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UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT TO LOCAL PEACEBUILDING:
a Case Study from Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

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Conflicts have become more complex and difficult to resolve through traditional peacebuilding and mediation approaches. Conflict resolution efforts built on liberal peacebuilding ideals have had only limited success in promoting peace and there is a growing understanding that peace at national level by the elite does not automatically trickle down to the local level. Afghanistan is an example of how modern peace operations have failed in bringing peace. Peacebuilding at local level has gained the interest of researchers and new, pragmatic approaches to resolving conflict have been advanced. This study contributes to the research on the practice of supporting local peacebuilding in general and by the United Nations in particular.

I wanted to understand how the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, supported local grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Through analysis of project documentation and expert interviews, I conducted a case study of one specific local peace initiative. I examined how UNAMA supported local peacebuilding and how such support was situated within ongoing reforms of UN peacebuilding efforts at the global level.

The study found that different actors at the local level were engaged and that the local community had an influence on the design of the initiative. Local agency was strengthened through the creation of and support to local conflict resolution mechanisms, where women and youth were included. By promoting certain local traditions and discouraging others, local values were respected while international standards of human rights, mediation principles and the inclusion of women were adhered to. The low-profile approach adopted, contributed to building trust and increasing the acceptance and legitimacy of UNAMA among the local actors. Elements of adaptive peacebuilding were included in the initiative but the design used for supporting local peacebuilding was essentially a project oriented approach based on liberal peacebuilding ideals.

The research highlights the need for a much longer period of time for supporting local peacebuilding, coupled with higher tolerance for slower, incremental change. An iterative process of adaptation, based on learning and experimenting, could enable a more flexible approach incorporating the complexity of reality. The study underscores how local peace initiatives could provide an avenue for putting in practice the sustaining peace agenda, introduced in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and bring together the pillars of peace and security, development and human rights while engaging the local community in peacebuilding.

Keywords: Afghanistan, local conflict resolution, peace mediation, adaptive peacebuilding, sustaining peace, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

Abbreviations

AGE	Anti-government elements
AGE-report	Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture
HIPPO-report	High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive device
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
LPI	Local Peace Initiative
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSG II	Second phase of Salam Support Group programme
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States
USD	United States dollars
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

1. Introduction

Peacebuilding in the world of today is increasingly challenging as conflicts have become more complex and intractable and difficult to resolve through traditional approaches. Since 1990 the number of major civil wars has tripled, battle deaths have increased and almost two thirds of conflicts relapsed within five years, indicating a failure of the peacebuilding process. Organised crime, internationalisation of civil wars and rise of violent extremism blur the lines between political, criminal and ideological interests and pose serious challenges to the way conflict is addressed.[1] Violent misogyny and sexual violence in conflict is rising and violations against women are perpetrated both by state and non-state armed groups.[2] The number of people displaced from their homes has doubled in the past 25 years and over half of all refugees come from three conflict-affected countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.[3] It is estimated that half of the people living in extreme poverty live in countries impacted by conflict, and their share is expected to rise to 80% by 2035.[4] Many modern peace operations have failed and UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding has been said to be in crisis.[5]

Afghanistan is an example of how modern peace operations have not been able to bring peace. The country has been in conflict for the past four decades and despite massive international efforts to sustain peace since 2001, it continues marred by violent conflict. After one and a half years of talks between the US and the Taliban, a 'peace deal' was signed between the two parties in February 2020. The aim was to start peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government allowing the US forces to withdraw from the country. Still today, the peace talks have barely started and a peace agreement remains elusive.

To tackle the challenges posed to peacebuilding by complex, modern conflicts, peace researchers and practitioners have identified and studied new, pragmatic approaches to resolving conflict. Efforts built on liberal peacebuilding ideals have had only limited success in bringing peace and there is a growing understanding that peace at national level by the elite, supported by international actors, does not automatically trickle down to the local or sub-national level. Instead, peacebuilding at local level is required to complement peace efforts at the macro-level to achieve sustainable results.[6] Building on this 'local turn'[7] in peacebuilding, and research on local agency and complexity theory, de Coning[8] proposed adaptive peacebuilding as one approach that could offer value-added to peacebuilding practice and an alternative to the liberal peacebuilding model. Adaptive peacebuilding could in his view help implement the 'sustaining peace-project',

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[1] von Einsiedel. 2017. 2-5.
[2] UNSC. 2019. Para. 36.
[3] von Einsiedel. 2017. 8.
[4] UNGA and UNSC. 2018. Para. 39.
[5] Autesserre. 2019.
[6] See Autesserre. 2017. and Lederach. 1997.
[7] for a literature review of the 'local turn', see Leonardsson and Rudd. 2015.
[8] de Coning. 2018a.

introduced into UN peacebuilding by identical resolutions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly in 2018.[9]

The identical resolutions were the culmination of a process of reforming the UN peacebuilding actions. The reform process started in 2015 when three groundbreaking, interlinked UN reviews on peace and security were released to ensure that the UN peacebuilding practice would better respond to modern conflicts[10]. The reports covered the peacebuilding architecture, peace operations and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and recommended actions to improve the effectiveness of the UN in addressing conflict and sustaining peace. All reports emphasised conflict prevention and engaging with the local level and provided a basis for strengthened emphasis on improving UN mediation and mediation support.

The sustaining peace-project exemplifies how not only research, but also policy has embraced the 'local turn'. In addition to researchers and politicians many NGOs working on peacebuilding emphasise local agency, and some even consider that "local people working to stop violence and build peace in their communities remain the greatest sources of untapped peacebuilding potential globally".[11]

Despite the interest in new approaches to peacebuilding by academia, practitioners and policymakers alike, and despite the sustaining peace-project acknowledging the importance of engaging the local in peace processes, support by UN to local peace efforts and mediation is limited and internationally supported multi-track mediation continues with an emphasis on elite level negotiations on track one, regarding the other tracks as supportive. Research on support by the UN to local peacebuilding is even more scarce and there is little information about how UN supports and could support local actors in peacebuilding.[12] This study contributes to the research on the practice of supporting local peacebuilding in general and by the UN in particular.

The primary focus of this study is on how UN in Afghanistan supports local grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Specifically, through a case study, I explore the role of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, as facilitator of dialogue and provider of mediation support to local conflict resolution. I investigate how UNAMA responds to challenges attached to local peacebuilding support, such as representation, ensuring local ownership and time frames. In addition, I examine how UNAMA supports the inclusions of women in the local peace initiatives and how it balances international normative requirements with respect for traditional values and customs.

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[9] UNGA and UNSC. 2018.
[10] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a, UNGA and UNSC 2015b, Coomaraswamy. 2015.
[11] Mathews. 2019.
[12] For UN support to local mediation in Libya see Vericat and Hobrara. 2018.

A secondary focus is the current reforms of the UN peacebuilding process within which I situate the research. I describe the reforms and their connection to the local turn and adaptive peacebuilding. Understanding the changes within the UN peacebuilding system enables analysis of the praxis of UNAMA in Afghanistan against recent policies at the global level.

In chapter two I provide the theoretical foundation for this study, describe how adaptive peacebuilding is conceptualised and discuss the local turn as a critique to liberal peacebuilding. Chapter three reviews the methodology of the research, while chapter four provides a brief overview of the peacebuilding reforms of the UN to contextualise the research and the current changes taking place in the UN peace and security agenda. Chapter five gives background information about UNAMA and its support to local peace initiatives in general and the case study in particular. In chapter six I turn the attention to the case study, presenting, analysing and synthesising the findings of the main research. Finally, chapter seven summarises the results and provides some final conclusions.

2. Adaptive Peacebuilding and the Local Turn - Responding to the Changing Nature of Conflict

As a consequence of the changing nature of conflict and the global environment in which conflicts take place, De Coning and Grey note how "there are more variables that can affect peace processes, less stability in the behaviour of these variables, and less predictability when it comes to how peace and conflict processes are likely to unfold."[13] In order to respond to these changes in conflict and conflict actors and make peacebuilding more receptive to the needs of conflict resolution in modern times, researchers have sought to find new approaches to peacebuilding. Adaptive peacebuilding and the 'local turn' in peacebuilding both seek to define a new approach to conflict resolution and mediation. In this chapter I will firstly review the evolution of the understanding of peacebuilding in the UN and the emergence of the concept of 'sustaining peace'. Secondly I will discuss adaptive peacebuilding as a pragmatic approach and framework to sustaining peace. Thirdly, I will trace the developments of the 'local turn' in peacebuilding and how external actors can engage with the local. Fourthly, I will examine the emphasis of the local turn on inclusivity and the inclusion of women in peacebuilding. Lastly, I will shed light on how mediation and mediation support as means to peacebuilding have benefited from adaptive peacebuilding and the local turn, and what the role of the external actors could be within these new approaches. As my research focuses on the practices of the United Nations (UN), I will make reference to examples from UN discourse and documentation.

2.1 From Post-Conflict Peacebuilding to Sustaining Peace

Peacebuilding is not a straightforward, easy to define concept and researchers and practitioners have defined it in different ways at different times. After the termination of the Cold War, when peacebuilding was introduced on the agenda of the UN, it was at first very narrowly defined. (Post-conflict) Peacebuilding was what followed peacemaking and peacekeeping. Its main objective was to prevent relapse into conflict after a peace agreement had been signed.[14] Such an understanding of post-conflict peacebuilding gives an impression of a linear conflict cycle, where rebuilding comes after conflict and peacekeeping. Today's conflicts are seldom linear in their sequencing and therefore new definitions of peacebuilding have been outlined.

Already in 2001 the UN Security Council broadened the definition of peacebuilding to include the whole conflict cycle, understanding that "peace-building is aimed at preventing the outbreak, the recurrence or continuation of armed conflict and therefore encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms".[15]

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[13] De Coning and Grey. 2018.
[14] See UNGA and UNSC. 1992.
[15] UNSC. 2001. 1-2

Despite this recognition of peacebuilding as a holistic activity, UN policy and practice continued to consider it as something post-conflict. Fifteen years later the UN Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture saw the need for change and urged the organisation to understand peacebuilding broadly and forget the 'post-conflict' part.[16] Through emphasis on 'sustaining peace', the Advisory Group made an important conceptual contribution to UN peacebuilding, clarifying it as an activity that can happen before, during and after conflict. In order to implement this broader view of peacebuilding, the Advisory Group established that "[s]ustaining peace should span an essential combination of actions across the diplomatic, political, human rights, economic, social and security areas, with particular attention to tackling the root causes".[17]

The joint UN General Assembly and Security Council resolution from 2016 officially embraced the concept of 'sustaining peace', thus expanding the notion of peacebuilding, and providing a definition of 'sustaining peace'. Sustaining peace was defined as:

> [...] a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict [...] is a shared task and responsibility [...] and should flow through all three pillars [development, political and human rights] of the UN's engagement at all stages of conflict".[18]

The UN Peacebuilding Support Office further explained that 'sustaining peace' should not be understood as redefining peacebuilding, but rather as clarifying and expanding it. In practical terms 'sustaining peace' should not be distinguished from peacebuilding.[19] The terms 'sustaining peace' and 'peacebuilding' understood as spanning the whole conflict cycle, are therefore used interchangeably in this thesis.

There is, however, no clear consensus on how 'sustaining peace' should be understood. The disagreements do not refer to its relationship with the term 'peacebuilding'. Rather there are differing views about how much emphasis should be put on short-term prevention and the development of risk prevention tools, including diplomacy, and how much emphasis should be put on structural prevention and strengthening the resilience of national capacities for sustaining peace.[20] Some tools, such as mediation and mediation support, can be used both for prevention and for consolidating resilience in which case such disagreements become inconsequential.

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[16] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 26
[17] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 122
[18] UNGA. 2016a. 2
[19] United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office. 2017.
[20] De Coning. 2018b.

De Coning finds the adoption of the concept of 'sustaining peace' as evidence of the pragmatic turn within the UN, as the "focus is now on identifying and supporting the political and social capacities that sustain peace".[21]

2.2 A Pragmatic Turn through Adaptive Peacebuilding

As a consequence of the changes in the nature of conflict and the failures of traditional liberal peacebuilding, research has sought to find approaches better suited for the world of conflict of today. The 'pragmatic turn' in peacebuilding represents an important shift away from liberal peacebuilding. It criticises the liberal belief that conflicts can be rationally managed in a non-political, technical way through careful planning and subsequent implementation of the plan.[22] Liberal peacebuilding assumes linearity in conflict development and belittles the complexity and dynamism of conflicts, overestimating the capacity of the external peacebuilder to understand the situation.[23]

In this study I adopt a pragmatic approach, underlining the practical and the experienced as basis for knowledge creation. Lehti asserts that "[i]f we accept the primacy of practice as well as experience as a source of all knowledge, the question of how peace intervention practice could better support transformation towards sustainable peace cannot have a purely theoretical answer since it would lack experience-based knowledge"[24]. Critical peace research has, however, largely neglected the study of third party experiences[25], and through this study I aim to contribute to this knowledge gap by examining how UN supports peacebuilding at local level in Afghanistan.

Adaptive peacebuilding is expressive of the pragmatic turn. It emphasises more the process than the end-state. Liberal peacebuilding saw local values often as problematic and had a very specific society (multiparty democracy, market-economy, individual human rights and rule of law) in mind as the successful end-state. Adaptive peacebuilding, on the other hand, is more open to local interpretations of peace.[26] This should not be interpreted as if values such as equality, human rights or justice would not be important for peaceful societies, but that realising these values can take different forms and that there are different understandings of rights and law, and that the key to transforming the conflict comes from local conceptions and practices.

In addition to the emphasis on the process, adaptive peacebuilding underlines the complexity of conflicts. In his inaugural speech in 2016, UN Secretary-General António Guterres recognised that "conflicts have become more complex" and that "we live in a complex world"[27]. The word

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[21] De Coning. 2018a. 304.
[22] Lehti. 2019. 72.
[23] De Coning and Gray. 2018.
[24] Lehti. 2019. 7-8.
[25] Lehti. 2019. 8.
[26] De Coning. 2018a. 301, 317.
[27] Guterres. 2016.

'complex' might not be just a linguistic choice, but an acknowledgement of the world and conflicts as complex systems whose analysis benefit from complexity theory. Peacebuilding scholars, such as De Coning, demonstrate that complexity theory is relevant for peacebuilding, as peacebuilding "is about influencing the behaviour of social systems" which are complex.[28]

Complexity theory rests upon the assumption that social systems are complex and thus unpredictable. They can change quickly and their development does not always follow a linear path. The system interacts with the environment, and the two evolve in a constant process of adaptation. This iterative process of adaptation is based on learning and experimenting for knowledge creation. It is this adaptive process that is the basis of what De Coning designates 'adaptive peacebuilding'.[29,30]

In De Coning's theory it is not only societies that are adaptive, but the term 'adaptive' also refers to the approach that should be adopted for peacebuilding practices. The traditional peacebuilding project cycle of analysis-planning-implementation-evaluation-selection assumes we understand the situation and can therefore plan a good solution for the problem. Such an approach does not work in a complex system, where the situation is unclear and we might not understand it properly. In contrast, the adaptive peacebuilding approach "suggests using a particular form of structured engagement that helps to generate institutional learning, and stimulates and facilitates adaptation".[31]

An adaptive approach understands that there is no one best way to explore and deal with a situation. Instead, based on our understanding of the situation, we engage and try one or several different approaches. Depending on the feedback, we adapt our projects. Some underperforming initiatives would be abandoned, others adapted and maybe even expanded. Sufficient variation and selection based on effect is the key.[32]

Furthermore, the adaptive approach facilitates adaptation to changes in the environment. It is rather illogical that a pre-set project design and objectives should remain unaltered throughout the project, notwithstanding changes in the environment. If anything, the contrary should be the norm: we should find it sensible to adapt our project as the world around us changes.[33]

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[28] De Coning. 2018a. 305.

[29] De Coning. 2018a. 305.

[30] De Coning refers to what in development circles has been called adaptive management or sometimes adaptive development. This approach was widely recognised in 2014, when distinguished representatives of the development community publicly declared that development programmes needed to base themselves on local knowledge and an adaptive approach. The Doing Development Differently Manifesto (DDD-Manifesto) called for a focus on local problems and local agency and adaptive programming, with rapid feedback loops to enable revision of the programmes. The DDD-agenda adopted the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach as a suitable approach for dealing with development in complex societies. See The DDD-Manifesto.2014. and Andrews et. al. 2012.

[31] De Coning. 2018a. 306.

[32] De Coning. 2018a. 306, De Coning. n.d.

[33] De Coning. n.d.

Social, complex systems are non-linear and self-organising. Non-linearity means that the relationships between variables, between inputs and outputs, are asymmetrical and it is impossible to know if A will result in B.[34] Self-organisation, on the other hand, refers to the capacity of a complex system for organising, regulating and maintaining itself without a controlling central actor.[35] Such a system is characterised by uncertainty. Thus, uncertainty should be understood as the normal state of affairs, not something that needs remedy.[36]

The role of the peacebuilding intervention and thus the external actor would in this kind of approach be one of process facilitation. The task of the external actor would be to "stimulat[e] those processes in a society that enable self-organization and that will lead to strengthening the resilience of the social institutions that manage internal and external stressors and shocks".[37] Similar to conflict resolution, also adaptive peacebuilding rests upon the assumption that conflict is necessary for change. The role of the external actor is to support the community in managing this change in a non-violent manner. The outcome is co-produced.[38]

To elucidate the role of the external actor, De Coning introduces the metaphor of the doctor and the gardener. In the medical version the doctor makes a diagnosis and prescribes a cure (traditional, liberal peacebuilding), whereas gardening refers to nurturing a situation, where agency rests with the society, and the role of the gardener is to influence and steer the direction.[39] This liberation from thinking in terms of 'problems' and 'solutions' "enables peacebuilders to focus on the quality and sustainability of the engagement with the communities and stakeholders necessary to sustain the peace."[40] Through an adaptive process of experimenting and learning, the gardener can support the community to analyse the causes and drivers of conflict and help strengthen the resilience of the local institutions to resolve conflict.[41]

Retraining from a doctor into a gardener might not be easy and in order to succeed De Coning sees a change in organisational culture and attitude necessary if UN is to respond more effectively to the conflicts of today. Abilities and expertise that will be needed are institutional curiosity and innovation, a culture that values failures and uses mistakes as opportunities for learning, ability to capitalise on crises, and encouragement of personal and organisational growth through recruitment of staff committed to learning.[42]

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[34] De Coning. 2018a. 307, Lehti. 2019. 94.
[35] Lehti. 2019. 94.
[36] De Coning. 2018a. 309.
[37] De Coning. 2018a. 307.
[38] De Coning. 2018a. 315.
[39] De Coning. n.d.
[40] De Coning. 2018a. 313.
[41] De Coning. 2018a. 313.
42 De Coning. 2018a. 308.

The UN could, however, be well placed to adopt an adaptive approach to peacebuilding. The fact that there are often several different UN agencies and funds with their own practices present in one country, could provide an opportunity to try different variations of peacebuilding in one conflict context.[43]

Some NGOs have applied an adaptive management approach to peacebuilding and lessons learnt from these practical examples could provide useful also for the UN. The Alliance for Peacebuilding examined, through ten case studies, how programmes were designed and what could be learnt from adaptive management in conflict settings. It recommended the development of programme structures that allow for flexibility, securing buy-in from donors and implementers alike for the new approach and the definition of technical requirements specific for adaptive management.[44]

For adaptive peacebuilding, it is imperative that the peacebuilding process is locally led, as "[i]t is not possible to direct or control self-organization from the outside; it has to emerge from within".[45] The assumption is that local actors understand the situation best and have knowledge of what is necessary, in contrast to the external actor who might not always get the diagnosis or the cure right. Adaptive peacebuilding therefore requires a process that engages the local community in reflection in a participatory way. Consequently, adaptive peacebuilding re-enforces the 'local turn' in peacebuilding both through theory (local agency) and practice (adaptive approach) and there is a clear link between engaging the local and adaptive peacebuilding.[46]

2.3 The Local Turn as a Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding

The importance of local agency and the fact that imposing elements such as individualism, secularism and liberal property rights undermine local ownership and authority has been understood in development circles for some time. For peacebuilding it is, however, a realisation that has been understood through the local turn.[47]

'Local' in peacebuilding has two dimensions. It can be an instrument for more effective peacebuilding (often within the liberal peace paradigm) emphasising local ownership and capacity building, or it can be a critique of traditional peacebuilding underlining local agency.[48] In this research I emphasise the aspect of local agency.

The 'local turn' as a critique of the liberal peace doctrine has been inspired by the critical and post-structural theory in peace and conflict studies. It is "characterised by a cacophony of

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[43] De Coning. n.d.

[44] Alliance for Peacebuilding. 2018. 3.

[45] De Coning. 2018a. 307.

[46] De Coning. n.d.

[47] Mac Ginty and Richmond. 2013. 776.

[48] Leonardsson and Rudd. 2015. 826.

thinking. It might be messy but it has the capacity to be vibrant and relevant to the communities from which it emerges. It points the way forward in improving our understanding of the injustices that cause conflict, the naturalisation of structures and practices (often elite, state, or Northern) that disguise them, and the reforms that are now required if the limits of Western epistemologies and methodologies of peace are to become more pluralist."[49]

Mac Guinty and Richmond establish four obstacles for the 'local turn' originating from liberal peacebuilding. These are standardisation, universalism, inability to capture local nuances, and possible co-optation of the local by liberal approaches. Standardisation through the spread of technocracy and professionalisation of staff and through the use of standardised conflict analysis and best practices in peacebuilding risk supplanting local approaches. The legitimacy of universal projects can be questioned by the local turn which consequently would be challenged by traditional peacebuilding actors. The third challenge is the inability of standardised liberal peacebuilding to recognise and understand local variations. Fourthly, Mac Guinty and Richmond fear that liberal peacebuilding projects risk co-opting the local, for example as local organisations have to abide by standardised rules and practices dictated by the donors.[50] An adaptive approach to peacebuilding is an opportunity to avoid these obstacles emanating from liberal peacebuilding. As adaptive peacebuilding relies on variation, on learning and adaptation, the use of standardised approaches is not possible and universality does not exist. Adaptive peacebuilding is a strong instrument to reject liberal, top-down peacebuilding in practice.

The focus in conflict resolution literature on conflict transformation, underlining the transformation of the conflict parties and their relationship, gives an added incentive to the 'local turn' in peacebuilding. To transform a conflict, an elite-level agreement will not be enough, as it will not alter the relationships at the grassroots level. For conflict transformation, it is therefore essential to engage with the local level.[51]

Conflict resolution is not only about resolving conflicts. Conflict resolution is a comprehensive term which refers to both the dynamic process of change and the end-state. Conflict resolution seeks to alter what Galtung called the conflict triangle, the three dimensions of conflict; attitudes and assumptions, behaviour and contradiction or structure of conflict[52]. The aim of conflict resolution is sometimes understood as seeking to eliminate or avoid conflict. Conflict is, however, a normal part of societal interaction and thus unavoidable and even valuable in bringing about change. What conflict resolution seeks to do, is "to transform actually or potentially violent conflict into peaceful (non-violent) process of social and political change".[53] In the end it is about transforming the conflict and particularly transforming the relationship between the conflicting

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[49] Mac Ginty and Richmond. 2013. 780.
[50] Mac Guinty and Richmond. 2013. 777-8.
[51] Mac Guinty and Richmond. 2013. 771.
[52] Galtung. 1996. 72.
[53] Ramsbothan et al. 2016. 36.

parties and strengthening community bonds in the process. In line with Ramsbothan, Woodhouse and Miall, in this thesis I understand conflict transformation as the deepest level of conflict resolution. Conflict transformation "implies a deep transformation in the institutions and discourses that reproduce violence, as well as in the conflict parties themselves and their relationships"[54].

The local turn does not appear only in research but is embraced also by politicians and practitioners. Paffenholz even finds that "the local turn in peacebuilding is a mainstream part of orthodox peacebuilding" as all major peacebuilding policy documents include local peacebuilding as an element that needs support.[55] Looking at recent UN documents, we can see that policymakers in general agree to the need of engaging the local in peacebuilding, often through calling for more inclusive peace processes. Lundqvist and Öjendal maintain that the adoption of the SDGs can be interpreted as UN embracing the local turn.[56] It remains, however, debatable whether such an understanding refers to an emphasis of local agency or merely views engaging the local as a means of improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Despite this general consensus of the importance of engaging the local, there is no common understanding in research of what 'local' means.[57] 'Local' is usually used to refer to actors and situations situated close to and directly affected by the conflict, in contrast to international, regional or national actors who are further away.[58] 'Local' in this study is not strictly defined in geographical terms, but it is recognised that usually 'local' is identified by belonging to a specific geographic location or to an identity group. It is separated from the international and national. The local is not, however, static, but is in constant interaction also with the non-local views, rules and practices.[59]

Furthermore, it is important to understand that the 'local' is in no way more democratic, more equal, more non-discriminatory, inclusive or peaceful than the national or international. The local should therefore not be romanticised. The local society is equally composed of power structures and hierarchies that affect the relationships within the system.[60]

While many donors and also the UN have acknowledged local peacebuilding as important and relevant to support, the practice of how externals can and do support local initiatives, still requires further study.[61] This research aims to contribute to the research on the practice of supporting local peacebuilding.

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[54] Ramsbothan et al. 2016. 35.
[55] Paffenholz. 2015. 867.
[56] Lundqvist and Öjendal. 2018. 17.
[57] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 413.
[58] Gruener and Hald, eds. 2015. Introduction.
[59] Mac Ginty and Richmond. 2013. 770.
[60] Mac Ginty and Richmond. 2013. 770.
[61] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 411.

2.4 Challenges for External Actors Supporting Local Agency

Liberal peacebuilding critique uncovered limitations in peacebuilding endeavours by external actors arguing that international efforts have yielded little results at the local level.[62] There are, however, situations where local institutions and actors have come to a dead-end and look for external support to address and resolve conflict. Local capacities might not exist or they might have grown weaker due to polarisation or conflict. Local actors might not be committed to peace or traditional institutions and customs might in fact be the cause of conflict and reproduce inequality. An external actor can bring leverage and encourage accountability and inclusivity and open political space.[63] In general, there is today agreement among scholars that "all else being equal, international support tends to increase the chances of successful peacebuilding".[64]

Analysing the practices of international NGOs, Lilja and Höglund found two important functions for external actors when aiming to support local peacebuilding: risk absorbers and accompanying actors.[65] These functions are relevant also to other external actors such as the UN.

As risk absorber the external actor assumes the financial and administrative requirements posed by donors who rely on external actors to bring legitimacy and integrity in the design and implementation, as the local actors are often not seen to have sufficient capacities to live up to the expectations of the donors. The external actor takes on these responsibilities and absorbs the risk for these functions, thus enabling the channeling of aid to local peacebuilders. As an accompanying actor, the external actor can enable and sustain local action through i.a. capacity enhancement and facilitation, ultimately contributing to the strengthening of local agency.[66]

Accordingly, external actors are sometimes required for successful peacebuilding. The question for the external actor then is how to do it in a way that does not undermine local agency and promotes local ownership and inclusivity.   Who should be supported and for how long? In addition, external actors need to be fully cognisant of local power hierarchies in order to avoid concealing structural inequalities in the local society and thus consolidating an unequal status quo.[67]

Lilja and Höglund established three main challenges as particularly relevant for international NGOs supporting local peacebuilding. The first challenge is representation which refers to the difficulty in knowing and deciding with whom to engage at the local level and how to deal with actors who do not abide by international norms. Often external actors are driven to resort to a few, local elite

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[62] Autessere. 2017. 118-119.
[63] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 411 and 414, De Coning and Grey. 2018, United Nations Development Program. 2014. 12.
[64] Autessere. 2017. 114.
[65] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 412..
[66] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 412 and 424-25, McCann. 2015. 16.
[67] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 27-28.

representatives who have higher education levels and can speak English, who live close to the centre which is accessible to the external actors and who have often spent substantial time abroad or in the capital. They thus represent only a small part of the local community and their ideas might not be shared with the majority. Sometimes the most relevant local actors do not have sufficiently sophisticated systems of financial management, and at other times the funding leads to pacifying of local social movements or the crowding-out of the most relevant actors.[68]

A second challenge is ensuring local ownership, measured by the level of local control over the process and outcome. Important elements are the control of the design and approach of the initiative and the priority setting.[69] McCann calls for local ownership in the form of multi-layered and broad-based participation already in the design phase, within the design of the project itself. Including broad-based participation of different voices from the community leads to deeper understanding of the context and more relevant and effective peacebuilding programme designs.[70]

Lastly, time frames and timing pose a challenge. Peacebuilding is a long process, but often funding is available for a certain time-period only.[71] This is why McCann calls for a much longer time-span for supporting peace initiatives together with higher tolerance for slower, incremental change. Peacebuilding should employ a process rather than a project approach. Understanding the actors and the context, building trust and answering to the complexities of conflict transformation requires sufficient time, resources and flexibility which are often lacking in a project approach with rigidly set, time-bound objectives.[72] This echoes well with the the adaptive peacebuilding approach and with the experience of peacebuilding NGOs who emphasise context specificity, localised approaches, and fluidity and flexibility of the interventions.[73]

Trust-building between the external actor and the local practitioners is emphasised by McCann. He maintains that demands of accountability and control by the project donor can add to a trust-deficit between the external actor and the local practitioners. In order to achieve a situation, where accountability and control can be exercised without it being seen as a lack of trust of the local actors, time and longer-term relationship building are required. Such long-term relationships can be challenging to uphold, because they can be seen as favouritism towards a few actors.[74] However, if long-term relationship building involves the whole community, not just one or two institutional practitioners, this risk could be mitigated. A more real risk for long-term relationship building would usually be the donor's demand for quick results. Building a relationship is seldom seen as a concrete result for the donor.

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[68] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 415, McCann. 2015. 18.
[69] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 416.
[70] McCann. 2015. 17.
[71] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 416.
[72] McCann. 2015. 17-18 and 25-26.
[73] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 34.
[74] McCann. 2015. 18-19.

The international NGO Interpeace has developed norms that it follows in all peace initiatives it supports. These could provide useful guidance also for other external practitioners who want to support local agency. The five norms are: i) invitation to engage, ii) local partnerships, iii) inclusive process, iv) locally developed, action-oriented solutions, and v) trust-enabled processes of collaboration.[75]

Looking at peacebuilding from a more macro-perspective, Lundqvist and Öjendal suggest two additional challenges to the local turn. These are atomism and subordination of local peacebuilding initiatives to higher level peace processes. Atomism refers to local peacebuilding occurring in isolation from other local, national or international peace processes. In this case, the local initiative does not promote to the building of synergies and its effect and significance becomes limited.[76] In addition, the national level process might become less effective. Many suggest that national level peace is not possible without peace at local levels. For example women's groups in Burundi maintained that "[...] solving the national conflict can only happen if there is peace at the local level, and that preventing the reescalation of the national conflict entails paying attention to the multiple potentially escalating local disputes".[77]

Subordination, on the other hand, denotes local peacebuilding that risks becoming subordinate to national level peace processes in the sense that it is influenced negatively by higher level developments. This challenge proved more prominent in societies, where top-down political leadership, neopatrimonial systems and other very hierarchical systems are traditionally the norm.[78] For example, a case study of the so called Council of Notables, a group of prominent and influential tribal, religious and community leaders in Iraq, found that one of the obstacles for its peacebuilding efforts at local level is the "underlying political tensions at the national level that polarise communities and can cause an escalation in conflicts at the community level".[79]

Examining international NGOs, Lilja and Höglund describe the international peacebuilding chain as having four actors: the externals (multilateral and bilateral donors), external intermediary actors (international NGOs), their local partners (local NGOs, religious congregations, unions), and locals (individuals, communities and institutions). They recognise that in some cases the international NGO works directly with the locals.[80]

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[75] McCann. 2015. 21-23.
[76] Lundquist and Öjendal. 2018. 18-19.
[77] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 19.
[78] Lundquist and Öjendal. 2018. 18-19.
[79] "The Council of Notables[...]". 2015. 80.
[80] Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 415.

2.5 Inclusion of Women as a Matter of Equality and Justice

Inclusivity is closely related to the local turn. It is, however, a broader concept not specifically confined to the local. Both national and local peace processes should be inclusive. The UN Secretary-General defined inclusivity as "the extent and manner in which the views and needs of parties to conflict and other stakeholders are represented, heard and integrated into a peace process".[81] This is how inclusivity is understood in this research. In this chapter I am, however, focusing particularly on the inclusion of women in local peace processes.

Inclusion of women in peace processes is important because women, like men, have the capacity to be catalysts for both peace and violence. In summarising earlier academic findings, Väyrynen, Lehti, Feron and Koopman, found that the inclusion of women is significant "since women can be influential throughout the entire conflict cycle and on all conflict resolution tracks". Inclusion of women supports already existing peacebuilding structures.[82]

As with inclusion in general, inclusion of women can be seen from both a normative and a pragmatic viewpoint. Inclusion of women fosters gender equality and strengthens women's rights in a patriarchal society, but it is also believed to be necessary for the sustainability of the outcome of peace processes. Recent research show that the inclusion and meaningful participation of women positively correlates with the conclusion and sustainability of peace processes and implementation of the agreed. Women were often the ones who pushed negotiations to continue or start if the process had stagnated.[83] De Coning finds that the concept 'sustaining peace', introduced by the UN in 2015, consolidates the role of women in peacebuilding, as it indicates a strong link between the inclusion of women and the effectiveness and sustainability of peace processes.[84]

Women's participation in peace processes can often be easier at community level than in national level negotiations, as the public and political sphere is often claimed to belong to men. It has been shown, for example, that while women in Afghanistan are largely absent from national level peace talks, they are involved in inter- and intra-family and community conflict resolution.[85] Overall, peacebuilding NGOs found that women were sometimes better placed than men in mediating conflicts between religious or ethnic groups at community level, as they more easily gained permission to take that role than men did. Women could also occasionally more easily cross community borders and advocate for dialogue between the conflicting groups.[86]

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[81] UNGA and UNSC. 2012. para. 35.
[82] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 11.
[83] UNSC. 2015a. para 8 and 12.
[84] De Coning. 2018b.
[85] Senarathn. 2015. 82.
[86] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 31.

Although women's inclusion in peace processes has been demonstrated to be beneficial to the society, Senarathn found that a pragmatic view on women's inclusion risked "[i]nstrumentalising gender equality and inclusivity rhetoric through a liberal agenda [which] can end up being harmful in the long run". If inclusion of women is promoted merely as a tool to an end, inclusivity can easily be replaced by other means to achieve the same end. Inclusion of women should therefore be seen as a question of equality and justice.[87]

Inclusion of women is, however, not always easy. NGOs have found it challenging to be too adamant and pushy with regards to women's participation in peacebuilding. In very traditional, male-dominated patriarchal societies, where gender equality is often a process of incremental change, NGOs have experienced that results can be more permanent if the process is slow and avoids radical change.[88]

Traditional community conflict resolution structures have often been important for resolving conflicts and fostering dialogue and reconciliation at community level. They can also be used for highlighting positive aspects of traditional cultural and religious values and practices on issues such as human rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Based on case-studies from Afghanistan among other countries, International IDEA suggests that external actors use existing structures of conflict resolution as entry points for promoting the inclusion of women in peace processes. Not doing so might strengthen the perception that including women is a liberal, western imposition.[89] Community conflict resolution structures can also be a means to enable local communities to take control of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.[90]

Although the inclusion of women in peace processes is recognised in policy documents and its positive effects proven through research, peacebuilding practices still require strengthening if women's inclusion is to be a reality. In this research I have also studied the practices of the UN in Afghanistan in supporting inclusion of women in local peacebuilding.

2.6 Mediation as a Means to Support Adaptive and Inclusive Peacebuilding

Mediation has always been a key instrument for the UN in its endeavours to sustain peace, because "[m]ediation is one of the most effective methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts"[91]. Mediation is mentioned as one of the tools for peaceful conflict resolution already in the UN charter.[92]

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[87] Senarathn. 2015. 82.
[88] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 30.
[89] Hedström and Senarathna, eds. 2015. 162-163.
[90] "Country case study: Liberia". 2015. 43 and 45.
[91] Ki-moon. 2012. 1.
[92] United Nations. 1945. art. 33, para. 1.

Mediation is defined by UN as "a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements". Mediation is thus not a collection of ad hoc events, but a structured engagement.[93] The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation suggests that mediation can be effective if the conflict parties are open to negotiation, if the mediator is accepted, credible and well supported and if there is a general consensus at the regional and international levels to support the process. Moreover, the guidance identifies eight key fundamentals to be considered in a mediation effort. These are preparedness, consent, impartiality, inclusivity, national ownership, international law and normative frameworks, coherence, coordination and complementarity of the mediation effort, and quality peace agreements.[94]

Mediation defined in this narrow sense is close to facilitation which alludes to "intermediary efforts to encourage the parties to move towards negotiations". Also providing good offices has the same objective, but takes perhaps a more minimalist approach.[95] Facilitation does not necessarily aim at an agreement but seeks to increase mutual understanding and improve the relationship of conflicting parties.[96]

Traditional mediation and high-level elite negotiations proved, however, insufficient to tackle the complexities of modern conflicts. The traditional definition does not allow for a broader and more flexible approach and does not sufficiently capture the local aspect of the mediation process. This has led both practitioners and scholars to call for new definitions.[97]

In 1997 Lederach introduced a holistic approach to mediation, involving multiple levels of actors. Instead of only dealing through traditional diplomacy with top-level (political and/or military) leaders (track one diplomacy), he suggested involving other societal levels into peace processes. Also track two, consisting of influential society members such as civil society leaders, intellectuals, political parties and other power figures, and track three, comprising of grassroots level interaction, should be involved.[98]

These three tracks have later been expanded with the inclusion of track 1.5 which refers to informal negotiations with top-level politicians in a non-official setting, often used to prepare for track one negotiation. It is now widely recognised that a successful national level peace process needs action on all these tracks. In addition, the processes at different levels need to be linked and communicate with each other. Such a multi-track approach is believed to have more chances for a successful outcome, particularly when dealing with deep-rooted protracted conflicts.[99]

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[93] UN. 2012. 4.
[94] UN. 2012. 3 and 5.
[95] Ramsbothan et al. 2016. 35.
[96] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 8.
[97] see Lehti. 2019. 5.
[98] See Lederach. 1997.
[99] Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD). 2017. 3.

A policy shift from track one state-level diplomacy towards multi-track diplomacy, where mediation support involves multiple stakeholders and various types of diplomacy, is discernible in the policies of multilateral organisations. For example the EU Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities, adopted in 2009, encourages the European Union to be involved in mediation process at all levels from the governmental to the grassroots. Such a multi-track approach "rests on the assumption that transforming complex and multi-dimensional conflicts requires an inclusive approach which does not solely focus on elite bargaining but requires constructive interactions at different levels of society in order to reach a sustainable settlement".[100]

Likewise among practitioners there has been a move towards the use of multi-track mediation by multi-stakeholder mediation teams. The Mindanao peace process in the Philippines has been cited as an illustrative example of such multitrack, multi-stakeholder mediation, involving NGOs, regional and international mediation support.[101]

Inclusive negotiations and a multi-track approach to mediation is motivated by the same considerations as inclusive peacebuilding in general. Inclusivity is practiced in order to increase the accountability, legitimacy and public support of the negotiations and its outcomes and to ensure the buy-in of a particular constituency. Inclusivity is also proven to strengthen the sustainability of the outcomes and is likely to increase the quality and durability of the settlement. An interesting research finding was, however, that these benefits of inclusion only materialised where all the stakeholders had real influence over the process. What matters is thus not only the quantity of included actors but rather the quality of their inclusion. From the normative perspective, inclusion enables the implementation of participation as a question of equality, and can ensure the commitment to the right to participate of specific groups. UN agencies for example are committed to ensuring the inclusion of women.[102]

Multi-track mediation continues, however, to place the focus on track one, and the other tracks are mainly seen as having supportive roles. To shift the focus and acknowledge the importance of the local actors, so called insider mediation has been introduced as a means to further strengthen the local turn in mediation. Insider mediation is not looking for an external, neutral actor, such as the UN, to mediate a conflict. Conversely, it "draws upon the abilities of institutions or individuals that are seen as "insiders" within a given context to broker differences, build consensus, and resolve conflict".[103]

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[100] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 3 and 5.
[101] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 13.
[102] Paffenholz and Ross. 2015. 29-30, Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 29.
[103] United Nations Development Program. 2014. 6.

UNDP defines an insider mediator as "[i]ndividual(s), groups, entities or institutions possessing high levels of legitimacy and trust with the individuals and institutions involved in a specific conflict setting by virtue of their relationships and reputation with the parties and who/which possess a unique ability to directly and indirectly influence the conflict parties' behaviour and thinking." It is worthwhile to note that often inside mediators might not consider themselves as such and instead they identify themselves as community leaders, elders or other notables in the community.[104]

Also religious leaders should be considered inside mediators, as they can have strong influence on local communities. Pentikäinen found that the prominent position of religious actors at local level is strengthened as extremist movements adhere to religious ideologies. Religious and traditional leaders can on one hand act as intermediaries towards extremist groups and can at the same time appeal to the local public in general. They can therefore play an important role as mediators of conflict.[105]

On the other hand, inside mediators can also sustain unequal social norms and traditions. An example from Mali showed that "while religious and traditional leaders […] play an undeniably positive role in solving local conflicts between and within communities, customary conflict management methods have also been described as conservative instruments for maintaining the status quo rather than promoting social justice."[106] Traditional structures should not, however, be regarded as static and unchangeable. Instead, they evolve incrementally and thus for example women's inclusion in peace processes can be supported through such structures.

In addition to relying on insiders in contrast to neutral externals, inside mediation also has a broader view in relation to the outcome of the mediation process. While traditional direct mediation aims for developing an agreement, the objective of insider mediation is the peaceful transformation of the conflict.[107] Seen from this perspective, the definition of mediation is approaching the definition of peacebuilding.

Another effort to strengthen the use of local knowledge and increase the sustainability of peace agreements is the extension of the adaptive approach to mediation. Adaptive mediation is defined as "the capacity to read important changes in the fundamental dimensions of mediation situations and to respond to them with strategies and tactics that are more 'fitting' and thus more effective in those situations".[108] Adaptive mediation is able to adapt and adjust the mediation strategies to respond to unpredicted changes in the environment. It recognises conflict as a complex system, where uncertainty is a natural element. Adaptive mediation "encourages the maximum possible

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[104] United Nations Development Program. 2014. 9.
[105] Pentikäinen. 2015. 72.
[106] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 29.
[107] Väyrynen et al. 2018. 9.
[108] Coleman et.al. 2017. 403.

participation of the parties themselves, whether independently or together, so as to encourage self-organisation and resilience".[109]

In adaptive mediation the role of the mediator is to facilitate the process without undermining self-organisation of the conflict parties.[110] Similarly, the objective of external support to insider mediation "should be to ensure that national and local capacities […] become self-sustaining and autonomous, and are not permanently dependent on external assistance."[111]

Supporting mediation and facilitating dialogue is an expanding arena, where both international organisations, states and NGOs are engaged.[112] Such support activities implemented by external actors can take different forms. They can include measures traditionally described as mediation support which "refers to methodical, technical, logistical, regional knowledge support provided by experts to mediation processes guided by mediators"[113]. The activities target not only the mediator, but the conflicting parties, interest groups and the society at large, and can be divided into five categories: i) support for an enabling environment, including providing analysis and developing guidelines; ii) support for the design of a mediation strategy and process; iii) support for effective operations, including logistical, security, administrative and financial support; iv) support for implementation of peace agreements; and v) support for building capacities.[114]

With the introduction of concepts such as 'inside mediation' and 'adaptive mediation', peace mediation is being positioned "in the interface of mediation and peacebuilding as well as in reconciliation" and it is difficult to distinguish between mediation, mediation support and other peacebuilding activities. Lehti suggests that "[i]f the objective of this mediation support is to change the attitudes towards violence of parties in conflict and to enable peaceful transformation, third party activity can still be regarded as peace mediation but the third party is then not necessary a mediator."[115]

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[109] De Coning and Grey. 2018.
[110] De Coning and Grey. 2018.
[111] United Nations Development Program. 2014. 12.
[112] Lehti. 2019. 38.
[113] Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD). 2017. 5.
[114] UNGA. 2017. para. 21.
[115] Lehti. 2019. 6 and 38.

3. Methodology

In this research I analysed how UN in Afghanistan supports local conflict resolution and peacebuilding and how such support relates to the ongoing reforms of UN peacebuilding efforts at the global level. In particular, I studied UN's role as facilitator of dialogue and provider of mediation support to local conflict resolution and peacebuilding and how the UN responded to challenges external actors commonly face while supporting local peacebuilding. I was mainly interested in finding out how the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, and its representatives who work with the local peace initiatives, describe their role, the support provided by them and ways to include the local community in general and women in particular in the process. I have therefore opted for a pragmatist and constructivist approach, accentuating the practical and the experienced as basis for knowledge creation.

In order to situate the Afghanistan case study in the global context and within the current reforms of the UN peacebuilding process, I analysed the peacebuilding reforms that have taken place during the last years within the UN peace and security agenda, and reflected the praxis of UNAMA against the changing global policy.

In this chapter I will firstly provide a justification for why I decided to study UN's support to local peacebuilding in Afghanistan and also why I focused on the Surobi local peace initiative in particular. Secondly, I will describe the documentation and other written and oral material used as main sources of data. Thirdly, I will explain how interviews were used as complementary data sources. Fourthly and lastly, I discuss some limitations and ethical considerations regarding the material used.

3.1 One Local Peace Initiative as Case Study

My main research is a case study of one specific local peace initiative supported by UNAMA in Afghanistan, the local peace initiative in Surobi district. I wanted to do an in-depth study of the dynamics of supporting local peacebuilding by UNAMA, and therefore I chose case study as the main methodological tool. As indicated by Mabry, "[t]he raison d'être of case study is deep understanding of particular instances of phenomena".[116]

UNAMA in Afghanistan was a natural choice based on proximity. At the time of selecting the research topic I was working for the Embassy of Finland in Kabul. It was therefore interesting to link my research in peace and conflict studies to Afghanistan, a country I had learnt to know during the previous year. The Embassy of Finland had recently decided to support UNAMA's Salam Support Group which also supported local peace initiatives. The local peace initiatives

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[116] Mabry. 2012. 214.

received, however, relatively little attention by Finland or the other donors, despite their relevance to peacebuilding in a complex conflict environment such as Afghanistan. I wanted to know more about the local peace initiatives and how UNAMA supported them.

The Surobi local peace initiative, one of the local conflict resolution initiatives supported by UNAMA, is the focus of this research. The choice of the Surobi case was made based on information provided by UNAMA whose representatives regarded the Surobi local peace initiative a successful initiative in many aspects. The political affairs officers in the Peace and Reconciliation office in UNAMA evaluated it as a 'good example' in the sense that it was a longer-term project in contrast to being a short-term, one-off event and the inclusion components were more prominent. The Surobi local peace initiative could thus provide interesting data on how local peacebuilding and conflict resolution can be supported by the UN in an inclusive manner.

The Surobi initiative had been implemented already during some years, and there were plans and reports available for research, as well as internal analysis on the successes and challenges. The Surobi case seemed overall more documented than many other local peace initiatives and this also contributed to the choice of this particular case study.

At the start of the research my attention was geared towards analysing the role of women in the local peace initiatives and how UNAMA supported the inclusion of women in these processes. I was therefore looking for case studies where women's inclusion was more prominent or where efforts to include women had been most successful, so called good examples of women's inclusion. Surobi local peace initiative was suggested by several representatives of UNAMA as a prime example for inclusion of women.

As I continued reading about external actors supporting local peacebuilding, I realised that support by the UN to local peacebuilding was in itself an interesting emerging topic which had not been extensively studied. There was little information about how UN actually supports and how it could strengthen its support to local conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Furthermore, due to the security situation and language barriers, my access to local women and men was limited. I therefore readjusted my research objective to focus not only on how UN supports the inclusion of women in the local peace initiatives, but on how UN supports local peace initiatives in general. The case of Surobi is, however, of importance and a good example also from this perspective, and therefore I decided to focus on the Surobi local peace initiative as my case study.

3.2 Project Documents as Main Source of Data

This is a qualitative research and the analysis was principally based on primary data, such as documents produced by UNAMA on the local peace initiatives and interviews with UNAMA staff. It also included three radio programmes aired in the Surobi district community radio as part of

UNAMA strategic communications as well as journalistic articles produced by UNAMA on its web-pages describing local peace initiatives in different parts of the country. The secondary data used included a study by Priscilla Hayner from the UN Mediation Support Unit in New York that sought to better understand the work of the UN in supporting sub-national peace mediation in Afghanistan.[117] The study was part of a comparative study of several conflict affected countries. It is the document analysis coupled with expert interviews that form the foundation of this research.

The research relies on a thorough analysis of unpublished documents produced by UNAMA, such as the concept note and progress reports prepared by UNAMA to the donors of the Salam Support Group activities which also covered local peace initiatives. The documents analysed included individual project documents, notably relating to the Surobi local peace initiative, produced for UNAMA internal purposes.

Local voices, the beneficiaries of the local peace initiatives, are included through three radio programmes recorded in Surobi district in 2017. The radio programmes comprise a one-and-a-half hour roundtable discussion with the Surobi district Women's Council together with the Head of Paghman district Women's Council and a representative of the Kabul Department of Women's Affairs, a one ten-minute interview about women's role and empowerment in the Surobi district and one programme of forty minutes interviewing representatives from Surobi district women's and youth committees on the role of women in the conflict resolution process. All the programmes were provided to me by UNAMA Central region office and were translated from Pashto into English for the purposes of this research by an Afghan fluent in both languages.

The research is also informed by some articles published by UNAMA on its web-pages. The articles chosen as material for this research mainly focused on the Surobi local peace initiative. These articles were gathered using internet-searches.

In addition to the documentation relating specifically to Afghanistan and the local peace initiatives supported by UNAMA, I have used documents produced by the UN in New York. They are important for understanding the context of peacebuilding discourse and reform within the UN system. The documentation published by the Security Council and General Assembly are of particular importance as both organs have passed important resolutions and reports related to peacebuilding reform. According to Mabry, "[c]ontextuality is an aspect of the dynamism and complexity of a case. Case study researchers recognize that cases are shaped by their many contexts – historical, cultural, linguistic, ideological, organizational, cultural, linguistic, philosophical, and so on. Relationships between contexts and cases (and among contexts) are interdependent and reciprocal".[118] Understanding the global context and the changes within the

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[117] Hayner. 2019.
[118] Mabry. 2008. 217

UN peacebuilding system makes it possible to analyse the interlinkages between how UNAMA supports local peacebuilding and the global reforms.

3.3 Expert Interviews as Complementary Data

In addition to the document analysis, expert interviews with eight UNAMA representatives, six women and two men, were conducted between August and December 2019. Interviews are a significant method for comprehending modern-day political activities and results and therefore well suited as a method for complementing the written material for this research.[119] The experts interviewed were political affairs officers from the Peace and Reconciliation office, the head of outreach from UNAMA strategic communications in UNAMA headquarters, and the heads of office from UNAMA regional offices, where local peace initiatives have been implemented to a larger extent, namely Central, Eastern, Southern and South-East region offices. The interviewees were suggested by the Peace and Reconciliation office representatives. All worked or had worked (among other things) with local peace initiatives in different parts of Afghanistan or in the UNAMA headquarters. All interviews provided valuable background information and augmented my understanding of how UNAMA supported local peace initiatives. However, not all interviews were used as references for the final study.

Thanks to the positive introductions from UNAMA's Central region office and the Peace and Reconciliation office, it was easy for me to approach the interviewees and obtain their consent for the interview. Two interviews were conducted through Skype as the interviewee was located in another part of Afghanistan, but most were carried out face-to-face in Kabul, mainly in the UN premises. All interviews were conducted in English. All interviews were captured through detailed notes taken at the interview site and complemented immediately after the conclusion of the interview, and most interviews were also recorded. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews generally took around one to one and a half hours each. The persons were interviewed individually, except for the political affairs officers working in UNAMA headquarters in Kabul whom were interviewed in a group of two. For each interview I had prepared in advance an interview guide with open-eded questions, but did not always strictly follow the questions and made several follow-up questions to the answers given by the interviewees to entice extended descriptions. At times the interview was more a conversation and exchange of ideas between the researcher and the experts and thus something between a semi-structured and unstructured interview.[120]

In general I asked questions about the process of planning and implementing the peace initiatives, challenges of engaging local community and particularly women, ways in which the UN

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[119] Mosley. 2013. 5.
[120] Roulston and Choi. 2018. 233.

supports women's participation, perceived impact of the initiatives and how monitoring of the results was conducted.

The data collection and analysis was an iterative process.[121] As I read the project documents and had conducted some interviews, I adjusted the interview questions for the subsequent interviews, because the previous interviews and documents read gave answers to some questions but left others unanswered or prompted completely new questions which new interviewees again could explain and clarify. Sometimes documents gave context to specific interview evidence. The interviews thus complemented the documents and the documents complemented the interviews as sources of data. The data was analysed mainly through inductive and comparative reflection and discussion.

3.4 Limitations and Validity

The documentation used as main source for information was provided by UNAMA and thus its integrity could be challenged, presuming for example that results deemed as unsatisfactory or undesirable by UNAMA could have been omitted. There was, however, at no point in the research process any attempt by UNAMA to hide any of the information, and the material provided to me included the annual reports for all years without exception. Overall, there is no reason to doubt that the documentation used for the research would not be complete. However, as the documents are prepared by UNAMA, they cannot be said to be objective in the sense of an outside evaluation. Many documents nevertheless include internal subjective reflections and self-evaluations.

The documents lacked, however, information of longer-term monitoring and it seems that monitoring of the sustainability of the peacebuilding and conflict resolution results or longer-term impact is lacking. This was a limitation to the research and it was not possible to draw conclusions about the sustainability of the results achieved through support to local peace initiatives. The interviewees were also not able to provide more information about longer-term sustainability or impact of the initiatives. The Surobi local peace initiative was, however, not yet concluded, and therefore analysis of the sustainability of the results of this particular case, would have been premature.

When I commenced my research process, the focus was on the role of women in the local peace initiatives and the ways in which UNAMA encouraged inclusion of women in the processes. Consequently, also the interviews conducted in the beginning revolved more in-depth around how UNAMA supported the participation of women in the local peace initiatives it engaged in. As I later changed the objective of the research to look at supporting local peace initiatives in general, albeit in an inclusive way, the reliability of the data collected through interviews could be

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[121] Kennedy. 2018. 49.

questioned. One could ask if I had posed the right questions during the first interviews. This concern is, however, unnecessary. Understanding how UNAMA supported women's inclusion in the local peace initiatives required understanding how UNAMA supported these initiatives in the first place. Consequently, also the initial interviews included in-depth inquiries into the dynamics of supporting local peacebuilding.

The interviewees represented a good combination of staff from UNAMA's regional offices in different parts of Afghanistan. One should, however, expect that as representatives of UNAMA, there would be limitations as to what the interviewees can say. It is assumed that possible negative sentiments would not be presented as openly as positive observations of the role and actions of UNAMA.

Only one of the interviewees was Afghan and although this is a research about supporting the local, the voice of local actors is largely absent. The local stakeholders are included only in the form of radio interviews of the local actors and web articles produced by UNAMA quoting local actors. This conscious choice was made partly based on time limitations and restricted financial resources for travel and interpretation, but mostly it was made out of necessity on account of the difficult security situation. Owing to ongoing conflict, travel within the country was severely limited and I could not conduct interviews outside the capital Kabul. Even in Kabul movement restrictions were common, and some interviews had to be postponed due to restricted movement at the time the interview was first scheduled to take place.

While working at the Embassy of Finland, I was instrumental in Finland's decision to support UNAMA's Salam Support Group. Accordingly, this reveals a personal bias towards the activities of the Salam Support Group, including the local peace initiatives. If I had not regarded them as important and relevant, I would not have recommended supporting such initiatives. Being aware of this bias, I was particularly careful in collecting and analysing the data in an as objective fashion as possible during the research.

This research does not claim to be able to generalise any of the results. As all documentation used was produced by UNAMA and all the interviewees were or had been employees of UNAMA, the material provide a restricted, but important, step in seeking to understand how external, multilateral actors can, and do support local peacebuilding.

In addition, the Surobi case was a very special local peace initiative. It was identified as a 'good example' by UNAMA. The way UNAMA supported local peacebuilding and conflict resolution in this particular case, does not signify that UNAMA always acts with a similar dynamic in other peace initiatives. The findings are thus not generalisable as to how the UN works, but bring interesting insights into the practices of UNAMA in this particular case and can in many aspects provide examples for other local peace initiatives.

Once finalised, the study was sent to the interviewees for their review and possible correction of misrepresentations. Only after this did I submit the thesis for final evaluation.

My research, even with its limitations, brings relevant information on how UN as an external actor can and does support local peacebuilding and contributes to sustaining peace and how external actors can adapt to complex, local systems.

4. Reforming UN Peacebuilding as a Response to Modern Conflict - Three Reviews

In 2015 Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General, called for profound change of the UN peacebuilding practice as "[t]he scale and complexity of conflict today and the suffering that it creates threaten the international order established 70 years ago. [The UN] urgently need new and stronger ways to address international peace and security challenges. [The UN] must harness the full range of tools available: political, security, development, human rights and humanitarian, and […] need to change the way in which [it does] business within and across that range."[122]

This growing concern of a UN unable to keep up with the changing character of conflict directed the review of UN's work for peace. In 2015 three groundbreaking reviews on peace and security were released and the Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) were adopted. Particularly the SDG 16[123], aiming 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, rests upon the understanding of the inter-relatedness of peace and security, development and human rights and is a strong advocate for a comprehensive view on peacebuilding.

The reports of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (AGE-report)[124], the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO-report)[125] and UN Women's Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (1325 Global Study)[126] describe the current nature of conflicts and the global environment they take place in, analyse UN's responses to conflict and make recommendations to improve the effectiveness in addressing conflict and sustaining peace. They all emphasise the importance of conflict prevention and a system-wide approach, as well as the importance of engaging with the local level. Although separate, they are interrelated and should be viewed jointly. The UN reviews, if followed by changes of praxis, can be the start of a paradigm shift within UN and the international community to embrace a new approach to mediation and dialogue processes, and to allow local communities a larger role, called for by i.a. Pentikäinen.[127]

In this chapter I will describe the main innovations emanating from or highlighted by each of the three reports and how they have changed UN policies. I will also mirror the innovations against the discussions in the previous chapter on adaptive peacebuilding, the local turn and inclusion of women, and what the introduced changes would mean for the UN as an external peacebuilder.

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[122] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. para. 130.
[123] UNGA. 2015.
[124] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a.
[125] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b.
[126] Coomaraswamy. 2015.
[127] Pentikäinen. 2015. 71.

Lastly I will look at the reforms introduced in UN mediation policies and discuss how they reflect the calls for new mediation approaches.

4.1 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Effectiveness through Sustaining Peace

The so called UN peacebuilding architecture was founded as a response to the 2005 World Summit which called for better support to countries emerging from conflict.[128] Through the adoption of a joint resolution by the General Assembly and the Security Council the Peacebuilding Commission was created and its secretariat, the Peacebuilding Support Office, and the Peacebuilding Fund, were established.[129] The objective of the Peacebuilding Commission was to assist post-conflict countries in transitioning from war to peace and to coordinate UN's work on peace and security, development and human rights. Although described as historic[130], the Peacebuilding Commission was not successful in this endeavour and the results of its work fell short of expectations and a new approach to peacebuilding was required.[131]

The report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (AGE-report) called for a broader, holistic approach to sustaining peace. The report claimed peacebuilding was generally understood as something undertaken only after a conflict had ended, and called for a more inclusive understanding of peacebuilding and introduced the concept of 'sustaining peace', a term which would encompass conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Insufficiency of the current peacebuilding approach was exemplified through "little effective United Nations attention to prevention, great attention to crisis response […] and again relatively little attention in the recovery and reconstruction phase".[132] The choice of the concept of 'sustaining peace' was important for the Advisory Group because "it draws attention to issues well beyond building and restoring peace after a violent conflict".[133] In order to sustain peace, understood in this broad sense, it was imperative to unite the peace and security, human rights and development pillars of the UN.[134] Thus the previously very segregated fields of peacebuilding and development were brought closer to each other at least in theory.

Another conceptual innovation introduced by the Advisory Group was the concept of 'inclusive national ownership' that would include participation by community groups, women's platforms and national civil society among others.[135] The AGE-report strongly advocated for inclusive

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[128] UNGA. 2005c. para. 97.
[129] UNGA. 2005b.
[130] UNGA. 2005a.
[131] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 95-97, UNGA and UNSC. 2010.
[132] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 68.
[133] Menon. 2018.
[134] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. 3.
[135] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 44.

national ownership of peace processes and understood that "[…] peace needs to emerge organically from within society, addressing the multiple concerns and aspirations of various sectors and seeking common ground so that all sectors feel invested in strategies, policies and mechanisms that offer the way forward."[136] Only domestic stakeholders, through inclusive national ownership could lead the process of building sustainable peace. The AGE-report underlined, however, that national ownership cannot and should not be equated with the national government or elite, as such an approach would risk perpetuating exclusion.[137] 'Inclusive national ownership' defined in this way as emanating from the local society, not only the national government, is a strong acknowledgement of the role and importance of local agency.

According to the Advisory Group, inclusive national ownership could mean for UN a new role in providing more mediation, facilitation and dialogue support rather than engaging in mediation itself.[138] The AGE-report thus envisages a role for the UN as facilitating and supporting people-centred processes which allow communities, young people and women to become engaged in peace processes. This represents a shift from the liberal peacebuilding model, where UN would be the external actor who could initiate and control a peace process which would end in a specific outcome, into an adaptive peacebuilding approach where "the role of the UN is to assist countries to sustain their own peace processes by strengthening the resilience of local social institutions, and by investing in social cohesion."[139]

The Advisory Group found it insufficient that the UN peacebuilding architecture would be understood as only comprising the three offices in New York. Much of the work on the ground was done by peacekeeping operations, special political missions, resident coordinators and country teams in general, and therefore these should be considered vital elements of the architecture. In order to make UN peacebuilding activities more efficient, working in a holistic manner, the AGE-report recommended abandoning the concept "UN peacebuilding architecture" and instead understand peacebuilding as an imperative of the entire UN system, requiring cooperation between the UN secretariat and its divisions, between the secretariat and the specialised agencies and programmes as well as between the headquarters and the field.[140]

The launch of the report triggered an intergovernmental process which culminated with the adoption of identical Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture. The resolutions embraced many of the recommendations of the Advisory Group: they endorsed the term 'sustaining peace' which they sought to define, they emphasised the importance of prevention of violence and recognised economic development and poverty eradication as important contributions to peacebuilding, thus calling for an integrated

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[136] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 42.
[137] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 45 and 127.
[138] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 42.
[139] De Coning. 2018. 304.
[140] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 59-65 and 125.

approach between the interlinked and mutually reinforcing political, development and human rights programmes. The resolutions emphasised inclusivity and national ownership of peacebuilding and underscored the role of women and youth calling for gender-sensitive and targeted programming. Importantly, the resolutions recognised that "peacebuilding is an inherently political process".[141]

This acknowledgement of the political nature of peacebuilding helps according to De Coning create "fertile ground for the emergence of new approaches to peacebuilding", such as adaptive peacebuilding, which can operationalise 'sustaining peace'. He considers the recognition of peacebuilding as inherently political a key feature of adaptive peacebuilding. Elements such as deciding on who takes the decision on which projects to give up and which to adapt, are political, not technical by nature.[142]

In January 2018 the UN Secretary General placed sustaining peace and preventing conflict at the centre of the UN agenda by launching a report outlining the progress made in implementing the resolutions and providing recommendations to address existing gaps.[143] The report was the launch of what can be called the UN Sustaining Peace project which some researchers believe is the "most serious attempt to prioritize prevention in the way the UN manages conflict since Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 Agenda for Peace"[144]. It has been hailed as a possible policy breakthrough "that contributes, over time, to significant positive change in how the U.N. approaches, manages, innovates, and resources its peacebuilding work."[145] Through this report the broad approach to peacebuilding took root in the UN and prevention was put in the forefront. Instead of reactive peacekeeping after a conflict has already broken out, sustaining peace requires attention and resources to preventing violent conflict from occurring in the first place.

The Secretary General made a strong plea for community-level engagement by the UN as a crucial element for sustaining peace. His recommendation of direct UN engagement with the local community came out much stronger than the language included in the AGE-report in 2015 or in the subsequent resolutions. He encouraged the UN country teams to develop community-engagement strategies in order to develop participatory approaches involving civil society and local communities in peacebuilding. He also encouraged channeling funding for peacebuilding activities directly to civil society organizations and ensuring that youth and women's organizations are well represented.[146]

The Secretary-General's report underlined that development is essential for conflict prevention and peacebuilding as it helps prevent relapse into conflict. Therefore providing people with

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[141] UNGA. 2016a and UNSC. 2016.
[142] De Coning. 2018a. 311-312 and 317.
[143] See UNGA and UNSC. 2018.
[144] de Coning, Cedric. 2018b.
[145] Ponzio. 2018.
[146] UNGA and UNSC. 2018. para. 59 and 62-64.

employment opportunities and creating possibilities for economic sustenance are important parts of the peacebuilding puzzle.[147] Likewise the response to human rights violations were seen as integral parts of peacebuilding. If human rights violations are left unattended they can become a source for relapse into conflict and impunity can undermine trust in and support for the peace process.[148]

The Secretary-General therefore reiterated the strong messages of the AGE-report on systemwide coherence and better cooperation and coordination between the development, political and human rights pillars of the UN. He also brought together, under the umbrella of sustaining peace, the three UN reform streams in the areas of development, peace and security and management, and envisaged that the proposed reforms would greatly contribute to a UN which is better equipped, more effective and credible in supporting its Member States in preventing conflict and sustaining peace.[149]

In April 2018 the United Nations General Assembly convened a High-Level meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. As an outcome of the meeting the UN General Assembly and the Security Council adopted identical resolutions endorsing the recommendations made by the Secretary General in his report. Relevant UN bodies were invited to consider implementation of the recommendations.[150]

It was disappointing that after all these reforms, UN Secretary General, António Guterres, in his 2019 New Year's greeting describing the UN reforms, again referred to the reform of the peace and security pillar as a measure to "strengthen prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding" without referring to 'sustaining peace' and by clearly seeing peacebuilding as a task to be undertaken after a conflict has been resolved.[151] In January 2019, however, the reforms of the development system, of the peace and security architecture and of the management system, came into effect together with decentralisation of authority to the field level. It remains to be seen whether the concept of sustaining peace will be operationalised and whether a paradigm shift will actually take place.

4.2 Review of Peace Operations: Harnessing Peace Operations for Sustaining Peace

The UN peace operations include peacekeeping, special political missions (such as UNAMA in Afghanistan), good offices and mediation to advance international peace and security. The 2015 report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the HIPPO-report, undertook a

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[147] UNGA and UNSC. 2018. para. 23.
[148] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 39.
[149] UNGA and UNSC. 2018. para. 7 and 65.
[150] See UNGA. 2018 and UNSC. 2018a.
[151] Guterres. 2019.

review of the peace operations and made recommendations to ensure that UN is capable of answering the challenges of the future. It was the most comprehensive review of UN peacekeeping and special political missions since the landmark 2000 Brahimi Report on UN peace operations.[152] Although the HIPPO-report acknowledged that there had been several improvements during the past fifteen years, it also highlighted serious challenges and called for change. The report placed political solutions at the centre of peace operations, called for a more flexible spectrum of peace operations, and demanded stronger partnerships and focus on the field-level. Like the Advisory Group, the High-Level Independent Panel called for more emphasis on conflict prevention and stressed the need to invest in mediation capacities and funding. Another element in common with the AGE-report was the call for engagement with local communities.[153]

De Coning believes that the UN in the HIPPO-report has taken a first step towards an adaptive peacebuilding approach, although he also recognises that much more needs to be done in order to claim that UN would have embraced adaptive peacebuilding as an approach to peace operations.[154] As an example he presents the suggestion of the panel to develop a sequenced two-stage mandate process. The reason for the suggestion was that the approach where the UN Security Council gives a detailed mandate at the beginning of the mission, rested on hastily developed assumptions and did not provide sufficient support for specific situations. The HIPPO-report believed that "[s]equenced and prioritized mandates will allow missions to develop over time rather than trying to do everything at once, and failing".[155] In such a model an initial mandate with an overall political goal would later be complemented and adapted by a more detailed mandate based on field-level planning.[156]

Regarding mediation and negotiation, the HIPPO-report advised UN to play an important role in promoting and sharing experiences and good practices with other mediation stakeholders, such as regional organizations and NGOs. The UN mediators were urged to work with local actors, including community level representatives, and champion the inclusion of women. The HIPPO-report also noted that through community engagement "United Nations peace operations can help to facilitate more inclusive political processes that address social cohesion, inequalities and marginalization and contribute to a more sustainable peace".[157] It considered national staff as particularly significant in liaising with the local community.

The HIPPO-report noted that many peace operations already engaged in supporting local conflict resolution, despite the challenges in interacting with the local population. The High-Level Independent Panel identified four main challenges: i) a large geographical area to cover can make

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[152] See UNGA and UNSC. 2000.
[153] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. para. 10-14.
[154] De Coning. 2018a. 311.
[155] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. 10.
[156] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. para. 184.
[157] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. para. 78-79, 250 and 252.

it difficult to gain access to a dispersed population, ii) it can be tempting to liaise with the English or French-speaking elite or it can be difficult to know who would represent community at large, iii) it can be difficult to know how to support civil society to contribute to a political process, and iv) the host Government might view engagement with local communities as suspicious or infringing on its sovereignty. A concern raised by interviewees of the panel was the risk that a peace operation would replace local conflict resolution mechanisms with exogenous structures due to lack of information, time or understanding of the local mechanisms. To remedy some of these challenges, the panel recommended that community engagement strategies should be developed by the missions.[158]

In September 2015 the Secretary General released his report containing the priorities and key actions for implementing the recommendations of the panel and strengthen UN's ability to address conflict. The Secretary General focussed on three main areas: renewed focus on mediation and conflict prevention; stronger partnerships; and strengthening planning and implementation of peace operations.[159]

The SG also embraced the recommendation of putting politics at the centre of peace operations, noting that "a negotiated political settlement is the fundamental objective of United Nations peace operations" but that the settlement should promote peaceful and inclusive societies and advance human rights, as these elements are seen central for a resilient society that can resolve conflicts without recourse to violence.[160] The role of the UN should thus be to support the conflicting parties to attain a negotiated solution to the conflict and prevention of conflict. Mediation, dialogue, facilitation and capacity-building should be the main vehicles for this.[161] In conclusion, it can be said that the HIPPO-report introduced in addition to the adaptive approach, also the local turn into UN policies, implying a facilitative role for the UN, supporting building of local resilience and self-organising.

4.3 Review of the UNSCR 1325 Implementation: Inclusion of Women Merely Rhetoric

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is made up of nine security council resolutions that address how to protect, include and empower women in conflict and in peace processes. The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2000 marked the beginning of the agenda.[162] In reviewing the progress made in implementing the UNSCR 1325, the 1325 Global Study published in 2015 found that there was a large gap between the verbal commitments and concrete political and financial support to the WPS-agenda. Despite

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[158] UNGA and UNSC. 2015b. para. 253-254.
[159] UNGA and UNSC. 2015c. para. 8.
[160] UNGA and UNSC. 2015c. para. 10.
[161] UNGA and UNSC. 2015c. para. 14 and 33-34.
[162] See UNSC. 2000.

the ambitions of the resolutions, women and girls victims of violence still did not receive justice, the political space for women in peacebuilding processes continued limited and the pace of change had been slow.[163] The 1325 Global Study, however, raised expectations of increased commitment and action to implement the WPS agenda.[164]

The 1325 Global Study called for a variety of measures to make UN peacebuilding better respond to the different needs and priorities of women and men, and in line with the two other studies it proposed focusing on prevention of conflict and ensuring women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts, including at local levels. Support should be provided to women peace builders and financing be directed towards addressing women's needs and advance gender equality.[165]

The 1325 Global Study aligns closely with the gender-related paragraphs in the AGE- and HIPPO-reports. All three reports highlight the need for increased and more qualitative participation of women in all areas of peace processes. The need for inclusion of women is justified both on the basis of normative human rights obligations as well as on the basis of increased effectiveness of peace processes. For example the AGE-report noted that women's inclusion is in addition to being an issue of rights, also is an issue of effectiveness. Without the participation of women, the economic recovery, political legitimacy and social cohesion risk being undermined and thus the risk of relapse to violence is higher.[166]

The Secretary-General released his report on women, peace, and security in September 2015[167], followed by a Security Council resolution in October 2015.[168] The Secretary General noted the important role of third-party mediators in promoting more inclusive processes and considered particularly women-leaders and faith-based actors being in a position to advance women's inclusion. He also underscored the importance of sub-national and local mediation initiatives for building peaceful, inclusive societies. He therefore encouraged all actors to ensure women's direct and meaningful participation in all phases of sustaining peace and saw unique opportunities to support women at community level, linking community-level action to national level processes.[169]

In its resolution the Security Council took note of the gender-related recommendations of all three reviews and urged their implementation, noting the need to do more for women's empowerment and implementation of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. In addition, it encouraged increased financial and technical support to women on mediation, advocacy and negotiation. It

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[163] Coomaraswamy. 2015. 14-15.
[164] UNSC. 2015a. para. 152.
[165] Coomaraswamy. 2015. 15-16.
[166] UNGA and UNSC. 2015a. para. 56.
[167] See UNSC. 2015a.
[168] See UNSC. 2015b.
[169] UNSC. 2015a. para. 17, 22 and 154.

further encouraged closer cooperation between all UN actors responsible for implementing the WPS agenda, specifically mentioning UN Women.[170]

4.4 Strengthening UN Mediation and Mediation Support

Despite mediation being a part of UN's toolbox since the start and despite the growing interest for mediation, the Secretary General noted in his 2009 report on enhancing mediation and its support activities that little attention or support had been provided to mediation, and it was not until 2006 that the Mediation Support Unit was established.[171]

In his report the Secretary General advocated for mediation before, during and after a conflict. Early mediation should be preferred, even before any mutually hurting stalemate had ensued, as this would hopefully save lives and enable seizing opportunities for early conflict resolution, as compared to waiting for the conflict to be "ripe"[172]. Instead, he acknowledged that third parties were in a position to cultivate and foster ripeness of a conflict by introducing new ideas, skills, resources, and creativity. Third parties could also persuade the conflict parties to embrace mediation as an option for solving the conflict.[173] Although the report advocated mediation as an instrument to be used during the whole conflict cycle, it mainly reflected a traditional view of the conflict as a linear chain of events, where the mediator therefore has the possibility to find an optimal time to engage. It was only in the Secretary General's report from 2017 on activities in support of mediation that UN recognised the complexity of conflicts and that a perfect time for mediation seldom presents itself. Therefore the UN should actively look for and seize opportunities for engagement.[174]

On the other hand, the Secretary General in 2009 maintained that mediation should not stop after the signing of an agreement, but should continue throughout the implementation as details of the agreement are worked out. He therefore regarded it important to ensure that mediation support is integrated not only at the level of the headquarters, but also into UN field presence, so that such support can be given during national reconciliation and while implementing agreed solutions.[175]

The Secretary General encouraged inclusive mediation, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders, including civil society and women, are heard. Finally, he prompted UN to promote national and local capacity for conflict prevention and resolution, as mediation, facilitation and

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[170] See UNSC. 2015b.

[171] UNSC. 2009. 4.

[172] 'Ripeness' and 'mutually hurting stalemate' refers to a stage in a conflict, where neither party to the conflict can win using violence and the cost of violence exceeds the benefits. The terminology was coined by Zartman and Berman. 1982. 66-78.

[173] UNSC. 2009. 5-6, 8 and 19.

[174] UNGA. 2017. para. 12 and 15.

[175] UNSC. 2009. 14 and 20.

dialogue seemed promising for resolving peacefully not only international conflicts, but also inter-group conflicts.[176]

Since the 2009 UN Secretary-General report, four UN General Assembly resolutions on "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" have been adopted.[177] As a response to the UN General Assembly resolution from 2011 calling for more guidance for successful mediation, the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation was published in 2012.[178]

Enhancing and improving mediation received particular emphasis through the three reviews of 2015 and their emphasis on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. The UN General Assembly recognised that mediation needs to be used more and more effectively, and called for increased professionalisation of mediation support. It also encouraged dialogue, including at community level, with a view to sustaining peace.[179]

In March 2017, the Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies was launched. It provides practical advice on how to design gender-sensitive and inclusive processes and how to promote women's engagement in peace processes.[180]

On request of the General Assembly, the Secretary General published in 2017 his report on the UN activities in support of mediation reflecting on how UN can and has provided support to mediation processes.[181] The report provided a start of the local turn in UN mediation. Local agency was considered critical for two reasons. On one hand, it is an instrument to "lay the groundwork for formal peace negotiations" and "help generate buy-in and support for peace agreements, including among women, and other constituencies, notably youth" to make the agreement more sustainable. On the other hand, local agency was important in itself, as it can "address recurring conflicts over issues such as land and natural resources, and help minimize electoral violence". The Secretary General saw interlinkages between local and national peace processes and noted that peace processes develop at different societal levels. Therefore, "[a]ddressing local-level grievances early on can avert their misappropriation for political purposes".[182]

Already the 2012 UN Guidance for Effective Mediation had advised mediators on the importance of national ownership, noting that "[n]ational ownership requires adapting mediation processes to local cultures and norms while also taking into account international law and normative

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[176] UNSC. 2009. 8-9, 16 and 20.
[177] See UNGA. 2011, UNGA. 2012, UNGA. 2014 and UNGA. 2016b.
[178] See United Nations. 2012.
[179] UNGA. 2016b. para. 2, 10 and 16.
[180] See United Nations Department of Political Affairs. 2017.
[181] See UNGA. 2017.
[182] UNGA. 2017. para. 6 and 35.

frameworks."[183] Furthermore the guidance encouraged the use of local indigenous forms of conflict management and dispute resolution.[184]

These reforms introduced in UN mediation policies suggest an increased understanding of the importance of the local actors in mediation. They do not, however, guide UN in directly supporting local mediation. Dudouet and Dressler suggest that if the local turn in the UN is taken seriously, it should mean increased support to local mediation and insider mediators as well as to facilitating the participation of civil society and communication with the general public.[185]

Overall, there is still a call for UN and other international actors to be better at supporting peacebuilding and conflict resolution at local levels. McCann is clear in this request: "If one of the fundamental tenets of peacebuilding is its need to come from within the society, external actors must reconsider how their support can be more effectively integrated into locally owned efforts towards building peace".[186]

The UN Secretary General recognised this need in his 2017 report. While acknowledging that the formal mediation processes are at the core of UN peacebuilding exercises, the Secretary General observed that "if we are to combine these efforts with engagement at the local and community levels, we need to improve our ability to harness and align a full range of mediation and dialogue tools. This means drawing on different strengths within the system and working with partners in the international community and at all levels of the societies concerned".[187] There is now a pressing need to concretise such realisations into UN peacebuilding practice.

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[183] UN. 2012. 14.
[184] UN. 2012. 15.
[185] Dudouet and Dressler. 2016. 29.
[186] McCann. 2015. 16.
[187] UNGA. 2017. para. 69.

5. UNAMA and Local Peace Initiatives

In order to better situate the findings of this research, I will in this chapter give some background information to the local peace initiatives (LPI) supported by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as well as to the case study itself, the Surobi conflict. After a short description of UNAMA, I will review the overall support of UNAMA to local peace initiatives, summarising the types of initiatives, their implementation and outcomes as well as some challenges in supporting LPIs identified by UNAMA. The next sub-chapter provides a brief overview of traditional Pashtun conflict resolution mechanisms, as their understanding is important to comprehend how UNAMA seeks to support local peace initiatives respecting the local culture and traditions. I will then shortly describe the Surobi district and the Uzbin valley, where the case study LPI takes place. The chapter concludes with a review of the conflict in Surobi, its origin and impact on the conflicting parties.

5.1 UNAMA in Afghanistan

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan was initially created in 2002 by the UN Security Council.[188] It is a political mission with a mandate in political affairs and in developmental and humanitarian matters and it receives direction and support from the United Nations Department of Political Affairs in New York.[189] Its mandate was last extended by the UN Security Council in September 2020, when it was decided that UNAMA would continue to coordinate and lead the international civilian efforts in Afghanistan. Focus areas include the provision of outreach and good offices to support the national peace process and confidence-building measures and support to gender equality and women's participation in peace talks and in peacebuilding strategies both at national and sub-national levels.[190]

UNAMA pursues its mission by "[b]uilding a culture of peace, including by backing conflict prevention and resolution, as well as local and national peace efforts; promoting inclusion and social cohesion; strengthening regional cooperation in support of peace and stability; supporting gender-sensitive peacebuilding and recovery; and the adoption of transitional justice". Through such peace efforts UNAMA "[s]upport[s] Afghans to build a culture of peace and social cohesion by advancing consensus-building and inclusive peace and reconciliation processes and mechanisms at the national and sub-national levels, as well as victim-centred transitional justice processes".[191]

The mission is led by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and has 1200 staff of whom over 800 are Afghans.[192] UNAMA has a headquarters in Kabul and field

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[188] See UNSC. 2002.
[189] UNAMA. n.d. "Frequently asked Questions".
[190] UNSC. 2020. para. 6a and 6f.
[191] UNAMA. 2020.
[192] UNAMA. n.d. "Mandate".

presence throughout the country. The number of field offices has varied, currently there are at least eleven field offices in operation. The staff is divided into a political affairs section, human rights section and strategic communications section, among others. A Peace and Reconciliation Office was created in 2018 to strengthen the Missions's focus on peace.

5.2 Support to Local Peace Initiatives

UNAMA's mandate does not specifically mention local peace initiatives but UNAMA interprets its mandate broadly, and it is considered that the reference to 'good offices' and support to national peace efforts include mediation and mediation support to local conflicts.[193]

UNAMA has engaged in sub-national peace efforts already during a decade, but since 2017 support to local peace initiatives has become more organised. There has been systematic efforts to improve the quality and impact of the LPIs and the structure of the LPI programme as a whole. This has included hiring of additional national staff to seven field offices in 2018 and training of the staff in mediation, conflict resolution and sub-national peace building.[194] Also the creation of the Peace and Reconciliation Office in 2018, following the requirement of UNAMA's renewed mandate[195] and the strategic review of UNAMA of the Secretary General[196], have had a positive impact on the structuring of the LPIs and have focused UNAMA's activities in support of peacebuilding overall.[197] In January 2019 UNAMA launched the second phase of the Salam Support Group programme (SSG II), funded by four Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Local peace initiatives are one of the five focus areas of SSG II[198]. Although the management of LPIs has improved and the capacity of staff has been strengthened, UNAMA does not have an overall strategy which would specify the aim of the LPI programme and identify if and how the local peace efforts relate to the national level conflict.

In 2017-2018 all eleven UNAMA field offices had developed and implemented at least one LPI. As can be seen in table 1, not all field offices have the same interest for LPIs. While some offices have implemented four or five projects, others have implemented only one. In total 29 LPIs were commenced and many were completed during this period. The projects were undertaken in 24 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan. In 2017-2018 the total budget for the LPIs, excluding staff costs, was 115 000 USD.[199]

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[193] Hayner. 2019. 8.

[194] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 1.

[195] See UNSC. 2018b.

[196] See UNGA and UNSC. 2017.

[197] Hayner. 2019. 7.

[198] The five focus areas of SSG II are: 1) support to high-level mediators, entities, and individuals involved in peace talks; 2) Track II and Regional Initiatives; 3) Local Peace Initiatives (LPI), peace outreach and advocacy, and support to inclusive peace processes; 4) Women, Peace and Security activities; and 5) Support to humanitarian access, civilian protection, and human rights discussions. UNAMA. 2019. 1.

[199] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 1.

The LPIs have been very diverse in terms of duration and complexity. While some projects have been one-off events, others have extended over years targeting complex challenges. Most of the LPIs (eleven projects) were oriented towards social cohesion, trust-building and improving community relations. Nine projects aimed at resolving tribal and factional conflicts, often over land or water resources. Five projects had as objective the strengthening of the voices of women and youth in peace efforts, and two sought to engage the ulema (religious scholars and clerics forming part of the national ulema council) and other religious leaders.[200]

Table 1. Number of LPIs in UNAMA field offices in 2017-18

Field Office	Number of LPIs
Kabul	4
Mazar-e Sharif	3
Maymana	1
Herat	4
Jalalabad	4
Kandahar	5
Gardez	2
Bamyan	3
Pul-e Khumri	1
Badakshan	1
Kunduz	1

Adapted from UNAMA. 2019.

From 2018 onwards there was an attempt to focus on more complex LPI projects which were considered having more impact and relevance also for the national peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban, rather than organising short-term, single events.[201] During 2019 UNAMA's field offices were asked to pay particular attention to women's meaningful participation in peace efforts and offer space for women to voice their concerns and opinions about peace. This was mainly done through the local peace initiatives which field offices were encouraged to develop and implement. Field offices sought to ensure participation of women from both urban and in particular rural areas.[202]

Each LPI has a communication component to ensure that communication channels have been thought through from the beginning of a project. Communication channels can be for example traditional leaders and women's health groups or media such as radio and facebook. Through communication the local community, both women and men, old and young, are informed about the project and their buy-in is strengthened. Communication also provides a channel for

[200] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 1-2.
[201] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 2.
[202] UNAMA. 2019. 2.

accountability, enabling the community members to monitor that leaders implement agreed peace agreements. In addition, countering negative narratives and brining positive news about peace and hope, is seen as one important aspect of communication.[203]

5.2.1 Local Peace Initiatives Supporting Conflict Resolution and Dialogue and Cooperation

UNAMA categorises the LPIs into local conflict resolution projects and projects that strengthen dialogue and cooperation among communities. Conflict resolution projects include actions to tackle tribal conflicts and conflicts arising from access to natural resources. The main forms to address these conflicts are consultations, dialogue and facilitation of traditional or sub-national dispute resolution mechanisms in order to support community leaders to resolve the conflicts. External communication, mainly radio, is used to inform a wider audience, both locally and nationally, about the conflict resolution activities.[204]

Examples of conflict resolution LPIs are for example the Surobi LPI in Kabul province and the LPI in Sherzad district in eastern Nangarhar province. The Sherzad district conflict had roots in a dispute over how water should be distributed to agricultural fields. UNAMA, through its field office in the province, held consultations with the community leaders and tribal representatives and finally a local *jirga* (community council) was organised between the two tribes involved. The *jirga* ended with the adoption of a resolution whose implementation is being monitored by the field office and a committee set up for the task. Women from both tribes participated in separate side-meetings which provided input for the final resolution.[205] The Surobi LPI will be analysed in detail in the following chapter. UNAMA considers the Surobi LPI one of the strong and sustainable LPIs and an example of a situation where UNAMA has been able to foster the establishment of local, community-based conflict-resolution mechanisms.[206]

Projects that support dialogue and cooperation and encourage consensus and support for peace include a variety of projects gathering community actors to discuss and promote peaceful resolution of conflicts. These projects also include projects supporting social cohesion. UNAMA will likely increase the development of such projects because "[a]ddressing issues of "social cohesion" rather than specific community conflicts could result in a deeper and longer-term impact"[207]. This preference for social cohesion projects perhaps reflects the recommendations of the UN Secretary General in his 2018 report on sustaining peace[208] and his emphasis on prevention of violent conflict in peacebuilding.

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[203] Adhikari. 2019.
[204] UNAMA. 2019. 5.
[205] UNAMA. 2019. 5-6.
[206] Hayner. 2019. 7.
[207] Hayner. 2019. 8.
[208] See UNGA and UNSC. 2018.

One example of an LPI that supports dialogue and cooperation is the LPI in the South-Eastern province of Khost. The objective of the LPI was to empower youth and women in remote communities to play a role in conflict resolution. After a period of consultations and individual engagement from the field office, a youth peace committee, consisting of both young women and men from six different districts, was formed. The aim was to organise meetings with the district and provincial authorities to discuss local peace efforts, and the youth peace committee undertook to support mediation and resolution of local conflicts in collaboration with community elders and local authorities.[209]

Another example of a project supporting dialogue and cooperation is the LPI in the Northern province of Balkh. The project sought to promote political participation and prevent radicalisation among the minority Turkmen communities and reduce tensions between the Turkmen community and the district and provincial authorities. The field office engaged in individual consultations and meetings with different stakeholders and organised an event where the Turkmen community representatives identified root causes for the radicalisation of the youth. The efforts concluded with a signed agreement between the Turkmen communities and local authorities, where each actor pledged to improve mutual relationships and focus on improving infrastructure and education services in the community.[210]

Some LPIs focus on women's inclusion in local and national level peace efforts. For example, one LPI assembled women from four Westerns provinces to discuss the design and content of the national level peace process. Another LPI identified active and influential women leaders in seven districts in Khost province and encouraged more collaboration and participation in peace processes.[211]

5.2.2 Implementation and Monitoring of LPIs

LPIs can be initiated on the basis of opportunities and needs identified by UNAMA field offices or they can be responses to requests from local actors. Usually the political affairs section in the field office takes the lead for the development of the project, while it receives support from other sections. The projects are approved by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan who ensures sufficient coordination has taken place with all relevant UNAMA sections also at the headquarters, including with strategic communication, human rights and gender advisory unit, as well as UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs when needed. Coordination among the different sections at the headquarters level is seen as important in order to avoid any possible overlap of projects and increase synergies between the sections. The LPIs

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[209] UNAMA. 2019. 6-7.
[210] UNAMA. 2019. 7.
[211] UNAMA. 2019. 7.

are implemented by the field offices and overseen by the Peace and Reconciliation Office in Kabul.[212]

When implementing the LPIs, the field office works closely with the local authorities and communities. Long-term presence in a particular region was identified by interviewees as one core element for developing a successful LPI. Such long-term presence enables trust-building with the local communities which in turn makes it possible to access information and analysis necessary for successful peace initiatives.[213] Through LPIs UNAMA engages directly with the local community without a local NGO or other organisation in between.

The preparatory phase is considered essential for the sustainability and impact of the LPIs, and some field offices invest a lot of time and human resources to develop the projects. The preparations include conflict mapping and analysis, ensuring acceptance of UNAMA's role and building partnerships with key stakeholders through outreach to community leaders and representatives, and consultations with both government and civil society representatives. If the field office does not have sufficient capacity for this phase, UNAMA's headquarters provides support through its own staff or external consultants.[214]

Collaboration with other UN organisations is encouraged, but UNAMA admits that this is an area which needs more effort. The objective is to increase impact through the utilisation of synergies and coordination between the different UN actors.[215]

The implementation of LPI outcomes has mainly been monitored through political outreach activities and by being in contact with relevant stakeholders. This is not sufficient and information about the long-term impacts of LPIs or the sustainability of agreements reached through them was not available for this research. To fill this gap UNAMA encourages the field offices to include longer lasting monitoring plans into the project designs.[216]

5.2.3 Outcomes of LPIs

In an internal UNAMA Lessons Learned document which summarised the experiences of developing and implementing LPIs, one chapter described the perceived direct benefits of the projects for communities as well as indirect benefits for UNAMA and its field offices. UNAMA identified three direct benefits to the local communities: i) establishment of working relationships and trust between community representatives and local authorities which led to joint responses to local challenges, ii) provision of platforms for religious and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable

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[212] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 2, Hayner. 2019. 6.
[213] Adhikari. 2019, Iribarne. 2019.
[214] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 2.
[215] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 2.
[216] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 3.

groups, such as women, youth and returnees, to interact with local authorities and community and civil society representatives, and iii) resolution of long-running conflicts, particularly in the Eastern region, often through organising traditional *jirgas* or provincial conflict resolution committees.[217]

One result of many LPIs was the creation or strengthening of local conflict resolution mechanisms.[218] UNAMA saw the resolution of local conflicts as a particular achievement, as it builds the capacity of local institutions and mediators who can play a role in supporting a national peace agreement at the local level.[219] In addition, resolving a conflict eliminates a source of instability. This leads to a more peaceful environment for the local population who can return if they have been displaced, and can again access markets, health care and grazing pastures as well as other services.[220]

The Lessons Learned document mentioned the development of innovative mechanisms to ensure inclusion of women and youth in the conflict resolution processes which traditionally are led by (male) community elders and (male) religious leaders. UNAMA considered that inclusion of women and youth had increased the representativeness of these processes and had provided a tool for building inter-generational institutional memory.[221] This is not described as a direct benefit in the Lessons Learned document, but is regarded as one by Hayner from UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers in her review of local peace initiatives in Afghanistan. According to her, UNAMA has through local conflict resolution been able to demonstrate how traditional conflict resolution mechanisms violate girls' and women's rights and has been able to suggest less discriminatory solutions. UNAMA has engaged women in peacebuilding processes which could encourage women's participation in other local and national fora.[222]

The visibility given to non-violent conflict resolution through local media could also be described as one outcome of LPIs, at least in cases such as the Surobi LPI. As shown in the Surobi case, the involvement of the local radio station can give the local conflict and the mediation process visibility way beyond the village, and it can provide a tool to instil a culture of peaceful resolution of conflicts to larger audiences.

Hayner noted that UNAMA's local engagement was well regarded by the local community and that both women and men valued UNAMA's work. This is a benefit to UNAMA as it strengthens UNAMA's legitimacy and its already good reputation in Afghanistan.[223]

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[217] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 3.
[218] Hayner. 2019. 9.
[219] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 3.
[220] Hayner. 2019. 9.
[221] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 3.
[222] Hayner. 2019. 9.
[223] Hayner. 2019. 9-10.

Indirect benefits included the ones that strengthened UNAMA's operations: i) improvement of internal working methods through the establishment of a multi-sectoral (political affairs, human rights and strategic communication) working group to support the LPIs, ii) attempts to improve coordination and cooperation with other UN organisations and the establishment of a Peace and Reconciliation Task Force In Kabul to share information on activities promoting peace, thus strengthening the One UN-approach, and iii) improvement of the assessment and understanding of the political and security situation in the region as a consequence of the conflict assessments and stakeholder consultations made and the close relations built with the communities in the preparation of LPIs.[224] In addition, the LPI programme had provided UNAMA's field level staff, both national and international, with training opportunities in areas such as conflict mapping and project development.[225]

5.2.4 Challenges for LPIs

Owing among other things to scarce natural resources and poverty, years of war and armed conflict, and a tradition of retaliation, there are many ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan at local level. One of the challenges of supporting local peace initiatives identified by UNAMA was the question of which conflict resolution to support. UNAMA is a political mission with a clearly defined mandate, and considers that it cannot and should not engage in mediating all conflicts at local level.[226] Some local conflicts are regarded as non-resolvable due to their closeness to the national conflict between the government and the Taliban or because the conflict has close links to drug trafficking.[227] It is, however, not fully clear what the closeness to the national conflict refers to and when such closeness would impede efforts to resolve a conflict at the local level. As will be discussed later in chapter six, UNAMA identified linkages between the Surobi conflict and the conflict at national level, and yet it decided to provide mediation support to the Surobi case.

The Lessons Learned document elaborated upon and summarised challenges faced by the field offices when designing and implementing LPIs. These challenges were mainly linked to ongoing armed conflict and the very traditional, male-dominated communities. One great challenge identified by all field offices was access to remote areas. Access was challenged due to bad weather and road conditions or due to insecurity. In some areas this was overcome by inviting the participants to more secure areas, such as district or provincial capitals or Kabul. UNAMA noted that such relocation of activities, would not, however, always remove the security threats for the participants.[228]

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[224] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 3-4, Hayner. 2019. 10.
[225] Hayner. 2019. 10.
[226] Iribarne. 2019.
[227] Hayner. 2019. 10.
[228] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 4.

Although innovative methods to include women in the peace processes were mentioned as a positive impact of the LPIs, simultaneously all field offices mentioned engaging women, particularly women from faraway and conservative, rural areas, as a challenge. In many places women can only participate if accompanied by a *mahram* (close male relative to escort the woman) which increases the costs of gatherings and may affect the issues that women are willing to raise in a meeting. Sometimes field offices had felt that community elders saw the insistence of including women in the conflict resolution process as something negative.[229]

Another challenge mentioned was spoilers[230]. Spoilers were a problem particularly when local stakeholders had strong links to power-brokers and patrons in Kabul. Such a situation reinforced the importance of conflict analysis and stakeholder mapping at both local and national levels. A fourth challenge identified was the lack of capacity or willingness by local actors to engage with each other or with UNAMA. Usually this was driven by strong interests (either personal, commercial or due to sympathies with a particular armed group) or by lack of trust (between the parties or towards local authorities). For longer-term projects constant changes in government appointees at local level was an issue. The projects often depend on the support of the local authorities, and changes in key staff can halt or even reverse progress made. Lastly, the field offices found UNAMA's internal project management procedures challenging as lengthy approval processes and slow fund disbursements delayed implementation of projects. UNAMA sought to respond to these challenges by appointing staff dedicated to LPIs and by streamlining the processes.[231]

In addition to the challenges identified by the field offices, Hayner found challenging the substantial number of human resources needed, both in Kabul and in the field, to manage a small number of relatively small projects.[232] It is, however, not only the quantity of human resources that is a challenge, but also the capacity of staff. It is obvious that local peace processes are as varied and complicated as any other peace processes, and mediation and peacebuilding capacity among staff must be robust. One of the interviewees referred to this and said: "I quite quickly realised that I probably don't have the necessary skills […] because peacebuilding is super complex"[233].

5.3 Traditional Pashtun Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The very traditional, patriarchal communities were identified as one of the main challenges for LPIs. Pashtun communities are a prime example of such communities. Pashtun are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and it is estimated that some 40-50% of the population is Pashtun.

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[229] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 4.

[230] Spoilers were defined by Stedman as "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it". Stedman. 1997. 5.

[231] UNAMA Peace and Reconciliation Office. 2019. 4.

[232] Hayner. 2019. 11.

[233] Leuenberger. 2019.

For most Afghans, particularly in the rural areas, life is still today characterised by strict adherence to both Islamic and customary traditional guidelines and norms. For Pashtun the customary norms and regulations are contained in *pashtunwali*, translated as 'the Pasthun way of living'. *Pashtunwali* is considered a collection of unwritten rules and values, a kind of ideal and code of conduct which a good Pashtun is expected to follow. Violations of the code bring dishonour not only to the person violating the *pashtunwali*, but also to his or her whole tribe or community. Important concepts are honour, hospitality, respect, frankness, pride and dignity as well as a strong sense of belonging to the tribe and belief in Islam.[234]

Customary law as inshrined in *pashtunwali* is distinct from religious *sharia* law. Religious law can in fact be in conflict with customary law, for example on the topic of revenge and blood feud. This is, however, often not recognised at the local level, perhaps due to low educational levels. Another important difference is that the written, religious law is considered static, whereas oral, customary law reflects the local culture and could change according to changes is customs and traditions.[235]

In some districts there are community councils, so called *shuras*, at the district or village level. There are different kinds of *shuras*, such as development *shuras* and women's *shuras*. A *shura* composed of the village leaders in the district is a link between the district administration and the villages and can function as a conflict resolution body.[236]

The *jirga* is the customary Pashtun conflict resolution mechanism whose functions include mediation. It is an ad hoc community council for resolving a particular conflict. It is composed of local elders who are usually and almost exclusively male, and its decisions are based on consensus. For the *jirga* to take place, the parties to the conflict must agree that the *jirga* has authority to settle the conflict. The objective of the *jirga* is social reconciliation and compensation for the wrongdoing, not punishment of the perpetrator, as is common in the state law. In minor cases it can be only one or two local elders to help resolve a dispute, whereas in more complex cases, several elders are invited as judges to investigate the facts and propose a solution. Barfield et al. consider the inclusion of a religious leader among the elders in any *jirga* an advantage, as he can attest that the resolution is acceptable also in the eyes of God.[237]

In Afghanistan many conflicts traditionally arise from the sources of income and honour in the rural community, such as land, possessions and women. The most difficult conflicts to settle are the ones involving a blood feud, because in these cases the parties have to agree to revoke their right of retaliation or revenge. This can be difficult, as traditionally in cases such as murder and rape, the wrongdoing is not directed at the community but directly at the victim and his/her family.

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[234] Adel. 2018. 110, Najib and Afroz. 2013. 52.
[235] Barfield et al. 2006. 13.
[236] Smith. 2009. 18.
[237] Barfield et al. 2006. 8-10.

It is expected that such wrongdoing is retaliated and the perpetrator or his family punished by the victim's family. Because of honour and responsibility, anything else would be a sign of moral weakness and lack of courage not just by the victim but by his/her whole family. If such conflicts are not solved, they can lead to a spiral of worsening violence involving not only the victim's and perpetrator's families but entire tribes.[238]

The settlement process through a *jirga* can start at the request of the parties or by mediators from other villages who propose a negotiated settlement. Particularly when dealing with a more complex case, such as killings, the parties must give a power of attorney, *wak*, to the *jirga* members. The *wak* can be given to only one individual who has been asked to mediate the conflict, or to several elders. Often the *wak* is given in the form of a written document. The parties must also provide a security deposit to guarantee the acceptance of the final resolution. If either party refuses to accept the decision, he loses the deposit to the other party. Such an economic incentive is often identified by the community members as the most powerful tool to ensure the implementation of the final decision.[239]

Women do usually not participate in a *jirga* and it does not treat women as equal to men. Women are often represented by their male relatives and some of the possible decisions, such as forced marriage of a woman as compensation, violate Afghan law.[240] Women are, however, not only disempowered bystanders in Pashtun conflict resolution tradition. Elder women can take the role of mediators and advisers in disputes within a family or between women.[241] There are also examples of women who have taken an active role in the *jirgas* and contributed to an enlarged acceptance of women in conflict resolution.[242]

Nanawati is a formal apology to the family of the victim and is often used especially in cases involving killings or injured people. A sincere offer of *nanawati* should be accepted and will end the circle of revenge. *Nanawati* can be performed by the perpetrator and his family but also by one or several of the *jirga* members. It can also be offered by elder women from the family of the accused or from a third party village. Azadmanesh and Ghafoori consider that the respect given to women who are present to repent and seek apology, can lead to faster resolution of the conflict.[243]

Often religion is referred to when limiting the role of women in conflict resolution. Azadmanesh and Ghafoori found, however, that many religious scholars in Afghanistan refute such

[238] Barfield et al. 2006. 8-10.
[239] Barfield et al. 2006. 10, Smith. 2009. 49-51 and 55.
[240] Barfield et al. 2006. 17.
[241] Smith. 2009. 13-14.
[242] Azadmanesh and Ghafoori. 2020. 5.
[243] Azadmanesh and Ghafoori. 2020. 5, Smith. 2009. 55.

interpretations and see no reason to limit the role of women in conflict resolution, giving examples of scriptures, where women have played an important role as advisers or positive influence.[244]

The decades long wars and conflicts in Afghanistan have weakened the traditional hierarchies such as *shuras* and *jirgas,* as younger military commanders and warlords have started to play a larger role in the community and as conflict forced people into displacement. To counter this development, traditional, customary institutions are being reinstated in many places as means to reduce further violent conflict and compensate for the lack of state institutions. It can, however, be difficult to reinstate *shuras* or *jirgas*, for example due to the presence of armed political groups. Sometimes military commanders take control of such tribal institutions and have the last say in any decisions in the community.[245] In such circumstances it is relevant to reflect whether it is meaningful to try to re-establish traditional institutions, or whether more innovative mechanisms and solutions would indeed be relevant.

5.4 Uzbin Valley - the Context

Surobi district is an example of a district with predominantly Pashtun inhabitants. It lies some 90 minutes drive east from Kabul (see figure 1). It is the easternmost district of Kabul province, situated along one of the main roads of the country, the highway connecting the capital Kabul to the eastern provinces and the town of Jalalabad, and the Torkham border crossing with Pakistan. In 2002-2014 it was the main supply route for petrol, food and equipment to Nato and US forces.[246]

The Kabul river floats through this large district. Most of it is located at around 1000 m above sea level and the terrain is mostly mountainous with ravines and gorges. Surobi is known for its rugged beauty and UNAMA described it as "a picturesque district located at the junction of the Kabul River and [the mountainous province of] Panjshir".[247]
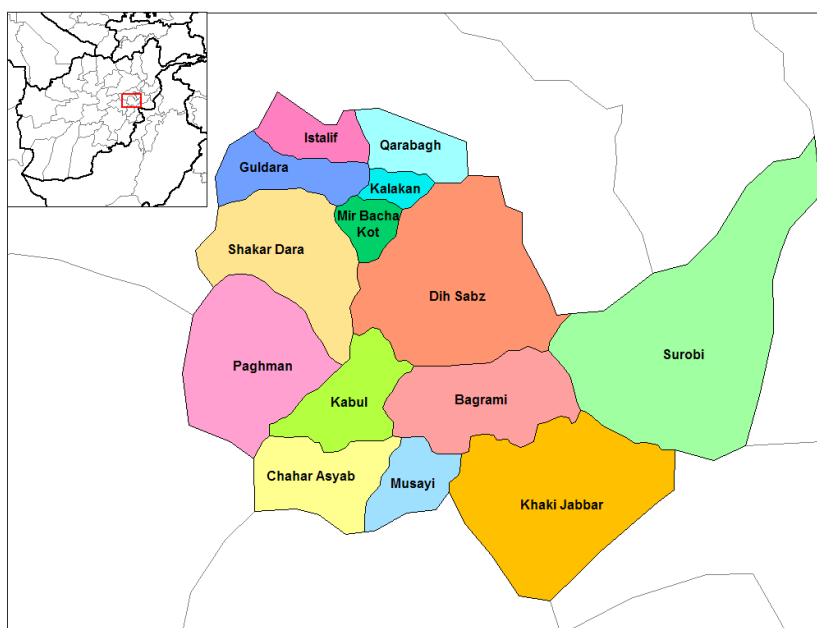
Figure 1. Map of districts in Kabul province.
Source: Wikimedia Commons
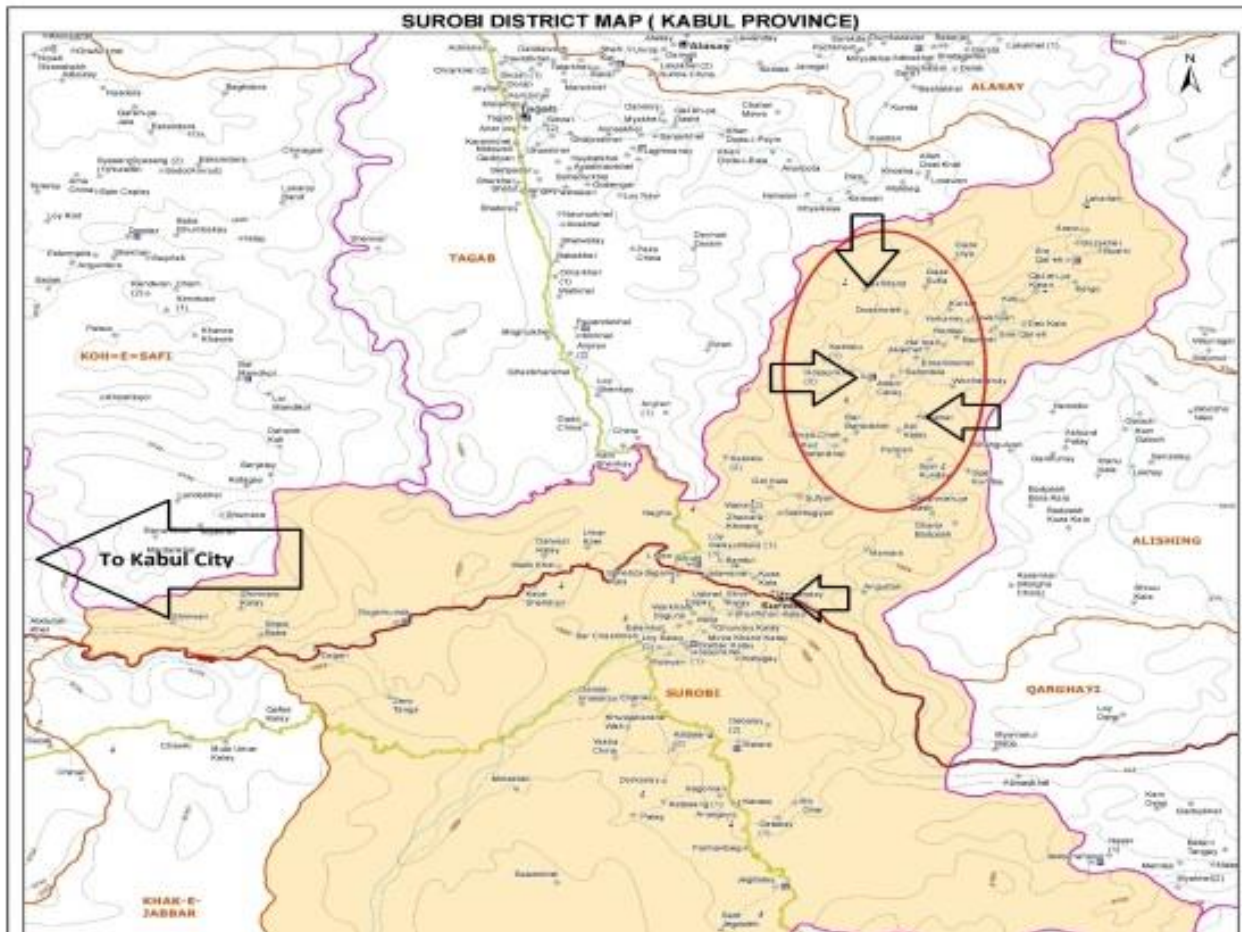
Figure 2. Map of Uzbin Valley in Surobi district.

Source: UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 4.

Uzbin is a side valley in Surobi and extends for some 30 kilometres north of the district centre and the highway that crosses it (see figure 2). The road from Surobi administrative centre traverses Uzbin valley following the water stream and thus divides the Uzbin valley leaving the Hussain Kheil villages to the West and Chenar to the East. Several Afghan National Army check-posts are located along the road.[248]

Despite being relatively close to the capital Kabul, Surobi is a poor district. According to World Bank estimates, over 82% of the population live below the poverty line. This means over 65 000 people from a total of 80 000 inhabitants in the district.[249] Only a quarter of the population is literate (43% of the men and only 5% of the women) and almost half of the the inhabitants use unprotected spring water as their main source for cooking and washing.[250]

Surobi has been the scene of heavy fighting many times in the history and saw some of the heaviest fighting during the civil war. The Asiaweek Magazine reported how on the 24th of September 2000 "[…] the Taliban swept into [Surobi] from three fronts, killing scores of Massoud's

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[248] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 7.
[249] World Bank Group. 2018. 16.
[250] Central Statistics Organization Afghanistan. 2013. 21 and 29.

elite. Four days later, many bodies were still sprawled by the roadside where they had been cut down"[251]. The Uzbin valley became a hotspot for anti-government elements and the Taliban probably due to its strategic location. It is said to have been the transit point for fighters coming from Pakistan on their route to the Kapisa valley, just east of the main U.S. base at Bagram.[252]

During the Nato-led ISAF mission in 2001-2014, Surobi was first allocated to the Italian troops and in 2008 the French military took over. Uzbin had already from the beginning of the ISAF-mission become a no-go area due to the presence of anti-government elements. The French, however, took a more aggressive approach and ventured into the Uzbin valley with catastrophic consequences.[253] In 2008 ten French soldiers were killed in an attack in the valley. The attack was described as "the single biggest combat loss for foreign troops in Afghanistan since 2001".[254]

The French stayed in Surobi for another four years, but in 2012 the district was "transitioned" to the Afghan security forces. Surobi, and the Uzbin valley in particular, continued as a hotspot for anti-government elements even after this. From the valley attacks on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway were staged. An especially dangerous stretch was a 15-kilometre-long gorge, where improvised explosive devices (IED) were frequently placed.[255] In 2014 Surobi was reported the most volatile district in Kabul province after Kabul city. Security incidents were mostly armed clashes, but included kidnapping, IED detonation, airstrikes and suicide attacks. According to European Asylum Support Office, the district was considered an insurgent stronghold in Kabul province, and particularly the Uzbin valley was considered "volatile".[256]

In 2018 serious security incidents were reported in Surobi district. These included airstrikes by Afghan security forces, killing and wounding Taliban insurgents, attacks by the Taliban killing representatives of Afghan security forces and civilians and Taliban attacks on Afghan security forces' outposts.[257] In March 2019 at least five civilians, including four women and one child, were killed in the Surobi district, as the Afghan and US forces conducted a raid including airstrikes in the district. The objective was Taliban fighters and the spokesman of the Nato forces believed that the Taliban Surobi district shadow governor was killed along with six Taliban fighters in the raid.[258]

Violence continues to chastise Surobi and the security situation continues precarious, unlike most other districts in Kabul province. The Uzbin Valley, where both conflict villages are located, is

[251] Davis. 2000.

[252] Hamida. 2009.

[253] Foschini. 2015.

[254] Hamida. 2009.

[255] Foschini. 2015.

[256] European Asylum Support Office. 2015. 40.

[257] European Asylum Support Office. 2019. 101.

[258] The Frontier Post. 2019.

mostly an area controlled by the Taliban. Due to security reasons UNAMA representatives were not allowed to go to the valley.[259]

Due to the insecure situation both in Surobi and its neighbouring districts and provinces, the district is prone to migration flows. Between 2012 and 2018 almost 14 000 internally displaced people from other parts of the country arrived in Surobi. At the same time almost 12 000 returnees (people who had spent time abroad) and returned internally displaced persons (IDP) came back to Surobi. However, at the same time 3600 people were estimated to have fled Surobi as IDPs to other districts.[260]

In addition to conflict, also natural disasters cause suffering to the inhabitants of the district. Surobi, including the villages inhabited by Hussein Kheil, is an area prone to floods and flash-floods. For example in August 2013, HALO Trust reported of heavy rains that brought flash floods and high levels of water to 17 villages in the district. At the time of reporting 30 people were confirmed dead but over 20 were still missing. 520 families suffered losses and nearly 460 houses were completely destroyed. In addition, there was severe damage to agricultural lands and the village water wells were reported to be contaminated.[261] In October 2019 the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development informed of ongoing construction work of a protective wall in Surobi district. The objective was to protect 1376 hectares of agricultural lands and houses from the risk of flood.[262]

There are two telecommunications towers close to Hussein Kheil villages, and the tele-operators have signed security agreements with the Hussain Kheil tribe. In exchange of money, the Hussain Kheil provide men and weapons to protect the towers from regular attacks by the Taliban. Hussein Kheil thus has an economic interest in the continuation of their role as protector of the telecommunications towers.[263]

The Jegdalek mines in Surobi are considered a prime locality for gem ruby and the ruby mines in this area have been known for centuries. The mines are located west of the Jagdalak Pass, Tora Bora mountains being on its east. Before the highway was built, the village of Jagdalak was an important stop on the trade route between Kabul and Jalalabad.[264] The area is controlled by the Taliban, but miners are reportedly able to mine, as long as they pay a 15 percent royalty. The unlicensed ruby mining is said to contribute with an annual income of 16 million USD for the Taliban.[265]

[259] Iribarne. 2019.
[260] International Organisation for Migration Afghanistan. 2018. 2-5.
[261] HALO Trust. 2013.
[262] "The construction Work of a Protective Wall […]". 2019.
[263] UNAMA Central Region 2016. 5.
[264] Brown. 2017. 227.
[265] UNSC. 2015c. para. 30.

Three large hydroelectric dams are located in Surobi: Mahipar, Naghlo and Surobi. The Naghlo hydropower plant was built in the 1960s to provide electricity to Kabul. It is Afghanistan's largest hydropower plant, and started its full operation again in 2018 with rehabilitation support from the World Bank, after several years of inoperability. It now provides electricity for thousands of people in the three provinces of Kabul, Kapisa, and Nangarhar.[266] The dam, and more specifically the electricity lines from the dam to the city of Jalalabad, have been the target of anti-government elements.[267]

In the presidential elections in 2014, many registered voters in rural and remote areas of the Surobi district were unable to vote. For example in Uzbin valley, many of the polling stations did not open due to security threats. This, and the local conflicts between tribes, impeded many from voting, as access to voting stations was difficult. This created socio-political tensions, as the representatives of a certain tribe would be unable to exercise their right to vote, whereas other tribes would be able to participate in the election.[268]

Surobi is the only district in Kabul province, where poppy is still cultivated. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, UNODC, estimated in 2012 that "due to the very low level of opium cultivation, the entire Central region could become poppy-free if effective eradication is implemented in Surobi district of Kabul province"[269]. This has not, however, materialised. In 2018 Uzbin valley recorded a record of 484 hectares under cultivation.[270]

As can be seen from the above description, Surobi district, and the Uzbin valley in particular, is not the easiest environment for peacebuilding. It is strategically located en route from Kabul to Pakistan and has a long history of persistent violence and clashes, most recently between the Taliban and the Afghan government. It is the only district in the province where poppy is cultivated and the ruby mines, tele-operators and the dams with electricity production present more or less illicit economic opportunities to many. Despite the complex environment, UNAMA saw opportunities for conflict resolution and decided to support a particular local peace initiative in the district.

5.5 The Surobi Conflict

The conflict resolution efforts of UNAMA in Surobi district started already in late 2016. The Surobi local peace initiative (Surobi LPI) aims at mediating and finding a peaceful solution to a conflict between two Pashtun tribal lineages[271] in the Uzbin Valley of Surobi district. The Hussein Kheil

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[266] "Afghanistan Resurrects its Largest Hydropower Plant […]. 2018.
[267] Foschini. 2015.
[268] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 6-7.
[269] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2012. 8.
[270] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2018. 21.
[271] The conflicting parties are from different Pashtun tribal lineages. To make the text more fluid, I will in this thesis use the term 'tribe' to designate the tribal lineages.

tribe is powerful and a major tribe in the district, while the Mosa Kheil tribe, living in Chenar village, is much smaller and has become marginalised.[272]

UNAMA defined the conflict as "[…] a 'land dispute' conflict that has been overshadowed by an unresolved 'murder case' that must be rectified first, before the land dispute conflict can be addressed". The land dispute which led to the violent clash, was about access to and control of fertile pastoral and rain-fed agricultural lands laying between the villages of the two tribes on the sides of a small stream flowing by. The five main families comprising Hussein Kheil tribe were settling internal disputes through land-redistribution. In a move contrary to Afghan customary law, one family laid claim to the lands on the Eastern side of the stream belonging to Chenar villagers.[273]

To enforce the land claim, one family occupied the land and utilised it for its own business developments. It also obstructed the construction of a road to Chenar village. The Chenar villagers actively resisted the unlawful occupation, and soon violent incidents broke out between the two tribes, leading finally to an armed conflict, where one of the members of Hussein Kheil was killed and another injured and one member of the Mosa Kheil tribe was paralysed.[274]

The Hussein Kheil tribe blamed the Chenar villagers for having shot one and wounded several other members of their tribe. As a response Hussein Kheil blocked the main route to Chenar. In the absence of one suspect for the shooting, Hussein Kheil brought a law-suit against all male in Chenar for protecting the culprit, and managed to get an arrest warrant for all Chenar men.[275]

Most Chenar villagers have left to neighbouring provinces, to the city of Jalalabad further East or even to Pakistan, due to insecurity and difficult access to markets and services. Only a handful are left to protect the land. The arrest warrant further restricted the movements of the male inhabitants of Chenar village who fear not only retaliation from Hussain Khail but also an arrest by the Afghan national police or security forces. The Chenar villagers stopped serving in the army and the police for the same reason. As the access to the main road was severely limited, the Chenar villagers resorted to paying extra to drivers who frequently drove along the main road, to get basic food supplies. Access to health care services was severely impacted. Children were taken to the clinic in the district administrative centre secretly by the drivers who brought food, but adults were forced to walk over mountains on foot to the neighbouring provinces to access health services. Reportedly many people had died due to the situation.[276]

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[272] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 9.
[273] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 7-8.
[274] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 8.
[275] Hayner. 2019. 1-2, UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 9.
[276] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 8-9.

For the women who had married into the opposing tribe or had to leave the Chenar village, the conflict prevented them from visiting their parent's house or to take part in family celebrations such as funeral and marriages. Such occasions are important in the Pashtun culture and so these impediments were deeply felt in the families.[277]

Before the conflict, Chenar village was made up of 150 families but today there are only some 25 households left (250 individuals). The villages where Hussein Kheil live, inhabit approximately 5000 inhabitants (500 households). While Hussein Kheil are considered supporters of the Afghan government and the Afghan army and many of the residents serve in the Afghan National Security Forces outside Uzbin valley[278], members of Mosa Kheil are believed to be Taliban sympathisers.[279]

Both tribes had grievances. The Mosa Kheil from Chenar village felt that Hussein Kheil had done them injustice in occupying their lands contrary to local traditional norms. They also considered that the government was biased in favour of Hussein Kheil. Hussein Kheil, on the other hand, thought that they had been treated unjustly as nothing was done to solve the killing and arrest the perpetrator and they nurtured a desire to revenge the killing.[280]

The dispute thus started as a land dispute after a serious drought nine-ten years ago, and escalated into a violent clash between the tribes which resulted in the killing of one and injuring others. These bones of contention are aggravated by the fact that the two villages are perceived to be on opposite sides in the ongoing national conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Hussein Kheil villagers put the blame on Chenar every time there is a Taliban attack in the area.[281] Although UNAMA described the conflict as a land-conflict and although the land dispute was at the origin of the violent conflict, it is obvious that the conflict evolved and questions such as honour and revenge of the death became important factors impacting the success of conflict resolution efforts, or the lack thereof. The discussion about traditional values and their importance for the conflict and its resolution seem understated in the project proposal.

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[277] Noor Bibi. 2017b.
[278] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 5.
[279] Hayner. 2019. 1-2.
[280] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 9.
[281] Hayner. 2019. 1-2.

6. Case Study: Surobi Local Peace Initiative

This chapter lays out the findings of the research and analyses and synthesises them. I clarify how and why UNAMA chose the Surobi conflict as one of the local peace initiatives to support, and describe how UNAMA designed and implemented the project. I explore how UNAMA sought to ensure local ownership and women's inclusion in the project. I will do this by highlighting how UNAMA described its role in the project documentation and in the expert interviews, and by explaining and discussing how UNAMA balanced between traditional values and international human rights norms. The chapter ends with an analysis and synthesis of the findings, comparing them to the discussions on external actors supporting local peace initiatives presented previously in chapter two.

6.1 Choosing the Right Conflict

UNAMA actively seeks opportunities for peacebuilding and to answer the question whether it should engage in a local peace initiative, it analyses the conflict environment and the specific conflict. In the case of Surobi, such outreach and analysis were very thorough. To decide whether to engage in a particular conflict resolution and local peace initiative, the interviewees mentioned several factors that impact the decision to go ahead with a peace initiative.[282] These considerations can be categorised as follows:

- request for engagement from the local government or community
- being welcome by all actors
- ripeness of the conflict
- existence of prior efforts to solve the conflict
- ability of UNAMA to support local mechanisms and efforts
- opportunity for a positive engagement and doing no harm
- sufficient time and resources

Before submitting the proposal for the Surobi LPI, UNAMA Central regional office had over the years engaged closely with stakeholders in the Surobi district. In November 2015 an expert from the UN Mediation Support Unit in New York had visited Afghanistan and this visit was seen as an opportunity to take stock of existing conflicts in the district and review options for engaging in conflict resolution. Four ongoing conflicts were identified: one linked to the extraction of rubies and displacement; another to the control of economic benefits from the three dams located in the district; a third to land grabbing and housing development in the centre of the district, and a fourth to the establishment of a district *shura*. In the end, however, UNAMA assessed that none of these four conflicts were receptive to mediation. It was, nevertheless, assumed that UNAMA

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[282] Iribarne. 2019, Hannon and Törmä. 2019.

could play a general role in facilitating shared understandings and fostering good relations in the district through its political outreach efforts.[283]

After some time, however, discussions between UNAMA and the district governor led the governor to request UNAMA's support to his mediation efforts in two conflicts related to the Hussein Kheil tribe. In the Yakhdand conflict the intention of UNAMA was to use its good offices to consolidate and stabilise the still fragile peace agreement reached in November 2015 through the governor's mediation efforts. For the other conflict, the one between Hussein Kheil and Chenar village, the aim was to encourage conflict resolution and support the mediation efforts of the district governor through leveraging the experience of the Yakhdand conflict. This is how Surobi LPI was originally envisioned, combining two inter-linked conflicts in the district into one local peace initiative for which the field office requested funding.[284] It was the first time the Central regional office undertook this kind of initiative.[285]

UNAMA confirmed the possibilities and existing local demand for externally-supported mediation through discussions with local authorities and key stakeholders. The Chenar villagers had already earlier sought support from the government for resolving the conflict and the district governor was seeking a power of attorney, *wak*, from the family of the killed victim, to be able to mediate and resolve the killing. The idea of UNAMA was to support the district governor to obtain the *wak* through its good offices, so that the killing could be resolved which would then pave the way for the district governor to start mediating the underlying land grabbing conflict. At the time of proposing the project UNAMA did not, however, know the view of Hussain Kheil to mediation.[286]

UNAMA feared that unless a solution was found to the conflict, Chenar villagers would see themselves obliged to take up an armed fight for self-defence, and assessed that unless addressed, the conflict could lead to increasing influence of Taliban and other anti-government elements (AGE)[287] in the region, including the increasing number of spoilers.[288] This in turn could lead to increased attacks against Hussein Kheil, particularly at military and police check-points, while the Chenar villagers were impeded from accessing basic services. UNAMA described the situation as "[…] a stalemate of some sort […], where the people of Chenar are more or less surrounded and confined to their immediate environs".[289] Through these observations it seems

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[283] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 3.

[284] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 2-5.

[285] Iribarne. 2019.

[286] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 3, 5 and 8-11.

[287] Anti-government elements (AGE) is a term used by UNAMA to designate "... all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as "Taliban" as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan [IMU], Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as "Daesh", Islamic State [ISKP – Islamic State of Khorasan Province] and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf a party to the conflict." UNAMA. 2018.10.

[288] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 9-10.

[289] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 9.

that UNAMA wanted to underline that the conflict had reached a mutually hurting stalemate and was ripe for mediation.

UNAMA identified several opportunities for positive engagement. The newly appointed district governor was perceived as neutral due to the fact that he came from the Southern province of Helmand. This was found helpful as it would avoid creating perceptions of bias towards any of the conflicting parties. In addition to the efforts of the district governor, there was buy-in from the Kabul provincial governor who supported the initiative. At local level again, there were strong inter-village linkages in form of marriages and many village elders were supportive of a settlement and would be able to engage their constituencies. Another important element was the Surobi community radio which already during the preceding year had broadcasted programmes funded by UNAMA featuring discussions on democracy, peace and reconciliation, women and youth, and human rights issues in the district. Additionally, the fact that the villages had prior experience of external support for economic development projects through the National Solidarity Program[290] was deemed an opportunity, particularly for later stages of the LPI, when economic development projects would be initiated as peace dividends.[291]

Identified risks included the possible sudden removal of the district governor who was instrumental to the project, and the need to come to timely resolution of the conflict to avoid missing the hurting stalemate or the ripeness of both parties for negotiation. The existence of Taliban and other anti-government elements could potentially threaten mediation efforts and it was deemed that the police and the Taliban could possibly collude due to family ties, undermining a government-led mediation process. Individual spoilers particularly in the Hussain Kheil village who benefited economically from the situation of conflict, were a risk. Another risk factor was the perception among local people that the security forces were biased toward Hussein Kheil. Finally, the need to show peace dividends in the form of economic development for both sides was seen as a challenge and potential risk to the success of the project.[292]

Although the 'ripeness' of a conflict was mentioned by some interviewees as a consideration when deciding to engage in a particular conflict, in practice UNAMA did not wait for such a moment, but rather sought to create it. This is a pragmatic renewal and reflects the consideration that ripe moments do not exist or that almost any moment can be ripe. As the UN Secretary General had noted in his 2017 report on mediation activities[293], there seldom is a perfect time for mediation and he therefore encouraged UN to actively look for opportunities. This is what UNAMA did in the case of Surobi LPI. While the request to support mediation efforts came from the local district governor, the Surobi LPI was a result of active engagement by UNAMA with the actors in

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[290] The National Solidarity Program was a World Bank administered programme aiming for rural development through the establishment of Community Development Councils to lead the community development. It was later succeeded by the Citizen Charter program. See Beath et al. 2015.

[291] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 13-14.

[292] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 14-15.

[293] UNGA. 2017. para. 12.

the district and an active search of mediation opportunities as well as careful mapping of the actors and analysis of the conflict. UNAMA weighed opportunities and risks and the options of supporting local efforts to ensure that it would contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. After analysing the situation, UNAMA thus decided that supporting conflict resolution in Surobi would be possible for this particular conflict.

6.2 Designing and Implementing Surobi Local Peace Initiative

Already before the launch of the 2018 report of the UN Secretary General on sustaining peace[294] and the subsequent resolutions by the General Assembly and the Security Council which emphasised prevention of conflict, creation of economic opportunities and engaging with local communities, the Surobi LPI had envisioned an inclusive, integrated approach, where prevention of violence would be complemented by economic development and the role of women and youth would be important.

The initial aim of the Surobi LPI was "[t]o facilitate the two inter-linked district governor-led mediation efforts and to enhance their outcomes; a peaceful resolution in terms of the 'Chenar conflict' [the conflict between Hussein Kheil and Chenar villages] and entrenchment of the [district governor]-sponsored agreement […] in the 'Yakhdand conflict'".[295] Seven objectives were defined of which one was directly linked to the participation of women, namely: "Strengthened links between women at the district and village level with government within locally acceptable cultural/ normative frameworks". The other objectives were: "i) Increased peace and stability in an otherwise historically conflict-ridden area (Uzbin Valley); ii) Decreased openings for opportunistic AGE interferences in localized conflicts - 'decreased AGE operational space'; iii) Increased/ improved provision of government services to all three conflicting communities; and closely related, iv) An improved humanitarian situation in relation to the fields of health and education (in particular for Chenar Village); v) Increased popular legitimacy for the local/district-level government; and vi) Potential openings for small-scale development projects (read 'peace dividends') due to increased stability and security in the affected areas."[296]

Originally the project was designed as a three-phased project for a period of two plus years, with a preparatory phase from December 2015 to October 2016, phase I from November 2016 to December 2017, and a second phase from January 2018 to ingrain peaceful coexistence and develop opportunities for economic development.[297]

The thorough preparatory phase was implemented prior to the project proposal submission and comprised expansion of political outreach and consultations by UNAMA towards Surobi

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[294] UNGA and UNSC. 2018.
[295] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 11.
[296] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 11.
[297] See UNAMA Central Region. 2016.

interlocutors, coordination with key stakeholders, identification of women participants for the Surobi women's committee, and production of the first radio programmes in the district. Phase I would set the institutional framework for the resolution of the conflict by establishing the Surobi working group led by the district governor. It would, moreover, consolidate the constituency and conduct consultations to ensure inclusive conflict resolution through the establishment of the women's and youth committees and building their capacity and empowering them, through dialogues and meetings and through the use of good offices and mediation to solve the conflict. Phase II in turn would focus on maintaining peace and addressing humanitarian and developmental needs through funding of small-scale development projects described as peace dividends.[298] For such economic development projects, UNAMA considered essential that they would need the cooperation of both sides to the conflict in order to generate benefits, as this would help consolidate any peace agreement reached.[299]

A Surobi good relations working group was formed within UNAMA Central regional office, comprising all thematic teams, such as human rights, governance, political and rule of law. The objective of the working group was to learn more of the Surobi district to support the implementation of successful political outreach activities.[300] The working group later facilitated the implementation of the Surobi LPI.[301] UNAMA's engagement during the project took different forms: meeting actors in Surobi and Kabul to understand the existing opportunities for conflict resolution and to gather support for the project; advocating on matters; organising workshops; producing radio programmes, and taking the initiative to form a new mediation forum, the Surobi working group.[302] To a large extent the project, such as all LPIs, was managed by national staff, while international staff would intervene in the planning and quality checking of the project.[303]

Local ownership was considered already during the project planning, when up to four UNAMA staff from the human rights, governance, political and rule of law sections would travel weekly to the Surobi district.[304] Most of the time was spent in meetings with different stakeholders, such as the district governor.[305] In this way the project proposal could be based on widespread consultations and discussions with the district governor, elders from the villages and district government officials. It also included a conflict mapping to identify the effects and causes of the conflict.[306] Despite this strong involvement of the local community, it seems clear that UNAMA exerted strong guidance on the design of the project and its outcomes, at least in the beginning.

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[298] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 2-3.
[299] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 10.
[300] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 3.
[301] see UNAMA Central Region. 2018a.
[302] Hayner. 2019. 2-3.
[303] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.
[304] Hayner. 2019. 2.
[305] Iribarne. 2019.
[306] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 5, 10 and 12.

Based on the project proposal, the notion of conflict transformation was strongly present during the design phase.[307] Understanding that an elite-level agreement would not suffice, enlarging the group of stakeholders became important in order to ensure that peaceful settlement of the conflict would enjoy as wide an acceptance and demand as possible. UNAMA sought to transform the relationship between the two conflicting villages and strengthen already existing community bonds while also transforming the discourses inciting to violence.

UNAMA divided the project target audience into three groups: the ordinary residents/ the communities, leaders such as *maleks* (village leaders), *ulema* (religious leaders) and other power-brokers, for example a school master and the host of Radio Surobi, and local government authorities. Separate meetings were held with these three groups. UNAMA thus created a multi-track approach whose aim was to "create a transparent, interactive and inclusive process that builds common understandings and greater ownership among the people so that they become meaningful stakeholders within any outcome forcing greater accountability by the 'powerful few' and mitigating against the actions of spoilers".[308]

Local government authorities were crucial to the project and there was strong support for resolving the conflict from both district and provincial authorities thanks to the advocacy and outreach by UNAMA. In addition to the governors, UNAMA identified in early 2019 the newly appointed district chief of police as crucial for resolving the conflict and approached him for support. He was from another province and was the first representative in the position that was not under the influence of a spoiler Member of Parliament (MP), so he was regarded as able to ensure that the police would act with impartiality and would not take sides for Hussein Kheil. The chief of police granted his support to the project.[309]

Generally UNAMA has a low-profile and is working behind the scenes in all local peace initiatives in Afghanistan.[310] This was the case also in the Surobi LPI. UNAMA's Central regional office had an active role in facilitating conflict resolution by supporting local actors behind the scenes, without leading the process.[311] Such an approach has clearly contributed to the acceptance and legitimacy of UNAMA among the local communities. In fact, UNAMA considered that the decision to keep a low profile and low visibility throughout the Surobi project and to give credit for any positive outcomes and results to the local government and district governor, were key factors in building trust between UNAMA and the district governor, and in granting UNAMA access to all parties of the conflict and other stakeholders.[312]

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[307] See chapter 2.2 and Ramsbothan et al. 2016. 35.
[308] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 17-20.
[309] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 4.
[310] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.
[311] Hayner. 2019. 2.
[312] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 1.

Close attention was paid to the analysis of stakeholders and the identification of possible spoilers already in the project preparation phase, and throughout the project the management of spoilers was an important aspect. A thorough spoiler analysis was done, identifying the spoilers, their motives and spoiling behaviours used.[313] Some elders from Hussein Kheil were identified as spoilers but the most important spoiler was a local powerbroker and MP who had a strong influence on the Hussein Kheil tribe, and who resisted a solution due to personal political interests.[314] Although from another district, he was a member of the Hussein Kheil tribe and also a member of the Hussein Kheil tribal *shura* in Kabul, exercising control over all families belonging to Hussein Kheil tribal lineage in Kabul province. His influence on the Hussein Kheil villagers was evidenced by the villagers requiring a 'blessing' from him in order to engage with the LPI or to give the power of attorney to the mediators.[315] The head of the women's committee who had visited Hussein Kheil elders, told in a radio programme how the elders had ensured her that they would solve the conflict by themselves if they just received permission from the MP. "[The elders were] willing to solve the conflict because the other side are their relatives", she said referring to the inter-tribal marriages in the valley.[316]

Several spoiler management strategies were used by UNAMA and the Surobi working group during the project. Firstly there was an attempt to socialise the spoiler and seek to address his legitimate interests while isolating the spoiling action. UNAMA staff first met with the MP in Kabul in March 2017 with the intention of obtaining his support for a mediated, sustainable solution to the conflict. He had promised his support in the meeting, but continued despite this to advocate against a settlement among the community members and had prohibited the villagers to engage in the process encouraging revenge. This led to serious delays for the project. Secondly, high-profile authorities were used to persuade the MP to support a peaceful resolution. This seems to have been a more successful strategy, and in February 2018, after a meeting with the district governor and elders from the Hussein Kheil tribe, the MP gave his consent to the process. In front of a large gathering of Hussein Kheil elders and district and provincial officials, Hussain Kheil granted a power of attorney to the district governor. The meeting was reported in the media and thus the commitment was publicly sealed and validated, something UNAMA hoped would strengthen the commitment to the process by Hussein Kheil.[317]

The direct costs of Surobi LPI were small, also in comparison with local peacebuilding support by UN in other countries[318]. On average costs totalled 4500 USD/year. In addition to this, UNAMA's communications section spent around 8500 USD in total in support of the radio programmes and radio Surobi. These amounts exclude, however, UNAMA's staff costs and cost of travel to Surobi. The staff and travel costs form a considerable part of overall costs and it is estimated that

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[313] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 1.
[314] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 3.
[315] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 7.
[316] Noor Bibi. 2017b.
[317] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 7-8.
[318] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.

between 25-70% of the time of two or three staff was spent on the Surobi conflict during 2017-2018. On average one trip was made from Kabul to Surobi each week.[319] The direct costs included costs for gatherings, transport to the participants and telephone credit for the members of the different working groups.[320]

The Uzbin valley of the Surobi district, is an example of an LPI operating in an area where insecurity affects access. UNAMA national or international staff was not able to travel to the valley and instead meetings were held in Surobi district administrative centre, an hour's travel South from Uzbin valley, or in the capital Kabul. For this reason UNAMA was more reliant on local actors to carry messages and involve people, as the locals were able to move around more readily in the area.[321]

There were several external incidents that delayed the resolution of the conflict. In 2017 there was political turmoil in the district after corruption allegations against the then district governor who subsequently lost interest towards the mediation process. A new district governor was appointed and simultaneously attempts were made to manage the powerful spoiler.[322] There were also delays due to attacks by Taliban which created mistrust between parties. In 2018 the parliamentary elections delayed the process and in October 2019 the project had been on hold for two months due to the presidential elections and campaigning which occupied the district authorities.[323] Despite these challenges and delays, UNAMA continued its support to resolving the conflict.

In June 2019 both villages as well as the district governor and the Surobi working group were hopeful that a negotiated resolution to the conflict would be reached in the near future. Both the Hussein Kheil as well as Chenar villages had given a power of attorney, *wak*, to the Surobi working group agreeing to a settlement.[324] However, the family members of the killed victim still needed to give their power of attorney before the settlement process could advance and this seemed to delay the project. In October 2019 the Surobi working group together with the district governor had obtained the power of attorney from one family member residing in the district administrative centre. They needed, however, a *wak* also from the other family members whom they planned to meet in Hussain Kheil village for a last attempt to obtain the power of attorney. Depending on the outcome of these consultations, UNAMA would then decide on potential project closure.[325] Despite much hesitance and after weighing the pros and cons in relation to the length of the project and UNAMA's continued engagement, the project continues. In 2020 project

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[319] Hayner. 2019. 2-3.
[320] UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.
[321] Hayner. 2019. 6.
[322] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 2.
[323] UNAMA Central Region. n.d. 2.
[324] Hayner. 2019. 3-4.
[325] UNAMA Central Region. n.d. 3.

activities came to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic but currently UNAMA is looking into resuming implementation of the project.[326]

The original timetable of the project, two to three years, turned out to be overoptimistic and still in 2021 the conflict had not been solved. It is probable that the complexity of the conflict was underestimated and the capacity of UNAMA as an external actor to support conflict resolution overstated. The belief that it would be possible to manage the conflict through careful planning followed by implementation of the plan, proved unrealistic. This does not imply that the project would not have advanced peace and stability in the communities and in the district on a general level. For example, in 2019 UNAMA reported a change of attitudes, particularly among the Hussein Kheil villagers thanks to the project. Previously several people had advocated for revenge of the dead community member, but thanks to the Surobi LPI many considered a negotiated settlement with Chenar village an acceptable solution to the conflict.[327]

6.3 Creating Community-Based Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

As discussed above in chapter 2.3, local ownership can be measured by the level of local control over the process and outcome, including in the design and approach of an initiative. A thorough preparatory phase enabled broad-based participation in the analysis of the context and design of Surobi LPI. Although the institutional framework created, such as the Surobi working group and the women's and youth committees, were initially ideas by UNAMA, local ownership was strong in terms of the process, approach and the desired outcome. Through public gatherings UNAMA documented suggestions from the local community and leaders on both process and outcome of the peace initiative to influence phase one of the project, as well as on local priorities for economic development from the community to feed into phase two[328].

Local ownership and capacity building of the local community was strengthened not only as a means to ensuring effective peacebuilding, but also to boost local agency. UNAMA's aim was to empower those most affected by the conflict to become active citizens with decision making power. This was done by creating three working groups or committees to become the main protagonists of the process: i) the Surobi working group, ii) Surobi women's peace and reconciliation working group (the women's committee), and iii) Surobi youth peace and reconciliation working group (the youth committee). The different constituency groups (elders, youth, women) were seen as important actors also in keeping up the momentum of the mediation process even during challenging times. UNAMA initiated and facilitated the establishment of these

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[326] Törmä. 2021.
[327] Hayner. 2019. 3.
[328] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 17-18, UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 1.

working groups, the convening of their meetings and the drafting of their action plans. UNAMA also participated in some of their meetings.[329]

To facilitate the work of the Surobi working group and the youth and women's committees in particular, both UNAMA, the district governor and his special mediation envoy used a lot of time for meeting stakeholders at the provincial and district level. They advocated for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and the importance of the work of the women and youth in the mediation process. UNAMA believes that without such advocacy, "the overall mediation environment would have been a lot more challenging for these two groups".[330]

The Surobi working group was established at the district level on UNAMA's initiative to serve as mediator and support to the district governor in the conflict. While the district governor at the time of project preparation had been involved in conflict mediation previously and could have played the role of mediator, UNAMA considered it risky to rely on one actor alone who had many duties and was likely to change during the project implementation period.[331] In addition, the district *shura* was not operational due to a leadership dispute.[332] Due to these considerations UNAMA suggested establishing the Surobi working group as a mechanism of continuity, should the district governor change. The working group was led by the district governor, with members from among different district line departments, religious leaders, community elders, Radio Surobi and the special mediation envoy of the district governor.[333] UNAMA liaised with the NGO Norwegian Refugee Council to provide conflict resolution training for the members of the working group and the committees. UNAMA hoped that the Surobi working group could perform the role of the non-functioning district *shura* and later meditate also other conflicts.[334]

Not relying only on the district governor proved to be a wise decision as the district governor changed twice during the project.[335] The governor was, however, a key figure whose backing was needed for the resolution of the conflict, and UNAMA used a considerable amount of time to introduce the project to the new district governors, inducing them to support the initiative and engaging them closely in the project.[336]

UNAMA, together with the Surobi working group, led the mediation process organising consultative intra- and inter-village meetings with the elders, religious leaders and general public to identify problems and possible solutions, while ensuring an inclusive, participatory and

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[329] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 2-3, UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.
[330] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 4.
[331] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 13-14, Iribarne. 2019.
[332] Hayner. 2019. 2.
[333] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 2, UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 1.
[334] UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.
[335] The district governor changed first in October 2017 and again in October 2018, after the district governor had been convicted to three years in prison for corruption. UNAMA Central Region 2018b, UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 4.
[336] Hayner. 2019. 2.

deliberative process. In this way UNAMA considered that both the problems and solutions would be locally owned, thus increasing the likelihood of sustainability of the agreement to be reached, while at the same time upholding quality and adherence to key principles of mediation. UNAMA sought the involvement and empowerment of respected local elders, such as the special mediation envoy of the district governor who could act as inside mediators and bring credibility and local ownership to the LPI.[337] With a view to exert pressure particularly on Hussein Kheil tribe to end the conflict peacefully, UNAMA engaged provincial level stakeholders, such as the provincial governor, provincial peace committee, provincial council, provincial directorate of women's affairs and other line departments. The engagement of the provincial governor turned out to be important and he was instrumental in influencing the spoiler MP to support the process and allow Hussein Kheil to enter into negotiations.[338]

In addition to the already existing Surobi working group, a new mediation team was created in May 2018, consisting of the district council chair and other influential elders from different tribes. The work of the mediation team did not, however, advance as planned. An armed attack by the Taliban in July 2018 near the district administrative centre killed five police and injured another five. As most of the police were members of Hussain Kheil, the tribal elders put the blame on the Chenar villagers for harbouring the Taliban and having facilitated the attack. It took many meetings and discussions between the Hussain Kheil elders and the district governor and the mediation team to re-establish trust and allow the process to continue. UNAMA reported in 2018 that the mediation team had established a financial security of one million Afghani, equivalent to approximately 10 000 euro, to guarantee that the parties abide by the decisions made by the team.[339] Later in June 2019, however, it seemed that there was no agreement regarding the security.[340]

The need for creating the mediation team and the relationship between the Surobi working group and the mediation team is not evident from the materials analysed. It seems that the mediation team did not continue its activities in the latter half of 2019 and instead the process continued with Surobi working group taking up its role of mediator.[341]

The youth committee was established to form a youth-led mediation track to ease tensions between the youth in the villages. The members of the youth committee advocated non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution and tried to encourage the local youth to refrain from violence.[342] "We should solve disputes and pick a pen instead of a gun", said the chair of the committee in September 2017.[343] In addition to advocating for a peaceful resolution of the Surobi conflict, the

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[337] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 1-2 and 6.
[338] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 1-2.
[339] UNAMA Central Region 2019. 2-4.
[340] Hayner. 2019. 3.
[341] UNAMA Central Region. n.d.
[342] Hayner. 2019. 2-3.
[343] Mr Tahir. 2017.

youth committee encouraged coordination and cooperation among youth by organising a first ever coordination meeting in December 2017 between four youth associations from different parts of the district to discuss possibilities for improved collaboration.[344]

In addition to directly engaging the different constituencies, an important way for UNAMA to support peacebuilding in Surobi was the engagement of the local community radio. In 2016 and 2017 UNAMA produced a series of radio programmes to "increase awareness among all existing tribes and communities in Surobi District about ongoing activities and mediation efforts led by the district authorities".[345] In addition to promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the programmes promoted human rights, including children's and women's rights. They were a means to get messages across to the communities in the Uzbin valley which was inaccessible to representatives of UNAMA due to security considerations.[346]

Through the radio programmes the visibility of the peace efforts was increased. They became known all over the district and thus the programmes supported the preparation and implementation of the LPI.[347] Radio programmes were continued in 2018 with eight round-tables "to generate public talk about the 'conflict in Uzbin and peace'", as a means to pressure the Hussain Kheil tribe to give the power of attorney to the Surobi working group.[348] The Surobi community radio was run by a local teacher who was also a community elder. The radio therefore played an important part in informing and influencing the community who respected the host. Such a role for a community radio is unique in the case of Surobi and is not common in other LPIs.[349]

UNAMA considers the collaboration with the local radio station successful in increasing the visibility of the Surobi conflict and the mediation process and it "even generated grassroots level support beyond the immediate environs of the two conflicting villages"[350] and "helped maintain momentum in terms of public support" when the project encountered delays.[351] Hayner considers that the creation of knowledge of peaceful conflict resolution beyond the two villages in the district is one of the sustainable results of the project. Through the radio programmes awareness was created about non-violent conflict resolution. As evidence of this one radio listener from Uzbin valley witnessed: "I was inspired by one of the radio discussions, where religious scholars talked about peaceful coexistence and solving of disputes amicably".[352] Through such awareness

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[344] UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.
[345] UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.
[346] Iribarne. 2019.
[347] Hayner. 2019. 2-3.
[348] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 3.
[349] Adhikari. 2019.
[350] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 4.
[351] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 3.
[352] "Surobi local elders canvass […]". 2019.

raising Hayner argues that "[the Surobi] case has served as an important example with a much broader educational value".[353]

6.4 Supporting Inclusion of Women

In line with the recommendations of the AGE- and HIPPO-reports and the 1325 Global Study referenced in chapter four, UNAMA aims at including women in local peacebuilding. Women's inclusion is considered a normative obligation and a way to increase effectiveness of the initiatives.[354] The inclusion of gender equality in Surobi LPI was seen as a great challenge due to the very traditional, conservative and male-dominated nature of the communities in the Uzbin valley. Surobi, and the Uzbin valley in particular, was described as a conservative, patriarchal community with severe limitations for women's freedom of movement, access to education and health services and economic opportunities.[355] Such limitations are common in traditional Pashtun communities and include the prohibition for a woman to appear in public without a close male relative, the prohibition to attend school after the beginning of menstruation, prohibition to be attended to by male health workers and the prohibition to work outside home with a few exceptions.

Notwithstanding these serious limitations, UNAMA assessed that linking women's empowerment with income generation for the households would be accepted by the communities, and sought to use this interpretation of women's empowerment to promote women's inclusion throughout the project. It was concluded that women's inclusion in the project should "be sensitive to the constraints, both cultural and practical in nature".[356]

In consultation with the district governor and line department representatives in Surobi, the women's committee was formed to complement the all-male Surobi working group. It was decided that the women's committee would convene separately from the men and from 'public gatherings', in order to avoid possible resistance from the village elders. Nevertheless, UNAMA envisaged convening the women's group in a way that could feed the deliberations of the women's group into the public gatherings. UNAMA also planned to ensure that any peace agreement would contain measures to facilitate the meaningful inclusion of women and their interests.[357]

At first it was difficult for UNAMA to find women whom to approach and with whom to discuss the idea to form a women's group.[358] The principal of a girls school turned out to be the key entry point and through him UNAMA was able to approach women who could become members of

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[353] Hayner. 2019. 5.
[354] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.
[355] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 15.
[356] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 12 and 15.
[357] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 12.
[358] Iribarne. 2019.

such a group.[359] Whereas the project proposal had envisaged a women's committee of fifteen members of whom five would come from each village party to the conflict, in practice the women's committee started with four members, increasing its membership to eight in 2017 and finally to 25 in 2019[360].

To set up the committee, UNAMA first supported in October 2016 the participation of five women to a workshop organised by UNWomen in Kabul on women's role in peace building processes at sub-national level.[361] It was also an opportunity for the women to acquire an understanding of women's rights overall.[362] Later UNAMA provided additional capacity building. It is apparent that such trainings were important for the women. The members of the women's committee mentioned several times during radio programmes how they had learnt about women's rights, for example about the right to inheritance, and about conflict resolution techniques. The trainings were also something they pointed out to the tribal elders when visiting them for mediation purposes.[363] After the training the women were invited to Kabul for a meeting to discuss and establish the women's committee. UNAMA reported that at first the male family members had been suspicious of the initiative, but had become supportive of the idea over time.[364]

UNAMA engaged select local authorities and power-brokers to ensure that the inclusion and participation of women was done in a culturally appropriate way. In addition, UNAMA tried to identify men who would support women's empowerment and who could advocate for the inclusion of women in the project. It is recognised, for example, that the district governor's special mediation envoy who was a religious scholar and an advocate for women's empowerment, played a great role in achieving this. With his support UNAMA was able to "factor in nuanced cultural dimensions such as religion and tradition into the mediation process".[365]

Despite the very patriarchal society, the women in Surobi were able to play a constructive role in the peacebuilding efforts. They visited community elders and their families from both villages and the families of the victims to mediate. During these visits the women discussed the negative effects of the conflict, particularly for women, and advocated for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.[366]

The women visited other women on both sides of the conflict who all hoped for a quick solution. "They told us one cannot wash blood with blood" the head of the women's committee said while the secretary of the committee noted that the women had promised to transfer the message of

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[359] Hayner. 2019. 4

[360] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 13, UNAMA Central Region. 2018b, Hayner. 2019. 4.

[361] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 12.

[362] Hayner. 2019. 4-5, UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 4.

[363] Mrs Mina. 2017a, Mrs Mina. 2017b, Noor Bibi. 2017b.

[364] Hayner. 2019. 4.

[365] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 5.

[366] Hayner. 2019. 4.

peace to male family members. She explained how the women first "came out of curiosity, because women visiting them with messages of peace and telling about their rights is a new thing. When we talked with them explaining that we are from your own district and these are our messages, then they called other women. The gathering became too huge to be accommodated in one room. They were happy and welcomed us."[367]

The fact that the women would participate in radio programmes also point to the recognition given to the women in the process. Not all women, particularly women from Pasthun families, would be allowed or be comfortable in speaking on the radio. The women on the programmes broke a taboo and set standards for the future.[368]

UNAMA recognised a great benefit of having women peacebuilders involved in the initiative and visiting the houses and families, because they had better access to all stakeholders. Women were able to move around more freely, as they did not raise the same kind of suspicions as (young) men, when crossing checkpoints or walking into Taliban controlled areas. Women also had better access to all members of a household. In the traditional Pashtun culture, elder women have access to both female and male members of the household, while men are allowed to talk only to other men. Also the district governor had found the women effective exactly because of their ability to reach out to everyone.[369] In addition, the women's committee turned out to be one element of continuity and consistency during the years of the project, while district governors changed and powerbrokers shifted their interest.[370]

In May 2017 the women's committee took the initiative to establish a women's *shura* in the district. The women's *shuras* are a link between the women in a district and the governmental authorities in the department of women's affairs at provincial and district levels. In practice the women's committee turned into the women's *shura*. This was the first women's *shura* in the district and the governor of Kabul province, the department of women's affairs in the province and the district governor supported its establishment. In addition to tackling issues of importance to women, the *shura* addressed the conflict between Hussein Kheil and Chenar village.[371] Issues the women's *shura* would discuss and promote when meeting community elders included elimination of harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage or exchanging girls as a means to resolve a conflict, girls' education, vaccination of children and women's right to vote and to obtain an ID-card.[372] The women's *shura* would also support women's economic development through small scale support to agriculture and literacy through literacy classes.[373]

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[367] Mrs Mina. 2017b, Noor Bibi. 2017b.
[368] Adhikari. 2019.
[369] Hayner. 2019. 4.
[370] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.
[371] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 3.
[372] Hayner. 2019. 4-5, Ms Mina. 2017c.
[373] Mrs Mina. 2017a, Mrs Mina. 2017c, Noor Bibi. 2017a, Noor Bibi. 2017c.

In 2018 UNAMA supported the building of links between the Surobi women's *shura* and women's *shuras* from other rural districts in Kabul province, something that was well appreciated.[374] The women also welcomed the small financial contributions provided by UNAMA for taking part in meetings, and they valued the political and social support granted to them.[375]

UNAMA considered the establishment of this women's *shura* as evidence of a successful strategy of incrementally including gender and women's empowerment in the project.[376] Hayner regarded the establishment of the women's *shura* as potentially one of the important legacies of the Surobi LPI. However, according to her, the limited support that the women felt they got from government authorities, including the provincial governor, was a matter for concern. This could in her opinion jeopardise the long-term sustainability of the women's *shura*.[377]

Another possible sign of sustainable change and women's empowerment was the fact that members from the women's *shura* could participate in a public event together with provincial and district authorities. UNAMA described such a visible role as exceptional. The event took place in February 2018, when UNAMA supported the district governor and the Surobi working group to organise a large gathering with over 200 participants to persuade the Hussein Kheil to accept a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The event gathered elders of the two conflicting tribes, the Kabul provincial governor and provincial peace council, district governors and religious leaders from 13 other districts in Kabul province.[378]

In 2018 two members of the women's *shura* nominated themselves as candidates for the district elections which, however, were postponed. UNAMA considered this an important achievement which could partially be attributed to the Surobi LPI.[379]

6.5 Reconciling Traditional Values and International Norms

In the Surobi LPI UNAMA made great efforts to respect local traditional values, while at the same time ensuring respect for human rights, mediation principles of inclusion, participation and deliberation, and the empowerment of women. UNAMA wanted to ensure local ownership by 'contextualising' and 'indigenising' the project. These two terms were used in the Surobi LPI Annual Report for 2017 to describe how UNAMA aimed to entrench the peace and reconciliation process in local traditions and religious values. UNAMA chose three thematic areas through which

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[374] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 2.
[375] Hayner. 2019. 5.
[376] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 3.
[377] Hayner. 2019. 4.
[378] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 2.
[379] UNAMA Central Region. 2019. 2.

synergy between the local traditions and international standards was sought: Islam, women's empowerment and *pashtunwali*.[380]

In order to link the mediation process to Islam, UNAMA gathered *hadiths* and islamic dictates that would reflect on peace and reconciliation and the responsibilities of leaders and the ruled. The working groups referenced these verses at the beginning and end of each gathering with stakeholders. In this way the mediation process was framed within the Islamic tradition, and peace and reconciliation was portrayed as sanctioned by Islamic values. UNAMA believed that this would create a closer connection between the mediation process and the stakeholders, as the project "benefit[ed] from greater levels of socio-religious connectivity, and therefore, increased relevance to the daily lives of people in the affected communities".[381]

Similarly women's participation and decision making role was framed through Islamic values. Examples were provided of how prominent women in Islam, such as the prophet's wife, had influenced their communities through consultations in peace and reconciliation.[382]

Already early on during project development UNAMA identified some aspects of *pashtunwali* as notable challenges to a mediated resolution. Particularly the Pashtun tradition of seeking revenge and retaliation, closely linked to the concept of honour, was seen as challenging, as it can easily lead to protracted blood feuds. UNAMA therefore planned to employ a strategy of using and coopting tribal traditions deemed constructive, such as pardoning/ *nanawati*, and discrediting and isolating traditions deemed destructive, such as retaliation.[383] Through such a strategy UNAMA considered it could lend "greater ´localized´ relevance and legitimacy to the mediation process as a whole, without jeopardising core human rights and mediation principles".[384] Local values and traditions could consequently be respected and conflict transformation conceived in support of constructive local practices and principles.

Achieving a balance between international norms, often regarded as liberal and Western, and the local tradition, was a constant struggle for UNAMA. The challenge would be in finding an equilibrium between the use of customary norms and "ensuring that they can - in the longer term - live up to the larger and more demanding normative requirements of national and international laws regarding the themes of justice and fairness".[385]

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[380] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 2-9.
[381] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 5.
[382] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 5.
[383] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 16.
[384] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 5.
[385] UNAMA Central Region. 2016. 15-16.

6.6 Avoiding Common Challenges to External Actors

Using the terminology of Lilja and Höglund[386] presented in chapter 2.3, UNAMA performed the functions of both risk absorber and accompanying actor. As risk absorber UNAMA was the one presenting a project plan for financing, as well as being the one that administered the funds of the project and elaborated reports. It effectively ensured that the requirements of the headquarters and donors would be paid full regard, thus absorbing any possible risks of expectations. It seems unlikely that the project would have been supported by external donors unless a well-known, neutral actor such as UNAMA would play this role. In addition to absorbing risk, UNAMA accompanied and supported the local peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms by providing opportunities for capacity building and by facilitating the process. In this way local agency was strengthened.

UNAMA itself defined its role in implementing the Surobi LPI as three-fold: i) providing mediation support to facilitate the process, ii) ensuring that the process protects human rights and observes principles for mediation, and iii) continuously observing and analysing the environment, at village, district, provincial and national levels, in order to detect early any possible problems arising.[387] Roles one and three could be considered as functions of an accompanying actor. Role two, on the other hand, is absorbing the risks. Protecting international norms and standards would certainly be one of the crucial elements expected to be fulfilled by any donor.

The Surobi LPI sought to avoid the challenges of representation, ownership and time, identified by Lilja and Höglund[388] as the key challenges facing external actors supporting local peacebuilding. In order to identify the actors that would best represent the conflicting parties and other local stakeholders, UNAMA engaged with both community leaders, women, youth and the community at large and was careful to include parties to the conflict also from the villages, not only the district administrative centre.

This was not always easy. For example, at the beginning of 2018 UNAMA was concerned about the lack of involvement of representatives from the villages in the process. It noted that most of the people involved thus far were from the district administrative centre which was more easily accessible, and stressed the importance of the involvement of stakeholders and interlocutors from the two tribes party to the conflict.[389] This had also been a request by the community members in the villages who wanted to be directly engaged and not only through village leaders whom they did not fully trust.[390]

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[386] See Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 412.
[387] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 6.
[388] See Lilja and Höglund. 2018. 415.
[389] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 5.
[390] UNAMA Central Region. 2018b.

UNAMA used very limited financial resources to engage the local actors. This strategy was well-founded in that it ensured that the local representatives could cover possible costs for participating in events and meetings and for liaising by phone with the community, yet simultaneously the funding seemed small enough not to constitute a financial incentive to engage. Consequently, the representatives would participate for other than economic reasons, perhaps because of their own interest and the importance they attributed to the process.

Local ownership and agency were crucial for UNAMA. The decision to engage was made after a request of the local district governor. Time was spent on building constituency, extending the range of actors involved and ensuring that the problems and solutions would have local support and ownership. UNAMA put emphasis on engaging actors from the conflict-affected villages and finding solutions relevant to the local reality, identified by the affected parties themselves. The project was framed within the local social and religious traditions.

Similar to many NGOs in Afghanistan[391], UNAMA created a new, inclusive community-based conflict resolution mechanism comprising the Surobi working group and the youth and women's committees. The Surobi working group managed to reinvigorate the mediation process and provided some continuity to it. According to Hayner, the all male Surobi working group is an achievement with potential for sustainability, working on conflict resolution beyond the conflict between Chenar and Hussein Kheil villages.[392] Without further research it is, however, not possible to know whether the local community considered the Surobi working group a sustainable forum for solving conflicts in general and the conflict between Hussein Kheil and Chenar in particular.

While some studies have found that similar, newly created peace councils have been effective in resolving community-based conflicts[393], others have criticised external actors in Afghanistan for creating different community councils which have sometimes negatively impacted local governance and rule of law.[394] In the case of Surobi, UNAMA thoroughly engaged with the local community to ensure local ownership and sustainability of the process. It weighed the different options and arrived at the decision of creating a new conflict resolution mechanism, the Surobi working group, to mediate between the two parties. As the district *shura* was inoperative and it would have been risky to rely only on the district governor for mediation, it seems that setting up a new mechanism, the Surobi working group, was the only sustainable option for initiating the process. The documentation reviewed did not, however, analyse if the establishment of the working group would have any negative repercussions for the local conflict resolution tradition or its sustainability, or the local governance in general. Moreover, the role of the Surobi working group in relation to the mediation team established in 2018 remains unclear and further study

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391 see Nader and Roberts. 2018.
392 Hayner. 2019. 5.
393 see Nader and Roberts. 2018. 82.
394 see Miakhel and Coburn. 2010.

would be needed to understand how the two mechanisms were viewed by the communities and what their simultaneous existence signified for the resolution of the conflict.

Time was probably the challenge UNAMA most acutely grappled with. As it turned out in the case of Surobi, progress and change was slower than anticipated and the environment more complex than foreseen. In the beginning UNAMA did not want to rush. The aim was not only to end violence but to allow for a sustainable and inclusive process. UNAMA wanted to ensure participation and inclusion of the local community and address the root causes of the conflict. In the preparatory phase UNAMA perceived pressure from many interlocutors and even decision makers to come to quick results and ensure top-down enforcement of the agreement. According to UNAMA, this would not have guaranteed sustainability and a long term solution and it hoped that "the innate added-value of the facilitative and directive aspects of this LPI will discourage the employment of quick fixes".[395]

Rather soon, however, time became a scarce resource. Already in early 2018 UNAMA was worried about the delays in the project, fearing that further delays would lead to the parties losing their willingness to negotiate. Delays were also assessed as possibly leading to the loss of overall support for the project and diminishing the support from UNAMA's headquarters or they might discredit the district governor, his special mediation envoy or the Surobi working group.[396] Despite these challenges with time, UNAMA continued supporting Surobi LPI and still five years on, the project has not been discontinued.

This has been possible thanks to a process approach employed by the Central region office. It considered that "a mediation process requires time, understanding, trust and flexibility - and most significantly; receptivity to path(s) chosen by the 'beneficiaries'".[397] This was approved by the management and Surobi LPI was granted some room for manoeuvre in terms of reporting, outcomes and outputs and the timeframe, something the field office clearly appreciated. In its 2017 annual report the project specifically mentioned the benefits that such flexibility granted. It allowed the Surobi LPI to adopt a process oriented approach, as called for by McCann[398], instead of a project oriented approach, and it was possible to "put greater focus on relationship-building with interlocutors at various levels of engagement - particularly that of the local/ district level - which in turn had fostered greater levels of trust between the [Surobi working group] and certain district-level actors".[399] Such flexibility enabled the LPI to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.

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[395] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 2.
[396] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 9.
[397] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 6.
[398] see chapter 2.3
[399] UNAMA Central Region. 2018a. 6.

6.7 Linking Local Peace Initiatives to the National Process

Although local peace initiatives are complex and take time, the interviewees considered them important, not only for the local level, but for the national level as well. The interviewees did not consider it probable that the LPIs would build a bottom-up process forcing change at the national level. Instead, LPIs were a way to empower local communities to resolve local conflicts which would not be solved through a national peace agreement. Local peace initiatives could play a role in reacting quickly to new negative developments in the community, preventing spoilers from rising, and addressing worsening local conflicts. Such efforts were seen as being even more important in the case of a national peace agreement as they would help consolidate peace at the local level.[400]

Developments at the national level affect the conflicts at local level. The direction of the impact is, however, not always straightforward. Although the Surobi conflict is a very local conflict, it is indirectly connected to the national conflict between the Afghan government and the Taliban as the two conflicting villages stand on different sides in the national conflict. The Hussain Kheil is said to support the Afghan government while the Chenar villagers are said to side with the Taliban. According to Hayner, the local conflict can be positively affected by positive developments in the national conflict. The fact that the villages are on opposing sides in the government -Taliban conflict has deepened the local conflict further, and a nation-wide peace agreement could thus provide the necessary impetus to facilitate a non-violent resolution to the Surobi conflict.[401]

On the other hand, some local conflicts might indeed worsen if the national level conflict is solved. The national conflict might have affected the local security situation negatively and kept the local conflict dormant. Once the security situation improves thanks to a national level agreement, the local conflict could have space to flare up.[402]

It is also possible that a resolution of a local conflict would affect the national conflict negatively. In Surobi, for example, a settlement would provide opportunities for displaced Chenar villagers to return which would increase the number of men in the village. Unless they find work and economic opportunities, they might join the Taliban ranks. Conversely, many local conflicts could risk destabilising any incipient national level peace agreement.[403]

The inter-linkages between local and national level peace processes were highlighted by the UN Secretary General in his report on mediation in 2017.[404] In Afghanistan, UNAMA "views sub-

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[400] Hannon and Törmä. 2019.
[401] Hayner. 2019. 6.
[402] Hayner. 2019. 6.
[403] Hayner. 2019. 5-6.
[404] See UNGA. 2017.

national mediation as an important role for the Mission in a post-settlement Afghanistan",[405] referring to a national level peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. For this reason the field offices were advised to analyse the possible local level implications of a national level peace agreement already at the preparatory phases of a LPI. Early support to the local communities could help mitigate possible negative consequences of a national peace agreement at the local level. Additionally, field offices were encouraged to analyse how local peace initiatives could support national peace endeavours.[406]

Overall, UNAMA recognised and sought to avoid atomism and subordination, challenges for local peacebuilding identified by Lundqvist and Öjendal and discussed in chapter 2.3. Subordination, the negative influence of the national level peace process on the local level, is to some extent visible in Surobi, where Hussain Kheil blames every attack in the region by the Taliban on the Chenar villagers. The local peace initiative was thus shaped by national patrimonial structures and political and tribal dynamics. This is, however, a challenge which is difficult to respond to, and was mostly something UNAMA took note of.

Atomism, the isolation of local peace initiatives from the national level, was tackled by the conscious attempt to build synergies between the local level conflict and the national level conflict. The interviewees found, however, that more needed to be done in order to avoid the current disjuncture between the local peace initiatives and the overarching national level peace process.[407] Developing an overall strategy for local peace initiatives could provide an avenue for UNAMA to break such isolation and connect the local peace initiatives both to each other and to the national level peace process.

UNAMA in Afghanistan is well-placed to build stronger links between the local peace initiatives and the national and international peace processes. As Pentikäinen notes, "[l]ocal mediation efforts need to be supported and synchronised within a wider political framework and within an international agenda. The existing gap between international policy considerations and local mediation efforts needs to be bridged."[408]

While actively looking for linkages between the local and national level peace efforts, it is, nevertheless, critical to realise that local conflict resolution and peacebuilding is important also in its own right. Local conflicts are important to the individuals at the local level and therefore conflict resolution at the local level is meaningful. Moreover, it can contribute to building peace and peaceful societies overall. This again could have an impact also on the national level conflict, even without direct linkages between the two levels. In the case of Afghanistan, Hayner argues that "more of [local peace initiatives] could together have an important, long term, positive effect

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[405] Hayner. 2019. 6.
[406] Hayner. 2019. 6.
[407] Hannon and Törmä. 2019, Leuenberger. 2019.
[408] Pentikäinen. 2015. 72.

on the security and peace of the country. Indeed, it could be argued that future national peace will depend not only on a national deal but also many small, intensive, and localised peace efforts".[409]

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[409] Hayner. 2019. 11.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to contribute to the research on the practice of supporting local peacebuilding in general and by UN in particular. The research objective was to understand how the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, supports local grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding and how this support relates to ongoing reforms of UN peacebuilding efforts at the global level. I adopted a pragmatic approach and underlined the practical and the experienced as basis for knowledge creation when analysing the case study, the Surobi local peace initiative (LPI).

Through an analysis of project documentation and expert interviews, I explored the role of UNAMA in providing support to local peace efforts and investigated how UNAMA had responded to challenges attached to local peacebuilding support, namely representation, ensuring local ownership and time frames. I also examined how UNAMA had supported the inclusion of women in these peace initiatives and how it balanced between the international normative requirements and traditional values and customs. In this concluding chapter I will summarise the findings and draw some conclusions based on them, reflecting upon if and how the Surobi local peace initiative presents elements of adaptive peacebuilding. I will also look back at the limitations of the study and suggest some further research. The chapter concludes with some recommendations with a view to strengthen support to local conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The inclusion of support to local peace initiatives in the peacebuilding toolbox of UNAMA reflects an unexpressed attempt to shift from a liberal peacebuilding model towards an approach where UN has a role of facilitator in support of inclusive peace processes as called for by the AGE- and HIPPO-reports and the 1325 Global Study discussed in chapter four. It also reflects the appeal of the UN Secretary General[410] to engage with the local communities as an important element of sustaining peace. Through the Surobi local peace initiative, UNAMA was able to bring leverage and encourage inclusivity in the local peacebuilding process in a situation where the traditional custom of seeking revenge was risking a prolongation and deepening of the conflict, and local capacities for conflict resolution were weakened due to leadership disputes.

It was the local district governor who requested UNAMA to support the mediation process. This does not mean that UNAMA had passively waited for an opportunity to engage. On the contrary, the Surobi local peace initiative was the result of active engagement by UNAMA with the actors in the district and an active search of mediation opportunities.

During implementation UNAMA performed the functions of both risk absorber and accompanying actor. As risk absorber UNAMA presented the project plan, managed funds and elaborated reports, and ensured that the requirements of the headquarters and donors would be paid full

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[410] UNGA and UNSC. 2018. para. 59.

regard to. As an accompanying actor UNAMA accompanied the local peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms by providing opportunities for capacity building and by facilitating the process and in this way strengthened local agency.

In the design and implementation of the Surobi LPI, UNAMA tried to avoid the challenges of representation, ownership and time. Although representation was an issue that UNAMA struggled with, it succeeded in engaging different actors at the local level, such as community leaders, women and youth, both from the district administrative centre and from the villages party to the conflict. The local community was included already from the start and the local stakeholders clearly had an influence on the design of the initiative. Although the objectives of the project seem to have been defined by UNAMA, local actors were involved in the mapping of conflict actors and analysis of the causes and drivers of conflict. This helped capture local nuances in the project.

Three working groups were created to lead the mediation process among different local constituencies and ensure local ownership and agency: i) the Surobi working group, ii) the women's committee, and iii) the youth committee. In close consultation with local actors, UNAMA took the initiative to create these institutions and facilitated their establishment, functioning and capacity building. As the traditional district *shura* was not functioning in Surobi, and it was assessed risky to rely on only one mediator, such as the district governor, the creation of a new main conflict resolution mechanism, the Surobi working group, was sensible.

The inclusion of women was one of the objectives of the Surobi LPI. UNAMA had a very cautious approach and did not want to be perceived as too intrusive or insensitive towards local values and customs. The inclusion of women was therefore framed within traditional cultural and religious values. Along with Islam, the women's committee, created to support the mediation of the conflict, was used as an entry point for including women in the process.

Despite the intention of UNAMA to strengthen the local conflict resolution mechanisms in a sustainable way, it remains to be seen whether this was achieved. Although local in composition, the Surobi working group, established to mediate the conflict, was an innovation and there seems to have been some challenges regarding its mandate, reflected in the need to establish a separate mediation team for a period in 2018. If, however, the composition of the working group is sufficiently broad and enjoys legitimacy in different villages of the district, the Surobi working group could take on the task of mediating also other conflicts, particularly in the absence of the traditional *shura*. Yet, only the future will tell whether this happens. The women's *shura,* on the other hand, whose establishment was facilitated by the creation of the women's committee, seems to have become well-functioning. It is an institution well established in the Afghan national system, and has good opportunities for continuing its existence beyond the project.

Time was a great challenge for the Surobi LPI. Progress and change were slower than anticipated, the conflict more complex than foreseen and the capacity of UNAMA as an external actor to

facilitate conflict resolution was overstated. Initially the project had been designed as a three-year project, with one year for the planning phase, one year for the implementation and one year for the consolidation phase. Yet, still after five years, the conflict is not resolved. Delays caused many headaches to the project team who feared that the momentum of conflict resolution might become lost or that management would lose its support to the project. This led UNAMA to consider ending the project despite incremental successes experienced along the way.

The Surobi LPI could be considered an example of a local peace initiative that had embraced elements of adaptive peacebuilding. Its objectives were flexible, the time allocated for conflict resolution was considerably extended from the original plan and the approach chosen allowed for local mediation mechanisms to be supported. These adaptive elements were, however, bundled into the traditional peacebuilding project cycle. Although UNAMA's Central region office had wanted to employ a process approach, understanding that a mediation process required time and flexibility, and although UNAMA headquarters showed flexibility in terms of the timeframe, the design of the LPI was essentially a project oriented approach based on a liberal view of a peacebuilding project, where conflict could be resolved through careful planning followed by implementation of the plan. Such a traditional peacebuilding project cycle assumes that the external actor fully understands the situation and can thus elaborate an ideal plan for peacebuilding.[411] The Surobi LPI highlighted the need for a much longer period of time for supporting local peacebuilding, coupled with higher tolerance for slower, incremental change. An iterative process of adaptation, based on learning and experimenting, could enable a more flexible approach that better incorporates the complexity of reality.

An adaptive and pragmatic approach to peacebuilding could bring a more nuanced appreciation of local peace initiatives as support to complex, non-linear systems, where project design should build in flexibility both in terms of time and approaches. It could also help balance between quick fixes and longer-term, sustainable outcomes. Although there were strong elements of adaptation during the implementation of the Surobi LPI, fundamentally the project was built on a traditional peacebuilding project cycle of analysis-planning-implementation-evaluation. Embracing adaptive peacebuilding in policy and in practice could add value to how local peace initiatives are supported.

An adaptive approach could also provide an opportunity to reflect on the stages of the project. The original plan had envisaged conflict resolution followed by consolidation of the peace agreement through peace dividends in the form of economic development. As the conflict was not resolved, no investments were made in economic development. Instead of adopting such a linear approach, it is possible that implementing these two stages simultaneously, could in fact bring more efficiency to the mediation process. This discussion goes, however, beyond the scope of the current study.

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[411] De Coning. 2018a. 306.

The need to balance between international norms and standards and the local traditional values was constantly present during the project. Efforts were made to ensure respect for local values, while adhering to human rights, mediation principles of inclusion, participation and deliberation, and the inclusion of women. This was done through the thematic areas of Islam, *pashtunwali* and women's empowerment. To frame the mediation process within the Islamic tradition, *hadiths* and islamic dictates that reflected upon peace and reconciliation were referenced in every gathering. Women's participation was promoted providing examples of powerful women within Islam. Pashtun traditions that were deemed destructive, such as revenge, were discredited while constructive traditions, such as pardoning, were promoted. Such contextualisation showed a profound understanding of the importance of local culture and tradition for the peacebuilding process.

Despite the will to respect and be sensitive to local values and customs, local traditions proved challenging. Notwithstanding the importance of traditional values for the conflict and its resolution, they received rather limited analysis in the project documentation. Although UNAMA described the conflict as a land-conflict and although the land dispute was at its origin, it is obvious that the conflict had evolved and questions such as honour and revenge of the death became important factors impacting the success of conflict resolution efforts, or the lack thereof. The importance of these traditional values had perhaps not been fully appreciated.

UNAMA emphasised trust. Trust was considered important both between the local stakeholders and UNAMA as well as between the different local actors, and it was something that needed nurturing. The fact that UNAMA was familiar to the district level actors already from before the initiative and was a trusted partner by the local authorities, meant that less time was needed to build trust among the actors. Additionally, the low-profile approach adopted by UNAMA, where credit for positive outcomes was given to local actors, such as the district government, contributed to building trust between UNAMA and the local actors, while increasing the acceptance and legitimacy of UNAMA.

In terms of supporting local peacebuilding and conflict resolution, being present at the provincial level is a great benefit and something the UN could capitalise on more broadly, particularly in countries such as Afghanistan, where it is regarded as a neutral actor by the local communities. Long-term local presence gives UNAMA a clear advantage over many other external actors in strengthening support to local peacebuilding and local peace initiatives.

Field offices had been advised to analyse possible synergies and links between the national level conflict and the conflicts at local level. These linkages were, however, not widely discussed in the project documents. UNAMA is well-placed to build stronger links between the local peace initiatives and the national and international peace processes thanks to its long-term presence both at national and local level. It is, however, important to note that local conflict resolution and

peacebuilding is important not only due to its linkages to the national level conflict between the Taliban and the government, but also in its own right.

The Surobi LPI demonstrated that while UNAMA in many ways sought to avoid top-down, liberal peacebuilding, it cannot be said that it would have operationalised adaptive peacebuilding. The UN could, however, easily embrace an adaptive approach when supporting local peace initiatives. On one hand, the existence of different UN agencies at the country level provides a platform for learning from different approaches and variations to peacebuilding, as noted by De Coning.[412] It also provides a potential platform for better cooperation between UNAMA and the UN development organisations and linking development to peacebuilding as called for by the UN Secretary general in his 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.[413] On the other hand, an adaptive approach could be operationalised within UNAMA as well. While it will not always be practical or desirable to try several approaches in one location/LPI, the fact that different field offices have different approaches to for example inclusion of women in local peace initiatives, offers an opportunity for experimentation and adaptation. While in Surobi LPI women's inclusion was strengthened through a cautious approach avoiding mixing men and women in public events, some field offices have used an opposite strategy and expressly aimed at mixing the genders. Such experimentation of approaches, their comparison and analysis could lead to an increased understanding of how best to support local peace initiatives in different parts of Afghanistan and how to adapt ongoing initiatives to challenges encountered.

While this research contributed to the knowledge on how UN supports local peacebuilding and made a deep dive into the Surobi LPI and the ways in which UNAMA supported the resolution of a local conflict, it also indicates avenues to extend the research. This research looked in depth at one particular local peace initiative, the Surobi LPI, which was considered by UNAMA a 'good example', a local peace initiative, where prior analysis and project design was thorough and local ownership and agency strong. The findings therefore cannot be generalised to other local peace initiatives supported by UNAMA. In order to gain a better understanding of the whole spectrum of approaches applied by UNAMA, further research is needed. Comparing the support to local peace initiatives in Afghanistan with that in other countries would also merit further study. Such comprehensive analysis would provide insights into the varied instruments and approached used by the UN in supporting local peacebuilding and conflict resolution and could provide valuable information in introducing adaptive peacebuilding into UN support to local peace efforts.

Moreover, the focus of this study was on the experiences of UNAMA and its staff and did not directly include the opinions and views of the local actors that were supported. A more nuanced picture of the support UNAMA provides to local peace initiatives and understanding how local

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[412] De Coning. n.d.
[413] UNGA and UNSC. 2018.

communities view the support provided by UNAMA and the benefits they perceive from it, merit further study.

Although this study did not provide findings that are generalisable to all support to local peace initiatives by UNAMA, it nevertheless points towards certain aspects that warrant consideration. If support to local peace initiatives is to play a more important role for UNAMA in the future, a clear strategy for these initiatives is needed. A strategy for local peace initiatives could clarify the reason(s) for supporting peacebuilding at local level and define the overall objective of such support. It could describe how UNAMA views the link between different local peace initiatives or between local peace initiatives and the national level conflict. It could shed light on which conflicts UNAMA would engage in and which ones it would leave aside. Finally, it could also define an adaptive approach used for local peacebuilding identifying possible cooperation across the UN system in Afghanistan.

In order to concretise adaptive peacebuilding and allow for a process approach rather than a traditional project approach, new templates for planning and reporting that integrate flexibility and adaptation, will be needed. In addition, both staff and management will need further understanding of adaptive peacebuilding and how to operationalise it. Organisational buy-in from donors will be equally important. Strengthening monitoring would enable the collection of information about the sustainability of the outcomes of LPIs which in turn would strengthen the process, provide an increased understanding of the differences in terms of sustainability and allow opportunities for adaptation.

Support to local level peace efforts is not explicitly mentioned in the current mandate of UNAMA, although it mentions supporting the inclusion of women in peace processes both at national and sub-national levels. In order to make UNAMA's role in supporting local peace endeavours more focused, it should be specifically mentioned in the mandate. This would be consistent with the calls for supporting local actors made by the UN Secretary General and the various reports on reforming UN peacebuilding.

Despite high-level resolutions, the interviews made for this study revealed that not sufficient focus was placed on local level peace initiatives. This study points into some directions in which support to local peace initiatives could be developed to further strengthen UN peacebuilding. As the effectiveness and capacity of the UN in sustaining peace has been questioned, local peace initiatives could provide an avenue for the UN to put in practice the sustaining peace agenda and bring together the pillars of peace and security, development and human rights while engaging the local community in sustaining peace. Such an approach would come timely for Afghanistan, where national level efforts have not been able to come to a breakthrough despite arduous attempts during the past years.

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