



# Making the Human Security approach work

Evidence from ZOA's Human Security programming in DRC, Burundi, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Afghanistan

ZOA Policy and Practice Paper, March 2017

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## Summary

Instability and insecurity directly affects the lives of many who live in volatile and conflict ridden situations across today's world. Traditionally aid agencies have been involved in humanitarian assistance or development to address short and long term needs. Working in volatile and conflict settings has been responded to by working in, around or on conflict.

Human security is a concept that regards community security a public good and as essential to address as humanitarian or development needs. Donors have promoted human security as an organising principle for their aid and foreign policy objectives (Brown and Grävingsholt, 2016) and in line with those interests have encouraged NGOs, and other actors, to make the concept more central in programme design and implementation.

This paper reflects on the experience of ZOA, an INGO headquartered in the Netherlands, in putting the concept to work in contexts characterised by volatility and conflict volatile situations across 7 countries.

ZOA's experience shows that human security can be pursued in creative and flexible ways with communities expressing significant improvements in their ability to mitigate conflict and build peace. ZOA's experience also highlights that important challenges remain to achieve sustainable human security. A key condition is for donors to stay committed to funding flexible programming and to promoting aligned and co-ordinated strategies. This to enable complementary action by multiple actors as required in the creation of human security.

### 1. Introduction: Dealing with Insecurity in Volatile and Conflict Situations

Crises, conflict and insecurity characterise many parts of the world with severe implications for local communities to cover basic needs, for humanitarian and development actors to design and deliver effective interventions, and for authorities and the international community to promote peace and stability.

Daily lives of communities on the ground depend directly on peace and stability. Conflict negatively affects livelihood outcomes, may necessitate humanitarian assistance, and limits the scope for longer term development initiatives. There are however many examples that show systemic shortcomings to bring peace and stability, particularly in protracted crises situations characterised by volatility and recurrent conflict.

One of the key questions therefore is how to promote peace and stability? How to design interventions that engage stakeholders at all levels to create positive change contributing to peace and stability for all? The concept of human security focuses on security as a public good and has been promoted as a strategic narrative to link human development, human dignity, state-society relations, governance, and peace and security issues (Schirch, 2016; p. 141).

This paper reflects on the experience of ZOA, an INGO headquartered in the Netherlands, in putting the concept of human security to practice across a range of volatile and often conflict ridden contexts in 7 countries.

The paper starts with describing the challenge for INGOs to make human security more central to their approach. It then looks at the key policy and response options in operationalising human security. Based on

this a number of case studies are presented that reflect ZOA's experience in working on human security. The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations based on ZOA's Reconstruction Projects (2012-16) in which human security is the central approach to conflict mitigation, peacebuilding and the delivery of relief-development interventions.

## 2. The Challenge: How to Promote Security as a Public Good?

Human security is a concept that regards community security as a public good and as essential to address as are humanitarian or development needs. Donors have promoted human security as an organising principle for their aid and foreign policy objective (Brown and Gravingholt, 2016) and have encouraged NGOs, and other actors, to make the concept more central in their programme design and implementation. There is a need for NGOs to reflect on the human security approach to aid programming, and its contribution to conflict mitigation, peacebuilding and addressing relief and development needs in an integrated manner.

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NGOs, like ZOA, increasingly work in fragile states or in post-war situations where there is neither peace nor war. Sustainable livelihoods depend to significant degree on security with insecurity directly affecting livelihood outcomes which may necessitate humanitarian assistance and compromise, or make impossible, longer term development interventions. NGOs have therefore adopted conflict sensitive approaches to relief and development and, depending on the context, work in, around or on conflict.



Current NGO programmatic practice in volatile and conflict-ridden contexts is however critiqued to excessively focus on the needs of communities, which results in programmes that address consequences rather than root causes. NGOs are thus advised to look beyond needs and to include security as an important public good in their programming. Such community security programming must account for, and be responsive to, the structures of power and political forces that influence local security (Price and van Veen, 2016).

'Community security programmes must account for, and be responsive to, the structures of power and political forces that influence local security'

Needs or entitlement-based thinking is inadequate for generating a good understanding of security in a particular community. A complementary approach is required which contains an explicit 'power and political lens' for programme design to contribute to peace and stability. In such a way 'programmatic interventions by NGOs can be a potentially powerful vehicle for improving the security of communities as they combine activities, resources and collective effort in a focused format of delivery' (Price and van Veen, 2016).

## 3. The Concept of Human Security: Policy and Response Options

### The Concept of Human Security

The UN defines human security as 'people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented measures that seek to reduce the likelihood of conflicts, help overcome the obstacles to development and promote human rights for all'. One of the human security principles, according to the UN's Human Security Unit, is that 'it is prevention oriented with conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies aiming for sustainable solutions'<sup>1</sup>.

In essence, and for the sake of this paper, human security refers to the security of individuals and communities. Human security is a population-centric idea; it is measured by the perceptions of whether local men and women, boys and girls feel safe. This distinguishes it from other enemy-centric concepts of security that focus on identifying and deflecting threats from certain groups (Schirch, 2016).

Individuals and communities measure their human security in different ways depending on their context. Threats to human security include violence caused by both state and non-state armed groups, poverty, economic inequality, discrimination, environmental degradation and health and other factors that undermine individual and community well-being.

<sup>1</sup> The other 4 principles as defined by the UN's Human Security Unit are: 1) it is people centred focusing on the safety and protection of individuals, communities, and their global environment; 2) is comprehensive with strategies ranging from a limited operational 'freedom from fear, approach to more encompassing approaches that include 'freedom from want' and 'freedom to live in dignity'; 3) is multi-sectoral addressing a range of interdependent global and local threats, insecurities and vulnerabilities in security, development, and human rights, and; 4) is context-specific as local dimensions of global threats are unique and require context-specific assessment and planning.

Comprehensive human security includes three components: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity.

### National Security vis-à-vis Human Security

National security and human security are not the same, they overlap and there may be tension between a state's national security interests and civil society's interest in human security.

National security approaches centre on national interests and focus on specific individuals or groups as threats which are responded to through deployment of military and police. Human security focuses on the safety of individuals and communities by looking at wider political, economic, social structures that give rise to violence through many different stakeholders, including civilian government agencies, military, police, and civil society (Schirch, 2016; p.140).



### Human Security and Civil Society

State-society relationships are increasingly seen as fundamental to both security and development. With security increasingly seen as a public good, NGOs and civil society (in particular Local Peace Committees - LPCs), are regarded important promoters of human security.

LPCs are a generic name for 'committees or other structures formed at the level of a district, municipality, town or village, with the aim to encourage and facilitate joint inclusive peace making and peacebuilding processes within its own context' (Odendaal and Oliver, 2008).

LPCs are increasingly seen and promoted as an essential element in a country's peace architecture, in particular as instruments for community based responses to prevent violent conflict and build peace. Donors and international organisations therefore call for community engagement and ownership through LPCs in conflict affected contexts to mitigate the drivers for conflict and instability (Schirch, 2016).

### Creating 'Legitimate Stability' in Fragile Countries

The promotion of human security through INGOs, their partner agencies and civil society organisations is becoming more central to donor interests including by the Dutch government. In the Dutch government's Theory of Change for its Security & Rule of Law spearhead, which is aimed at creating legitimate stability in fragile countries, human security is an important policy goal<sup>2</sup>. See box 1.

**Box 1. Description of the Human Security policy goal under the Dutch government's Security & Rule of Law spearhead** (source: Dutch government's Theory of Change for Security and Rule of Law).

#### Improved Human Security:

1. All kinds of violent acts against citizens, including sexual violence, and other physical security threats are reduced.
2. Institutions responsible for maintaining security perform their tasks effectively, accountably and in better coordination, responding to the needs of citizens.
3. Communities and civil society contribute to human security and a culture of nonviolence, independently and in coordination with responsible institutions.

It is in this context that ZOA has been entrusted with Dutch government funding to implement programmes contributing to human security, legitimate and capable government, and social and economic recovery.

ZOA's 2012-16 Reconstruction Projects have been implemented in 7 countries: cross border in DRC-Burundi (Ruzizi Valley) and in South Sudan (Pibor and Akobo in Jonglei State)-Ethiopia (Gambella Regional National State), and 'individual' projects in South Sudan (Bor-South and Terekeka), Sudan (Darfur), Uganda (Amudat, Karamoja) and Afghanistan (Jawzan and Sar-e-Pul Provinces).

## 4. ZOA Practice

### Adopting a Human Security Approach

ZOA made a well-informed decision to adopt a human security approach to its Reconstruction Projects. This decision was taken first and foremost because the concept of human security is in line with ZOA's policy on peacebuilding which regards security as a public good (case 1). ZOA also realised that working with civil society, in particular LPCs, would require an approach that enables LPCs to stay relevant in dynamic contexts. ZOA therefore initiated a research project with grassroots-organisations to find out how best to support LPCs (case 2).

<sup>2</sup>Besides legitimate and capable government, social and economic reconstruction, effective rule of law and inclusive political processes.

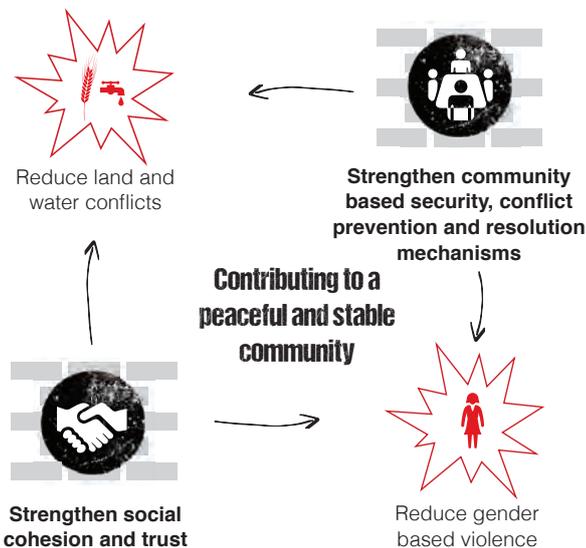
### Case 1: ZOA's Policy on Peacebuilding

ZOA's Policy on Peace Building is focused on interventions that contribute to peaceful and stable communities. The policy is in line with the essence of human security: 'for local men and women, boys and girls to feel safe'.

The four focus areas are: 1) to strengthen community based security, conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms; 2) strengthen social cohesion and trust; 3) reduce land and water conflicts, and; 4) reduce gender based violence.

ZOA's policy prescribes that peacebuilding programmes must be based on a solid context and conflict analysis combined with an analysis of ZOA's added value (for which a toolbox has been developed).

ZOA's Peacebuilding Policy in combination with ZOA's other Policy Documents (such as for example on Gender, WASH and Livelihoods & Food Security) and its Signs of Hope Vision & Mission document contribute to comprehensive human security: 'freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity'.



### Case 2: DRC-Burundi: Supporting Local Peace Committees

LPCs have become an important strategy of development organisations to promote conflict mitigation and peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts. But are LPCs the solution? And if so, how best to establish LPCs or strengthen existing ones?

ZOA, in partnership with MIPAREC and Radboud University, carried out the 'Enhancing Local Peace Committees' research project to explore the assumptions and preferences guiding the support to LPCs. In working with local practitioner organisations the research also considered how, in working with LPCs, to take into account the evolving context and how to engage other local stakeholders (such as local government and community leaders) in the strategic choices involved.

The project started from the premise that intervention strategies in support of LPCs strongly depend on proper analysis and conflict dynamics. It is therefore important to map out and question implicit and explicit assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and subjective prioritisation by 'outside' agencies about what should happen or could be done to address conflict and achieve peace.

The project developed and tested two toolkits that visualise the programmatic choices in designing interventions on conflict mitigation and peacebuilding 'through' LPCs<sup>3</sup>: a picture box meant for LPCs and other community level actors, and a series of video clips for staff of peacebuilding and development organisations to better inform support to LPCs (see box 2).

### Box 2. Programmatic choices in designing interventions on conflict mitigation and peacebuilding 'through' LPCs.

How to understand the nature of conflict and envisioned peace?

1. How to deal with the past?
2. Ending violence or addressing underlying structural issues?
3. Local level peace or peaceful society?
4. Working on peace directly or through development?

The methodology or approach to establish or strengthen the Peace Committees.

5. Which degree of vertical collaboration?
6. Whom to include?
7. To what extent may 'best practices from elsewhere provide inspiration?

Relationships with other institutions.

8. How to deal with customary/traditional institutions?
9. How to go about the state and the formal judicial system?
10. A permanent or transitional structure?

The 'Enhancing Local Peace Committees' Resource Package (ZOA, 2016b).



<sup>3</sup> The toolboxes do not aim to prescribe how best to support or establish LPCs rather aim at stimulating discussions to reveal diverse and opposing perspectives and on this basis how best to design intervention strategies.

## Cases on Human Security

Two cases (South Sudan and Ethiopia) are presented both of which were found to have reduced conflict as a result of the combined efforts of communities, civil society and institutions to contribute to human security.

### *Case 3. South Sudan: from Peace Committees to Peace Commissions and Inter-State Peace Agreements*

ZOA's experience in South Sudan has been that establishing Peace Committees at County level and Peace Commissions at State level requires flexibility as the type and nature of conflict change geographic focus. Peace Committees created at County level first and foremost had to work on conflicts between clans at village level and, once these were successfully addressed, focus changed to Payam (commune) and County level in address of conflicts at tribal level amongst the Mundari.

Towards the end of the project focus shifted again to establishing a Peace Commission in Bor in address of State to State conflicts between the Mundari and Dinka tribes.

*'As soon as the Peace Committee was informed about the incident they initiated a 'Community Peace Dialogue Meeting' and managed to convince the families of those killed not to take revenge but instead ask the authorities to bring the families together. The authorities arrested the perpetrator and traditional reconciliation was practiced with the families of the perpetrators slaughtering a bull and paying a total of 62 cows in compensation to the family of the diseased'.*

The success of ZOA's Reconstruction Project in South Sudan made UNDP South Sudan, which implements the UN-mandate on community peace building, to support ZOA financially to facilitate a peace agreement between Jonglei and Boma State (constituting one of South Sudan's most volatile areas for a long time). Initial meetings between Dinka and Murle took place with the United Nations peacekeeping Mission In South Sudan (UNMISS) facilitating logistics and security arrangements. A first peace conference was organised in September 2016 in which over 500 people from Jonglei State participated to identify the drivers of conflict and capacities for peace. Based on this ZOA prepared the County-level Peace Committees (representing the traditional leaders, church leaders, women and youth representatives), the State-level Peace Commissions (representing the LPCs and directly advising State Governors and State Ministries) and government authorities of both Jonglei and Boma State to engage in peace talks.

On the 4th of December 2016 the Peace Agreement between Boma State and Jonglei State was signed attended by over 200 participants including the Governors of Jonglei and Boma State, the Ministers of Local Government and Law Enforcement, the Paramount and Head Chiefs, the Chairpersons for Peace and Reconciliation Commissions and UNMISS.

The peace agreement is an example of creating 'legitimate stability' in a conflict ridden area. Peace agreement resolutions included ending child abduction, ending cattle raiding, improving livelihoods and keeping the peace. To ensure security and protection of the communities a new integrated police force of 1.500 men and women will be deployed in areas prone to inter-communal conflicts with border courts to be established to deal with conflict issues.

Furthermore a Conflict Early Warning and Response Network will be established and a joint communication network set-up with UNMISS. An appropriate mechanism is required for monitoring the peace agreement resolutions and for triggering action when needed. Even then politically inspired changes in State level leadership may challenge 'legitimate stability'.



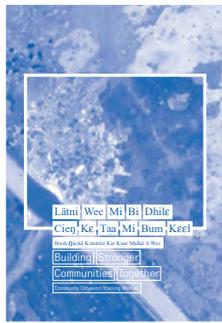
### *Case 4 - Ethiopia: Capacitating Gambella's Bureau of Justice*

In Ethiopia ZOA has been invited by the government to build the capacity of Gambella's Bureau of Justice to enable their staff to work with local communities on conflict mitigation and community cohesion in remote and conflict ridden communities in Ethiopia's border area with South Sudan.

Central to the approach has been a community based assessment of conflict within and between communities which has given rise to violent conflicts. Conflict issues were identified and communities were engaged by the Bureau of Justice, with support of ZOA, to seek community owned solutions to issues such as cattle raiding, use of dry season grazing areas, illegal and early marriage, and ownership and use of small arms.



Round tables were organised with all relevant stakeholders involved which culminated in agreements signed between the conflicting groups including follow-up and monitoring of the agreements.



Gambella's Bureau of Justice will use the Community Cohesion Manual (ZOA, 2016a) to train staff from other government ministries and to guide future work on conflict mitigation and community cohesion in other parts of Gambella.

## 5. Findings: Making Human Security more Central to Programming Works!

In implementing its Reconstruction Projects ZOA has adopted the concept of human security as central to their programming. The starting point of each of the Reconstruction Projects was a thorough conflict analysis which informed the design of conflict mitigation and peacebuilding work and guided needs based programming in support of wider community cohesion work.

The Reconstruction Projects contributed to human security as illustrated by the cases presented above. The end-of-programme evaluation found that in all seven countries the Reconstruction Projects had contributed significantly to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding.

The Reconstruction Projects' consolidated evaluation report (ZOA, 2017) yielded important good practice lessons, the most important of which being listed below.

**Combining conflict mitigation and peacebuilding with other sector interventions, such as food security, WASH and education, through a human security lens works.** Conflict mitigation and peacebuilding, and improved livelihood outcomes are seen and experienced by communities on the ground as interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

**Investing in community based conflict mitigation and peacebuilding is fundamental to promote broader human security.** Communities reported a strong increase in trust and confidence in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding through LPCs as essential for more effective working relations with traditional and formal authorities and work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding with other communities. Even basic training on conflict mitigation and peacebuilding at community level can have a profound impact, particularly in those situations where there is a lack of awareness and ability to effectively deal with local community-level conflict.

**Designing effective human security interventions requires local and regional conflict analysis including monitoring of conflict dynamics in volatile contexts.** Conflict is dynamic also at local level, for example addressing conflict over land may transform

into conflict over intra-family land heritage in situations of land scarcity. Higher level conflict may spark local level conflict particularly if horizontal integration of conflict mitigation and peacebuilding at community level is weak.

**Establishing or strengthening LPCs is instrumental for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding and can bridge the gap between local structures and formal state institutions at local (LPCs) and regional level (Peace Commissions or Councils).** To increase its effectiveness it is essential that LPCs represent different groups including faith based groups, women and youth.

## 6. Recommendations

**On Human Security: Increase robustness and sustainability/strength**

**Human security programming may start at community level but for it to be robust needs to be functionally linked-in with higher level structures for other actors to complement and strengthen conflict mitigation and peacebuilding.** It is encouraging to see that increasingly National Law itself calls for the creation of Peace Commissions or Councils at district, province or state level.

**Need to align human security approaches as integral part of infrastructures for peace.** Whilst there is a need for context specific programming to promote human security it is important for actors to align approaches to build effective infrastructures for peace and stability at local, regional and country level. The creation of Human Security sector meetings, along the lines of established sector meetings such as for example WASH sector meetings, for different stakeholders to meet, discuss and co-ordinate action is strongly recommended.

**Sustainable improvements in human security in volatile contexts depend as much on capacities for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding as on people's ability to cover basic needs in a sustainable way.** Government institutions in volatile settings are typically weak and ill resourced and in such situations aid



In Afghanistan the establishment of female Peace Shura's have helped women to have access to conflict resolution and to gain respect in the family and in the community.

agencies should prioritise creating community ownership over public resources, including security, invest in their capacity to manage them and demand government action to ensure security through deployment of police or army if and when necessary.

**Take a gender transformative approach by ensuring participation of women to promote human security.**

Women are strongly in support of human security as issues of peace and conflict disproportionately affect women and their children. It is therefore of fundamental importance to collect gender-disaggregation data to allow for proper data analysis and programme recommendations.

**For NGOs like ZOA to make Human Security more central to their Programming**

**When serious to promote human security ensure that key staff has an understanding how to operationalise human security in relation to 'traditional' needs-based programming.** It is just not good enough to draft a Theory of Change around human security without investing in staff and teams to put it to practice and without designing an appropriate M&E system. A Theory of Change should be practical and do-able at field level, easy to understand by staff and target populations and aligned with other actors' complementary action.

**Selection of own staff and implementing partners in the delivery of human security requires careful consideration.**

In situations where governments or elites have particular interests human security may be at risk of politicisation. The legitimacy of LPCs and other actors must be in line with the basic principles and objectives of human security (freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity) and ownership on the basis of common interest of the community at large.

**Development of M&E for human security impact requires careful thought and attention.**

In some of its Reconstruction Projects ZOA has been struggling with its indicators of achievement being too complex, not practical, not smart and not easy to apply. In developing M&E for Impact accountability towards beneficiaries is central and requires community based M&E.

**For Donors wanting to promote Human Security Programming**

**Work on 'human security' is an approach that demands commitment: longer timeframes and flexible programming.** In financing NGOs and other human security actors clarity about donor accountability vis-à-vis beneficiary accountability is instrumental.

**Financing human security requires donors to enable various actors to work in an aligned and harmonised way.**

Complementary action at various levels is required to address the complexity of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a sustainable way.

**Promoting human security requires substantial resources but is most often cost-effective in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.**

Costs at community level may be limited, certainly so when human security programming informs needs based programming; costs increase significantly when programming at district, province or state level (such as for peace agreements, setting up border courts and deployment of police and security forces).

**Work on local human security cannot and should not be a substitute or excuse for failures of states to protect the rights of its citizens. States have obligations to promote human security of its own citizens and population and to promote it in States that fail to do so.**

Human security is being promoted as an organising principle for donors' aid and foreign policy objectives. While there is some concern about the securitization of foreign aid ZOA's experience in making human security more central to its programming works.

Human security, when critically applied by NGOs, can contribute to local and regional conflict mitigation and peacebuilding while at the same time addressing humanitarian and development needs in an integrated manner.



In Burundi political youth were involved in training on nonviolent communication and joint community activities. They disengaged from national politics agreeing that they could differ on political issues and preferences but for this not to be a reason for local conflicts.

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## Acknowledgements and Credits

ZOA kindly acknowledges the donors which funded its work on human security:

- The Reconstruction Projects: funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, under the Reconstruction Tender.
- The Enhancing Local Peace Committees Research Project: financed by the research programme 'Security & Rule of Law in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings' (a subsidy scheme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands), under the Applied Research Fund: Evidence-based policy advice and tools, and funded by NWO-WOTRO. The project was co-financed by ZOA the Netherlands, MIPAREC, and the Faculty of Management Sciences of the Radboud University Nijmegen.

*Photo credit first page: Margreet Noordhof*

### About ZOA

ZOA is an international relief and recovery organization supporting vulnerable people affected by violent conflicts and natural disasters in fragile states, by helping them to rebuild their livelihoods.

ZOA operates in challenging locations where our field staff together with our partners provide assistance to the most vulnerable people. The countries in which ZOA is present are Afghanistan, Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Liberia, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Uganda and Yemen.

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