Sustaining Peace through Community Engagement in Peacekeeping Operations[1]

1. The Importance of community engagement

The primacy of political solutions for international peace and security questions has been continually reiterated: from the 2015 HIPPO report to the 2018 Declaration of Shared Commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, both national and sub-national political solutions are at the core of any UN strategy to bring peace to countries affected by conflict.

Moreover, there is widespread recognition that the sustainability of such political solutions is dependent on their inclusivity as this is required to generate a shared societal agreement about what peace means and what it entails. In the words of Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016): "'sustaining peace' […] should be broadly understood 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".

This cannot be simply achieved through top-down approaches, such as through formalizing elite bargains and brokering power-sharing agreements, as these have been proven to be short-lived in the absence of broader buy-in. Therefore, community engagement – unde116.6 cP(t)-4( )oo11(er no-4( )](al) TJETQq0.00000912 0 612 7

when undertaken as part of a deliberate strategic vision and through integrated interventions, community engagement activities have contributed to sustaining peace through three broad ranges of interventions: a) supporting community-based

The introduction in 2009 of Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) in some of the largest and more challenging peacekeeping settings has brought missions closer to communities and enabled them to play an important role in supporting communities to strengthen or develop local mechanisms that allow them to better appreciate and address their security needs.

A good example of how missions engage local communities through CLAs in order to set up community-based early warning mechanisms is when in September 2019, in the Central African Republic, community alert networks informed MINUSCA about rising inter-ethnic tensions in the aftermath of violent local clashes between the "Le Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique " (FPRC) and "Mouvement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice" (MLCJ)

For instance, in Mali in 2018, MINUSMA provided support to more than 150 CSOs working on State reform and democratic processes, as well as for the implementation of the Peace Agreement. In collaboration with the *Forum des Organisations de la Société Civile* (FOSC), civil society capacity building workshops were organized in Mopti, Gao, Segou, Ménaka, Kidal, Timbuktu and Taoudénit to strengthen their capacity in conflict resolution and monitoring public policies. On the implementation of the Peace Agreement, regular exchanges between locally elected officials and civil society were organized to monitor the decentralization process, with a focus on the participation of young people and women in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and on the challenges to be met for their active commitment. In this regard, seven observatories to monitor the Peace Agreement were created in Mopti, Segou, Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu, Taoudénit and Ménaka. Each observatory is comprised of at least 21 organizations. A diverse, representative and well-organized civil society can contribute to the monitoring of peace agreements through a credibility stemming from their status as non-partisan stakeholders, and a claim to be directly involved in sustaining peace.

In the Central African Republic in 2019, MINUSCA supported local authorities by enhancing their capacities in the management of their administration, in their role in the protection of civilians and in their contribution to the peace process. Through said support, 329 chiefs, including 90 women chiefs of villages were trained in management and conflict resolution.

A particularly sensitive area of state-society relations in conflict-affected settings is usually the security sector. In the context of heightened ethnic tensions in Ituri (DRC) between the Hema and the Lendu community and the perceptions that the national security forces were not acting impartially during the conflict, MONUSCO initiated dialogue sessions with the conflicting communities in Djugu and facilitated a training for traditional leaders on conflict management from 2018 to 2019, followed by community