stakeholders and operate beyond the reach of local actors. Far from providing simple solutions to these complex challenges, the stories told by field staff ultimately serve to underline the critical role of good analysis and informed strategic choices. There are always choices to be made in how to engage with different local actors and how to prioritize a mission’s limited resources.

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Organization of this Toolkit

This toolkit identifies challenges and good practices that do not exclusively relate to the work of civil affairs teams. Some concern both civil affairs and the wider UN mission; others concern the wider peacebuilding community, the host state or other external actors. This graphic provides an overview of the challenges and good practices addressed in this toolkit and the actors that have to be involved in tackling them.



Introduction: Civil Affairs Teams and Local Conflict Management

Civil affairs teams are a key element of peace operations. Since the early 2000s, most multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions have featured a sizable civil affairs component. The role of civil affairs has become more important over the past ten years in particular, during which the UN Security Council has increasingly tasked UN peacekeeping missions with protecting civilians, peacebuilding and strengthening state authorities. For the 2015–16 period, almost 1,000 Civil Affairs Officers and several hundred Community Liaison Assistants are expected to be deployed for 12 missions worldwide. Civil affairs teams perform various tasks: building and maintaining relationships with local interlocutors, maintaining early warning networks, facilitating conflict resolution at a local level, supporting state authority in conflict management tasks, feeding knowledge about local conflict dynamics into the mission, coordinating with national and international NGOs, and surveying local perceptions of the security situation.

This toolkit focuses on one aspect of civil affairs work: support to local conflict management. There are many competing usages of the term “conflict management.” This toolkit uses it as an umbrella term for prevention, mitigation or resolution conducted in a manner that recognizes the constant presence of social and political conflict in the area where a peace operation has been deployed. A mission’s support to local actors in managing this conflict aims to prevent the escalation of violence and to reduce ongoing violence, ultimately to protect civilians and create space for a political process toward peace. How ambitious UN missions can and should be in their conflict management efforts is disputed within the UN community. For

UNMISS

Since the outbreak of the South Sudanese civil war in December 2013, the Security Council refocused the mandate of UNMISS from strengthening the state to protecting civilians, monitoring human rights and facilitating humanitarian assistance. In the spring of 2015, the work of UNMISS Civil Affairs differed enormously between the different states of South Sudan, reflecting the enormous challenges posed by the active fighting taking place in about a third of the country and the more than 150,000 civilians seeking shelter at three large UN bases.

MONUSCO

In contrast, not only is MONUSCO the largest peacekeeping mission and one of the oldest in terms of large-scale civil affairs experience, but it is also operating in a much more permissive security environment. Its mandate focuses on the protection of civilians, stabilization and the restoration of state authority. All three pillars bring the mission in constant contact with local conflicts, but none of them clearly spell out and define what the mission is expected to do in support of managing these local conflicts. Given the mission's long existence and the challenges of protecting civilians from armed groups, MONUSCO has developed innovative ways to deploy civilian staff for this task. These include the Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), created by MONUSCO in 2009 as a link between the military contingents and local populations. The 193 CLAs deployed across the country today comprise a significant part of MONUSCO Civil Affairs. (The current MONUSCO budget, p. 35, gives a figure of 288 posts in its civil affairs team.)

example, some people push for the UN to take an ambitious role in conflict resolution, while others prefer the UN to take the more modest role of managing conflicts.

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations¹ recognizes conflict prevention and the protection of civilians (including by non-military means) as priority areas that UN Peace Operations must improve upon in order to ensure a more effective UN peacekeeping system. By engaging with communities at the local level, bringing conflict stakeholders together or running early warning mechanisms, civil affairs teams are constantly working to prevent the emergence of new conflicts or the escalation of longstanding ones. As a result, they are at the forefront of what the High-Level Independent Panel identified as the necessary “field-focused and people-centered” approach to peacekeeping.

The challenges and good practices collected in this toolkit emerged from a combined seven weeks of working with civil affairs teams in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the DR Congo (MONUSCO) in April, May, June and September 2015, including several small team retreats and roundtable discussions. Dozens of civil affairs colleagues in the field facilitated our trips and spoke to us at length about their work, for which we are immensely grateful. Without them, this toolkit would not have been possible.

Naturally, UNMISS and MONUSCO are not representative of all UN operations. This toolkit does not aim to present a comprehensive overview of civil affairs work in local conflict management across the UN system, nor does it reflect authoritative UN guidance. But it presents practical challenges that civil affairs teams in both UNMISS and MONUSCO face in their daily work on local conflicts that might be familiar to the civil affairs staff of other UN missions. These challenges address a wide range of actors: some lie largely within the responsibility of civil affairs leaders, while some require the active collaboration of other mission components or concern issues of working with UN and NGO partners, host country authorities or other local stakeholders.

¹ The report published by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations was published in June 2015 and is available for download here: http://www.un.org/sg/pdf/HIPPO_Report_1_June_2015.pdf.

We hope that the “practice examples” presented in this toolkit will be helpful for the work of civil affairs officers across the UN system. Some of these examples are “good” practices; others might simply be considered “reasonable.” Often, they do not provide full answers to the challenges we have identified. They show practical ways in which UNMISS or MONUSCO civil affairs units are trying to tackle a particular challenge. The paper is meant to be a useful addition to the existing, comprehensive guidance materials for civil affairs officers – most importantly, the UN DPKO/DFS Civil Affairs Handbook from March 2012.²

Civil Affairs and Conflict Management

Peace operations and their civil affairs teams are not the only actors supporting local conflict management in their host countries. There is a wide variety of actors who work on similar issues, depending on the country context. What added value can civil affairs contribute when there are UN agencies and NGOs working on the same issue? In the DRC and South Sudan, civil affairs staff and their partners identified four areas in which civil affairs can add greater value to conflict management activities than can UN agencies and local and international NGOs:

- **Political advocacy:** Civil affairs can back up their own work with political advocacy capacities and access to government authorities, which is available to a UN mission at the local, provincial and national levels.
- **Access:** Given the military capabilities and air assets of a mission and within the limits of UN security protocols, civil affairs teams can access insecure areas that other organizations cannot.
- **Logistical support:** Given these capacities, civil affairs can provide logistical and practical support to the conflict management work of other organizations.
- **Local presence:** The access and logistical capacities of civil affairs teams might have more widespread local

² To consult the Civil Affairs Handbook, see: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/civilhandbook/Civil_Affairs_Handbook.pdf.

presence than any one organization and are thus better able to quickly collect information on security incidents and to take the temperature of local conflict dynamics.

In line with these comparative advantages, it is helpful to differentiate between three different functions of civil affairs in conflict management, detailed below. These three functions are not always distinct from each other and can overlap. To think about them as distinct types, however, can help in the prioritization of civil affairs work and coordination with partners on conflict management tasks.

“Fire Brigade”

Much of the conflict management work of civil affairs teams is preventing the immediate escalation of violence by putting out “fires,” which may be immediate threats or dangerous rumors. Immediate threats are often reported to civil affairs staff by local authorities or civil society, informally or through structures such as the Community Alert Networks (CANs) that MONUSCO created and maintained primarily for the protection of civilians.

In these cases, civil affairs usually facilitates the overall mission response (which may include troop or police deployments) and contributes support to short-term crisis management conducted by or together with local authorities or NGOs. Such efforts include political engagement, mediation or advocacy towards state or customary authorities, mostly at the subnational levels. After the immediate threat is gone, civil affairs often tries to ensure sustained engagement with the conflict parties to enable a more long-term process of conflict resolution. Often, however, logistical and security challenges as well as competing priorities (e.g., the next flare-up elsewhere) make it very difficult to ensure sustainability in civil affairs engagement and to support effective conflict resolution over months and years.

In pre-independence Southern Sudan and in the early days of South Sudan, UN civil affairs was often able to defuse moments of high tension just by quickly getting key stakeholders to verify pervasive rumors and to talk face to face. In many instances, civil affairs leaders were able to leverage their trust relationships with official

and non-official authorities from all sides, as well as the mission's unique mobility (e.g., helicopters) to take elders or trusted leaders to investigate the site of a rumored massacre against their tribe that did not actually happen or turned out to be no more than a violent confrontation between a few people. When these leaders returned to their communities, they were able to report what they had seen and suppress dangerous escalatory dynamics.

“Enabler”

Another type of support to conflict management involves enabling partners outside of the mission to engage in long-term conflict resolution processes. These partners include UN agencies and NGOs. Specialized peacebuilding NGOs, local or international, are widely seen as being more effective than peacekeeping missions at supporting long-term conflict resolution if and where they are able to attract reliable funding, build a qualified team and earn the trust of stakeholders. Where they cannot work (as in South Sudan, since the outbreak of the civil war in 2013) or where donors fail to provide funding, this leads to a major gap in conflict management capacity (see below).

Where specialized peacebuilders do work, however, they can be a key partner for UN missions. In working with such partners, civil affairs focuses often – and ideally mostly – on logistics, security and the deployment of the mission's political advocacy efforts, where it has better access to relevant authorities and power brokers. Direct engagement in mediation by UN civil affairs officers is a rare exception. In the daily work of civil affairs teams, this is felt less as a long-term process than as a series of short-term requests for support by their partners. However, such contributions require regular engagement with communities and partners working on the conflicts themselves. To be effective, partners may require mission support to have some level of predictability, which is not always easy to guarantee when it comes to scarce assets like helicopters.

In Kalehe in South Kivu (DRC), the civil affairs unit has been facilitating MONUSCO's support to the work of the Life and Peace Institute and of a local NGO, called Action pour la Paix et la Concorde (APC), since 2014. APC worked on a dialogue program to resolve local conflicts over land, customary power and identity.

Some of the key actors driving the conflict did not live in Kalehe, but in Kinshasa. MONUSCO flew a team from APC to the capital to meet with these actors and include them in the dialogue process on resolving conflicts in Kalehe. MONUSCO Civil Affairs also helped APC with outreach work and access to funds for a cash-for-work roadworks project, while coordinating with the NGO on its training of local authorities.

“Provider of Last Resort”

Effective and reliable peacebuilding support by NGOs or UN partners usually depends on security, access and donor priorities. Such support has been much more common in the DRC than in South Sudan. But even in the DRC, the number of peacebuilding NGOs that are broadly recognized as effective and trusted is very small, and they are not always immune from accessibility bias (e.g., focusing on easily accessible cities and towns rather than difficult rural settings), herd behavior among donors (which leads to oversupply in some areas and undersupply in others) and a loss of trust from the parties involved.

As a result, despite the thousands of NGOs delivering aid, effective conflict resolution support remains insufficient, and many simmering conflicts remain unaddressed. In such situations, where there is nobody else to do the work and there is a major long-term risk of escalation, a mission (if mandated accordingly) may take the strategic decision of having civil affairs engage in long-term support to conflict management or conflict resolution.

In the longstanding Hema–Ngiti conflict in the Ituri province (DRC), it seems that NGOs have not been making much progress beyond the grassroots level in the last few years. Given that the conflict between the communities is escalating and that no other actor is working on tackling its dynamics at the provincial level, MONUSCO Civil Affairs is attempting to facilitate a mediation process between the parties.

Civil Affairs Components

Civil Affairs Components

Planning Strategically and Prioritizing Work

Challenge

In civil affairs, a week can go by quickly. There are meetings with local government officials to attend, traditional chiefs to meet in nearby villages and IDP representatives from temporary camps to look after. There are phone calls bringing warnings of imminent violence. There is a workplan demanding that a workshop be held in some remote town to train a more or less receptive group of community leaders in conflict management methods. These constant external demands and the administrative routines for budgetary planning, often unnecessarily cumbersome, have led some civil affairs teams to lose the element of strategy – that is, the ability to set their own goals and the allocation of their time and resources to the most pressing priorities.

Often team leaders in civil affairs components understand UN rules and regulations to be more inflexible than they actually are. Because they consider the agreed-upon annual workplans as rigid, they sometimes conduct workshops with local partners only because these workshops were part of their workplans. Unsurprisingly, activities whose timing is entirely divorced from conflict dynamics tend to have limited impact on a conflict. The lack of strategy prevents teams from focusing their limited resources on those conflicts and windows of opportunity where the risk of violence and the opportunities for impact are highest. Ideally, civil affairs should be engaged in areas where it has the biggest comparative advantage. It should focus on immediate threats in need of the mission's logistical capacities and assets (“fire brigade”), hand these off to NGOs or UN agencies if and when possible, and devote its remaining capacities to long-

term efforts tackled by no other organization (“provider of last resort”). Of course, this works only where high-quality political work by NGOs or agencies is being funded and implemented on a sustained basis – a major gap in donor attention in many places. Determining which situation requires which kind of civil affairs intervention will only be possible if the teams regularly engage in strategic planning exercises, both on their own and as part of the entire mission, with a view to supporting necessary adaptations within the mission.

Good Practice: Holding Regular Strategy Workshops to Discuss Priorities

In South Sudan, the Civil Affairs Division pulled a few members (one team leader or deputy, one additional international officer and one national officer) of three of its state teams out of the field for a one-day strategy retreat in Juba. Following in-depth consultations with the civil affairs leadership and the members of the three teams, a group of external facilitators (including the authors of this toolkit) designed and moderated the retreat. As a group, the civil affairs officers first went through a summary conflict analysis for their respective states, prioritized the state's most pressing and/or most promising conflicts, and developed realistic mid-term objectives. They then split into mixed working groups to develop strategies for reaching these objectives. The exercise in June 2015 not only led to new ideas for practical steps that could be taken, but also, more importantly, provided a space for discussing priorities and relative opportunities for impact. For example, participants of the discussion on Jonglei State identified one major conflict as having the highest priority: the political-administrative dispute about the role of the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), linked to the ethnic discord between the Dinka and Murle peoples. They also saw an opening for civil affairs engagement and considerable political will on both sides to resolve longstanding grievances. Many participants concluded that this priority required an adjusted mix of instruments and a greater share of their time and resources.

Using All Available Flexibility in Workplanning and Budgeting

Example

While peace operations are required to set up annual workplans and budgets, it is impossible to predict a year in advance the precise activities that will be needed to mitigate conflict in a fast-changing political environment. Though such detailed advance-planning is not necessary for compliance with budgetary rules, some teams in both UNMISS and MONUSCO created cumbersome procedures for planning their activities for the following fiscal year in great detail, including times and locations. As a result, these teams found themselves bound to conduct workshops even when there was little demand, while targeted activities with demonstrated need and opportunity for impact lacked resources.

Challenge

Many civil affairs teams are confronted with the following challenge: work and financial planning is not flexible enough to be adjusted throughout the year. The rules that they consider binding, however, are often actually flexible enough. The problem is that over time, unnecessarily bureaucratic routines develop, and they are accepted without question. Given the constraints of working in a conflict zone, the strategy of a civil affairs team must be capable of responding to a changing conflict environment as well as movement constraints (e.g., due to a rainy season or security restrictions). New tools such as the UMOJA³ financial system might create more flexibility, but it is first and foremost a management challenge to make sure that field-based teams are not unnecessarily constrained by routine planning tools that exceed the needs of binding budgetary rules.

³ *Umoja* means “unity” in Swahili.

Good Practice: Avoiding Unnecessarily Constraining Details in Workplan

In Lakes State (South Sudan), the civil affairs team experimented with an annual workplan and budget that purposely avoided unnecessarily constraining details. It specified the activities that were to be conducted in each time period (e.g., “workshop”), but avoided tying itself down more than a year in advance to specific locations and participants by using generic information such as “Lakes State” or “community leaders.” This allowed the team to allocate the available activities and budgets flexibly, in line with constantly changing conflict dynamics as well as changes in available funding.

Identifying Medium- and Long-Term Risks

Example

After heavy fighting between the government army and the South Sudanese rebel forces around the town of Bor (Jonglei State) in early 2014, the Ugandan army moved in. Until the fall of 2015, it protected the area from opposition attacks. The withdrawal of troops would have put the Ugandan minority in Bor at considerable risk. Because of a myriad, existing day-to-day challenges, the civil affairs team in Jonglei State, as of summer 2015, did not plan for a scenario in which the Ugandan army would withdraw (it eventually started to withdraw in October 2015).

Challenge

Civil affairs teams regularly face the challenge of being overwhelmed by their “fire brigade” tasks. This means that they do not spend enough time identifying medium- and long-term risks. Understanding such risks would enable them to adjust to new local, national or international developments that may create risks and opportunities for local conflict management. Analyzing longer-term risks is a prerequisite for knowing which

situations may need urgent attention and where the UN mission might have to play the “provider of last resort” role when there are no partners or NGOs that can address a risk situation.

Good Practice: Addressing Long-Term and High-Risk Conflict Dynamics

In the DRC’s Ituri province (formerly a district), the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups have been locked in a conflict about land and identity for decades. Fighting between these two groups escalated into the Ituri conflict between 1999 and 2003. Since then, several peace agreements have been made and broken. For the past few years, the conflict has persisted at a lower level of violence, but the potential for largescale armed conflict remains. Following several attempts, the civil affairs team in Ituri decided to address the Hema–Lendu conflict again in mid-2015 by supporting a longer-term process of conflict mediation. In collaboration with notables of both communities and provincial authorities, a roadmap for political negotiations was drafted, and the team started a lengthy process of meeting with officials from both sides to get them on board the mediation effort. In its analysis, it combined the information contained in complaints made by members of both communities that were sent to the head of office at MONUSCO, with its knowledge of the long history of civil war between the two groups and the lack of substantial initiatives aimed at addressing the risks of renewed violence. Based on this analysis, the team decided to engage. In some instances, even one-day retreats may provide the space for joint analysis and contingency planning such as in Ituri, but each team needs to develop its own mechanisms to ensure that longer-term risk analysis is integrated into its work.

Supporting and Empowering National Staff

Challenge

Skilled, politically astute, well-connected and loyal National Professional Officers (NPOs) play a key role in making a UN civil

affairs team effective at supporting local conflict management. The importance of national staff is often not reflected in the practice of decision-making, even though UN staff rules assign authority among professional staff strictly by grade, regardless of national/international status. In some situations, it is important that international staff take the lead in protecting national colleagues from political and social reprisals if the UN needs to take unpopular decisions. But this decision-making dynamic can lead to implicit hierarchies between national and international employees. This can create a stratified culture within teams, to the extent that staff members are not treated or employed in ways that are most productive for the mission, solely due to their status as national officers.

Good Practice: Allocating Tasks Equitably

In some civil affairs teams, the allocation of tasks and responsibilities crosses the formal lines of status between national and international officers. For example, a talented national officer was trained and then trusted to manage the unit’s budget, while mundane tasks, like driving, were more equitably shared among the staff. Access to regular staff meetings in accordance with rank and equal allocation of training and professional development opportunities boost the morale, loyalty and effectiveness of all staff members.

Making Capacity Building More Relevant and Effective

Example

Partly due to access and security restrictions, one of the main activities of civil affairs in Jonglei State (South Sudan) is workshops for local authorities and community leaders on conflict management techniques. Lacking detailed guidance and training on the content and methodology of such workshops, civil affairs officers have developed these courses themselves,

based solely on their past personal experience with conflict management. While these workshops are always successful in the sense of drawing reasonably broad participation and overwhelmingly positive participant answers to evaluation questions, participants tend to describe them exclusively as advocacy events (e.g., “it was important for the UN to disseminate the message of peace”) rather than as genuine opportunities to learn.

Challenge

Having considerable experience with all kinds of workshops delivered by international actors, not to mention with their own rich traditions of conflict management, local officials and community leaders have raised their expectations for genuinely useful training or workshops on these issues. In interviews and group discussions conducted for this toolkit, civil affairs officers identified the lack of manuals and didactical seminars (“train the trainer”) as major obstacles to developing more-effective workshops on conflict analysis, management and transformation techniques. Even though missions usually have training budgets, staff feel in many cases that training opportunities are insufficient, or that the training does not always meet their needs. More broadly, according to experienced civil affairs staff in both missions, capacity building activities on conflict management for local community leaders are most successful if they are part of a political engagement strategy to open opportunities for dialogue that require timely follow-up and other related activities. Conversely, they tend to be less useful if implemented as ends in themselves (see Planning Strategically and Prioritizing Work).

Good Practice: Investing in Training of Local Trainers

In the DRC, civil affairs is making a concerted effort not to conduct any trainings by itself. The teams always try to use an external, local mediator or trainer. MONUSCO supports “train the trainer” seminars for these local mediators – for example, by flying them to trainings in Kinshasa. By doing so, the mission ensures that knowledge of how to conduct such conflict mediation workshops stays with the communities. Relatedly, a lesson learned by MONUSCO Civil Affairs is to focus these trainings on people with incentives to stay in their respective communities – often the older and more-settled community leaders. There have been instances of younger community leaders using their new qualifications to apply for jobs with international aid agencies and leaving the communities in which they were supposed to mediate. Similar problems have come up with religious leaders, doctors and teachers who were redeployed elsewhere in the country by their congregation or by the ministries of health or education after their training. Therefore, teams should try to select for training those leaders who are most likely to stay in the community.

Good Practice: Investing in Capacity Building for Civil Affairs Staff

For civil affairs officers in South Sudan, as in the DRC, various types of basic and advanced training opportunities have been provided through the mission’s training budgets and the facilitation of Integrated Mission Training Centres (IMTCs). Often, however, only a handful of spots in good courses were available for the mission each year – far too few for more than 100 civil affairs officers. There is also a shortage of courses offered in French. Under these constraints, UNMISS civil affairs officers in Jonglei suggested a partial remedy: promote in-mission exchanges of best practices among and between state teams on issues of methodology, curricula and workshop design. The teams often face similar challenges with the workshops. They would like to start by exchanging the workshop materials already created and drawing upon the substantial expertise of each team.

Civil Affairs Components / The Mission

Civil Affairs Components / The Mission

Establishing a Budget Line For Petty Cash

Example

In North Kivu (DRC), MONUSCO Civil Affairs is engaged in a variety of efforts to support local communities, government officials and customary authorities in order to resolve longstanding conflicts. In many of their efforts to organize meetings or workshops with local communities on short notice, however, civil affairs teams are hampered by their lack of “petty cash” – very small sums of money, no more than a few hundred US dollars per location and month, that they can flexibly spend on transportation, food, water or phone credits. “MONUSCO is not made for this kind of budgeting,” said one staff member. The individual cited the following example: “We have budgets for helicopter flights, but when it comes to finding five dollars to pay for a local mediator’s phone credit, we cannot do it.”

Challenge

In much of the conflict management work conducted by civil affairs – be it of the short-term “fire brigade” or the longer-term “provider of last resort” nature – a key role of the UN mission is to organize meetings or involve government officials, tribal leaders or other authority figures in conflict resolution. These workshops and meetings are mostly planned and budgeted for in advance (e.g., through “outreach” funds or “specialized expenditure”). Because of the way that workplanning and budgeting in UN missions work, however, it is difficult to access

very small sums of money on a short-term basis, to be used for providing food and water at meetings, ensuring mediators have enough phone credit to call conflict parties or transporting government or other officials to workshops.

Recommendation: Getting Petty Cash

Together with mission support colleagues, the leaders of civil affairs units should ensure that civil affairs officers have access to petty cash when needed. This should be the case not only for long-planned workshops or activities, but also in “fire brigade” scenarios, where small sums of money used for transporting a government official to a meeting can be decisive to preventing conflict escalation. While related, such petty cash – like the larger funding lines used for planned activities – should not aim to compete with the (often hidden) attendance fees paid by some NGOs and UN agencies, which would only further exacerbate the “workshop economy.” To effectively engage in conflict management, however, it might be necessary to cover travel-related real costs for key authority figures on a case-by-case basis.

Effectively Sharing Analytical Knowledge About Local Conflicts

Example

In the DRC, the civil affairs teams at the provincial level drive an annual process of mapping and prioritizing local conflicts in the eastern part of the country. Together with government officials and NGO representatives, they identified 744 local conflicts in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Orientale and Katanga in the most recent mapping (2015). Of these conflicts, 215 were ranked as “high priority” according to a list of criteria, including their geographical extent, intensity, threat level, potential for escalation, duration and complexity. Such a number of conflicts is obviously far beyond the capacity of less than a dozen

MONUSCO full-time conflict management specialists. While the mapping provides the only comprehensive overview of local conflicts in the region, it does not feature much analytical depth. Perhaps as a result, the mapping data has not been used by other sections of the mission in the past, including the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), the Stabilization Unit and Political Affairs. In turn, other parts of the mission often complain about the lack of conflict analysis emerging from the civil affairs unit.

Challenge

Civil affairs teams are uniquely situated to gather local knowledge. Since they are in constant contact with local communities, they could and should make the contributions that are most crucial to the mission's understanding of the local political environment, including sources and dynamics of conflict. The knowledge that exists in civil affairs is very relevant for the rest of the mission. Sometimes, however, the data collected by civil affairs is not shared with or used by other relevant parts of the peacekeeping mission.

Good Practice: Feeding Local Knowledge into Mission-Wide Analytical Products

In UNMISS, JMAC runs a weekly predictive risk-assessment matrix: essentially, a geographically organized table that identifies and prioritizes the risks of violence against civilians. The information for this risk assessment is sourced from all parts of the mission. Local civil affairs teams, with strong support from the reporting officers at civil affairs HQ in Juba, use this JMAC-led process to synthesize their extensive knowledge about local conflicts into extremely concise analytical products (often just 1–2 paragraphs per state/province), accessible to other sections and the mission's senior management. It is a major investment for UNMISS Civil Affairs to develop these briefs (and to do so every week), but it makes an important contribution to mission-wide situational awareness and ultimately to better protection of civilians. It is a more effective mechanism than expecting other sections to consume detailed reporting about civil affairs activities themselves.

Getting and Using Local Knowledge of Civil Affairs

Example

“In mid-2010 ... in the Congolese village of Luvungi, members of a local militia called Mai Mai Tcheka reportedly gang-raped 387 civilians over the course of four days. The victims were assaulted in their homes, in the bush, and around the village. A UN peacekeeping base was located nearby, and a patrol of Indian blue helmets actually passed through the village while the rapes were taking place. The Indian soldiers, however, spoke no French or Swahili, and they had virtually no previous contact with the villagers. The local population did not trust the peacekeepers, and Congolese victims were reluctant to approach them – the Indian soldiers did not realize that atrocities were unfolding and moved on to the next village.”⁴

Challenge

There are many stories of local peacekeepers lacking local knowledge, such as the Luvungi case summarized above by anthropologist Séverine Autesserre. Collecting and sharing local knowledge about conflict dynamics and being in touch with local communities are key to both the protection of civilians and the conflict management tasks of any UN mission. In many peace operations, the actor that is most spread out throughout the country is the military. But language and operational barriers often hamper contact between the military and the local population. Civil affairs has a key role to play in collecting and sharing knowledge about the local context. Even where civilians are stationed with the military, however, good civil–military cooperation is not a given. Separate civilian and military reporting chains often lead to the loss of important information on potential or ongoing local conflicts.

⁴ See: Séverine Autesserre (2015), “Trouble in Peaceland,” *Foreign Policy*, October 6, 2015 <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/06/trouble-in-peaceland-united-nations-congo-development/>>.

Good Practice: Deploying Community Liaison Assistants

Recognizing the need for a better link between local communities and the mission, MONUSCO Civil Affairs created Community Liaison Assistants in 2010. As of 2015, more than 200 CLAs are based in around 70 military bases of MONUSCO in Eastern DRC.⁵ CLAs are national staff who usually live on the base or in the communities. They support interaction between the military, local communities and state authorities by establishing connections, acting as translators, gathering information about local conflict dynamics and running Community Alert Networks that inform MONUSCO about protection threats in the communities. They have become an invaluable resource for the mission's conflict management activities and serve as an example that other missions, including in South Sudan and Mali, are beginning to emulate. Currently, however, CLAs are very dependent on the military, including for transportation. "Ultimately, CLAs report to the military," said a civil affairs officer. They could be more effective in the DRC if they were given a transportation allowance – and if security guidelines were revised to permit them – to use motorcycles, which would enable them to move in and between communities with greater flexibility.

Good Practice: Strengthening Civilian Presence on Military Bases

In the DRC, the Ituri office of MONUSCO is experimenting with the establishment of more permanent presence of civilian UN staff on the smallest military bases. In addition to language assistants and CLAs, a few additional civilian staff will be posted to liaise with local authorities and guide the work of the CLAs. Such staff will also provide coordination with military commanders on a level of comparable seniority, thus implementing the peacekeeping principle of civilian leadership at this more-senior level, too.

5 See also: MONUSCO Civil Affairs Section – Ops East (2014), "Community Liaison Officers best practice review."

Good Practice: Adding Civilian Reporting to Military Channels

In the Ituri province (DRC), MONUSCO is improving the quality of information available to military commanders at the provincial HQ level by adding a civilian reporting channel parallel to that of the military. When Community Liaison Assistants report a threat related to local conflicts to their respective MONUSCO base commander, they simultaneously send a report to the civil affairs section of the provincial HQ in Bunia. The latter forwards this "flash report" to the head of office as well as to the commander of the Ituri Brigade (IB), where it often arrives faster and, more importantly, in greater detail than through the military reporting channel. This is particularly relevant in an area where military contingents operate, whose local commanders and staff officers often have difficulty communicating in French or English, and where some military staff sections simply lack the situational awareness to interpret fragmentary information received from deployed units and to put them into context. The complementary reporting channel through civil affairs remedies such challenges in a simple and effective way.

The Mission

The Mission

Prioritizing Conflict Management in Allocating Logistical Resources

Example

In the summer of 2015, ethnic tensions around Nyamilima in North Kivu (DRC) led to several people being killed and more than 2,000 fleeing into a church. MONUSCO Civil Affairs supported the dispatching of a group of local businessmen and community elders – the Baraza la Wazee, as they were called – to Nyamilima to help set up a local “antenna” of their group to mediate. The elders also wanted to go to other villages around Nyamilima, but did not have the resources to travel there. They asked MONUSCO for logistical support, but the military contingent in the area did not support the transport. As a result, the elders could not engage in conflict resolution efforts in these nearby communities.

Challenge

For much of the conflict management work of civil affairs teams, in particular the short-term, immediate “fire brigade” cases, access to the logistical capacities of the UN mission is critical. Civil affairs can provide key local knowledge for the entire mission. By quickly bringing quarreling parties together, it can put out fires that have the potential to create greater conflict and instability (or fuel the flames – using this powerful tool is not without risk). For this important function of civil affairs to work, however, civil affairs staff and local partners must be given priority access to the mission’s logistical capacities. As the UN moves from a “risk avoidance” to a “risk management” model in its security posture, civil affairs work in conflict management

- particularly regarding the immediate prevention of violence
- must be prioritized in order for its strategic contributions to mandate implementation.⁶ This work is key for mission activities related to stabilization and the protection of civilians. Both civil affairs and its partners in civil society should have higher priority in mission planning.

Good Practice: Using MONUSCO Air Assets to Reach Conflict Areas That No Other Organization has Access to

In some instances in which MONUSCO gave sufficient priority to logistical support to civil affairs, the mission made key contributions to addressing local conflict. In the area of Kalonge in South Kivu, for example, the murder of a customary chief and a power struggle involving an influential diaspora community in Bukavu led to an upsurge of violence and the displacement of about 150 families from the villages. The area is inaccessible by road, no international agencies or NGOs worked there, and the only local NGO that had previously supported peacebuilding efforts was not welcome because it was perceived to be closely associated with one of the parties. Only a series of engagements and workshops held by a MONUSCO civil affairs team from Bukavu, flying in via helicopter with diaspora representatives and a civil society mediator, was able to ease the situation and enable families to return to their villages. In this situation, the ability of MONUSCO Civil Affairs to use the mission’s air assets multiple times over a prolonged time period was critical to preventing further escalation of the conflict and violence.

⁶ On risk management by peacekeeping missions, see also: Sebastian von Einsiedel, “Non-Military Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations: Experiences and Lessons,” *United Nations University Centre for Policy Analysis*, Tokyo, Japan, p. 3.

Good Practice: Supporting Fact-Finding with UNMISS Assets to Dispel Dangerous Rumors

In the years prior to South Sudan's independence, UNMISS developed impressive flexibility in allowing civil affairs the use of civilian helicopters at short notice to prevent imminent violent clashes. Many cases of major violence had been started by rumors that were later proven baseless or wildly overblown. A brawl between adolescent cattle herders or a single murder would become a tale of mass killing, threatening to set off retaliatory violence by hundreds of fighters. In such instances, "within about 14 to 16 hours, the mission could launch a flight" to take trusted community leaders to the site of the presumed attack and help them establish the facts, recounted one staff member. Based on the authority of heads of office or regional coordinators to take final decisions about the security risks associated with such flights, this capability was critical to dispelling dangerous rumors or getting key community leaders into face-to-face contact to prevent a further escalation of violence.



The UN Family and Peacebuilding Community

The UN Family and Peacebuilding Community

Working and Coordinating With Partners: UN Agencies and NGOs

Example

The sheer number of national and international civil society organizations working on conflict resolution in Eastern DRC is overwhelming. All of them respond to the pressures of securing funding and demonstrating success, as do UN agencies. In Eastern DRC, this leads some communities to complain about being “over-workshopped.” For example, it is not uncommon, as one staff member of a local NGO observed, for one community to have “several organizations that create a conflict resolution committee with the exact same people, dealing with the exact same conflict. At the same time, nobody is working on the conflict in the community next door.”

Challenge

In most places where UN civil affairs teams work, there are numerous domestic civil society organizations and international NGOs engaged in conflict management activities. Civil society organizations have to be more selective about their engagements and often work more on a grassroots level than the UN does. Most of them have multi-year funding cycles and project funding. This means that ideally, there is a logical division of labor between NGOs and civil affairs teams. NGOs are better placed to lead longer-term and more in-depth work on dialogue projects and local conflict resolution. The UN mission

does not have the capacities to do this kind of long-term work, aside from a few exceptional cases. Therefore, good coordination with NGOs open to working with the UN is necessary in order for civil affairs to concentrate on engagements to which they can add the greatest value: (1) “fire brigade” situations, in which the quick access and mobility of a peacekeeping mission are needed, and (2) “provider of last resort” situations, in which no other organization is able or willing to get involved. In order to hand off “fire brigade” situations to the longer-term efforts of NGOs and concentrate only on “provider of last resort” situations, civil affairs teams need a good working relationship with UN agencies and NGOs. Good coordination can also help avoid “over-workshopping” and ensure that conflict resolution work is conducted where it is most needed.

Good Practice: Co-Chaired NGO-UN Civil Affairs Working Group

In Lakes State (South Sudan), the civil affairs team has established the Rumbek Peace Actors working group, which brings together civil society organizations and NGOs dedicated to local conflict management in the state. It is co-chaired by the NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce and meets on a monthly basis. So far, it provides a forum for discussion and information sharing rather than for full coordination. The peace advisor to the state government takes part on behalf of state authorities. At every meeting, there is an in-depth presentation by one member of the group, followed by discussion. Some of the topics discussed in 2015 included the effectiveness and legitimacy of tribal courts, the impact of the rainy season on conflicts in the state, and where and with which communities the different members of the working group are currently working.

Good Practice: Steering Project Funding Through Donor Coordination Unit

A potential model for greater coordination and better division of labor between the UN mission, agencies and NGOs may be found in the system that MONUSCO is currently building through its Stabilization Support Unit (SSU). SSU is supporting strategic donor fundraising to align projects with the government's stabilization plan. This effort has the potential to improve coordination of NGO activities in the conflict management field. SSU could steer funding towards projects where civil affairs needs to hand over "fire brigade" (after the initial firefighting) or "provider of last resort" cases to NGOs or UN agencies. Such a coordinating role taken by the stabilization unit would necessitate excellent and constant exchange of information between civil affairs teams and SSU – something that might still need work in MONUSCO.



The State and Other Stakeholders

The State and Other Stakeholders

Working With Weak State Authorities

Example

In Eastern Congo, civil affairs teams spend a lot of resources supporting the establishment and functioning of local risk analysis committees (Comités d'analyse de risks). The committees are supposed to bring together provincial authorities, civil society organizations, UN agencies and MONUSCO in each province to analyze the conflict situation and prioritize the conflicts that need intervention. MONUSCO provides logistical support to the committees and lends its political weight to bringing members to the meetings. The meetings are supposed to be called and chaired by government officials. However, many committees stop meeting regularly soon after their establishment. In North Kivu, for example, even though they themselves created the committees, provincial authorities often complain that they are too busy to chair or even attend the meetings. Appointments are cancelled, or the government sends only lower-rank representatives who have little to no authority. The low effectiveness of such meetings raises the question of whether organizing and supporting them is worth the mission's time and resources.

Challenge

Many civil affairs teams face the challenge of how to ensure that their conflict management work goes hand in hand with the task of strengthening state authority. Even where they would like to work with the relevant mission, host-country governments often

lack the capacity to lead conflict management work, as was the case with some risk analysis committees in the DRC. In a related challenge, peace conferences, roundtables and community dialogues regularly identify state institutions as playing a crucial role in implementation, e.g., through the provision of policing, justice systems or correction services. But these state authorities often lack the capacity to meet those demands. Police forces are too few, not well trained and not respected in communities; courts lack judges with the appropriate mandate to try capital offenses; and prisons are overcrowded and lack basic supplies. As a result, local expectations that these peace initiatives will be created are disappointed. Civil affairs teams need to find a way to constantly reassess the role that government authorities are able to play in leading conflict resolution and then adjust their support to that role. This requires constant engagement with political elites.

Good Practice: Supporting Reconciliation of Leaders Through Logistical Support

After many years of mutual cattle raiding and associated violence between the Gok and Pakam communities from Cuibet and Rumbek North counties in Lakes State (South Sudan), community leaders on both sides were fatigued by the situation, which created an opening towards reconciliation. To assist the efforts of local chiefs, an unusually experienced and committed county commissioner and the governor's "peace adviser," UNMISS Civil Affairs provided logistical support by shuttling community leaders from both sides to meetings for discussing their issues. The two communities then appointed representatives who met at a roundtable organized by the NGO ACTED and UNMISS Civil Affairs to find solutions to the underlying problems of resource sharing and road access. By April 2015, the negotiations led to a series of ceremonial inter-marriages between the two clans and a cessation-of-hostilities agreement, which – with the exception of a brief but significant clash between hundreds of youth from both sides on May 1 – still held at the time of this research in June 2015.

Good Practice: Keeping All Relevant Government Officials Involved

As a result of recent and ongoing reforms of the provinces in the DRC (découpage), it has been unclear as of mid-2015 who formed the government in the new province of Ituri (formerly a district of the Orientale province). Lacking clarity regarding which government officials to engage in its conflict management work, the Bunia civil affairs team, as an alternative to putting government officials in the lead, made a concerted effort at least to keep a variety of officials informed about their efforts and achieved a formal statement of agreement by these officials on MONUSCO's local conflict management efforts. These include the mediation engagement between the Hema and Lendu communities (see above).

Good Practice: Working with Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Sometimes it is possible to strengthen local conflict resolution mechanisms without putting state authorities in the lead while also not undermining their authority. In North Kivu, one of the structures that civil affairs works with – supported by the provincial government – is the Baraza La Wazee, a group of elders who represent all ethnic communities in the province. The civil affairs team provides the Baraza with logistical support to travel to locations in which conflict is flaring up, so that the elders can engage in dialogue and reconciliation work that does not overly rely on state institutions – at least when it comes to inter-community conflicts.

Dealing With Authorities as Stakeholders in Local Conflict

Example

In North Kivu, a Provincial Arbitration Commission (Commission Provinciale D'arbitrage des Conflits Coutumiers) is officially charged with investigating conflicts over the exercise of traditional powers. In most cases, these conflicts involve competing claims to traditional offices, e.g., multiple individuals claiming to be the rightful traditional chief. There are elaborate procedures for investigating the cases, hearing oral arguments according to tradition and law, and drawing up arbitration decisions. Nevertheless, the commission's practical impact is negligible because of its consultative status and effective dependence on the provincial governor, who decides whether to recognize and enforce an arbitration decision – a decision usually based on political expediency. In the political context of the DRC, a governor is rarely a neutral party in such disputes. Still, as part of the state authorities, which the peace operation is mandated to strengthen, the arbitration commission draws on MONUSCO Civil Affairs for logistical support (i.e., transport, accommodation, food) during its investigations throughout the province.

Challenge

Any UN support to conflict management faces a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, missions are usually mandated to strengthen the authority of the state and its local representatives. After all, a functioning state is the only exit strategy for a peace operation. On the other hand, the state representatives are usually deeply involved in the conflicts. In this context, how can the mission support conflict management (which often requires a significant degree of impartiality) as well as the state? What kind of support should the mission provide state representatives to fulfill its mandate and work towards its exit strategy without jeopardizing its support to the local people in managing their conflicts? Effective civil affairs work often found case-by-case

solutions to this dilemma by strategically involving different local authorities in different ways. It is important to recognize that by working exclusively or primarily with the representatives of state authority, missions are unavoidably “taking sides” in a fluid local struggle for political recognition, legitimacy and power. Clearly, locally led conflict management processes are the most effective, if not the only type of conflict management that succeeds. But in every (post-)conflict situation, there are competing local authorities to lead. The challenge is to prioritize support to those who genuinely and effectively work for violence reduction and conflict resolution.

Good Practice: Empowering Citizens to Demand Basic Services from their Local Representatives

In Rutshuru (North Kivu, DRC), MONUSCO’s Stabilization Support Unit (SSU) has steered funding to a project for community violence reduction in the context of the reintegration of former members of the FDLR militia. The project is implemented by Resolve, an international NGO, and its local partner FEMISA. In alignment with the international community’s stabilization strategy for the DRC (International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, ISSSS), the project includes a bottom-up process to establish effective contact between the targeted communities (villages that have accepted former fighters to reintegrate) and the superior authorities of the state. These so-called “democratic dialogues” are designed to empower citizens and communities at the lowest level to articulate their legitimate demands for basic services and political representation vis-à-vis the politicians who claim to represent them.

Dealing With Faraway Spoilers

Example

Lakes State (South Sudan) appears stuck in a cycle of cattle raiding and mass violence between various Dinka clans. Peace

agreements among these communities tend to break down quickly and frequently, partly because local community leaders are not the only relevant actors. Much of the local land and cattle is controlled by wealthy owners who live in Juba or even outside the country, including businesspeople, politicians and military figures. Locally, it is considered common knowledge that they arm the communities who tend their cattle or work their land, pressure them to grow their herds and take care of individuals wounded in violent clashes with their neighbors. None of these powerful people sit at the table at most peace conferences, nor do they accept being considered a party to the violence. They prefer to stay in the shadows, effectively spoiling many attempts by local communities to break the cycle of violence.

Challenge

Local conflicts often do not stay local when politicians, businesspeople and military figures in faraway capitals (or even abroad) manipulate local grievances for their own political or economic gain. Peace initiatives among local actors are almost bound to fail, or succeed only in the very short term. After all, it makes little sense to negotiate a deal if the most relevant parties to the conflict do not even sit at the table or share an interest in finding a solution. At the practical level, when such powerful spoilers live far away from the actual violence, civil affairs teams on the ground or their local partners (community leaders, civil society activists or local government officials) are neither logistically nor politically well placed to engage them.

Good Practice: Providing Opportunities for Communities to Influence Spoilers in a Safe Context

In the DRC, outside observers mentioned MONUSCO's political advocacy in such situations as a key comparative advantage of the mission over other peacebuilding actors (NGOs and UN agencies). Through close collaboration between local civil affairs teams, heads of office, civil affairs leadership at HQ level and political affairs colleagues, the mission managed to orchestrate effective political engagement with powerful actors, resulting in at least temporary reductions in local violence. In one instance of recurring inter-ethnic violence stirred largely by a local politician now residing in Kinshasa, a local NGO, supported by funding from the Swiss government, was able to convene a large conference that included the Kinshasa spoiler. Rather than formally framing it as a "peace conference" and forcing participants to accept their role as "conflict parties," the conference was deliberately framed broadly as a "social dialogue." But because it was positioned so prominently (it was broadcast by live radio transmission), it attracted the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including the powerful spoiler from Kinshasa. In the conference, all sides – including the representatives of a marginalized local community of so-called "refugees" – had the opportunity to present their points of view, followed by a long debate between 24 speakers. At some point, apparently impressed by the discussions, the spoiler from Kinshasa got up and delivered a long speech in which he blamed the problems to past misunderstandings, but then undertook to reduce his meddling. While this intervention did not entirely resolve simmering tensions between the local communities, NGO and UN staff confirmed a reduction in violence afterwards.





Conclusion

The challenges and good practices identified for this toolkit in dozens of conversations, roundtables and workshops with civil affairs staff in UNMISS and MONUSCO are mostly focused on issues of management and organization of work, although some do address key issues of support to conflict management itself.

Within civil affairs, most of the wisdom collected from experienced colleagues in the field had a common thrust: a call to be more strategic. This means making time for good conflict analysis, using those insights to consciously set priorities at the expense of less important issues and employing the political instruments of civil affairs in service of these top priorities, should they be the facilitation of access to logistical resources, the political engagement of individual local leaders or major undertakings such as trainings or peace conferences. This is easier said than done. Constant external demands and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures leave little time to think or plan. But we hope that the examples collected from colleagues in the field provide some ideas for finding that space (i.e., by not doing certain other things) and using it productively.

Civil affairs is not an island. Many of its key functions are effective only in close collaboration with other parts of the mission. This cuts both ways: better conflict prevention and protection of civilians require greater support to local conflict management, which entails structural adjustments in a mission that enable a civil affairs team to make the most out of its unique capabilities and resources. Two of these adjustments are the establishment of budgets for “petty cash” and the prioritization of logistical resources for support to local conflict management. In some missions, a revision of security protocols as part of the larger UNDSS shift from risk avoidance to risk management might be required, even if it does not materialize overnight. In turn, if missions want to be better attuned to local political dynamics, they must invest in on-the-ground knowledge (e.g., by hiring Community Liaison Assistants, which is currently underway in a number of missions beyond MONUSCO) and effectively feed the wealth of local analysis produced by the civil

affairs community into mission-wide information channels and decision-making processes.

In working with the UN family and NGOs, both UNMISS and MONUSCO provide several models of coordination with partners on local conflict management. Form should follow function: the precise shape of a forum or working group will be determined more by the actors and the context than by any particular model. Being more strategic, however, may require missions to make a more ambitious investment into filling a part of the “peacebuilding gap” that civil affairs alone cannot make up for. As shown by the most recent efforts of MONUSCO’s Stabilization Support Unit, a mission may be able to translate its political convening power in the international community into channeling donor funding to priority areas, e.g., support to local conflict management by NGOs or agencies recognized for high-quality work at the local level.

“Local conflict” is rarely just local. The key challenges of preventing the escalation of violence have to do with calibrating engagement with those who happen to represent the state – some of whom may have a stake in the conflict themselves – and with hidden “spoilers,” who deny their role as stakeholders and operate beyond the reach of local actors. Far from providing simple solutions to these complex challenges, the stories told by field staff ultimately serve to underline the critical role of good analysis and informed strategic choices. There are always choices to be made in how to engage with different local actors and how to prioritize a mission’s limited resources.

To put these arguments in context, the challenges and good practices collected in these pages emerged from seven weeks of working with civil affairs teams in South Sudan and the DRC in April, May, June and September 2015, including several small team retreats and roundtable discussions. Our selection of issues and stories reflect the limitations of working with only two missions and their specific mandates and environments. At the same time, focusing on fewer missions allowed us to dig deeper and spend more time in the field than in mission headquarters. Most of our time was spent away from Juba and Goma, in a conscious attempt to avoid the headquarters bias common among external observers and advisors to peace operations. In fact, our choice of topic – local conflict management – may have resulted in a slight bias to the contrary: an underemphasis of the

linkages to the national and international levels. That being said, we trust that the UN remains sufficiently wedded to nation-states to ensure that those dynamics will not lack for attention any time soon.

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